

TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES OF HOW HIGH-STAKES TESTING INFLUENCES
INSTRUCTIONAL DECISIONS AND PROFESSIONALISM

by

BRENDA CROOM SCHULZ

(Under the Direction of Sally J. Zepeda)

ABSTRACT

Given the political and public demands for accountability, the purpose of this study was to discover the perspectives of six elementary school National Board Certified teachers as to how high-stakes testing influenced their instructional decisions and sense of professionalism. This qualitative case study sought to draw from teachers' experiences and interactions with others to learn how high-stakes testing had influenced instructional decisions and professionalism. An interpretive approach was used to discover how teachers developed their perspectives and why they believed as they did. Through the lens of symbolic interactionism, grounded theory methods were used for inductively analyzing data from interviews, fieldnotes, and other artifacts. The constant comparison method aided in uncovering the themes grounded in the data.

Five themes emerged revealing the positive and negative consequences of high-stakes testing. Two themes related specifically to professionalism identified gaps in the reflections of the teacher, signifying high-stakes testing had more of an impact on professionalism than teachers were able to articulate or understand. Cumulatively, the themes indicated high-stakes testing placed teachers in the unfortunate position of defending their instructional effectiveness to the public based on one test. Additionally, results from high-stakes tests did not always accurately reflect the student learning or the instruction that had occurred. Results indicated

high-stakes testing had limited positive influence on instructional decisions and professionalism. More significantly, findings indicated high-stakes testing had a more negative influence on these areas.

Findings have implications for further research, particularly in the area of professionalism. Interestingly, professionalism was found to have not developed beyond the surface characteristics of appearance and confidentiality in communication and work related to completing tasks. While these are all important characteristics often used to define professionalism, for the teaching profession to thrive, a deeper, more meaningful persona of professionalism must be achieved.

INDEX WORDS: Teacher professionalism, High-stakes testing, Accountability, Teacher as Professional, Teacher as Decision-Maker, National Board Certification

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to those people I love most—my family. Without their love and encouragement, I would not be where I am today. Roger, you have been openly proud of my each small step and your tireless support has carried me through this incredible journey. Thank you for being with me every step of the way – I love you with all my heart. Joey and Scott, every mother should be so fortunate to have sons as caring and loving. I am so proud of the choices each of you have made and the respectful, confident young men you have become. Thank you for allowing me the time away from you to achieve this goal and for your continued support throughout the process. I am honored that you have understood the importance of my goals and have supported me and celebrated with me all along the way. May this be just the first of other dissertations that will be earned by a member of our family.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Political and public demands for increased accountability have created an explosion of testing requirements, placing America's teachers and students under the microscope to ensure that learning is occurring at efficient and successful levels (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Hoffman, Assaf, & Paris, 2001; Paris & Urdan, 2000; Popham, 2003). Content standards have been adopted in all 50 states, with accompanying accountability systems for measuring achievement of these standards (Quality Counts, 2004; Reeves, 2001; Rothman, Slattery, Vrandek, & Resnick, 2002). Eight states have policies in place in which promotion is contingent on a passing test score and in 21 states, graduation is dependent on a statewide exit or end-of-course exam (Quality Counts, 2005). The logic behind this widely accepted philosophy is that test scores will prove school and teacher effectiveness and measure student achievement (Heubert & Hauser, 1999; Pedulla et al., 2003; Popham, 2003). In his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention, presidential nominee George W. Bush (2000, August 3) vowed that the "soft bigotry of low expectations" would end, all children would receive a high quality education, and proof of the success of this endeavor would be evident with increased test scores.

However, while it is a commendable goal for all students to receive a high quality education, do test scores accurately reflect the teaching and learning occurring in the classroom? When assessments become a part of the instructional program, a clear message is sent to educators as to what is important in teaching and learning (McTighe, 1996). There is scant

evidence that the implementation of testing programs has demonstrated an increase in student achievement or improvements in teaching (Allington, 2000; Amrein, 2002; Linn, 2000; Paris & Urdan, 2000). A study of the Texas “miracle” by Haney (2000) revealed little evidence of achievement gains. Analysis of documented scores shown on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) raised doubts about the reliability and validity of the scores. Additionally, a recent study by Clarke et al. (2003) reported that attaching high stakes to the testing program can adversely affect the instructional program, have a negative impact on at-risk students, and at the same time, not show improvements in teaching and learning. Furthermore, teacher professionalism is impacted in a negative way (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003; Perrault, 2000). The reporting of scores in local papers is cited as one example of how results impact teachers’ attitudes about testing. Results from a national survey on the perceived effect of state testing programs by classroom teachers, found that regardless of the stakes involved, a substantial majority of teachers reported disapproval of how the media reported testing issues (Pedulla et al., 2003).

According to Reeves (2000), an effective accountability system must focus on individual student progress, how school organization and leadership affects school performance, how students learn, and the interpretation and use of data for making changes in the instructional program. Results of past reforms indicated that greater achievement gain was evident when states and districts relied on the use of standards for teaching and learning, performance-oriented curriculum, more equitable methods for allocating resources, more support for student learning, stronger investment in teacher learning, and a higher quality of teaching in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Furthermore, the findings in the field of cognitive psychology reported that learning requires active construction of knowledge, not the rote learning of facts

that is frequently required for performing at sufficient levels on tests (Lin, 2002; Shepard, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). Popham (2003) also described the negative impact on teaching and learning as a result of poorly implemented and monitored testing systems. Accordingly, a great debate has developed concerning the effectiveness of implementing high-stakes testing programs given the number of intended and unintended consequences that have surfaced as a result.

In light of the current debate about the effectiveness of high-stakes testing, this study was designed to uncover accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives on how high-stakes testing influences instructional decision making and professionalism. In Georgia, results on the 3rd grade reading and the 5th grade reading and math components of the Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT) determine the grade placement for students for the following year, and schools are held accountable for students receiving instruction that ensures adequate progress on this annual test. Implementing a high-stakes assessment can lead to detrimental unintended consequences for teachers, as well as students, as evidenced in recent studies by Amrein (2002), Jones, Jones, and Hargrove (2003), and Pedulla et al. (2003). On the surface, it appears that these assessments primarily affect the student, but the teacher's instructional decisions and moral and ethical commitment to the profession may also be affected. Because Georgia is entering into a high-stakes testing system, it is important for policymakers and educators to understand the impact of these assessments from the perspective of the teacher.

As more children entered school and as schooling became an increasing part of public budgets, public concern and interest in education grew. Questions from both educators and the public concerning accountability in public schools are neither uncommon nor unwarranted. The public has asked for proof of effective outcomes of student learning, and the schools have searched for the appropriate means for determining and reporting student achievement. Based on

the increasing interest, it is not surprising that there continues to be an on-going discussion and debate of the intended and unintended consequences of employing a high-stakes testing system for determining student achievement and school effectiveness (Amrein, 2002; Clarke et al., 2003; Jones et al., 2003; Pedulla et al., 2003). What impact does a high-stakes test, such as the CRCT, have on accomplished elementary school teachers and the kinds of instructional decisions they make? In an era of high-stakes testing, is there an impact on the teachers' decision-making in the classroom? Do the current high-stakes tests influence how accomplished teachers perceive the teaching profession and the quality of professionalism among teachers? Questions such as these reveal apprehensions of current policies. These questions also reflect the importance of finding answers to these questions to best meet the concerns of the public as well as to respect and trust the teaching profession to make effective decisions regarding student learning. Results of past studies, reforms, and policies have led policymakers and educators to consider new approaches for meeting the challenges of educating all students.

Background of the Study

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education submitted a report entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, which described an educational system that was failing students due, in part, because of a lowering of high expectations and an acceptance of mediocre educational performance. The lack of accountability was credited as one of the causes for the high number of students exiting school without sufficient skills to read, write, think at a critical level, or use technology to its fullest potential. The push for standards based reform became a primary focus over the next two decades and on January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the reauthorized *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA), more widely known as the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*

(NCLB). The new law leaves few excuses for anyone as to the expectation that each child will receive a quality education and that test scores will be the vehicle for proving school effectiveness. Administrators and teachers are accountable for increasing the standard and ensuring that all children learn, regardless of ethnicity, gender, race, or disability. Schools lagging behind in test scores must offer parents opportunities for additional tutoring services as well as the option for attending another school. The increased level of accountability has left many educators scrambling for strategies and practices to maintain and to increase test scores.

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* requires each state to implement an accountability program that tests children annually in grades 3 through 8 and once in grades 9 through 12 on a challenging set of content standards in reading and math. Although states are given the choice as to the stakes applied to the testing program, under previous Georgia Governor Roy Barnes, legislation passed attaching high stakes to the testing program. The *A-Plus Education Reform Act of 2000* (as amended in 2003), in an effort to increase the level of student achievement, completely revamped the accountability system, adding rewards and sanctions to the results. For example, third grade students who score at Performance Level I—below 300 points out of a possible 450 points—in reading are not promoted to fourth grade, unless there is an appeal filed by a parent, teacher, or administrator and the decision is revoked. Sanctions are also applied to schools that do not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on the CRCT. Schools not meeting AYP are required to write a plan for improvement and, depending on the number of years the school has not made adequate progress the sanctions can include offering school choice or reassignment of duties for teachers and administrators.

Teachers are key players in the accountability movement and how they respond to the policies being implemented has an affect on students' performance (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas,

2000; Olson, 2002; Pedulla et al., 2003). Reform through accountability measures too often regulates the process and content of teaching by implementing teacher-proof curricula and further increase a hierarchal control over teachers (Rosenholtz, 1989). Rosenholtz stated, “Much negative publicity has resulted, and the public climate of opinion has become increasingly hostile; there has been an abrupt and utter evaporation of confidence in the nation’s teachers, and consequently of their own confidence in themselves” (p. 214). The teacher’s perspective is not often the one being sought by those who make or determine policy (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Goodlad, 1990; Pedulla et al., 2003). Arnold Shore, the executive director of the National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy, stated that “In the public debate, in the public conversation, the voices of those who are implementing testing and accountability policies are either underheard or not heard much at all” (Olson, 2002, ¶13).

Paris and Urdan (2000) further supported the importance of the role of the teacher by describing two reasons their voice is important. First, tests are often used as the vehicle for changing instruction. The goals and standards of the curriculum are aligned to the assessment; therefore, the taught and the tested curriculum supposedly become synonymous. Second, the public is demanding stronger evidence of teacher and school effectiveness, and test scores are the method by which schools prove they are meeting higher expectations for improved teaching quality. For teachers to assist in the support of changing instruction and meeting public demands for higher achievement, the unintended consequences such as weakened teacher professionalism and less autonomy in making important instructional decisions must be addressed.

Through teacher education, assessment can be used in a manner that is instructionally sound. By wisely aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment, an instructional plan that will benefit students can be developed (Glatthorn, 1999; Guskey, 2003; Popham, 2003). However, a

significant finding in the study by Clarke et al. (2003) was the lack of capacity which could be attributed to teachers not clearly understanding the relationship between standards, tests, accountability, and classroom instruction. Focus groups held with teachers from successful and less successful schools revealed that many teachers reported feeling a lack of autonomy necessary to make important instructional decisions and a negative sense of professionalism (Perreault, 2000). Guskey (2003) encouraged systems to help teachers develop quality assessments, align their assessments with valid objectives, and instruct teachers in methods of how to use the results to improve teaching and learning.

Cimbricz (2002) also reported the relationship between testing and teachers' beliefs and practices, but findings revealed the relationship as one that is often influenced by factors such as teacher knowledge, experience, status in the organization, views of learning, and approaches to teaching. According to Cimbricz, while testing does have an impact on what might be taught, simply implementing a testing program may not necessarily affect how content matter was taught. Grant (2000) explored the changes that occurred in classrooms when there was a change in testing practices and he found little evidence to suggest how and to what extent tests influenced or actually created changes in instruction. Fieldwork conducted by Firestone and Mayrowetz (2000) in England, Wales, and two American states suggested that many times the content matter studied is impacted but not the instructional strategies used for teaching the content.

In an analysis of intended and unintended consequences of high-stakes testing, Amrein (2002) found that in many schools, tests were driving the instruction. While the study suggested that the narrowing of curriculum often resulted in an increase in scores on the high-stakes test, only teaching content on the test denied opportunities for minority and economically

disadvantaged students to learn subjects not tested. Amrein's research pointed to the fact that not only was the curriculum directed to subject and content areas being tested, but also purchases and subsequent instruction were limited to test preparation materials. Moreover, staff development was geared to test score improvement.

Pedulla et al. (2003) reported in the study for the National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy a comparison of the perceived effects of state-mandated testing on teaching and learning in three states of varying levels of accountability. Findings suggested that the level of change in instructional practice occurred as the accountability level changed. Little evidence of instructional change was found in two of the three states in which the stakes were of low to medium impact. However, in the state where the highest level of accountability was attached to the test, teachers tended to alter instruction to focus more on test items. In an era of high-stakes testing, it appeared that often instructional decisions were made to meet accountability demands rather than applying content and pedagogical knowledge for making instruction decisions.

From their study of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), Hoffman, Assaf, and Paris (2001) reported a "de-emphasis on teaching content not related to the TAAS," (p. 490) but instead teachers devoted large blocks of time preparing for the test. Paris and Urdan (2000) found that classroom instruction was narrowed to only the content covered on the test and teachers, feeling pressure for students to obtain high scores, were engaging in what could be considered as unethical practices, such as using commercial test preparation packages, practicing items from last year's test, or reviewing or teaching topics covered on the test. Eisner (1999), in voicing concern for how a standardized test will help children learn to solve problems, deal with ambiguity, or adjust to a world that requires complex thinking, stated that the purpose of

education is “not merely to enable our children to do well in school but also in life outside of school” (p. 55).

Jones, Jones, and Hargrove (2003) found in their survey of teachers in North Carolina that many teachers and students reacted negatively toward the high-stakes testing program. Results suggested that instructional practices had changed to adapt to the demands of the test and in many cases left the teacher questioning the value of the teaching profession. One teacher stated, “Feeling like less of a professional is an understatement. I don’t want to be appreciated, I want to be valued for my skill” (p. 142).

Statement of the Problem

There is a large body of literature surrounding the topic of high-stakes testing in particular because of the recent changes in federal law requiring states to implement a testing system. The impact of tests on teachers relative to instructional decisions and professionalism are but two of the issues surrounding the accountability movement. While there is strong evidence that high-stakes testing impacts instruction, specifically how tests impact teachers’ instructional decisions and teacher professionalism is not as clearly defined in the literature.

Barth (2001) stated that schools are failing in the most important mission—creating lifelong learners. Finding evidence of students who possess the ability to learn along the way must be the goal. Barth supported these beliefs with the statement:

If your school has succeeded in getting 95 percent of its students scoring at the 95th percentile on standardized tests, and at the same time students are leaving a teacher, a grade, or the school ...saying, ‘I’m outta here!’ then you have won a battle and lost the war. (p. 17)

Clearly, the professionalism of teaching is in jeopardy when teachers are restricted to only teaching what is on a test, including little in the instructional program that leads to a greater ability to solve problems and effectively communicate in the working world.

Georgia legislation requires school systems to test students annually in grades K-8. Students in third, fifth, and eighth grade are held accountable for passing the statewide assessment to move to the next grade. Students in grades 9-12 must take a test at the end of certain courses, with the scores counted as a portion of the total grade. In a system that places the results of a statewide test as the sole indicator of student achievement, it is important to understand the relationship between testing and instruction and, more specifically, how accomplished elementary school teachers' perceive how high-stakes testing influences their instructional decision-making and sense of professionalism

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to uncover the perspectives of accomplished elementary school teachers relative to how high-stakes tests influence instructional decisions and professionalism. To further define this study, accomplished teachers by their designation as National Board Certified Teachers were interviewed to gain their perspectives to determine if their instructional decisions and professionalism were affected by the use of high-stakes testing. Teachers were selected from elementary schools in a single suburban school system outside the metropolitan Atlanta area.

The response to educational reform involves more than just posting a test score. Curriculum development and instruction is dependent on teacher interpretation and knowledge, as well as the structure of the school environment (English, 1992). Discovering the accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives of high-stakes testing and how these tests influence their instructional decision-making and sense of professionalism is important for acquiring a deeper understanding about the impact of accountability systems at the teacher level.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) is committed to honoring the teaching profession by acknowledging that the aim of the educator is to empower the student to strive toward greater understanding and knowledge. The belief and vision of the group was that teacher quality would improve and, in turn, improve student achievement by raising the standards, strengthening educational preparation programs, and by requiring teachers to participate in performance based assessments. This was the first group to raise the standards for teacher education by focusing on the implementation of teaching behaviors rather than on the effects of teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1997a).

Tomlinson and Allan (2000) described a set of beliefs about teaching and learning in which they stated “Students should be at the center of the learning process, actively involved in making sense of the world around them through the lenses we call ‘the disciplines’” (p. 17). Erikson (2001) described the role of teachers in creating this environment, “Teachers who take responsibility for the design, delivery, and assessment of curriculum and instruction show greater interest and engagement with the learning process” (p. 203).

According to Wraga (1999), one of the strategies used for responding to current reform movements is curriculum alignment with the underlying assumption that by aligning curriculum with current state and national standards, there would be gains in student achievement. Wraga further asserted that curriculum alignment and the standards movement were not supported by research as a means of curriculum improvement. Curriculum improvement, therefore, depends on a continuous process of diagnosing and expanding opportunities for all children to learn instead of narrowing to only those standards included in a curriculum.

Popham (2001) warned that teachers were not taking full “advantage of the instructional benefits of properly constructed tests” (p. 1). Educators who were knowledgeable of how tests

were developed and used for diagnosing individual students needs, were better prepared for using test results in making improvements in their instruction (Popham, 2003). Schmoker (1999) further emphasized this point by encouraging schools to work collaboratively in keeping track of data to facilitate improvement in student learning. Stiggins (2001) also reinforced the importance for educators to cultivate a knowledge base of assessment literacy. Overcoming the barriers to gaining a sense of assessment literacy increases the understanding of the role of assessment in the education of all students.

However, evidence abounds suggesting that the implementation of high-stakes testing has impacted teachers in a negative way, especially in the area of professionalism (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Jones et al., 2003; Perrault, 2000; Rapp, 2002). A survey of National Board Certified Teachers in Ohio found incongruity between what teachers viewed as effective classroom practices and what legislative policies required, leading them to believe that education is “headed in an unhealthy direction,” especially in the area of creativity and autonomy (Rapp, p. 218). Varying levels of teacher confidence were evident among schools implementing high-stakes testing programs, according to Berry et al. (2003) who described “an invasive scrutiny of their classrooms, increased intra-district competition, and specific pressures on teachers to make changes whether or not there were professional reasons to do so” (p. 26).

To maximize the positive and to minimize the negative effects on the instructional program, data must be available describing the effect of high-stakes testing on classroom practices relative to teacher professionalism and teacher knowledge for making instructional decisions. However, little is known about how accomplished Georgia educators perceive or implement the current accountability system at the elementary school level. To date, no studies were found to document the level of accomplished elementary school teachers’ understanding of

the relationship between Georgia curriculum, effective instructional practices, and the current high-stakes accountability system in the state of Georgia. Furthermore, no studies have been found to date that documents the perspective of Georgia's accomplished teachers as to the effect high-stakes testing has had on instructional decisions and teacher professionalism.

Research Questions

Because of the many facets of curriculum, instruction, and accountability, a multitude of questions arise. How knowledgeable are teachers of current reforms and how are they responding to changes? Does increased accountability influence the way instruction is addressed in the classroom and, if so, how? Are there effective instructional methods, strategies, or even certain content areas that are omitted because of the pressure to "hurry up" and cover a topic that is included on the test? The purpose of this study was to uncover accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives on how high-stakes testing influences their instructional decisions and sense of professionalism. Questions this study sought to answer include:

- 1) What are accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives of high-stakes testing? And to a greater specificity,
- 2) As a result of the pervasive testing requirements found in high-stakes accountability systems, are there professional judgments and decisions of teaching and learning that are being compromised?
- 3) What are accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives of how high stakes testing has affected or impacted their role as a professional educator?

Conceptual Framework

To adequately uncover accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives on how high-stakes testing influences instructional decisions and professionalism, it was important that

the theoretical framework used would help define an understanding of the social interactions that exist when a high-stakes test is implemented. Have there been changes in how instructional decisions are made and, if so, how are these changes described? How do accomplished elementary school teachers react to a high-stakes testing system? Does it influence their sense of professionalism? The attempt to understand teachers' perspectives of high-stakes testing and its impact was further refined by applying an interpretive theoretical perspective. By examining the process for *how* teachers come to develop their perspective, this study aimed to identify the reason for *why* teachers believed as they did. Furthermore, through interpretive analysis, themes as to what is important to teachers would surface in their perspectives about high-stakes testing.

Studying the perspectives of accomplished teachers for how high-stakes testing influences their instructional decision-making and sense of professionalism was best understood from the point-of-view of the teachers. Qualitative inquiry grounded in symbolic interactionism allowed the researcher to seek understanding for how accomplished teachers defined the impact of high-stakes testing. An assumption of symbolic interactionism is that meaning is assigned based on the interactions between people and their interpretations of these interactions. The process of interpreting experiences and interactions with others allows individuals to develop perspectives and assign definitions to objects, people, situations, and events (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003).

The philosophical foundations of symbolic interactionism set by George Herbert Mead and sociologist Herbert Blumer (1969) included three central premises that embody this construct. The premises of symbolic interactionism include: (1) Human beings react toward things based on the meanings they have developed. (2) The source of the meaning has developed from interactions with others. (3) The meanings are further developed and modified

through an applicative and interpretative process in dealing with things encountered. Contrary to empirical studies, symbolic interactionism focuses on understanding society by relying on the perspective of how the world is interpreted through interactions with others (Hutchinson, 1990). The philosophy of symbolic interactionism also supported conducting this research using the grounded theory methodology, allowing the researcher to uncover the prominent themes that existed in classrooms and schools where a high-stakes test is mandated.

A case study method was chosen to allow the researcher to study the perspectives of six National Board Certified teachers who taught at five different elementary schools in a single system. Through multiple interviews, data were gathered regarding these accomplished teachers' perspectives about high-stakes testing and its impact on the teaching profession and, more specifically, perspectives which are relative to the instructional decisions that are made.

Overview of the Method

Glaser and Strauss (1999) described the grounded theory methodology as the “discovery of theory from data” (p. 1) using a comparative analysis strategy. A constant objective comparison of emerging themes and how these “themes” have meaning was used by following the basic rules regarding the grounded theory methodology. This method of inductive, qualitative analysis required objectivity and a process that allowed the researcher to “build theory rather than test theory” (Patton, 2002, p. 127). Grounded theory necessitates the ability of the researcher to “critically analyze situations, to think abstractly, and to have sensitivity to the words and actions of the respondents” (Patton, pp. 489-490). A continuous cycle of gathering, analyzing, and comparing data resulted in the emergence of consistent themes.

Using a case study approach, interviews were held with six National Board Certified elementary school teachers in two one-hour sessions regarding instructional decisions and

teacher professionalism. National Board Certified elementary school teachers from one suburban school system in Georgia were asked to participate. All teachers involved taught elementary school students in reading or math. Teachers were given the opportunity to read the interview transcript and analysis before the second interview. By using this approach, teachers were able to reflect and to verbalize their perspectives about the impact of testing.

The analytic process of interpreting the data from a whole to part and part to whole concept aided in applying meaning to the findings. By systematically coding each piece of data and employing a method of constant comparison, patterns and themes emerged. Triangulation of data helped further validate the findings. Multiple data sources, such as fieldnotes, artifacts, and interview transcriptions, were used for confirming consistencies or revealing the inconsistencies generated by the data (Patton, 2002).

Significance of the Study

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* requires each state to develop and to implement a single, statewide accountability system in which Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is addressed and in which awards and consequences are included (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2004). Each state was given flexibility to determine content and achievement standards, the design of their assessments, and whether or not to apply student stakes to the annual test (United States Department of Education, 2004). Consequently, the standards for school systems, teachers, and students vary from state to state. Georgia's assessment, the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), was developed as the annual measurement instrument for students in grades 1-8. Georgia is one of only eight states that depend on the results of a statewide test to determine promotion at the elementary school level (Quality Counts, 2005). (See Appendix A for a list of states that are considered high-stakes states.) While the data

collected from studies in other states can provide generalizations about the perspectives of high-stakes testing, only teachers from Georgia can provide accurate feedback and perspectives as to the implementation of Georgia's accountability system.

Additionally, Firestone and Mayrowetz (2000) found that not all stakes are perceived to be equally high and that pressure on teachers comes from sources other than just the stakes applied to the tests. Many variables were found that lead to change in instructional practices within a testing environment, which included, but may not be limited to, the amount of pressure placed on teachers for instructional change or for their students to perform well on the test, the perception of and understanding by the teacher of high-stakes testing and its purposes, and the relationship between the test and the curriculum expected to be taught (Berry et al., 2003; Cimbricz, 2002; Clarke et al., 2003; Firestone & Mayrowetz, 2000; Grant, 2000; Pedulla et al., 2003). Not only are all stakes perceived to be equally high, the unintended negative effects differ from state to state and among grade levels (Clarke et al., 2003). As the stakes attached to the test increase, so do the unintended consequences, such as increased pressure on the students and teachers and the increased focus on instruction of only tested areas (Clarke et al., 2003; Pedulla et al., 2003). The incongruent results of current research imply that policies used to generate change and, subsequently, increases in student achievement are dependent on teacher interpretation and perception of policies.

It is important to understand how these recently introduced policies related to high-stakes testing are being implemented in elementary schools across Georgia and how they have impacted teachers' perspectives in their efforts to increase student achievement. This study allowed the researcher to gain specific insight into accomplished teachers' perspectives on how high-stakes testing influences their instructional decision-making and sense of professionalism. Often

teachers are regarded as “obstacles to effective policy” (Lee-Smith & Fey, 2000, p. 343), especially when teachers feel the policies are not in the best interest of the student (Jones & Egley, 2004; Lee-Smith & Fey, 2000). Jones and Egley’s (2004) survey of teachers in Florida supported the need for additional teacher input. Results indicated that while teachers approved of the need for accountability, they were discouraged by the fact that policies continue to be handed down without their input. Furthermore, Jones and Egley stated “To ignore teachers’ voices is to ignore their ideologies. Moreover, this lack of a voice appears to have created a resistance and silent controversy to the testing program” (p. 21). Lee-Smith and Fey (2000) suggested that for changes to occur, teachers must become knowledgeable of the culture produced by policies and the intentions behind them. Therefore, this study is as important to teachers as to other educators and policymakers.

The current workplace, where high-stakes testing has become a guiding force, is in the process of changing to meet the increased expectations of the public and to comply with federal and state law. Few educators, policymakers, and community members understand how or why tests impact the school and classroom, especially since tests are now the determining factor indicating student and school performance (Amrein, 2002; Lee-Smith & Fey, 2000; Popham, 2001; Rapp, 2002; Sacks, 1999). In fact, in a mixed quantitative and qualitative study by Yarbrough (1999), recommendations for further study included the need for the identification of attributes contributing to low teacher morale that existed when high-stakes testing programs were implemented. Furthermore, Rapp (2002) stated that there was “the pressing need for research that captures the perceptions of teachers and conveys them to the public” (p. 218).

Studies of the accountability systems in other states, including Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, and Massachusetts, have found significant unintended consequences of high-stakes

testing and often the perspective of the teacher is only one source among several used for documenting the findings (Amrein, 2002; Clarke et al., 2003; Jones & Egley, 2004; Jones et al., 2003; Pedulla et al., 2003; Rapp, 2002; Yarbrough, 1999). Furthermore, many studies use a quantitative research method in which teachers volunteer to reflect on the current testing mandates through surveys. Few studies single out the perspective of the teacher and even fewer focus on the perspectives of a specific group of teachers. Two examples of specific groups included those studies by Rapp (2002) and Hoffman, Assaf, and Paris (2000). Rapp (2002) surveyed National Board Certified teachers in Ohio as to their perspective of high-stakes testing and Hoffman, Assaf, and Paris (2000) polled teachers who were members of the Texas Reading Association for their perspective of the Texas Assessment Academic Skills (TAAS).

Teachers are in direct contact with the students and are primarily responsible for the instruction the student receives. Therefore, optimal success of policies depends on the teacher's support of the federal, state, and local policies they are asked to follow. Research documents the need for the teacher's voice to become a part of the decisions made by state policymakers (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Lee-Smith & Fey, 2000; Olson, 2002; Rapp, 2002; Yarbrough, 1999). By seeking the accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives on how high-stakes testing influences instructional decisions and professionalism, findings represent those who are often regarded as exemplary educators as well as those directly responsible for success on the high-stakes tests. Multiple interviews with the participants allowed the researcher to hear personal descriptions of how high-stakes testing has impacted their role as a professional, particularly in the area of instructional decisions. Given the fact that few studies place a single focus on the teacher's perspectives of high-stakes testing and that no studies have been documented, to date, in Georgia, this study is timely and important for influencing future policy.

Assumptions

It was assumed that all participants understood that the state-wide accountability system required students to perform at a particular level on the annual statewide assessments in grades 3 and 5 for promotion. It was also assumed that because all teachers involved in this study were National Board Certified teachers that there was a high level of knowledge about effective instructional practices as well as a high level of professionalism among the participants.

Definition of Terms

Accomplished Teachers – In this study, an accomplished teacher is one who has earned National Board Certification status.

Accountability system – According to the *No Child Left Behind Act*, each state must establish a system of reporting student achievement. The standards for instruction, how they are assessed, and how they are reported to the public are the components of the accountability system.

Adequate Yearly Progress – Each state is required to set a minimum level of progress for students to achieve. Adequate Yearly Progress is the standard set for each school and system to meet on an annual basis. The reporting of annual progress is significant for meeting the 2013 deadline for 100% proficiency on the state test.

Assessments – An assessment is a method of evaluating the level of mastery of specific skills and concepts. Assessments and tests are used interchangeably in this study.

Curriculum – A set of objectives that teachers strive for all students to learn is included in the curriculum. Georgia's curriculum is currently referred to as the Quality Core Curriculum, or the QCC. Incremental phasing in of newly revised curriculum is underway in Georgia. This new curriculum is referred to as the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS).

High-stakes testing – Students take tests many times during their educational tenure. When the score of one test is used to determine sanctions such as retention, placement, or graduation, or rewards such as merit pay, these tests are referred to as high-stakes.

Instruction – Activities or methods teachers use to teach the intended curriculum.

Professionalism – Defined by Doyle (1976), a profession is “an occupation whose members are reputed to possess high levels of skill, commitment, and trustworthiness” (pp. 21-22). Therefore, professionalism would typify those members who display these characteristics.

Standards – The level of understanding each student is expected to reach is expressed as a standard. Students must satisfactorily perform certain tasks that demonstrate a high level of understanding to meet the standard.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited by the participants who included six elementary school teachers who are noted as accomplished by their status of National Board Certified teachers. Because of the level of experience and expertise in teaching that is characteristic of National Board Certified teachers, six classroom teachers in second, third, and fourth grade were selected to participate in this study. In the elementary school setting, the second, third, and fourth grade levels are among the most impacted by high-stakes testing because it is in these grades that students are tested. Moreover, the participants taught across five elementary schools in a single suburban school system outside the metropolitan Atlanta area. Finally, the temporal nature of the data from the time of the study was limited to the spring of the year, coinciding with the high-stakes testing of the students. The first interview was held just weeks prior to the administration of the high-stakes test. The second set of interviews was conducted a few weeks after the testing occurred.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 describes the background and the rationale for the study, the statement of the problem, and the significance of the study including the research questions. Chapter 2 presents a review of the related literature relevant to accountability systems, including standards and assessments, national and state policies related to accountability and standards-based reform, and the impact of high-stakes testing on teacher professionalism and instructional decisions.

Chapter 3 presents the research method and the overall scope of how the study was performed. Chapter 4 reports the data and its analyses of six individual cases. Chapter 5 presents a cross case analysis of the data presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 6 discusses the results and the implications for those who implement policies developed at state and national levels. Chapter 6 also includes implications and recommendations relating to the findings for teachers, administrators, and policymakers.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The current educational environment in Georgia places a set of high-stakes consequences on results of annual assessments given to students in grades three, five, eight, and graduating students in high school. While consequences of this accountability system have surfaced at the student, teacher, and district level, the purpose of this research was to uncover accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives on how high-stakes testing influences their instructional decision-making and sense of professionalism. Questions this study sought to answer included:

- 1) What are accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives of high-stakes testing? And to a greater specificity,
- 2) As a result of the pervasive testing requirements found in high-stakes accountability systems, are there professional judgments and decisions of teaching and learning that are being compromised?
- 3) What are accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives of how high stakes testing has affected or impacted their role as a professional educator?

The literature on high-stakes testing is comprehensive, particularly in documenting the unintended consequences resulting from high-stakes testing (Amrein, 2002; Clarke et al., 2003; Jones, Jones & Hargrove, 2003; Yarbrough, 1999). Recent studies have documented multiple unintended consequences in states that have implemented a high-stakes test. Table 1 represents a sampling of studies conducted on accountability systems and the accompanying intended and unintended consequences.

Table 1

Representative Sampling of Studies Regarding Intended and Unintended Consequences of High-Stakes Testing

Author(s)	Year	Consequences	
		Intended	Unintended
Amrein	2002	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make students, teachers, and other educators accountable 2. Motivate students to work harder and teachers to focus on improved teaching 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Minority and low socioeconomic students received increased focus only on tested content 2. Teachers and administrators found guilty of cheating 3. Deprofessionalizing of the profession
Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas	2000	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve quality of educational services 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Negative effects on teaching as a profession 2. Places undo pressure on students 3. Increased emphasis on test preparation
Clarke, Shore, Rhoades, Abrams, Miao, & Li	2003	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve educational quality and student achievement 2. Measure how well students have learned content and skills associated with the state standards 3. Make students, teachers, schools, and/ or districts accountable for how well students have learned the content and skills set by the state standards 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inappropriate use of materials and pace 2. Narrowed curriculum 3. Test driven curriculum that is not always sensitive to student's needs 4. Student motivation had greater impact on high achieving students than on at-risk students 5. Test dictates curriculum and teachers are left without the support, guidance, or information necessary for true instructional change

Table 1 (Continued)

Representative Sampling of Studies Regarding Intended and Unintended Consequences of High-Stakes Testing

Author(s)	Year	Consequences	
		Intended	Unintended
Clotfelter & Ladd	1996	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve schools' academic performance 2. Measure the effectiveness of the organization in a manner that is easy for teachers, other school officials, and the public to understand 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teaching is strictly on tested content 2. Taught curriculum becomes narrowed 3. If too much emphasis is placed on rewards or negative consequences, the integrity of test administration becomes questionable
Elmore	2004	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Influence and improve classroom practice 2. Increased school performance 3. Increase opportunities to learn content and improve quality of teaching 4. Motivate students to become more autonomous in regard to their own learning. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of correlation between test scores and what students may actually know leads to misrepresentation in the evidence of learning 2. Increased focus on test preparation
Furhman	2004	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve student performance 2. Promote improved instruction 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Narrowly focused curriculum 2. Increased test preparation 3. Increased dropout rates
Herman	2004	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Motivate effort and improved learning 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased pressure on teachers 2. Increased focus only on content areas which are tested 3. Risk of increased gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students

Table 1 (Continued)

Representative Sampling of Studies Regarding Intended and Unintended Consequences of High-Stakes Testing

Author(s)	Year	Consequences	
		Intended	Unintended
Jones & Egley	2004	1. Make educators accountable for student performance	1. Increased pressure on teachers 2. Negative effects on teacher motivation
Jones, Jones, & Hargrove	2003	1. Measure student achievement 2. Improve the quality of instruction as well as inform the public as to the state of quality instruction 3. Hold students and educators accountable for student progress and school improvement	1. Narrowing of curriculum 2. Increased use of test preparation materials 3. Unethical decisions regarding test administration 4. Decrease in teacher autonomy and increasing levels of low morale
Paris & Urdan	2000	1. Improve the quality of teaching	1. Overt pressure on teachers to improve test scores 2. Lowered teacher morale 3. Increased engagement in unethical practices 4. Increased use of test preparation materials
Pedulla, Abrams, Madaus, Russell, Ramos, & Miao	2003	1. Measure student achievement of the state's content standards 2. Indicate school effectiveness	1. Increased pressure to teach only tested content 2. Increased drop out rate in high school 3. Increased student retention

In most cases, a quantitative approach was used for gathering data; thus, while important statistical information was made available, research that included the voices of the teachers and

how testing requirements along with state and federal policies affected teaching and learning was not as prevalent. Few studies center their research only on the teachers' perspectives and fewer still focus on professionalism as an aspect related to the impact of high-stakes testing.

Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2000) studied the perspectives of teachers and their practices in regard to high-stakes testing, but also addressed parent perceptions. A key study by Pedulla et al. (2003) surveyed teachers in 47 states regarding their perspectives of testing, but results were not disaggregated by state, therefore, how teachers in Georgia viewed high-stakes testing was not explicit. Additionally, Jones and Egley (2004) surveyed teachers in Florida as to their perspectives about the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT). The study categorized the statements of hundreds of teachers from all across Florida into 10 themes. The data from this study confirmed findings from other studies about the unintended consequences of testing, but again the focus was not on the impact on professionalism nor did it limit perspectives to accomplished teachers. A study by Rapp (2002) revealed the perspectives of National Board Certified teachers in Ohio concerning accountability systems. In researching the effects of testing policies on instructional practices, Rapp discovered numerous unintended consequences of testing, one of which was the impact on professionalism. While this study did rely on the perspectives of accomplished teachers, it did not examine the effect on professionalism related to the decisions made by teachers.

As evidenced by the above sampling of key studies on high-stakes testing, many studies used a quantitative approach to gathering data while none sought to discover why teachers responded as such or teachers' perspectives about the implication of their beliefs on their professionalism. Teachers function at the heart of the instructional picture and, therefore, it is important that their perspective is documented regarding the effects of high-stakes testing on the

instructional decisions made at the classroom level and the sense of professionalism.

Unfortunately, teachers' voices are seldom heard regarding the implementation of federal or state policies. In the study by Pedulla et al. (2003), they concluded, "only by listening to what teachers tell us is happening as a result of these state testing programs can we be confident that they are having the intended effect" (p. 123).

