

WHOLE LANGUAGE TEACHERS: CONFLICT BETWEEN PHILOSOPHICAL  
BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE ARTS INSTRUCTION AND DISTRICT  
MANDATES

by

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(Under the Direction of JoBeth Allen)

ABSTRACT

Teachers in the study were mandated to follow district and school mandates that were anti-thetical to their beliefs about literacy instruction. All of the participants had adopted the whole language philosophy, which informed their classroom practices. External forces such as changes in leadership as well as political and parental pressures caused new mandates to become imposed on their teaching practices. Extensive interviews were conducted to determine how these teachers dealt with such mandates. The results indicated that the teachers developed various coping strategies in an attempt to reconcile the incongruence between their beliefs about literacy instruction and mandates that were in opposition to those beliefs. The strategies used by the teachers consisted of compromise, giving up, direct compliance, appearance of compliance, closing the door and ignoring the mandates, and leaving the school system.

INDEX WORDS: Whole language, Literacy Instruction, School Reform, Teacher Change, Coping Strategies for Teachers, Professional Development, Mandates

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Each of us views the world through a personal lens through which we construct unique realities based on our experiences, culture, and intellect. The lens through which we view the world affects our interpretation of everything around us and determines how we define reality. This worldview is unique to us as individuals and is no less influential in our professional lives than it is in our personal lives as all of our experiences are filtered through this worldview. All of our learning is based on cultural norms, perceptions, beliefs and experiences that determine the conclusions we make as individuals (Lambert, et.al., 1996). Our understanding of any phenomenon is based on these factors.

Across Cultures, there may not be any understanding of a cultural norm that transcends groups as much as the concept of school and what takes place in school. Sarason (1996) noted that before we even enter school, we have developed conceptions about school. For the last century relatively little change has taken place in the daily rituals of teaching and learning. While there have been many reform efforts to change teaching practices, most have failed to bring about significant changes in teaching and classroom experiences. “Important educational changes have taken place and they frequently reflect significant public ideas” (Duke, 2004, p. 56). The reform efforts that have influenced education and schools, have most often been in the form of court decisions or legislative mandates.

Some have determined who can attend school such as the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision providing for equality in educational opportunities for minorities or

the Public Law 94-142 giving the right to special education children to have a public education. More recent changes address issues of accountability and academic standards. Such changes are reflective of the expectation that schools respond to the demands of a changing society. These are just a few examples of the demands that have been placed on education over the years that have resulted in change. However, the classroom experience for students and observations of teaching practices over the last century have changed very little. The focus of this study centered on reform in literacy instruction that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s with the whole language movement. To situate this reform effort in the context of other reform efforts that have occurred historically, I have provided a brief introduction to the history of teaching practices and efforts to reform teaching.

#### Brief History of Instructional Practices and Reform Efforts

Current classroom practices reflect a history of teaching that has been pervasive for the last century. "By the 1890s over a half century of school movement had spread across a growing nation. Urban public schools had established policies and practices that would be familiar to observers a century later" (Cuban, 1993, p. 24). A visit to classrooms today brings observations of practices similar to those that were in place at the turn of the century. These include a 9 month school year, age-graded classrooms, self-contained classrooms, rows of student desks facing a teacher's desk, a chalkboard, report cards, homework assignments, and courses of study that determined what was taught and when (Cuban, 1993).

Examination of literacy instruction during this time period shows basal materials in use, which were very systematic and standard in the delivery of reading and language skills and standardized tests were used periodically to monitor student progress (Shannon,

1990). Textbook publishers used the principles of scientific management to develop basals. “These materials were the technology of reading instruction that would standardize teachers’ practices according to scientific principles in order to ensure efficiencies and quality control over student learning” (Shannon, 2001, p. 17). There is a long-standing history in education to scientifically identify the characteristics of good teachers, administrators and schools (Kliebard, 2002).

During this century, teaching has been defined and characterized by historical and social context issues that have tightly bound the work of teaching to common meanings for those in the profession and those who would enter the profession. These attributes have been imposed on teachers by society in its expectations of public education, by organizational arrangements drawn from business theory, and by those in the profession itself (Lambert, et.al., 1996, p. 2).

Although the classrooms at the turn of the century were very teacher-centered, as the majority has remained since that time, there were reform movements to focus instruction on the child. Influential in this movement in America was the work of Edward Sheldon, Francis Parker, John Dewey and their co-workers who worked to spread the reformers' ideas about child-centered pedagogy (Cuban, 1993). During the 19th century, Edward Sheldon applied Pestalozzi's ideas about natural learning using objects in the student's environment as the curriculum, combining labor and academics.

Sheldon and his colleagues designed lessons during the Oswego Movement to develop the principles of "object teaching" to be used in schools. “Reducing Pestalozzi’s original principles to a formula for object lesson design, Sheldon published volumes of set lesson plans that he and his teachers had developed and then arranged in the proper

sequence for instruction” (Shannon, 1990, p. 30). His ideas claimed to be attempts to produce classrooms that were child-centered. Instead of becoming a child-centered focus, most of the object teaching lessons soon became very scripted lessons. Over time it became impossible to distinguish object teaching from the recitations that had been in place all along. Pestalozzi’s commitment to democratic principles was no longer evident in the Oswego Movement (Shannon, 1990). Nevertheless, Sheldon's ideas left an imprint of possibilities and encouraged new thinking in child-centered pedagogy.

Francis Parker's work also provided great influence in the movement to child-centered classrooms. The direction of a more child-centered approach provided promise of the move from a curriculum focused on the written word as well as the promise for a more developmental view from psychology (Kliebard, 1992). Parker believed that children are at the center of education and went on to lead the Quincy Schools in the late 1800s. His leadership changed the face of schooling in Quincy, Massachusetts. Parker maintained a belief that subjects should be integrated which he called "correlated" at the time. He wanted children to see connections between the various subjects they were studying including the fine arts. "In these lessons, literacy was considered a form of personal expression, an activity of liberation from immediate surroundings, and a means for understanding contemporary society" (Shannon, 1990, p.5).

The Quincy Schools had basic underlying principles, but strict uniformity among teachers was not an expectation. Natural learning was a foundational belief as well as support for democratic principles.

Teachers used lessons predicated on students' oral language communication and their abilities to use that language wisely in meaningful contexts. Teachers

employed an informal approach in which they negotiated the content of the lesson, working from natural language toward a consideration of language form. They were well outside the mainstream of literacy lessons for their time (Shannon, 1990, p. 3).

Parker's work drew much interest from around the nation as hundreds flocked to observe the "Quincy Method." At the same time, he met with resistance from parents and traditional educators who questioned the practices. Due to this opposition, Parker came close to being dismissed many times during his tenure. Despite strong opposition, there were many, like John Dewey, who were influenced by Parker and continued his work into the 1900s.

In the Laboratory School, John Dewey and his colleagues were able to experiment with innovative ideas in child-centered pedagogy and incorporate these principles into the curriculum. With this movement, the experience of the child was central in determining what was to be taught (Kliebard, 1992). The progressive movement provided students with the opportunities to work in cooperative groups, be actively involved, participate in decision-making, apply skills learned in the classroom to real life situations and incorporate democratic principles.

For the most part pedagogical reformers wanted instruction and curriculum tailored to children's interests; they wanted programs that permitted children more freedom and creativity than existed in schools; they wanted school experiences connected to activities outside the classroom; and they wanted children to help shape the direction of their learning (Cuban, 1993, p. 50).

This model recognized the play of children as having pedagogical values in helping children learn and develop (Luke, 1988). Different versions of student-centered instruction appeared most in smaller private schools at the elementary level. The challenge to traditional teacher-centered practices began to spread putting many teachers in a position to attempt incorporating new thoughts on pedagogy into classroom instruction. Most often teachers opted to create ways to make new ideas fit the existing structure within their classrooms. Teachers often confronted conflicting expectations within the work place, which prevented reform entirely or caused them to create hybrids of reform ideas. Therefore, only a minority of teachers incorporated any changes at all. “Even in its heyday, then something like two-thirds of all classrooms in the United States were left untouched by the tenets of the child-centered movement, and, in any case, the modest steps actually taken in that direction left little by the way of a lasting effect” (Kliebard, 2002, p. 128).

After all, teachers knew that they were expected to concentrate on basic skills, maintain classroom order, and develop respect for authority; this was what the larger society expected of schools. Every teacher had to resolve individually this dilemma of wanting to embrace the values of progressive pedagogy while satisfying the social and organizational demands for children to obey authority, behave uniformly, and acquire a common body of knowledge (Cuban, 1993, p.113).

The progressive movement opened classrooms to debate about pedagogical issues and left many teachers feeling the need to manipulate the new ideas to fit within the existing structure and demands on their classrooms. “As leaders of various reform

movements were arguing the case for changes in particular directions, schools were quietly amalgamating pieces of all of them” (Kliebard, 2002, p. 54). As a result, many hybrids of progressivism were created and many were what Cuban (1993) called "teacher-centered progressivism." "This paradox of teacher-centered progressivism that grew in the interwar decades is one that has persisted since, creating classrooms where teachers are beset by conflicting impulses to be simultaneously efficient, scientific, child-centered, and authoritative" (Cuban, 1993, p.114).

The progressive movement was most successful in systems where the administration supported the effort and provided what teachers needed to carry it out. It had the greatest impact on instruction in these districts, particularly at the elementary level. The influence of the progressive movement could be seen in other districts, but unfortunately the majority of the classrooms remained teacher-centered. Instruction was still conducted most often through lecture to the whole class but student freedom of movement and flexibility of furniture arrangement allowed for more group work among students.

In general, teachers taught the entire class at the same time. Classes continued to be taught then much as they continue to be taught today through recitation as the most dominant teaching strategy (Kliebard, 2002). By that time, the concept of what teaching should be was deeply ingrained in the culture of school. “In short, teachers have learned, first from their own teachers and later from colleagues, what works and what doesn’t, and thus have developed a set of beliefs about teaching” (Hampton, 1994, p. 128). This strong set of beliefs and practices about teaching allow for little deviation when new paradigms are introduced. “In times of endemic change, schools may be looked to as an oasis of

stability and continuity” (Duke, 2004, p. 34). Sarason (1996) noted that the failure to recognize or consider alternatives is in and of itself an obstacle to change.

Therefore, the progressive movement was limited in its spread to classrooms in the way Dewey defined it and was victim of individual interpretations with regard to implementation. From the mid-1940s and into the 1950s, the progressives' attacks on the traditional system began to be less well received. The war had moved the United States out of the depression. "In this climate, the anti-traditionalist rhetoric went unheard, as both patriots and progressives began to wax eloquent concerning "our country and our culture" (Shannon, 1990, p. 127).

The war also brought to the forefront the number of soldiers who were functionally illiterate causing outcry for reform in public education. “A staggering number of males were rejected for military service because of illiteracy, mental retardation (as determined by an IQ test), or personal instability” (Sarason, 1996, p. 374). Following the World War, competition with Russia continued the perceived need to focus on traditional curriculum. The Cold War and the Russians’ success in space travel increased an emphasis on basic skills and efforts to ensure that students excelled academically. “The new national mood was one of fierce competition with the Soviet Union, especially in the areas of science and technology” (Kliebard, 2002, p. 86). With this, came a renewed fervor for traditional teaching practices.

By the late 1960s the influence of progressivism could be seen once again in the enthusiasm for informal schools whose popularity rose in the early 70s. It was the second major attempt at classroom reform within the century. As a result of the open classrooms, students were allowed more freedom to move about the room, centers were developed

and tables were clustered so students could work in groups. The spread of the open classroom was similar to that of the progressive movement in the early 1900s. As with progressive education, hybrids were created that blended formal and informal practices. Despite the enthusiasm for open classrooms, "an overwhelming majority of teachers stayed with what can comfortably be called teacher-centered practices" (Cuban, 1993, p. 202).

Educational reforms involving changes in teaching practice fail with such monotonous regularity because enlightened reform rhetoric and the generosity of spirit that impels people to attempt to change things for the better simply come into direct conflict with institutional realities. Good intentions and even competence notwithstanding, teachers are absolutely required to maintain a precarious order, and only the very courageous are willing to risk its loss (Kliebard, 2002, p. 132).

In the late 70s and through most of the 80s and 90s, the focus of instruction shifted from informal classrooms to the effective schools research. "By the mid-1970s, concerns for basic skills, test scores, traditional alternative schools, and minimum competencies had replaced open classrooms on the agendas of school boards, superintendents, principals, and teachers" (Cuban, 1993, p. 153). The highly touted scientific research on effective teaching practices drove classroom practice. This body of research attempted to define effective teaching, isolate the behaviors of effective teachers and determine how they became effective. This move was reflective of scientific management principles with a focus on predictability and the standardization of teaching

practices. This mechanistic view of teaching is designed to preserve the status quo (Lambert, et.al., 1996).

Much of the effective teaching research became a recipe for teaching and actually reinforced the prominence that traditional practices had in the classroom. "Because they were encouraged to do so, many teachers relied even more heavily than before on the practical pedagogy that they had always used. Both national and local evidences suggest a strengthening of teacher-centered instruction in the 1980s" (Cuban, 1993, p.232). Along with the effective schools research came the "teacher-proof" materials of the 80s. These teacher's manuals were designed as scripted lessons to ensure that teaching followed the "recipe" of steps touted by the effective teaching research.

The foundations for these practices can be traced to Charters and Bobbit's scientific management assembly-line model of curriculum, instruction and assessment and the technicist oriented basal reading manuals reflected that school of thought (Luke, 1988). Professional knowledge was not viewed as necessary or relevant to the teaching of reading as practices were standardized and reduced to the science of teaching within the teacher's manual. As I heard Norma say on that fateful afternoon, "Anyone can teach using these manuals."

Though teacher-centered instruction remained strong, the mid-1980s also brought about a renewed "interest in neoprogressivism: the integration of reading, writing, and thinking into "whole language" instruction"(Cuban, 1993, p.235). This time period brought a reform effort contextualized in economic concerns. For the first time in history, the United States was faced with the need to educate all students to a higher degree so they could be successful in the workplace (Murphy, 1991). Educators of the early 19th

century would have recognized these student-centered practices as similar to those promoted during the progressive movement. "The whole language movement has historic roots in a continuous attempt since the beginning of formal schooling to move away from simplistic views of teaching and learning" (Goodman, 1990, p.248). Like the reform movements prior to its onset, whole language too fell to hybrids created by teachers trying to make reform ideas fit into the existing structure of the classroom. The whole language movement experienced a highly publicized campaign that there had been a drop in student achievement due to whole language teaching. As a result, legislation was passed during the Clinton and Bush administrations that support, with federal monies no less, the use of pre-packaged materials for reading instruction. This ensured a move back to more traditional practices within the classroom.

In making choices about adopting reform ideas, teachers face many decisions. Oftentimes they find change to be emotional and experience disappointment as a result of their efforts to change.

Expectations get pumped up during the preparatory phases of the change process as proponents hold out the promise of improvement. When the actual experience of implementing change falls short of these expectations, the result can be frustration, discouragement, and cynicism regarding future change effort. Some veteran educators learn to protect themselves against disappointment by resisting or discounting change (Duke, 2004, p. 160).

The outcomes of efforts to change instruction can fall short of expectation due to lack of substantive changes in practices. Many efforts to change instruction involve placing new ideas into existing structures.

All classrooms have a constitution; their structure and ambiance are not random affairs—they are reflections of conceptions, almost always un verbalized about what is right, natural and proper. Challenges to those conceptions are literally regarded by the teacher as countercultural and, therefore, to be resisted, and that resistance is spontaneous and automatic, not reflective, not a spur to self-scrutiny (Sarason, 1996, p. 327).

Practices often do not change because the context in which they are introduced does not change. “In other words, when a curriculum change is introduced without due regard for modification of the context in which the change is to take place, the innovation is almost surely doomed to a short life” (Kliebard, 2002, p. 81). The lack of attention to the culture of school and the context in which reform movements are situated has caused what some would term as the pendulum swing or the basic assumption that movement from one new approach to teaching will assuredly lead back to more traditional practices. This assumption in itself has become an underlying piece in the culture of school.

#### Researcher’s Professional Journey as an Educator

As I read about the relative consistency of teaching practices, I could see the images of my own personal teaching experience within the pages of these texts. My own history began with traditional practices in which I was schooled as a student and later carried into my own classroom. I was heavily influenced by the effective schools research of the 1980s and embraced the "teacher-proof" materials of that decade, which fit with my perception of “how to do” school.

After years of professional experiences and personal reflection, I have come to view effective teaching as an art as well. An artist's work imitates life just as the teacher's

classroom and teaching style imitate his or her belief systems about teaching and learning. Teachers, like artists, must view the world from different angles, must visualize, plan and implement different strategies to achieve a desired goal while all along the way relishing surprises at what certain combinations will bring and rejoicing in the uniqueness and diversity that can be enhanced through the art of teaching. Like gifted artists, effective teachers do not desire that others merely imitate their work but wish to pass along the tools for others to explore the world for possibilities and to construct their own renditions of that world.

Although art has always permeated every aspect of my life, it did not initially filter my view of teaching or my teaching practices. When I began teaching, instead of viewing my profession through the lens of an artist, I seemed to thrive on "sameness" or on the way I understood teaching was to be conducted. If the first grade hallway on which I began my career had been an art museum, it would have been like walking through an exhibit with multiple prints of the Mona Lisa on display. Each of us did approximately the same thing on any given day.

The "personal" contributions to my teaching were there, mostly in room décor and art projects, but were limited. We used the same basals, the same worksheet packets, the same homework assignments, and taught using almost identical plans for instruction. Much like the Mona Lisa, there was little joy reflected in the faces of any of the participants. If our classrooms had been a canvas and we the artists, our portraits were paint-by-number with the numbered canvas designed by others outside our classrooms. Not that any of us would have voiced discontent, if we had been asked; we were pleased

with our efforts and believed we were providing the best possible learning environment for our students.

We were conducting school in much the same way we had been schooled and there was little basis for our decisions other than the foundation laid by our own experiences in the educational system. Our classrooms were framed by tradition and there were few options for deviation from that framework. We relied heavily on materials produced by others to inform our teaching practices because we were not of the mindset to do otherwise. Eventually, I did see the need for change, and when I did, it came suddenly and unexpectedly for me.

### Finding the Artist's Lens

On what was otherwise just another day, I made my way down the main hall on what I thought was an ordinary trip to the teachers' lounge for an afternoon soda. Opening the lounge door, I could see Norma perched in her usual afternoon spot as she spoke with a colleague about reading instruction. Norma was adamant in her comments, "Anyone could come in off the street and do what we do. Anybody could come in here and teach these kids to read using these manuals." I was incensed at the thought that just *anybody* could do what I did each day. However, the more I thought about Norma's comments, the more I realized there was a lot of truth in her statements. I began to see the "sameness" in what I did each day with my students. If the scripted basal reader was followed, most anyone on the street **could** teach reading, at least as it was defined by the textbook publishers. I realized that I did not want to teach like just anybody could teach. I wanted to be something more, something better.

For the first time, I could see the line of Mona Lisas down the first grade hall and the world of teaching lost color. Visions of the disappointed expressions on the faces of the six year olds in my classroom as they dragged themselves over to join me at the kidney-shaped table for their next reading lesson ran through my mind like a bad critique of an artist's work. I could see Larry reading words incorrectly day after day, yet passing all the assessments and magazine tests that accompanied the reading series. I could see the yawns (including my own) that dominoed around the table during a lesson as we struggled together to get through a daily necessary evil--the reading groups. "If your life's work is in schools, you have been socialized to see them in certain ways and to become insensitive to many things you take for granted and, therefore, never examine" (Sarason, 1996, p. 334).

As I reflected on my boredom and my students' boredom, I desperately desired to make wholesale changes to enable me to incorporate more effective literacy instruction into my classroom. I wanted to be more than a technician reading from a user's manual. I no longer wanted to "role play" being a teacher who was careful each day not to deviate from the *script*. I wanted to be a skilled professional who could make appropriate instructional decisions based on expertise of effective teaching. I wanted to do something more than just *anybody* could do for my students. I had been given a blank canvas on which to begin a new creation but was unsure of which color to use first. I began, for the first time, to view my profession through the lens of an artist.

#### Defining Whole Language

The whole language philosophy that was becoming a "pervasive force in American education" (Moorman, Blanton, & McLaughlin, 1994, p. 309) formed the

background for my new portrait of teaching and opened up a whole new palette of colorful options. Whole language dramatically changed the way literacy instruction was viewed by me and many others across the nation who were rethinking their practices. It was a grass roots movement that led to many changes in curriculum (Moorman, et.al., 1994). Whole language left its imprint on students, educators and parents from Wollongong, Australia to Nashville, U.S.A. (Watson, 1989). Teachers were elated about the students in their classrooms who were becoming joyful readers and writers. Temes (2002) notes that change from the bottom-up works because it starts with actual change and that change can then move upward in the system.