Given the fact that few studies place a single focus on the teachers' perspectives of high-stakes testing and that no studies have been documented, to date, in Georgia, this study is timely and important for influencing future policy as well as providing direction for school and district instructional leaders to guide more efficiently the implementation of state accountability systems, including standards and assessments. Additionally, it is assumed that accomplished teachers have a high level of knowledge about effective instructional practices as well as a high level of professionalism. An embedded case study approach focused the researcher on accomplished teachers' perspectives and because these teachers were interviewed, it was possible to delve into the meanings that framed their decisions. Interviews also proved an effective method for discovering reoccurring themes in regard to accomplished teachers' perspectives of high-stakes testing and the effects of such tests on their professional practices, such as making instructional decisions.

Three areas of related literature were deemed important for review and for the complete understanding of the issues surrounding this topic. Presented in this chapter is related literature pertaining to: (1) accountability systems, including the intended and unintended consequences when high-stakes are attached to the assessments, (2) national and state policies related to accountability, and (3) teacher professionalism and the impact of high-stakes testing.

Accountability Systems

Public education was founded on the premise that education was a means for ensuring that all citizens had access to moral and civic instruction (Timar & Tyack, 1999). Local control of educational institutions furthered the cause for reminding citizens of their obligations toward maintaining a republic government. Consequently, it has not always been important to hold schools accountable. However, as the shift in education governance moved from local control to more formal governmental control, how schools were governed became of more interest (Timar & Tyack, 1999). The distribution of federal funding and the accompanying regulations added layers of bureaucratic control and much of the local control over educational issues gave way to a more centralized and formal educational system. As we look at the history of public and political involvement in education, it is evident that over the years education has become a larger part of political agendas.

The sixties was a period of social, cultural, political, and economic change. In an effort to ensure that all children received an equitable education, President Lyndon Johnson passed the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*. This was the first major federal funding sent from the government, specifically earmarked to serve schools whose students were from high poverty communities (Popham, 2001). Well-intended government programs such as Title I, Headstart, Upward Bound, Job Corps, and Community Action were created to assist needy families work their way out of poverty through increased educational programs (Finn, 2005). For many of these programs, the monitoring of the appropriate use of the funds relied on the results of standardized tests.

Then, in 1983, the release of the report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education entitled, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, set the stage for

significant educational reform. The economic slump of the late 1970s and early 1980s created concern among key political figures about the quality of education and its effectiveness for ensuring students exited high school with the knowledge necessary for competing in a more diverse and global society. The report described the results in terms of untalented and under prepared teachers, students who were poorly trained in technology, and a public not satisfied with public schools (Berliner & Biddle, 1995), creating an image of American schools so weak that they were blamed for the economic crisis facing the nation at that time. As a result, Berliner and Biddle (1995) submitted a counter response in their book, *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Schools*, challenging the public to consider other facts before making judgments of American schools. Nonetheless, myth or fact, *A Nation at Risk* served as a catalyst for a series of reforms over the next two decades. Mandated courses and testing requirements, proposals for improved teacher education programs, and school restructuring through a set of more challenging standards have each been a focus over the past 20 years for school improvement and increased student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1997a). Consistent in each of these reforms has been the push for an accountability system consisting of clear and challenging standards with accompanying assessments to show student progress.

The accompanying assessments in an accountability system can have low-, medium-, or high-stakes applied to the results. The intensity of the intended and unintended consequences varies depending on the stakes applied (Clarke et al., 2003; Pedulla et al., 2003). Whereas Table 1 represented the broad overview of the research studies related to high-stakes testing, Table 2 more narrowly reflects the findings directly related to intended and unintended consequences of high-stakes testing. As with any policy, there are intended consequences that prove successful but often there are also accompanying unintended consequences. Research supports a host of

unintended consequences relative to high-stakes accountability systems that are often reflected in a negative connotation; however, it is possible that the effect could also reflect positive aspects.

Table 2

Intended and Unintended Consequences of Accountability Programs with High-Stakes Attached to Tests

Intended Consequences		Unintended Consequences	
Effort to close achievement gap	Accountability Programs with High-Stakes Attached to Tests		
Change teaching behaviors (e.g., Amrein, 2002; Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Paris & Urdan, 2000)		Unethical testing practices (e.g., Amrein, 2002; Clotfelter & Ladd, 1996; Jones et al., 2003; Urdan, 2000)	
		2003)	

Intended Consequences of Accountability Programs

The minimum competency of the 1970s and 1980s proved to be ineffective in gaining the desired results for improving student learning (Amrein, 2002). Tests administered for assessing mastery of skills were viewed as “dumbing down” the content taught to students (Amrein, 2002). The release of *A Nation at Risk* and poor results of the minimum competency reform led to the push for the development of more challenging standards for students in conjunction with assessments to check the mastery of those standards.

According to Cohen (1996), “the years between 1980 and 1994 saw a remarkable realignment in American education” (p. 99). Shortly after the release of *A Nation at Risk*, it became evident that schools and school systems should begin to focus their efforts on results and student performance rather than on the monetary resources they received (Cohen, 1996). As a result, education began to see a national movement toward systemic reform. The development of a successful reform depended on several key assumptions (Cohen, 1996). First, it was assumed that if the goals set by state and federal agencies were demanding enough, then improved and effective teacher instruction would follow suit. Second, it was assumed that goals could be achieved in a fairly short period of time. Third, state and federal agencies would be responsible for development of standards, the instructional framework, and the assessments, and as a result, changes in teaching and learning would occur. The final assumption was that by holding all students accountable for the same high standards and assessment, there would be improved performance of disadvantaged children. Two assumptions which created much discussion, as stated by Baker and Linn (1997), included “how to assure that high standards and challenging assessments improved the performance of disadvantaged students and the preservation of state and local authority for educational matters” (p. 10).

In 1989, at the education summit in Charlottesville, Virginia, President Bush and governors, led by then Governor Bill Clinton, from all 50 states agreed on national educational goals (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). However, because of political volleying, it wasn't until 1994 that Congress adopted eight national goals by enacting *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*. The National Educational Standards and Improvement Council (NESIC) was created to develop national content and performance standards in key content areas (Cohen, 1996). Funding was made available to states to support the development of state goals, performance standards, and accountability plans.

The reality of the goals coming to fruition in a timely fashion was immediately recognized as questionable. Republican control of Congress, occurring approximately six months after the approval of *Goals 2000*, proved unable to provide the necessary support for an agency that would certify national school reform (Cohen, 1996). With little or no federal oversight or collaboration, total responsibility of the implementation for meeting these eight national goals was given to individual states. As a result, efforts varied in states' guidance toward meeting increased expectations for student performance. Cohen (1996) described a study of local systems regarding their approach toward improved instruction of a set of challenging standards. Cohen stated, "only one of the school systems that we studied made anything that might approach a serious and sustained effort to shape principals' decisions about instruction" (p. 106). In a review by Hobbie (2001) of just one of the eight goals, she stated, "despite the past six years' effort to raise standards, ensure accountability, and assess progress, accomplishment of the first national goal cannot be documented. As stated, Goal #1 is so ambiguous that it is practically immeasurable" (p. 51).

Many viewed the development of standards and assessments as the means for improving educational achievement and reform (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Kreitzer & Madaus, 1995; Marzano, 2003; Popham, 2003). The rise in scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was cited as evidence of the success of implementing higher academic standards (Education Commission of the States, 2000). It is documented, however, that standards-based reform is most effective when used in conjunction with aligned curriculum, resources, and assessments (Briars & Resnick, 2000; Education Commission of the States, 2000; Schmoker, 1999).

From the research, it appears that how the accountability system works in conjunction with standards and assessments is critical to success in the standards reform movement. However, Reeves (2000) stated that, “too often, educational tests, grades, and report cards are treated by teachers and parents as autopsies when they should be viewed as physicals” (p. 10). Popham (2003) described the importance of building a relationship between student learning and assessment. Using assessments for determining student learning through a formative means rather than summative means, help teachers gain insights into student learning and for making improvements in the instructional plan.

Proponents of testing believe that a well-constructed test matched to common, clear goals can be used as an indicator of student success (Kreitzer & Madaus, 1995). When assessments are tied to high expectations for students and based on a set of curriculum standards, a strong connection occurs between the curriculum and the assessment. Indeed, this is the goal of a standards movement—to clearly state the desired learning and then develop assessments to indicate if students are meeting the standards (Stiggins, 2001). The caveat, however, is in the type of assessment developed. By employing a well-constructed test, those objectives which are

critical for learning are tested and taught. Kreitzer and Madaus (1995) found that by implementing a performance based assessment, the teacher's judgment of student learning through their wisdom, experience, observational skills, and reflective abilities was restored and valued.

Unintended Consequences of Accountability Systems

Unfortunately, the *No Child Left Behind Act* requires a single assessment for determining adequate yearly progress, leaving no means for states to use tests in ways other than instruments for determining the appropriate sanction or reward. This leads to severe, intended and unintended, consequences for some students, teachers, and school systems. Depending on state policies, as in Georgia, the results can also lead to a student's promotion or retention in a grade or graduation from high school. Negative consequences such as these have caused standards and accountability to become a highly controversial issue.

Not all approaches to standards-based curriculum reform with accompanying high-stakes tests have been successful. Unintended consequences, such as greater grade retention, higher dropout rates, and narrowed focus on curriculum, have resulted from applying stakes to assessments (Amrien, 2002; Clarke, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Jones et al., 2003). Research is clear about the limitations of applying sanctions to assessments, prompting some organizations to develop a position on high-stakes testing (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Most notably, the American Educational Research Association (AERA), warned of the negative consequences when high-stakes tests are used inappropriately. Among the 10 considerations AERA suggested when implementing a high-stakes accountability system included the proper alignment between tests and curriculum, adequate resources for teachers and students, the use of a test that is known to be reliable and valid, and the protection against a single test being used as

an indicator of decisions about student placement or graduation (AERA, 2000). The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) also issued a position statement on the use of high-stakes testing. Again, the group warned of using a single test to issue sanctions or rewards to students, teachers, schools, districts, or states among other recommendations (ASCD, 2004). Position statements from other organizations, such as the National Research Council, International Reading Association, and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, have taken similar positions against high-stakes testing.

Studies have indicated that higher scores on tests are not always indicative of skill mastery (Amrein, 2002; Hoffman, Assaf, & Paris, 2001; Kreitzer & Madaus, 1995; Pedulla et al., 2003). Marzano (2003) asserted that positive results in student achievement do occur with the implementation of a “guaranteed and viable curriculum” (p. 15). However, while standards do provide teachers with a set of clear goals, the accountability system can narrow the focus to only those areas that are on the test, and as the stakes increase, the more focused instruction becomes (Jones et al., 1999; Pedulla et al., 2003).

The quality of instructional time is often questioned. Studies have found that the time used preparing for a high-stakes test is excessive (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Hoffman et al., 2001). One Texas study found that test preparation took 8 to 10 hours per week (Hoffman et al., 2001). Jones et al. (1999) found that 80% of the teachers surveyed said that more than 20% of their time was spent practicing for the annual assessment.

Popham (2001) described ways in which the profession has been jeopardized because of unethical practices in striving for the acceptable score. Increased cheating is a consequence that sometimes accompanies the high pressure of testing. Teachers giving their students more than the allowed amount of time to complete the test, changing answers, or even less obvious,

designing instruction around tested items are all examples of unethical practices that are a result of the pressure for high scores and placing teachers in ethical dilemmas.

Policies Related to High-Stakes Testing

National Policy

The most sweeping educational reform of the past 30 years occurred with the signing of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (Coble & Azordegan, 2004). Not since the inception in 1965, had there been a reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) of this magnitude. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) redefined the expectations for closing the achievement gap between minority and disadvantaged children and their peers (United States Department of Education).

As a condition of receiving federal Title I funds, under NCLB, states must develop an accountability system that demonstrates “adequate yearly progress” for students in reading or language arts and math. States are given the flexibility to set the score for gaining status of proficient or above on the state assessment but there must be equal increments of progress set to reach absolute proficiency by 2013-2014 (Office of Education Accountability, 2002). Additionally, for schools to meet adequate yearly progress, 95 percent of all students and the subgroups must participate in the assessments, while demonstrating progress on the assessments as a group and within subgroups.

According to Viteritti (2004), NCLB is the “most intrusive of federal power in the history of education” (p. 80). As a general rule, the federal government has had little authority over state policies and guidance in educational practices. Financial aid to disadvantaged populations and support for research have been the typical areas of support. Occasionally, recommendations for the design of new programs, materials, training are supported based on educational research

(Baker & Linn, 1997). Conversely, NCLB mandates annual assessments proving adequate yearly progress of not only schools but of population subgroups and that every classroom is staffed by a highly qualified teacher. It also requires reliance on research-based materials and programs for closing the achievement gap (Coble & Azordegan, 2004).

While it appears the law is heavy-handed by applying only sanctions for lack of progress, a multitude of resources are now available. The new law brings increases in funding for reading programs, after-school programs, school libraries, preschool in high-poverty neighborhoods, and professional development for teachers (Coble & Azordegan, 2004). Additionally, states are given the flexibility to develop their own standards and accountability system. The options for rewards and sanctions granted to schools are left up to the discretion of states and how the accountability system is designed.

Highly Qualified Teachers and Alternative Certification

One of the most challenging issues in the law is the provision for employing a highly qualified teacher in every classroom. The definition of a highly qualified teacher includes one who holds a Bachelor's Degree, has earned full state licensure or certification, and has demonstrated competence in the subject or field assigned (Coble & Azordegan, 2004). Also, under NCLB, provisional certification is no longer allowed. This can cause hardships on school systems trying to find teachers for every classroom.

Placing a content area certified teacher in every classroom has been especially difficult for rural areas and for middle schools. Often middle school teachers have acquired certification under the same requirements as elementary teachers and now they must meet content specific regulations, similar to their counterparts at the high school level. In a report by Blank (2003) from the Council of Chief State School Officers, data showed fewer teachers with a major in-

field now than in 1994. This is attributed to changes in demographics, making it more difficult to meet the demands of NCLB. According to Blank, the increasing school enrollment, the increasing need for teachers, and the lowering of class size regulations are each contributors to placing an in-field certified teacher in the appropriate content related class.

At the same time as federal mandates dictate a highly qualified teacher in every classroom, some schools still just need to put *a* teacher in every classroom. The teacher shortage facing many school systems has allowed teachers to enter into classrooms without adequate training or complete certification (Grossman, 2003). President Bush responded to this challenge by calling for states to revisit their teacher certification policies to find means for allowing more teachers into the field. As cited in Grossman's article, "The 2002 Report, 'Meeting the Highly Qualified Teacher Challenge,' states will need to streamline their certification system to focus on the few things that really matter: verbal ability, content knowledge, and, as a safety precaution, a background check of new teachers" (n.p.). This issue has sparked debate among the professional education community and proponents for alternative licensure. Many see alternative means for certification as a lowering of standards as well as means toward lack of professionalization of the field (Coble & Azordegan, 2004). Nonetheless, how states will comply with the current mandate of a highly-qualified teacher in every classroom is an area of concern and interest for both advocates of professionalization and for those in favor of deregulation.

State Policy

Georgia's *A Plus Education Reform Act of 2000* (as amended in 2003), signed into effect by previous Governor Roy Barnes, has impacted to some extent almost every area of school law—governance, personnel, students, instruction, and financing (O'Neal, 2001). The *A Plus Education Reform Act of 2000* (as amended in 2003) addressed the federal requirements for the

development and implementation of a single, statewide accountability system by requiring students in kindergarten through grade 12 to participate in an assessment that will serve as indicators of student learning (O’Neal). Results are disaggregated by ethnicity, gender, disability, language proficiency and socioeconomic status and are used to prepare a report card for each school in the state that is available to the public via request and state or school websites. Additionally, sanctions are applied to schools that are unable to meet adequate yearly progress. For Title I schools not meeting progress for two sequential years, supplemental services, school choice, school improvement, or restructuring are consequences that are in place. Students also face consequences that may be implemented as remediation. For students in grades three, five, eight, and certain courses in high school who fail to meet proficiency on the annual assessment are not eligible for promotion or graduation.

Teacher Professionalism

The literature on professionalism is abundant, and it is clear that the term commands a wide range of definitions. Definitions are often described in terms that apply to such highly regarded professions as law and medicine, as evidenced by the report by Sullivan (1995) that shows Americans have consistently placed medicine and law as top-ranked professions. Both medicine and law evolved to professional status and, while both continue to be regarded as professions, there is a constant effort toward maintaining that status. Both professional organizations strived to ensure high standards for entry, the trust and respect of society remain constant, and the results of the practice show a high competency level that is consistent with professional standing.

Teaching, unlike the medical profession, depends on a reciprocal relationship between teachers and community, parents, and students (Fernstamacher, 1990). While a doctor can

dictate a “diagnosis” based on medical knowledge, teachers must use their knowledge of teaching and practice in a cooperative way with parents, students, and other educators, among many others to appropriately assess the educational needs of a student. Consequently, the respect and trust of the community, required in a profession, depends in the case of teaching on the establishment of a relationship with community, students, and parents. As Fullan (1993) asserted, for teaching to gain the status of a profession, teachers must “form and reform productive collaborations with colleagues, parents, community agencies, businesses and others” (pp. 16-17).

Three components are typically included in all definitions of the word “professional.” To fit the definition a professional must possess: (1) knowledge and competence acquired from highly specialized training and formal education, (2) the respect and trust of community and peers that leads to a degree of autonomy and self-direction, and (3) a set of values, moral and ethical, that allow the performance of the job to become more service-oriented rather than profit-oriented (Darling-Hammond & Goodwin, 1993; Freidson, 1970; Starr, 1984; Sullivan, 1995). As Doyle (1976) stated, teaching is “an occupation whose members are reputed to possess high levels of skill, commitment, and trustworthiness” (pp. 21-22). Doyle ascertained that for an occupation to attain professional status, the occupation must be viewed by the public as having “significant, far-reaching, and proximal social consequences” (p. 23) and it must be perceived by the general public that only members of the occupation are capable, willing, and skilled enough to perform the duties of that occupation. In this important way, the professions distinguish themselves from “occupations” through the unique tasks, skills, and moral commitment individuals engage in when joining the profession.

Barriers to Educational Professionalism

A legitimate profession has a strict set of standards that allow only the most qualified to enter. Teaching requires discretion and continuous decision making based on the needs of the students. Studies have indicated that teachers need not only content knowledge but pedagogical knowledge (Darling-Hammond & Goodwin, 1993) and, therefore, acquisition of a broad body of knowledge becomes a key component in achieving professional status in education. While efforts are currently underway toward ensuring that entry into the teaching field is based on a set of high standards and using the criteria for accepted definitions of professionalism, it appears there are several other obstacles to gaining full professional status.

Varied opinions exist regarding the lack of professional status granted to education. Professionals have a wide body of knowledge in their field and are competent to make decisions because of their specialized and formal training. Earning the respect and trust of the community also contributes to the autonomy for making important decisions. Based on the common attributes in the definition of professionalism, three barriers appear to exist that keep teachers from feeling like they are members of a profession. These include: (1) the organization of the educational system that restricts autonomy and self-governance and also creates a sense of distrust among teachers, (2) the controversy regarding the level of training required for entry into the field that questions the validity of the knowledge base on teaching, and (3) the sense of respect and trust from the public for making educational decisions (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1997a; Hargreaves, 2003; Rosenholtz, 1989).

The Bureaucratic Educational System

The bureaucratic educational system is a deeply rooted tradition that can be traced to the early 1900s. A bureaucratic system lacks the ability to treat teachers as highly skilled and

trained professionals (Darling-Hammond, 1989) and little time is devoted to teacher induction, further learning, or opportunities for collaborative and collegial discussion about their job.

Darling-Hammond (1997b) described a model of bureaucratization as including the following characteristics:

- Lack of school-level flexibility for allocating resources—dollars, people, and time—to meet students’ needs
- Lack of classroom-level flexibility for determining appropriate teaching content, methods, and materials
- Overspecialization that fragments learning and teacher-student relationships
- Increased paperwork required to communicate directives and to monitor school activities as external decisions are enforced by reporting systems. (p. 64)

Ironically, while these foundations of bureaucracy are often created to increase student gains, many times they impede student learning. In the 1980s, two reforms, prescribed curricula and minimum competency testing, emerged in an effort to increase teacher quality. According to Rosenholtz (1989), the hierarchical control stifled continued improvement and led to a substantial decline in workplace commitment. The greater the bureaucratic control, the less success in student learning (Rosenholtz). Minimum competency testing further diminished the efforts towards professionalism by creating a system in which teachers lacked autonomy and students were not granted the opportunity for enriched activities that sparked critical thinking.

A bureaucratic system results in minimal expense for teacher training (Darling-Hammond, 1997a) since the logic is that teachers only need a prescribed curriculum to follow. Training resembling that of semi-skilled workers leaves teachers earning less pay and preparation than most other educated workers. Because this pattern has existed for an extended time, changing this attitude and approach is more difficult. As a result, however, necessary educational reforms have not been successful because of the lack of the system’s ability to prepare and retain highly skilled teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1997a).

In addition to the top-down style of management, state and local policies specifying a mandated curriculum all but leaves out the fact that students come into the classroom with “different preconceptions, levels of understanding, and styles of learning” (Darling-Hammond, 1997b, p. 51). The continuous search for the “teacher-proof curriculum” (p. 51) creates a sense of distrust in teachers’ abilities to make sound judgments and decisions about what should be taught. Policies prescribed by political agencies hinder the ability for teachers to make decisions that are in the students’ best interests (Darling-Hammond, 1997b). Darling-Hammond (1997b) further stated, “teachers who most faithfully follow rationalistic curriculum schemes are least likely to teach for understanding” (p. 72). Laursen (1996) also reiterated the need for a more reflective approach to instruction as opposed to the rationalistic curriculum as not only a means for gaining professional status but for increasing the “teachers’ awareness of the learning of students and the creativity of teaching” (p. 54). This setting is often seen when high-stakes tests are administered because instruction is prescriptive to the items on the test. Findings by Amrein (2002) revealed that “student learning was so fixed it did not transfer from the high-stakes measure to an external measure of similar constructs” (p. 190). Darling-Hammond (1997b) reported that controlled curriculum not only hinders teacher’s decision-making processes but demoralizes and demeans the knowledge base of the profession.

Finally, another result of the bureaucratic model is a “one size, fits all” approach in which novice teachers are treated no differently than experienced teachers and assume the same responsibilities (Darling-Hammond, 1989). As a result, the term professionalism has come to denote compliance rather than a high level of knowledge and commitment (Darling-Hammond).

Teacher Training, Licensure, and Certification

The idea that teacher knowledge is critical for increasing student learning began to take root in the late 1980s and following the publication of *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*, from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was established (Danielson, 1996). This was the first group to raise the standards for teacher education by focusing on the implementation of teaching behaviors rather than on the effects of teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1997a). One goal was to raise the status of professionalism for the teacher. The NBPTS is committed to honoring the profession, stating that the democratic aspect and ethical dimensions of education are characteristics of professionalism that distinguishes it from other professions. The aim of the educator is to empower the student to strive toward greater understanding and knowledge. Not only does the job require the passing on of knowledge, but the character of the teacher is in continuous judgment by students, peers, and parents, demanding positive performance as a role model (NBPTS website).

A frightening consequence of the lack of effective and efficient teacher training is that students in low-income and high-minority schools tend to have a less qualified teacher (Grossman, 2003). According to Grossman, the New York Regents' Task Force on Teaching reported that 12% of the teachers in the schools with the highest number of minority students were not certified. In the school with the lowest minority population, only 5.4% of the teachers were uncertified. America's public schools are increasingly becoming more diverse and the need for teachers who are more qualified is necessary to meet the demands of a more challenging student population (Darling-Hammond, Berry, Haselkorn, & Fiderler, 1999). The NBPTS is leading the efforts toward setting standards of accomplished practices. Findings by

Darling-Hammond, Chung, and Frelow (2002) substantiate these efforts by revealing that teachers who are prepared through teacher education programs and knowledgeable in all areas including content, pedagogy, curriculum development, and assessment are more effective and successful than those who enter through alternative programs.

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) is a major force in the push for more specialized teacher training. Through widespread consultation with lay and professional organizations as well as individuals, a 1996 report from NCTAF was released that recommended five major concepts as:

- Get serious about standards for both students and teachers.
- Reinvent teacher preparation and professional development.
- Fix teacher recruitment, and put qualified teachers in every classroom.
- Encourage and reward teacher knowledge and skill
- Create schools that are organized for student and teacher success. (Sykes, 1999, p. xvi)

Sykes further reported that while it is encouraging that organizations are recognizing the need for more qualified educators, certain issues remain to be addressed such as “the quality of teacher education, state standard setting, district recruitment and selection routines, and the organization of schools for teacher learning” (p. xvi).

The importance of teacher preparation has become clear with further examination of failed implementation of reforms or further research. For instance, the launching of the Russian space satellite, Sputnik, sparked the United States to initiate new reforms aimed at challenging students to think critically and independently. However, the lack of sufficient training left teachers unable to follow the new curricula in the most effective manner and consequentially they fell back to using essentially the same teaching practices as before, resulting in predominately rote learning teaching styles (Darling-Hammond, 1997b). Additionally, initial

research reported in the *Coleman Report* challenged common sense notions about teacher effectiveness. This report provided empirical data detailing the lack of evidence concerning the effect of the teacher on student achievement. Since then, however, researchers have found that school does have a heavy impact on student achievement and furthermore, adequate, meaningful, and appropriate training and professional development are necessary for continued improvement (Marzano, 2003). Darling-Hammond (1989) also cites numerous findings revealing increased levels of student achievement when associated with teacher expertise, education, ability and experience.

Darling-Hammond (1989) described autonomy and professionalism as a cause and effect relationship in public-service occupations. Because teaching is client based, requiring discretion and judgment in meeting the needs of the clients, accountability becomes an integral part of the process of student achievement. Well-trained professionals improve the quality of the profession as a whole through self-evaluation and continual refinement of best practices.

The most recent debate for increasing teacher and school quality lies in one agenda to professionalize teaching and teacher education through high standards, licensing and certification, and an opposing agenda that recommends deregulation of teaching preparation by encouraging states to employ alternative routes into teaching along with high stakes teacher tests. Using a discourse analysis approach, Cochran-Smith and Fries (2001) researched the on-going debate of these two agendas. Three themes emerged: (1) an empirical versus ideological position, (2) outcomes versus inputs, and (3) public good versus private good. In the first theme, also considered as the evidentiary warrant, both sides cited empirical findings, knowing that taking an ideological position would cast them in an unfavorable light. Deregulationists propose that teachers who enter the field through alternative routes are at least as effective as

teachers who receive more preparation. Advocates for professionalization view teachers and the quality of preparation make the most difference in student achievement. The next theme, the highly contested accountability warrant, shares the justification of policies based on the outcomes. While both agendas tout the importance of reviewing outcomes, the deregulationists narrowly focus on students' test scores and advocates for the professionalization approach focus more on teachers' professional performance. The third theme, the political warrant, refers to the competing policies and the justification of how each view the purposes of school. Again, both sides use the same language for portraying their view; however, the definitions and context in which the language is used is diametrically opposed. Also, both sides point to the funding sources for supporting their agenda. Advocates of deregulation are funded primarily through the Fordham Foundation, the Heritage Foundation, the Pioneer Institute, and the Manhattan Institute and advocates for professionalization are funded by several private foundations such as the Carnegie Corporation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Ford Foundation, and the DeWitt Wallace Reader's Digest Fund. The strategy used relies on which can most convincingly describe to the public that the thrust of their agenda supports the public good and not a private agenda.

The struggle over professionalization and deregulation and which reform is most effective is reduced to both sides "attempting to persuade others that the 'solution' is obvious and logical, based on simple common sense and clearly intended for the common good of the public and of American society" (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001, p. 12). It appears that current reform agendas are in competition with one another and until "we examine the discourse of teacher education policy reform, we will make little progress in understanding the politics of teacher education and the nuances and complexities of the various reform agendas..." (Cochran-Smith & Fries p. 13).

Considering the growing demand for teachers and the current debate about the value of teacher preparation programs, it is important that research is available to support the value of providing quality teacher education programs. Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) surveyed beginning teachers to discover their views of preparedness, their sense of self-efficacy, and their plans for remaining in the field. Results indicated that teachers who graduated from a teacher education program felt more prepared to enter into the classroom than those who entered from alternative programs. An additional significant result was related to the increased self-efficacy and commitment to teaching associated with teachers from teacher preparation programs. Furthermore, findings indicated that while there were differences in the quality of teacher education programs, the differences were not significant. Results from this study give credence to teacher education programs since responses from teachers revealed a relationship between teacher preparation programs and positive teaching experiences (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002).

Reform has typically resulted in legislative guidelines and demands for increased results with very little attention to the need for increased teacher training (Darling-Hammond, 1997b). Throughout the last century, it is well documented that each time progressive reforms began to take hold, a back-to-basics movement resurfaced. According to Darling-Hammond (1997b), the primary reason for the lack of success with these reforms is an “underinvestment in teacher knowledge and school capacity” (p. 13). The increased accountability measures and a large number of new and unqualified teachers entering classrooms created a new challenge for districts around the country. As a means for addressing this problem, districts began implementing highly scripted curriculum materials (Grossman, 2003) reinforcing the bureaucratic structure of schooling. Many saw this move as a substitute for investing in teacher skills and knowledge.

A key study by Clarke et al. (2003) reported that a lack of capacity was one of the largest barriers for teachers when implementing standards, particularly in low performing schools. The authors of the study recommended for states to invest in quality staff development and training, especially in the area of classroom assessment techniques. The premise is that for students to show progress, teachers must be knowledgeable in interpreting tests results, monitoring and diagnosing student progress, and familiar with effective strategies for fostering a motivation of student learning.

Ball and Cohen (1999) summarized that many teachers base decisions on their own educational experience. Critically important, then, teachers need to be placed in settings that allow them to see the connection between theory and application, similar to the medical field. Findings as reported by Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1999) stated that teachers who have more background in their content area as well as knowledge of student learning and development are more effective with students.

One characteristic of professionalism is specialized formal training that allows the member to become knowledgeable in the field. However, efforts are made to deregulate the teaching field by advocating for alternate routes for teacher certification, using high stakes teacher tests as the gatekeeper into the profession.

Lack of Public Confidence

As more children began attending school and as schooling became an increasing part of public budgets, public concern and interest in education grew. The launching of the Russian spaceship, Sputnik, in 1957 sparked public doubt about the quality of education and school effectiveness. There was a sudden interest in educational accountability, especially evident in the areas of math and science. The philosophies of Dewey and other proponents of progressive

education became the subject of heated debate and suddenly the public was demanding for a return to the “basics.” The March 1958 issue of the popular magazine, *Life*, further fueled doubt about the efficiency of schools by featuring a series of articles about American education and how it compared to the educational systems of other nations.

The *Coleman Report* in 1966 did little to improve the image of public schools (Marzano, 2003). Findings revealed that schools were unable to contribute sufficiently to achievement for all students, reporting that success was attributed predominately to the student’s background. Moreover, reform efforts were not supported since the stated and implied findings of this highly publicized report revealed little hope for schools to have a positive impact (Marzano, 2003).

The release of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* in 1983, exacerbated the negative opinion of public education, particularly in the discussion of teacher effectiveness and quality. The dire economy was partially blamed on public schools because of the perception that students were not exposed to a curriculum with the same rigor as students in other countries. Rosenholtz (1989) stated, “Much negative publicity has resulted, and the public climate of opinion has become increasingly hostile; there has been an abrupt and utter evaporation of confidence in the nation’s teachers, and consequently, of their own confidence in themselves” (p. 214). This negative opinion added to the greater demands for accountability (Berliner and Biddle, 1995; Kohn, 2000; Popham, 2001; Sacks, 1999). Consequently, the focus on how students performed on tests became an increasingly important indicator of student, teacher, and school effectiveness.

Furthering the declaration of the ineffectiveness of schooling came with the release of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). This international study compared mathematics and science curricula, instructional practices, and school and social factors

(Marzano, 2003). Results revealed that 4th graders performed quite well in comparisons to their counterparts in other countries; however, the 8th and 12th graders did not fair so well. As a result, the image of the education of students in the United States continued to be criticized and criticism appeared to be primarily based on the results of tests scores.

Americans continue to rely on the public reporting of test results for making important decisions and developing perceptions about the status of our nation's schools. Tests virtually affect our lives from kindergarten to applying and gaining employment (Sacks, 1999). Real estate agents often sell property based on the reported results of test scores. Survey results from a poll conducted by Public Agenda (2004) reported that 61% of the public surveyed agreed that standardized tests are a necessary evil and that schools need some kind of standardized assessment. As a result, it is evident that test scores highly impact the perception the public has about the effectiveness of teachers and schools and their impact on student achievement.

In the book, *The Manufactured Crisis*, Berliner and Biddle (1995) presented a strong case for the credibility of schools and the positive impact on students. While the book offers significant background disputing the implications of previous research, the lack of public support remains. Berliner and Biddle reported, however, that the worst damage resulting from prior reports and studies lies in the fact that Americans became "distracted from the real problems of education and from thinking about useful steps that we might take to resolve those problems and improve America's schools" (p. 344).

Professionalism and High-Stakes Testing

The use of test scores has been one means for gaining credibility with the public. The results, however, are more far-reaching than just the reporting of a score. Much evidence exists suggesting that the implementation of high-stakes testing has impacted teachers in a negative

way, especially in the area of professionalism (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Jones et al., 2003; Perrault, 2000; Rapp, 2002). The reporting of scores in local papers is cited as one example of how results impact teachers' attitudes about testing. Results from a national survey on the perceived effect of state testing programs by classroom teachers, found that regardless of the stakes involved, a substantial majority of teachers reported disapproval of how the media reported testing issues (Pedulla et al, 2003). A lack of ability by the media to accurately reflect the complexities of teaching or how learning occurs was the main reason for dissatisfaction.

In a survey completed by National Board Certified Teachers in Ohio, Rapp (2002) reported that teachers felt they should have a major voice in decisions that are made and that their practices and classroom climate had been affected by education policy. The incongruity between what teachers believe are effective classroom practices and what legislative policies require caused these teachers to believe that education is "headed in an unhealthy direction" (Rapp, p. 218) especially in the area of creativity and autonomy. In a sense, these expert teacher's professional knowledge and judgment appeared to have no effect in shaping educational policies. This sentiment was echoed in a study completed by Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2000) in two states administering high-stakes tests with teachers in master's and doctoral-level literacy programs. In a focus group discussion, one teacher described the effects on high-stakes testing on the teaching profession by stating, "I just think it is deprofessionalizing the whole teaching profession" (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, p. 392), while another stated "...it's an insult. It's saying that we aren't a profession and we can't be trusted to do our jobs, so high-pressure tactics are necessary to make us behave. They're treating us like stupid children, they're turning us into bad teachers, taking away every bit of pride" (p. 392).

The desire for, and consequentially the lack of, respect is noted in other studies as a result of high-stakes testing. Jones et al. (2003) reported finding that while there is merit to the implication that teachers are leaving the profession because of high-stakes testing, testing is one more thing on an already overloaded list of reasons teachers leave. As one teacher in their study summed up, “Feeling like less of a professional is an understatement. I don’t want to be appreciated, I want to be valued for my skill” (p. 142).

Varying levels of teacher confidence is evident among schools implementing high-stakes testing programs. According to Berry et al. (2003), teachers in lower-performing schools were less confident and faced more difficult economic and social challenges. Teachers described a feeling that the lack of public confidence in them caused them to be on the defensive. Furthermore, teachers described “an invasive scrutiny of their classrooms, increased intra-district competition, and specific pressures on teachers to make changes whether or not there were professional reasons to do so” (Berry et al., 2003, p. 26).

While there is frustration among teachers about high-stakes assessment and how the tests have affected professionalism, there is agreement that some benefit could be gained from the assessments. In the Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2000) study, teachers voiced their concern more in the manner of how the tests were being implemented, that scores from one assessment are being used to make important decisions about a student’s progress, and the apparent lack of respect for teachers’ professionalism. However, teachers are not in favor of dismissing assessment altogether because they value the information test results can provide (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Jones & Egley, 2004).

Chapter Summary

Political decisions have a vast impact, indirectly or directly, on teachers and their attitudes toward the educational profession. Over the years this has been evident in reform movements such as the development of a standards-based curriculum, high-stakes accountability, and in teacher education debates between the push for higher quality educational programs and the deregulation of teacher preparation, certification, and licensure.

While the accountability systems prior to the 1980s focused on system process standards, such as teacher certification, financial management, and minimum level competency tests, the current accountability system focuses on student performance (Furhman, 2004). Schools are held accountable for increased performance on a statewide test. Implied in the development of the state accountability system include (a) accurate alignment between standards and the test, (b) increased opportunities to learn the content being tested, (c) state support and accountability for success of standards such as increased opportunities for professional development, funding, capacity to support instruction, and remedial programs, and (d) a well-thought through process used in the development of an accountability system (Furhman, Goertz, & Duffy, 2004). However, according to Furhman et al., “Accountability systems don’t produce performance, they mobilize incentives.” The lack of available data showing how schools actually respond to measures of accountability and the stakes applied reveals the limitation of testing for proving increased student achievement. As evidenced in Table 1, recent studies have revealed intended and unintended consequences of high-stakes testing.

Often conflicts arise between philosophy and implementation, noticeably apparent by the current reform and attaching stakes to required assessments. High-stakes testing places teachers under pressure to choose between their professional judgment as educators and satisfying

bureaucratic demands (Darling-Hammond, 1989; Rosenholtz, 1989). Constant preparation and drill for the test is often in opposition to the methods and styles the teacher believes are most effective practices (Johnson & Johnson, 2002; Paris & Urdan, 2000). Research of recent years report that high-stakes testing narrowly focuses the curriculum (Amrein, 2002; Jones et al., 2003; Pedulla et al., 2003).

When policies are passed that restrict teacher dialogue, key characteristics of professionalism are jeopardized (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Pedulla, 2003). For teachers to grow professionally, they must be involved in decision-making and have opportunities for shared leadership responsibilities (Shantz & Prierur, 1996). Meeting the public demands for higher student achievement, facing the unintended consequences of accountability systems, and having lessened teacher autonomy for making important decisions are all reasons for why there must be increased teacher dialogue (Berry et al., 2003; Paris & Urdan, 2000).

This loss of autonomy because of government controls has also been expressed by teachers in England. With the implementation of the National Curriculum in England, teachers experienced a new low level of morale and elicited strong opposition in not being included as a part of the reform process (Lofty, 2003). Lofty maintained that teachers need to have the freedom to express their opinions and reflectively discuss different theories and approaches to teaching. Popham (2001) made a statement about how we, as educators, have perpetuated this attitude, “we allowed our instructional effectiveness to be determiners of schools success. We sat back meekly as newspapers publicly equated test scores with our instructional skill” (p. 24). Rosenholtz (1989) attributed the decline in commitment to the profession as directly related to increased bureaucratic control, especially in light of research that promotes otherwise. The educational system must move from a bureaucratic system to a more collegial and constructive

system for efforts that promote true professionalism to be successful. Policies that require high-stakes accountability restrict the effort of schools to function more democratically, as evident in studies that have shown lowered levels of autonomy, the narrowing curriculum through prescribed programs, and the pressure placed on teachers for high scores. Policies that allow teachers to enter the profession with limited preparation also diminish the importance of unique knowledge and skills that teachers, as professionals, need to possess for making quality decisions about the educational progress of the students. The intent of the highly qualified teacher in every classroom is for each child to receive a quality education from a skilled teacher.

Continuous reform efforts at improving the teacher image and public opinion have occurred by focusing on teacher quality through education preparation programs, curricula changes, and accountability. Improved learning will occur with a quality teacher but with the efforts toward the deregulation of the teacher preparation programs, many teachers are entering the field less prepared than ever before (Grossman, 2003).

With the implementation of a state-wide accountability system, it is important to understand how federal and state policies impact teachers' decision making and sense of professionalism. The move toward a performance-based standards curriculum beginning next year in Georgia schools creates for teachers new challenges to add to the current demands of annual high-stakes tests. Therefore, uncovering accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives on how high-stakes testing influences their instructional decision-making and sense of professionalism will be timely and informative for educators and policymakers.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The literature review on high-stakes testing was broadly focused on the intended and unintended results of accountability programs. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the intended result of the current educational reform, as described in the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* is to close the achievement gap between the disadvantaged and minority children and their peers through “four basic principles: stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work” (U.S. Department of Education, *Testing for Results*, 2002, February, ¶1). Therefore, the national reform effort intended for testing at the state level included the ability to measure student achievement, to provide information about the quality of schools, and to make all students and teachers accountable (Jones et al., 2003). However, the intended consequences are not the only consequences of testing. Too often students receive instruction only in the tested areas, and they are instructed on how to take a test, testing vocabulary, and test format. The taught curriculum and the tested curriculum become synonymous. This reform, by way of testing mandates, has resulted in a loss of developmentally appropriate practices in the younger grades (Jones et al., 2003). Additionally, teachers are left feeling less professional. As one teacher in the study by Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2000) stated,

These tests, and all of this pressure to make kids do well on the tests...it's an insult. It's saying that we aren't a profession and we can't be trusted to do our jobs, so high-pressure tactics are necessary to make us behave. They're treating us like stupid children, they're turning us into bad teachers, taking away every bit of pride. (p. 392)

The purpose of this study was to uncover accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives on how high-stakes testing influences instructional decisions and professionalism. To further define this study, accomplished teachers, by their designation as National Board Certified Teachers, were interviewed to gain their perspectives to determine if their instructional decisions and sense of professionalism were influenced by high-stakes testing. The participants in this study included six accomplished teachers selected from five elementary schools in a single suburban school system. A qualitative case study approach was used to discover the accomplished teachers' experiences and their perspectives about these experiences. In the study by Pedulla et al. (2003), they indicated, "only by listening to what teachers tell us is happening as a result of these state testing programs can we be confident that they are having the intended effect" (p. 123).

This chapter included the research questions, the theoretical framework that guided the research, a description of the research design and rationale for the study, the data sources, an overview of the analysis of the data, and the limitations of the study.

Research Questions

Six accomplished elementary school teachers were selected to participate in this study. Each participant was interviewed a minimum of two times. The first interview was conducted to establish each teacher's knowledge and perspective of current reforms, effective instructional practices used in the classroom, philosophy of teaching, and view of professionalism in light of high-stakes testing. It was also important to gain an understanding of their decision-making practices and how they viewed their role as a professional. The second interview was conducted to delve deeper into why statements were made and to gain a greater understanding of the

experiences and perspectives of the teachers and how high-stakes testing influences their instructional decision-making and sense of professionalism.

Questions this study sought to answer included:

- 1) What are accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives of high-stakes testing? And to a greater specificity,
- 2) As a result of the pervasive testing requirements found in high-stakes accountability systems, are there professional judgments and decisions of teaching and learning that are being compromised?
- 3) What are accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives of how high stakes testing has affected or impacted their role as a professional educator?

Theoretical Framework

Silverman (2000) stated that the decision to use qualitative research as opposed to quantitative research depends on what is being researched. Patton (2002) further detailed qualitative research as designed to supply descriptions for telling a story that offers insight into the experiences of the participants. Contrary to quantitative research, which studies a single component of a phenomenon, qualitative research seeks to discover how all the components work together to form a whole (Merriam, 1998). Additionally, Merriam (1998) described the role of the qualitative researcher as one who gathers data and inductively analyzes the results through a descriptive product. Thus, uncovering the perspectives of teachers and the impact of high-stakes testing on decision-making and teacher professionalism is best determined from a qualitative approach.

After collecting data, the attempt to understand teachers' perspectives of high-stakes testing and its impact was further defined by applying an interpretive theoretical perspective. By

examining the process for *how* teachers come to develop their perspective, this study aimed to identify the reasons for *why* they believed as they did. Using the methods of grounded theory, an interpretive analysis enabled the study to draw out themes as to what is important to teachers based on their description of how high-stakes testing influenced their instructional decision making and sense of professionalism. The interpretive perspective of symbolic interactionism and the grounded theory method of this case analysis research guided the data collection, interpretation, and analysis.

Interpretivism

Denzin (2001) stated that interpretive interactionism “endeavors to capture and represent the voices, emotions, and actions of those studied” (p. 2). By using this approach, it allowed the researcher to “bracket” the essential elements of the phenomenon and examine those critical pieces of the study. According to Denzin, interpretive interactionism clarifies meaning through the process of interpreting and understanding the meaning that has been expressed. Interpretive interactionism emphasizes the importance of meaning and for researchers to stay closely to the lived experiences of those studied. In this study, it was important to understand how those directly involved in high-stakes testing perceived the influence on instructional decision-making and the sense of professionalism. Discovering how teachers’ perspectives were formed, through interpretation, created an understanding of why and how their perspectives influenced their instructional decision making and sense of professionalism. The rich, thick descriptions of the accomplished elementary school teachers provided data for interpretation.

The researcher believed there were several contributions to qualitative research to support the use of this approach. These contributions not only further defined the study but also verified

the use of the qualitative approach of the study. Denzin (2001) defined the contributions to evaluative research as including the:

1. Identification of other perspectives.
2. Identification of the assumptions of the group.
3. Evaluation of the phenomenon and the possibility of providing strategic points for intervention.
4. Gaining of the point of view from those most directly involved and affected since meaning is derived from lived experiences.
5. Exposing the limits of quantitative research and statistical information.

Uncovering teachers' perspectives of how high-stakes testing influences instructional decision making and a sense of professionalism through an interpretive qualitative approach, the participant's perspectives, not the researcher's, were revealed and provided another dimension to information regarding high-stakes testing.

Symbolic Interactionism

The focus of symbolic interactionism is to better understand the perspectives of members of society and how they interpret and view their surroundings through and in social interactions (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionism details social conduct in real settings and captures the nature of social life. "Only through dialogue can one become aware of the perceptions, feelings, and attitudes of others and interpret their meanings and intent" (Crotty, pp. 75-76). Blumer described symbolic interactionism as based on three premises:

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.
2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows.
3. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (Blumer, 1969, p. 2)

Therefore, symbolic interactionism, according to Blumer (1969), views the creation of meaning as a product formed in and through the activities and interactions among people.

In this study, the interview process allowed the researcher to engage in dialogue with participants on an individual basis about high-stakes testing in elementary schools. The first interview was important for beginning a discussion about high-stakes testing and establishing rapport with the participants. After an initial analysis of the transcription from the first interview, a second interview allowed the researcher to further draw on how and why their particular perspectives were established.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) described symbolic interactionism as a means for individuals to construct meaning associated with their experiences and their processes of interpretation. Furthermore, people in given situations often develop common definitions. Because of the likelihood for common understandings within the social interactions to form, it was important for this study to note the perspectives of teachers and how their school setting may have played a part in cultivating their perspectives. Interviews were conducted with individual participants in five different school settings.

Rationale and Research Design

No specific studies were found about the intended or unintended consequences of high-stakes testing in the area of decision-making and the impact on the sense of professionalism on teachers from Georgia. However, there are several key pieces of research detailing similar high-stakes testing programs in other states. Jones et al. (2003) reported from a series of interviews and surveys completed with teachers and administrators the intended and unintended consequences of high-stakes testing in North Carolina. Clarke et al. (2003) also looked at the impact of high-stakes testing on teaching and learning, and they found that the consequences

were greater for students, teachers, and schools in high-stakes states. Another key piece of research by Amrein (2002) indicated that high-stakes testing had a negative effect on learning. Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2000) found that teachers experienced a great deal of pressure for their students to perform well on tests. Each study addressed the intended and unintended consequences, but the impact on and discussion of professionalism and decision-making was only a small part of the studies by Jones et al. (2003), Clarke et al. (2003), Amrein (2002), and Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2000). The literature often addressed the broad implications of full-scale accountability, including the impact on students, teachers, parents, and the curriculum. Research of the past ten years has resulted in evidence that tests, especially those with sanctions attached, have a negative effect on students, teachers, teaching, and learning (Amrein, 2002; Clarke et al., 2003; Jones et al., 2003; Madaus & Kellaghan, 1993)

Test developers recommend building a test after the desired standards have been decided (Kreitzer & Madaus, 1995; Popham, 2003; Stiggins, 2001). Even when tests are developed after curriculum design, only a small sampling of the year-long curriculum can possibly be included on the assessment. As a result, classroom instruction tends to focus on the tested areas while other areas of the curriculum are omitted (Amrein, 2002; Clarke, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Jones et al., 1999). Research has indicated that instructional time is often devoted to learning specific test vocabulary, test format, and “tricks” for completing the test in the allotted timeframe (Amrein, 2002; Clarke, 2003; Jones et al., 1999). Studies have shown that there is an effect on professionalism (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Rapp, 2002) but how the process for making decisions in the classroom and how this influences professionalism through the perspectives of teachers is not explicit.

Case Study

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) described a case study as best represented by a funnel. The design of the study begins broad and as the study becomes more developed, the study also becomes more focused and narrow. There are many approaches to conducting a qualitative case study. The case study itself is not a methodology but a means of analysis (Patton, 2002). Each case contains its own particular set of data consisting of all of the information about that case. These records are then compared and analyzed for patterns. Through inductive analysis, patterns, themes, and categories emerge.

Merriam (1998) described the case study as a means for gaining understanding of and meaning for a phenomenon. She stated, “interest is in the process rather than the outcomes, discovery rather than confirmation” (1998, p. 19). While case studies generally do not predict future behavior, results have proven to be effective for informing policy. Rich, holistic descriptions of real-life situations that evolved from the participants’ experiences help others to understand the impact of and gain insight about a particular phenomenon. In this case study, the researcher sought to discover the perspectives of accomplished teachers regarding how high-stakes testing influences instructional decisions and a sense of teacher professionalism.

This study sought the perspectives of high-stakes testing from six participants. Each participant represented a case. Data from each case were coded and then inductively analyzed for themes. After each case was analyzed individually, a cross-case comparison was conducted to analyze, compare, and further interpret the themes and patterns that emerged. By employing a multiple case study design, the generalizability and the validity of the findings were expanded (Yin, 2003).

Data Sources

The purpose of the study was to determine the perspectives of accomplished teachers' relative to how high-stakes testing influences decision-making in the classroom and teacher professionalism. Therefore, it was important to select participants who had earned status as a National Board Certified Teacher, and to find a school system that had introduced the formally adopted standards-based curriculum in the state of Georgia. The participants were employed in a school system currently implementing a standards-based curriculum and performance-based assessments. These teachers' perspectives could provide valuable information to policymakers and school leaders about how high-stakes testing influenced their decision making and professionalism. Because the state of Georgia is in its infancy in the process of implementing standards-based curriculum and performance-based assessments, the perspectives of teachers are worthy to examine.

Sampling

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) described two types of sampling, purposeful and random. In this study, purposeful sampling was selected because it was "believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory" (p. 65). Qualitative inquiry typically pulls from a smaller sampling to strengthen the study (Patton, 2002). The focus is generally on selecting cases that enrich the findings of the study rather than gathering information from a large, statistical representation.

Purposeful sampling was conducted to determine the participants of this study. Three criteria were used for selecting the sample: (1) Participants had earned the designation of National Board Certified Teacher, (2) Participants were employed in a single system and trained in standards-based curriculum and instruction and performance assessment, and (3) Participants were classroom teachers in an elementary school setting. Accomplished teachers, by their

designation as National Board Certified Teachers (NBCT), are regarded to be among the most qualified and effective teachers. Research has indicated that students of NBCTs show greater gains on state tests than those of teachers who are not certified (Goldhaber, Perry, & Anthony, 2003). A study by Cunningham and Stone (2005) brought into question these claims; however, the purpose of this study was to gather perspectives from National Board Certified Teachers because of their experience and extended studies, not to validate their effectiveness as an instructor.

Federal law requires each state to develop and to implement a standards-based curriculum accompanied by an accountability system that measures proficiency of the standards. Over the next four years Georgia will be phasing in a standards-based curriculum in four content areas for grades kindergarten through 12. At the time of this study (2005), schools were implementing standards-based language arts curriculum in all grade levels, and in the fall of 2005 elementary schools begin the implementation phase of new math standards. A statewide assessment is administered each spring to measure students' levels of proficiency on these standards.

The suburban school system selected for this research began implementing performance assessments in 2002. Teachers in the system were familiar with the vocabulary, the purpose, and the philosophy that was the vision of State leaders. Because of the propensity for a greater understanding of the State vision in curriculum and instructional implementation, this system was selected as the site for the research.

Contextual Setting of the Study

Research for this study was conducted in a suburban school system outside the metropolitan Atlanta area. The community was one of the fastest growing in America, with a population of 98,407. According to the 2000 census statistics, the increase in population in the

previous 10 year period was 123% (FedStats, 2004). Additionally, there was a high per capita personal income level when compared to other counties in Georgia and the United States. In 1999, the county per capita personal income was \$29,114, as compared with \$21,154 for Georgia and \$21,587 for the United States (FedStats, 2004). White residents comprised 95% of the population in the county. The next most predominant race was Hispanic (FedStats, 2004).

The school system served approximately 24,000 students in 14 elementary schools, 6 middle schools, 3 high schools, and a transition center that provided educational and emotional support to students in grades 6—12. Approximately 5,000 new students entered the system during the past 4 years (Georgia School Council Institute, 2004). Because of the tremendous growth, new schools opened each year for the past two years with plans for a new elementary school and a new middle school to open in the fall of 2006 and an additional middle school and a high school in 2007. Plans were underway for additional schools at all three levels because of the steady increase in students entering the system.

While the school system consisted of a population of families who were in a high socioeconomic level, there were three schools in the system that had enough students eligible for free and reduced lunch to qualify for Title I federal funds. The percentage of eligible students at these three elementary schools was 28%, 29%, and 34%. As a result, federal funds were provided to supplement the instructional program for meeting the needs of targeted students in each of these schools. According to demographic information provided by the Georgia Department of Education (2005), the system percentage of students eligible for free and reduced price lunch was 13% as compared to the state percentage of 45.

In spite of the three schools that received additional federal funding for supplemental instruction, elementary school students in the Aim County School System (pseudonym) scored

high on the annual Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) in the spring of 2004 and 2005. Ninety percent or higher of the students met or exceeded the standards in reading, English/language arts, and math in 2004. In all grades, more students scored in Performance Level 3, the highest level, than in the other levels on the reading portion of the tests. That trend was also true in English/language arts and math for grades one and two. Scoring in Performance Level 2 represented a passing score according to the Georgia Promotion and Placement Guidelines and more students in grades three, four, and five scored in Performance Level 2 than in Performance Level 3 on the English/language arts and math portions of the CRCT.

Elementary teachers employed by the system represented the racial make-up of the county population. Most elementary teachers were white females who had a Bachelor's or Master's Degree in early childhood or elementary education. Twenty-four elementary teachers had earned their specialist's degree and one teacher had earned a doctorate degree. Most administrators had earned a six-year specialist's degree and had between 21 to 30 years experience. Again, the racial make-up of administrators mirrored the county.

It appeared that the Aim County School System encouraged and supported teachers who desired to achieve National Board Certification. At the time of the study (spring, 2005), 41 teachers in the system had earned National Board Certification status. Sixteen of those teachers were assigned to the elementary school level, 12 teachers were teaching at the middle school level, and 13 were high school teachers. Thirteen schools in the system employed National Board Certified teachers. Of the 41 National Board Certified Teachers, 4 served as administrators in the system, 12 were classroom teachers in the elementary schools, 8 were gifted education teachers, 2 were special education teachers, 1 was a teacher for limited English speaking students, and 1 was a physical education teacher. At the middle and high school levels,

the teachers who had earned the National Board Certification had completed work in their content area. Three of the teachers were certified in the area of math, six in social studies, three in English, and one in science.

The 16 National Board Certified Teachers at the elementary level represented 8 of the 14 elementary schools and 12 met the criteria for participation in the study. One teacher was appointed to an administrative position in the system, two of the teachers were teaching gifted education classes, and one was a physical education and health teacher. These four teachers were eliminated from the sampling since the purpose of the research was to determine the classroom teacher's perspective. The result was 12 National Board Certified teachers—3 kindergarten, 2 first grade, 3 second grade, 2 third grade, and 2 fourth grade. These teachers represented 5 of the 14 elementary schools in the system.

Students in all grades, kindergarten through grade five, were tested annually but only the test scores from grades three and five were used for promotion purposes. It made sense to seek the perspectives of teachers who taught third and fifth grade to serve as participants of the study. In addition, because teachers of grades two and four represented the transitional years, their perspectives were also important. This study focused on teachers' perspectives of a state accountability system in which promotion and retention was a critical component; therefore, it was decided to only include those grade levels most impacted by annual statewide testing. An additional criterion was added to the purposeful selection of participants to include only those accomplished elementary school classroom teachers of grades two, three, and four. The inclusion of a grade five teacher in the study would have been ideal but, at the time of the study, no fifth grade teacher had earned the National Board Certification. The five elementary schools were located in various areas of the county, and one of the schools represented received federal

Title 1 funding. Table 3.1 illustrates preliminary characteristics of the school and the participants. All names are pseudonyms to protect the identification of the system, the schools, and the teacher participants.

Table 3.1

Characteristics of Selected Participants and the School

School	Grade	Participant's Name	Racial Make-up of the School	Poverty Rate of the School
Apple Elementary	2nd	Jane Rogers	91% White 7% Hispanic	13%
East Elementary	2nd	Mary Scott	84% White 11% Hispanic	13%
South Elementary	3rd	Holly Gray	93% White	1%
	3rd	Tracy Joseph	1% Hispanic	
West Elementary	4th	Emily May	95% White 3% Hispanic	6%
George Elementary	4th	Patricia McCall	79% White 20% Hispanic	29%

Participant Profile

Merriam (1998) described purposeful sampling as selecting participants based on the assumption that the researcher wants to "discover, understand, or gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 61). The first step in purposeful sampling is to develop a set of criteria used for selecting participants. Selected participants met the following criteria: (1) Participants had earned the designation of National Board Certified Teacher, (2) Participants were employed in a single system and trained in standards-based curriculum and instruction and performance assessment, and (3) Participants were currently 2nd, 3rd, or 4th grade classroom teachers in an elementary school setting.

Six teachers from second, third, and fourth grade were contacted by the researcher, either in person or through e-mail requesting their participation in two interviews conducted between March and June of 2005. All participants eagerly agreed to contribute their perspectives. The participants in this study were all employed by one suburban school system outside the metropolitan Atlanta area. Two teachers were assigned to a 2nd grade classroom, two were 3rd grade teachers, and two were teaching 4th grade. Table 3.2 represents an overview profile of each participant.

Table 3.2

Profile of Participants for School Year 2004-2005

	Jane Rogers	Mary Scott	Holly Gray	Tracy Joseph	Emily May	Patricia McCall
School	Apple Elementary	East Elementary	South Elementary	South Elementary	West Elementary	George Elementary
Grade	2nd	2nd	3rd	3rd	4th	4th
Years of Teaching Experience	16 years	17 years	23 years	8 years	9 years	26 years
Years in the Aim School System	4 years	5 years	3 years	2 years	2 years	23 years
Advanced Education Degrees Earned	Master's Early Childhood	Master's Math	Master's in Early Childhood; Specialist In Early Childhood	Master's Reading	Master's Middle Grades	Master's Middle Grades
Year Earned NBC	2003	2004	2004	2002	2004	2003

Jane Rogers

Jane was a second grade teacher at Apple Elementary. Of her 16 years as a primary grade teacher, 4 of those years had been in the Aim County School System. Jane had earned a Master's Degree in early childhood education and had completed her National Board Certification in 2003. Jane believed in teaching through a hands-on and integrated approach but also understood the importance of ensuring that students had a firm grasp of foundational skills. Collaboration with her teammates and working in a school environment that valued collegiality was important to Jane. She believed she was currently teaching in a school that had supportive administrators and who valued the importance of working together as a team.

Mary Scott

Most of Mary's 17-year career was as a primary teacher in Maryland, but she had been a part of the teaching staff at East Elementary in the Aim County School System for the past 5 years. Her Bachelor's Degree was in elementary education and her Master's Degree was in mathematics. She earned her National Board Certification in 2003. Mary believed in the importance of developing a relationship with her students and attributed this to increased student achievement. Because of this philosophy, she had "looped" with her classroom on several occasions. Two years ago she was a first grade teacher. She remained with her class the next year and served as their second grade teacher. After teaching second grade an additional year, Mary will go with her current students as their 3rd grade teacher.

Holly Gray

Holly had taught 23 years at the time of the research. Her experience led her to teach in a variety of grade levels, kindergarten through sixth grade, as well as having served as an instructional coordinator at Georgia Sheriff's Girls' Home. Holly had taught third grade at South

Elementary since the school opened in 2003. She earned a Master's and a Specialist in Education Degree in early childhood education and, in 2004, earned the National Board Certification. Beside being active in her church and community, Holly also served as grade level chair, served on the local school advisory council, and she was a teacher leader who presented the "Working on the Work"¹ foundations to new teachers in the system. She represented her school as the Teacher of the Year and was also selected to represent the system as the 2005 Elementary Teacher of the Year.

Tracy Joseph

Teaching was a second career for Tracy. She spent nine years as an agent underwriting for a major insurance company before entering into the education field as a substitute, a paraprofessional, and finally a certified teacher. She had been teaching as a certified teacher for eight years. In her relatively short career as an educator, Tracy had served as a third grade teacher, an instructional lead teacher, an instructional technology specialist, and an assistant principal. She had taught third grade at South Elementary since the opening of the school in 2003. Beside the required Bachelor's Degree, Tracy earned a Master's Degree in reading and the teacher support specialist add-on. She earned the National Board Certification in 2002. Tracy and her family were new to the community. She shared that she is active in her church and wants to become more involved in her school. Tracy served as a system instructor of the induction course for teachers new to the system. Additionally, she was selected by her principal to attend the training to become a reading endorsement teacher for the system.

¹ Working on the Work (WOW) was a system initiative based on the Schlechty model for school reform. System leaders instruct teachers on the protocols of the WOW design that include such topics as change, beliefs and vision, student learning and product quality, participatory leadership, results-oriented decision making, continuous learning and improvement, ongoing support, innovation, employing technology, and fostering collaboration.

Emily May

Before entering the field of education as a teacher, Emily was a computer programmer for seven years. She decided she wanted to teach and went back to school to earn her Master's Degree in education. For the past nine years she had taught 4th, 5th, and 6th grade in various school systems in Georgia. She said she was "proud to have earned her National Board Certification" in 2004 because it "helped me become a more observant and reflective teacher." She had taught 4th grade in the Aim County School System for two years. Emily was a leader in her school and she served on the local school advisory team. She shared her perception that "administrators are proud to have me as a part of their team." One administrator commented, "All of the parents want their children in Emily's room. She is a fantastic teacher. We would not want to lose her."

Patricia McCall

Patricia's 26-year career began in Florida where she taught third grade. After three years in Florida, Patricia came to Aim County School System. She spent a few years at another school but for 18 years, she had taught at George Elementary. While Patricia had taught third, fourth, and fifth grade, she was currently teaching at the fourth grade level. All teachers on the grade level taught a language arts block but departmentalized for math, science, and social studies. She taught math and science, both content areas for which Patricia held a passion for teaching. In addition to teaching her fourth grade students, she also served on the system teacher leader team as a professional development instructor. Patricia had a Master's Degree in middle grade education, and she earned her National Board Certification in 2003.

Interviews

Kvale (1996) detailed the purpose of the interview in the qualitative research process as finding out how people understand their world and their life from their point-of-view. The interview was described by Kvale as “the construction site for knowledge” (p. 14). He cited six criteria of a quality interview:

1. The extent of spontaneous, rich, specific, and relevant answers from the interviewee.
2. The shorter the interview’s questions and the longer the subjects’ answers, the better.
3. The degree to which the interviewer follows up and clarifies the meanings of the relevant aspects of the answers.
4. The ideal interview is to a large extent interpreted throughout the interview.
5. The interviewer attempts to verify his or her interpretations of the subject’s answers in the course of the interview.
6. The interview is ‘self-communicating’—it is a story contained in itself that hardly requires much extra descriptions and explanations. (Kvale, 1996, p. 145)

Kvale (1996) emphasized the importance for gathering an understanding of the concepts and interpretation, the verification of the meaning, and how the data were reported during the interview. Probing questions that generated in-depth answers were vital because of the natural means for verification. The right questions allowed for repeated verification of the meaning and interpretation of the participants’ comments by the researcher. Yin (2003) described interviews as “guided conversations rather than structured queries” (p. 89).

Good interviews require good listening and probing questions that generate detailed descriptions of experiences. As Bogdan and Biklen (2003) emphasized, “the goal of understanding how the person you are interviewing thinks is at the center of the interview” (p. 98). Merriam (1998) asserted that in qualitative investigations, the interview process was generally unstructured, semi structured, or highly structured and the questions were open-ended. According to Merriam, a combination of interview structures allow for some standardized information to be obtained from all participants and for exploration of the particular insights of

individual participants. Presenting open-ended questions to the participants allow them to become a part of the study because their knowledge and expertise is sought out by the researcher (Bogdan & Biklen).

In this research, two interviews were conducted with each of the six NBCTs during the spring of 2005. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. The first interview was conducted in March to early April, prior to the statewide test, the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). The second interview was conducted in May after the administration of the CRCT. Other sources of data were gathered from fieldnotes and applicable artifacts, such as school performance data and evidence of the participants' professionalism (e.g., committee work, publications, and presentations).

To afford convenience, the researcher allowed the participants to select the time and the place for both interviews. All but one interview occurred during the work week after the teacher had completed her teaching duties. One interview occurred on a Sunday afternoon. Four of the first interviews were held at the participants' schools. One interview occurred at the researcher's office and one at the participant's house. Three of the second interviews were also held at the participants' schools, one at the researcher's office, and two at local restaurants.

The first interview began with a brief description of the study along with details of the participant's and the researcher's responsibilities. All participants stated that they understood their role and agreed to participate. The first set of interview questions allowed the researcher to develop a rapport with the participant and to gain an understanding of their basic philosophical beliefs. It was necessary to identify enough possible questions to allow the researcher to fully understand the perspectives as well as how and why the participants had formed those perspectives. Yin (2003) encouraged the development of "how" and "why" questions since

answers were likely a description of the experience and generally initiated a thick, rich description. On those occasions that a “yes” or “no” question was asked, the research prompted for a clarification or example if one was not given voluntarily. Most participants were eager to share and the occasional yes or no question did not appear to discourage the participants from providing information. Table 3.3 presents questions that were illustrative of the questions asked and ones that guided the conversations in the first interview.

Table 3.3

Questions Used in Interview #1 Aligned to Each Research Question

Establish Rapport	Questions to Address Research Question #1	Questions to Address Research Question #2	Questions to Address Research Question #3
Tell me about yourself—your background and experience	Describe your understanding of the accountability movement in Georgia.	What methods or strategies have you found most effective in your classroom?	What is your definition of professionalism?
Tell me about your class.	How do your pedagogical beliefs fit into the philosophy of current state-mandated assessment?	How did you know these methods were effective?	Describe what it means to be a professional.
Tell me about your instructional goals for the year.	Describe your understanding of the relationship between standards and the statewide assessment	Are there times during the year when testing requirements impact your plans for instruction? Describe those times.	Describe your experience as a professional.
	Describe how you use the results of the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) that is given statewide every year.	How did you feel about those times you had to make instructional decision that may or may not have fit in with the demands of high-stakes testing? Describe	Describe your thoughts on the relationship between professionalism and high-stakes testing.

Table 3.3 (continued)

<i>Questions Used in Interview #1 Aligned to Each Research Question</i>			
	What are your perspectives of high-stakes testing?	How would you feel if one of your students did not pass the CRCT?	Have there been times you feel that you have had to make instructional decisions that could be considered unethical?
	What experiences have most influenced the development of your beliefs about education? About high-stakes testing?		What about decisions that may have been in conflict with your definition of professionalism?

Depending on the responses of the participants, additional follow-up questions to clarify or to extend the meaning were also asked. These questions could not be pre-determined since they were dependent on the dialogue occurring in the interview. Sample follow-up questions could include questions such as “tell me more about...” or “describe that experience more in depth.”

The first transcriptions from all interviews were completed within three weeks. During this time, participants were on their spring break and then spent a week administering the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). One participant e-mailed the researcher the week after her interview and prior to the testing describing her feelings and apprehensions about the test. This prompted an e-mail dialogue between the researcher and other participants as to their feelings regarding testing. One topic discussed centered around the requirement to remove all charts, word walls, number lines, or any resource that might provide answers to the test.

After the first interview was transcribed, the transcription and an interpretation of the interview as it related to high-stakes testing was sent through school courier or delivered by hand to each participant. Additionally, a copy was sent via e-mail. This allowed the participant the

opportunity to read the transcription and interpretation for verification and clarification, if necessary, prior to the second interview.

Each participant was notified and again offered the opportunity to set the time and place of the second interview. Interviews began with a discussion regarding the transcription and the researcher's interpretative analysis. One participant wanted further clarification about her beliefs regarding the analysis and use of the data. Another participant wanted to expand on her statements regarding the support she received from her school. She wanted to make sure it was clear in her statements that her principal was supportive and offered her opportunities to discuss her ideas and proposals for school and student improvement. All participants were satisfied with the interview transcription and the analysis.

The second interview allowed the researcher to delve deeper into discovering the causes for the participants' belief systems and to gain a better understanding of the true perspectives of how high-stakes testing influenced instructional decisions and teacher professionalism. Furthermore, the second interview occurred after the administration of the CRCT. In some instances, teachers had already received their scores and were able to reflect on the achievement of their students. Table 3.4 reflects sample questions asked during the second interview.

Table 3.4

Sample Questions Used in Interview #2 Aligned to Each Research Question

Establish Validation of Interview #1	Questions to Address Research Question #1	Questions to Address Research Question #2	Questions to Address Research Question #3
Do you agree with your statements and my interpretation of the previous interview?	Who do you feel is being held more accountable – teachers, students, or is it both?	Are you comfortable with the instruction your students received this year?	Describe any time during the week of testing that you felt less of a professional?

Table 3.4 (continued)

Sample Questions Used in Interview #2 Aligned to Each Research Question

Are there statements in your interview or in my interpretation you would like to add, delete, or clarify?	With the implementation of high-stakes testing, do you believe there was an intended focus on holding someone (administrators, teachers, students, parents, etc) accountable?	You mention the differences you think we will experience in social studies and science regarding curriculum and testing. What changes, if any, did you make in your instruction because of this? (<i>When applicable</i>)	Why do you love teaching?
Do you have a telephone number or summer e-mail address I could have in case I have a question about something you said? If so, give me any times that would not be convenient to call you.	What do you think are the intended consequences of high-stakes testing? Unintended consequences?	How confident are you in the comprehensiveness of the state curriculum?	How do you think it has changed over the years?
	You talked a little bit about the pressure children are under to perform. Where is this pressure coming from?	How do you feel about retention?	

Each interview addressed slightly different aspects based on the first interview. For example, one of the five schools represented in the sample experienced being placed on the State's Needs Improvement List. During the first interview, the participant from that school mentioned that she understood the terminology of the label "needs improvement school," but she described very little of that experience. For the next interview, the researcher encouraged a more in-depth description of what it was like to be a teacher in a school that was in need improvement

status. The participant described why she perceived the school was placed on the list, strategies and interventions that helped remove the school from the list, and her perspectives related to the positive and negative impact of the interventions. This also prompted questions for other participants to reflect on why they perceived their school was not on the Needs Improvement List. After reviewing the key topics discussed by each participant, it became apparent that it was important to find out what all participants thought about retention and how much time was devoted to social studies and science instruction. Both of these topics were discussed in most of the interviews but not all. For the two participants who did not address retention specifically, a question was written for them to describe their beliefs about retention. Moreover, if it was not specifically addressed in the first interview, the participant was asked to reflect on the instructional impact on social studies and science since reading, language arts, and math were the only subject areas tested for promotion and retention purposes.

Data Analysis

Dey (1993) described qualitative data analysis as a process of breaking apart data to find its characteristics and structure, classifying the data into concepts, and then looking for the connections between the concepts to provide a new description. The inductive approach, as opposed to the deductive approach, of collecting and analyzing the data, allowed the researcher to discover generalizations or theories based on the data collected instead of collecting data to test an already existing theory. As a result, working with the data can “offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12). Strauss and Corbin further described the process as a mix of science and art because the researcher uses his or her craft of interviewing to ask open-ended and thought-provoking questions, to compare key concepts conceptually and abstractly, and to create categories while

science required using results to develop reliable and trusted theories. Induction as it applied to qualitative research was defined by Strauss and Corbin as going from specific to general and that statements of hypothesis were made based on data. Because interpretation could be defined as a form of deduction, Strauss and Corbin (1998) emphasized the importance of constant comparison of one piece of data against another to validate the interpretation.

The analysis of data was based on the use of the constructivist method of grounded theory. Charmaz (2002) described the method as seeking to discover participants' experiences within the setting. The interviewing process allowed teachers to describe and share their goals, opinions of mandated testing, and their perspectives of how their decision-making and sense of professionalism were impacted with the implementation of high-stakes testing.

Grounded Theory

For nearly 30 years, Glaser and Strauss (1999) perfected their research methodology of grounded theory. The roots of grounded theory are found in the symbolic interactionism perspective that assumed social interactions between people were related through meaningful symbols (Hutchinson, 1990). The premise of grounded theory is based on understanding the emerging themes that occur during in-depth immersion by the researcher in studying a social phenomenon. Grounded theory necessitates the ability of the researcher to "critically analyze situations, to think abstractly, and to have sensitivity to the words and actions of the respondents" (Patton, 2002, pp. 489-490). Hutchinson (1990) described grounded theory as being constructed by working in a circular fashion rather than a linear one. A continuous cycle of gathering, analyzing, and comparing data resulted in the emergence of consistent themes. Once certain themes were identified, data were then labeled and sorted accordingly. By inductively analyzing the data, a theory was constructed. Interwoven throughout this process

was the constant reflection of the emerging theory as well as the review and testing to substantiate the accuracy of data collected and the development of theory (Hutchinson, 1990).

In stark contrast to most research, grounded theory relies not on the testing of the hypothesis but rather on the data to determine and to validate the theory. Grounded theorists study a social situation and from the data, prove why a theory is plausible and reliable. Throughout the process, questions of validity and reliability arise such as “Does this theory apply consistently and reliably throughout my study?” or “Does the data accurately define the theory?”

Constant Comparative Analysis

Because grounded theory relied on a simultaneous method of data collection and analysis, it was important that the constant comparative method was employed. Glaser and Strauss (1999) described four stages in the constant comparative method that included comparing incidents in each category, integrating categories and their properties, reducing the data to the level of formulating a theory, and, finally, writing the theory.

Interpreting and analyzing data through an inductive process involved coding, memoing, forming categories, assigning properties and dimensions, and eventually exposing emerging themes in the data. Open, focused, axial, and selective coding helped determine the key concepts. Concepts were sorted and grouped into categories and assigned properties and dimensions. These categories were representative of the organization and meaning of the text. Noting the similarities and differences helped to provide clarity to the categories and differentiated one category from another. Comparisons were made through many venues including “people with other people, people with themselves at different times, incidents with incidents, data with categories, and categories with other categories” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 515).

Through continuous interpretation and analysis of the emerging themes and their meanings, the researcher was able to “build theory rather than test theory” (Patton, 2002, p. 127).

Analyzing the Data

After each interview, the researcher used the transcription for selecting key words and comments related to the research questions. A chart was developed for each interview detailing the key comments, the line number in the transcription from which the comment could be located, the code reference, and a place for comments. As an example, Table 3.5 shows how each transcription was analyzed for the participants’ perspectives on high-stakes testing and its influence on instructional decisions and professionalism.

Table 3.5

Sample of Transcription Analysis

Key Words	Line #	Code	Comments
Not a cutesy type; more meat and potatoes	27	Instruction	Description of instruction
More respect “oh you did that”	36	Professionalism	Improve the sense of professionalism
Maybe others are afraid of the challenge; it is a big time commitment	44; 52	Setting	Description of character
Trying to raise the bar; benchmarks we have to meet	66	Accountability	Intent
Balk at the idea of the benchmark testing – “what are we doing to children”	79	Accountability	Perspective of
But I’ve studied the test results; I know what they need to learn	81	Accountability	Positive consequence
You have to be your own person, nobody is looking, have to be true to myself	331	Professionalism	Characteristic of professionalism

The codes and the comments revealed evidence of multiple interpretations about broad areas, such as accountability. Accountability included the participant’s perspective of or belief about accountability, the intent of accountability, or their perspectives regarding a positive or negative consequence of accountability. Further reducing the data to the various aspects of a concept led to a more accurate and defined explanation of each category, allowing the researcher the ability to sort data into the appropriate category.

This process of coding and further reducing the data until it could be sorted into categories was followed after the first interview. The data were the basis for a preliminary interpretation of the participant’s perspectives. The interpretative analysis detailed the participant’s perspectives of the intent of high-stakes testing and the positive and negative consequences of high-stakes testing related to instructional decisions and the sense of professionalism. For each participant, a chart was developed to provide for the participant a visual of their perspectives. Moreover, the contents of the chart also illustrated the participant’s perspectives aligned to the research in Chapter 2, Table 2.2. Table 3.6 illustrates the content of one participant’s chart.