Whole language research, theory and practice created a new image of literacy instruction in classrooms. Much like the progressive movement, whole language was difficult for some to grasp because it did not provide a set of prescribed methodologies that have been so prevalent from the influence of the scientific management school of thought. It is a philosophy or set of principles, which guides the practitioner during teaching (Moorman, et. al., 1994). This philosophy is grounded in research, which informs the common beliefs of whole language educators. However, each individual teacher, like individual artists, has painted a personalized rendition in creating a whole language classroom and has developed a unique perspective of how whole language is defined, making it vague and difficult for some to see the commonalties that lie within the uniqueness. Some of the ambiguity in understanding whole language is a direct result of the lack of a single, concise definition of what it means. When asked to define whole language, even experts in the field produce many variations. What whole language

advocates do have in common with one another is a theoretical underpinning about literacy learning and instruction (Weaver, 1990).

#### Theoretical Foundation of Whole Language

With the implementation of whole language, the face of literacy instruction was redrawn to reflect John Dewey's transactional view of learning and the social constructivist theory rooted in the work of Vygotsky. Dewey (1902) provided insight into the need for knowledge to be immediately useful and meaningful to the learner as well as the need to link learning in and out of school. Dewey did not view school as preparation for life; he viewed it as life (Dewey, 1938). He further recognized the importance of learning by doing and the central role of language and thought in the everyday problem solving of learners (Dewey, 1902). Dewey viewed learning not as a means to an end but the means to further learning tomorrow (1902).

Vygotsky believed that learning is socially constructed and mediated through language; language enables us to share experience and link ourselves to others to create a social intelligence that is superior to that of individuals (Vygotsky, 1978). Learning occurs first through external interactions between the learner and the environment after which the learning becomes internalized. Learning not only occurs through a child's interaction with the world but can be enhanced through the support of an adult or more capable peer in what Vygotsky called the "zone of proximal development" (1978). Vygotsky's work helped us discern that as "children transact with their world they are capable of doing more than they appear to be and that they can get much more out of an activity or experience if there is an adult or more experienced playmate to mediate the

experience for them" (Goodman, 1990, p. 228). Vygotsky believed that "what a child can do in cooperation today, he can do alone tomorrow" (1962, p.188).

The influence of Vygotsky and Dewey can be seen in the theoretical underpinnings of the whole language philosophy. According to Edelsky (1992) there are five theoretical positions that whole language takes: (a) language is whole, not something that can be taken apart into little bits; (b) written language is language; (c) knowledge is social; (d) it is more optimal and interesting to look at people's language strengths rather than their deficiencies; and (e) reading and writing are transactions (p. 326).

Those who advocate whole language believe that language is whole and should not be broken apart into small bits for instructional purposes. All language, including written language, is learned through using it for real communicative purposes not through skill and drill exercises that isolate bits of language as though they were unrelated. "When language is whole, relevant, and functional, learners have real purposes for using language, and through their language use, they develop control over the processes of language" (Goodman & Goodman, 1990, p. 225).

Further, whole language advocates believe this language learning is inherently social, that children learn about language through the use of language in social contexts. Learning in whole language is viewed as socially constructed and builds upon what the child can do. Instruction is based on what the child already knows and ties new learning to existing relevant knowledge including that, which is acquired outside of school. This learning is affected by individual experiences, culture and views of the world. "There is no reality or fact that hasn't been filtered through a perspective" (Edelsky, 1992, p.326).

Individual perspectives not only influence the learner's perception of interactions with the world but influence the role of written language in that world as well. Reading, based on Rosenblatt's theory, is considered to be a transaction between the reader and the text (1995). Each reader brings unique perspectives and experiences to the text which means that the interpretation of that text will vary from one individual to the next. This same position applies to writing in which the writer transacts with "one in the writers mind" (Goodman, 1992, p. 358). The written text represents a writer's meaning and the influence of the writer's perceived audience. The reader, in turn, constructs new meaning upon reading that text.

These theoretical positions about the learner and learning provide the basic foundation within which the principles and practices of whole language can be actualized in the portrait of the classroom.

### Principles of Whole Language

Based on these theoretical positions, common principles and practices of whole language can be grouped into four categories: (a) time, (b) choice, (c) community, and (d) response (Atwell, 1987).

#### Time

Time must be provided each day for students to use language for real life, meaningful communicative purposes. Students are immersed in language and language mediates their daily learning. Reading, writing, speaking and listening are integrated throughout the instructional day. Time is provided for socially-mediated learning experiences in which students learn about language through the purposeful use of language with others. Students also have time to share what has been learned with the

teacher and peers. There are real audiences for the sharing of reading and writing.

Teachers provide time to read and share thoughts on books. Language learning happens through the use of language in meaningful contexts, so adequate time is allowed for such opportunities to use language in the classroom. The student learns about complex processes because time is allowed to participate in those processes.

### Choice

Within this time structure there are many opportunities for student choice.

Whether it is in choosing a book to read or a topic to write about, students have meaningful input into their learning. The learner actively pursues his or her own learning and the allowance for input and choices promotes learning and growth (Weaver, 1990).

By providing choices, the teacher recognizes the ability of students to be creative and productive. The teacher provides choices that take into account everything that he or she knows about the learner, learning, language and subject matter (Watson, 1989).

There is an expectation on the part of the teacher and the student that learning will occur, that all members of the classroom have input into the learning and that the child will be successful. The teacher "does not do for the students what they can do for themselves" (Watson, 1989, p.136). As a result, the teacher allows the child to take more responsibility for his or her own learning. Through choices, input and responsibility, the student becomes empowered as a learner. The sketch of the whole language classroom, as a result, represents a collaboration of the many artists within.

### Community

Through collaboration among the artists, a community of learners grows and develops. Everyone in the community, including the teacher, is viewed as a learner. The

teacher models the behaviors that characterize a literate adult and fosters the kind of thinking that allows students to view themselves as competent readers and writers. The learner is treated as a capable individual who is allowed to develop self-control rather than being controlled by the teacher. The student and teacher have vested interests in the classroom and, as a result, are empowered members of the community. Like the artist who begins a new creation with an image of a finished piece, the learner in a whole language classroom is aware of the purpose of learning activities and, like that artist who may choose a variety of colors to create the image, the learner has many choices of opportunities for learning as well.

### Response

On the first attempt, as the artist may choose colors that do not blend well in the portrait, the learner may make mistakes in learning. The artist is free to begin again and so is the child in the whole language classroom. The teacher knows that although the choices of colors may not blend well this time, it will lead to even more beautiful combinations in the next creation. The teacher accepts approximations and allows students to learn from errors. The teacher focuses on the process of learning rather than only on the product. The process-oriented focus allows students to be risk-takers and construct meaning through reading, writing, speaking and listening. The thought processes of the students are valued and there is less focus on correctness than on learning from errors. Students are willing to attempt skills that might otherwise go unattempted.

Throughout the learning process, the teacher gives feedback to students about their progress as well as provides opportunities for students to give feedback to one

another about learning. Assessment of learning is ongoing and an integral part of daily feedback and instruction. The whole language teacher views assessment as a collection of information about the learner, like the portfolio of an artist's renderings, to serve the purpose of informing the learner. The focus is on the learner and what feedback the learner needs to have in order to be successful. This provides continuous feedback to the learner about his or her progress and this type of assessment informs future instruction and classroom practices which are based on the underlying theories and principles of whole language.

### Classroom Practices in Whole Language

Classroom practices focus on a process-oriented approach to teaching and learning. The focus is on the learner as opposed to the past focus on the teacher and curriculum. Classrooms are child-centered and the teacher serves in a facilitative role to guide learning and allow student input into learning. A sketch of a whole language classroom includes a community of learners in which socially-mediated learning is central and involves the integrated use of language in meaningful contexts such as reading and writing for real purposes. Skills are taught within this meaningful context. The illustration shows "learners using language and at the same time learning language, learning through language and about language" (Goodman, 1989, p. 117). Dorothy Watson provides a condensed view of practices in a whole language classroom:

Although there is no such thing as an archetypical whole language classroom, certain experiences consistently appear in whole language learning communities: for example, reading of untampered texts, telling stories, student-generated writing, making personal and social connections to meaning, student choice and

responsibility for learning, acceptance of errors and always an emphasis on meaning (1989, p.139).

The whole language classroom looks quite different than a traditional classroom because the relationships among the participants change. The environment in a whole language classroom is much more democratic in structure as students and teachers work collaboratively to build a community of learners in much the same way Dewey promoted democratic classrooms in the early 1900s. Instructional practices common to whole language classrooms include Reading and Writing Workshop.

Unlike traditional reading instruction, the Reading Workshop includes groups of students who are grouped for reading based on reading interests. The workshop time would include reading to children by the teacher, the teacher reading with children in groups based on needs and interests and reading by children as children engage in reading self-selected texts independently. The workshop time with the teacher would include work on skills and strategies important to effective reading as well as activities to focus on response and comprehension.

The Writing Workshop includes instruction by the teacher on the writing process, the conventions and the craft of writing. Students generate pieces of writing in a variety of genres on self-selected and assigned topics and take these pieces through the writing process to publication. Students are given multiple opportunities to learn about writing while writing for real purposes. Each workshop includes time for sharing and receiving feedback. This sharing may be done as a class, in small groups, with partners or with an intended audience. In the Writing Workshop and Reading Workshop, the students are

empowered with choices and are provided literacy instruction in the context of real reading and real writing.

Whole language teachers understand the need to make learning experiences meaningful for students and that, as teachers, they must be empowered to make informed decisions about their practices in order to provide such an environment (Goodman, 1989). To provide these opportunities for learning, the power structure of the classroom must change and the students must *also* be given a blank canvas on which to design their own learning with the guidance of the more experienced artist, the teacher. Thus, the teacher returns "the power to learn" to the children (Rich, 1985). In a whole language classroom, "children are not first and foremost learners; they are first and foremost people living the complexities of their day-to-day lives" (Dyson, 1995, p.36). Dewey argued that education be viewed as a "process of living and not a preparation for future living" (1938).

Whole language brought about marked changes in how learning is viewed by both the teacher and learner. Children became connoisseurs of the art of learning and teachers the art of teaching. However, change in the classroom was only a beginning, not enough in itself to bring about sweeping changes. Even though whole language brought with it positive changes in classroom instruction, it fell victim to the perspectives of those beyond the classroom who pushed for a more traditional approach to instruction.

#### Role of the Whole Language Educator in the Downfall of Whole Language

When I first began this study in 1998, the focus of the study, from my perspective as researcher, centered on reform in language arts instruction particularly the whole language movement. I had become a whole language educator alongside the participants in my study and had experienced firsthand the positive changes not only to my teaching,

but in my students' learning as well. At the time of the study, I had left the classroom and was teaching at the university level where I enthusiastically taught undergraduate students about whole language practices. My theoretical understanding of effective literacy instruction was grounded in the whole language philosophy. Whole language had truly been a career-saving change for me in a rather dull world of standardized teaching. If whole language had not been introduced to my professional practices, I can state with certainty, like several of the participants in my study, that I would not have remained in education. At the time, I could not have verbalized the source of my discontent, but it is obvious now that it was associated with the controlled "teacher-proof" materials I was required to use each day.

Despite my experiences as a whole language educator and those similar to mine, the educational climate had shifted since I left the classroom and whole language was no longer an "accepted" model for literacy instruction in schools. It was difficult at the time to understand why others around me did not embrace it as readily as I did. It was even more difficult at the time of this study to understand why such strong opposition to whole language existed and why, for all intents and purposes, whole language had been driven from mainstream practices. In an effort to understand this, I returned to these teachers with whom I had once taught to understand what happened. This study served as a follow up to the experiences of those whole language teachers to assist in understanding why whole language had failed and was no longer openly practiced or even discussed.

While the initial focus of the study did center on whole language instruction, it came to represent more than just whole language. Over time, it became apparent that the data in this study are about more than whole language. The data represent one of many

failed attempts to make lasting changes to teaching in our schools. Attempts at reform fail for various reasons, the least of which not being the ineffective and archaic structure of schools. “Creating democratic learning environments is difficult work, whether the context is the individual classroom or a whole school district” (Church, 1996, p. 31).

Democratic learning environments do not fit readily into a hierarchical system.

I have had the unique opportunity to experience reform efforts from both a teaching and administrative standpoint. This has allowed me to experience reform within the walls of my own classroom and observe and lead change efforts as an administrator. Seymour Sarason so aptly summarized my experiences over the last two decades as an educator. “Changing any important feature of the school culture is no easy affair, a conclusion that may well be the understatement of the century” (Sarason, 1996, p. 333). Kliebard (2002) stated that the structure of schools is antagonistic to curriculum reform.

I am fortunate to currently be employed in a school system where the professionalism of educators is held in high regard. Teachers’ opinions are respected, they have input into curriculum, text selection, and are provided a monthly forum directly with the superintendent. Teachers have the professional discretion to teach the curriculum using the instructional strategies they deem most effective in meeting their students’ needs. They are empowered to use what they know works. The superintendent makes our mission of teaching and learning clear each time he speaks publicly. As a leader, I feel empowered to focus my efforts on improving student achievement through school wide development of sound instructional practices that engage students in learning.

In my interview for the position of principal, I told my superiors that I could not let the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) become all I was about as a leader if I were to

become principal. I was still hired. I find that very encouraging. However, it does not diminish the very real pressure I feel to meet the measures of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Although AYP has been around for years now, at no time in my career have I felt these pressures more. The bottom line is that AYP stops at my door and I am ultimately held responsible for the results of the measures used to determine AYP. This is partially due to the very nature of the sanctions that come with the mandates, but also because of my new position. The requirements of AYP and of my own local evaluation brink on those standardized test results. My school can be labeled as failing for not measuring up and I can ultimately be labeled as failing with three-quarters of my evaluation also resting on those test results. The literature is clear on the importance of the building leadership in effective schools, which presents the additional challenge to become the effective leader you aspire to be without the threat of sanctions driving everything you do.

With NCLB comes the very real pressure to increase standardized test scores. This is the pressure that teachers also feel to have their students “measure up” on standardized tests each spring. In that sense, the local support for empowerment loses some of its impact. It would be naïve to say that it does not impact my leadership or the choices teachers make in their classrooms. The legislation has robbed us, at least partially, of our professionalism and empowerment to always teach and lead in ways that we know are best for students. In the end, the federal government mandates really have the last say in what we do because of that influence. Standardized tests do not measure the significant things we observe and experience with our students each day. Knowing this makes it difficult for teachers to trust that good teaching will produce the results “we” need on the standardized tests.

Situated where I am today, looking at where we are today and looking back at the whole language movement of yesterday, I believe there are various reasons why the initiative died in the school system where my study took place. I will discuss those reasons in more detail in chapter seven. However, I think it is important to acknowledge upfront some major errors that we made as whole language educators that contributed to the demise of whole language in the public schools. If we truly wanted there to be opportunity to examine our practices as language educators, we had to be open to forums of debate about our practices.

As whole language educators, we failed to acknowledge important facts that contributed to the failure of our attempts to change classroom instruction. We failed to legitimate the thoughts of those who did not readily embrace whole language practices as effective for all students and we failed to acknowledge the validity of their opposing views. Most detrimental of all, we failed to acknowledge how the shifting power structures that resulted from whole language would attempt to dismantle the status quo and make us vulnerable to resistance and inevitable failure.

#### Opposition to Whole Language

Schools, for the most part, are eager to have parental involvement within the schools. Many have created ways to increase and encourage parent involvement within the schools. Having parental support and input often creates a more democratic form of decision making and provides the parental support that schools know is important to student success. Over the past decade parents have become more empowered about the decisions that affect the schooling of their children.

Although there are few instances of lasting change in the power status of teachers, that is not the case with parents and others in educational decision making (Sarason, 1990). Schools across the nation now have parent advisory committees that seek parental input into the decisions being made at the school and system level. Parents are assigned to committees from long range planning to textbook adoption. In the same way parental involvement can have a huge positive impact on schools, this influence can also work to impede change within the school or school system.

As in the case with whole language, some parents objected to it and became catalysts to its demise. Central to schooling is the battle to determine the purpose of schooling and how and what is taught. Parents offer differing perspectives on how schools should work and how teaching should be conducted. Whole language practices were counter to what most parents knew and understood about teaching and learning. Many called whole language practices into question and made efforts to diminish its effects. Whole language went against the grain of their perceptions of schooling. Drastic changes in classroom practices will require a deliberate effort to educate parents and bring them along as partners in those changes.

Schools implementing whole language found they had great opposition from parent groups, particularly those of the conservative far right. "Opposition to public education and advocacy of back-to-basics and phonics have historically been part of the agenda of the religious right (Goodman, 2004, p. 59). Whole language was considered "another secular humanistic invention to be feared" (Berliner, 1997, p.406). Many of the parents who opposed what they believed to be whole language went to school boards and administrators to voice their discontent. Berliner argued that members of the far right

"believe their demands are divinely sanctioned" (1997, p. 383). For this reason, he believes there are no compromises when it comes to dealing with the conservative right because they care most about getting their way.

"If you are of the Christian Right, to be pragmatic, to give in, to compromise, to bargain or negotiate--that is, to engage in politics--is to lose to Satan" (Berliner, 1997, p. 383). He argues that this gave school officials no ground to stand on in attempting to deal with the concerns of these parents in a rational manner. The momentum of the movement of the Far Right gained legitimacy in the eyes of the public and the press once conservatives gained control of the White House (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). The ultimate goal of those in the Christian Right was to abolish public education and to hinder its growth rather than work to improve public schools.

On the other hand, according to Apple and Oliver (1996) the voices of these parents were treated as attempts at censorship and not taken seriously. Such reaction to the parents only caused the concern to increase. The groups of parents who are in opposition to school reform "do not view raising objections as censorship; it is protecting the entire range of things that are at the center of their being" (Apple & Oliver, 1996, p. 52). In many ways, as whole language educators, we contributed to their fears of whole language.

Our inability to define whole language and our ignorance of poor teaching practices that took place in the name of whole language contributed to their escalating fears about whole language. "Used to a structured, old-order way of teaching, they assume this new way is sloppy, careless, and without standards and expectations. On top of that, many witnessed firsthand the illegible handwriting, abominable spelling, and lack

of attention to conventions in writing in their children's work" (Routman, 1996, p. 37-38). As whole language educators, I believe we were naïve about the requirements needed to change the perceptions of parents. Concerted efforts to inform parents about the changes were needed at the onset of implementation. I think their reactions to the challenges whole language made to the status quo were grossly underestimated.

The reaction of the school administration and the board members sent ordinary citizens into the arms of the Right (Apple & Oliver, 1996). Many parents got involved in the conservative movement and were determined to have their voices represented. Many ran in local school board races in an attempt to create a new, conservative Christian school board. Many succeeded. Across the country, conservatives were being elected to local school boards and by 1995, 1,700 politically active committees had been set up in various districts (Gaddy, Hall & Marzano, 1996). The efforts of parents to gain a foothold in positions of influence and power were reflective of the age old battle to determine the purpose of schools and schooling.

We were also naïve about what is required to change the practices of teachers. As a result many practices were called whole language that had little to do with the philosophy. Sarason discussed the challenge of changing teacher practices when teachers were attempting to learn new math. "No one formulated the problem as one requiring teachers to unlearn and learn—to give up highly overlearned ways of thinking at the same time that they were required to learn new procedures and new ways of conceptualizing" (Sarason, 1996, p. 53). This same realization is true with whole language learning as well. We approached the implementation as that of learning something new or adding to

instead of unlearning and relearning. As a result, some teachers merely added to existing practices.

Those in education only worsened matters through their lack of ability to define whole language and explain its components to parents. Routman (1996) stated that our inability to define whole language under the guise that it was too complex allowed others to define it for us. This resulted in many teachers claiming to "do whole language" who had little or no understanding of what it is. "Many teachers nationwide have grabbed onto the term whole language before understanding it" (Routman, 1996, p. 37).

I know from personal experience alone that I heard teacher after teacher call the literature-based reading series a whole language basal. "Unfortunately, much of what is called whole language is simply a generic offering of some specific teaching/learning strategies which are delivered according to a whole language formula" (Rich, 1985, p.717). This left parents and policy makers to believe that teachers did not know what they were doing and gave the policy makers and parents yet another scapegoat for the ills of education. We tend to become distraught about those things about which we are uncomfortable.