Table 3.6

Perspectives on the Intents of High-Stakes Testing—Positive and Negative Unintended Consequences and Influence on Instructional Decisions and Professionalism

Intents of High-Stakes Testing	
Improve the quality of instruction	
Unintended Consequences	
↓	
Positive Unintended Consequences	Negative Unintended Consequences
Allows for analysis of data to determine student strengths and weakness	Undue pressure on students to perform

Table 3.6 (continued)

Perspectives of the Intents of High-Stakes Testing and the Positive and Negative Consequences in Relation to Its Influence on Instructional Decisions and Professionalism

Additional support when retention has been recommended	Undue pressure on teachers for their class to score well
	Undue pressure on parents
	Narrowing of curriculum to only tested items and content areas—social studies and science suffer the most
	Only one indicator for promotion or retention
	Lack of focus on the importance of formative assessment
	Impact on sense of professionalism in making instructional decisions

The second interview included time to go over the analysis and the chart with the participant.

While each participant felt that accountability was important and necessary, often they had more negative comments than positive ones. This came as a surprise to most participants. All participants had mentioned the importance of students meeting standards and for teachers to ensure that instruction allowed for that understanding. One participant even stated, “I’m not one that No Child Left Behind bothers.” After the second interview was transcribed, the process of selecting key concepts, coding, sorting, and forming categories was conducted again. The researcher then went back to each participant’s table and added any positive or negative consequences that were not evident from the first interview.

It was important to continue analyzing the data and to discuss how it related to the original research questions. The researcher matched the concepts and categories to the research

question the data represented. Table 3.7 illustrates an example of how data were matched to the research question it addressed.

Table 3.7

Common Concepts and Resulting Categories Related to Each Research Question

Research Question	Concepts	Categories
1. What are accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives of high-stakes testing?	Data analysis Pressure on students and teachers Retention doesn't work for all students Instruction must change for retained students Home environment impacts the success of retention Pressure on students, teachers, and parents Philosophy of teaching and learning Using results of tests Increasing the quality of teachers and teaching Teachers are blamed	Positive and negative consequences of testing Beliefs about the intent of high-stakes testing Beliefs about testing
2. As a result of the pervasive testing requirements found in high-stakes accountability systems, are there professional judgments and decisions of teaching and learning that are being compromised?	Performance based teaching and assessments Standards based curriculum Alignment of test and curriculum Format and terminology Progress of students Curriculum depth Areas not tested	Planning instruction Instruction in a high-stakes environment Use of test preparation materials
3. What are accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives of how high stakes testing has affected or impacted their role as a professional educator?	Experience in teaching Becoming a National Board Certified Teacher Merit system Test results Testing Cheating Administrative support	Professionalism characteristics Impact of testing on professionalism

Inductive analysis required constant comparison. During the continuous comparison of data, categories were more clearly defined. Table 3.8 provides the definition of each category and its relationship to the original research question.

Table 3.8

Memo Defining Each Category Derived from the Data and Aligned to the Research Question

Research Question	Category	Definition
1. What are accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives of high-stakes testing?	Beliefs about Testing	Comments included the participants' thoughts, opinions, and beliefs about testing and accountability. Many times these comments revealed the participant's perspectives of the intent of accountability. The comments assigned to this category were not interpreted as the participant's intention to reveal a positive or negative consequence of accountability systems.
	Intent of High-Stakes Testing	This category was reserved for comments interpreted as the participant's perspective about the intent of high-stakes testing.
	Positive and Negative Consequences	Comments in this category were limited to positive and negative consequences of testing. Comments about the positive and negative consequences of testing related to instructional decisions or the sense of professionalism was not included.
2. As a result of the pervasive testing requirements found in high-stakes accountability systems, are there professional judgments and decisions of teaching and learning that are being compromised?	Planning for Instruction	Comments in this category were related to how the teacher planned for instruction prior to, during, and after testing. Also included were any comments related to testing and instructional planning.
	Instruction in an Era of High-Stakes Testing	Participants' comments related to instruction

Table 3.8 (continued)

<i>Memo Defining Each Category Derived from the Data and Aligned to the Research Question</i>		
	Test Preparation	Even though test preparation could be defined as a part of planning for instruction or for instruction itself, comments were not included in that category. This was a conversation each participant had with the researcher and, therefore, it seemed important enough to be included as a separate category.
3. What are accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives of how high stakes testing has affected or impacted their role as a professional educator?	Characteristics of Professionalism	Each participant began their discussion about professionalism by defining it in their own terms. Comments in this category were limited to only the characteristics of professionalism.
	Impact on professionalism	This category was defined by those data that were related to the positive or negative aspects of high-stakes testing on the sense of professionalism.

After the transcription of the second interview was completed, the data were analyzed, coded, and sorted to categories. Additional findings were added to the interpretive analysis. This analysis along with the transcription was sent to the participants for review and clarification, if necessary. No participants requested clarification.

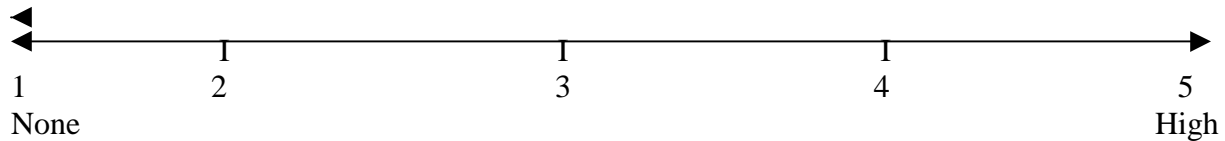
The second interview added depth to the existing data and the interpretation and analysis of the interviews became richer. However, because the participants were supportive of accountability but stated many negative consequences, it was decided to further validate the data by collecting an additional piece of data. Each participant was asked to rate their perspective on a scale of one to five. Explanatory comments were requested and accepted. Most participants mentioned how their awareness of preparing their students was heightened after the winter break.

Because of this, a rating scale was developed for the fall and the spring. Figure 1 illustrates the scale to which the participants were asked to respond.

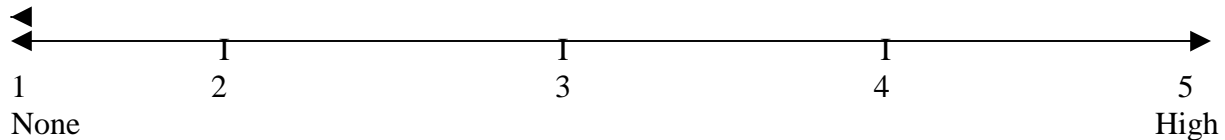
Figure 1

Rating of Perspectives of High-Stakes Testing

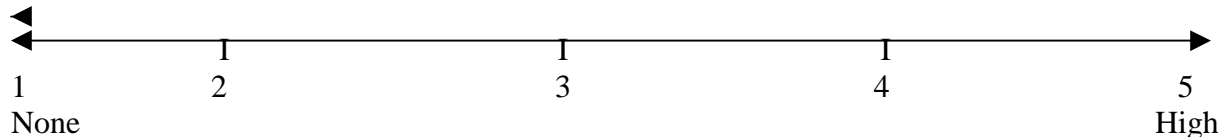
1. Mark the level that most adequately describes the level at which high-stakes testing influences your instructional decisions in the fall of the school year.



2. Mark the level that most adequately describes the level at which high-stakes testing influences your instructional decisions in the spring of the school year.



3. Mark the level that most adequately describes the level at which high-stakes testing influences your sense of professionalism.



The responses for the each of the questions were used as further validation of the data already collected.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative study, it is essential that trustworthiness is established (Merriam, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted that trustworthiness is gained when the researcher “persuades the audience that the findings are worth paying attention to, and worth taking account of” (p. 290). Four methods were identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as critical for strengthening the

findings and assisting the researcher in establishing trustworthiness: validity, reliability, generalizability, and neutrality.

Validity

Merriam (1998) stated, “All research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner” (p. 163). The triangulation of data conveyed the idea that findings from the qualitative research have been established through more than one source of information (Bogdan & Biklin, 2003). Stake (1995) stated that triangulation increases the validity of the case study. In this study, the researcher gathered data throughout the research from several sources which included:

1. Transcriptions of two interviews each with six teachers.
2. The researcher’s fieldnotes.
3. Other artifacts, such as school performance data and teacher credentials.

To further validate the findings, respondent validation was used. Transcriptions of each interview were provided for the participant to read and to respond as to the accuracy and clarity of their statements. Participants were given the opportunity to clarify statements, add statements, or retract statements to ensure greater validity. Participants read and responded to the first transcription before the second interview occurred. This was necessary to ensure any clarifications were made prior to the more in-depth interview. Moreover, a rating scale was sent to each participant requesting a point which best described their perspectives about high stakes testing and the impact on instructional decisions and the sense of professionalism. Finally, the second transcription was also sent to participants to clarify statements, add statements, or retract statements.

Reliability

Kvale (1996) stated that reliability “pertains to the consistency of the research findings” (p. 235). Stake (1995) referred to the use of triangulation protocols for confirming and, therefore, supporting the credibility of the interpretation. Multiple data sources were acquired to ensure consistency in the data. By interviewing accomplished teachers from five different schools, the information gathered assisted in establishing credence to the findings. Additionally, fieldnotes were compiled and artifacts collected.

It was also important that the researcher remain cognizant of not asking leading questions in the interview process (Kvale, 1996). Open-ended questions were asked with no intent on the part of the researcher for a response of a particular point-of-view. By allowing the participants to read the transcriptions for validation as to the accuracy and clarity of their statements, there was an increased level of reliability of the research. Kvale also recommended that analysis is more reliable when using standard methods and checks. To further add to the reliability of the study, the researcher allowed the participants to read the researcher’s interpretation of the interviews.

Generalizability

Stake (1995) asserted that case studies “use the method of specimens as their primary method to come to know extensively and intensively about the single case” (p. 36); therefore, in a concentrated study of a particular case, there is little interest in generalizing. Merriam (1998) stated that the issue of generalizability depends on the possibility of whether or not the study can be generalized. Merriam addressed generalizability in two possibilities including, 1) generalizability is a limitation of the method or 2) the use of many cases as an attempt to strengthen generalizability (1998, p. 208). This study does not attempt to make a broad

generalized statement about how high-stakes testing influences decision-making or its effects on the teacher's sense of teacher professionalism; rather, the intent of this study is to follow the constructivist approach of gathering data to uncover themes and to build theory based on the data collected from the six participants included in this perspective-seeking study. Through careful reflection and analysis of the events and general social processes that existed in this setting, themes emerged that assisted in building theory.

Neutrality

Patton (2002) acknowledged the limitations for neutrality in qualitative research due to the fact that the researcher has personal contact with the participants. Ensuring that the researcher maintains a neutral view and does not “set out” to prove a particular perspective is critical. Instead, the role of the researcher is to commit to balanced and fair reporting, holding “true to complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge” (Patton, p. 51). Stake (1995) emphasized the importance for the researcher to understand their role in all circumstances and, “the role should be an ethical choice, an honest choice” (p. 103). The researcher must be constantly aware of existing opinions and prejudices in the data. To ensure neutrality, the researcher kept fieldnotes that included reflections, conducted member checks, and remained constantly aware of personal reactions to the process. Maintaining a clear focus on the purpose of the study and the questions the research hoped to address aided in remaining committed to the ethical boundaries required of a researcher to remain neutral.

Before the study was conducted, permission from the system was obtained. Participants were assured of their anonymity. System administrators were also given the guarantee that the identification of the system participating in the study, including the participants, would remain anonymous.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited by the participants who included six elementary school teachers who are noted as accomplished by their status of National Board Certified teachers. Because of the level of experience and expertise in teaching that is characteristic of National Board Certified teachers, six classroom teachers in second, third, and fourth grade were selected to participate in this study. In the elementary school setting, the second, third and fourth grade levels are among the most impacted by high-stakes testing because it is in these grades that students are tested. Moreover, the participants taught across five elementary schools in a single suburban school system outside the metropolitan Atlanta area. Finally, the temporal nature of the data from the time of the study was limited to the spring of the year, coinciding with the high-stakes testing of the students. The first interview was held just weeks prior to the administration of the high-stakes test. The second set of interviews was conducted a few weeks after the testing occurred.

The scope of this study was limited to accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives in one suburban school system. Furthermore, the school system in which these teachers were employed was implementing a standards-based curriculum along with performance based assessments. Teachers were required to attend five half-day professional development sessions annually related to standards based curriculum and performance assessments. These sessions were taught by system teacher leaders and are included as a part of the teacher's contracted day. Therefore, the perspective of these teachers was unique in terms of how they were currently responding to system curriculum expectations that were not in effect in other school systems around the state.

CHAPTER 4

INDIVIDUAL CASE FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to uncover accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives on how high-stakes testing influences their instructional decision-making and sense of professionalism. To further define this study, accomplished teachers, by their designation as National Board Certified Teachers, were interviewed to gain their perspectives to determine if their instructional decisions and sense of professionalism were influenced by high-stakes testing. The research was conducted to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives of high-stakes testing? And to a greater specificity,
- 2) As a result of the pervasive testing requirements found in high-stakes accountability systems, are there professional judgments and decisions of teaching and learning that are being compromised?
- 3) What are accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives of how high stakes testing has affected or impacted their role as a professional educator?

The participants in this study included six National Board Certified teachers selected from five elementary schools in a single suburban school system outside the metropolitan Atlanta area. A qualitative case study approach was used to discover the accomplished teachers' experiences and their perspectives about these experiences. In the study by Pedulla et al. (2003), they indicated, "only by listening to what teachers tell us is happening as a result of these state testing programs can we be confident that they are having the intended effect" (p. 123).

To introduce the reader to the participants and the context of the study, this chapter includes a description of the contextual setting of the state and its implementation of new curriculum standards, the contextual setting of the system, and the participants' profiles. Next, the chapter provides the analysis of individual cases derived from interviews, fieldnotes, and artifacts. Each participant was interviewed two times for approximately one hour each time. The data from the interviews were categorized and coded. Patterns were noted and categories were determined from the perspective of each participant in regard to how they viewed high-stakes testing and how the statewide test influenced their instructional decisions and sense of professionalism. To further validate the findings, artifacts and fieldnotes were used in the analysis of the data. Additionally, each participant was asked to provide a ranking of one to five, with one representing the lowest impact and five the greatest amount of impact, to illustrate their perspectives of how high-stakes testing influenced their instructional decisions and sense of professionalism. This task allowed the researcher to confirm the interpretative analysis, providing greater validation of the findings.

Contextual Setting of State Initiatives Related to Standards Based Curriculum

In his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention, presidential nominee George W. Bush (2000, August 3) vowed that the "soft bigotry of low expectations" would end, all children would receive a high quality education, and proof of the success of this endeavor would be evident with increased test scores. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* put into motion the President's goal for American education. However, the push for accountability was a key focus 20 years earlier when, in 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education submitted a report entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. The report described an educational system that was failing students due, in part, because of a lowering of

high expectations and an acceptance of mediocre educational performance. The lack of accountability was credited as one of the causes for the high number of students exiting school without sufficient skills to read, write, think at a critical level, or use technology to its fullest potential. Then, on January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the reauthorized *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA), more widely known as the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB). The new law leaves few excuses for anyone as to the expectation that each child will receive a quality education and that test scores will be the vehicle for proving school effectiveness. Administrators and teachers are accountable for increasing the standard and ensuring that all children learn, regardless of ethnicity, gender, race, or disability. Schools lagging behind in test scores must offer parents opportunities for additional tutoring services as well as the option for attending another school. The increased level of accountability has left many educators scrambling for strategies and practices to maintain and to increase test scores.

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* requires each state to implement an accountability program that tests children annually in grades 3 through 8 and once in grades 9 through 12 on a challenging set of content standards in reading and math. Although states are given the choice as to the stakes applied to the testing program, under previous Georgia Governor Roy Barnes, legislation passed attaching high stakes to the testing program. The *A-Plus Education Reform Act of 2000* (as amended in 2003), in an effort to increase the level of student achievement, completely revamped the accountability system, adding rewards and sanctions to the results. For example, third grade students who score at Performance Level I—below 300 points out of a possible 450 points—in reading are not promoted to fourth grade, unless there is an appeal filed by a parent, teacher, or administrator, and the decision is revoked by an unanimous vote.

Sanctions are also applied to schools that do not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). Schools not meeting AYP are required to write a plan for improvement and, depending on the number of years the school has not made adequate progress, the sanctions can include offering school choice or reassignment of duties for teachers and administrators.

Because federal law required each state to put into place a set of standards by which students are held accountable for learning and to develop an annual assessment that measured the progress of student learning, Georgia entered into a complete revision of state curriculum standards and assessments (Georgia Department of Education website). Standards in all content areas, kindergarten through grade 12, were approved by the State Board of Education in the spring of 2005. An incremental schedule of implementation was put into place for K-12 Georgia Performance Standards. During the 2005-2006 school year, the English Language Arts standards for kindergarten through grade 12, science standards for grade 6 and grades 9 through 12, and math standards for 6th grade will be implemented. Students will be assessed on these standards in the spring of 2006.

To ensure teachers are adequately trained to implement new standards, a massive and aggressive statewide training schedule was developed. The plan is two-fold. Representatives from each school system in Georgia are being trained not only on the standards themselves but also on an implementation plan based on the work of Wiggins and McTighe and described in their book titled *Understanding by Design* (1998). During the 2004-2005 school year, teacher representatives and curriculum specialists from each system attended five days of training sponsored by the Georgia Department of Education. Training focused on the new curriculum standards, how to implement and teach the standards, and provided explanation about the

differences between formative and summative assessments. Administrators attended leadership training for ensuring successful and effective implementation of the new standards using the *Understanding by Design* framework.

Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998) is a framework based on improving student learning and achievement. Using this three stage model, units of study are developed by determining the learning goals, devising on-going assessments that reveal the depth of student learning and if the goals have been achieved, and crafting effective and engaging activities and strategies to guide the learning. This process, known as “backward design,” aids in preventing teachers from assigning activities prior to setting learning goals and purposes based on curriculum standards (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). During the summer and school year of 2005-2006, teachers and administrators from all school districts in Georgia will attend training for writing units of study based on this model.

Contextual Setting of the Aim County School System

The Aim County School System is a member of the Standard Bearer Network, one of 10 pilot districts in the nation responsible for providing data relative to effective school reform. As a participant in the reform efforts of the Schlechty Center for Leadership in School Reform, the Aim County School System has incorporated 10 standards for improved teaching and learning in the classroom. According to the Schlechty Center for Leadership in School Reform (2004), the 10 standards include:

1. Developing shared understanding of the need for change.
2. Developing shared beliefs and vision.
3. Developing focus on the student and on product quality.
4. Developing structures for participatory leadership.
5. Developing structures for results-oriented decision making.
6. Developing structures for continuity.
7. Providing ongoing support.
8. Fostering innovation and flexibility.

9. Employing technology.
10. Fostering collaboration.

Meeting the challenges of these standards led to a unique and ambitious plan for system-wide school reform by the Aim County School System. The plan included developing a set of performance standards based on the Georgia Quality Core Curriculum objectives, a standards-based grading and reporting system, and a professional development agenda to meet the capacity needs necessary for implementing a plan of accountability. The plan was not a linear design, but cyclical, to reflect the continuous refinement and revision for ensuring student success. System data, including demographics, community expectations and beliefs, local, state, and national test results, available resources, and desired results assisted in the alignment of system, school, and professional goals. Using teacher leaders, a plan was created toward developing a community of learners and training focused on the system's core work.

Professional learning for the Aim County School System is centered on "focused choice" goals and personal professional goals. Goals, related to the system-wide initiative, include: standards-based unit design, assessment for learning, high leverage instructional strategies, teacher induction, standards-based grading and reporting, and technology in performance standards. Each year, teachers select a "focused choice" goal and a personal professional goal to study. Ten days each year are set aside for professional learning at the system and/or the school level. Six of these days are early release days for students to allow teacher training during their contracted hours.

Based on the *Understanding by Design* model created by Wiggins and McTighe (1998), a merging and integrating of curriculum, instruction, and accountability was incorporated. Three stages comprised the model which include: identifying desired results, determining acceptable evidence, and planning learning experiences and instruction. The Aim County School System

developed performance-based standards and, at the time of the study, was in the process of implementing an incremental standards-based grading and reporting system. Standards-based grading and reporting was used in kindergarten, grade one, and grade two. The third grade standards based reporting system was scheduled for pilot implementation during the 2005-2006 school year with systemwide implementation the following year. Because of the new Georgia Performance Standards in English/Language Arts, it was necessary to revise the kindergarten through second grade reporting system.

Understanding the alignment among curriculum, instruction, and accountability for effective student achievement has long been a recommendation (English, 1992; Marzano, 2003; Popham, 2001; Schmoker, 1999). Merging of these three components was evident in the professional learning plan for the Aim County School System, and courses were offered that addressed specific components of the system plan. Because curriculum was described as “what” is taught and expected for students to be able to know and do, curriculum development was addressed in a focused choice course option titled “Standards Based Unit Design.” This session assisted teachers in developing units based on the performance standards and desired results. Instruction was described as “how” students were taught to ensure key concepts were mastered. The focused choice session offered was titled “High Leverage Strategies.” Assessment is the measurement of “how well” students have performed against the standards, and teachers studied this in the “Assessment *for* Learning” course. For teachers new to the system, an induction course was offered that introduced them to the system initiative, known as Working on the Work (WOW). Teachers involved in the standards based report card attended a year-long study on grading and reporting. Finally, a technology course was offered that incorporated technology with curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

The schools in Aim County have consistently recorded above average test scores. Each fall, students in 3rd, 5th, and 8th grade are administered the Cognitive Achievement Test (CogAT) and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). Results from the CogAT indicated that students in the Aim County School System can be expected to perform at the average to above average levels. Average stanine scores reflected a five in each area—verbal, quantitative, and nonverbal. The ITBS in 3rd grade signified that students were performing above average. The national percentile range for 3rd grade students was 74 percentile in reading, 72 percentile in language, and 76 percentile in math. All students in first through eighth grade are administered the Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) each spring. Scores on the 2004-2005 CRCT revealed above average performance.

According to the most recent report from the Office of Student Achievement, student enrollment in Aim County Schools has steadily increased over the past three years. Approximately 25,000 students are expected to attend school in the Aim County School System in 2005-2006. Most of the students entering the schools are from above average income families as evident from the county poverty rate which is 13%, as compared to the state average of 48%. Thirteen percent of the students are eligible for gifted education services, and 12% are students with disabilities.

Ethnicity in the Aim County School System is majority White, but there is a growing population of Hispanic students. According to the Georgia Office of Student Achievement (2003-2004), the system average of Hispanic students is 7%. It is proposed that this is due, in part, because of the multiple opportunities for work in construction and the poultry industry. Because of the increased number of Hispanic students, the English as a Second Language program in Aim County Schools includes slightly more students than the state average.

Contextual Setting of the Five Schools

Purposeful sampling was used to select teachers for participating in this study. The six participants represented five different schools in the Aim County Schools. The following provides the contextual setting of each school represented in this study.

East Elementary

In the early years of the last century, a one-room school house served students in this now bustling suburb in southeastern Aim County. East Elementary opened in 1996 and, in 2004, there were approximately 1240 students in grades kindergarten through 5th grade. The racial make-up of the school was slightly more diverse than the system with 12% of the students represented by the Hispanic race, 1% Black, and 87% White. The free and reduced lunch rate was 12%, as compared to the system average of 13%. Seventy certified teachers served this growing population. The highest level of certification for most teachers was a Bachelor's Degree but many had earned a Master's Degree. Most of the teachers had taught less than 10 years. Two teachers had earned their National Board Certification. There were three administrators at the school. Each administrator had a Master's Degree and had less than 20 years of experience.

Test data reflected above average student scores for third and fifth graders on the Cognitive Achievement Test (CogAT) and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in the fall of 2004. Based on the positive results of the 2003-2004 and the 2004-2005 Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), the school made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Table 4.1 represents the CRCT test data from spring 2004 and 2005. Scores reflected the average scaled score total from a possible 450 points.

Table 4.1

East Elementary—CRCT Scores in Reading, Language Arts, and Math for 2004 and 2005

Grade	Reading		Language Arts		Math	
	2004	2005	2004	2005	2004	2005
1	366	365	356	358	361	363
2	368	371	349	356	350	352
3	362	356	345	345	347	345
4	370	362	350	342	340	335
5	359	362	339	348	343	358

Apple Elementary

Apple Elementary was located in a rural, but growing area in the northeastern part of Aim County. Students began attending the school in 1993. Growth in this lake community has forced the school to expand both in 1998 and in 2002. The mission of the school reflected the environment by stating, “Together we will create quality work, provide a safe, nurturing environment, demonstrate personal responsibility, embrace individual differences, and teach and learn with enthusiasm.” Respondents of an annual parent survey indicated that the teachers, staff, and administrators were meeting the expectations expressed in the mission statement.

Eight hundred-twenty students in kindergarten through 5th grade attended Apple Elementary. Most of the 55 state certified teachers in the school had earned a Master’s Degree. The majority of the teachers had less than 10 years experience. Three teachers had earned the National Board Certification. The two administrators, both of whom had earned a Specialist in Education Degree, had between 11 to 30 years experience. The racial make-up of the school included 89% White students, 8.7% Hispanic students, 1% multi-racial, and less than 1% of Asian and Black students. The free and reduced lunch rate was higher than the system average at 19%.

Scores on the ITBS in 3rd and 5th grade showed that students were above average in reading, language, and math. The national percentile rankings for both grades in reading language and math in 2004 were between 67% and 78%. Scores on the CRCT indicated that at all grade levels most students scored at the Performance Level 3 in reading. The percentage of students scoring in Performance Level 1 was very small for all grades and content areas. Table 4.2 reveals the scaled scores for the past two years in reading, language arts, and math. The total points that could be earned were 450.

Table 4.2

Apple Elementary—CRCT Scores in Reading, Language Arts, and Math for 2004 and 2005

Grade	Reading		Language Arts		Math	
	2004	2005	2004	2005	2004	2005
1	367	377	352	350	358	362
2	367	366	345	345	346	351
3	354	366	339	342	338	348
4	362	364	342	338	333	340
5	350	358	336	345	333	356

South Elementary

South Elementary was the newest elementary school in the district, opening in the fall of 2003. The school was not only the newest addition to the already 13 existing elementary schools in the district, but it had also grown to become one of the largest in terms of student population. At the time of the study, the student population in kindergarten through 5th grade was 1309.

The architecturally appealing two-story brick building was located at the end of a winding drive through the beautifully landscaped grounds in the southeastern part of the county. There was ample parking for the 83 teachers and 3 administrators who worked at South Elementary. The majority of the teachers who worked at South Elementary had less than 10 years experience and had obtained the minimum required Bachelor's Degree. Approximately one-third of the teachers had a Master's Degree. Two of the teachers had earned the National

Board Certification. All three administrators were White females. Two of the administrators had between 11 and 20 years experience and had earned their Master's or Specialist in Education Degree. The principal had over 30 years experience and had a Doctoral Degree.

The school served students from surrounding neighborhoods that were recognized as the most affluent in the county. The poverty percentage for 2004 was documented at 2%, well below the system average. While the students were generally achieving at a high academic level, the parents could be demanding of the teachers and administrators for ensuring their child had the best education possible. The number of identified gifted students was among the highest of any elementary school in the system. The gifted classes were currently serving approximately 13% of their enrollment.

Racially, the majority of the population was White, at 93%, but the school had noted a growing percentage of Hispanic students. The growth was recognized by the system; therefore, the system was granted an additional teacher for the students who qualified for services through the program for English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

Third grade students at South Elementary scored above average on the CogAT and the ITBS. The CogAt stanine of six on the verbal portion and a stanine of five on the quantitative and nonverbal sections both revealed average to above average performance. ITBS results indicated students were in the 79th to 83rd percentile in reading, language, and math content areas. Results on the CRCT from the past two years indicated there was indeed a high academic focus at the school. Table 4.3 reflects the spring 2004 and spring 2005 scores on the CRCT by grade level. Scores reflect the average total from a possible earning of 450 points.

Table 4.3

South Elementary—CRCT Scores in Reading, Language Arts, and Math for 2004 and 2005

Grade	Reading		Language Arts		Math	
	2004	2005	2004	2005	2004	2005
1	363	374	352	359	366	372
2	376	373	362	359	365	359
3	358	366	342	348	343	353
4	368	374	346	347	343	348
5	365	361	339	346	348	356

George Elementary

George Elementary was originally constructed in 1961, and in 2002 students moved into a new state-of-the-art building not far from the original school. In 2004, George Elementary housed approximately 1050 kindergarten through 5th grade students, 75% of whom were White and 20% Hispanic. This targeted assistance Title I school had a free and reduced lunch rate of 29%, more than double the system percentage. The mission statement of this increasingly diverse school recognized the changes taking place and stated that the school was “dedicated to providing an environment that would prepare students to meet the challenges of a culturally diverse, technological world.”

There were 83 certified teachers at George Elementary. Approximately half of the faculty had earned a Master’s Degree. Five teachers had earned a Specialist in Education Degree. Most teachers had less than 20 years experience. One teacher had earned the National Board Certification. The principal had a Doctoral Degree and had over 20 year’s experience.

In 2002, the school was placed on the Needs Improvement List for not meeting the minimum state assessment goals. However, interventions were put into place and, in 2005, the school received a Distinguished School certificate from Title I for making Adequate Yearly Progress for two consecutive years. Scores on the ITBS in the fall of 2004 revealed a population of 3rd and 5th graders scoring above average at 63 percentile to 71 percentile in

reading, language arts, and math. CogAT scores also revealed average scores. The stanine for verbal, quantitative, and nonverbal sections was five, which indicated an average score. Table 4.4 illustrates the scaled scores for the CRCT at all grades in reading, language arts, and math for 2004 and 2005. Scores represent the number of points earned from a total of 450.

Table 4.4

George Elementary—CRCT Scores in Reading, Language Arts, and Math for 2004 and 2005

Grade	Reading		Language Arts		Math	
	2004	2005	2004	2005	2004	2005
1	355	359	339	343	348	354
2	354	360	331	346	337	350
3	347	352	333	332	336	339
4	359	357	339	337	334	332
5	342	351	330	333	330	346

West Elementary

West Elementary opened in 1976. This neighborhood school serving kindergarten through 5th grade students was nestled among several upscale neighborhoods not far from the busy highway that was known as the thoroughfare in this fast-growing community. According to an annual parent survey documented on the school website, 94% responded that they felt welcome in the school, and 97% reported that learning was clearly the main focus at the school. These results indicated that the school has met the intent of its mission of “together is better” and that the school is a “place of learning with the kinds of human relationships which give children a feeling of belonging, a feeling of being a genuine part of what school and education is about.” The school has also been named a Georgia School of Excellence.

Ninety-four percent of the 628 students were White and 3% were Hispanic. The school’s poverty percentage was below the system average at 6%. West Elementary employed 49 certified teachers, 2 of whom had received the National Board Certification. Most teachers had

less than 10 years experience and a majority had only earned the minimum required Bachelor's Degree. Ten teachers had earned a Master's Degree and four had earned a Specialist in Education Degree. There were 2 administrators, both with less than 20 year's experience. One administrator had a Master's Degree and the other had earned a Specialist in Education Degree.

The school has met Adequate Yearly Progress each year. Scores from the fall 2004 administration of the CogAT and ITBS revealed a high performing student population. Third and fifth graders scored between the 74th percentile and 80th percentile in reading, language arts, and math on the ITBS. CogAt scores on the verbal section of the test revealed a stanine of five at third grade and six in fifth grade. CogAt scores for both quantitative and nonverbal sections for third and fifth grade revealed an above average stanine of six. The CRCT results were similar, with most students scoring in Performance Level 2 or 3. Table 4.5 illustrates CRCT scores for Spring 2004 and 2005 in reading, language arts, and math. Again, scores are reflected by a grade level scaled score out of a possible 450 points.

Table 4.5

West Elementary—CRCT Scores in Reading, Language Arts, and Math for 2004 and 2005

Grade	Reading		Language Arts		Math	
	2004	2005	2004	2005	2004	2005
1	358	364	345	353	354	363
2	383	379	352	357	360	358
3	366	367	347	354	347	352
4	365	363	338	341	331	342
5	359	363	330	350	338	356

Participants' Perspectives

Participants were interviewed two times between March and May, 2005. Each interview was approximately 60 minutes each. Participants were provided the opportunity to read each interview transcription to provide interpretive analysis and revise, retract, or add statements they

believed would more accurately reflect their perspectives. While this opportunity was provided, no participant wished to retract their statements. Two of the participants did add clarification to some of their statements. An additional request was made after the second interview to further validate the findings. Each participant was asked to provide a ranking between one and five as to how they perceived high-stakes testing influenced their instructional decisions in the fall of the year and then in the spring and how high-stakes testing influenced their sense of professionalism. A ranking of one represented a low level of influence and five represented the highest level of influence.

Participants of this study represented five schools in this suburban school system outside the metropolitan Atlanta area. Each of the six participants had earned the National Board Certification and was currently assigned to teach 2nd, 3rd, or 4th grade. Table 4.6 illustrates the profile of the participants.

Table 4.6

Profile of Participants for School Year 2004-2005

	Jane Rogers	Mary Scott	Holly Gray	Tracy Joseph	Emily May	Patricia McCall
School	Apple Elementary	East Elementary	South Elementary	South Elementary	West Elementary	George Elementary
Grade	2nd	2nd	3rd	3rd	4th	4th
Years of Teaching Experience	16 years	17 years	23 years	8 years	9 years	26 years
Years in the Aim School System	4 years	5 years	3 years	2 years	2 years	23 years

Table 4.6 (coninuted)

Profile of Participants for School Year 2004-2005

	Jane	Mary	Holly	Tracy	Emily	Patricia
Advanced Education Degrees Earned	Master's Early Childhood	Master's Math	Master's in Early Childhood; Specialist In Early Childhood	Master's Reading	Master's Middle Grades	Master's Middle Grades
Year Earned NBC	2003	2004	2004	2002	2004	2003

Jane Rogers

The first interview with Jane was held after school in her 2nd grade classroom. Evidence of student work indicated a sense of student focused learning. There was a group of computers in one area of the room, a classroom library, art supplies, and manipulatives for making learning more authentic. Jane was excited about sharing and often told stories as examples of how testing impacted her as a teacher.

The second interview was held on a Sunday afternoon at a local restaurant. Jane had received the transcription and the interpretive analysis from the first interview and was eager to relay her perspectives. The second interview occurred approximately two weeks after the administration of the CRCT, so Jane had reflected on her testing experience. Both interviews lasted approximately one hour.

Nursing was Jane's first interest but found she lacked the enthusiasm for her classes. Jane reflected, "I started nursing and then after two years and a couple of chemistry classes, my mom said, 'why don't you be a teacher.'" In her education classes, Jane was successful and received "straight As in every single class." For her efforts she described, "I was awarded the

Most Outstanding Education Major at Georgia College and State University.” She was satisfied that teaching was exactly what she was meant to do and she added, “You have to like what you do. There are so many teachers out there that don’t enjoy what they do and you are like, ‘why are you a teacher.’” After 16 years of teaching primary children, she was confident in her instructional decisions. Becoming a National Board Certified Teacher in 2003 only added to her repertoire of effective strategies and methods. She stated,

It allowed me to look at what I was doing and see where I needed to improve. There was a lot of reflection and I was able to see how it affected the kids. I had to take out a lot of things that I liked doing but they really weren’t getting anything out of it.

On Jane’s website, she reiterated her desire to work with children and to remain a partner in education with the parents of the students in her class by stating, “It is a pleasure to be able to work with your children this year. We will have a great year learning and working together.”

Perspectives of High-Stakes Testing

Jane attributed the testing mandates to pressure from the public to improve Georgia’s reputation for low test scores. She pondered, “I think it was because our test scores in Georgia have been so low and we ranked so low nationally that we had to do something.” As a result, Jane described the purpose of the state’s high-stakes testing as twofold. First, she believed that high-stakes testing was a means for holding teachers accountable for teaching the curriculum standards to all students. Secondly, she believed high-stakes testing provided a stronger focus on curriculum and instruction with more consistency in how students were measured for determining mastery of the standards.

Holding teachers accountable for their students’ learning and for results representing a minimum competency level was, in Jane’s opinion, a method for maintaining consistency in teaching and grading. She stated, “You have to have something to measure the children, you

have to have a standard to be able to measure.” As an example, she described ways that assigning grades were usually at the discretion of the teacher,

If I’m having a test like a reading test and the child skips two of them because they were in a hurry, I will give it back to them and say, ‘you missed these two, go back and finish it.’ I’ll give them another chance. Well, another teacher might just count it off and say ‘well, you missed it, you’ve lost 10 points.’

By setting standards and measuring those standards with a common assessment, she believed that there would be a more accurate picture of the effectiveness of the instructional program. Jane further defined the intent of high-stakes testing,

The intent was to provide a standardized form of testing around the state to compare how the children were doing because you just can’t assume everybody was teaching the students the same just because there are objectives. I think they tried to assume that but children were getting passed on and on and then they were getting to upper grades and couldn’t read so you have to have a standard test so you can measure the children’s abilities.

Jane explained that testing helped her “stay grounded” because for her students to be successful, she must make sure she had taught the content. She added, “We have to be accountable, not only this year but the following years, too.”

Jane considered the intent as reasonable but had mixed feelings about the unintended consequences especially those related to her instructional decision and professionalism. When making instructional decisions, she considered the positive consequences, but she also believed there were many unintended negative consequences.

Influence of High-Stakes Tests on Instructional Decisions

Jane reflected on two positive unintended consequences related to her instructional decisions. These included a more appropriate pacing of instruction in terms of selecting what is taught according to the curriculum and what is taught for enrichment as well as the ability to analyze data for more effective instruction. Unfortunately, Jane believed that high-stakes testing

had more negative unintended consequences related to her instructional decisions. These included:

- Using one test score to determine student achievement and promotion or retention
- Increased student pressure to pass the test.
- Test preparation taking the place of in-depth instruction.
- Pacing of instruction is too fast to develop conceptual understanding

According to Jane, high-stakes testing impacted her pacing both positively and negatively. Positively, the test made Jane remain aware of her instructional decisions because she had to make sure she had adequately taught the content. Jane explained, “I have to make sure I cover multiplication before the test because there are questions. For my students who are anxious, they will get to the question and they will shut down.” Jane considered this a positive result of high-stakes testing because it provided reassurance that all standards would be taught.

In addition, another positive consequence was the ability to analyze data that was tied to curriculum standards. Each year the results of the CRCT as well as other system, school, and classroom data were used to help determine the instructional plan for Jane’s students. Jane explained, “We use the results of the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), Comprehensive Reading Test (CRT), and Standardized of Achievement in Reading (STAR©) plus written input from teachers, and they are all logged in the computer and we form classrooms based on the results.” Through analysis of this data, Jane was able to judge what her students needed but she was quick to say that determining the specific needs were only “loosely based on this data.” Once she began to work with her students it was easier to know exactly what skills each individual student needed. She stated, “You have to look at the whole picture just because there are so many different things influencing them.”

Jane was convinced that using the scores from one test on one day was not a fair assessment for determining promotion or retention. She stated, “You need something, but how fair is it to test them on one day, to pass or fail them based on one test. I think you have to look at the whole picture.” As a teacher, Jane used multiple forms of assessment to determine how to base her instruction and the students’ progress. She thought that multiple assessments were a more appropriate way to determine if a student should be promoted or retained. She explained “We are talking about all the ways now that you can assess children and it’s so much performance assessment and so many different types that we’re seeing that maybe standardized testing does go against everything.”

For Jane, multiple assessments were considered a better indicator of student progress, and also provided information about objectives not tested. Jane described students in her room “who had good grades but had gaps in their learning.” Because the test only assessed a limited number of skills, Jane was concerned about these gaps. As an example she described these children,

I’ve had children who look good on paper and get As and Bs and there is something that is just not there, it’s not clicking, they are paying attention and they are doing their best and their initiative kinds of helps them along, still you see they are not making the letter sound relationships. You have to look at the whole picture just because there are so many different learning styles.

Jane was troubled by “how many cases are out there like that.” She was concerned about the potential for the test to portray incomplete or inaccurate knowledge of a student’s true ability because the test would not indicate “gaps” in the learning nor would it always show the true measure of learning. Jane added that not all children performed well on a “paper and pencil test.”

Jane was confident in her teaching, but she was concerned about the pressure placed on students to pass the test. She believed that if a student in her room failed the test “there could

possibly be a reason” and she hoped the test would be able to show exactly what it was they did not know. Jane explained, “I couldn’t see anyone in here failing their test and if they did, it wouldn’t be because of their ability, it would be because of their anxiety.”

Jane taught her students to “use their resources.” This included things posted on the wall and on student desks such as the “hundreds grid, the alphabet, and words often used in their writing and reading.” Before the test, Jane had to remove those resources. She had mixed feelings about this requirement but rationalized it as establishing an environment in which “everyone takes the testing in as equal a setting as possible in order for the tests to be valid.” She voiced her concern by stating, “We teach them to look for patterns, count down a row for 10, etc. and then, we literally rip it off their desks for this test and hope that they have been able to internalize the information.” This mandate left a negative impression on Jane for how high-stakes testing improved learning.

Jane considered communication as a means for preventing failure and removing some of the stress. In her description of the CRCT she stated, “Right now it’s like a green monster. They have no idea what it’s gonna be like.” The previous year, Jane called a parent about the child’s lack of progress and cautioned them by stating, “This is what I’m seeing and you need to have a talk with him and make sure that he’s paying attention in class and doing his best.”

In Jane’s opinion, there must be a “balance” in preparing the students for the test and making them anxious about their performance. She explained, “The students must understand the importance of the test or they will just ‘Christmas tree’ it.” The school counselor talked to the students about “good test taking skills,” the benefits of relaxing, getting a good night’s sleep, and eating a good breakfast, but countered the seriousness of that advice with “playing a bingo game and giving them snacks.”

While Jane believed she had been careful not to add pressure on her students, she described some of the things being done to prepare the students as “a little over the top.” Jane described an example of intended positive motivation such as “little star sandwiches with a note saying ‘be like a star and shine your best.’” Conversely, however, there was the negative communication occurring between parents and students such as when parents told their children, “you are going to have to go to summer school if you don’t pass this test.” Moreover, Jane described that some students “came in crying on test days.” She added, “It’s scary because you don’t know what parents are saying to them and you don’t know their anxiety level.” She had recognized that “more of these students were in third and fifth grade” and wondered how this behavior affected her second graders.

Jane tried to reassure her students by making sure they were successful in her class. She recognized that the learning styles of the student must play a role in planning instruction and believed that the “assessment should match the needs of the student.” She explained that she would sometimes “give tests orally” if she believed the traditional paper and pencil test would not accurately show what a student may know. When describing a student in her room, Jane explained that “if he were not able to take the test with accommodations he would not pass the state test.” She said, “He has the information, it’s just that he’s very visual and he’s very hands-on and he just kind of shuts down when he has a paper and pencil test.”

An atmosphere filled with a plethora of test preparation materials was not one that fit Jane’s philosophy. She confessed she was committed to “keeping test preparation activities to a minimum” but that prior to testing time she had to make instructional decisions that she would not normally make if there were no high-stakes tests. Jane explained,

A couple of weeks before the test we have to stop and review a lot. If we are behind in the curriculum and we haven’t covered fractions, we have to quick get that in. I think all

year it makes you ‘keep up with the Jones’s’ and you can’t get behind because you know that you have to cover things before April and before spring break.

Jane realized that there were several considerations with the implementation of high-stakes testing as related to test preparation besides just ensuring that there was a balance between preparing for the test and teaching toward the mastery of the standards. Even though she believed in a balance, she admitted her schedule changed prior to testing to include test preparation.

Jane described three reasons for test preparation. One reason was to introduce her students to the terminology used in the test. Jane explained,

We have to make sure they have the right terminology because for example, this year the word ‘passage’ confused some of the children.’ Last year the test used the word ‘syllable,’ but this year they used ‘word part.’ Terminology like ‘passage,’ ‘syllable,’ and ‘data’ and things that you know are going to be on there, you need to make sure you cover that, and you might not necessarily do that if you didn’t know that testing was around the corner.”

Consequently, Jane had to make sure her students were at least introduced to the “multiple ways a word could be used.” She admitted that “test-taking techniques will be helpful after their school career” even though she did not like “stopping what we normally do.”

Secondly, she believed test preparation activities were a means for familiarizing her students, as well as the parents, with the format of the test. She described, “We would pull practice tests off the web site and assign them for homework so the parents can kind of be familiar with the types of questions.” She added, “Our school doesn’t go out and buy all the test booklets and put all the money into that and say, ‘you need to do this.’”

Finally, Jane believed students needed to know some of the basic test-taking strategies even though it required additional time out of her normal instructional routine. She stated,

We are stopping and practicing our CRCT, and we are talking about ruling two answers out and looking for what is right if you don’t know what is right or in case it doesn’t

jump out at you. Then we are doing test taking skills for a week. I find it hard to stop what we are normally doing, the normal routine and teach the test taking techniques.

While Jane described her test preparation as minimal, it was obvious that she made sure it was included in her instruction.

Jane was concerned that in some cases, test preparation would take the place of in-depth instruction, resulting in lessons that were not motivating to the students. Maintaining “student engagement,” Jane believed, allowed her to ensure students were learning concepts. Jane attributed the positive student attitude in her room to the “creative and innovative ways” she presented information. She added, “They have to be involved and they have to have ownership of what they are doing. You have to keep them moving and keep them interested.” She monitored their engagement in the learning by observing their involvement in the lessons as well as through “periodic assessments.” Jane stated, “We can’t do kill and drill all the time. We are doing Australia and Japan and taking them there and getting them involved and bringing the writing and reading across the curriculum.” Jane was confident in the learning because she could “see they are more motivated to learn when doing those things.”

High-stakes testing forced Jane to consider the negative impact on instructional pacing. Jane believed that some of the activities she used for reinforcing concepts had to be eliminated because of time. Children sometimes needed more time to develop the deep understanding of certain skills, such as fractions, and this disturbed Jane when she was trying to quickly cover topics to prepare them for the test. She described, “I normally wouldn’t rush through or skip over things. Then just the drilling, we spend like an hour a day doing that this week.” If there were no high-stakes tests, she would devote her time to helping students understand the concepts and how to “apply their learning to everyday life.” For example, Jane described an activity she liked to do when she had the time, “Normally, we do the pizza making and we cut the pizza into

fractions and we don't have time to do it so we just have to skip it." Instead, Jane used parent volunteers to "come in and do a lot of the skills if I notice that the kids are not getting it."

Influence of High-Stakes Tests on Professionalism

Jane considered herself a professional, and she did not believe that high-stakes testing had impacted her sense of professionalism. Likely, this was because she described professionalism in terms of the actions of a professional, such as "the way you dress," and "how you communicate with parents." Also, Jane believed, "professionals have to be structured. You can't be flying by the seat of your pants all the time. You need to have your plans done and know where you are going." Moreover, she believed that professionalism was earned.

Professionals, according to Jane, "have to earn the respect of parents." She continued by stating,

I think a lot of time teachers as a whole complain about not being respected and I think that goes back to professionalism. I think a lot of that is just communication and making sure that when you are speaking in front of an open house, it's the first impression that they are going to get and you have to have your act together. You have to have your power point ready and you have what you are going to say and not just trying to wing in.

Maintaining respect was a characteristic Jane believed was "easier as she gained experience."

Communication and dress were two other attributes of professionalism Jane considered significant. Having strong written and oral communication skills was clearly essential to Jane since she mentioned it on several occasions in the interview. For Jane, communication was a routine approach she used for developing a relationship with her students and their parents. She recognized that communicating with parents not only "makes them a stronger partner in the education of the student" but that it was also was a necessary component for her professionalism.

Experience had taught her to be careful in her oral and written communication. She described,

I've learned from phone calls and e-mails that tone can be put on e-mail and it's better to say 'why don't you come in and talk about that.' I think when you are talking with a parent face-to-face it solves things a lot more easily and more amicable.

Jane continued her description by relating how mistakes in communication can be misunderstood as lack of expertise,

I think when communicating with parents you need to make sure you cross your t's and dot your i's and things like that. Although it can be a simple mistake, it can be misconstrued as, 'look at this teacher, she is complaining about my Johnny and she can't even spell the word Australia.'

It was obvious that Jane remained aware of how communication could possibly impact her professionalism.

While she did not dwell on appearance and the way teachers dressed, Jane did mention dress as an attribute she considered a part of professionalism. She described how she believed it was "important to be viewed as a professional from the public." Her perspective was grounded by a statement several years ago from a parent at her previous school who stated that the teachers looked like they "were going to a picnic." Jane reacted by stating, "You have to have a certain sense of professionalism in the way you dress, we don't have to wear suits and ties but we need to look the part."

Jane described the "increased opportunities for professional learning" as a positive consequence of high-stakes testing on professionalism. Because there are "good and bad teachers out there," the professional learning "helps alleviate some of that." As examples, she described more opportunities for learning how to "teach writing and use technology."

Jane was hesitant to talk about situations in which her professionalism may have been jeopardized. She described instances related to high-stakes testing that inherently had potential for impacting professionalism; however, her descriptions consistently included reasons for why she believed these occurrences happened. Moreover, she confessed on several occasions that her sense of professionalism had not been influenced by high-stakes testing. In any event, she

described two negative consequences of how high-stakes testing influenced professionalism including:

- The increased pressure on teachers to prove they are professionals and their ability to make effective instructional decisions.
- The potential for competition among teachers, destroying efforts toward collegiality, collaboration, and trust.

Jane was convinced that the intent of high-stakes testing was to hold teachers accountable for teaching standards and assuring student achievement. While she agreed with this viewpoint and its intent, she described some of the negative consequences. One negative consequence was the pressure to keep the public informed, but yet continue to maintain their support. Posting scores in the paper or on the Internet were inevitable but, consequently, Jane sensed the pressure for high scores. She was disappointed that “parents don’t go into the schools and meet the teachers” because she believed it was a “better indicator of what my school and I as a teacher are doing to ensure each child is learning.” Jane admitted,

People who are buying houses are looking on the Internet and they’re [the scores] right there. So, it’s a primary indicator of what’s out there. If you are buying a house, you are going to look at the scores and I’m guilty, too. You’re going to find where you want to live based on what their scores are.

Jane believed she was “constantly having to make sure that we are proving our professionalism to the public.” For example, during the testing, “We have a monitor, have our door windows uncovered, and have people peeking in our doors. This is unnerving.” However, Jane adds, “It’s understandable. The public has put so much pressure on the testing that school systems have to be able to prove that teachers are professionals.”

Jane said that “unprofessionalism occurs because of undue pressure for high scores.” She referred to stories she had read about “unethical testing behavior in other systems” and

attributed the behavior to an atmosphere of “do what you have to do.” Stories of increased pressure and cheating were of concern for Jane. She said, “Because of what has happened in other schools, it might trickle down and affect testing for everybody.” According to Jane, this was not the atmosphere in her school or in the school system. She perceived her school system as wanting an accurate reporting of students’ strengths and weaknesses. She said, “There is just faith and trust in our teachers that they are doing all they can to help kids learn.”

Jane admitted that much of the pressure was self-imposed. She believed “parents hold the teacher accountable, the general public, all of the attention and the focus goes back to the teachers.” Consequently, Jane “blamed” herself and referred to teachers as the “scapegoat.”

Jane was concerned that testing may bring about the practice of “comparing teachers.” She said, “I can see where that would cause animosity between grade levels or between teachers, or even cause the third grade teachers to look down at second grade and say ‘well, it wasn’t just me.’” She shared a story of how last year a particular teacher was “applauded for her class earning high scores on all domains of the CRCT.” While the faculty was excited for the teacher, Jane said she “wondered if all things were equal such as did the teacher have special education students or students who had limited English-speaking skills.” Jane explained her concern that this type of activity may only breed competition and would not encourage collegiality or collaboration. However, in a positive vein, she countered, “I know we have meetings and look at our scores compared to the other schools in the county and we’re up there and, definitely, that can impact the motivation.”

Jane noted that in her school, she “definitely has a voice in decisions” and that her principal “really listened and considered our suggestions.” She said,

You can see him weighing it and we discuss it and he's like what do ya'll think. It's really not this is how we are doing it, this is how it's been done, and this is how we are going to do it. This is the first school that I've really felt that we have a voice.

When asked if she had a voice in the system, Jane said, "Not as much as the school. I think that sometimes you don't even take it that far because we feel like it's going to be fruitless." However, this did not appear to be of a concern for Jane because she believed that "we are impacted more and the children impacted more based on what we are doing in the schools."

Jane believed that respect for her as a professional was demonstrated during the testing week. The administrators had "organized the testing materials and had them ready for the teachers." Accompanying the materials was a "bag of goodies." This simple demonstration of support had an impact on Jane. She said, "I just really felt like they helped us and they really supported us."

It appeared that being respected for her input, collaboration, and collegiality were necessary components of a school for Jane and that was also the culture of the school. However, in spite of Jane's continuous praise for the support she received from her administrators, she relayed an incident at her school regarding her recommendation for the retention of a student. She stated

Sometimes you are asked to compromise what you feel is in the best interest of the student. I believed we should retain this student this year, he should have been retained last year, but they say 'well, he will be retained next year because he may not pass the test.'

She believed the attitude of "waiting until next year" could be a "disservice to children." But Jane justified the behavior through her statement,

Because of the test you have to make different choices than you would otherwise make and you have to keep in mind to do what is in the best interest of the kids. This is a tool to see the whole picture instead of as an ultimatum.

Jane appeared to be satisfied with and respected the decisions the leadership in her school recommended and did not question what she believed as a possible “disservice to children” as influencing her professionalism.

Case Summary

Jane was asked to respond to three questions that were used to further validate the analysis from interviews, fieldnotes, and other artifacts. She was first asked to specify on a scale of one to five, with one being the lowest indicator and five being the highest, how she believed high-stakes testing influenced her instructional decisions. Jane remarked that the influence was “less in the fall than in the spring.” During the year, Jane explained that in the fall she took time “focusing on the individual needs of the students but in the spring I would take more time reviewing lessons and assuring I had taught all of the skills that may be tested.” She stated,

For example, it is easy to get ‘behind’ in math and not fully cover an important concept such as fractions. I that is the case, I would make sure to go through the objectives and skip to that chapter before the test. So, the testing date influences planning.

Jane ranked the influence of high-stakes testing on instructional decisions in the fall as two and slightly higher in the spring as three. This indicated that Jane perceived high-stakes testing to indeed have an influence, while limited, on her instructional decisions.

Jane was also asked to rank her perspective of how high-stakes testing influenced her professionalism. She ranked this as two out of five. She reflected that she tried to “maintain a sense of professionalism regardless of other influences” and attributed testing as the cause for the “amount of stress the public had placed on school systems and teachers.”

As a final statement, Jane very clearly affirmed her position on high-stakes testing and how it influenced her instructional decisions and sense of professionalism. The following summarized her perspective,

I'm not totally against it and I know it's necessary, but I think it helps us slow down and make sure we are covering everything and then speed up and make sure we don't put a lot of fluff into what we are doing. It helps us stay grounded. I think it helps us just know that we can't close the door and do whatever we want to do in our classroom, that we have to be accountable; we have to be ethical in what we are doing.

For Jane, high-stakes testing did play a role in her instructional decisions as well as her sense of professionalism. However, she acknowledged that she “kept her perspective in check so that it did not get in the way of what was best for students.” She realized that accountability could be perceived as a negative obstacle for student learning but if she was careful, she could “maintain a positive attitude” about the impact and ensure that her decisions were the best for her students. Table 4.7 summarizes Jane's perspectives of the positive and negative intended and unintended consequences of high-stakes testing in relation to its influence on instructional decisions and professionalism.

Table 4.7

Jane's Perspectives on the Intents of High-Stakes Testing—Positive and Negative Unintended Consequences and Influence on Instructional Decisions and Professionalism

Intents of High-Stakes Testing	
Hold teachers accountable for teaching the curriculum standards to all students	
Provide greater consistency in how students are measured on mastery of the standards	
Unintended Consequences of High-Stakes Testing	
↓	
Positive Consequences	Negative Consequences
More appropriate pacing of instruction in terms of selecting what is taught according to the curriculum and what is taught for enrichment	Test scores are used to determine retention and promotion and are not always accurate
Increased ability to analyze data	Increased pressure on students to pass a test

Table 4.7 (continued)

Jane's Perspectives on the Intents of High-Stakes Testing—Positive and Negative Unintended Consequences and Influence on Instructional Decisions and Professionalism

More training opportunities available that allow us to become better teachers	Test preparation taking the place of in-depth instruction
	Pacing can also be a negative consequence when students need more instruction to develop an understanding of the concept
	Increased pressure on teachers to prove they are professionals
	Could potentially cause competition among teachers and destroy efforts toward collegiality and collaboration

Mary Scott

Doing “what is best for kids” was the expression Mary continued to use throughout the interviews. She earned her National Board certification two years ago to learn more about how to be a better teacher. She said, “It was a way to learn how to self evaluate myself and to make sure that I was doing the best that I could do in the classroom for the kids.”

Both interviews with Mary were held in her second grade classroom after the students had left for the day. Her own children were in the classroom during the first interview. She had given them money for a snack, and they entertained themselves on the computer while she participated in the interview. Their presence did not appear to interfere with her statements. Mary’s husband came to her room and picked up the children prior to the second interview. The first interview was longer than the second lasting a little over an hour. The second interview was about 45 minutes.

Mary had taught for 17 years, 12 of which were in Maryland. In Georgia, the amount of testing in the primary grades as compared to her home state was a surprise for her and had

impacted her as a teacher. She admitted that she had to make “a huge adjustment to the testing schedule” while remaining cognizant of how she could prepare her students for the test “academically as well as helping them approach the test with confidence.” Mary’s philosophy of assessment included the “focus on and the value of using assessment *for* learning rather than assessment *of* learning.” On several occasions she described how the instruction in her room was “based on the student working toward a goal and knowing why or why not they had not met the standard.”

Ensuring that her instructional plans were developmentally appropriate and sequential for her students was important to Mary. She explained that looping with her students had shown her that this instructional method allowed for her to “start the year off with the same group of children who knew your expectations, knew how the class ran, knew the management.” She confirmed, “We start the year off running on the first day of school.” In 2004-2005, she remained in second grade for the second year but prior to this year, she had the same group of students for first and second grade.

Mary had taught first and second grades. She had a Master’s Degree in math education and had used that degree to provide for students the foundation they needed for developing advanced math skills. She had been in the Aim County School System for five years, all of her years at East Elementary.

Perspectives of High-Stakes Testing

The intent of the accountability program was, according to Mary, “to hold teachers accountable.” She explained, “We have to be accountable now for everything we do, to keep track of all of the work. I hold it all year long.” Unfortunately, she did not agree that it was fair to hold teachers completely accountable. She explained, “Teachers are concerned that they may

look bad or that if their students don't score well, it may have an affect on the teacher skills."

While she did not elaborate, her opinion was clear by her statement, "It is just an easy way to blame [the teachers] if something isn't going right. It always comes back to the teacher—from the administrators, the parents..." Mary was not supportive of high-stakes testing, but she was committed to "doing what is right for my kids and making sure that they are getting what they need." This included "the extra enrichment and the test practices."

Mary accepted the intent of high-stakes testing even though she did not agree with the premise and the consequences. She saw little positive value in the testing program, mentioning only that it "allowed her the opportunity to see the growth and progress of the student" and to "let the teachers for the next year see what the students knew." In her opinion, there were multiple negative consequences that influenced her instructional decisions and professionalism.

Influence of High-Stakes Tests on Instructional Decisions

Mary was not supportive of high-stakes testing primarily because she perceived the requirement in direct opposition to her beliefs about instruction. She described her philosophy as "project-based" and "hands-on" and took pride in ensuring her students "gain an understanding of what they miss and why" on formative on-going assessments. While it appeared Mary was trying to force a positive viewpoint about high-stakes testing, she did admit that in an attempt to "do what is best for her students," she used results of the CRCT for planning instruction. She said she used test results to "place children in reading and math groups and to make sure special areas of need are covered."

Mary acknowledged the positive parental support she received during the year, "I have very good parent support." Unfortunately, she said parents worry about the test. She said, "They want their kids to be the best, they hear that the test is coming, and they want to know what they

can do to prepare them.” Mary was careful to include test preparation activities in her instructional plan as well as communicate with the parents of her students. She reassured her students’ parents and guided them to “use the practice skills we send home and the website has extra tests, but not to worry, no pressure.”

Mary described the negative unintended consequences of high-stakes testing as including:

- Undue pressure on students and parents
- The narrowing of curriculum to only tested items and content areas such as social studies and science.
- Too much focus on one score resulting in a lack of focus on the important of formative assessment or what the student has learned.
- Test preparation replacing a focus on “real learning”
- Using only one indicator for promotion and retention

High-stakes testing, according to Mary, placed “a lot of unnecessary pressure on young children, teachers, and parents, and the whole school.” The pressure on teachers remains, though, as Mary summarized, “They get the blame if something goes wrong and they blame themselves.”

Mary suspected that the focus was often too much on how the students performed rather than their emotional well-being. She expressed her apprehensions, “A couple of my kids are very concerned because they know what would happen in third grade if they didn’t pass and I really don’t know who has told them.” She suspected that “older brothers and sisters said ‘if you don’t pass that in third grade, you don’t pass the grade.’” Mary tried to reduce the stress of the test by “not making it a major focus for the children. They know they are taking this test and that it’s pretty serious.” She continued by saying that there were other methods of showing

student progress without “the pressure of taking a three-hour daily test for a week. It would be easier on the children and less stressful.” One way she tried to help her students was by “doing a lot of self-esteem building. A lot of positive reinforcement so that they don’t even know that they are practicing for the test because they are enjoying what they are doing.”

Additionally, Mary tried to keep the same routine used all year during test-taking time, so that the students were not too anxious. That proved to be difficult when she learned about the requirement during testing week to put away the instructional tools her students used on a daily basis. This included such things as the word wall, student work, maps, and number line. She explained,

They get very nervous and uncomfortable because a lot of them are dependent on having the word wall or they’ve been taught to use the word wall or the number line and they’ve been taught to have the resources that we have in here and then all of a sudden I’m taking them away from them after I’ve told them all year to use them for their benefit and to help them. Now I am taking it away.

Mary’s beliefs included teaching students how to use the resources available to them. Requiring her to take away those resources during the week of testing was contradictory to her beliefs.

Finally, Mary described the pressure “students put on themselves” to do well on the test. She said,

You never know how much pressure they are putting on themselves. My daughter is a worrier. She worries if she doesn’t get a 90 on everything. She puts a lot of pressure on herself. She asked me, ‘even if I get all As in second grade, will I be held back if I don’t pass this test?’

She had experienced this in her own daughter, and she believed that it was probably happening to other children, too.

For test scores to improve, Mary was confident that there needed to be a “focus on math computation and grammar” because she knew these were tested skills. Unfortunately, this forced social studies and science to receive less instructional attention. Mary explained, “We don’t get

into as much of the experimenting as we do into the reading about science.” This was a concern for her because, in her opinion, just “reading about a scientific subject could be detrimental to learning how the scientific process works.” Mary acknowledged that she tried to “integrate the lessons where they could be integrated” but there still seemed to be a “lack of focus on or time for science and social studies.” She confirmed that often she “probably spends more time reviewing the skills than actually applying them.” Additionally, Mary admitted that the test “puts an added amount of pressure on learning certain skills and sometimes you have to teach to the test but you could do so much more with the children.”

Mary acknowledged that high-stakes testing placed “too much focus on one score” and that resulted in a lack of focus on the importance of formative assessment or what the student has actually learned. She explained, “One test could not provide a complete picture of a student’s knowledge and skills.” Mary’s philosophy favored a more “authentic form of assessing a student’s progress” and acquisition of knowledge because it provided valuable information for the student, the teacher, and the parents regarding “what had been learned and how that learning has occurred.” Mary explained, “The parents get a score and they don’t necessarily know what they’ve [the students] missed and what they need to learn and what they know. It’s just a number.” It was this scenario she tried hard to avoid in her classroom. She stated,

It restricts me because I like to teach in a very project based classroom, I like them to be able to know why they’re learning things that they are learning and how they can use them in life rather than just to know the standards, the application is lost sometimes in the teaching to make sure that they pass the test.

As a result, high-stakes testing placed restrictions on Mary’s ability to provide the instruction and assessment she valued. Mary was a firm believer in teaching students how to “self assess.” She provided her students with “rubrics to help them know what is expected of them, what information to include in their assignments, and how they will be scored.” She advocated this as

a greater tool for not only finding out how her students were progressing but in helping students “gain an understanding of what they missed and why.”

Mary was convinced her “project-based learning” style was effective. She described a math lesson that included using a checkbook and a reading lesson that motivated her students to pursue more knowledge about the subject. She portrayed the students in her room,

You can see it in their writing, they want to learn, and they soak it up like a sponge and it’s not just a worksheet. They want to go ahead. I have reports of my students who just actually went home and decided on their own they wanted to report on something we had learned about. They researched it on the computer. They have a desire to learn when it makes sense to them and when they see why it’s important.

Mary believed there were other ways for showing student performance without having to give a high-stakes test. She supported the system initiative of standards-based reporting because “we have an assessment for each standard and you can see what they have and what they don’t have.”

Automatically retaining a student because of a test score was not a practice Mary felt was appropriate. She explained, “What if the child is sick or not feeling well or it’s a bad day at home? They come in and they’ve done well all year and then they fail the test. That’s when it’s not accurate.” She believed retention must be dealt with on a “case by case basis” and was concerned about the “inability to be flexible because there is no excuse for missing this test.”

In her opinion, for retention to be effective there must be something different provided for the child. She said, “Retention is not the answer if the parents aren’t involved or if things aren’t going to change. The teaching needs to be different.” However, Mary described the frequent absenteeism of her Hispanic students as a common occurrence at her school. She agreed that “when the student missed a lot of school retention may be necessary and effective.” She also considered the “developmental issues that occurs with late birthdays.” Overall, though, Mary was not supportive of one test determining promotion or retention.

With the addition of high-stakes testing, her instruction had a different focus. She had to decide how she would ensure her students were prepared for the test including setting aside time for test preparation. Test preparation was one way the teachers on her grade level ensured their students were “ready for the test” but she thought there “was too much time lost just practicing.” For Mary, she stated, “I used it to get an idea of how they might word things because a lot of times the wording can be a little different on the test than the teacher’s wording.” For the most part, she “left testing practice to the parents” by communicating with them about the opportunities for testing practice online. “I said ‘you need to do this during homework time, on the weekend, or when you have free time, but I had rather it not take away from class time.’” Mary admitted that she “hoped she had made the right decision and that it didn’t hurt them. It was my decision to make sure they were getting more instruction than practice.” She allowed approximately “20 minutes per day two weeks prior to the test for review and practice.”

According to Mary, test preparation was not productive and too much time was spent practicing. Moreover, she believed it took the “focus way from getting into to depth on concepts the students needed.” She admitted that the “test was very general” and that test preparation activities did not “allow us to get into as much depth as the curriculum allowed.”

Influence of High-Stakes Tests on Professionalism

Mary’s definition of professionalism included attributes such as “making sure you do the very best for each child’s individual needs, being punctual, and doing what you are responsible for.” Additionally, Mary believed that “confidentiality, communication, and collaboration” were important characteristics of professionalism. She admitted that she “teaches a little differently than some but I don’t do anything to not be a team player.”

Mary viewed herself as a professional and also believed that the public viewed her as a professional. She acknowledged that her sense of professionalism stemmed from her “continuation to learn and do what is best for the children. I come to school and I do what is expected and I reach my goals.” In spite of her assurance of her professionalism, she described events that questioned the amount of professional respect she received.

Mary appeared to be reluctant to discuss professionalism and many times would not elaborate on her responses. Additionally, reactions from her during the interview in May and the e-mail response received from her in July were contradictory. Mary confessed she was committed to “doing what was best for her students” and in remaining a “team player” so those beliefs may have influenced how she explained her perspectives. However, Mary’s discussion of the negative consequences of high-stakes testing that influenced professionalism included:

- The increased pressure on teachers to prove they are professionals
- Potential competitiveness among teachers

Doing what was best instructionally for students was a critical indicator relating to Mary’s sense of professionalism. If she was asked to do something that was not in the students’ best interest, it would “influence her sense of professionalism.” She also added, “I would do what I think is best for my students because every student is an individual and not everything works for everybody.” Unfortunately, high-stakes testing added pressure on teachers for students to perform at high levels on the statewide test.

While Mary stated that she did not believe high-stakes testing had influenced her professionalism, she admitted that, “there is a negative attitude about testing because if the students don’t score well, it may have an affect on the teacher skills.” Mary stated she did not interpret the pressure as stemming from her grade level colleagues or from the administration in

her school, but she believed there was an unstated tenet that scores revealed the “teacher’s quality of instruction.” She said, “Teachers are concerned that they may look bad if their students don’t score well. They get the blame if something goes wrong.” She explained that teachers were the ones who were often made to feel that they must take full responsibility for a student’s failure. Mary defended her profession by stating,

All teachers want to make sure the kids do the best, no matter what their grade level. You want to make sure the kids have the foundation they need for them to make into the next grade. I do what I think is best for my students because every student is an individual and not everything works for everybody.

When pressured by the researcher to elaborate on the relationship between this and how it influenced her professionalism, she would not elaborate.

For Mary, it was important her instructional time was used wisely and making effective instructional decisions was considered as an attribute of professionalism. However, she said, “High-stakes testing has not made me feel different as a professional. It does make me feel like I can’t do as much with the children as I’d like to do, but not necessarily less of a professional.” During the week of testing, Mary’s sense of professionalism was jeopardized when she was told she could not “teach reading before her students took the reading test or math before the math test.” She said, “Our reading test was on Tuesday, so we couldn’t teach reading on Monday or Tuesday so that it wouldn’t appear that we were last minute covering certain skills.” As a result, Mary said there was no real instruction all week. She described the week by stating, “There was a lot of fluff teaching.” Additionally, this practice made her question her ability to make professional or instructional decisions for fear she would be “inappropriately preparing her students for the test.” Mary described,

I was uncomfortable because I was afraid that if I mentioned adverbs or adjectives it might be wrong. It might be perceived as covering the skills on the test. Of course, we

didn't really know what was on the test. It wasn't like we were cheating or anything—I don't know. I felt like it, though.

In spite of this incident, in July Mary responded in an e-mail to the researcher that she did not believe high-stakes testing had impacted her sense of professionalism. However, Mary added that high-stakes testing “influenced the way others looked at you” and that she believed teachers were “scrutinized during this time.”

Mary attributed unprofessional behavior to pressure for high scores. In her school, there had been discussions about the proposed “pay for performance.” Mary did not approve of this proposal and said, “Some teachers are very concerned and could tend to do something unprofessional to help increase their odds. I don't think that's right.” She had not experienced the pressure for high-scores to the degree she believed possible.

Having a “voice in school decisions” could result in “more discussions” about testing. While Mary believed it was important to have a voice, she did not believe her voice was important in her school or in the system. She said, “There is a negative attitude about testing and if we could hash it out, it would be better. Instead, it's ‘this is how it's going to be and end of story.’” This could possibly be the reason for Mary's lack of voice in her perspectives about professionalism and high-stakes testing.

Case Summary

It appeared that Mary had resigned herself to comply with high-stakes accountability in spite of the fact that she did not believe it was in the best interest of student learning. While she did think that accountability had the propensity to improve the quality of instruction, she speculated if the negative consequences could possibly overshadow any positive benefit. She was especially concerned with the feeling that “testing was causing instruction to becoming more scripted” for what she taught and how she instructed. This was evident in her description of

what she could and could not do instructionally during the week of testing. Mary described consequences of how high-stakes testing influenced her instructional decisions and professionalism, but often contradicted her statements, especially those related to professionalism.

In July, Mary responded to three questions from the researcher. The questions were intended to further validate the data and the analysis. The participants were asked to respond by ranking the influence of high-stakes testing on instructional decisions in the fall and the influence on instruction in the spring. When asked to provide a ranking of one to five, with one being the lowest indicator and five being the highest, Mary ranked the influence of high-stakes testing on her instructional decisions as a two in the fall and a three in the spring. This confirmed her statements regarding instructional decisions. High-stakes testing had influenced her instructional decision but as she stated, she “made the decision not to use a lot of test preparation because she would rather not take was from class time instruction.” Furthermore, she was asked to rank the influence of high-stakes testing on her professionalism. She indicated that this would best be represented with a one. This response indicated that incidents such as the one Mary described during the week of testing were perceived as a much greater influence the week after testing than two months later. It also indicated that perhaps influences on professionalism were often rationalized over time as a common consequence of high-stakes testing. Mary considered the incident as not influencing her personal view of her professionalism but “how others viewed her professionalism.”

The data resulting from interviews and fieldnotes taken during March and May, 2005, were summarized and represented in a visual. Table 4.8 details how Mary perceived high-stakes testing and its influence on her instructional decisions and professionalism.

Table 4.8

Mary's Perspectives on the Intents of High-Stakes Testing—Positive and Negative Unintended Consequences and Influence on Instructional Decisions and Professionalism

Intents of High-Stakes Testing	
Hold teachers accountable	
Unintended Consequences of High-Stakes Testing	
↓	
Positive Consequences	Negative Consequences
Allows for analysis of data to determine student strengths and weakness	Undue pressure on students and parents Narrowing of curriculum to only tested items and content areas—social studies and science suffer the most Only one indicator for promotion or retention Test preparation replacing a focus on “real learning” Too much focus on one scores resulting in a lack of focus on the importance of formative assessment or what the student has learned Increased pressure on teachers to prove they are professionals Potential competitiveness among teachers

Tracy Joseph

The first interview with Tracy was at her house after her workday. At least an hour was spent discussing high-stakes testing and several times during the interview, Tracy apologized for her tone and her opinion. The second interview was held at a local restaurant during the week she was administering the CRCT. The researcher did not pay for the participant's meal because

it was understood that there would be no compensation for participating in the research. Tracy stated that she was comfortable with the first transcription and the interpretive analysis and was eager to provide a more in-depth reflection regarding testing. The atmosphere did not appear to diminish her opinions and again she was very frank and explicit about her perspectives. Since she had administered the test as recently as the morning of the interview, there was a sense of freshness and honesty attached to her perspective.

Tracy began her career as an “underwriter with a nationally known insurance agency.” Even though she was promoted in the company, Tracy decided to enter into the education field and she worked as a paraprofessional while earning her degree in elementary education. After earning her degree, she taught in a classroom but quickly moved into a leadership position. She was a lead teacher, an instructional technology specialist, and an assistant principal. Tracy was tapped for the position of principal but family issues required relocation to another area of the state.

Unfortunately, there were no administrative positions in Tracy’s new school system, and she decided to focus on earning the respect of the community and the school system as an effective classroom teacher. At the time of the study, Tracy was teaching 3rd grade in a large elementary school located in the southern part of Aim County. Her goal was “to be the best she can be.” She stated, “I take pride in what I do and I want to know that I am with the best of the best.” Continuous learning was important to her, as evidenced by her earning of a Master’s Degree and the National Board Certification. Tracy also taught professional development courses for the system. This past year she was the instructor for the induction session for all new teachers to system and was selected to teach Reading Endorsement courses.

Perspectives of High-Stakes Testing

For Tracy, the accountability movement was “politically charged.” She believed the intent was “to have Georgia students as a whole perform better.” For high-stakes testing to show gains in student achievement, there were several intended positive and negative consequences. In Tracy’s opinion there were three intended consequences of high-stakes testing that included: (1) ending social promotion, (2) holding teachers accountable, and (3) increasing the focus on curriculum.

Tracy believed that one consequence was to “end social promotion.” She explained, “They are using it as a way, to me, so that the educational system in a county doesn’t have to battle with parents whenever they keep a child back.” Tracy was adamantly opposed to one test score being used to determine promotion or retention because she believed that “there should be proper proof and a portfolio to say why this child should not go to the next grade.” She was frustrated that the test determined promotion in spite of the vast amount of research showing “retention does not work and too often a child won’t make it through high school.” Furthermore, she believed that educators should “do what is best for the child.” She stated, “When we make any, any, any decision about a child, we’ve got to look at the whole picture, not just one form of assessment.” According to Tracy, for retention to be a positive decision there must a change and that change must take place in all aspects of the student’s life. “If a child is held back but their environment at home is not going to change and they’re not going to get any support, why make the child suffer through it again?”

Second, Tracy believed that the statewide assessment was used as an evaluation of her effectiveness as a teacher and could have a positive outcome. She considered herself accountable for “teaching the state curriculum.” Tracy accepted it as her responsibility to do

whatever was necessary for ensuring that each child received the very best instruction. She explained,

We have to prove that we are sticking to a curriculum and that we are preparing the children for the following year. If they don't get the foundation in third grade, fourth grade concepts are going to be foreign to them. So, this is another way of saying 'we are going to measure what you are doing.'