Not only did whole language educators alienate parents, there was some separation from opposing professional views about whole language. Along with individual teachers' misconceptions of whole language and how it is defined, similar to misconceptions of the progressive movement, experts in the field of whole language could not agree on a concise definition. The debate about best literacy instructional practices was not new to the whole language movement. This debate has existed for as long as there has been formalized schooling. The difference was the way in which whole

language educators closed off the perspectives of others in the field. The level of tolerance for the beliefs of others was low and with it brought ramifications (Routman, 1996). “Believing that if it’s theoretically inconsistent with whole language in any way, it’s wrong, some of us have loudly proclaimed that any instruction of a ‘part’ is not whole language” (Routman, 1996, p. 51).

Prominent educators spoke openly about their concerns about the process approach to literacy instruction being suitable for all students. Lisa Delpit and Jacqueline Irvine were among the educators who questioned the effectiveness of this approach with black students.

While publicly saying that we need to hear all the voices, some of us also say, by our actions, that all voices in the profession are not equally respected. While talking loudly about the respect we must show all students and how we need to build on students’ strengths, we have not always shown that same respect to our colleagues by actively listening to what they have to say (Routman, 1996, p. 51).

My own personal reaction to those opposing whole language at the time I was immersed in its implementation was much like that which Routman describes. In a recent rereading of sections of Lisa Delpit’s book, *Other People’s Children*, my comments in the margins reflect my initial defensive response to her genuine concern for black students and process approaches to literacy instruction.

Lisa Delpit expressed some of the same concerns as parents over the seeming lack of skill instruction. She stated that while it was not necessarily process writing itself that kept students from learning skills, she did express concerns about some teachers using these approaches to teach writing. “However, writing process advocates often give the

impression that they view the direct teaching of skills to be restrictive to the writing process at best, and at worst, politically repressive to students already repressed by a racist educational system” (Delpit, 1995, p. 18). This concern was expressed by Delpit, whose own research and experiences demonstrated the need for a more explicit model of skills instruction with black students. Church felt it was imperative that whole language critics be addressed. She recommended that time be taken to address weak or criticized areas of whole language to be able to move forward and avoid the casting aside of whole language (1996). The reluctance of whole language educators to be open to debate about weaknesses did contribute to whole language being cast aside.

Another faction, although not new, that emerged at about the same time period during the 1980s were the views of the neoconservatives. They argued that academic standards were eroded and that student achievement had diminished. Whole language became the scapegoat for everything from declining test scores to illiteracy rates (Routman, 1996). With that came the renewed focus on accountability and standardized testing as the measure of accountability. “Above all, schools and educators should be made “accountable”; they should be required to provide objective evidence of their accomplishments” (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 137). This same mindset can be traced back to the scientific managers and still has persisted in 2004 with reform efforts currently focused on accountability, standardized test scores, and standardized teaching practices much like that at the turn of the century.

As a result of the focus on test scores, public confidence waned due to a perceived decline of standardized test scores. According to the *Sandia Report*, there has been a general pattern of stable student achievement on the National Assessment for Educational

Progress (NAEP) and even gains in some areas. Many factors such as the demographic composition of the student body also play into standardized test results, yet whole language became the scapegoat for all of these test results. The pressures to increase test scores that officials claimed had declined "caused teachers and whole schools to abandon the emphasis on literature in favor of a skills approach, which they believed would result in more positive test results" (Apple & Oliver, 1996, p. 34). Test scores are the single most common method used by administrators, the public, and policy makers to evaluate school effectiveness. Even though whole language allowed teachers to closely assess student progress using a variety of methods, it was not what the public demanded. This created a formidable obstacle for many teachers and districts. There was evidence to the contrary, and while it may have fallen on deaf ears, whole language educators did not engage in an opposing public campaign to expose the fallacy of these claims.

Those outside the classroom were once again driving the instructional practices inside the classroom. Much of what caused whole language and other reform efforts to fail existed in the hierarchical power structure of schooling. "While the focus of critics has been on the perceived lack of attention to skills, this really masks a broader concern among both teacher and the community about the notion of teachers sharing power and control with their students" (Church, 1996, p. 30). Whole language upset the existing power structures within the schools and brought the status quo that has been in existence in schools for the last century into question.

### Power Structure of Schools

The power relationships within schools are so familiar to those of us who have been enculturated in the world of school that most of us are not even aware of the

existence of the structure. Just as it was for the first grade teachers on my hallway, we were conducting school the way they knew best, the way it had always been done, the concept of schooling and how it should be conducted has changed relatively little over the past century. "The strength of the status quo-- its underlying axioms, its pattern of power relationships, its sense of tradition and therefore what seems right, natural, and proper- almost automatically rules out options for change in status quo" (Sarason, 1990, p.35).

As teachers, we have historically been unable to see a need for change because we were unaware of what was truly in existence. Our familiarity with the system has led to blind acceptance. To be capable of considering alternatives, we had to be dissatisfied with the existing practices (Sarason, 1990). The first and most difficult step in implementing change in schools is the recognition of a problem "because we all have been socialized most effectively to accept the power relationships characteristic of our schools as right, natural, and proper, outcomes to the contrary notwithstanding" (Sarason,1990, p.7). When power is perceived to be in the hands of others (administration, policy makers, etc.), the teachers see themselves as powerless to institute change (Thomas & Rinehart, 1994).

Schools, like any social system, can be described in terms of the power relationships within that system (Sarason, 1990). Power is always distributed unevenly within any social system and a rationale exists for that distribution (Sarason, 1990). According to Sarason (1990) the differentiation in power within the schools is justified by tradition and as a necessity to ensure achievement of the goals of the system. Schools are very similar to one another in the distribution of power and the rationale behind the

structure of that distribution. "Schools are a hierarchical society to fit a hierarchical society" (Edelsky, 1992, p.324). Sarason (1990) contends that the failure of school reform is in part due to the inadequate and inappropriate power structure that continues to exist in school systems. "We know from our early experiences with whole language that even our less overtly political challenges to the status quo did not sit easily within the hierarchichal school system" (Church, 1996, p. 31).

Historically, teachers have had little input into the decision making process that takes place within schools and school systems. A top-down structure has been in existence with policy trickling down from the top to the teachers. Decisions about what is taught are handed down by policy makers from the legislature to state and local school boards who have little or no understanding of the structure of the system. The textbooks that are purchased for use in teaching state and county mandated curricula further drive not only what is taught, but how. This leaves teachers with little input into their own practices which is often readily accepted as it was for me and my first grade colleagues.

Opportunities for reform have been dictated by those outside the system in much the same fashion. "Those outside the system with the responsibility for articulating a program for reform have nothing resembling a holistic conception of the system they seek to influence" (Sarason, 1990, p.26). The edicts are handed down to teachers as though all teachers and students are identical and as though solving problems is merely a matter of fixing them and what they do each day. Teachers are expected to carry out daily instruction with little input into what is taught and what materials are used which, in turn, affects how students are treated. This is done without regard to the change process itself. Duke (2004) noted that "understanding something about change is a prerequisite for

accomplishing change” (p. 213). Past educational reform efforts have done little in the way of laying groundwork or preparation for change.

The very people who are affected most by the decisions of the policy makers are never consulted about implementation of changes. This leaves the artist, the teacher, trying to sculpt a creation of an unseen image with unfamiliar materials. With so much of their day mandated by others, teachers and students do not have a vested interest in the way their day is structured, no forum for their opinions, and view themselves "as the objects of unilateral actions" (Sarason, 1990, p.).

Instead of considering the context within which change is implemented, attempts at reform have focused on one part or problem as though the system within which they are situated is healthy in its current existence (Sarason, 1990). Those who are charged with making recommendations for improving education believe the focus should be on a variety of issues which in no way relate to the structure of the system.

They think they know who the villains are: inadequate teachers, irresponsible parents, irrelevant or inadequate curricula, unmotivated students from whom too little is expected or demanded, an improvement-defeating bureaucracy, a lowering of standards for promotion and graduation, and a lack of competitiveness that would serve as a goad for schools to take steps to improve themselves (Sarason, 1990, p.13).

As a result of such thinking on reform, teachers are required to implement changes that may or may not fit within the existing colors. In that case, the teacher must paint over existing images to create new ones or merely scrape away the old layers of paint to find they have returned to an image of long ago, an image that has already been

portrayed but has been touched up with new colors. “Any attempt to introduce change into the school setting requires, among other things, changing the existence of regularities in some way. The intended outcomes involve changing an existing regularity, eliminating one or more of them, or producing new ones” (Sarason, 1996, p. 96). The lack of change within schools to existing regularities has been counter to efforts to reform educational practice.

The teacher must stroke the paintbrush one direction and then another, seeking to find the "right image" because the art critics (policy makers and parents) have required such to eliminate the perceived problems of the portrait. For the outsider the portrait has changed, but it is just a matter of time before the cracks underneath will surface through the top layer, requiring yet another coat of paint. Little in the portrait ever changes without altering the background on which the portrait is constructed.

Whole language provided an opportunity to change the background of the portrait and for the first time the power structure within the system began to change. It was the first time that change came from the ground up, from the classroom all the way to the board room (Goodman, 1992). For example, after they had experienced a year of approaching language arts instruction in a more holistic, meaningful way, the teachers in Albermarle County took their arguments for change to the local school board. The teachers spoke spontaneously and enthusiastically about what was occurring in their classrooms. The way these teachers interacted with their students, each other and system administrators changed (Walsh, 1993). The teachers were taking a vested interest in teaching and classroom practices. Teachers felt empowered by having confidence in their knowledge level about teaching and learning and made instructional decisions and took

actions based upon their own knowledge not what others told them to do (Thomas & Rinehart, 1994). Teachers took ownership for their professional practices and, in turn, allowed students to take ownership for learning.

Just as any instance where power structures begin to change, those in power in Albermarle County were also uneasy with changes in the power structure that were taking place as a result of the actions of teachers who saw a need for change and believed in what they were doing. The power structure in Albermarle, like many districts implementing whole language, changed from a top-down model to a more horizontal model (Walsh, 1992).

As the influence of whole language began to sweep the nation, teachers began to chip away at the old layers of paint on their portraits of teaching, but as has historically been the case, those in power did not adjust well to the new images. "Those who wield power, do not look kindly on any possible dilutions of that power" (Sarason, 1990, p.55). All the way down the hierarchy to the level of principal, increased teacher power was viewed as less power for others. There is no demand among policy makers, or the public generally, to advance a change in the power structure within the schools or school systems (Sarason, 1990).

Therefore, initiatives like those in Albermarle County are soon halted due to the resistance to change from those outside the classroom. Much like the change process for the participants in my study, the change process for the teachers in Albermarle County was stopped by outside forces. And just as it did for the participants in my study, in the end, the halted efforts for change in Albermarle County came down to power (Walsh,

1993). “Any non-trivial effort at institutional change that is insensitive to the issue of power courts failure” (Sarason, 1996, p. 89).

Walsh described the efforts to change as upsetting the power structures. “For a brief time, schools were being run by educators, not by politicians. Teachers were sitting in the board’s seats. They were educating the board members. That is not the way it is supposed to be” (Walsh, 1993, p. 259). Those who resisted the changes in Albermarle, as well as, in my study, were not only those in the role of policy makers such as board members but parents and other educators as well. “Sometimes it’s not just forces outside our classrooms that are resistant. Often we teachers fight to maintain the status quo. It seems a lot easier to be told what to do (by a teacher’s manual) or to continue doing what we’ve always done than it is to reexamine our teaching and make changes” (Routman, 1996, p. 58). Those oppositions served as blockades to widespread change in teaching practices.

#### Statement of the Problem

Despite public perception of its evils and weaknesses, many teachers embraced the whole language philosophy. Some, like those in my study, continue to feel strongly about their commitment to it even though they may not be able to openly express this commitment. Regardless of the positive impact of whole language, the public and policy makers have once again decided for teachers and students, and whole language has been abandoned and even forbidden in many parts of the country. At the time of this study, a pattern emerged similar to the cyclical patterns throughout the history of reform and that was a nationwide push to move "back to basics" with a focus on skills and phonics instruction in literacy instruction. This is reflective of the school of thought of the

scientific managers that has been the most influential school of thought and has driven curriculum practices since the turn of the century. The definition of what qualifies as science is very narrowly defined. With each new attempt at mainstream educational reform, there has followed a move back to the specificity and standardization of scientifically-based instructional practices. The history of educational reform has shown that it is less of a move back in practice as it is a move back in rhetoric. The history of educational reform demonstrates that more traditional practices have never truly been abandoned. “What is not recognized or verbalized cannot be dealt with, and if it is important and not recognized, efforts to introduce substantive change, particularly in the classroom, result in the illusion of change” (Sarason, 1996, p. 110).

The very principles of whole language were called into question and, once again, the questions are raised and answered by those other than educators. The voices of the teachers once again remain unheard. Over the past six years since I initially collected these data, the battle to mandate what occurs in the classroom continues. The efforts to control teaching through political mandates continued today as those did in 1998 and before. In fact, with the newest legislation that accompanied the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the latest mandates and accompanying accountability measures and consequences, under No Child Left Behind, are more restrictive and harsh than ever before. The public has continued to demand tangible evidence of student learning in a form with which they are comfortable and with which they believe they understand. The No Child Left Behind legislation included the following key elements:

- Every school in every school system across the United States will be required to demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress.
- Adequate Yearly Progress is accomplished by all students meeting academic standards on yearly state exams.
- Students in all subgroups based on poverty levels, race, ethnicity, special education, English as a second language and gender must meet the yearly academic standards.
- Schools meeting the Adequate Yearly Progress standards will continue to receive federal funding.
- Failure to meet Adequate Yearly Progress will result in the school being labeled as Needs Improvement.
- Repeated failures will result in sanctions against the school ranging from withdrawal of federal funds to parent school choice to the state taking over the operations of the school.
- All students, in all subgroups, are expected to demonstrate proficiency in reading and math on state exams by the year 2014.

Goodman (2004) states that the effects of NCLB will devastate public education. “It is designed to force conformity and achievement of impossible goals through a system of punishments of local and state authorities, administrators, teachers, students and parents” (Goodman, 2004, p. 7). He further notes that NCLB removes the control of every aspect of education from the local districts. “NCLB seeks to solve two problems—1. To reduce the costs of public schooling, and 2. To demoralize and deskill teachers in order to discredit the public schools in which they teach” (Goodman, 2004, p. 25). At the heart of

every back to basics reform movement lies the direct use of mandates to deskill teachers and teacher proof instructional practices as a simplistic solution to the question of how to improve education. These mandates are imbedded in political efforts to control schools and schooling. They preserve the current power structures within the hierarchical system and are more focused on preserving these existing power structures than with improving schools. This power structure remains devoid of teacher representation.

Until we provide avenues for teacher representation at the forefront of reform, reform efforts will continue to be devoid of their insight and perspective. One way to help in understanding the neglected voice in reform, the voice of the teacher, is to document their experience during reform movements. Representation of the teachers' perspective on reform can also provide insight into the cyclical pattern of failed reform efforts in education through documentation of all sides of the issue.

It is imperative that we understand the setting in which reform takes place if the implementation of changes is to be successful. A large part of that understanding lies in the documentation of the perspectives of the various stakeholders in the reform effort. To date, little documentation of the perspectives of teachers in dealing with reform has been collected. "We have relatively few studies on what teaching in our schools does to teachers and other personnel" (Sarason, 1990, p. 143). The focus of much research is to document what can be "measured," not what we need to understand (Sarason, 1990).

The purpose of this study was to access the teachers' voices and document their perspectives about how they cope with curriculum mandates like the current move to change language arts instruction and how such mandates impact their professional practices. Through teachers' input, new perspectives on curricular changes can be

documented which can inform reform efforts in the future. The documentation of reform through an insider's lens will bring to the forefront issues with which others may not be aware.

### The Research Question

The following question provided direction for this inquiry: How did one group of whole language teachers resolve conflicts that arose between their philosophical beliefs about language arts instruction and district mandates?

### Conclusion

The power structure within schools and school systems has historically been devoid of teachers' perspectives on instruction and implementation of educational reform. Whole language allowed teachers to have a voice in what happens in the classroom. Positive results occurred as teachers became empowered in the whole language movement and the power structure within schools began to shift. This is now ended, and power has been stripped from teachers once again. Whole language has become a "dirty" word and to some has become synonymous to a no phonics, no skills approach to literacy instruction. The understanding of how these shifts in power relations and literacy instructional practices transpired and to understand the impact these changes had on teachers and has continued to covertly have on their literacy instruction can inform future reform efforts in literacy instruction.

Educators in this country are very vulnerable in their efforts to make schooling more open and responsive, more participatory and meaningful. Because educators are so vulnerable, it is crucial that the stories of those who have struggled--and still struggle--be told (Walsh, 1993, p. 252).

Through the voices of those who are most affected by the change process, it is my hope that this inquiry will help to inform future reform efforts by situating the events of the whole language reform effort within the one of the contexts in which it took place.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There are many factors that affect decision making, reform issues, and curricular changes in schools. By looking at reform historically, we can inform current efforts and possibly be more effective in efforts to improve schools. According to Sarason, in order for reform to be successful, the "process of implementation requires an understanding of the settings in which the ideas have to take root" (1990, p.99). In reviewing the literature on the history of reform in and out of the field of language arts, I found that my searches brought me back to a handful of researchers whose work was sighted throughout my investigation. Because the literature on reform could easily fill a moderately-sized library, I decided to return to what appear to be seminal works in the field of reform for the purpose of this study.

In this chapter, I reviewed the literature on reform that was most related to my study. To provide a better understanding of the current move to "back to basics" in language arts curricula, it was important to look at change historically. To touch on the many layers of relevant literature and lay the groundwork for my discussion on the related reforms in language arts instruction, I included a review of literature on the teacher's role historically in reform issues, the factors that influenced change and stability in curricula, and because this study centered around literacy instruction, I included a brief review of the changes in literacy instruction over the past century up to current reform efforts in literacy instruction. I concluded the chapter with a discussion of whole

language, its influence on changes in literacy instruction as well as a brief discussion of the move away from whole language to more prescribed practices.

### Defining the Teacher's Role Through Gender

To better understand the current role of teachers in decision making and reform issues, it is important to look at their role historically in the educational system within which they work. Before the induction of mass elementary education in the late nineteenth century, men accounted for the majority of individuals who held teaching positions in this country. Shortly after the turn of the century, women had made their way into a majority of the teaching positions.

In a time when "women had only a few choices of occupation; and compared with most--laundering, sewing, cleaning, or working in a factory--teaching offered numerous attractions. It was genteel, paid reasonably well, and required little special skill or equipment" (Apple, 1986, p. 66). Teaching became an avenue for upward mobility for women and as the number of schools increased, so did the number of women teachers. Despite popular belief that women entered teaching because of their love for children or desire to marry, they usually entered teaching because they needed work. The opportunity for women to enter teaching was largely a result of men having more job opportunities available to them rather than working on the farms (Grumet, 1988).

Although teaching was more attractive than most jobs available to women, they were not of equal status or equal pay with the men in the profession. As compulsory schooling grew, school districts began to hire women teachers for less money to offset the costs of opening more schools and educating larger numbers of students. This demand for teachers and shortage of funding, put women in a position to receive lower salaries

than their male colleagues. "Women were paid approximately two-thirds of what their male counterparts received" (Apple, 1986, p. 61). Men working as teachers had an average salary of \$15.44 per month while women working in the same position earned \$5.38 on average (Grumet, 1988). As teaching positions filled with women, teaching soon became viewed as women's work.

Women's work is considered somehow inferior or of less status simply because it is women who do it. Added to this is the fact that 'those occupations which became defined as female were expanded at a time when the skills needed to do them were [seen as being] commonly held or easily learned and when there was a particularly high demand for labour, or an especially large pool of women seeking work (Apple, 1986, p. 57).

Teaching was viewed as merely an extension of a woman's work at home. Rather than being viewed in a professional way, teaching, like other service work and 'caring professions,' remain part of the relationship between work inside and outside the home (Apple, 1986).

Due to large numbers of immigrants, the demand for teachers increased. It was cheaper to employ women teachers at lower salaries allowing local boards to gain more teachers for the amount of money spent. Due to the large number of women in teaching positions, rationalization of the job increased and control of teaching and curricula increased as well. Not only in teaching but "in every occupational category, women are more apt to be proletarianized than men" (Apple, 1986, p. 33) There has been a distinct correlation historically between the entry of large numbers of women into an occupation and the gradual modification of the job. When jobs are filled by women, attempts from

the outside to control the content of that job and how it is accomplished greatly increases. This trend can be traced back to the early role of women as teachers in the workplace. “The ideal teacher was one who could control the children and be controlled by her superiors” (Grumet, 1988, p. 43). There tends to be a division between the conception and definition of the job and the individual who carries out the responsibilities of that job. According to Apple (1986), deskilling and depowering of jobs has been a strong force in issues concerning women's labor.