Unfortunately, Tracy admitted that there were "many teachers who are pretty good with covering what they are supposed to and they are conscientious." In Tracy's opinion, these teachers "didn't need to be held accountable," but regrettably, there are those "teachers who surface and if all of this is to weed them out, then we are wasting a lot of time because we know who they are."

Finally, as a result of holding teachers accountable for teaching the curriculum, Tracy believed there would be a more comprehensive focus on instruction. Tracy gave examples of teachers "who used only the textbook as their guide for what was taught." She stated, "If the system adopted textbook doesn't include information on all of the state objectives, then students are not taught what is expected from the state curriculum." Because of the test, Tracy was convinced that teachers were now more aware of what needed to be taught and that it had forced teachers to see the curriculum as a "map for what we should do."

Influence of High-Stakes Tests on Instructional Decisions

Unfortunately, Tracy also believed the public, including policymakers, had a "very narrow view of accountability" and, therefore, there were unintended positive and negative consequences related to her instructional decisions and professionalism. For Tracy, there were many more negative unintended consequences than positive ones. She believed the most significant unintended positive consequence was the ability to use data for determining strengths and weaknesses in the teacher's instruction. The negative unintended consequences were much more numerous and included:

- The increased stress on students.
- The narrowing of curriculum and instruction
- Increased use of test preparation, which replaces more in-depth coverage of curriculum.

Tracy considered the influences of high-stakes testing on her instructional decisions and did admit that test scores could serve as a diagnostic tool for teachers to determine areas of strength and weakness. She explained this one positive unintended consequence,

It could have a good side by leading to the point where we can see a pattern. I can look back and say ‘that’s an area that I’m weak in, this what I need to improve on.’ By looking at several years of data, areas can be determined where there may be a weakness in instruction.

If over time, students continued to perform poorly in an area, then this could become an indication that the teacher may need to “seek support for instructional improvement.” Tracy added, “We would have concrete information to help us be a better professional in the classroom.”

Tracy reflected on three unintended consequences. First, according to Tracy, the public does not understand how accountability has impacted the student. She was concerned about the undue amount of stress being placed on the student. She said,

People outside of education say, ‘well, they can handle that, they will understand’, and then move on. They are not in that room with the child getting ready for a test and they [the students] get sick because they are under so much stress.

The stress students are under was something that Tracy viewed as an unnecessary and unacceptable negative consequence of high-stakes testing. She attributed much of the stress as stemming from parents’ expectations. Tracy explained,

A lot of it is from the parents because if a child isn’t performing on grade level, then parents don’t accept that. They are a higher socioeconomic group of people, they want their children doing better than the common person.

As a teacher of third grade students, Tracy realized that her students may be more worried than other students because “they know that they have to pass to go to the next grade.” She continued with her view from the student’s perspective, “You see them shaking because they know if they don’t perform the standard, then Mom’s going to be upset. Their whole world is based on how they score.” Additionally, Tracy said, “There is a situation with every child and sometimes it’s not the perfect situation. They could have had a stomach bug and didn’t get to bed.”

One example of student stress as a result of high-stakes testing was described by Tracy. A student in her classroom was struggling, and she was sure that “he was aware that he didn’t understand the material as well as his friends.” This feeling of inadequacy and “lack of confidence” in the ability to do well on a test, manifested itself into “aggression on the playground.” She stated, “I had one child get more aggressive on the playground. He was pushing his best buddy, pushing the girls, and just a personality I had not seen. It went away after the test.” Furthermore, she wondered if some of the stress was a result of attempts to teach children how to relax. At Tracy’s school, the counselor came into each room and talked to the students about the test and stress “reducers” they could practice. She said, “Are the kids thinking ‘Should I be stressed?’”

Second, from Tracy’s perspective, there were several concerns when students and teachers were placed in a high-stakes testing environment. Annual high-stakes testing can be a source of stress not only for the students but for the teachers. Consequently, the teacher experiences a sense of urgency to “get objectives introduced and taught so that students will be prepared to master any of the objectives questioned on the test” and that by only skimming the content, “in-depth learning can not occur.” Tracy explained, “I can’t devote what I know I need to because I’ve got pressures from accountability.” As a result, Tracy sometimes “stops teaching

a concept because I need to go back and review and also make sure I touch on this other area.”

According to Tracy, even with the state curriculum revision, there was “still too much to cover in 180 days.”

For the student who may not be developmentally ready for some of the content, there was the expectation to perform at equal levels as all other students. As a result, Tracy expressed her perspective of this unintended consequence from high-stakes testing. She stated that many times she was “being pulled in many different ways when I know a focus should be strictly teaching in that room, making sure my children are getting what they need.” This resulted in the narrowing of curriculum and instruction for her struggling students as well as her more advanced students. She said that for her struggling students her instruction was “far beyond the foundation and they were not ready for it.” She used the example of “teaching possessive nouns and possessive plurals while expecting it in their writing and then to pick it out on a CRCT question is not developmentally appropriate.” The pace was too fast for these students who were not making adequate progress. She stated, “They are being pushed along much faster in many cases than they are able to do.” Consequently, without the necessary skills, the student won’t pass the test and will be retained.

As a result of the time Tracy believed she needed to spend on instruction with her struggling students, she realized her more advanced students were not always receiving the enrichment they deserved. Tracy explained that without the pressure of the test, she could “enrich the lessons because they have the concepts and could move even farther.” However, she ended up “giving them something independently so that I can take the time to work with the students on the low end.” She admitted that this was an instructional decision she was not happy

with but she said, “I have to make sure my test scores are up. That makes it look like I am doing my job.”

Tracy voiced concerns about science and social studies instruction for all students. For these subject areas, there was a great deal of content and Tracy found herself “cramming in” information. She explained, “We have to skim things and brush on subjects and ideas and move on quickly.” While she found herself more conscious of pacing at this time of the year, she did think that for social studies and science, particularly, there was too much content to cover in a year. Pacing was not her only concern. She felt that teachers “cut corners with science and social studies because of the focus on reading and math.” She admitted that many teachers used reading as the vehicle for teaching about social studies and science concepts but a more hands-on teaching approach as well as resources were needed to really teach the social studies and science concepts in depth.

Finally, pacing of her instruction and how to incorporate appropriate test preparation materials were considerations for Tracy because of high-stakes testing. Tracy’s instructional pace increased after the winter break because of the limited time to prepare her students. She stated that she felt “compelled to cover as much content as possible before the test.”

Vocabulary used on the test was an area Tracy realized affected her students’ scores. She concentrated on “squeezing in as much content vocabulary as possible to broaden the vocabulary knowledge before the test.” Unfortunately, in her teaching of grammar skills, Tracy used terms such as “statement and question and the test used the terms declarative and interrogative.” She stated, “When they got to that, I had to just say ‘do your best.’ I didn’t use the correct vocabulary and so I failed them.”

Influence of High-Stakes Tests on Professionalism

A professional, according to Tracy, was someone who was “educated in their field and continued to learn throughout their career.” Additionally, Tracy believed that multiple characteristics were evident in a professional. She stated,

Being a professional means you have to look at the whole of what somebody does and not just pieces of a job. As an educator it’s somebody that looks at how to plan lessons, how to score, how to grade, how to talk to parents, how to get along with co-workers.

Tracy elaborated, “my experiences helped me become a better professional and a more effective teacher,” and she “hoped that others would bring to my attention things that could help me improve.”

Tracy stated three unintended consequences of how high-stakes testing had influenced her professionalism. First, she believed that teachers’ effectiveness in the classroom was unfairly judged by just looking at a test score. Second, Tracy was concerned about the propensity for competition among teachers for high test scores because she believed it would result in unethical behavior as well as a lack of collegiality and collaboration. Finally, Tracy was discouraged by the lack of voice teachers have in decision-making. She believed that having a voice in how decisions were made was important in any profession.

Tracy believed that high-stakes testing had influenced her sense of professionalism but because she “has confidence in my ability to help students, that sense of professionalism remains intact.” She said, “I don’t need someone telling me that I’m a professional. If I did, then I wouldn’t be a teacher.” However, she did not understand why there continued to be such a lack of trust from the public in her competence. She stated,

We have the brain, we have the ability, we have the capacity to go in the classroom and make our decisions and teach, but then we’ve got the high-stakes test. I’m sure it’s a different level of stress for each one of us. From January on a teacher has in the back of her mind that it’s high-stakes time and we’ve got to prove that we’ve done our job.

She compared educators to other professionals by explaining that in “every profession there were those who do not represent the majority of their members and those who are not as competent as others.” She suspected this was what had happened in the education field. Tracy resented that as a result she felt forced to make instructional decisions she did not consider were always in the best interest of the child just to prepare them for a test that would prove her effectiveness.

Tracy voiced her disappointment in how the public viewed educators and thought that other professions, such as doctors, were treated more as a professional than teachers. Tracy attributed a part of the lack of professionalism to the fact that “women had dominated the teaching field for so long and that they were not respected for their contributions to a professional field.” She did state that she was encouraged by the appearance that this “attitude was changing because more women were in administrative positions.”

Tracy described students whose scores did not match the evidence of learning in the classroom. Often students’ scores on the CRCT were lower than what Tracy would have expected. However, it was the opposite scenario that influenced Tracy’s professionalism the most. She explained that she had “students who passed the test but, yet, had exhibited weak skills in the classroom all year.” Tracy described that in these cases, the parents say, “my child knows how to do this, look at this score.” She said that she wanted to respond with an explanation like, “they guessed well that day because that is not the ability I’ve seen in the classroom.” In Tracy’s experience her credibility in the diagnosis of weak areas was questioned when the test score reported otherwise.

Tracy resented test scores being used as motivation for her to “do her job.” She believed there was a “negative impact when test scores are in the newspaper. It really says ‘teacher, you better do your job’ and teachers worry.” In her opinion, there were many variables that affected

how much a student learned and the teacher was diagnosing the “learning styles” of each to ensure instruction was appropriate. Tracy was convinced that with “the merit system” the focus on student learning and instruction will be “impacted negatively.” She was worried about the progress some teachers had made with the focus on working together. Tracy explained,

You can walk in a school and you can see a grade level that has meshed, they are using their resources, and they are doing things together. Those teachers who are making high test scores may not always be the ones who have worked hard with a low group. Some teachers have moved children leaps and bounds more than the teacher who has the 98 percentile score. The merit system will not always pat the right teacher on the back and that is going to cause some teachers not to share and collaborate. The main reason we’re here is for the kids and that will be lost.

In Tracy’s opinion, because students had different learning styles and were developmentally different, basing a teacher’s ability on scores was unfair and could cause a lack of collaboration.

Finally, Tracy was not convinced that the voices of teachers were being heard. She thought it was critical that there were opportunities for teachers to voice their opinion but in her experience other things were the priority. Tracy elaborated, “When you hear a two-second bleep on the teachers’ perspective, and then you watch 20 minutes of what the governor’s going to do, no, I don’t believe our voice has been heard.” Her frustration was heard in her statement,

I think it is important for them to know we have a brain, that we do know a direction to take and at least let us be a part of decisions being made, at least understand that we are the ones in the trenches.

Tracy believed that teachers needed a voice in decisions that were being made but she also reiterated the fact that “we must remember to focus on what the students need and how we can improve their learning.”

Case Summary

For Tracy, high-stakes testing had an impact on both her instructional decisions and her sense of professionalism. She proposed a more holistic view of a student’s progress when

considering promotion or retention. While she approved of some form of accountability, she predicted more negative consequences resulting. The high-stakes tests, in her opinion, have placed undue stress on both teachers and students. Additionally, the pace at which she was forced to comply resulted in students not receiving the individualized instruction they needed or the in-depth instruction necessary for truly mastering a concept. Furthermore, the feeling that she must prove her competence had left her feeling less of a professional.

Tracy was asked to respond to three questions to further validate responses from her interviews. Each question required her to provide a ranking of one to five describing her perspective of how high-stakes testing had influenced her instructional decisions and sense of professionalism. A ranking of one represented the lowest amount of influence and a ranking of five represented the highest amount of influence. First, she was asked to provide the number that represented her perspective of how high-stakes testing influenced the instructional decisions she made in the fall of the year. Her response was indicated by a two. She considered her pacing and knew there were skills she was teaching in the fall that her students would need for the spring test, but the pressure from the high-stakes test was not as prominent in the fall. Next, she was asked how her instructional decisions in the spring were impacted by high-stakes testing. This time her response was four out of a possible five. This validated her statements from the spring interviews, indicating that high-stakes testing influenced her instructional decisions in several areas including instruction in science and social studies, decisions regarding test preparation activities, and teaching only tested skills. The third question asked her to rank the influence of high-stakes testing on her sense of professionalism. She responded with a four. Tracy had stated in her interviews that because the teacher's effectiveness was being judged

based on test scores that her sense of professionalism was impacted. Therefore, these additional questions further validated responses in her interviews and in the researcher's analysis.

Table 4.9 is a summary of Tracy's perspective of the intent of high-stakes testing and the positive and negative consequences of high-stakes testing in relation to its influence on instructional decisions and professionalism.

Table 4.9

Tracy's Perspectives on the Intents of High-Stakes Testing—Positive and Negative Unintended Consequences and Influence on Instructional Decisions and Professionalism

Intents of High-Stakes Testing	
Teachers are held accountable	
Increased focus on curriculum	
End social promotion – decisions about retention	
Unintended Consequences of High-Stakes Testing	
↓	
Positive Consequences	Negative Consequences
Increased opportunities for data analysis	Increased student pressure
	The narrowing of curriculum
	Increased time for test preparation.
	Increased competition among teachers for high scores.
	Pressure on teachers to prove they are professionals
	Lack of teachers' voices in decisions

Holly Gray

Holly was very personable and eager to participate in the research. She was also flexible when scheduling a time and place to meet. Both interviews were held in the researcher's office after Holly had completed her teaching duties. She related her experiences and perspectives for approximately 90 minutes during the first interview. The second interview was 60 minutes.

Holly's tone and her body language were the essence of what one would imagine in a primary school teacher. She spoke clearly and enunciated her words very carefully so that it was easy to understand just what she was saying. Her body language expressed confidence but yet there was a sense of humbleness and kindness about her. It was evident that Holly's family was very important to her. Throughout the interview she spoke of her husband, her children, and her parents. She was a firm believer in the need for establishing a relationship before the "real" work can be done. When asked about her classroom, she stated, "I spend a lot of time creating a sense of community. Without respect, there isn't true learning."

Holly was confident in her abilities and comfortable with her philosophy and beliefs about children and learning. She was the first to say that it had "developed over the years" and knew that her experiences had helped her "gain wisdom in knowing what was best educationally for her students." She stated that she "firmly believes that all children can learn but how and when they learn may be different." Timing and pacing were different for all children. She explained, "I remind myself that my own daughters learned to walk and talk on their own schedules, not mine."

Holly described her lifelong ambition to become a teacher, and she had continued to set personal goals toward not only being a good teacher but also being the best teacher possible.

Through earning the National Board Certification, she was confirmed that her “meat and potatoes” approach was justified. When asked about her instructional practices, Holly replied:

The most important thing is setting up a community within the classroom. We have to know each other, we have to care about each other, we have to have respect for each other. Without that I don’t think we can learn.

Holly attributed her success in the education field to her dedication and commitment to doing what is “best for children.”

Holly had experienced teaching students in kindergarten through sixth grade. For two years, she was an instructional coordinator for a girls’ home. Holly had taught in the Aim County School System for three years. When South Elementary opened in 2003, she requested a transfer to teach third grade. Holly had earned a Master’s Degree and Specialist in Education Degree in Early Childhood Education and, in 2004, she earned her certification as a National Board Certified Teacher. She taught a professional learning course entitled, Standard Based Unit Design for teachers in the system. This course focused on designing and developing units of study based on curriculum standards. She had also served on teacher committees for the selection of textbooks, review of the Georgia Performance Standards, and the development of a system curriculum map.

Holly’s perspectives of how high stakes testing had influenced instructional decisions and professionalism were built on her “experiences as a child and as a teacher.” Holly grew up in Princeton, New Jersey, and she credited her beliefs about testing on her “experiences as a student.” She described that as a child, “most major national tests were developed” in her hometown. She stated, “We would come into our class and would be given a test to bubble in. We were the guinea pigs. Testing became a part of our culture.” Because of this early influence, Holly was not intimidated by the new accountability system in Georgia.

Perspectives of High-Stakes Testing

Holly supported the accountability program because she saw the intent as “improving the quality of education in the state.” She stated, “High stakes shows we are serious in Georgia about student achievement.” Holly cited as one example for evidence of a good educational system was the need for “continued economic growth.” Georgia is a fast-growing state and test scores are reflective of the educational system. “We want to be proud of the education in our state,” she said. Holly believed that “Georgia didn’t want to be down on the bottom, and we shouldn’t because everybody wants to move here.”

Holly also believed that by holding “both teachers and students accountable,” the quality of education would improve. She understood that accountability was the means for “raising the bar for all children and making sure they are learning what we are teaching them” and that “cleaning up was not always a bad thing.” Holly explained,

The students have to understand that they have those goals set up so that they know they are going from here to here, rather than just meandering through their lives. And the teachers have similar goals. Yes, we should be accountable.

Making sure “the teachers are quality and that your children are working and everyone has the same focus,” was the intent of accountability, according to Holly. She was clear that the intent was not to “zap the kids and hold them back.” Holly speculated that teaching had become a more difficult job with the implementation of the accountability system. She mentioned that she had “heard of teachers leaving the profession” but recognized that it could be a positive outcome if the teacher “wasn’t willing to work hard.” She elaborated, “You have to make sure you have quality teachers and that your children are working and that everybody has the same focus.” In these cases, accountability could “be a positive thing because they may have needed to be out of the profession.”

Influence of High-Stakes Tests on Instructional Decisions

It was clear that Holly was a supporter of the intent of the accountability program and believed that high-stakes testing could have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and instruction. However, Holly also believed there were unintended positive and negative consequences of high-stakes testing. Interestingly, while it appeared that Holly fully supported accountability and that she believed there were several positive unintended consequences, she also believed there were equally as many negative consequences. Among the positive unintended consequences were:

- The ability for increased data analysis for identifying students' weak areas.
- Retention decisions were supported by scores on the CRCT.

Holly believed the negative unintended consequences of high-stakes testing included:

- Lack of teacher input regarding promotion and retention.
- Test preparation activities affect the motivation to learn.

Holly briefly described two areas that could be attributed to positive unintended consequences to high-stakes testing. One positive unintended consequence was the ability to use test scores for making better instructional decisions. Holly noted that “at the end of the year, if we get the scores back quick enough, we can make recommendations for the next year.”

However, test scores are primarily analyzed for the “crop of children we are working with.”

Holly explained,

I go through each test and I just make a little tally mark and look at the different subtests and the similarities in lower scores or higher scores. Then, I use the lower scores to plan where I'm going to target my teaching. If I need to be harder on decoding or punctuation, I know that I need to focus my instruction that way. If they are doing great on punctuation and capitalization, I'm going to review it and we are going to move on.

By analyzing the scores for identifying the student's weak areas, Holly was able to provide the instruction each student needed for being successful.

Second, the ability to use the test scores for supporting retention decisions was a positive consequence, according to Holly. She stated, "if the child has struggled all year long and is just barely getting there, no, they don't need to go on." Furthermore, Holly believed that "if the teacher has recommended retention, then the test scores can back you up." Conversely, however, Holly explained that more often decisions related to retention were a negative unintended consequence of high-stakes testing.

Holly indicated that test scores often supported her decision for retention. However, she believed that test scores should not be the only indicator for making retention or promotion decisions. Moreover, it should be one indicator along with "teacher judgment and a body of evidence." She added, "How can you take one day of testing and say that is what the career of that child is based on. You can't because you don't know what happened before they get into the building." She also believed that "maturity and motivation" had a role in how serious the student was about taking the test and that "sometimes their skills aren't the strongest but they will be able to make next year if they work harder."

Not wanting to negate her perspectives about the intent of the high-stakes testing program, Holly added, "like most educators, I agree with the importance of having high expectations for students." Holly said, "At first I balked at the idea of the benchmark testing. I thought, 'what are we doing to children!'" She said, "By having the test match the curriculum that was expected to be taught, passing the test becomes the responsibility of everyone." She recognized the benefits of goals and the importance of measuring student progress toward those

goals. Furthermore, she accepted the responsibility for “monitoring the progress of my students.”

Holly further explained, if one of her students scored in Performance Level 1 and had to be retained, she believed that, “First I would cry and ring my hands and say ‘what did I do wrong?’ Then I would look back at who that child was, or is, and really reflect on was it truly a struggling child in my class or was it a fluke.” Holly explained, “If a child in my room failed the test, I would feel I had not done my job or had not prepared the parents.”

Communication about high-stakes testing must be, according to Holly, a critical component of the accountability program. If a student was not performing to the level expected, “the school must know so that accurate improvements could be made to the instructional plan.” In other words, Holly did not think failure should come as a “surprise to the parent.” She stated,

I think really we need to do a better job of communicating with communities, parents, and new teachers coming in so that they will be more understanding of it. There is almost this unknown out there and I see some parents really getting depressed. They don’t have that deeper understanding of why that would be happening.

Sharing with parents all year about the progress of their child “helps parents understand why their child may not pass the test.”

Using test preparation activities and taking time out of the instructional day for testing preparation was one area that Holly believed was a significant negative and unintended consequence. Not using specific test preparation activities and materials was a decision Holly committed to and one in which she felt comfortable. She stated the reason for this decision as,

I chose not to use the test prep because it takes away from what I need the children to learn and I feel like if I’m teaching them the skill throughout each and every day, then on this test they should be fine.

She admitted that she reviewed skills and previewed some of the social studies and science content. With science, she tried to use “teachable moments to pull in things we don’t have time

to cover.” She provided as an example, “This child brought in a tadpole. We hadn’t done life cycles yet, so it was perfect timing. Life cycles will be on the CRCT and so we can just do a little preview with the tadpoles.” It was the same with the economics unit. Holly said, “We won’t quite have time to finish that unit before the test but it’s a small chunk and won’t break them if they don’t know everything about it.”

Holly stated that test preparation may have a place in some classrooms. She explained, “I think new teachers, especially inexperienced teachers, are not as sure of their own ability and they may think they’ve got to do this because it helps their students.” However, she acknowledged that she had not heard of any “research proving that test preparation worked.” In fact, she felt strongly that it would be “more detrimental to those students in low-performing schools because of the negative effect on motivation.”

While Holly chose not to use test preparation materials, she considered it important to teach her students good test-taking skills. Additionally, teaching good habits for taking a test could not be limited to one time a year. She was convinced this should be done all year long through exposing students to many different ways a problem could be presented and solved. She told her children, “There is more than one way to skin a cat and I’m going to teach you as many things as I can.”

The day before she was to administer the CRCT, Holly e-mailed the researcher, and she hoped she had made the “right decision not to use the test preparation materials.” It appeared she was beginning to become nervous about the test. A couple of days later, though, Holly e-mailed the researcher again and stated,

I looked around while the children were working and how diligent most of them were, I could see the confidence in them. So, I did feel better that I didn’t compromise my idea and say we are going to do the test prep.

Holly was encouraged by her ability to remain true to her beliefs in spite of the increased pressure she felt prior to the test.

Influence of High-Stakes Tests on Professionalism

Being considered a professional was important to Holly. According to Holly, professionalism does not “just happen” and “experience and wise mentoring helped educators become professionals.” She stated, “Professionalism doesn’t just happen when you get your teaching certificate. You feel like you are a professional but it is a process.” She also considered professionalism as a part of “your beliefs, not just your formal learning” and that is a “big responsibility.” In the school, Holly realized being a professional meant that she had to “be her own person and be true to herself.” She explained,

We walk into a classroom every day and we can shut the door and do what we want to do because nobody is really peeking over our shoulders. You have to be your person and be true to yourself and your beliefs every single day. I can’t leave my house being one person and be a different person in the classroom even though my husband is not there to see.

She warned of the need to stay away from the “negativity and petty stuff” that leads to unprofessional behavior. If there was too much negativity, Holly recognized the need to make a change. “I have been in a school where I felt like I couldn’t be the professional I wanted to be, I couldn’t stay there so I asked for a transfer.”

In spite of the positive climate in Holly’s school, Holly did not consider high-stakes testing a positive venue for encouraging the sense of professionalism. She considered testing as a means for creating a sense of distrust about a teacher’s ability to instruct. To prevent this from happening to her, she has vowed “not to let the fear of testing compromise what I feel is best for my students.” Holly added, “We need to teach our curriculum.”

A lack of communication about the intent of accountability and high-stakes testing was one explanation Holly believed created a sense of distrust in a teacher's effectiveness. Holly opened the second interview with a story of how even she had not done a good job of communicating the intent of the test with her own family. She related a conversation with her husband about a recent newspaper article,

Evidently we were lambasted by this guy up in Michigan. Al and I started talking about it and I wanted to tell him what I felt that what we are doing is not wrong. The reporter said that we are totally missing the mark in Georgia with what we are doing with testing and we are just testing the kids and like rolling them down like bowling pins. I'm like, that's not what we are doing, but maybe to the outside world that's what it seems like. I haven't even communicated well with my husband.

Holly appreciated the need for accountability if Georgia wanted to be "respected around the nation as having a quality educational program with quality educators." She stated, "We don't want to be down on the bottom and we shouldn't be."

However, experiences during testing perpetuated the feeling of distrust. Like most teacher, Holly used the classroom wall for displaying instructional resources. She was frustrated with the requirement that she remove those resources during the administration of the test. She covered her work with newspaper instead of taking it down since the students would use the resources again after the testing period. In an e-mail to the researcher she stated, "I'm not taking things off my walls—just covering up with newspaper. Do I like that? NO! We use our resources all year, and then, POOF, they're gone!" However, she was more positive in the message she gave to her students. She told her students, "The state wants to know what you know, not what you can glean from resources."

During the spring 2005 administration of the test, Holly was disappointed in the lack of flexibility she was given as to what she was required to do during the two-hour testing periods. She described her testing period,

I was only to monitor and I don't know if that was an effective use of my time. I don't think I should have ignored the children but I should have been able to look through some resources and gather some ideas while the children were working. All I could do was give them the instructions and say go to it and then 45-60 minutes later, they stopped.

Holly believed she should have been provided the respect of knowing what she should and should not do when determining the testing atmosphere in her room. She had talked to other teachers who were allowed to do "some walking around work" and Holly believed that was a better use of time.

When asked about high-stakes testing and the sense of professionalism, Holly described how the climate of the school and the administrators played a role in cultivating the sense of professionalism within a testing environment. When there was a great deal of pressure for teachers and students to perform well on the state test, Holly described the role of the administrator as the support system for teacher, parent, and student,

If the pressure of the testing that everybody in your class has to pass, I wonder if some teachers wouldn't be tempted to be unethical because of the fear of what would happen to them if not everybody was passing.

Holly also believed that communication could contribute to lessening the pressure teachers feel. She admitted that "in every career you have some sort of testing" but that many times "parents don't know enough about the whys and wherefores so they are stressed and that stress comes over to the children and then to us, too."

One reason Holly felt she had developed a strong sense of professionalism was the result of the leadership opportunities her school and the school system had offered her. She was honored that her school valued her opinion and was comfortable offering suggestions for improvements. Holly described how the school system had contributed to her sense of professionalism, "This system encourages professionalism and discourages unprofessionalism.

The different programs we have available with our focused choice is only going to make us better teachers. They give us the avenues and we just have to take the walk.”

Case Summary

Holly was asked to respond to three questions to further validate her statements in the interviews and the researcher’s interpretation. She was asked to provide a ranking that would represent her perspectives of how high-stakes testing influenced her instructional decisions and sense of professionalism. A number of one to five, with one being the lowest indicator and five being the highest, represented her perspective. The first two questions related to instructional decisions in the fall and in the spring. The third question asked her to provide a ranking that represented how high-stakes testing influenced her sense of professionalism. A ranking of one for all three questions revealed that high-stakes testing had little impact on her instructional decisions or sense of professionalism. These responses mirrored her statements and the interpretation with the exception to professionalism. Holly had indicated more of a negative influence on professionalism than a ranking of one would indicate.

Holly’s experience had allowed her to gain the confidence necessary in an era of high-stakes testing. Clearly, Holly was not intimidated by the mandate for annual assessments but respected the consequences that could occur. She made the decision not to alter her instructional practices or instructional decisions because of high-stakes testing. She also possessed a strong sense of professionalism that was warranted based on the fact that she was well-respected among her peers throughout the system. She attributed her positive experiences as a professional to the “culture of her school and the faith others had in the ability to teach children.” While Holly had developed a confidence in her teaching, she could understand how a positive sense of professionalism could be destroyed with the implementation of high-stakes testing. Table 4.10 is

a visual summary of Holly’s perspectives regarding intents of high-stakes testing and the positive and negative consequences of high-stakes testing in relation to its influence on instructional decisions and sense of professionalism.

Table 4.10

Holly’s Perspectives on the Intents of High-Stakes Testing—Positive and Negative Unintended Consequences and Influence on Instructional Decisions and Professionalism

Intents of High-Stakes Testing	
Hold teachers and student accountable	
Improve quality of education	
Unintended Consequences of High-Stakes Testing	
↓	
Positive Consequences	Negative Consequences
Ability for increased data analysis for identifying the student’s weak areas	Lack of teacher input regarding promotion and retention decisions
Scores could back up teacher decisions about retention	Test preparation activities affect motivation to learn
	Pressure on teachers to prove they are professionals (diminished trust, pressure for high test scores)

Emily May

Emily’s strong personality emerged early in the interview. She was eager to share her opinions and even stated that she “probably has way too many opinions.” At one point she candidly began offering her opinion of the language arts textbook the county had adopted saying, “I’m going to get in trouble here.” She then remembered the confidentiality of the interview and continued by describing the text as “weak” and “un-exciting” for her students. Emily believed it

was her duty and “responsibility to speak up” about issues she considered important and in need of addressing.

Both interviews with Emily took place in her 4th grade classroom. Her children attended the school so she made sure they were with another adult before beginning the interview. There were no interruptions but at one point during the first interview, the door had to be closed because the janitor was vacuuming outside her door and it was too noisy to carry on the conversation. Emily’s confidence was immediately recognized through her demeanor and sense of comfort with the questions. She was quick to respond and often elaborated with explicit answers. She also did not hesitate to ask questions if she was not clear about the question. Both interviews lasted approximately one hour each.

Emily was not afraid to seek challenges and considered herself a risk-taker. For her, becoming a National Board Certified Teacher was a “challenge” she pursued enthusiastically. She believed the additional certification would make her a more effective educator. According to Emily, the “emphasis on reflection was one of the most beneficial outcomes of the process.” She stated that she had continued the practice of “videotaping to learn more about my students because I learn so much about them.”

While Emily was a veteran teacher with nine years of teaching experience, she had not always been in the education field. She began her career as a computer programmer. At some point in her education career, she would like to use her “expertise in technology,” but she wanted the job to “include working more directly with the students.” In the meantime, her students benefited from frequent use of technology in her room.

Perspectives of High-Stakes Testing

Emily was not opposed to the accountability mandates of No Child Left Behind. She viewed the purpose of high-stakes testing program as “holding the teacher accountable for teaching” and ensuring students are receiving appropriate instruction. Emily considered the testing as a way for understanding how “well you are helping these kids and making sure that they pass.” Unfortunately, Emily believed there was a lot of “finger-pointing” and “holding the teachers more accountable.” She said “They look at our scores each year. They look to see how our kids are doing.” She described times when children were not successful that it was usually a “combination of factors” and not completely the teacher’s fault. She said, “We aren’t a miracle worker in a year—the home environment, all of those things play heavily in everything they are trying to hold us accountable for. No teacher wants to leave kids behind.”

Emily viewed “an increased consistency in what is taught and how achievement is measured” as another intent of high-stakes testing. This was a positive result of high-stakes testing, according to Emily. She “saw a need for the test” because grading can be “subjective” and that the test became a more “consistent indicator of students’ knowledge and skills.” Emily had experienced students who “will have these great grades but they can’t do anything.” However, she did think that the test “must be aligned with the curriculum.” She sated, “It should be that way because what we are expected to teach and what the kids are expected to learn should be on the test or it would be unfair.”

Emily was generally supportive of the implementation of an accountability program. Except for the field test items, she felt the test was “adequately aligned to the curriculum.” The field test items posed a problem for her students. She described these questions as ones that “stress the kids out.” This was the case particularly for her students who were overachievers.

“They freak out if they don’t know how to do something,” she said. Emily had been involved in administering a “pilot CRCT and it was an accurate reflection of what students could and could not do.” She explained that as long as there was an opportunity for an “appeal of retention decisions” on an individual basis, it could have a positive effect by raising a “good red flag.” Concluding her perspective she stated, “I’m not one of those that No Child Left Behind really gripes.”

Influence of High-Stakes Tests on Instructional Decisions

While Emily approved of accountability, she did have some concerns of high-stakes testing as it related to instructional decisions. Interestingly, she only noted one positive unintended consequence of high-stakes testing which included increased opportunities for data analysis for determining teachers’ and students’ strengths and weaknesses.

According to Emily, automatic retention was not always the most viable solution for all students who fail the test. This unintended consequence carried a negative connotation in the interview with Emily; however, she also believed that retention could have a positive result. Other perspectives were delivered by Emily as much more significant negative unintended consequences. These included:

- Inappropriate accountability measures for the special education students.
- Propensity for increased test preparation that may increase test scores but not lead to greater understanding of concepts and skills.
- Retention as not always a viable solution for student achievement.

Positively, Emily believed the increased opportunities for data analysis were made available with annual statewide test results. Emily used test results to determine the materials and strategies necessary for each child to progress. She described her process,

I take the prior year's scores and I actually map out each area to see where each individual student went up or down. Then I put those together and find my weaknesses because if they all went down in a certain area or they didn't go up in a certain area, then that is the area that I focus on for the next year of teaching.

By using test results for analyzing individual student achievement, she was confident in her ability to “differentiate” her instruction.

However, Emily did not rely solely on CRCT scores to help her develop her instructional plan. Emily believed in using scores from “multiple assessments to determine the students’ knowledge and skills” and for measuring how well they were progressing. She provided her students with multiple opportunities to show what they knew because the students “may get it one day and then the next day they don’t.” She also used results to help her diagnose her strengths and weaknesses. She explained, “I find my weaknesses because if they [scores] all went down or they didn’t go up in a certain area, then I focus on how I can improve my teaching in that area the next year.”

For there to be more accurate data analysis, Emily felt strongly that there must be an “alignment of skills students learned and the skills that were tested.” She also thought there should be a closer look at the “vertical alignment of the tests so that teachers could look at how a student performed from one year to the next” and to gain an accurate analysis of progress. As the tests were currently designed, she did not think this had been done. “I think the fourth grade test is a little bit harder. I’ve looked at the scores and fourth grade scores across the county are lower.” She was quick to say that there may be a reason for this, such as “more material to cover, the student population, or even that the cut scores were set so that not too many students were retained in third and fifth grade.”

“Student engagement” was a priority in Emily’s classroom. She made sure her students were involved in activities that were “hands-on and provided multiple opportunities for skills to

be reinforced.” She also believed it was important to “capture the student’s love of reading by using novels for teaching reading.” She described her experience with the language arts textbook by explaining that her students began to “lose interest in reading and wanted to know when they were going to read a ‘real’ book.” Again, Emily relied on her test scores to determine if her methods were appropriate. “The kids had really strong scores and my reading scores have always been my strongest scores. If they dropped, I would say I can’t keep doing that because it’s messing them up.”

Retention was an area that Emily believed depended on the situation of the individual student. During her interview, it was evident she had mixed perspectives about how retention influenced her instructional decisions in a high-stakes environment. Emily said, “Retention doesn’t solve many problems and I think you need to look at that very carefully before you retain a kid.” Because Emily was such an advocate for individualized instruction, she wanted each case to be considered for the consequences and benefits. Emily reflected that in some cases “retention was a motivator” for students. During the test Emily said students would ask if they had to pass the test to go to the fifth grade. Passing the fourth grade test was not a requirement but Emily said she “just told my students to do their best.” Additionally, she relayed a story about one of her students who did not realize that “placement in a remedial program was the result of poor scores on the previous year’s test.” She explained that when she told the student this, she perceived the student as “taking more time selecting her answers.” Emily also explained that if the student “does not pass the test, the low scores were probably an indicator that learning was not occurring” and retention may be a positive solution. She said, “There are always exceptions to everything, but if they can’t do some of the basics, then we aren’t doing them any favors. Someone needs to put a flag up and help them.”

Another negative and unintended consequence Emily described was the “inappropriate testing for special education students.” She commented, “I don’t think they thought of special education because of the way they set the percents.” Emily believed there should more “accommodations for the special education” student population, especially since she “modifies everything for them all year long, yet, then we give them the test they have to pass.” In Emily’s classroom, she looked carefully at the data she collected for helping her determine what to teach and, as a result, her special education students were taught on an appropriate instructional level. She explained,

For my special ed students, I modified their work, but when it came to the CRCT I know that one of them didn’t pass, she made a lot of progress but she didn’t pass and that was held against her. I did have a problem with modifying the work and still testing them on that level.

She believed that the test did not allow for an appropriate level of individualism and many times students were not recognized for the progress they have made, but simply the score they received on the test.

The emphasis on test preparation was another unintended consequence that Emily believed had a negative impact on instruction. Emily believed that test preparation could possibly “improve test scores” but that it would not, in her opinion, be considered an “accurate diagnosis of what the student knew.” She expressed her view of test preparation by stating, “It would take away from real instruction. And the kids hate it, they absolutely hate it. It would probably make the scores go up but would it make them a better learner? No.”

Emily felt comfortable with her instruction because she made sure that all of the standards were taught. However, since the test was administered approximately six weeks prior to the end of the school year, Emily explained that she had to “preview some of the standards.”

This was especially true for social studies and science. She defended her decision by stating, “There is just no way we can cover everything before the test.”

At Emily’s school, instructional decisions made by the teacher were respected by the principal. Emily was not required to participate in scripted test preparation materials. She expressed her appreciation for her administrator by stating, “I’ve heard of principals who require that you do CRCT practice every day. I would resent that.” Emily made the decision to only focus her test preparation activities on certain aspects of the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). Vocabulary was one of those areas. The syntax and semantic structure used in the instructions sometimes confused the students. She explained, “The students don’t always understand what is meant by the question or maybe it was a word.” Another area she focused on was the test format. She wanted her students to be familiar with the format of the test so that they could focus on the content.