Edelsky (1996) defines deskilling as:

A process in which occupational skills are redefined so that former skills entailing judgment and intuition and a sense of start-to-finish control over large work spheres become atomized, then behaviorally described, then appropriated by management. The purpose is to cut costs and increase efficiency as well as enhance management's ability to assess the execution of now-atomized skills (p.175).

With few choices of occupations and being accustomed to working under a patriarchal structure, women mostly did what male supervisors ordered. This is not to say that all women workers, including teachers, were passive. There were many who took direct stands on labor issues but inequities between genders clearly existed. There was little opportunity for women to serve in leadership roles. “There was little incentive to choose teaching as a lifetime career as contracts were extended by local boards for only one term at a time and the positions of principal or assistant principal were definitely closed to women” (Grumet, 1988, p. 38).

This served to compound the obstacles incurred by women working in a patriarchal structure and despite the greater proportion of women teachers, most did not move into leadership positions. “Thus, since the majority of teachers were women, it seemed reasonable to set up a bureaucracy of men to control them” (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 254). Many men left the classroom to go into administration and became leaders or principals of primary and elementary schools (Apple, 1986). The traditionally patriarchal system continued to be such even with the influx of women into the profession.

It is not possible that "all of teaching be understood as totally related to patriarchy, though why it is structured the way it is due in very large part to the history of male dominance and gender struggles" (Apple, 1986, p. 34). Teachers, as a result of external controls through rationalization of the job, become good managers of what goes on in the classroom but have a decrease in control over curriculum. “Accordingly, female teachers complied with the rationalization and bureaucratization that pervaded the common schools as the industrial culture saturated the urban areas” (Grumet, 1988, p. 55).

Without recognizing the traditional dissemination of power and how it relates to gender within the educational system, it is not possible to understand what has happened to teaching and curriculum over time.

Education is not among the more respected of professions: Indeed, many members of society do not view it as a profession at all. Teaching is viewed as women’s work with children. The relatively low pay, lack of autonomy, centrally controlled curriculum, and blue collar unionism have depressed the status of

schooling to a lower level in our society than other professions (Lambert, et. al, 1996, p. 5).

Over time, this structure has left the predominately female population of teachers with little input into their own profession and with little value as change agents. Teachers have had defined roles in implementing curriculum that 'others' designed to address needs as perceived by those other than classroom teachers. Programs are mandated for teacher use in the classroom in an effort equalize the playing field for all students.

This practice is still strongly evident in today's schools with NCLB requirements for the use of specific materials by schools and teachers. When programs do not work well in producing results, the program does not catch the blame. "Since the programs are "scientifically" proven to be fail-proof, the teachers get the blame. They must be "reeducated" (Goodman, 2004, p. 97).

Despite the fact that they have little say in educational change, teachers and schools are continuously charged with implementing changes imposed on schools by outside forces. This keeps the existing top-down, patriarchal structure in place and "the fact remains that the strongest pressures for change have come from outside the school system" (Sarason, 1996, p. 9). Schools have become the avenue for addressing social problems and teachers have become the soldiers to "carry out the mission." Along with lack of the teacher's role in decision making and reform are other factors that affect change and stability in schools and curricula. I will now turn my discussion to those factors.

## Determinants of Curricular Change

The structure that currently exists within schools and school systems has been around for over a century. "By the 1870s, the structure of corporate school boards, superintendents as experts, principals as administrators, and teachers as all-purpose agents of society was in place"(Cuban, 1979, p. 143). Through this structure, many attempts at change have occurred. Most have been unsuccessful, particularly those issues dealing with curricular changes that directly impact what happens in the classroom. "No major social institution has been more subject to pressure for change than the public school system" (Sarason, 1996, p. 9).

The notion of change fascinates educational researchers and practitioners. The spicy tang of power, buried within the idea of intentional change, has lured many writers into searching out how it occurs, why it seldom turns out as anticipated, and what can be done to improve the process. Curriculum, one version of planned school change, has been no exception to that lure (Cuban, 1979, p. 141).

There are many factors that play into the change process within the complex organization of the educational system. "It is all too easy to pinpoint a problem *in* schools and to propose changes *within* schools, unaware that the problem did not arise only in the context of schools" (Sarason, 1996, p. 12). There are both external and internal influences that affect curricular changes.

### Schools as Change Agents for Social Issues

Over the last century, many social changes have had an impact on schooling. "Rightly or wrongly, public education has been regarded as the first line of defense against problems that threaten the nation" (Duke, 2004, p. 52). Schools are culturally

bound and have been used as a tool to address social problems. "Social problems, processes, and changes external to schools impinge dramatically on schools and create problems for them" (Sarason, 1990, p. 34). Some of the most prominent social issues to have an impact on schools include industrialization, progressivism, the Cold War, and national defense concerns. Schools as they are can be confused with what some think should be (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). "It is cliché to say that we are a nation of immigrants, but it is not cliché to say that few people realize how the pluralism of our society has made schools frequent scenes of ideological battle" (Sarason, 1996, p.24). Differing views on the purpose of schooling is central to the political battles to determine what is taught in schools.

Out of industrialization came the influence of uniformity and efficiency as schools began to model after industry. Standardized curriculum and texts were used to ensure tight control of what was taught and how. Students were the 'product' in the industry of schooling. In addition, large sums of money were spent on vocational-technical education to train and better prepare students for the needs of the new industrialized work force.

During the early twentieth century, progressivism became an influential force in curriculum development. The school's role went beyond the academic and moral to a concern for the child's entire welfare. This new focus on the whole child had an impact on curriculum and the development of child-centered practices. The goal was to link curriculum, avoid teaching subjects in isolation and place the child at the center of the learning process. During this time period, most influence of the progressive movement was in private and university-based schools. Another result of the progressive movement

was the idea of a differential curriculum for students. Preparing students for various careers was seen as a 'socially efficient' use of schools (Cuban, 1979). This view placed schools in the role of social change agent. Schools came to be viewed as the institution to prepare children for adult roles, morally and academically.

Following World War II, there came a booming economy and a large expansion of public education (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). Soon after the war, another impact of social forces on schooling came with perceived threats to national security. As a result of the insecure military position with Russia, the National Defense Education Act was passed. The gap between our technological advances in the military and the field of science and that of the Russians was linked to deficiencies in the schooling that students were receiving at the time. School was viewed as being too easy and responsible for intellectual decay. In response to this insecurity, the 1950s and 60s brought about a "movement to inject new scientific content and academic vigor into the classroom" (Cuban, 1979, p. 149). New curricula and texts were developed to address the perceived need for tougher academic standards in schools.

By the end of the 1960s, "\$200 million in federal funds had been invested in curriculum" to address these concerns (Cuban, 1979, p. 151). New texts and curricula were developed as a result of this funding and soon became labeled with titles such as "new math." The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was developed from concerns over equity in education, but was also driven by concern over America competing worldwide. "Competing world powers pointed to America's poor and minority populations as demonstrations of that American economic and political

systems could not serve as the effective model for other nations” (Goodman & Goodman, 2004, p. 16).

The turmoil that surrounds social changes will inevitably make its way into school as they seek to accommodate these changes (Sarason, 1990). The exact impact of these changes has not been documented but a clear correlation exists between the two but it is also important not to overestimate the strength of that impact (Sarason, 1990). By the 1970s, it became obvious that the schools might not be able to accomplish all that was pushed upon them in the 1950s and 1960s.

In those years, schools were seen not only as providers of knowledge and cultural uplift but also as centers for hobby and recreational interests, objects of ethnic or community pride, solvers of social problems, purveyors of services for individuals and their families, and engines of economic growth. In retrospect, many of these expectations were unrealistic, but this was not understood at the time. And when the economy soured and social problems soared in the 1970s, these expectations became standards against which schools were judged and found wanting (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p.130).

Americans tend to expect schools to fix all the social problems faced by its citizens. In so many ways, schools are asked to accomplish the impossible. “By expecting so much of our schools, Americans allow the schools’ functions to become so diffuse as to detract from the quality of service to students” (Kliebard, 2002, p. 125). In fact, it has become the expectation that schools should be the solution to the social problems in society, which loses sight of the purpose of schools. “Schools and teachers are affected by economic, social, and cultural change, to be sure, but economic, social and cultural

change are not educational change” (Duke, 2004, p. 30). In the same way the National Defense and Education Act impacted change in curriculum, other types of legislation and court decisions have also affected what is taught in schools. Sarason (1996) states that it is a myth that school cultures are non-political and that it is not possible to reference schools without reference to the federal government.

### Legislated Changes and Court Decisions

Education has seemed to remain at the forefront of political campaigns and state and federal legislative sessions. "Anxious for quick, politically acceptable analyses of, and solutions to horrendous problems, federal and state governments identify education as the arena for attention (Edelsky, 1996, p. 174). Improving education seems to be a cause for which everyone seems to have an idea. “Federal reformers tend to believe that local practice is bankrupt of ideas, and often seek to reform it by improving on or replacing local knowledge” (Sarason, 1996, p. 85).

Since the 1980’s, multiple efforts, implemented by the federal government in an effort to reform public education, have been underway. There have been many agendas raised with regard to educational reform with each year that passes. Top-down, state-mandated reforms have regularly been developed as solutions to problems in education. (Lambert, et. al., 1996). “But the adoption of projects did not insure successful implementation; moreover, successful implementation did not guarantee long-run continuation” (Sarason, 1996, p. 74).

With this approach to school improvement, often came the formation of various commissions to make recommendations for improving education followed by government legislation to improve our system of educating students. Unfortunately, these

commissions often provide the foundation for legislated mandates to which schools are expected to adhere. "Whether the result of lobbying by special interests or sweeping social changes that produced potent political coalitions, state and federal laws have either mandated specific courses for students or produced changes in what content was taught" (Cuban, 1979, p. 151).

One of the most significant pieces of legislation has been the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The ESEA, which had undergone many reauthorizations since its inception in 1965, continues to greatly impact educational reform and mandates placed upon schools to this day. One of the original tenets of the ESEA was to prove to the rest of the world that the United States government could provide equal opportunities for children living in poverty (Goodman & Goodman, 2004). The Title I section of the ESEA provided for the creation and funding for intervention programs for children who lived in poverty. During its reauthorization in 1994, funding for programs for children living in poverty continued. In 1999, during the next reauthorization, the focus shifted to educational excellence and accountability and the previous focus on intervention programs for students of poverty shifted to requirements that those students meet challenging standards (Duke, 2004).

Since that time, many commissions have been formed over the years to examine public education and determine the changes needed to provide a sound education for all children. There was a "veritable explosion" of documents and pronouncements during the Reagan and Bush administrations (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 3). Those appointed to these commissions are usually "people who have no experiential basis" for their

recommendations to the task at hand (Sarason, 1990). As a result, many of these recommendations have been based on faulty or limited information.

Federal officials have redefined and curtailed assistance to combat hunger, insufficient income, poor housing, unemployment, and poor health care, leaving teachers as the only public workers charged with the responsibility to help Americans (regardless of background) prepare themselves morally and mentally to compete in the world (Goodman & Goodman, 2004, p. 17).

During the Reagan administration, the changes to ESEA were based on the results of *A Nation at Risk*, which claimed that the nation's schools were ineffective to the point that our students and workers could not compete with international peers. The claims were touted as based on evidence although the evidence was never shared and the report blamed the lack of talent and motivation of teachers as a cause for the ineffective educational system (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). These claims were made repeatedly in the press and no one ever disputed the lack of documentation for these claims. Within a decade of the release of the report, the majority of all states had developed new standards for curriculum (Duke, 2004).

This trend continued during the Clinton administration calling for high academic standards, high-stakes testing, and parental choice (Goodman & Goodman, 2004). At the Educational Summit in 1999, solutions to the problems of education included adoption of academic standards by each state and examinations to measure student progress against these standards in addition to rewards and consequences that were based on students' test scores (Shannon, 2001). While Reagan's focus was a return to more

traditional standards for education, Clinton proposed school reform to prepare students with the skills needed for the future.

Within Clinton's proposals for the expected 1999 reauthorization of ESEA, state standards were set, state tests were written, a 10-year deadline for proficiency was proposed, reporting by categories would be required, annual yearly progress and the penalties were to follow in case of failure. Clinton included a block grant system, which allowed state officials more control of federal education funding (Goodman & Goodman, 2004, p. 20).

The most recent reauthorization of ESEA has taken place during the Bush administration under the name of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which actually includes many of the elements from the Clinton administration. Bush, however, included a centralized system to standardize curriculum and instruction, which would be enforced by strict accountability. These requirements were modeled after Bush's efforts to improve education when he was Governor of Texas.

The tight system required teachers to follow scripted lessons in commercially prepared guidebooks during reading and math instruction, to devote twice the instructional time to these subjects (limiting science, social studies, and the arts in the elementary school curriculum), and to prepare students to take yearly state examinations. School funding and continued employment were contingent on Texas students' from second grade through high school improving their scores on state tests (Goodman & Goodman, 2004, p. 20)

Oftentimes these laws are accompanied by federal and/or state grants with strict regulations and conditions. The grants often make it possible to purchase new materials

for implementation of the legislation. Funding and legislating of practices falls short, though, of bringing about significant changes in what is taught and how. According to Cuban (1979), the RAND Corporation found there was less impact from these federal funds when schools adhered to the strict terms of the grants. When monies are allocated in such a way to address problems in education, it can also leave the public with the perception that the "problems of schooling are like problems in mathematics in that they have clear answers" (Sarason, 1990, p.37).

The most recent of reform efforts imposed by the federal government falls under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. Goodman (2004) calls the NCLB legislation a direct attempt to privatize public education. He states that politicians understand that the American public perceives the public education as the avenue through which every child has the possibility at achieving the American dream (Goodman, 2004). "They exaggerate the weaknesses of the system into a crisis and divert attention away from the real school problems that stem from unequal and inadequate funding. They manufacture crisis, claiming schools are so bad they can't even teach kids to read and write, add and subtract" (Goodman, 2004, p. 5). This is another example of change being implemented from outside forces with little say from those who will carry out the implementation. The conception of the idea was separated from the execution of it. Beyond legislation, mandates placed upon schools and school systems can be the result of court decisions. Mandates handed down by judges can have a huge impact on what schools are expected to implement.

Court decisions involving teacher and student rights, religion and related issues are instances of judicial intervention into school curriculum (Cuban, 1979). One example

of this comes in the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision. Many changes took place during the years following the decision to desegregate schools. There were changes in the tracking of students, curriculum, texts, and course offerings as a result of this case. Although changes did result, the problems were not *fixed* as can be evidenced by similar issues being raised today. Many of the same issues dealing with equity in education, tracking and establishing a curriculum that represents the needs of all races of students that were brought to the forefront in the *Brown* decision remain open forums for discussion and legal issues. Like the *Brown* case, court decisions are often reflected in course offerings and curricular changes. If court decisions are made on a federal level, they can have far-reaching effects and influence more than curriculum and course offerings but the contents of the texts students use in school as well.

#### Textbooks Role in Change

The textbook is most often what is used by the teacher for classroom instruction and therefore, the textbook determines what will be passed on to students. It is estimated that 75 percent of the time elementary and secondary students are in class and 90 percent of homework time is spent using textbooks (Apple, 1986). As a result of the pervasive use of textbooks, what gets into books has a captive audience. In most instances, teachers use pre-packaged curriculum materials and follow a sequence that was dictated by a top down system that leaves little room for teacher input or adaptations (Luke, 1998). This is true despite the fact that such pre-packaged programs do not produce significant results in student achievement. “Programmatic instruction—where someone outside the classroom who cannot see either learners or teacher decides what the teacher should do next—has

never been successful beyond its own prescribed and limited objectives” (Smith, 1986, p. 69).

Apple (1986) suggests that the powerful influence of these textbooks has been overlooked when attempting to understand schools and how they work. He further states that "the curriculum in most American schools is not defined by courses of study or suggested programs but by one particular artifact, the standardized, grade-level specific text in mathematics, reading, social studies, science and so on" (Apple, 1986, p. 85).

When researching changes in curriculum and instruction, many have not acknowledged the significant role the textbook plays in curricular change and stability. “As for their overall social function, textbooks act as the interface between the officially state-adopted and sanctioned knowledge of the culture, and the learner” (Luke, 1988, p. 64). When considering the influence of texts on curriculum, the decisions made by the publishers about the content of these texts must be considered.

"Publishers are responsible for translating many of the national curriculum efforts into marketable products that textbook sales representatives sell to teachers" (Cuban, 1979, p. 154). This fact allots a great deal of power to textbook publishers to initiate changes in curriculum and possibly even teacher practices. "Yet most publishers, especially the larger, corporately owned ones, seldom initiate or take many risks in charting new directions in content" (Cuban, 1979, p. 154). The primary function of the textbook company is to make a profit.

The need for profit has caused publishers to be even less willing to take risks in publishing new materials. Instead, the emphasis is placed on developing and marketing a text so standard in content that it can be revised and used for years by many different

school districts. This often reduces the basis for publishing decisions to what will sell instead of what is important to know (Apple, 1986). This practice, while grounded in financial profit-making, has a huge influence on instruction across the nation.

It is not ideological uniformity or some political agenda that accounts for many of the ideas that are ultimately made or not made available to the larger public.

Rather it is the infamous 'bottom line' that counts. 'Ultimately...if there is any censorship, it concerns profitability. Books that are not profitable, no matter what their subject, are not viewed favorably (Apple, 1986, p. 97).

The attitude of publishing houses has turned from more traditional reasons to publish to the attitudes of capitalist business (Luke, 1988). "The twentieth-century selective tradition, the very process of cultural reproduction and transmission, has been mediated to an ever greater extent by the economic interests of corporate publishers" (Luke, 1988, p. 67).

With the onset of NCLB, publishers have experienced profits from the mandated use of phonics programs as part of the Reading First grants as well as increased revenues due to the increased testing requirements placed upon school systems. "Educational publishers, particularly the big three—McGraw-Hill, Houghton Mifflin, and Harcourt Brace—are identified as Bush stocks on Wall Street, paying record dividends since 2000. NCLB makes a bull market for business, but a bear market for public schools"(Goodman & Goodman, 2004, p. 25). In addition to publishers reaping benefits from NCLB, private industry has experienced increased profits as well. Under NCLB, the schools that have been deemed as "failures" must provide for the cost of outside tutorials for their students. This allows private companies that provide tutoring services to profit from the schools

labeled as underperforming. Goodman and Goodman (2004) call this an attempt to privatize public education.

Another factor that plays into publishing decisions is that of state textbook adoption lists. Many states have approved textbook adoption lists from which schools must purchase books in order to receive government money for their purchase. In order to profit, it is important for the publisher to get on the list in various states. As a result, some states carry a great deal more influence in determining what goes into a text. Because of their population, California and Texas alone can account for over 20 percent of the total sales for a company, making them very important states in textbook sales. The influence of these states on the 'market' will also influence the content of the books. The content will often largely be based on the needs of these states as perceived by the text publishers.

Publishers themselves, simply because of good business practice, must by necessity aim their text publishing practices towards those states with such state adoption policies. The simple fact of getting one's volume on such a list can make all the difference for a text's profitability" (Apple, 1986, p. 98). Just as access to government funding for the purchase of texts from the state adoption list is important to schools, there are funds outside of government that can drive decisions in the change process.

#### Grants, Foundations and University Research

Over the years many educators have claimed that more financial support for needed resources would help them to improve education (Sarason, 1990). One option for additional funding of reform efforts can be financial assistance from private foundations. "The Ford, Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Kettering foundations over the last two decades

have filled gaps left from federal support of curriculum development in such areas as the arts and social sciences" (Cuban, 1979, p. 154).

Two influential foundations that provide financial support, but foster conservative causes are the Heritage and Scaife Foundations. The Heritage and Scaife Foundations are built on conservative principles and have close ties to the Christian Coalition. Their funds are used to further the conservative right-wing organizations and agendas. One of the goals of the Heritage Foundation is to rid the schools and educational institutions of their liberal-humanist biases (Scatamburlo, 1998). At one point, analysts from the Heritage Foundation even recommended the elimination of the Department of Education (Scatamburlo, 1998). The Heritage and these other foundations, like government grants, are accompanied with guidelines and stipulations. Change cannot be implemented solely through funding and mandates, but such foundations do influence curriculum decisions.

Professors in liberal arts and in schools of education, through their publications, research, and students, have had an impact upon school curriculum. Their expertise is often influential in school system decisions to adopt change because universities can carry on research and develop materials that schools often lack the financial resources and expertise to do. It presents a great opportunity for those conducting research to collaborate with practitioners.