Practice for the high-stakes test in Emily’s room did not begin until January and was only for a short time each day. Emily explained, “For morning work, they do an overhead of math CRCT practice to get them ready for the format. We go over it every morning because a lot of times it may be the wording, too.” Emily tried to tie a technology aspect to her practice by going over “practice tests on the interactive white board.” While the time she devoted to test preparation was limited, she had made the decision to include it in her instructional plan each day. Emily was confident in her ability to ensure her students received appropriate and effective instruction and that all students were learning and; therefore, she did not see the need to “rely on test preparation activities” for her students to score well. Additionally, her philosophy was “for students to learn,” which, in her opinion, could be “different than obtaining a high score on the test.”

Influence of High-Stakes Tests on Professionalism

Having a sense of professionalism and being thought of as a professional was important to Emily. She defined professionalism as “how you compose yourself, how you dress, how you act, how you speak to people, how you speak to your students, and how you behave.” Emily added that professionalism was “doing your job, what is expected of you at all times in front of the kids and parents and everywhere—just do what you are supposed to do.” She attributed her growth as a professional to her “experience in a variety of places and positions.” Emily described,

When we first moved to Georgia, I taught in a very low economic middle school. Then I spent a little time in an exclusive private school. It helped me see kids from all walks of life. I think those varied experiences have opened me up to a lot. To see that everybody has a different story and there is more behind there than sometimes we think.

Emily had taught in rural as well as urban areas and in private and public school settings. The opportunity to “serve on the school leadership team” was an additional aspect for developing a sense of professionalism for Emily. She realized that people could have a “limited view” unless they had experiences to help them “understand that decisions were often made based on the positive benefits for the majority.”

In an era of high-stakes testing, Emily believed that communication and collaboration were critical. She viewed the principal as the “key figure for creating a sense of collegiality and camaraderie among the staff that, in turn, facilitated positive communication.” Emily believed the leadership team in her school was responsible for “working together to solve problems and to make suggestions for improving the achievement of all students in the school.”

Emily believed that she was responsible for students’ success or failure on the test. An aspect of being a professional was, in Emily’s words, “being responsible for what we are supposed to do.” When asked about how she would feel if one of her students did not pass the

test, she responded, “I would feel like it’s a reflection on me and what I am doing. I would take it personally, but I’m not going to bog down my curriculum because of it.”

Emily stated that in an era of high-stakes testing there appeared to be a lot of “finger-pointing” and “holding the teachers more accountable.” She explained that she did not “care for it” because “the test is the ultimate test that is used to hold teachers accountable and it shouldn’t be in one test but a multitude of things.” For Emily, it was not fair to hold teachers completely responsible as evident in her statement, “We aren’t a miracle worker in a year—the home environment, all of those things play heavily in everything they are trying to hold us accountable for. No teacher wants to leave kids behind.”

In spite of the fact that Emily believed that high-stakes testing made her accept more responsibility for student success than she agreed was fair, Emily responded that she did not feel that high-stakes testing had impacted her sense of professionalism. She attributed her positive sense of professionalism to the leadership in her school, the trust the principal had for her instructional decisions, and the confidence she had in her ability to teach.

Case Summary

Emily further confirmed the data and the analysis by ranking the influence of high-stakes testing on her instructional decisions as having little influence in the fall but more of an influence in the spring. When asked to provide a ranking of one to five, with one being the lowest indicator and five being the highest, she ranked the influence of high-stakes testing on her instructional decisions as a two in the fall and three in the spring. Furthermore, she was asked to rank the influence of high-stakes testing on her sense of professionalism. She indicated that this would best be represented with a two. Based on Emily’s positive comments about her

professionalism, it was difficult to justify why she ranked professionalism with a two. Emily did not elaborate why she believed this warranted a ranking of two.

High-stakes testing appeared to have had a limited impact on Emily’s instructional decisions and sense of professionalism. She was aware of some of the potential negative consequences of high-stakes testing and had taken steps to not let these negative consequences impact her or her students. She was most concerned about the impact on special education students. In addition, she was convinced that decisions to retain students should be carefully considered. High-stakes testing had given her the opportunity to identify skills her students had not mastered as well as areas she may not have been as thorough in her instruction. Finally, Emily perceived high-stakes testing as the avenue for providing a more consistent and accurate picture of student learning. Table 4.11 provides a visual summary of Emily’s perspectives of the positive and negative consequences of high-stakes testing in relation to its influence on instructional decisions and professionalism.

Table 4.11

Emily’s Perspectives on the Intents of High-Stakes Testing—Positive and Negative Consequences and Influence on Instructional Decisions and Professionalism

Intents of High-Stakes Testing	
Hold teachers accountable	
Consistency in instruction and grading	
Unintended Consequences of High-Stakes Testing	
↓	
Positive Consequences	Negative Consequences
Opportunity for increased data analysis to identify the weak areas in students’ learning and teachers’ instruction	Inappropriate accountability measures for special education students

Table 4.11 (continued)

Emily's Perspectives on the Intents of High-Stakes Testing—Positive and Negative Consequences and Influence on Instructional Decisions and Professionalism

Retention is not viable solution for all students who fail the test

Test preparation may increase but learning would not

Teachers are held totally responsible for student success on the test

Pressure on teachers to prove professionalism

Patricia McCall

Consistently throughout both interviews, Patricia linked instruction and learning to the relationship she had developed with her students. At one point, she described one of her students and then said, “She made so much progress. I was so proud.” It was clear that her 26 years of experience had increased her intuitiveness regarding what the students in her class needed in both personal and academic areas.

Interviews with Patricia were conducted in her classroom after she had completed her duties for the day. Patricia was quiet and appeared a bit aloof but she was agreeable to participate in the study. Once a rapport was established, it was apparent that Patricia was knowledgeable of high-stakes testing and had many perspectives she was eager to share. Both interviews lasted approximately one hour.

Patricia was the only teacher in her school who had earned the National Board Certification. When prompted about why she decided to earn this certification after 23 years of teaching, she stated, “I was contemplating on getting my Specialist’s Degree but decided to do

the National Boards.” She admitted that the financial benefit was a motivator but found that going through the process of earning the National Board Certification made her think more about what she was teaching and student outcomes. She said, “It made me think harder about my teaching. I think I was a good teacher before but it enriched me and made me an even better teacher.” Test scores from previous years indicated that Patricia was a strong teacher, especially given that she taught in a lower performing school in comparison to others in the system. Additionally, her school served a large number of students who were not proficient in the English language. While her scores exceeded the system average in only one domain for only one of the past three years, scores consistently met or were above the school average.

Of the 26 years Patricia had taught, all but three were in the Aim County School System. She had watched the community develop from a rural farming community to a fast-paced suburban area that was one of the fastest growing in the United States. Among her colleagues, she was one of the few who began teaching at the school when it opened 17 years earlier. She had taught grades three through five but was currently teaching fourth grade. While Patricia was hesitant to talk about her accomplishments and successes in the classroom, her principal, Mrs. Berry, was very quick to say that she was an outstanding teacher, and she was well-respected among her peers. As evidence of her principal’s confidence in her, Mrs. Berry recommended Patricia for participating in the training for teacher leaders in the system. Patricia was responsible for attending system-wide training sessions on implementing the Working on the Work² (Schlechty) protocols. In turn, she redelivered the training to other teachers in her school.

² Working on the Work (WOW) is a system initiative based on the school reform model by Phillip Schelchty. Patricia is an instructor for teachers about the vision and goal of the initiative.

Perspectives of High-Stakes Testing

Patricia explained that, in her opinion, the President and the passing of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, was the catalyst for increased accountability. As a result, the intent of high-stakes testing in Georgia was intended to hold teachers accountable. Unfortunately, both teachers and students were under pressure to perform. However, Patricia, perceived teachers were being held more accountable than students. She stated, “Teachers are being held accountable because you want your students to pass the test.” She realized this added pressure could be detrimental for some teachers but she said, “I know that I do the best job that I can do so I’m satisfied.”

Patricia was not opposed to being held accountable for teaching her students. She believed that all children should be held to high expectations of learning and the teacher was responsible for teaching all students, regardless of disability. She stated, “We should expect high goals out of all students. We are accountable for teaching all students to reach the highest ability.”

George Elementary, where Patricia teaches, did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress and was placed on the needs improvement list in 2001. The school has met the yearly goals for four consecutive years and is no longer on the needs improvement list. Patricia reflected on the “positive outcomes from that experience.” The school received additional personnel support “such as Title I teachers” but more notable was the “time block that was untouchable for language arts and math.” Because of the positive results, Patricia “did not think the school as going back to previous scheduling.” This experience attributed to Patricia’s limited support of accountability.

Influence of High-Stakes Tests on Instructional Decisions

Patricia considered positive and negative unintended consequences with the implementation of high-stakes testing. She believed there was an increased opportunity to analyze data for identifying students' and teachers' weak areas that would positively influence "our" instructional decisions. However, there were multiple negative unintended consequences that influenced instructional decisions and professionalism. These included:

- Pressure on students to pass a test, especially impacting the limited English proficient student and the struggling reader.
- One score used for retention purposes and as an indicator of the ability of the student.
- Limited instruction in social studies and science
- Increased test preparation

High-stakes testing had provided Patricia the opportunity to look at data more closely. She said, "I look at test scores to reflect on my teaching to see if there is an area that I need to improve on." The current method of testing did not allow Patricia to analyze data in a way that she believed was representative of how she had impacted their learning. She proposed, "I would prefer if we gave a beginning of the year test and gave the same test at the end of the year. I could use those results better." Regardless of the way the testing program was currently implemented, she still reflected on her teaching and "tends to look at the results a little bit closer to see if there is an area that is really weak." Patricia admitted that she analyzes scores more for indicators of "teacher weakness, so that I can address it in my instruction," but she also uses test results for determining who "qualifies for Title I and EIP." She has found that "vocabulary and math computation are consistently the lowest scores." Increased opportunity for data analysis

was a positive consequence of high-stakes testing, but Patricia also discussed the more negative aspects of high-stakes testing and the influence on her instructional decisions.

Patricia worried that high-stakes testing placed undue pressure on students for performing at a certain level and contributed the pressure as “coming from the state level.” As a teacher, she did not place an inordinate amount of time or focus on preparing her students for taking the test nor did she talk about the test with her students. She said, “I don’t talk all year, ‘you have to pass the CRCT, you have to pass the CRCT’ but I do say ‘this is a skill you need to learn.’” She tried to provide her students with “real life examples and relevance for why they needed to learn something.” One of her students expressed to her that “last year they felt pressure.” Patricia assumed the pressure was “from the parents knowing that they had to pass the CRCT to go onto fourth grade.” As for this year, Patricia said, “They really feel pressured. They mentioned it this year because we had specials during testing. They asked, ‘Mrs. McCall, did they give us specials this year because we are so stressed and they knew we needed a break.’”

The growing population of students with limited English-speaking skills concerned Patricia, and she was apprehensive about the expectation for these students to pass an annual state exam. In her opinion, she believed these students should be given the same opportunity for accommodations as special education students. She said

At our school I kind of think it’s crazy expecting a child who is in our school, in our country for the first year to take the same test as everybody else and expect them to still meet the standard. There should be some kind of transition time for those students. When we gave the kids the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), I could ask for the math version in Spanish, I’ve asked for this for the CRCT and was told no.

In addition to her concerns regarding the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students, she was also concerned about her lower performing students. These students, according to Patricia, were “anxious about performing well on the test.” She explained, “It’s not because they don’t know

the materials or that they didn't read it, it just that they kind of clam up. You can see it on their faces." Patricia was not sure if this behavior was a result of "stress or maybe they are so used to failure."

Patricia further confided her apprehensions of testing and the pressure on students,

I know there are some students who would have higher test scores if it wasn't in a situation that was so intense. You have this amount of time, start now. The pressure is so great that I think some of them really don't perform to their ability.

She confessed, "It bothers me when I know they can apply it in class and then their test scores are lower than their ability."

Patricia was not supportive of retention for students based on one test score. She believed this was a decision that should be made based on multiple sources of evidence and on how remaining in the grade a second time could positively affect the student. She said, "If you are going to retain them and they are going to do the same exact all over for another year, then it's not going to be beneficial, the same worksheet, the same story." Patricia suggested that retention decisions "should be based on the individual child and that if the child received additional assistance in the weak areas, it might be better to go onto the next grade."

After the winter holidays, Patricia began to pay more attention to her pacing. She said, "I think in the back of my head, what have I covered, what do I still have that I need to make sure I get in before the testing." Patricia speculated that science and social studies were not "valued because of the increased focus on reading and math." She explained, "The test included questions about social studies and science but scores were not a part of determining promotion or retention." In spite of the lack of importance Patricia viewed as being placed on science and social studies, she still "assumed responsibility" for ensuring her students received appropriate and adequate instruction in both content areas. Because of the large amount of material in the

state curriculum for both content areas, pacing became problematic. She was concerned that the solution would include pressure to “totally integrate those areas into the reading and language arts block.” While she considered this a viable solution, she was afraid that there would be “gaps in their conceptual understanding of science and social studies.”

Patricia stated that she “would feel devastated if one of her students failed the CRCT because it would mean I didn’t meet their needs for this basic test.” Patricia was confident in her instruction and, therefore, included a limited amount of test preparation. In January, Patricia “introduces the parent to how they can go on line and take practice tests.” Any other activities that could be considered preparation for the CRCT was incorporated in Patricia’s instruction throughout the year. Patricia said, “I use Wordly Wise and Spectrum hits hard the objectives, but I use it all throughout the year.” Additionally, explicit test preparation only focused on format and vocabulary specific to the test.

Even though vocabulary was an area of weakness reflected in test scores, Patricia did not consider the emphasis she placed on vocabulary a direct result of test scores or high-stakes testing. Instruction in Patricia’s room focused on increasing a student’s vocabulary regardless of the testing. However, because of testing, she tried to “present my vocabulary instruction in a format that was reflective of the test format.” She often gave her students “bubble tests” and when reading aloud to the students, she stopped and asked them to “discuss the meaning of a word.”

While Patricia may be more cognizant of student scores and the state curriculum, her teaching style had not changed. She continued to conduct small reading groups. She stated, “They come up to me for the guided reading. If I don’t do this, I don’t get that one on one to know how they are reading.” She was aware of the hard work involved in planning for

appropriate individual instruction, but was convinced that students benefited and showed progress. She also described this as a time when she had to use her “hawk eyes” for watching to make sure everyone was on task and that she was adequately holding the students accountable for their own learning.

Influence of High-Stakes Tests on Professionalism

According to Patricia, professionalism was “reflected in the manner in which one appeared to our fellow workers, type of input we give them, the type of help we give them.” She considered a professional to be a “team player, helpful to others, well-groomed, and a person who possesses good communication skills.” It was important that Patricia was perceived as a professional. She also believed that “experience and maturity play a role in forming a professional.” She said, “When I began teaching, I was a work in progress, working towards being a professional, but I was doing what I thought a professional was at that time. I’ve grown since then.” Patricia was not convinced that “just because you have straight As, meant you were a good teacher or a professional.”

Patricia acknowledged that high-stakes testing had not influenced her sense of professionalism. She responded, “I am confident in my ability as a teacher.” However, Patricia did believe the intent of high-stakes testing was to hold the teacher accountable.

Patricia also believed that her principal respected her talents as a teacher. Therefore, in Patricia’s opinion, there had been “no reason to question my professionalism.” When asked about her role in school decisions, Patricia was quick to give accolades to her administrator. She said, “If I have an issue that I need to speak to her about, she makes the time and she listens.” She did not feel the same amount of respect for her voice at the system or state level but also said that it had not impacted her sense of professionalism.

When presented with a hypothetical situation that would require Patricia to use a “scripted lesson plan,” she was concerned that it “could influence professionalism but more importantly, the impact would be on student learning.” She expressed her apprehension of how “individual needs would be met” and how it would “limit my ability to make learning fun and hands-on.” She was thankful that had not been a factor in her school.

Case Summary

Patricia was asked to respond to three questions to further validate her statements in the interviews and the researcher’s interpretation. Each question required her to supply a ranking of one to five, with one being the lowest indicator and five being the highest indicator, that represented her perspectives of how high-stakes testing influenced her instructional decisions and sense of professionalism. The first two questions related to instructional decisions in the fall and in the spring. A ranking of two revealed that in the fall Patricia’s instructional decisions were influenced on a limited basis but in the spring the ranking of three showed that there was an increase. Patricia remained cognizant of the curriculum standards while pacing her instruction. She explained that in the fall of the year she was introducing and teaching all standards. Then, after the winter break, she would begin to review and teach skills in more depth. She acknowledged that the high-stakes test was “always in the back of her mind.”

The third question asked her to provide a ranking that represented how high-stakes testing influenced professionalism. Patricia reported a ranking of two for how high-stakes testing influenced her sense of professionalism. Patricia’s response to the ranking of the influence of high-stakes testing on professionalism was somewhat unclear because she was not explicit about any indicators of how high-stakes testing influenced professionalism.

Clearly, Patricia’s focus was student driven. She had made some changes to her instructional planning such as paying more attention to the curriculum the standards tested. She was also more knowledgeable about analyzing test results that could impact which particular skills she should focus her instruction. Additionally, her pacing had been altered. She had to be careful that all standards and objectives were taught prior to testing. This had caused some content, primarily in social studies and science, not to receive the in-depth instruction Patricia felt was necessary for students in gaining a deep understanding of the concepts. Table 4.12 summarizes her perspectives of high-stakes testing and the positive and negative consequences in relation to its influence on her instructional decisions and professionalism.

Table 4.12

Patricia’s Perspectives on the Intents of High-Stakes Testing—Positive and Negative Unintended Consequences and Influence on Instructional Decisions and Professionalism

Intents of High-Stakes Testing	
Hold teachers accountable	
Unintended Consequences of High-Stakes Testing	
↓	
Positive Consequences	Negative Consequences
Increased data analysis to identify the weak areas	Pressure on students to pass a test, especially impacting the limited English proficient student and the struggling reader.
	One score used for retention purposes.
	Limited instruction in social studies and science.
	Increased test preparation

This chapter has included the context and data for each individual case. For each participant's perspective to have meaning, it was also important to present the context of the state, school system, and the schools in which the six Nationally Board Certified teachers worked. Each case presented data regarding the participants' perspectives of high-stakes testing, the influence on instructional decisions, and the influence on professionalism. Data specifically addressed the participants' perspectives of the positive and negative intended and unintended consequences of high-stakes testing. The following chapter will use this data to present common themes among the six participants.

Chapter 5

CROSS CASE FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to uncover accomplished elementary school teachers' perspective on how high-stakes testing influences their instructional decision-making and sense of professionalism. To further define this study, accomplished teachers, by their designation as National Board Certified Teachers, were interviewed to gain their perspectives to determine if instructional decisions and professionalism were influenced by high-stakes testing. The research was conducted to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives of high-stakes testing? And to a greater specificity,
- 2) As a result of the pervasive testing requirements in a high-stakes accountability system, are there professional judgments and decisions regarding teaching and learning that are being compromised?
- 3) What are accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives of how high stakes testing has affected or impacted their role as a professional educator?

Six elementary National Board Certified teachers agreed to participate in this study. Each teacher was interviewed two times. Additional data were gathered from fieldnotes, anecdotal notes, and artifacts. Triangulation was used to ensure validity of the study. Participants were asked to read the transcriptions and the researcher's interpretive analysis to provide clarification or to add or delete any information. To further validate the findings, each participant was asked to respond to three questions regarding their perspectives of how high-

stakes testing influenced their instructional decisions and sense of professionalism. The previous chapter provided an analysis of the findings of the individual cases.

This chapter provides a cross case analysis of the six participants' perspectives of high-stakes testing. Three aspects of high-stakes testing were discussed including participants' perspectives of high-stakes testing, how high-stakes testing influenced their instructional decisions, and how high-stakes testing influenced their sense of professionalism. Perspectives of all participants were compared for commonalities until a saturation point in the data was reached.

The six participants worked in five different schools of the Alachua County School System. Of the 14 elementary schools in the system, the schools represented in this study mirrored the range of demographics of the school system. South Elementary had the lowest poverty ranking of all 14 schools, and George Elementary had the highest poverty ranking. Of the three remaining schools in the study, one had a poverty ranking that was below the system average, one was equal to the system average, and one was above the system average. White students represented the majority of the students in the system as well as in each of the five schools. The increased number of Hispanic students was evident in two of the schools in the study—George Elementary and East Elementary. All schools in the study met Adequate Yearly Progress on the statewide test for the past four years. In 2001, George Elementary was placed on the Needs Improvement List because the school had not met the designated yearly progress. The school has not been on the Needs Improvement List for the previous four years.

While each school represented a range of demographics and results on statewide test scores, there appeared to be no noticeable differences in the responses that could be attributed to the school setting. For example, each participant was asked why they believed their school was not on the state's Needs Improvement List. Teachers from all schools reported that it was

because of the “high caliber of the teaching staff, the supportive administrators,” or the support of parents, and in the case of two schools, it was also attributed to the “socioeconomic level” of the families. The “encouragement and support of the administrators” was the most notable characteristic as evident from five of the participants when asked why they perceived the school had a successful and effective instructional program. Patricia remarked about her principal, “If I have an issue that I need to speak to her about, she makes the time and she listens.” Jane attributed her administrator’s support for the positive atmosphere that preferred to “gain accurate information about test scores” rather than an inflated score. She explained,

I know in the paper with all of the unprofessionalism that was going on, I feel blessed that we don’t feel that type of pressure. I feel we want to get an accurate judge for what we are doing. I feel sorry for people that work in that kind of situation.

In Mary’s school, she believed that the effectiveness of the instructional program at her school was credited to the socioeconomic status, parent support, good teachers, and hard working students.

Perspectives of High-Stakes Tests and the Intended Consequences

There were indications that all participants understood the new federal and state guidelines detailing the expectation that all children would achieve at grade level and that, in Georgia, those students who did not perform on the annual statewide test would be retained. Consequently, all participants believed that teachers were ultimately responsible and accountable for student progress. Furthermore, they believed this was the intent of the accountability program. Holding teachers accountable was accepted by each participant as part of their professional responsibility. Holly expressed, “High stakes shows we are serious in Georgia about student achievement. You have to have quality teachers.” Patricia expressed her support,

“We should expect high goals out of all students. We are accountable for teaching all students to reach the highest ability. I know I do the best job I can do.”

While each participant believed the intent was to hold teachers accountable, not all regarded the intended consequences as positive. Emily stated, “We aren’t a miracle worker in a year—the home environment, all of those things play heavily in everything they are trying to hold us accountable for. No teacher wants to leave kids behind.” Mary added to that sentiment, “Teachers get the blame if something goes wrong. It is just an easy way to blame them if something isn’t going right.” Jane also believed this and defined teachers as “scapegoats.” Tracy argued, “We have the brain, we have the ability, we have the capacity to go in the classroom and make decisions and then teach.”

Jane, Tracy, and Emily discussed the positive effect of the united focus on the instruction of curriculum standards and the assurance for consistency in assessing the standards. These teachers represented 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade, which was one indication that the grade level of the participants did not enter as a factor in their perspectives about high-stakes testing. Jane described the state test as “holding all teachers accountable to the same standard,” providing greater assurance that the state curriculum would be covered, and that the pacing of instruction may be more appropriate. Jane added, “You just can’t assume everybody was teaching the students the same just because there are objectives.” Tracy reported that because of the testing, teachers would be forced to look at standards and not just use the textbook as the guide. She stated, “If the system adopted textbook doesn’t include information on all of the state objectives, then students are not taught what is expected from the state curriculum.” Tracy further described this as giving “teachers a map for what she should do.” Emily believed having test results would provide teachers with more accurate data that “shows what the students can do.” She said, “We

all see kids that have come up and they will have these great grades but they can't do anything. Grading can be so subjective."

Individual participants mentioned other intentions of accountability through high-stakes testing including the increased accountability for students, ending social promotion, and increasing the quality of education. Holly believed that high-stakes tests encouraged students to accept responsibility for their own learning. She said, "The students have to understand that they have those goals set up so that they know they are going from here to here, rather than just meandering through their lives." Holly also believed that high-stakes testing and accountability would be a positive influence on how the state is perceived across the nation. She explained, "We want to be proud of the education in our state. Georgia didn't want to be down on the bottom, and we shouldn't because everybody wants to move here." Tracy believed the intent was to "end social promotion in Georgia." Her beliefs about retention were in direct opposition to this intent; therefore, she viewed this as a negative intended consequence of high-stakes testing.

Table 5.1 summarizes the participants' perspectives of the intent of high-stakes testing. Generally, participants supported accountability but were resentful of the implications that they were singularly being held accountable for increased student scores on the annual state tests.

Table 5.1

Participants' Perspectives on the Intents of High-Stakes Testing

Characteristic	Jane	Mary	Tracy	Holly	Emily	Patricia
Teachers are held accountable	X	X	X	X	X	X
United focus on curriculum standards and the assessment of student mastery	X		X		X	
Students are held accountable				X		

Table 5.1 (continued)

<i>Participants' Perspectives on the Intents of High-Stakes Testing</i>						
Characteristic	Jane	Mary	Tracy	Holly	Emily	Patricia
End social promotion			X			
Improve the quality of education				X		

Participants were eager to offer their perspective for why or why not they believed high-stakes testing was an effective means to promote student achievement. Communication with parents was one avenue suggested for a more positive accountability program. Holly stated, "The parents don't know enough about the whys and the wherefores of it, so they are stressed out and that stress comes over to the children and to the teachers, too." Holly was offended by the news report that someone in another state perceived the Georgia testing program as "missing the mark and that we are just testing the kids and rolling them down like bowling pins." She considered communication as not only sharing with the local community but the "outside world." Tracy added, "As a teacher, I am trying to make sure that parents are aware so that it's not shocking news to them that I have no control over whether their child will go to fourth grade or not." Communication with parents was also important for Mary. She empathized with parents whose children worry because her own daughter worried about the test. Tracy stated that she made sure she let parents know what they could do to help their child at home, "I just tell them to work hard on the practice skills that we send home." Mary added, "I tell them not to worry."

Influence of High-Stakes Tests on Instructional Decisions

High-stakes testing influenced the instructional decisions of all participants. Additionally, it appeared that instructional decisions were most impacted after the winter break until April when the state tests were administered. When asked to respond to a ranking of one to five indicating the influence of high-stakes testing on instructional decisions in the fall and in the

spring, most participants indicated that high-stakes testing had less of an influence in the fall than in the spring. All participants, except for Holly, ranked the influence of testing in the fall with a two and a three in the spring. Holly ranked each question with a one because she believed that “if we teach to the standards, then the students will be successful.” Tracy explained, “I would love to keep the same pace all year that we have before Christmas. But they come back and here we start flying by the seat of our pants to get ready for a test.” Debbie also remained aware of the “CRCT objectives all year” but she added, “in January, I take a closer look to see what I have covered and what do I still have to cover before the testing.”

High-stakes testing resulted in positive and negative unintended consequences regarding instructional decisions. There were only three positive unintended consequences noted among the six participants, which included the increased use of data analysis, increased guidance for pacing, and support for retention decisions. The participants noted many more negative consequences influencing instructional decisions including:

- One score to determine promotion and retention.
- Increased test preparation.
- Pressure on students.
- Narrowing the curriculum to tested areas
- Inappropriate accountability measures for special education and limited English proficient students.
- Inappropriate pacing of curriculum.

The most significant positive consequence of high-stakes testing on instructional decisions was the use of the test scores for planning. All of the participants indicated that they used the results for determining small group instruction or for discovering areas they may have

not provided enough instruction. In fact, Patricia stated that because of high-stakes testing she “tends to look at the results a little bit closer to see if there is an area that is really weak.” Mary used scores to look at the progress students made. Because Mary typically followed her children to the next grade, it was important for her to see skills her students had or had not mastered. Holly noted that “at the end of the year, if we get the scores back quick enough, we can make recommendations for the next year.” She explained,

I go through each test and I just make a little tally mark and look at the different subtests and the similarities in lower scores or higher scores. Then, I use the lower scores to plan where I’m going to target my teaching. If I need to be harder on decoding or punctuation, I know that I need to focus my instruction that way. If they are doing great on punctuation and capitalization, I’m going to review it and we are going to move on.

By analyzing the scores for identifying areas of strength and weakness, more focus was placed on appropriate instruction.

Since there was a greater focus on teaching all standards prior to the spring test, Jane believed a positive consequence of high-stakes testing was the importance of appropriate pacing. She was the only participant to mention this specific positive outcome. Jane said, “I have to make sure I cover multiplication before the test because there are questions. For my students who are anxious, they will get to the question and they will shut down.”

The discussions regarding retention and promotion were significantly in favor of multiple assessments used for determining placement. One participant, Holly, believed that tests would often support the teacher when making retention recommendations. Mary and Emily also believed there were positive benefits to retention but did not comment on the direct link to support for retention recommendations. Mary indicated that in the case of some of her Hispanic students, retention could be beneficial. She explained that the Hispanic students often returned to Mexico during the year and missed school. Because they were absent for instruction of

important skills, Mary believed the additional year was necessary. Sometimes parents were not open to learning their child was falling behind in their learning. Emily stated, “There are always exceptions to everything but if they can’t do some of the basics, then we aren’t doing them any favors. Someone needs to put a flag up and help them.” Holly reaffirmed Emily’s statements,

I do like the way that we are able to say, ‘Okay, they flubbed up the test. They’ve done well all year long’ and we can look at it and see what happened, but if the child has struggled all year and is just barely getting there and then doesn’t pass the test, no they don’t need to be promoted because what are they gonna do next year?”

It appeared that retention and promotion based on test scores could be a possible positive unintended consequence as long as it was accompanied with other forms of evidence.

The negative unintended consequences of high-stakes testing were much more prominent. Among the negative consequences, retention based on a single test score was the most significant. In accordance with the Georgia Promotion, Placement, and Retention Law (O.C.G. A. §§ 20-2-28-2 through 20-2-285), 3rd grade students who score in Performance Level 1 on the reading portion of the CRCT and 5th grade students who score in Performance Level 1 on the reading and/or math portion of the CRCT are retained in their current grade level. However, a unanimous decision among the parent or guardian, teachers, and administrators could repeal the retention requirement. In spite of this knowledge, all of the participants interviewed were opposed to one test score determining promotion or retention. Tracy believed that if there were not “changes made in the environment or the teaching,” retention may not be the answer and suggested a “portfolio of evidence.” Jane agreed because she knew students “who had good grades but gaps in their learning.” Patricia explained, “If you are going to retain them and they are going to do the same exact all over for another year, then it’s not going to be beneficial, the same worksheet, the same story.” Mary reiterated, “Retention is not always the answer. The teaching needs to be different.” Holly questioned, “How can you take one day of

testing and say that is what the career of that child is based on? You can't." She suggested "teacher judgment and a body of evidence," as better indicator.

Test preparation was another topic that was widely discussed among all participants. None of the participants committed large blocks of time to test preparation and all made a conscious effort to integrate testing tips into the regular instruction. Admittedly, all participants were confident in their instruction and, without that confidence, they may have placed a stronger emphasis on test preparation. Holly explained, "I think new teachers, especially inexperienced teachers, are not as sure of their own ability and they may think they've got to do this because it helps their students." In fact, Holly made the decision not to do any test preparation with her students because she felt it took away from learning. Instead, she reported incorporating testing tips throughout her instruction "all year." She recognized the negative consequences of high-stakes testing for students who are subjected to continuous test preparation activities and especially for lower-achieving students. Holly stated, "It would even be less effective because it's not very exciting doing those test preps." Jane was confident that the closer they came to the testing period in April the more likely she would make instructional decisions that went against her better judgment. Knowing that she needed to prepare her students for the test, she would plan lessons accordingly. Jane said, "I normally wouldn't rush through or skip over things. Then just the drilling, we spend like an hour a day doing that this week." Mary, Tracy, and Patricia mentioned that they particularly focused their test preparation on the vocabulary and format that would be used on the test. Emily chose to include a limited amount of time on test preparation activities. She stated, "It takes away from the real instruction. And the kids hate it, they absolutely hate it." Additionally, Emily added, "It would make their test scores maybe go up for that test, but would it make them a better learner, No."

The level of student stress was a concern four of the participants mentioned as a negative consequence. Most admitted that they purposefully did not place a focus on the test for fear that students would become more anxious. Patricia stated, “I don’t talk all year, ‘You have to pass the CRCT, You have to pass the CRCT,’ but I do say, ‘This is a skill you need to learn.’” When asked where they thought the stress was originating, all participants believed it was a combination of factors including teachers using test preparation activities with the students, the student’s personal desire to do well on the test, parent pressure, or even, ironically, the counselor coming in and providing stress-reducing or test taking tips. Tracy pondered, “Are the kids thinking ‘Should I be stressed?’” She described those students whose scores did not reflect their learning and proposed the possibility of anxiety interfering with their performance. “You see them shaking because they know if they don’t perform, Mom will be mad,” declared Tracy. Jane described the parents in her school as “going a little over the top.” She explained, “The parents are bringing in snacks and they get little star sandwiches, like be a star and shine your best.” Jane summarized her concern succinctly, “Their parents are saying, ‘you are going to have to go to summer school if you don’t pass this test.’ I’d be afraid to take the test.”

Four teachers described taking resources down from their walls and off students’ desks as contradictory to their instructional beliefs and a possible source of student stress. Each teacher described how their students had been taught to use the resources and viewed the ability to locate information was an important life skill. Mary described the reaction of the children,

They get very nervous and uncomfortable because a lot of them are dependent on having the word wall or they’ve been taught to use the word wall or the number line and they’ve been taught to have the resources that we have in here and then all of a sudden I’m taking them away from them after I’ve told them all year to use them for their benefit and to help them. Now I am taking it away.

Holly stated, “‘I’m not taking things off my walls—just covering up with newspaper. Do I like

that? NO! We use our resources all year, and then, POOF, they're gone!" Tracy removed all of the resources from her wall. She resented the implication that the resources were a "cheat sheet for one test, one day out of the year."

In addition to the possible stress participants believed occurred when they removed the resources, Mary recognized the exacerbated sense of school being over for the year. Most participants noted that they paced their instruction so that all standards were addressed prior to the spring test. Therefore, students already had the sense that school was nearing completion. With the simple removal of the resources from the wall, there was an appearance that school was over. Mary stated, "I will put back up my resources. We have seven weeks of school left."

High-stakes testing appeared to also influence the intent for effective, in-depth instruction. The focus on instruction was described as impacting the time spent on in-depth instruction of subjects such as social studies and science and the inappropriate pacing of instruction for some students. Three teachers described how they had felt compelled to spend more time on the tested subjects, reading, language arts, and math, than on science or social studies. Interestingly, the three teachers represented three different grade levels implying that limiting instruction to just tested content was not isolated to one grade level. Mary, a 2nd grade teacher, explained that in her room the science experiments were often "neglected" in her instruction. She stated, "We don't get into as much of the experimenting as we do into the reading about science." Tracy's concern was for her higher achieving third grade students because she felt they were not always "receiving the enrichment they deserved." Patricia did not believe that her fourth grade students received adequate instruction in science and social studies because of the focus on math, reading, and language arts. She was disappointed that science and social studies were "not valued like reading and math." Patricia described the large amount of

content and pacing as contributing to the problem of adequately meeting the instructional standards.

Patricia was concerned for her students who did not have confidence in their ability to pass a test as well as students who were limited in their understanding of the English language. She said, “It’s not because they don’t know it, they just clam up. The pressure is so great, they don’t really perform to their ability.” Emily worried about the special education students in her room because she did not think one score accurately defined their abilities. Emily explained that “modifications given throughout the year” were not always the same modifications given on the test.

Pacing was mentioned by two participants as a possible negative influence on instructional decisions. Jane mentioned that she had eliminated some of her activities because of high-stakes testing. She said she “would not normally rush through or skip things.” However, with high-stakes testing she had eliminated some activities she used to do to “save time” including using a pizza to “learn more about fractions.” Tracy was also concerned about the instruction of her lower achieving students because she felt her pacing was sometimes not developmentally appropriate. She stated, “They are being pushed along much faster in many cases than they are able to do.” Tracy also believed that there was too much “content to cover in a year” and found herself “skimming ideas and cramming in information.”

In summary, there appeared to be many more negative consequences than positive ones when exploring the influence of high-stakes testing on instructional decisions. As noted throughout, some of the topics the participants discussed as influencing their instructional decisions were also contributors to influencing their sense of professionalism. Table 5.2

summarizes the positive and negative consequence of high-stakes testing on instructional decisions.

Table 5.2

Perspectives of the Positive and Negative Unintended Consequences of High-Stakes Testing on Instructional Decisions

Positive Consequences						
	Jane	Mary	Tracy	Holly	Emily	Patricia
Means for increased data analysis	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ensure that curriculum is covered	X		X			
Increased support for retention		X		X		
Negative Consequences						
	Jane	Mary	Tracy	Holly	Emily	Patricia
One score determining retention	X	X	X	X	X	X
Test preparation	X	X	X	X	X	X
Too much pressure on students	X	X	X			X
Narrowing of curriculum—limited instruction in science and social studies		X	X			X
Inappropriate accountability measures for special education students and limited English proficient students					X	X
Pacing is too fast for students	X		X			

Influence of High-Stakes Tests on Professionalism

It was important to discover how the participants defined professionalism to know what characteristics participants believed professionals possessed. After reviewing the characteristics of professionalism defined by each participant, common attributes were discovered. Six attributes were provided as criteria for a professional including:

- Instructional expertise.
- Good communication skills.
- Job experience.
- Desire for continuous learning.
- Cooperative working relationship with co-workers.
- Appearance.

It was apparent that knowledge of effective instructional practices and doing what “was best for children” was an important attribute of professionalism as five of the six participants elaborated on this. Mary defined professionalism, in part, as “making sure that you do the very best for each child’s individual needs.” Tracy mentioned that a professional was someone who had “multiple attributes but included the ability to plan according to what best suited the needs of the students.” Holly considered professionalism a “big responsibility” because she was in charge of the student’s learning. Emily summarized what others believed, “Professionalism is doing your job, doing what is expected of you at all times.”

Also important was communication among teachers as well as with parents. All of the participants discussed aspects of communication when describing professionalism. A professional, according to Emily, was careful when talking to members of the community because it was a “reflection on the school.” Jane mentioned that she preferred to meet with

parents because “sometime notes or e-mail did not reflect the right tone.” These participants believed that better communication with the public could improve the perception of education, teachers’ roles and responsibilities, as well as promote the positive aspects of high-stakes testing. Holly said that better communication with parents would “relieve the pressure” of the high-stakes test. She relied on her communication with parents to provide accurate information about the progress of her students. Communicating with parents was an attribute of professionalism for Jane and Mary. For Jane, a professional was one who will “take the time to make sure you are communicating with parents, keep information confidential, and not compare students.” She added, “We have to earn the respect of the parents.”