Instead of working collaboratively with those schools to facilitate change, in many cases, researchers or "experts" in the field become another external force in passing along recommendations to be followed by practitioners. Besides the influence on in-service teachers, colleges of education have an influential role in the training of pre-service teachers. They can facilitate changes in the way pre-service teachers view their

role in the classroom. This is an important aspect of teacher training and one way to facilitate growth and change within schools and school systems at a local level.

### Internal Forces that Influence Curricular Change

Within the school community there are a number of individuals who have an effect on change within schools and school systems. Sarason stated that the change process involves “three general types of social relationships: those among the professionals within the school setting, those among the professionals and pupils, and those among the professionals and the different parts of the larger society” (Sarason, 1996, p. 59). He further states that all change processes will have an affect on these relationships and these relationships will affect the change efforts. Understanding these relationships can impact the success of change efforts. When new curriculum is developed or new texts are adopted, these local school system employees are in a position to adopt the ideas and texts wholly, partially, or not at all. Their individual or group decisions have a direct impact on the implementation of new curricula and materials. “The problem of change is the problem of power, and the problem of power is how to wield it in ways that allow others to identify with, to gain a sense of ownership of, the process and goals of change” (Sarason, 1996, p. 335).

Employees of the system are not the only members of the school community to influence change. Parents can also determine change especially if their basic values appear to be threatened. In his book, *Storm in the Mountains*, James Moffett documents one of the most notable conflicts over textbook adoption in history. He discusses "the tension between Appalachian and cosmopolitan, conservative and liberal" (Moffett, 1988, p.12). The initial tension was the result of a conflict over sex education materials. Parents

believed the materials were a direct threat to their personal values as well as a threat to their perception of the role of the schools. The opposing sides were at odds over what they perceived to be the imposition of values other than their own upon their children. The program threatened the very core of beliefs of some groups of parents. It was viewed as "anti-Christian and anti-American and as indoctrinating an atheistic and relativistic view of morality" (Moffett, 1988, p. 13). It was eventually removed from the Kanawha County Schools.

In September of 1974, when new language arts texts were adopted in this same county little was said at the beginning. One board member objected to contents of the books and soon had many parents rallying behind her to rid the county of these "dirty" books. Fliers were distributed with supposed excerpts from the texts containing sexual content, which in actuality had little to do with the content of the books. The school board pulled the books for a thirty-day review period. During this review period, there were protests, gunfire at picket points, threats to school officials, vandalism, an elementary school was dynamited and another was fire-bombed. Extreme outrage over the textbook adoption was prevalent throughout the review period.

By December of that same year, the school board took most of the recommendations of the review committee to adopt the language arts books but with a resolution to allow parents to send in a list of books they objected to having their children read. These parents had a direct influence on textbook adoption and use. This is an extreme case due to the violent reaction of the parents and clergy but, nevertheless, an example of how parents can become angry over curriculum, which they believe threatens their basic values of what children should be taught.

With so many forces influencing schools and changes in curriculum, it is difficult for schools to make autonomous decisions about reform issues. Like the parents of Kanawha County, "many of these participants enter, make noise, and exit at different points with varying volume and amount of time spent, again depending upon the issue and the school district" (Cuban, 1979, p. 162). In education, the squeaky wheel usually gets oiled, leaving schools to endure the treadmarks left by the many wheels that have squeaked past. "During the past several decades, the education system in the United States has been in a self-proclaimed state of reform. The continuous state of reform has represented a major issue for teachers, suggesting how they should teach, how they should group students and how they should design curriculum" (Lambert, et.al., 1996, p. xiii).

Schools cannot control external changes and have relatively little influence on the consequences of each new wave of change. "Vulnerable to each wave of social change, laws and court decisions, political lobbies, publishers, and a host of other groups, the schools are easily penetrated" (Cuban, 1979, p. 158).

#### Determinants of Curricular Stability

One part of understanding the vulnerability of schools lies in the previous section determining what influences curricular change in schools. The other side of this is understanding what influences bring about stability in curriculum within schools. Just as there are external and internal influences affecting curricular change, these same sources of influence can also cause the curriculum to remain quite stable.

### Societal Definitions of Schooling

Throughout the nation, the curriculum is remarkably similar. “The general public, no less than educators, have been socialized to accept the system as it has been and is. The values and axioms undergirding the culture of our schools are those of the larger society” (Sarason, 1996, p. 381). School, from most viewpoints, is viewed as serving the betterment of society by preparing our youth to be productive citizens. Compulsory schooling laws were enacted to require students to attend school and it became the school's function to prepare them for adulthood. “Schools exist within political, legal, cultural, social and economic contexts. From time to time education goals come under fire for being out of step with the expectations, norms, or requirements of one or more of these encompassing contexts” (Duke, 2004, p.68). Not only has society come to define the school's purpose as socializing children into adult roles, but school personnel have incorporated the socializing functions into their beliefs and behavior. With the prevalence of this definitive purpose of schooling, innovations and any curricular changes that challenge this notion are rejected. We have all been so immersed in this view of schooling that we allow little room for alternatives.

“Because such functions are so much a part of who teachers are, what they do, and the organization of the school day and the formal curriculum, they account for much of the stubborn continuity in course content and instruction over the decades” (Cuban, 1979, p. 177). Society's view of schooling as a tool for socialization is one of several obstacles to wholesale curricular changes within schools. Alongside the public's socialization demands on schools are their expectations for accountability.

### Accreditation of Schools, Standards, and Standardized Testing

Although the accrediting agencies' requirements are minimal and they rarely impose sanctions against schools during the process, the threat of losing accreditation is viewed as an educational life or death issue" (Cuban, 1979, p. 177). This fear drives schools to adhere closely to these minimum requirements as they make decisions about what is taught making atypical curricular changes difficult at best.

In some cases it becomes quite a production as schools prepare for accreditation and, at times, instructional time is lost to preparation efforts. As I recently requested teachers for presentations at the Literature Conference, several metro area schools were unwilling to let teachers present due to the fact that accreditation was taking place the same week. This has consistently been my personal experience with schools and the accreditation process. When accreditation time arrives, all else must pause until it is over.

Educators have experienced frustrations over the years that student learning is often reduced to a score on a standardized test. "Since the mid-1990s, education policy at both the federal and the state levels has yoked together high academic standards and accountability for student outcomes" (Duke, 2004, p. 45). In the name of accountability, testing often drives the accepted measure of learning, a test score, which has become almost synonymous with accountability. "Tests often leave out large chunks of knowledge, attitudes, and abilities that students will need to be successful in life" (Lambert, et. al., 1996, p. 41).

Standardized tests also contribute to the sameness in curriculum across the nation. "According to the federal government, teachers', students', and even the public's opinions matter little in making decisions about the status of American schools and how

they might be improved. Only students' results on standardized paper and pencil tests matter" (Shannon, 2004, p. 31). Standards based curricula has been established and standardized tests are the central form of measurement for student success against these standards. In addition to standards, the tests themselves are a driving curricular force. "When teachers tested students in class, they used the same types of questions and prompts that students could expect to find on the state tests" (Duke, 2004, p. 46).

Today, many of these tests such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) drive local curriculum decisions as schools make concerted efforts to raise test scores. Often the test scores are correlated with school achievement because both the test and class work require the same kinds of reading and writing (Edelsky, 1996). "Standardized tests appear to be rocks of stability in a sea of unanchored opinions, and it is small wonder that people worry when critics make alarming assertions about "massive" declines in student achievement" (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 14).

The relevance of these test scores in the eyes of the public is enormous though and the public often uses these scores as a single factor in judging school effectiveness. Schools are held accountable in unreasonable ways for the range of social and economic influences, which the public demands have reduced to quantifiable outcomes such as test scores (Luke, 1998). It is another effort to deskill teachers in an effort to control their practices with accountability through standardized testing. "Standards created in remote bureaucracies and rigid curricular mandates devoid of local input serve to control school personnel and processes and thus maintain an image of certainty in school organizations" (Lambert, et.al., 1996, p. 7).

With such wide use of standardized tests and an emphasis on test scores nationwide, preparation for testing produces similarities in curriculum from state to state. "In some school districts, preparation for these exams starts months before the examination dates and it supplants the teaching of subjects not tested by the state. In these ways, the federal government has a direct influence on the what and how of literacy instruction" (Shannon, 2001, p. xii). Berliner & Biddle (1995) stated that such great emphasis has been placed on the SAT scores that it had reduced twelve years of learning to 138 item multiple choice test. The push for accountability through standards-based curricula and test score results has been accompanied by efforts to control teaching through mandated texts.

#### Textbooks, Legislation, and Curricular Stability

Along with the uses of similar standardized tests, use of similar textbooks also influenced the congruence of curriculum across the nation. "Nowadays, with a publishing industry national in scope, most school systems hold on to texts three to five years, although with revisions a popular text can last for a decade"(Cuban, 1979, p. 178). Along with this is the fact that the companies who publish the textbooks are the same companies that publish the standardized tests allowing one market to drive the other (Daniels, 1993).

As discussed in a previous section, textbook companies are most focused on a profit; therefore, they try to develop texts that will appeal to a large audience. To ensure that they will appeal to a large number of teachers, publishers are less apt to incorporate innovations into texts because this could prove to be a risk to the "bottom line." By developing materials that appeal to a large number of school systems, the publishers have, in fact, contributed to the stability of curriculum. "Like all text, school textbooks

remain potentially agents of mass enlightenment and/or social control" (Luke, 1988, p. 64).

In much the same way that textbooks can serve as change agents as well as contributing to stability in curriculum, new legislation affecting curriculum can also act as a change agent or a stabilizing factor. Legislation can cause stability in curriculum because "once enacted, state-mandated courses, for instance, are virtually impossible to abolish (in effect, once in, always in)" (Cuban, 1979, p. 178). In much the same way certain practices become "the way we've always done it," legislation can become ingrained in what is mandated by curriculum with little regard to how it got started or why. Once the legislation is in place, it is unlikely that anyone will question or challenge its relevance. As changes in policy are mandated, it is assumed that what happens in the classrooms will change as a result; therefore, oftentimes change in policy is confused with a change in practice (Sarason, 1990). Along with such external factors that contribute to curricular stability, there are internal structures that contribute as well.

#### Organizational Traits of Schools

Attempts at reform often attempt to solve one problem and then another "as if the system in which they emerge is basically sound" (Sarason, 1990, p. 43). School systems are organized bureaucratically, but are dissimilar to other bureaucracies in corporations, industry and the military (Cuban, 1979). The bureaucracy has rationality as its foundation and as a structure for education can be traced back to the quest for rationality at the turn of the century. "Schools are about the only places that still look more like 1920 than 2000" (Glickman, 1998, p.38). The continual hunt for rationality within the organization has had a strong impact on the stability of curriculum and this structure is heavily

influenced by the technical stance on education and curriculum development of the early twentieth century.

The model works through a combination of centralized and standardized curricula, corporately produced curriculum materials with teacher guidebooks, and state and nationally normed tests; together these represent an extension of the industrial-control model (Luke, 1998, p. 310). The model of curriculum development can be traced back to the scientific managers and the work of Bobbit. This long-standing tradition of efficiency and specificity is ingrained in the culture of schools, which makes it difficult to engage in changes to the existing hierarchical structure within schools and school systems. This bureaucratic structure further lacks the ability to take into account all of what goes on in schools. "There is much that is emotional, imprecise, and unknown in classroom life that the rational model misses" (Cuban, 1979, p. 181).

Such a rational approach to curriculum development, therefore, probably strengthens the stability of the existing curriculum due to the fact that it is not applicable to what happens in schools and in teaching. Furthermore, the bureaucratic structure by its very assumptions that each subordinate has less expertise than his or her superiors perpetuates the notion that teachers lack expertise, and therefore, a say in their own practices. This structure has resulted in the fact that the ideas, thoughts, opinions or feelings of those most impacted by change efforts are rarely consulted if at all (Sarason, 1996).

The bureaucracy of schools creates conditions of social interaction that imitate factory hands in a production line. Those at the top have the right to direct the behaviors of those further down in the hierarchy. Because those at the bottom

(factory workers, teachers students) are always larger in number than those at the top, strategies have to be used to establish and maintain control. These strategies have involved rules, regulations, punishments, incentives, and cultures based on formal authority, patriarchy, and isolation. These ideas have become particularly fixed and unchanged in public bureaucracies such as education (Lambert, et.al., 1996, p. 3).

These assumptions automatically place teachers at a disadvantage for having an active role in decision-making and school reform issues. They are clearly at the bottom of the hierarchy in a bureaucracy. Because schools are not like other bureaucratic organizations, they need to be managed differently (Weick, 1982). "Much of their uniqueness derives from the fact that they are joined more loosely than is true for other organizations" (Weick, 1982, p.673). Loose coupling of schools may explain some of the curricular stability and change that has occurred within schools. "Loosely coupled systems, however, seem to nourish continuity more persistently than change" (Cuban, 1979, p. 181). According to Weick, when conventional management theory is applied to loosely coupled organizations, "effectiveness declines, people become confused, and work doesn't get done" (1982, p. 88). When change does occur, it is slow and the influence of the change is weak.

Typical management of a bureaucracy assumes that 4 properties exist:  
the existence of a self-correcting rational system among highly interdependent people, consensus on goals and the means to attain those goals, coordination by the dissemination of information, and predictability of problems and of responses to those problems (Weick, 1982, p. 673).

Schools do not meet these basic assumptions. Within most schools, the goals of the school have not been clearly articulated. There are many participants in the system of education and many opinions about how to approach teaching and learning. "Unfocused goals mirror, in part, a lack of consensus among participants over what schools are for. Most school goals are intangible, as are the results of schooling" (Cuban, 1979, p. 161). "Schools are not places for surfacing and debating the issues that have and will continue to impact on schools. The culture of the school is one which makes it unsafe to bring up controversial issues that implicitly or explicitly are critical of existing practice and call for change" (Sarason, 1996, p. 328). As teachers try new ideas and new curriculum, it is very difficult for them to know what is working and what is not.

The cause and effect behaviors in education continue to elude us. "Reforms that seek to correct symptoms without first addressing causes are doomed. To effect fundamental meaningful reforms, all educators must first be able to admit and agree that our traditional guiding vision of education is no longer relevant in a postindustrial , knowledge-based society" (Sarason, 1996, p.358). The fact that educators do not know what works should be reason to develop diversity in planning and involve multiple voices in the planning (Fraatz, 1987). Instead, this lack of reliable knowledge about basic daily operations creates insecurity. "What happens in such settings is a constant search for a better answer, an easy solution to entangled problems" (Cuban, 1979, p. 163).

Over the years, experienced teachers have seen many curricular changes embraced for short periods of time to only disappear as quickly as they arrive, leaving teachers feeling uncertain about what works and what does not. This causes traditional practices to look more inviting and causes teachers to be more conservative in adopting

change and often educators turn reforms into what they already know what to do (Tyack and Cuban, 1995).

In their struggles to provide instruction for everyone, in their attempts to avoid any behavior that might increase uncertainty, and in their isolation from sources of support for innovation, teachers are led to focus their energies on maintaining routine and control while providing instruction and materials in sufficient amount. Innovations threatens their already tenuous sense of control and instructional effectiveness; and since their incentives are so centered on what happens in the classroom, teachers are unwilling to risk what little stability and sense of accomplishment the status quo can give them (Fraatz, 1987, p. 193).

Along with this uncertainty about practices, the teacher must also contend with the influence from the many who have a vested interest in what he or she does each day. Teachers constantly juggle the demands of many and must constantly assess how these demands fit into their own beliefs about teaching and learning. Many of these decisions are made in isolation from others in the building.

Within the school community, members are not interdependent and have a large span of control. There are few administrators to supervise and monitor what actually happens in classrooms and many students for a few teachers to supervise and teach effectively. Teachers, for the most part, are focused on their group of students with little knowledge of what others are doing. There are very few individuals within the school that are involved in all that goes on. The variables of the teacher's job change from day-to-day and year-to-year. This fact supersedes the teacher's ability to always have a predictable way of dealing with problems that arise.

Much of the cause of the unpredictable nature of teaching lies in the loose coupling of the school and the demands placed upon the teacher within that structure. Rarely has the understanding of the structure of schools or the culture of teachers been considered by those wanting to reinvent education (Tyack and Cuban, 1995). Lack of consideration to the roles of the teachers as key players in reform efforts will contribute to continued lack of lasting reform.

#### Demands of the Workplace

To understand teacher beliefs, values, and behavior, it is imperative to understand the constraints under which they must work (Cuban, 1979). Teachers treasure the freedom they often have once they close their door but this also means they are isolated from one another. Luke (1998) calls teaching *alienated work*. The high demands of work conditions make it nearly impossible for teachers to work in collaboration with colleagues and develop their own thinking and intellectual growth (Luke, 1998). There is little time for adult exchanges during the day or professional collaboration on ideas, beliefs, or curriculum issues. Teachers in the United States have less time for planning than in any other developed nation (Glickman, 1998). The highly individualistic and isolated nature of teaching is at the heart of teacher attitudes, values, and behaviors and encourages conservative responses to demands for change (Cuban, 1979).

“Teachers may resist reform for various reasons, such as an unwillingness to risk failure, or a commitment to the status quo” (Duke, 2004, p. 150). The screen sorts through what will fit into the existing structure of the classroom and drops what does not. Classroom life and teacher behavior have endured stability over the many of these batterings at the schoolhouse door and continue to remain consistent as they have over

the past century. Teachers exercise the most influence over plans and the meaning that is created in the classroom (Fraatz, 1987). Despite the fact that they do acknowledge that they have a bigger effect than anyone over what happens in the classroom, teachers do not view this as power because they confuse it with their struggle to control the daily issues that arise in the classroom (Fraatz, 1987).

“Schools and school systems may lack the organizational capacity to support change. Resources are needed, as are an organizational structure and culture that facilitate the implementation of new programs, practices, and policies” (Duke, 2004, p. 150). A small body of research indicates the limited nature of change that has been brought into classrooms and the central influence of the teacher in determining the pace and extent of implementation of change (Cuban, 1979). "The regularities of institutional structure and of teacher-centered pedagogy and discipline are the result of generations of teachers' experiences in responding to the imperatives of their occupation: maintaining order and seeing that students learn the standard curriculum" (Tyack and Cuban, 1995, p. 124). No one can deny the fact is that once a teacher's door is closed, no one but the children really know what goes on behind it. According to Sarason, “if you want to change and improve the climate and outcomes of schooling both for students and teachers, there are features of the school culture that have to be changed, and if they are not changed your well-intentioned efforts will be defeated” (1996, p. 34). Supervision in schools is minimal, which in essence, gives teachers much more autonomy than most of them or their supervisors would be willing to admit. This role, although yet to be acknowledged for its value in the change process, is crucial.

All of these external and internal factors have been strong influences in determining curricular stability and change. Now I turn to the changes and stability that have occurred historically that have had an impact on literacy instruction in the United States.

#### Literacy Instruction: From Progressive Education to Reading First

At the turn of the century, there were several schools of thoughts that impacted the way literacy instruction was conducted. The most prevalent of this time period were the humanists, scientific managers, social reconstructionists, and the child-centered advocates. All but the Humanists were members of the Progressive Education Association and incorporated aspects of Dewey's work into their own beliefs, but, in fact, had very different views on instruction.

#### Humanists

The humanists were conservative in their views of educating children. Their goal was to maintain as much status quo as possible while understanding that some change would be necessary as time passed. The humanists believed in tradition and preserving the traditions of schooling were important to them. The foundation for Humanistic studies dates back to the fifteenth and sixteenth century. It was a curriculum designed to meet the needs of an elite class. The emphasis in curriculum was placed upon basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. Humanistic studies came to be associated with the languages and the arts (Kliebard, 1992).

Although very few of their students went on to secondary school or college, the humanist curriculum was driven by college entrance requirements. Literacy instruction included a beginning focus on word form and pronunciation moving into a study of the

great literary traditions of Western civilization in the fourth year and ending with a study of grammar to understand the structure of language (Shannon, 1990). This literacy instruction centered around the text, formal recitation, rote memorization, as well as skill and drill methodology.

Following the Industrial Revolution and Darwinian revolution, reformers called for a move away from the aristocratic origins of Humanistic studies (Kliebard, 1992). “By the second decade of the twentieth century, social efficiency emerged as the predominant educational ideal, and while humanism showed surprising resilience, its decline was inevitable”(Kliebard, 1992, p. 12). The move to educate the masses shed a new perspective on what was needed in the school curriculum. The focus shifted to skills needed to succeed in society, which made the Humanistic studies seem no longer relevant. The subjects included in the Humanities came to be associated with that of the leisure segment of life rather than knowledge needed to be successful in society.

#### Decline of the Liberal Arts Curriculum

With major social change, comes a focus on education. The Victorian Era was no exception following the Industrial Revolution. Along with the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution, came the influence of the theory of evolution. This theory brought with it a new focus on science and the need to examine what should be learned in schools.