Experience in the field contributed to professionalism as mentioned by five participants. Holly stated that “professionalism could be groomed” and that experience and wise mentoring helped educators become professionals. Emily also attributed her professionalism to her “experience in a variety of places and positions.” She realized that people could have a limited view unless they had experiences to help them “understand that decisions were often made based on the positive benefits for the majority.” Patricia believed that experience and maturity played a role in forming a professional as did Jane. Patricia explained, “I was still a work in progress but was doing what I thought was professional at the time. I’ve grown since then.” Jane added, “Just through experience, you learn little things.”

Being cooperative and having the ability to work with others was also described by half of the participants as a characteristic of professionalism. Three participants were concerned that teamwork would be jeopardized if merit pay became a part of the accountability program. Jane described an incident at her school that resulted in one teacher “receiving accolades for her students’ scores on the CRCT.” Jane explained that while everyone was proud of the teacher’s

accomplishments, she wondered if everything was “equal, such as the number of students who were performing below grade level or the number of gifted students.” Jane used this example as a means for voicing her concern about proposed merit pay. Mary and Tracy voiced similar concerns.

Continuous learning was a characteristic of professionalism as stated by half of the participants. This characteristic did not appear to have been greatly influenced by high-stakes testing. However, Jane described that in an effort to ensure teachers received the necessary training for instructional purposes, there had been an increase in professional learning opportunities at her school. The Aim County School System incorporated 10 half-days of professional learning throughout the school year; therefore, this aspect was probably not mentioned because continuous learning was a part of the culture of this system. As an example, Holly referred to the system’s extended opportunities for professional learning. She stated, “This system encourages professionalism. They give you the avenues, you just have to take the walk.”

Half of the teachers mentioned appearance as an indicator that they were a professional. Understanding how participants defined professionalism assisted in determining the impact of high-stakes testing on the sense of professionalism. Table 5.3 reveals the six common characteristics of professionalism as defined by the six participants in this study.

Table 5.3

Characteristics of Professionalism

Characteristic	Jane	Mary	Tracy	Holly	Emily	Patricia
Communication (confidentiality; talking to parents)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Experience (professionalism increased with experience)	X		X	X	X	X

Table 5.3 (continued)

<i>Characteristics of Professionalism</i>					
Instructional (planning, expertise)	X	X	X	X	X
Appearance (dress, composure, how others perceive us)	X				X X
Continuous learning (education; formal learning)		X	X	X	
Cooperative (working with others)		X	X		X

Having a voice in school decision-making was important for all six of the participants, even though it was not identified as a characteristic of professionalism. Four of the six teachers stated that their school administration respected and valued their opinions. Indications from the teachers pointed to the fact that most of the schools had a clear process for seeking teachers' opinions. This attitude of administrative respect for the teacher played a considerable part in the sense of professionalism the participants had gained. "Teamwork, collegiality, and support during testing time" were all the words used to describe the climate of the school. In the second interview with Jane, she was adamant that the researcher include a description of the support she had received from her administrator during testing time.

While decision-making appeared to be prominent, most participants also reported that they did not think their voice was valued at the system or state level. Holly was the only participant who believed she had a voice in system decisions. She stated, "This system give us the avenues, you just have to take the walk." Holly had been a member of many system committees and, therefore, may have had more opportunity to provide input for system decisions.

Because of her involvement on multiple system committees, she was probably more aware of system-level opportunities and involved in more system-level decisions. Jane believed that “school decisions had a greater impact on students” and was not concerned about the lack of voice she believed she had at the system level. Both Mary and Emily explained that opportunities had been made available for input into system decisions, but that often they believed their suggestions were not important because final decisions had already been made.

Five of the six participants revealed that they believed teachers were under pressure to prove they were professionals. Holly considered testing as a means for creating a sense of distrust about a teacher’s ability to instruct. To prevent this from happening to her, she has vowed “not to let the fear of testing compromise what I feel is best for my students.” She added, “We need to teach our curriculum.” Holly believed there continued to be the “connotation that teachers teach because they can’t do anything else.” She hoped that “respect for teachers would increase with communication and more opportunities for partnerships with business professionals.” Tracy wished that the public understood that teachers “have the brain, the ability, and the capacity to go into the classroom and make decisions.” Emily revealed that she “didn’t like being held accountable” because “it’s not always our fault that a child doesn’t succeed.” She added, “We aren’t a miracle worker in a year.” Jane believed that teachers are sometimes viewed as “scapegoats” but said that she “maintains a sense of professionalism regardless of what other influences are taking place. That is the nature of our job,” Jane concluded. Finally, Mary admitted that “teachers are often scrutinized at this time. We are watched more carefully to make sure we are not doing something unprofessional.”

The majority of the participants reported that high-stakes testing had a limited influence on professionalism. Interestingly, three of the participants revealed incidents at their school that

implied professionalism was jeopardized. Mary related an incident at her school that made her question her sense of professionalism. She stated, “Our reading test was on Tuesday, so we couldn’t teach reading on Monday or Tuesday so that it wouldn’t appear that we were last minute covering certain skills.” As a result, Mary said there was no real instruction all week. She described the week by stating, “There was a lot of fluff teaching.” Additionally, this practice made her question her ability to make professional or instructional decisions for fear she would be inappropriately preparing her students for the test. Holly also related that she felt her time during testing was not valued. She described her testing period,

I was only to monitor and I don’t know if that was an effective use of my time. I don’t think I should have ignored the children but I should have been able to look through some resources and gather some ideas while the children were working. All I could do was give them the instructions and say go to it and then 45-60 minutes later, they stopped.

Jane related that at her school she believed high-stakes testing played a role in how her recommendation for the retention of one of her students was received. While she was very supportive of her administration, she was concerned about the difficulty she had in “convincing” the administrators that one of her students needed to be retained. In Jane’s opinion, because of the 3rd grade requirement for passing the reading portion of the CRCT, there appeared to be a tendency of the administration to recommend waiting until the following year for the 3rd grade test results to retain the student. She believed this could be a “disservice to children.” Finally, Tracy believed that her sense of professionalism had been damaged simply because of public opinion about teachers. She stated, “We have a brain, we have the ability, we have the capacity to go in the classroom, make our decisions and teach, but then we’ve got the high-stakes test.”

Four of the teachers revealed a concern about the influence of merit pay on their sense of professionalism. If pay was tied to the results on students’ test scores, Holly feared there would be an increase in unethical behavior especially if it was not handled properly by the

administration. She stated, “If the pressure of testing was so great that everybody in your class has to pass I wonder if some teachers wouldn’t be tempted to be unethical because of the fear of what would happen to them if everybody didn’t pass.” Furthermore, Mary described a potential for competitiveness and unethical behavior if test scores were related to pay or prestige.

This same concern was also mentioned by Jane and Tracy.

The table below summarizes the participants’ perspectives of the influence of high-stakes testing on professionalism. It was evident that high-stakes testing had the potential for influencing professionalism.

Table 5.4

Participants’ Perspectives on the Influence of High-Stakes Testing on Professionalism

Characteristic	Jane	Mary	Tracy	Holly	Emily	Patricia
Pressure on teachers to prove they are professionals	X	X	X	X	X	
Competition/ merit pay	X	X	X	X		

Summary of the Findings

It was evident from the analysis of the data that high-stakes testing had an influence on instructional decisions and professionalism. Many times one area impacted another and topics discussed about instructional decisions were brought up again during conversations about professionalism. Indications revealed that teachers often did not allow the negative influences of high-stakes testing to impact their instructional decisions or their sense of professionalism. For example, Emily was generally supportive of high-stakes testing and considered the test as beneficial for some children in assuring they received the instruction they needed. However, she believed that the intent of high-stakes testing was to hold the teacher accountable. While Emily

stated that she “felt the finger is always pointed at us—if a child doesn’t succeed it’s our fault,” she did not believe high-stakes testing had impacted her sense of professionalism. Moreover, Patricia was also opposed to test scores determining retention but did not feel her sense of professionalism was jeopardized.

Factors indicated that high-stakes testing had positive and negative intended and unintended consequences. When asked to rank the influence they believed high-stakes testing had on professionalism, most of the participants provided a ranking of one or two out of a possible of five. Since one was the lowest indicator of influence, this response validated the information received from the participants that professionalism was not heavily influenced by high-stakes testing. Only one participant provided a ranking of four out of five. She was very strongly opposed to the mandates for testing and the impact it had on her as a professional. The only explanation for the difference in her perspective would be that of all of the participants, she had the least experience in the system and had also been an administrator in her previous role. Participants appeared to believe that the negative consequences, whether intended or unintended, could be counteracted in a positive climate that encouraged and supported teachers. Also, the attitude and confidence of the participant seemed to have a role in the perspective of the positive consequences of high-stakes testing.

From the cross case analysis of the six teachers, five themes emerged through the constant comparison of the data. These included:

1. Teachers accept accountability but are not supportive of implementation methods that negatively impact students.
2. Measuring true student learning requires multiple assessment data.
3. Instruction is often compromised by high-stakes testing.

4. There is increased pressure on teachers to prove their effectiveness in making instructional decisions and on their role as a professional.
5. The intrinsic sense of professionalism is not truly understood and articulated by teachers in a high-stakes environment.

Chapter 6 provides a summary of the study in relation to the literature as well as discussion of the five themes that emerged from the analysis of the six case studies. Implications for further study are also discussed.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to discover the perspectives of National Board Certified teachers for how high-stakes testing influences instructional decisions and professionalism.

Questions this study sought to answer included:

- 1) What are accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives of high-stakes testing?
- 2) As a result of the pervasive testing requirements found in high-stakes accountability systems, are there professional judgments and decisions regarding teaching and learning that are being compromised?
- 3) What are accomplished elementary school teachers' perspectives of how high stakes testing has affected or impacted their role as a professional educator?

Summary of the Research Design

A qualitative case study approach was used for determining the perspectives of six elementary school National Board Certified teachers. Participants represented five schools in one suburban school system outside metropolitan Atlanta. At the time of the study, participants were classroom teachers of 2nd, 3rd, or 4th grade. Data were gathered through multiple sources to further validate the findings. Sources included:

1. Two one-hour interviews with six National Board Certified teachers.
2. Fieldnotes gathered before, during, and after each interview.

3. Artifacts collected such as state and local test scores, school mission statements, and school system demographics.
4. E-mail correspondence collected throughout the data collection period.

Blumer (1969) described symbolic interactionism as means for better understanding the perspectives of members of society and how they interpret and view their surroundings through and in social interactions. The premises of symbolic interactionism as described by Blumer included: (1) Human beings react toward things based on the meanings they have developed. (2) The source of the meanings has developed from interactions with others. (3) The meanings are further developed and modified through an applicative and interpretative process in dealing with things encountered. Crotty (1998) added, “Only through dialogue can one become aware of the perceptions, feelings, and attitudes of others and interpret their meanings and intent” (pp. 75-76).

The attempt to understand teachers’ perspectives of high-stakes testing and its impact was further defined by applying an interpretive theoretical perspective. Denzin (2001) stated that interpretive interactionism “endeavors to capture and represent the voices, emotions, and actions of those studied” (p. 2). Examining the process for *how* teachers came to develop their perspectives assisted in identifying the reasons for *why* they believed as they did. Using the methods of grounded theory, an interpretive analysis enabled the study to draw out themes as to what was important to teachers based on their description of how high-stakes testing influenced their instructional decisions and professionalism.

Employing a grounded theory methodology requires an in-depth immersion of the data by the researcher when studying a phenomenon. Consequently, the premise of grounded theory is based on the understanding that themes, or “theory,” will emerge from the data. Hutchinson (1990) described grounded theory as being constructed by working in a circular fashion rather

than a linear one because there is the continuous analysis and comparison of data until attaining a level of saturation. It is at this level of saturation, that theory will begin to “emerge” from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This was the process used for interpreting and analyzing the data gathered from the six participants in the study. Consequently, it was through this process that the participants’ experiences gave meaning to why and how they came to believe as they did.

Since the researcher was employing a grounded theory methodology, the study was constructed to gain information from individual participants as to their perspectives of high-stakes testing. Each participant reflected on their perspectives through two interviews, and the researcher was able to gather additional data in fieldnotes and artifacts. Because each case was analyzed individually and then collectively, commonalities among the cases were discovered.

Grounded theory methodology necessitates the ability of the researcher to “critically analyze situations, to think abstractly, and to have sensitivity to the words and actions of the respondents” (Patton, 2002, pp. 489-490). Reading the transcripts and coding key phrases led to the development of categories. Categories derived from the data included the participants’ perspectives of the positive and negative consequences of high-stakes testing in both the area of instructional decisions and professionalism.

The constant comparative method was used to analyze the data as described in the process of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). Data from individual cases were compared and analyzed to discover each participant’s perspective in several ways. Each time a category was formed, the researcher compared the data to other data and other categories to ensure the accuracy of the interpretation. The constant comparative method was employed again for analyzing the common categories from all six cases. It was when this final cross case analysis was conducted that theory began to emerge.

As expected when conducting research based on symbolic interactionism through a grounded theory methodology, participants' perspectives were derived from their personal experiences and interactions with others. Themes emerged that were related to the influence of high-stakes testing on instructional decisions and based on the participants' descriptions of student stress, increased test preparation, or minimal in-depth instruction of non-tested content areas. Participants described experiences such as the awareness of increased student aggression on the playground or children crying because of fear of taking "the" test. Furthermore, participants expressed appreciation of their administrators for having the latitude to select instructional methods for preparing their students for the test. While many of their colleagues were participating in daily test preparation activities, none of the participants of this study believed in the effectiveness of the daily mundane tasks often found in test preparation materials. Holly described test preparation as "un-motivating," while Emily related that the "kids just hate it." Mary advised parents to become involved in preparing their children by visiting the "on-line test preparation site." Holly noted that less experienced teachers may need to "do a little more test preparation because they are less confident in the effectiveness of their instruction." Tracy elaborated that when too much time is taken preparing students for a test, instruction in other areas is neglected. She described her experience as "having to go a little too fast for my lower achieving students and not providing as much enrichment for the higher achieving students." Patricia had noted that science and social studies "were not as valued." She further explained that "just reading about the subjects is not enough. Students need hands-on experiences."

Similar findings occurred in the discussions of the influence of high-stakes testing on professionalism. The experiences of the participants impacted their beliefs about testing. Each referred to the week of testing as "unnerving" when people "peeked in the door windows" or

how testing took “so much time that other, more enriching instructional activities were sacrificed.” This experience was exacerbated when Mary was told that she could not “teach reading or math until after the test was given because it might be construed as ‘teaching to the test.’”

Another key theme that emerged from the data was based on the professional experiences of the participants. It was evident from their descriptions that having a voice in decision making was important. Each participant expressed the acceptance of their ideas and suggestions at the school level and attributed their building level administrator for encouraging collaboration. However, at the system level, the experiences of the participants had not been as positive. They referred to their voice in system-level decisions as “fruitless” or “the vision is already set and our ideas are not really heard.” Possibly even more impacting on professionalism was the feeling that they were not valued as a professional by the public. Tracy said, “We have a brain, we have the ability.” Jane added that it was disturbing when “people don’t visit my classroom when making a decision about purchasing a home. They look at test scores posted on the Internet.”

These experiences helped form for each participants their beliefs and perspectives of high-stakes testing. Five themes emerged from the data related to high-stakes testing and the influence on instructional decisions and professionalism.

Discussion

Referring to the review of relevant literature, the five themes that emerged from the analysis of the case studies of six teachers are discussed in relation to the influence on teachers’ instructional decisions and professionalism.

Theme 1: *Teachers accept accountability but are not supportive of implementation methods that negatively impact students.*

All participants accepted accountability measures for various reasons. Emily related how test scores helped her determine if her instructional methods were effective. Tracy added, “If there is something that would help me better myself, I’m willing to do that.” Holly believed that accountability would increase the quality of instruction and, therefore, improve the reputation of the state. She stated, “We want to be proud of the education system in our state.” Jones and Egley (2004) reported that teachers in Florida indicated “accountability is good or necessary” and invariably there was a “but” that followed describing why the statewide high-stakes test was not effective. Similar findings were reported by Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2000), which noted that teachers considered it best practice to periodically assess for improving teaching and student learning.

Concerns regarding the negative unintended consequences of the accountability programs were noted by all participants. Student stress, retention decisions, and the need for addressing political and public demands were among the reported unintended consequences of accountability. Clarke et al. (2003) noted that “there are more negative than positive test-related effects on students, such as test-related stress” (p. 11). Tracy stated, “When we make any, any, any decision about a child, we’ve got to look at the whole picture, not just one form of assessment.” Emily was one of the most supportive of the accountability program but she noted her concern about retention decisions. She said, “Retention is not always the answer.” Four of the participants had observed an increase in student stress. One participant noted “no one sees the kids coming in shaking because they are afraid.” Tracy remarked that she had noticed an “increase of aggressive behavior” in one of her students. Invariably, studies have reported increased levels of anxiety when students are required to take a high-stakes test (Amrein, 2002; Johnson & Johnson, 2002; Jones et al., 2003).

Rosenholtz (1989) stated, “Much negative publicity has resulted, and the public climate of opinion has become increasingly hostile; there has been an abrupt and utter evaporation of confidence in the nation’s teachers, and consequently, of their own confidence in themselves” (p. 214). The truth of this statement was evident in all participants’ comments. They believed that because of accountability, they were often the “scapegoats.” Emily stated that in an era of high-stakes testing there appeared to be a lot of “finger-pointing” and “holding the teachers more accountable.” She noted, “We aren’t a miracle worker in a year—the home environment, all of those things play heavily in everything they are trying to hold us accountable for. No teacher wants to leave kids behind.”

Theme 2: *Making instructional decisions about a student’s learning can not be determined by one high-stakes test.*

Studies have indicated that higher scores on tests are not always indicative of skill mastery (Amrein, 2002; Elmore, 2004; Hoffman et al., 2001; Pedulla et al., 2003). Tracy described a student who had passed the test but had not demonstrated grade level work all year. She would have recommended retention but since the test scores indicated differently, the student was promoted. Additionally, Patricia described her students who did not possess the confidence necessary to pass the test. She explained that the students were so used to failure they were too anxious about the test to perform to their ability. A nationwide study by Clarke et al. (2003) recommended that “decisions not be made on the basis of a single test” but allow options for “students to demonstrate achievement so that all have a chance to be successful” (p. 15). Similar findings were noted in this study. All participants indicated the need for multiple criteria because often test scores did not accurately portray the ability of the student.

The topic of retention and promotion was mentioned by all participants multiple times during the interviews. Using one test to make decisions about a student's grade placement was not a practice that had gained wide support among the teachers participating in this study as well as the teachers who participated in other studies. Pedulla et al. (2003) found that using one assessment for promotion and retention was not accepted by teachers or administrators. In fact, national groups such as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (2004) and the American Educational Research Association (2000) posted position statements indicating the negative consequences of such practice.

Theme 3: *Instruction is often compromised by high-stakes testing.*

Studies found that the time used preparing for a high-stakes test was excessive (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000, Hoffman et al., 2001). One Texas study found that test preparation took 8 to 10 hours per week (Hoffman et al., 2001). While the extensive use of test preparation materials was not evident in any of the classrooms of the teachers interviewed, all teachers believed that preparing for the test took the place of "more important instruction." Emily reported that she made a conscious effort not to "take away real instruction" but Jane described "stopping what we would normally do to practice," and "hurrying through instruction" of some topics that would be assessed on the test. Jane admitted to spending up to an hour a day preparing. Tracy noted that she began preparing her students after the winter break. Test format and vocabulary were two areas teachers tried to make sure their students were familiar. For example, Patricia would sometimes give her students a "bubble spelling test" so they could practice the format. The contexts of the schools are worth noting. Every participant spoke about the nature of test preparation and the extent to which it can potentially "subtract" from the "real learning." Holly explained that her grade level has a set of test preparation activities for use

prior to the test. She had made the decision not to use any of the materials “because I feel confident in my instruction.” Holly did, however, understand why a novice teacher may want to use the activities since “they have not had the experience to feel confident in their instruction.” Patricia noted that she was “thankful” her principal did not “make her use the test preparation materials.” Emily explained that “scores may go up but the score would not represent the real learning.”

Participants expressed apprehension about the degree of learning students received in content areas. The narrowing of curriculum to a point that only the tested subjects are taught in depth was found in multiple studies (Amrein, 2002; Clarke et al., 2003; Jones et al., 2003). Tracy believed that because the test focused on certain content areas other subjects did not receive the necessary attention. Additionally, she was concerned about the depth of learning for her gifted students and the fast pace at which she had to instruct her lower achieving students. Amrein (2002) and Clarke et al. (2003) noted that high-stakes testing had a negative impact on minority and low socioeconomic students. Emily agreed that there was an impact of high-stakes testing on the special education population. She stated that all year they were given accommodations and then during testing time, they were not always receiving the same accommodations. Patricia referred to this same problem with her students who were limited English proficient.

Theme 4: *There is increased pressure on teachers to prove their effectiveness in making instructional decisions and on their role as a professional.*

One of the common attributes of professionalism includes the sense of respect and trust from the public for making educational decisions (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1997a; Hargreaves, 2003; Rosenholtz, 1989). Unfortunately, each teacher who participated in this research believed it was the intent of the accountability program to hold them

individually responsible for student achievement. Most of the teachers also stated that a characteristic of professionalism was to make wise instructional decisions and do what was best for students. Regardless, they resented the implication that the public did not trust them. Tracy stated, “We have the brain, we have the ability, we have the capacity to go in the classroom and make our decisions and teach.” Emily agreed, “No teacher wants to leave kids behind.” Jane had reconciled with the mandates of testing and the positive and negative consequences. Yet, she was disappointed in the attitude of the general public. She stated,

I think the parents hold teachers accountable and you feel, if a child who doesn’t do well, you put pressure on yourself, blame yourself, and you don’t look at the first eight years—did he do his homework, did someone read aloud to him, help him—parents aren’t going to blame themselves. We become the scapegoat and you blame yourself.

Rosenholtz (1989) noted the negative publicity and the lack of confidence in teachers added to the greater demand for accountability.

Pedulla et al. (2003) reported the dissatisfaction of teachers in the manner of how the media reported testing issues. Better communication was proposed by participants of this study as a way to gain more respect and to educate parents and the public about the issues surrounding testing in the classroom. Tracy described children who were anxious about the test because they were afraid they would “make their mom mad or their teacher unhappy.” Jane had also seen children enter her school crying on the day of the test because parents had told them if they “did not pass the test, they would have to attend summer school.” However, Holly believed it was going to take a continued effort for relaying accurate information about the consequences of high-stakes testing. She described a conversation with her husband trying to explain to him the influence of high-stakes testing and admitted, “I haven’t even communicated well with my husband.”

Consequently, there appeared to be a need for a more positive image of accountability. Fullan (1993) asserted that for teaching to gain the status of a profession, teachers must “form and reform productive collaborations” (pp.16-17). The teachers involved in this study indicated a willingness to work toward a more positive image but progress relied on a greater respect for their professional decisions. Assigning high-stakes to the accountability formula appeared to have only added undue pressure on students, parents, and teachers. These teachers inferred that the same student achievement gains could be made without high-stakes attached to testing.

Popham (2001) described ways in which the profession had been jeopardized because of unethical practices in the quest for acceptable scores. Additionally, Popham noted that increased cheating was a consequence that sometimes accompanied the high pressure of testing. Unethical behavior was mentioned by several of the participants even though they did not perceive any behavior on their part as unethical. Mary was worried about everything she did during the week of testing because of the “fear of being accused of unethical behavior.” Jane described the monitoring during testing time as “unnerving” when people continued to “peek in my door window.” These reactions are not uncommon. In a study by Amrein (2002), it was noted that teachers were being accused of cheating, when in fact, they believed they were preparing students for the test. This led Amrein to recommend that “differentiations between effective test preparation and cheating have to be made.” However, it can be noted that increased incidences in cheating have occurred in high-stakes environments (Amrein, 2002; Popham, 2001).

Theme 5: *The intrinsic sense of professionalism is not truly understood and articulated by teachers in a high-stakes environment.*

Evidence exists that with the implementation of high-stakes testing professionalism has been impacted (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Jones et al., 2003). In this study, however, not

all teachers interviewed believed professionalism was influenced by high-stakes testing. The reflections of all participants indicated evidence of instances that one would have predicted would influence professionalism. For example, during the week of testing one teacher was very upset that she was told she could not teach reading or math until the test had been administered. As a result, this teacher described that no “real teaching occurred all week” for fear something would be said that would imply she was “teaching the test.” Two other participants mentioned the “unnerving” effect of people looking in their windows and doors to make sure they were administering the test properly and “ethically.” Additionally, one participant described how her recommendation of retention for one of her students was questioned because the “student would probably fail the test next year” and why not wait for the test to make the placement decision. This participant believed this was a “disservice to children.”

In spite of these instances, most of the participants reported their sense of professionalism was intact. When asked why these events had not influenced their professionalism, the answers were invariably statements such as “I will not let the fear of testing influence my professionalism” or “I know I am a professional. If I was unsure of my professionalism, I would not have gone into teaching.” Emily also vowed not to let outside opinions influence her decision to make effective instructional decisions. She stated, “You almost feel like the test scores are a reflection on you and what you are doing. I take that personally but I’m not going to bog down my curriculum because of it.” Darling-Hammond (1989) explained that the bureaucratic model has led the term professionalism to denote compliance rather than a high level of knowledge and commitment. It is plausible to think that perhaps the participants had not yet gained the high level of commitment necessary for true professionalism. Three of the

participants had more than 15 years experience and 2 had less than 10. However, all participants had received their National Board Certification less than three years prior to this study.

It appeared that the support of the school leaders and the collegiality among the teachers were an important component of maintaining this self-assured sense of professionalism. The climate of the school and the support of the administrator were attributed to why many of the participants maintained their sense of professionalism. Holly explained,

There is negativity. That can happen because we have a hard job. We get there early, we stay there late and we get grungy and all of that and we are still supposed to pretty. I have been in a school where I felt like I couldn't be the professional I wanted to be, I couldn't stay there. I just feel like if the administration can't respect each teacher's professionalism then that's not where I need to be.

Jane also referenced to her administrator as “really listening to our suggestions and treating us as professionals.” This was a troubling finding in that research described professionalism as building capacity through collaborative and collegial means; however, the participants in this research could only define professionalism in terms of work and tasks.

Implications

The influence of high-stakes testing on instructional decisions and professionalism has implications for future research, state policymakers, local school system administrators, and professional developers. The broader implications include the importance of gaining the perspectives of teachers. All participants discussed the significance of their voice in decisions made at the school level but yet there appeared to be a lack of opportunities to share their beliefs with others outside their grade level or school. To increase the capacity of educational leaders and instructors, the voices of those who are closest to the students must be heard. This sentiment was voiced by Arnold Shore, executive director of the National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy, “In the public debate, in the public conversation, the voices of those who are

implementing testing and accountability policies are either underheard or not heard much at all” (Olson, 2002, ¶13). The perspectives of the participants in this study provided invaluable information for future study.

Additionally, the value of technology for opening the communication paths can not be stated enough. A great deal of data for this research was gathered through e-mail. By writing their thoughts, participants were able to ensure their perspectives were clear and accurate.

Finally, the findings reported in this paper are limited to six participants in one system outside metropolitan Atlanta. While their perspectives are important, it would be worthwhile to have additional data to support the findings of this research. The study of how high-stakes testing influences instructional decisions and professionalism is timely. Moreover, at the time of this study no other research was found on the influence of high-stakes testing in Georgia and there was limited qualitative research found from other states about the impact of high-stakes testing.

Implications for Further Research

The research model employed in this study allowed for teachers’ perspectives to be heard within the setting of their own school and the culture from which they were a part. Through two interviews, fieldnotes, artifacts, and e-mail dialogue a deeper understanding of true perspectives was gained. One of the unintended consequences of this study was found in the realm of professionalism. It was apparent through the conversations with the participants that their definitions of professionalism lacked the deeper articulation of the true meaning of professionalism. For example, the opportunity for having a voice in decisions was important to each participant but yet none of the participants indicated that being a part of the decisions-making process was a characteristic of professionalism.

Ball and Cohen (1999) stated that many teachers base decisions on their own educational experience. The findings of this study revealed participants' definitions of professionalism were generally couched in the way others viewed them and lacked the articulation of the role they must take for improving their image in the political and public arena. Attributes such as appearance, how information was communicated, or how the teacher planned for student instruction were used to describe professionalism. Statements such as "we had a parent comment that we dressed like we were going on a picnic" and "we have to earn the respect of the parents" implied that it was important to be viewed in a positive light. Continuous learning was mentioned by participants but it was not clear that they understood the relationship between continuous learning and how that learning contributes to professionalism.

The demands from political and public groups for increased accountability have placed a certain amount of pressure on educators to prove their effectiveness. Administering a high-stakes test places the teacher in an even more visible and vulnerable position. The posting of test scores by the media is just one example of how teachers' instruction is judged. Jane was disappointed that "parents don't go into the schools and meet the teachers" because she believed it was a "better indicator of what my school and I as a teacher are doing to ensure each child is learning." She confessed that teachers were "constantly having to make sure that we are proving our professionalism to the public." However, Jane added, "It's understandable. The public has put so much pressure on the testing that school systems have to be able to prove that teachers are professionals."

At the time of this study, little research on the impact of high-stakes testing on teacher professionalism was found. Perhaps by using the findings from this study further research will

provide a greater understanding of teachers' efficacy, professionalism, and the impact of high-stakes testing.

Implications for School Leaders

Findings of this study related to instructional decisions were similar to findings of studies in other states (e.g., Amrein, 2002; Jones & Egley, 2004; Jones et al., 2003). However, a significant difference was found in the level of understanding about high-stakes testing. These National Board Certified teachers were confident in the effectiveness of their instruction and they monitored the impact of high-stakes testing. Emily stated, "I'm not going to bog down my curriculum because of it." Moreover, each participant talked about how they either limited test preparation or did not do it at all because of information they had learned about the lack of effectiveness of test preparation. Knowing that high-stakes testing could reduce the amount of time spent on in-depth instruction, participants were careful to take advantage of "teachable moments" such as the student who brought the tadpole to Holly's room, or the parent volunteers Jane used for tutoring her lower achieving students. The participants continued to be concerned about the consequences but awareness of the consequences allowed them to look for ways to compensate for the negative impact of high-stakes testing.

It must be noted that school leadership and the climate of the school played a heavy role in building a level of teacher confidence and commitment. Most participants talked at length about the support and wisdom of their school leaders. Additionally, they were impressed with the professional learning of the system. Holly noted, "This system encourages professionalism. They provide the avenues; you just have to take the walk."

Conversely, the support teachers received through professional learning opportunities and the leadership in the school for implementation of standards and accountability masked the lack

of growth of deeper, more intrinsic characteristics of professionalism. While these teachers may have experienced professional growth through school reform implementation, little attention has been given to the efficacy of teachers associated with the understanding of the relationship between knowing what a professional is and how a professional reacts to the factors that influence their professionalism.

Implications for Policymakers

Case studies generally do not predict future behavior; however, results have proven to be effective for informing policy. The participants of this study did not believe they had a strong voice in decisions being made at the policy level. The level of trust appeared to be so low that most participants did not bother to make contributions or voice opinions to their local teacher associations because of past experiences. Jane stated, “You don’t even take it that far because we feel like it’s going to be fruitless.” Tracy added, “When you hear a two-second bleep on the teachers’ perspective, and then you watch 20 minutes of what the governor’s going to do, No, I don’t believe our voice has been heard.” Instead, teachers in this study had accepted the state requirements and were working with their children and parents in the best manner possible to shield them from the pressures of state testing. Statements such as, “I don’t care for it, but I will do what is best for my students,” and “we must remember to focus on what the students need and how we can improve their learning” indicated that teachers are dedicated to their profession. This lack of motivation to become involved in state policy is disturbing in light of the responsibility the public has for contributing to the effectiveness of the political process. Policymakers must begin to make a greater effort to seek the voice of teachers in decisions made that impact student learning.

Merit pay attached to students' scores was a concern for half of the teachers interviewed. In their opinion, this would jeopardize the efforts made to encourage collegiality, collaboration, and communication among teachers, students, and parents. The competitive edge might further create a wedge obstructing the very activities and habits of mind of professionals who can collaborate, support, and nurture one another amid public attacks of teachers and education in the media. Policymakers would be well served to study this method of motivation for increased student achievement regarding the positive and negative consequences from other areas in which merit pay has been used to impact the quality of teaching.

Implications for Professional Learning

Gaining the perspectives of teachers is invaluable in planning how to provide learning that will improve their ability to work in an educational environment also required to comply with strict guidelines for student achievement. Teachers in the system in which this study took place understood the value of basing their instruction on standards and using data to closely follow the students' progress. While teachers appeared to be gaining a greater understanding for how to more effectively instruct and assess, they were not gaining the greater sense of professionalism that is required for building the capacity of professional educators. The participants believed that their voice in decisions was being heard at the school level. Jane remarked about the "continuous support from my principal. You can see him thinking about our suggestions. He really considers them." As a result, she had noted that the school provided more frequent professional learning opportunities based on the weak areas teachers had identified in their test data. Patricia noted that her principal "really listened to us and tries to find the answers to our concerns." However, none of the participants believed their voices were heard at the system level. Each participant described an experience that had led them to not

pursue making suggestions at the school system level or at the state level. Expressions such as “fruitless” and the “vision is already set into place” described the reluctance to voice an opinion at the system level. They had accepted the premise that professional learning was grounded in the system level initiatives. None of the participants would elaborate on this phenomenon, leaving the researcher to discern a gap based more on what the participants did not say, rather on explicit descriptions of their experiences.

It is recommended that professional learning leaders carefully select opportunities for learning that are grounded in the needs of the participants. Additionally, opportunities must be provided that assist teachers in gaining a greater understanding of their significance in the educational system and in ensuring students are prepared for successful futures.

Concluding Thoughts

The purpose of this study was to discover the perspectives of teachers as to how high-stakes testing influenced instructional decisions and professionalism. The study explored the perspectives of National Board Certified teachers and the related positive and negative intended and unintended consequences of high-stakes testing. Through a case study design, six participants in a suburban system outside metropolitan Atlanta described their experiences with high-stakes testing. These teachers were instructors in 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade classrooms. Their perspectives were analyzed using the constant comparative method as defined by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Further analysis was conducted to examine the process for *how* teachers come to develop their perspective and *why* they believed as they did. It was important for a methodology to be incorporated that allowed the researcher to listen to and gain an understanding about the experiences of participants and how these experiences formed their perspectives. Using the methods of grounded theory, an interpretive analysis enabled the study to draw out themes as to

what is important to teachers and why. At the time of this research, no studies in Georgia could be found that sought the perspectives of teachers and the influence of high-stakes testing on instructional decisions and professionalism. The findings are timely and significant considering Georgia implements a high-stakes test in which elementary school students in grades three and five are promoted based on their reading and math scores.

Related literature discussed the most common negative unintended consequences of high-stakes testing such as reports indicating increased student retentions, excessive amounts of time preparing for tests, and undue stress placed on students, teachers, and parents. Also noted in the literature were decreased amounts of instructional time on non-tested content areas and lack of in-depth or developmentally appropriate instruction for minority and low-socioeconomic students (Amrein, 2002; Jones et al., 2003; Jones & Egley, 2004). All of the most frequently noted negative consequences were also discussed by the participants of this study. The perspectives of these participants further confirmed and validated the findings from other studies on high-stakes testing and the negative impact on instructional decisions.

The perspectives of the participants in this study present a unique finding related to professionalism. Several participants related instances in which it would appear professionalism had been jeopardized. Additionally, all participants resented the implication that they were totally responsible for student achievement. They believed that achievement was also influenced by variables outside their influence, such as home environment and students' experiences. Participants noted examples such as "the public has put so much pressure on the testing that school systems have to be able to prove that teachers are professionals" or "scores are reported in the paper that don't accurately reflect my instructional ability" as indications that negative public pressure had influenced their perspective. However, they did not reflect these beliefs when

asked if high-stakes testing influenced their own sense of professionalism. Only one participant believed her professionalism had been influenced. All others reported no impact. No data were available to indicate why this one participant had a different viewpoint other than she was the most recently hired teacher into the system. System initiatives could possibly influence professionalism, since there were multiple opportunities for professional learning.

More research is needed to fully understand why teachers believe that their professionalism either was or was not impacted by high-stakes testing. Georgia has received its share of negative press about its educational system. Additionally, teachers perceive the definition of professionalism as grounded in how the public views them. It is possible that these two factors have influenced their beliefs. In an effort to defend the status of education in the state, teachers have assumed a confidence in their own abilities and the results they see in student achievement. This belief was self-perpetuated. However, teachers may not have developed this confidence to the level of understanding the relationship between how the public views them and how they view themselves related to professionalism.

Recruiting and retaining educators is consistently a concern in school systems. Participants of this study were disappointed in the confidence the public revealed in their ability to provide quality instruction to their children. For teaching to become a highly respected professional organization, the impact of high-stakes testing must be further examined. The definition of a professional included the following attributes: (1) knowledge and competence acquired from highly specialized training and formal education, (2) the respect and trust of community and peers that leads to a degree of autonomy and self-direction, and (3) a set of values, moral and ethical, that allow the performance of the job to become more service-oriented rather than profit-oriented (Darling-Hammond & Goodwin, 1993; Freidson, 1970; Starr, 1984;

Sullivan, 1995). Each of these aspects of professionalism must be a part of the goal for teaching to become a highly respected professional occupation. Moreover, teachers must be involved partners in reaching and maintaining professional status. How high-stakes testing influences that goal must be determined before teachers can understand and acquire the characteristics reflective of the true meaning of professionalism.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

State-by-State Student Accountability

State	Grade promotion is contingent on passing exam	Graduation contingent on passing high school graduation exam
Alabama		✓
Alaska		✓
Delaware	✓	
Florida	✓	✓
Georgia	✓	✓
Idaho		✓
Indiana		✓
Louisiana	✓	✓
Maryland		✓
Massachusetts		✓
Minnesota		✓
Mississippi		✓
Missouri	✓	
Nevada		✓
New Jersey		✓
New Mexico		✓
New York		✓
North Carolina	✓	✓
Ohio		✓
South Carolina		✓
Tennessee		✓
Texas	✓	✓
Virginia		✓
Wisconsin	✓	
	8	21

Source: Adapted from Quality Counts 2005