Herbert Spencer and Thomas Huxley were reformers whose influence carried into twentieth-century America (Kliebard, 1992). Following Darwin’s principles of evolutionary thought, Spencer developed a theory of evolution of knowledge. “According to this view, the course that the curriculum should take is one that follows scientific

principles, which when discovered and followed, lead inevitably to a desirable curriculum” (Kliebard, 1992, p. 30). This was not a call for more focus on science as a content area, but as a model for curriculum. “Education would proceed along evolutionary lines in the same way that the various plants and animal species, including the human species, proceeded” (Kliebard, 1992, p. 30). This proved to be a strong opponent to previous conceptions of a liberal arts curriculum.

G. Stanley Hall was heavily influenced by Spencer’s ideas that the educational system should be formed based on scientific principles. Hall was instrumental in spreading these thoughts on the role of schooling and curriculum throughout America. The focus became a curriculum of self-preservation or one that focused on those skills needed to survive in the world. This was reflective of a new industrialized nation, which was highly specialized and the needs of each trade were very different. This fine-tuning of the curriculum and focus on specificity are still apparent today. “Moreover, the idea persists that education should be designed with very specific purposes in mind (hence the continued emphasis on state educational objectives in highly specific terms)” (Kliebard, 1992, p. 46).

### Scientific Managers

Another prevailing view of the time period was that of the scientific manager, which became a view that has had the longest lasting impact on curriculum making. At the center of scientific management beliefs was the view of education as a science. They "sought to use exact measurement and precise standards to determine the most efficient ways to intervene in child development in order to train children to become useful citizens" (Shannon, 1990, p. 10). Scientific principles had been successfully applied to

business and there was a move to make these applications to education. “With this doctrine, with its promise of precision and objectivity, had an immediate appeal” (Kliebard, 1992, p. 84). The purpose of schools in the eyes of the scientific manager was to serve as a socializing agency for the intellectual, social and moral development of the child. Education consisted of preparation for adulthood and this goal of curriculum planning was to develop skills and knowledge that the student would need in the future (Kliebard, 1992). The focus of the curriculum was on topics, which had the most social utility and the most efficient ways to achieve these academics goals. Subjects, goals, and standards were determined by grade levels (Shannon, 1990). Objectives were highly specific and dependent on utility. “Curriculum was reduced to objectively testable skills with speed and accuracy reified as the primary criteria for success” (Shannon, 2001, p. 17). There was little correlation between one subject and another and sought to have teachers isolate the important information in each subject area and teach it separately.

By 1911, scientific management was so well accepted in the United States that the National Society for the Study of Education's Department of Superintendents appointed a Committee on the Economy of Time in Education to make recommendations to eliminate nonessentials from the elementary school curriculum, to set minimum standards for each school subject, and to improve teaching methods through scientific research (Shannon, 1990, p. 11).

There was an effort to standardize classroom practices and use standardized tests to measure student achievement. “Just as the global and complex process of building an automobile can be broken down into a series of minute and simple operations, so presumably can the activities of a mother or a teacher” (Kliebard, 1992, p. 91). Materials

were developed to delineate the skills students needed to learn to read and were touted as the best methods to ensure that every child was receiving the 'same' instruction. These materials were written by 'experts' and if followed, would serve to ensure that every child acquired the skills that are necessary to learn to read and write. This provided a mechanistic view of humans as predictable and controllable (Lambert, et.al., 1996).

Boyd Bode openly criticized the work of Franklin Bobbit and W.W. Charters and the thought on the scientific management of curriculum. In the early 1920s, he had no way of knowing the lasting impact of the scientific management movement. “Certainly Bode never dreamed that legislation embodying these principles would be enacted across the United States and that the very ideas he was attacking would become semi-official doctrine in federal and state agencies as well as in many educational institutions” (Kliebard, 1992, p. 83). It is from the work of Bobbit and Charters that became the basis for curriculum development that still prevails today (Kliebard, 1992).

### Social Reconstructionists

During the time of the Great Depression, a reform movement called the social reconstructionists began to gain recognition. Social reconstructionists did not believe the traditional schools could address the social problems that had arisen due to industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. Led by Counts and Rugg, social reconstructionists “sought to focus the curriculum on persistent and pressing social problems in an effort to make schools more responsive to social needs and consistent with their conceptions of social justice” (Kliebard, 2002, p. 4). Social Reconstructionists were very concerned with the citizens who were not of the privileged or middle class. They believed that all citizens should have equal access to knowledge provided by an

education. "That is, the social reconstructionists sought to make the politics of schooling explicit and to enlist teachers as advocates to society's have-nots" (Shannon, 1990, p. 13). They spent much of their time educating adults. The goal was to develop schools that would focus on educating these adults on societal issues that would assist in improving their lives. They were not convinced that society could be improved through the education of children and were unwilling to wait for the next generation to find out.

These community-centered schools developed curriculum with the input from students, teachers and parents but individual interests did not replace the needs of the adult society. Much like Dewey had done in the Laboratory School, teachers in these community-centered schools were to "direct--students' attention toward the positive and negative aspects of the connection between the individual and the political, social, and economic structure" (Shannon, 1990, p. 95). In hopes of making life outside of school more equitable, the social reconstructionists called upon teachers to connect social issues to life inside of schools.

The focus of literacy lessons from a social reconstructionist's perspective is centered around issues such as crime, poverty, and unemployment to prepare students for adult life. Not only did the content of literacy lessons change as a result, but the context in which they were taught changed as well. The lessons were to encompass experiences and research of these social issues within the community in which the students lived. This was supposed to inform them about the community and the culture of the community to better equip them for adult society. For the social reconstructionist, it is literacy that promotes social change. Much of the social reconstructionist debate remained within the circles of educational leaders (Kliebard, 2002). The most long term outcome of the social

reconstructionist movement was the development of social studies textbooks by Harold O. Rugg.

### Child-Centered Schools

The progressive movement also brought a more child-centered focus to instruction in classrooms. Incorporating Dewey's work on teaching and learning, they believed the child's natural development should lead the education of that child. These teachers attempted to understand the interests of the child "through observation and systematic analyses in order to help children progress through the natural stages of their development" (Shannon, 1990, p. 9).

They instructed based on the child's needs and interests and approached curriculum in an integrated way and avoided teaching skills in isolation. The child-centered advocates believed school was to help each child develop his or her individual talents. The Progressive Education Association suggested that a child-centered curriculum should foster freedom over control, child over teacher initiative, activity, children's interest, creative self-expression, and personality adjustment" (Shannon, 1990, p. 91).

During literacy lessons, students were allowed to "use their literacy skills for natural communicative and self-expressive purposes" (Shannon, 1990, p 9). For the majority of child-centered teachers, early literacy lessons consisted of learning words, sentences and then on to phonetic properties of words. Children used these skills in authentic ways such as the reading of great literary texts, writing letters, and keeping journals. Writing was also done "for personal development, emotional adjustment, and intellectual growth" (Shannon, 1990, p. 119).

Lucy Sprague Mitchell was involved in many of the most important efforts of progressive education. In describing the selection of books for children, she discusses the importance of "meter, the sound, and repetition of the language of the stories--all should be from the child's natural language patterns"(Shannon, 1990, p. 118). These lessons centered around the child's interest and the needs of the child as determined through systematic observation. Literacy lessons used the child's interest as a starting point and constructed future lessons based on these interests and the child's needs. "In summary, literacy to the child-centered advocates was an art form, which enabled children to play with language in print as well as to cull and create information about their environment" (Shannon, 1990, p.123). They set out to change society one child at a time.

The progressive education movement was a revolt against the traditional approach to teaching. Unfortunately, for the most part, teachers found it difficult to create lessons out of children's lives and favored the basals provided by the scientific managers instead. Through publication of basals, publishers contributed to the dominance of these texts in literacy education in the United States. Teachers, for the most part, relied on 'experts' outside the classrooms to inform their teaching.

By the mid-1900s the Progressive Education Association began its demise. In attempting to incorporate the scientific managers', social reconstructionists', and child-centered advocates' beliefs into its efforts, its mission became clouded and unequipped to deal with controversies that resulted from differing viewpoints of how progressive education is defined. "Until its demise in 1955, the PEA changed its name twice; passed, rescinded, and repassed three mission statements; and nearly went bankrupt twice. In

1957, the last vestige of the organization, *Progressive Education*, stopped publication" (Shannon, 1990, p. 126).

By the mid-1960s a resurgence of interest in the ideas of progressive education emerged. The new critics of public education argued that schools were more interested in social control than social improvement. They argued that "because schools sought standardization of outcome--educating Americans for particular social classes--they reinforced, rather than challenged, social, economic, and intellectual biases" (Shannon, 1990, p. 129). These critics wanted schools based on the lives and language of the students who attended them. As a result, free schools and the open education movement made their way across the country.

#### Free Schools and Open Education

"Free schools attempted to replace the oppression of public schooling with a liberating education that would enable students to understand themselves and their relationship to their communities" (Shannon, 1990, p.129). Much of the growth of free schools was the result of parents, teachers and communities who were dissatisfied with public education in its current form. The focus of the schools was to help students and members of the community develop communal competence outside the control of the state. Due to a lack of funds and internal disagreements over instructional issues, free schools were not in existence for a long period of time.

In an attempt to provide more choices in school for the learner and to provide activities, which would motivate the learner to be involved in the learning process, the United States offered open education as an alternative to traditional schooling. Modeled after the British Primary Schools, open education was to include a curriculum based on

choice and participation, and to build an atmosphere that was open, authentic, and supportive (Shannon, 1990). Literacy skills were to develop throughout the day during the integrated activities that were available to students. Teachers were to have activities available for children to work on the skills they needed to develop into literate individuals. It was considered a balance between skills and personal development as opposed to a focus on one or the other aspect of the child's development.

Open education became "widely distorted so that open space was substituted for openness of ideas, learning centers for learning-centeredness" (Edelsky, 1996, p.108). Though it was never truly implemented on a large scale, open education was viewed as a failure (Edelsky, 1996). Just as other innovations in American education, open education became a casualty within a short period of time. The desire for fundamental changes in literacy instruction did not die with open education, but were revived by the whole language movement that followed shortly after.

### Whole Language

Much like progressive education, "whole language depends on a perspective held by the teacher; it cannot be mandated by an administrator or a school district" (Edelsky, 1996, p. 109). This new paradigm of literacy instruction resists the predominant traditional practices set forth in the early twentieth century by scientific managers that have prevailed for the largest part of the century. Whole language redefines instruction in a way that truly reflects the basis for democratic classrooms and makes successful literacy development possible for all students.

Since I have defined whole language in detail in chapter one, I would like to take this opportunity to only briefly revisit the basic assumptions behind the philosophy to lay

the groundwork for further discussion about the objections to whole language. I will borrow from Regie Routman who has developed a succinct definition of whole language.

Whole language is a way of thinking, teaching, and learning in a social community where learners are continually supported to purposefully use language (reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, thinking, drawing, composing, making sense mathematically and scientifically, and so on) in order to inquire and to construct and evaluate their own understanding of texts and real-world issues" (Routman, 1996, p. 41).

She goes on to describe whole language as "a social, constructivist, democratic way of teaching, learning, evaluating, and being that values and builds on each student's language, culture, and strengths. Inquiry and language in authentic use are at the heart of the curriculum" (Routman, 1996, p. 42). Glickman defines democratic learning as "set of purposeful activities, always building toward increasing student activity, choice, participation, connection, and contribution" (1998, p.31). Students and teachers make choices, take risks and share decision making. Educational decisions about teaching and learning are based on the needs and interests of children. "That is, at the core of transformational efforts to improve education is the belief that the individual school community must become the focus of attention, that the resources and authority to change must reside with those—teachers, parents, administrators—who are closest to the learners" (Murphy, 1991, p. 36). Students and teachers experience reading and writing quality literature in a variety of genres, communication is used for real life, meaningful purposes, collaboration, self-evaluation, and goal setting are all essentials in the community of learners within the classroom.

"What has been most transforming about the whole language movement is the empowerment for self-directed, lifelong reflection, learning, and action--not just for students but for teachers too" (Routman, 1996, p.146). "Consistent with this change are efforts to develop new forms of school organization and management" (Murphy, 1991, p. 18). It also alters the traditional power relationships within the classroom, which is necessary "to increase the kinds of opportunities children have to learn to read, especially those that make educational interactions more appropriate to the child" (Fraatz, 1987, p. 189). Students and teachers across the nation have taken charge of their learning, which does not stop at the classroom door. Learning within school is connected with learning outside of school in authentic ways. Students "are able to inquire independently about everything that interests them, choose to read and write for their own purposes, find and use resources to seek the knowledge and information they desire, write to learn, reflect, think, modify their thinking, and take new action" (Routman, 1996, p. 147).

From practices to furniture arrangement, classrooms have taken on a whole new look as a result of whole language. Teachers and students could be seen working in groups within comfortable, inviting classrooms. "Knowledge is personal and contextualized. Learning is a social phenomenon" (Murphy, 1991, p. 19). Conferring is at the center of instruction and evaluation has taken on a more authentic appearance as it draws from a variety of sources of information about the child's growth and progress as well as involves the child in self-assessment. With such positive results brimming from whole language classrooms, it is hard to imagine any individual or group growing discontent with it.

### Efforts to Abolish Whole Language

In recent years, whole language has come under fire and just as other educational reform movements have been the scapegoat in the past, whole language is no exception. The current political climate has blamed whole language for the perceived ills of student performance in reading and language arts in this country. Whole language has been blamed for everything from poor test scores to illiteracy. "The truth is, whole language hasn't been around long enough to accept responsibility for the ills of education" (Routman, 1996, p.35).

Much of the criticism of whole language has been unwarranted. The effects of whole language have not been as significant as the media would have us believe. Harvey Daniels (1993) estimates that despite the fact that 82% of fourth grade teachers claimed to be whole language teachers on a 1993 survey that only about 5% actually are in practice. Whole language has come to mean different things to different people. In much the same way a clear definition of progressive education was needed in earlier reform efforts to develop child-centered schools, whole language has fallen victim to a similar pitfall. Based on this fact, much of what is criticized about whole language really has little to do with whole language but more to do with widely varying conceptions of what it is. "My concern, however, is not that whole language theory is lacking, but that many children are not learning to read and write because of the way that theory has been enacted in practice" (Church, 1996, p. 34).

#### California Initiatives

Much of the initial criticism of whole language originated out of California. As a state California has always been a precedent setter. Much of this has to do with the size of

the population and for the obvious influence the state has on text development as discussed earlier in this chapter. In 1987, the state of California developed a framework "which did not even mention whole language" but focused on literature-based instruction, which is not synonymous with whole language (Daniels, 1996, p. 44).

In many eyes of those inside and outside education, the two were one in the same. Like most changes that trickle down from the powers that be, the 1987 switch to literature-based instruction really had little affect on what occurred in most classrooms. At the height of the program's implementation, it is estimated that about 15% of teachers in California were using a true literature-based approach to reading instruction (Daniels, 1996).

The influence of the framework went far beyond the state of California as other states modeled after the framework and new reading texts were developed by publishers that included anthologies of literature to meet the demands for a new approach to literacy instruction. Some districts threw out previously used reading programs without training teachers in using the new literature-based materials. Poor teacher training in the use of the new materials brought about misconceptions of literature-based instruction and left teachers equating it with teaching the whole class, using the same story, at the same time. To compound the problem, many of the new texts lacked support for teachers in the areas of skill and strategy teaching.

When California test scores dropped in 1994, panic struck and immediately there were reactionary forces looking for an easy blame and an even easier solution. Whole language, which had become synonymous with California's literacy framework, became the scapegoat for the lower test scores. McQuillan (1998) demonstrated that there was no

real way to determine if there was an actual drop in test scores. The NAEP did not provide individual state results prior to the 1987 implementation of the framework. There was no way to determine if the test scores had actually dropped from before the implementation. The only assessment data available that was administered prior to 1987 was the state California Achievement Program. These scores indicated that achievement was virtually the same or slightly higher than they were in 1984 (McQuillan, 1998).

When viewing the larger scope of what was occurring in California schools at the time, a drop in test scores can easily be linked to other factors. Daniels (1996) attributed the drop to "the state's pattern of growing poverty, the increasing immigration of non-English-speaking children, and its soaring class sizes, which are among the largest in the country" (p. 45). Regie Routman would add the low number of library books available to students and poor teacher training as other important contributing factors. McQuillan (1998) showed the strong correlation between the quality of the school's library and availability of reading materials to student achievement results on the NAEP. California, at the time of this study, had some of the worst libraries in the country and had very poor rankings in overall library quality, which directly impacted student access to print.

As a result, California developed a task force, which released a report on the direction needed in language arts instruction. While retaining its emphasis on using literature and writing, the task force report included an element of systematic skills instruction including phonics. Some interpreted this as a move on the part of California to get "back to basics." In the same way some misinterpreted literature-based instruction to mean "no skills," many regarded the task force report to mean a push for phonics in direct opposition to whole language. "We are an either-or society, pigeonholing ourselves and

others into black or white positions--"(Routman, 1996, p.9). Whole language fell victim to this either-or train of thought and was soon viewed as the diametrically opposing view to phonics instruction.

### Phonics vs. Whole Language

Recent debates over literacy instruction presuppose that all literacy-related problems can be solved by simply finding the right pedagogy (Luke, 1998). At the center of recent debates on reading and language arts instruction is the issue of whole language vs. phonics instruction as though the former excludes the latter. "Beginning in 1994, a campaign was started to label these disagreements as the "reading wars," with advocates of whole language on the one side and phonics on the other" (Goodman, 2004, p. 191). The debates over the most effective methods for teaching reading were not new. The debates over reading instruction historically have been politically driven. The phonics versus whole language argument was founded mostly on ideology rather than research according to Allington (2002).

Influential political groups like the Religious Right and back to basics advocates worked to promote phonics laws in a number of states (Goodman, 2004). "The truly sorry situation in education is that many of the mandates that have been issued—intensive phonics, decodable texts, grade retention for low-achieving students, proven programs—fail to conform with the reliable research evidence that's available" (Allington, 2002, p.36). Misleading information about whole language indicated to the public that advocates of whole language encouraged teachers to avoid teaching phonics.

Much of the debate on the superiority of phonics was based on Chall's 1967 publication, *Learning to Read: The Great Debate*. Chall's work really had little to do

with the current debate on phonics versus whole language. “Chall compared what she called “meaning-emphasis” versus “code-emphasis” methods, but many of the meaning--emphasis methods examined often had little in common with our current understanding of how children make sense of texts” (McQuillan, 1998, p. 57).

Whole language does include phonics instruction but it looks different than the systematic training that most associate with phonics instruction. In a whole language classroom, phonics instruction is taught within the context in which it is needed, for purposes of real reading and writing. “Phonics may not have been emphasized enough, but the teaching of phonics was never banned” (Routman, 1996, p. 10). The media has served to perpetuate the belief by the general public that the two are mutually exclusive. “They’ve also built on the public confusion between science and technology, promoting high-stakes tests as the only sure way to hold schools and teachers accountable, and promoting rehashed phonics as the new research-based sure-cure for what ails the schools” (Goodman, 2004, p. 56-57). As a result, “in 1999, Congress passed the Reading Excellence Act with bipartisan support, which essentially established direct instruction of phonics as the national reading curriculum” (Goodman, 2004, p. 192).

Lots of people who talk against whole language pit it against phonics, as if the two were mutually exclusive. They are not, nor have they ever been. It is, however, the position on phonics--and all the misperceptions and practices about phonics--that most fuels the debate for and against whole language” (Routman, 1996, p. 9).

Issues have been raised about the effectiveness of phonics instruction since the early 1900s when behaviorist first suggested teaching language by breaking it down into

isolated bits of information (Daniels, 1993). "Fueling the public debate is the common perception that U.S. students' reading achievement has declined because of whole language, literature-based instruction, or other holistic approaches" (Baumann, Hoffman, Moon, Duffy-Hester, 1998, p.638). The data from the results of the 1992 NAEP reveal a very different scenario.

As part of the assessment, fourth-grade teachers were asked to indicate their methodological approach to reading as "whole language," "literature-based," and/or "phonics." The average scores for each type of approach were then compared, and those children in classrooms with heavy emphasis on phonics clearly did the worst (McQuillan, 1998, p.14).

The evidence to support the negative contentions about whole language had been misconstrued along with many other facts dealing with whole language. "Strong claims that systematic, explicit metalinguistic instruction is necessary (versus merely helpful) for children to learn how to read are not warranted by the data currently available" (McQuillan, 1998, p. 31).

#### Decline in Reading Achievement: Fallacy or Fact

Test scores speak loud and clear to the American public about schools and their effectiveness. The headlines of newspapers each spring report test scores for various counties and schools as though they are the single best indicator of the quality of education our children are receiving; in the eyes of the public, they are. Test scores are the public's avenue for monitoring schools and holding them accountable for student performance. The perception that reading test scores are dropping as a result of whole language practices has been fueled by the media although there is evidence to the

contrary. “What is striking about reading achievement scores in the United States over the past twenty-five years is not how they’ve declined, but just how *stable* they have been” (McQuillan, 1998, p. 2). Yet the public has been given the impression that there is a “crisis” in our classrooms and that children are not learning to read. McQuillan adds that if a reading crisis currently exists, then one has always existed since the NAEP scores are relatively unchanged. The public perception of a “golden age” of good readers of days long since past is a myth (McQuillan, 1998).

“The so-called “crisis” in education is an opportunity for politicians eager to show how their bureaucratic initiatives can and will trump seasoned educators. In the same way that war is too important to be left to the generals, it is the belief of many politicians that education is too important to be left to the professionals (Rapoport, 2004, p. 77).

Recent findings of the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association show that students, in fact, read better today than at any other time in history (Routman, 1996). By reviewing the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) results, reading achievement has remained virtually the same or had small increases over the past thirty years (McQuillan, 1998). “The case for failing schools cannot be made easily with NAEP data because that data show only improvement! (Berliner, 2004). The data does show that students who live in poverty do continue to lag behind students from other socio-economic groups. The largest achievement gaps exist for the children from the poorest of living conditions (Berliner, 2004). These results were not shared with the public in the same way the inaccurate information about declining test scores had been promoted. “And it’s difficult to

understand how the public can make effective decisions about education—or any other concern for that matter—unless it has full access to the facts” (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 168).

These assessments looked at students' ability to decode and literal comprehension skills. In other areas where students had to apply knowledge and use analytical thinking, U.S. students fell in performance. "Despite public outcry that we are not teaching the basics, the irony is that we are overfocusing on discrete skills and superficial learning at the expense of not teaching our students how to interpret, evaluate, analyze, and apply knowledge for Information Age learning" (Routman, 1996, p.6). Whole language promoted a classroom with learning through participation and "an aversion to reducing critical thinking to a subskill practiced on trivial hypothetical problems" (Edelsky, 1996, p.188). This classroom structure would provide a natural environment for students to use higher order thinking skills. Despite popular belief, whole language could address weaknesses in our students' reading rather than creating those weaknesses. The media has gone far in leading the public to believe otherwise.

### The Role of the Media

In the October, 1997 issue of TIME, the headlines read, "A war is on between supporters of phonics and those who believe in the whole language method of learning to read; caught in the middle--the nation's schoolchildren"(Collins, 1997, p.78). The article proceeded to spell out the battle between the "dueling" methods of teaching. Collins' article weighed heavily in favor of phonics due to the "scientific" research that documents its benefits although he does end with statements calling for need for balance; a balance he had a hard time finding when writing his article. Collins' article was accompanied by

many others that were published in magazines and prominent newspapers at approximately the same time in what Goodman terms a media blitz on the “Reading Wars.” All of the articles slammed whole language and promoted phonics (Goodman, 2004).

It is obvious from his discussion that he had little true understanding of whole language. He stated that "even whole language teachers now maintain their approach is balanced, because, after all, they do address phonics, albeit in an ad hoc fashion" (Collins, 1997, p. 81). He worded this in a way that the public would believe that whole language had only incorporated phonics since being enlightened by knowing individuals such as himself who opened their eyes to the need for a more balanced approach. Any whole language teacher teaches phonics, has always taught phonics and will continue to teach phonics as what is: one aspect of language arts instruction.

The media focus on the issues of reading had not only been misrepresented but had created "reading wars" that have little foundation for existence. It was one more effort by external forces to develop simplistic answers to complex problems. This media blitz was nothing new for the 1980's when the largest period of public education bashing began. "After all, every week our media seem to supply us with yet another frightening story about the dreadful state of education in our country" (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 1). The media have expertly been "playing the literacy card" which had directly and indirectly blamed schools for a myriad of social and economic problems (Luke, 1998). Rarely are the concerns raised by the media based on the concerns of those involved who work in schools and are often presented to the public in a manner that insinuates that the concerns or opinions of those that work in schools do not matter (Shannon, 2001).

In 1995, 20/20 ran a segment highlighting the old Distar program as "the way" to teach all students to read. By calling "direct instruction a method that outperforms other techniques and that works every time," they made the results of the program look misleading and the answer to concerns about reading instruction uncomplicated (Routman, 1996, p. 12). This was misleading to the public and fueled their concerns about reading instruction.

As I opened my local newspaper each week, I could count on an article written by the local orthodontist on the ills of education. He preached about the need to mandate the reading of a canon of traditional literary works or ignorance would prevail among our students. He had the answers for correcting the ills of education, based of course on his own upper-class schooling with little knowledge of the educational system and how it works. He was a School Board member and he was one of many who believed they had the simple answers to solve the problems of education. Much of the problem with all of these solutions was that were addressed at solving problems that did not exist in reality (Berliner & Biddle, 1995).

Unfortunately, he, like others, had access to the media so their thoughts had an immediate audience. This public audience, like the writers, was also looking for simplistic answers to social problems and readily latched onto such ideas based on their own limited knowledge. The media had capitalized on the fears of those who believed that public schools did not care about kids who live in poverty and are undermining traditional religious and moral values (Goodman, 2004).

"Part of the problem, here and elsewhere, is that people reporting on education are often not educators" (Routman, 1996, p. 13). They have no idea what a complex

organization the educational system is and how many factors influence what happens within that system. As educators, we have not held them accountable for their actions. The voices of educators often remain silent, which, in turn, contributes to the perpetuation of misleading information. Silence, in this case, can be construed as agreement with what is said.

Historical patterns have once again repeated themselves and this climate has brought about more mandates and attempts to control language arts teaching from those outside the profession and *fix* the problems. According to Edelsky, "most of this pressure for change and increased control is aimed at teachers (their skill, their training) and teachers' domains (curriculum, assessment)" (1996, p. 174).

Few recent criticisms of education, for example, have critically spotlighted decisions by state agencies. No commissioned reports have faulted the ties between corporate sales practices and schools' reliance on textbooks and packaged curricula. None have complained about the role of the media in misinformation about tests and test scores (Edelsky, 1996, p. 175).

Steps most recently taken include legislative bills or department of education policies in a dozen or more states that mandate that phonics be part of the elementary curriculum or that specific phonics programs or materials be adopted and used (Monaghan, 1997).

### Reading First

NCLB legislation has such stipulations for schools with a "one-size-fits-all curriculum and methodology and a law that punishes the schools if any one group falls below an increasingly unobtainable test score" (Goodman, 2004, p. 6). Once again

legislators attempt to define curriculum and classroom practices. The Reading First program is a state approved and endorsed program for reading instruction. Federal grant dollars are available for schools who use this approach to literacy instruction. With the adoption of Reading First, comes very specific time constraints that teachers must follow for each segment of the program. A large emphasis is placed on pre-packaged phonics programs that teachers are required to use every day for an hour, regardless of student needs. The writing component of Reading First is a very formulaic approach to writing instruction called Power Writing. The students are taught to fit their ideas for writing into a "formula" to ensure the elements needed in the piece are included. Legislators have once again mandated simplistic answers to complex questions about complex practices.

Teachers need to be a part of the decision-making process not only because they are professionals but because their daily lives are influenced by decisions in which they have no voice (Sarason, 1990). Whole language teachers value the autonomy that has come with their new sense of empowerment and need to fight to maintain the professional autonomy of their own classroom practices and the professional status they deserve. Although teaching is "called" a profession publicly, there are great efforts to the contrary.

### Looking Ahead

Standardization of curriculum and of criteria for assessing teachers as well as children, school policies that turn teachers into clerks, teacher preparation programs being reorganized to provide training in the narrowest sense rather than education--the moves to deprofessionalize abound (Edelsky, 1996, p. 174).

Teachers involved in grass roots movements like whole language challenge the forces that attempt to control their work and 'deprofessionalize' what they do in the classroom. Whole language teachers are swimming upstream in waters of mainstream thought. Some have become involved in whole language support groups to continue their professional growth with the support from others with similar beliefs.

The goal of these groups is "bringing theory and action together, improving education by resisting policies, programs, and materials that contradict holistic language and learning principles and that restrict teachers' autonomy (Edelsky, 1996, p. 181). These support systems are crucial to teachers who are trying to implement change in the grass roots manner that whole language has been implemented. "Teachers face serious obstacles to improving instruction from the inside out" (Tyack and Cuban, 1995, p. 138). In light of this fact, whole language teachers must go beyond this and take an active role in ensuring that their voices be heard. My hope is to document one small segment of these voices.

### Summary

For as long as a public education system exists, there will continue to be debates about what should be taught in them and how it should be taught. Shannon (2004) states there has been a century-long effort to determine the one best methodology to teach all of our students. Although there is much literature on the issues of reform and the factors that influence change and stability within our school curricula, teachers' influence and voices in the change process remain absent.

The current debate over the issues of reading and language arts instruction is no exception to the reform movements of the past and is being documented through a variety

of voices and points of view from journalists to researchers and "experts" in the field of education. The set of voices that are rarely heard in these debates are the voices of the teachers, particularly those who embraced the whole language philosophy. "As so often happens when education issues become political, teachers are rarely consulted" (Baumann, et. al., 1998, p. 648). As a matter of historical practice, reform has often centered on the premise that there is a need to control teachers and their practices instead of empowering them to use professional best practices.

The current trends that began in the 1980's and continue with NCLB legislation focus on strict, centralized control of teaching. This view reflects the scientific manager approach to educating American students, which attempts to standardized classroom practice.

For example, federal officials recommend scripted lessons, which direct teachers' statements and actions as they lead students systematically through commercially-prepared materials toward standardized assessments of students' reading. The rationale for this recommendation is that the scripts enable teachers to be more efficient, less prone to error or bias, and uniform in their instructional efforts (Shannon, 2004, p. 29).

Baumann, et. al. (1998) conducted a study to document the voices of teachers in the current debate over reading and language arts instruction through surveys. They analyzed the results from 1,207 teacher surveys regarding these issues. They did not single out a particular group of teachers identifying themselves with a particular paradigm. They found that teachers completing the survey implemented a balanced,

eclectic approach when it comes to teaching reading and language arts (Baumann, et. al., 1998). I believe that for teachers, in general, this is true.

While whole language may be deemed as a failed effort to change classroom practice, there is value in examining what happened in this bottom-up reform effort. “Even if bottom-up change dies as it moves upward, the fact that the whole process has begun with something good happening—actually happening in a real classroom with real students—is profound” (Temes, 2002, p. 146). I wanted to take such an investigation directly to a group of whole language teachers one-on-one and document what has happened to their practices in light of this debate and how they cope with the mandates that accompany them.

According to Luke (1998, p.309), "teaching is a matter of coping--but that involves navigating through the complex industrial environments that schools, districts, and state education authorities have become." Teachers remain in the background of decision-making and reform efforts. “Elected officials have a great deal to say about fixing schools. Business people generally have a good number of ideas to improve schools too. Seldom, though, are teachers offered the opportunity to join in the public debate” (Temes, 2002, p. 201).

Kliebard (2002) noted that the predominant perception among educators is that educational reform is an overall failure.

My point is that if we look at educational reform in general, we cannot give a very precise answer to the question of whether reforms succeed or fail, but if we look at the type of reform and ask ourselves with some specificity how and in what respects and in what circumstances these reforms succeeded or failed, we may

begin to get some insights into the popular conception that education is a rather futile undertaking” (Kliebard, 2002, p. 130).

Sarason noted that repeated failures at reform efforts signals the influence of the culture within which the reform efforts took place, particularly the school culture, which is so resistant to change. Sarason (1996) further notes that the school culture often seems so right and so natural that we do not really examine it and prevent other ways of thinking into the existing culture. One way to examine the success or failure of this reform effort is to bring the lived experiences of the participants to the foreground through an inquiry that documents their perspectives on reform. Through these efforts, I hope to contribute to a void in research on reform issues: a void of teachers' perspectives.

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS

According to Vygotsky (1987), the very process of putting experience into language is a meaning-making process. As a qualitative researcher, my concern is in having my informants put their experiences into language. My concern is with the perspectives of others about their experiences. My goal is to provide an intensive, holistic description of the meaning of these experiences for the participants. In doing so, I hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of that particular phenomenon.

### Research Design

The purpose of this study is to conduct an investigation of ways whole language teachers in one school district cope with mandates that are counter to their philosophical beliefs about language arts instruction. Because I want to investigate a phenomenon that entails understanding the perspectives of these whole language teachers, I chose to use an ethnographic interview design. In ethnographic research, questions arise from the informant's culture (Spradley, 1979).

Since my study was focused on documenting certain experiences from a teacher's perspective, in-depth interview techniques that focus on understanding the meaning teachers make of these experiences were central methodology used in my study. "At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of the experience" (Seidman, 1991, p.3).

Ethnographic interviewing afforded me the opportunity to delve into the meanings of

these experiences for this group of teachers. The very process of putting experience into language is a meaning-making process (Vygotsky, 1987).

### Researcher Beliefs

#### Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective that informed my study was that of phenomenology. Bogdan and Biklen define researchers in the phenomenological mode as attempting to "understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations" (1992, p.34). Phenomenology emphasizes the interpretive understanding of human interaction. "Phenomenologists do not assume they know what things mean to people" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992,p.34). They attempt to gain access to the conceptual world of the participants and emphasize the subjective aspects of behavior in an effort to understand how the participants construct meaning and what the meaning of everyday events has for the participants (Geertz, 1973 in Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). They focus in on how we put together our experiences of a particular phenomenon to make sense of it (Patton, 1996).

The phenomenological perspective can mean either or both (1) a focus on what people experience and how they interpret the world (in which case one can use interviews without actually experiencing the phenomena oneself) or (2) a methodological mandate to actually experience the phenomenon being investigated (in which case participant observation would be necessary) (Patton, 1990, p.70).

For the purposes of my study, I conducted in-depth interviews that focused on how this group of whole language teachers experienced and interpreted their world.

Phenomenology assumes that there are essences to shared experience of participants (Patton, 1990). My study focused on the essences or core meanings shared by this group of teachers. These consisted of the commonalities of the experience that I documented from interviewing one teacher to the next.

From a phenomenological perspective, we interpret our experiences through interactions with others. The meaning we construct about those experiences becomes our reality. Our learning and our realities are socially constructed. By approaching the research through a naturalistic study concerned with the emic perspective of the participants, it was my hope that any distortion of the participants' experience would be minimal (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). It was through the documentation of teachers' perspectives on mandates that were antithetical to their beliefs about language arts instruction that I hoped to understand the meaning of such events in their lives.

#### Researcher as Student

My heart was broken recently as I read an article in the local newspaper about a third-grade student who was killed in a horseback riding accident. The article was written by the child's teacher, thanking the community for the support during this difficult time for her class. It was reassuring to hear that the community had been there in a time of need for those who were grieving her death. At the same time, I was devastated that all the teacher could write about her memories of this child was, "She was a wonderful student. Her work was always nice and neat and she always did what she was asked to do." I imagined the many truly wonderful talents this child must have had to offer this classroom but never got to because the expectation was compliance, not contribution.

I thought about my own classroom experiences of long ago in which the expectation was the same. My teachers' comments in the paper might have read more like, "Well, the room has certainly been quieter since her passing." Every report card I have states, "Cindy is much too talkative." I was a good student who made good grades (except in conduct) but the inability to have a say in my schooling was difficult for me. I had a very traditional schooling with loads of copying from the board and seatwork that had to be finished before going to recess. There was nothing democratic about my classrooms.

Fortunately, despite the fact that I was not the "perfect" student, I succeeded in school but I wonder about the many students who did not. I believe that my own experiences greatly influenced my struggle to find something better for my own students. I know firsthand what it is like to sit quietly for so many long hours that you feel as though you will burst. Whole language provided the opportunity to make classrooms democratic and give the "Cindys" of the world a chance to learn through the use of language rather than designating it as something for "free time." It was the opportunity to make schools more than five and a half hours of busy work with time off for good behavior at lunch and recess. These experiences and frustrations for myself as a student of traditional schooling led me to realize how important it was to create a community of learners where students have input into their own learning.

#### Researcher as Teacher

I began the study with a clear understanding of whole language and knew the informants I interviewed for the study. I wrote about my own transformation to whole language practices in chapter one and the group that served as informants were central to

the support group of teachers whose beliefs about language arts instruction changed alongside mine. I was fortunate enough to be a classroom teacher in a county who wholeheartedly embraced whole language at that time. I served as an integral part of this group of teacher-leaders in helping to train others in whole language. The transformation in our teaching was exciting and being at school was positive for teachers and students alike. Students were reading and writing more than ever and so were we. We were also spending more of our paychecks than ever on children's literature (and loving every minute of it).

After becoming so immersed the whole language philosophy, I had the desire to know even more. As a result, I left the classroom and soon became a full-time doctoral student in language education. Unfortunately, new leadership came into the county while I was away at graduate school and the once positive acceptance of whole language began to fade. The teachers with whom I had worked so closely struggled to maintain their practices in light of the push to move away from whole language. Having something that is at the core of your beliefs about teaching and learning be called into question was not an easy task to accept. My positive experience as a whole language teacher made it difficult for me and others like to me to understand opposition. For many of us, whole language had been a bright spotlight in a sometimes dim world of traditional teaching.

That experience was at the heart of this study and my desire to document the voices of teachers in this move to "back to basics." I left the school system just as the push for back to basics began and I wanted to know what the experience had been like for the participants. I also wanted to know how they had and would continue to cope with it. I often wondered what I would have done if I had still been there teaching and the very

core of my beliefs had been challenged. I felt an obligation to document this inquiry out of my gratitude for what whole language did for me and my students, out of the need to give teachers' voices a forum, as well as out of fear that no one else would do so.

### Site Selection

In part due to the fact that I wanted to provide some help for these teachers in their classrooms in reciprocity for their time with me, I planned to conduct interviews in their classrooms. This gave me the opportunity to work for them in their classrooms after they had given time to me for the interviews. It was important to conduct the interviews in a place that was comfortable and familiar to each informant. Werner and Schoepfle (1987) recommend that interviews should take place in or close to the setting that the informant will be discussing. That did not mean that informants should not be interviewed if this was not possible, but it was often easier to elicit information within a setting related to the events being discussed (Werner & Schoepfle, 1987).

The informants were also more comfortable in familiar surroundings. By being surrounded by the normal classroom materials, I hoped it might spark important conversation during the interview that might otherwise be forgotten or left out. The interviews were scheduled to begin in the summer so it would be easier to conduct the interviews at school. The schools were open most every week and the students were gone, there was less distraction and the teachers felt fewer constraints on their time due to pressure to be doing other things. This was the case for any interview conducted during the summer, but after the summer, I was careful about infringing on an already hectic schedule. The ultimate decision of interview location was left to the participants. Barbie and Rebekah were comfortable holding the interviews in their classrooms. The other

three participants chose to have our interviews in their homes. This location still provided a place that was familiar to each of them, but allowed them to feel comfortable that their anonymity was safe. They did not want others to know they were participating in the study.

### Participants and Research Site

The school system in which I conducted my study was a metro Atlanta area school system in the state of Georgia. It was a small community with a population of about 65,000 residents. The school system, at the time, was made up of 3 high schools, 3 middle schools and 10 elementary schools. There were approximately 10,000 students in the system. These students were predominately white students and most often came from lower- middle class to middle class homes.

Until recent years, the system had been considered very innovative and progressive. Several changes in leadership had brought about changes in countywide expectations for instruction that most would have considered a "back to basics" move with an emphasis on traditional teaching. As part of these changes, language arts and reading instruction in particular were targeted. Since my study centered on whole language teachers, the participants in the study had to be those who embraced the whole language philosophy. The best group for me to target for such was a group of teacher-leaders who conducted the whole language training during the late 1980s and early 1990s in the county. They were the group of teachers that I could be assured had made the transformation to whole language and did not merely claim to be whole language teachers as many had since the original professional development.

### Locating Informants

There were many teachers who might have been willing to serve as an informant, but not all of them would have made good informants. One defining characteristic of my informants was clearly that they must be whole language teachers. Many problems could arise from failure to find good informants (Spradley, 1979). To further help identify good informants, I used Spradley's guidelines for selecting a good informant: “(1) thorough enculturation, (2) current involvement, (3) an unfamiliar cultural scene, (4) adequate time, and (5) nonanalytic” (1979, p. 46). My informants were teachers who were *thoroughly enculturated* or knew the culture under study extremely well and were *currently involved* in that particular culture. As experienced teachers in this school system, my informants had not only a present immersion within the cultural but had a historical connection as well. This knowledge guided the actions of their decisions in everyday occurrences and informed the direction of my study.

It is best if the culture being studied is an *unfamiliar cultural scene* to the researcher so that he or she will be sensitive to everyday terms and events that otherwise might go unnoticed. This presented a challenge for me that I had to deal with in my interviews. I had been directly associated with the teacher informants for many years and had maintained positive relationships with them. I do believe the fact that I had been out of the classroom for the past 6 years had “removed” my insider’s perspective to a certain degree, but I was always cognizant that I had to be extremely focused in an effort to prevent key points from slipping by because they were commonplace for me. This was a fact of which I had to analyze and consider at all times. Being too close to the culture could have made it difficult for me to find anything when analyzing data as well. Data

analysis was an integral part of the process of conducting in-depth interviews and helped me ensure that my familiarity did not hinder my ability to see commonplace things.

By allowing the data to inform the development of my questions as Spradley (1979) suggests, I was better able to stay focused on the language and perspectives of my informants and focus less on my own ideas about their experiences. I was aware, though, that my lens colored how I interpreted their conversations and my personal connection to the experience gave me an insider's view. Conducting a lengthy series of interviews assisted in getting clarification and elaboration from the informant each time.

For the same reasons I worried about being an insider, my rapport and trust level with the informants were strengths going into the study. I had established an excellent rapport with these teachers and a high level of trust, which I believe enhanced the quality of my interviews and the results of the study. The ability of the researcher to develop a good relationship with the informants is the foundation for the success of data collection. "The interviewing relationship must be marked by respect, interest, attention, and good manners on the part of the interviewer" (Seidman, 1991, p. 74). "Gaining trust is essential to an interviewer's success" (Fontana & Frey, 1995, p. 367). The relationship between me and the informants was crucial to the success of the study. I was constantly aware of our relationship and how the interactions between us were affecting it. As a result of our personal connections, I found the participants willing to speak openly and very frankly about their lived experiences. Good interviews take place when informants are relaxed and talk freely as well as produce data filled with the informants' language and reveal the informants' perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The rapport between the informants

and this researcher greatly affected the informants' ability to relax and be candid on issues that were not always easy or comfortable to discuss.

Developing a sense of trust and a good rapport were a result of not only the interpersonal dynamics but of my ability to listen to the participants. "Listening is the most important skill in interviewing" (Seidman, p. 56). "Interest in the participant's experience and a willingness to hold one's own ego in check are keys to the hard work of listening in an interview" (Seidman, 1991, p. 59). Listening skills have always been an area of strength for me but I had to do a number of things to let the informant know I was listening. My body language had to communicate that I was listening in addition to the use of paraphrasing and other verbal signals that I used to let the informant know I was attentive and listening.

The three-interview sequence per informant recommended by Seidman for conducting in-depth interviews provided *adequate time* to get at the cultural meanings. To do this, the informants had to be available and willing to give the time required to participate in the interviews. I used my willingness to help out in their classrooms to encourage them to be more willing to give the time for interviews. Overall, I found this reciprocity to be unnecessary. The participants chose not to have the extra help. They were eager to talk about their experiences and were very willing to share. When offered the classroom assistance in return, they declined. I believe our close and comfortable relationships provided the foundation from which my research questions were developed and discovered.

## Data Sources and Collection

Some form of interviewing has been around since ancient time with the early gathering of census information, which eventually led to conducting surveys, questionnaires and qualitative interviews that, today, are common methodology of social research (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Interviewing has become an integral part of academia over the past century and can take on varied roles depending on the purpose of the study. “It can be used for the purpose of measurement or its scope can be the understanding of an individual or a group perspective” (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 361). Many think of interviews as face-to-face encounters but they may also take place over the phone, through the mail, on questionnaires, and in groups (Fontana & Frey, 1994).

Types of interviews can range from *structured interviews*, where a set of specific questions with specific responses are used, to various *unstructured interviews* such as an open-ended ethnographic (in-depth) interview, oral history, creative interviewing, and postmodern interviewing (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Bogdan and Biklen believe it is more effective to use a “more free-flowing, exploratory interview”, particularly at the beginning of a study (1992, p. 97). For the purpose of this study, I focused on the unstructured interview particularly the open-ended ethnographic interview. Techniques I used for conducting in-depth interviews with informants are addressed in the next section in an attempt to provide a guideline for documenting teachers’ perspectives.

### Interviewing and Questioning Techniques

Seidman suggested using open-ended questions to “build and explore” participants’ responses to questions and to “have the participant reconstruct his or her experience with the topic under study” (1991, p.3). In order to obtain a meaningful

answer, the researcher must ask a meaningful question (Werner & Schoepfle, 1987). To help with this I learned as much as possible about the culture prior to beginning the interviews. Under these circumstances, I had a distinct advantage in already knowing the culture well since I had once been a member of that particular group of teachers.

Kahn and Connell (1957) emphasized the importance of communication during these interviews and the need for the interviewer and informant to share enough language to promote clear communication. Although the informant and interviewer may speak the same native language, as in my case, there are many ways to say something and there other things that should never be said at all which makes it imperative that the researcher know enough about the culture to be able to avoid uncomfortable situations (Fontana & Frey, 1995).

Not only did answers come directly from the informants' data but I also developed questions from the informants' knowledge as the study progressed. A succession of questions in any ethnographic in-depth interview arises from the informants' conversation. Descriptive questions were used most often and formed the basis for my ethnographic interviewing (Spradley, 1979). There are several types of descriptive questions which "aim to elicit a large sample of utterances in the informant's native language and are intended to encourage an informant to talk about a specific cultural scene" (Spradley, 1979, p. 85).

By using questions that were focused on *examples*, I had the informants describe the event as well as experiences they had with a particular setting, and elicited terms that were used within the culture under these particular circumstances (Spradley, 1979). Asking *structural questions* elicited information that showed how the informants had

organized their knowledge and were also important to these in-depth interviews (Spradley, 1979). *Contrast questions* allowed me to “discover the dimensions of meaning which informants employed to distinguish the objects and events in their world” (Spradley, 1979, p. 60). Through contrast questions I was able to discover when a symbol or event did not fit into a particular domain. Each type of question was used periodically throughout the series of interviews with the intent of eliciting more and more specific details from the informants and getting closer to the cultural meanings of their experiences.

Although Spradley recommends six or seven hour-long interview sessions with each informant, Seidman recommends a series of three separate ninety-minute interview sessions. Each interview has a specific focus.

The first interview establishes the context of the participants’ experience. The second allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. And the third encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them (1991, p. 11).

I agree with Seidman that in-depth interviews, if done well, can elicit rich data that are situated in the context of the informants’ lived experiences if the three-interview series is followed. Seidman (1991) recommended adhering to the three-interview structure to avoid erosion of the focus of the interview and the purpose of the interview. “The open-ended, in-depth inquiry is best carried out in a structure that allows both the participant and the interviewer to maintain a sense of the focus of each interview in the series” (Seidman, 1991, p.13). I adhered to the three-interview structure but allowed for the flexibility to conduct further interviews if I had needed them.

With each successive session, I developed new questions based on the data collected previously. This allowed the informants to clarify and elaborate as needed. Seidman recommends 3 days to a week apart to allow time for reflection without losing the interview connection (Seidman, 1991, p. 14). At the same time, I also had to remain aware of my own influence on the informant and responses that resulted from that influence. I had to avoid certain practices like asking leading questions, asking questions that require only “yes” or “no” answers, interrupting the informant or being evaluative of the informants’ comments (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

It was imperative to remember that the goal was to learn another’s perspective and by taping the interviews, I was able revisit interesting points over and over at a later time. By listening carefully, I helped move the interview forward based on what the informant was saying. At the same time I brought an interview guide with possible questions with me to each interview to help me stay focused but it was imperative that I remained sensitive to the informants’ responses and interests (Seidman, 1991; Werner & Schoepfle, 1987; Spradley, 1979).

Seidman suggested listening to what the participant is saying, listen for the inner voice “ by taking the participants’ language seriously without making them feel defensive about it, interviewers can encourage a level of thoughtfulness more characteristic of inner voice” (1991, p. 57). As it was needed, I asked for clarification when I was unsure about the informants’ responses and asked more questions to achieve better understanding. Qualitative interviews are cumulative in nature and each builds upon the previous and connects to each other (Bogdan & Biklen, 1995).

Data was collected from each extensive interview and used to develop questions for follow-up interviews that focused on getting closer and closer to cultural meanings for the informants (Table 3.1). To assist in documenting interviews, I tape recorded the interviews to allow for verbatim transcripts to be typed and assist me with recall of the events. Each informant readily agreed to be taped at each of the three interviews. Just as my presence affected the informant's responses so did the presence of a recording device. There were a couple of times, albeit only twice, that two of the informants asked for the tape to be stopped so they could say something "off the record." Those comments typically involved derogatory comments about another individual's role in the change process they were experiencing and were more personal in nature. These comments were not included in this study.

#### Phase I: July 29, 1998 –August 27,1998

The first phase of the study began in July and lasted for approximately one month. I found it challenging to schedule the interviews within the one-week time frame that Seidman recommends. The schedule conflicts with the participants prevented conducting all five interviews in one week. Beginning the interviews in the summer, while adding some flexibility to the time of day we could meet also added additional scheduling conflicts such as vacations that would not normally interfere. However, I was able to keep individual interviews proximate in time from one interview to the next. This required that time frame of each phase overlap as I began each consecutive round of interviews with those first interviewed before I had finished with all five participants' interviews in the previous phase. This helped me prevent too much time from elapsing between interviews.

During phase one, I conducted the initial interview with each of the five teachers. The purpose of this initial interview was to get the informant to tell as much as possible about him-or herself that is related to the present topic. I wanted them to reconstruct "early experiences with their families, in school, with friends, in their neighborhood, and at work" (Seidman, 1991,p.11). This allowed me to situate the current events in the context of the informants' life history.

The questions for this phase were open-ended.

- Tell me about your experiences in school as a child.
- Tell me about your experiences as a teacher.
- Tell me about yourself as a reader and writer (as a student and as a teacher).
- How do you believe these experiences inform your current practices in literacy instruction?
- Tell me about your journey to becoming a whole language teacher.

#### Phase II: August 19, 1998- September 18, 1998

During this phase, the purpose of the interview focused on the details of the present experience in relation to coping skills in the classroom. I wanted to get at the very details of this lived experience with change and what it had been like for the participants. I asked them to give the details of how this experience had been affected by those outside of school as well.

Card sorting Activity - I used the card sorting activity suggested by Spradley (1979) to inform the direction for the remainder of the study. I wrote key terms found in the data onto individual index cards and sorted them by the domains in which I currently

had them categorized. The informants then verified that I had accurately sorted the cards by domains and I made adjustments based on the informants' feedback about the cards and conversations with me about the categories that were placed in front of them. This activity allowed me to get closer and closer to the meanings of the terms used in the informant's own language.

### Phase III: September 16, 1998- September 30, 1998

During this interview phase, the purpose was to have the informants reflect on the meaning of these experiences. Given the previous interviews about their lives before, during and after these events, I wanted to find out what understanding the participants had about these experiences. How did all of this interact to bring them to their present situation and current philosophical beliefs and practices?

### Data Analysis

Once data collection had begun so too did data analysis. The researcher has “a great deal of influence on what part of data will be reported and how it will be reported” (Fontana & Frey, 1995, p. 370). A systematic approach to data analysis assisted me in the interpretation of data but that interpretation was still always affected by my own personal history. There are many methods of data analysis that can be used in a qualitative study but for the purpose of conducting in-depth interviews in which data analysis is an ongoing part, I combined Spradley's ethnographic analysis and Seidman's recommendations for analysis of data. The ethnographic analysis is “the search for the parts of a culture and their relationships as conceptualized by the informants” (Spradley, 1991, p.93).

The central importance of analyzing data was to identify cultural meaning. I looked for ways the participants **used** symbolic objects instead of merely defining their meaning. Instead, by defining their **use** and identifying under which circumstances each might be used, I began to identify what Spradley called domains. “Any symbolic category that includes other categories” is considered a domain (Spradley, 1979, p. 101). I reviewed the transcribed interviews to identify domains as part of a *domain analysis*. From the preliminary domain search, relationships were identified and sentences about these domains were taken from transcripts and were rewritten into questions about that domain that were then used in following interviews

Seidman recommended reading the data and bracketing meaningful chunks and then check to see if what is interesting to you seemed that way to the informant. As a first time researcher, this was a useful strategy for me to use. Much like the domains that Spradley discussed, Seidman also recommended organizing meaningful excerpts from the data into categories and looking for connections between the categories that can then be grouped into themes. He recommended using this information to draft a narrative profile of the informant's experiences using language from the data. He considers this one effective way to share the data. Structural and descriptive questions were be formed and prepared for the next interview as a result of these analyses.

Through my use of the card sorting questions, I wrote down key folk terms that were present in the transcripts onto individual cards and grouped them by the tentative domains already established. The informant read the sets of cards as they had been classified into domains and told me whether they all fit into a specific domain or not. This allowed the informant to add any terms that should be present and may not be or to

remove any that should not be included. These were excellent strategies for keeping the interview focused on the understanding of cultural meanings and experiences of the informant, getting the informant to be more specific and allowed me to develop a better understanding of cultural terms and their meaning for the participants. This gave me another opportunity to have the informant elaborate and clarify the **use** of these terms.

During this phase, Seidman (1991) suggested that the researcher label passages from the transcript that have been bracketed into meaningful chunks, looking for words within the passage itself to suggest a category. These categories were tentative and subject to change as the data analysis proceeded in ways similar to those of the domains in Spradley's ethnographic analysis. Seidman (1991) suggested putting these excerpts into files under the category name. Once the files were complete, I reread each file to help me sort out the ones that were less compelling. Seidman emphasized the importance of my need to sort important passages from the ones deemed less important. I sorted data chunks through the data that went back to my original questions posed in chapter two as well as those phenomena that were most intriguing to telling the participants' stories.

Each interview built on the next to develop in-depth interviewing, with my focus on getting more and more detail from each interview, and the data analysis did as well. Once the detailed groupings were identified by the researcher, structural and descriptive questions were formulated based on these categories and they were used in the next interview to help construct a more complete category. The researcher can understand the cultural meanings if the relationships among the symbols within the culture can be mapped out in the taxonomy (Spradley, 1979). Seidman (1991) stated the importance of finding out what meaning any contradiction in data has for the informant.

At this point in the analysis, I looked through transcriptions to find areas in which to develop contrast questions. The purpose in developing these questions was to find out how symbols within the culture differ. “The meaning of any folk term is dependent on what it does not mean as well as what it does” (Spradley, 1979, p. 157). The identification of the contrasts within the study led me to identify contrasts to better define the specific attributes of the cultural symbols (Spradley, 1979).

A contrast that was documented in the data was selected for analysis and used to develop contrast questions to elicit any missing attributes of a particular category from the informant and to help me complete each category by aligning how the data fit into specific groupings. This allowed me to identify recurring themes, which, in turn, allowed me to understand the culture and experience much better. Cultural themes are those that are “recurrent in a number of domains and serve as a relationship among subsystems of cultural meaning” (Spradley, 1979, p. 185).

It was through the continual process of data collection, analysis and the identification of further areas of investigation that enabled me to delve into the lives of others in an in-depth manner. The teachers actually informed the direction of the inquiry as I identified patterns within the informant’s language and cultural descriptions. Without a series of interviews based on a growing body of knowledge about the informants and their lives, it would have been impossible to document their experiences at an in-depth level.

Spradley has developed a very systematic approach to analyzing large chunks of like that collected during my in-depth interviews. His suggestions for analysis along with those of Seidman allowed me to move from the most general analysis to a much more

detailed, specific analysis. Data analysis, at times, was extremely overwhelming as I had hundreds of pages of data transcripts to read. For a new researcher, like me, Seidman's work was particularly helpful. By following the procedures and guidelines of established researchers, data analysis was less overwhelming than it might have been otherwise.

### Validity

One concern that exists in any research is the issue of validity. When asked whose meaning is really being reported in a study, it can be difficult to answer. The interviewer serves as the research instrument with unique thoughts and perspectives that clearly influence the direction of the interview and how the data are interpreted. "Every aspect of the structure, process, and practice of interviewing can be directed toward the goal of minimizing the effect the interviewer and interviewing situation have on how the participants construct their experience" (Seidman, 1992, pp.15-16). However, the interviewer must also recognize that to some degree these constructs are a result of the interaction and relationship between the participant and interviewer.

By using the three-interview structure recommended by Seidman, there were built in structures to enhance the validity of my study.

It places participants' comments in context. It encourages interviewing participants over the course of 1 to 3 weeks to account for idiosyncratic days and to check for the internal consistency of what they say. Furthermore, by interviewing a number of participants, we can compare their experiences and check the comments of one participant against those of others. Finally, the goal of the process is to understand how our participants understand and make meaning of their experience. If the interview structure works to allow them to

make sense to themselves as well as to the interviewer, then it has gone a long way toward validity (Seidman, 1991, p. 17).

In addition to these built in structures to help with validity, I worked to stay close to the data throughout the study. I did so by making sure to transcribe the tapes immediately following the interviews. This supported my ongoing analysis work to accurately record information and look for internal consistencies as well as discrepant cases as I categorized the data throughout the collection process. Any conclusions I wrote about were directly supported by primary data from the interview data I collected throughout the study.

#### Ethical Concerns

All participants in the study were given a consent form for participation. All reports written from the data collected in this study maintain confidentiality of the participants' identities. Pseudonyms were used for all participants. I continue to have concern though that because my study centered on a specific group of teachers of which there are an obvious few in the school system that they can be identified even with confidentiality. I also continue to be concerned that my longstanding relationship and the nature of that relationship with the informants caused them to say things to me that they might not have said to others. I do believe from the request that the tape player be turned off at two points during my interviews with two of the participants that the participants were careful to not share information that might jeopardize their position or status in the school system.

I tried to incorporate opportunities to reciprocate the teachers in a meaningful way for the time they are giving to my study. I did not want any of them to feel like this was a

situation where they gave their valuable time and received nothing in return. One of my biggest concerns was that my knowledge of the situation as an insider would distort how I interpreted the data. That is why member checks are especially important in this study. Because I had such a strong personal connection to the teachers and their well being, it was a struggle to avoid letting this affect my reporting of the data. The teachers had to continue to work in this school system following my interviews and I did not want to do anything to jeopardize or compromise their working conditions as a result of my study.

Due to a serious illness with my oldest daughter, I had to put my study on hold from the fall of 1999 until 2004. While I had completed data collection and begun an analysis, I stopped in midstream and completely removed myself from the study. As a result, I have had to postpone full data analysis for several years after data collection.

This has presented new challenges to validity that I did not have to consider originally. With so many years away from the data and participants, it allowed me to analyze the data from more of an outsider's perspective. I was much further removed from the context of the study than I had been when I originally collected data in 1998. In that sense, it probably assisted in making the data analysis more representative of the participants' perspectives and increased validity.

I was able to review the data and categories with fresh eyes. It was like beginning anew. The downside of my situation in the case of validity was the lack of ongoing member checks in close time relation to the interviews. To be sure the member checks have been included, I asked each participant to read the study, offer feedback and any afterthoughts. The participants' feedback from the member checks and afterthoughts are included in my conclusions in chapter seven.

### Summary

In this chapter I have described the methodology I used in the study. The study evolved around the data as it informed the development of my questions and the direction of the study. Through these ethnographic interviews, I was able to document whole language teachers' perspectives on coping with mandates that were antithetical to their beliefs about language arts instruction. This study was conducted based on my belief the answers to change and reform in classrooms are situated in the stories of teachers' lives as they live these changes. If we desire to make meaningful long-standing improvements to teaching, we must look for answers with those that face the challenges of teaching and learning on a daily basis.

**Table 3.1. Timeline of the Study**


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 Significant Events in the Study
 

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June, 1988	Cindy, Rebekah, Carey and Maggie attend weeklong whole language workshop.
	Carey teaches Barbie the workshop content each evening.
June 1989	Patty attends whole language workshop
August 1988-Fall 1995	Implementation of whole language
Spring 1994	Dr. Perryman leaves superintendent position
	Dr. Dyer appointed interim.
	Dr. Neilson named as his successor.
Spring 1995	Dr. Neilson suddenly resigns.
	Dr. Dyer succeeds her and moves district away from whole language.
Spring 1996	Researcher leaves the school system.
1995-1998	System moved away from whole language and banned whole language practices.
Spring 1997	Dr. Dyer retired.
	New superintendent named to raise test scores
July 1998- 1998	Data Collection

**Table 3.1. (continued)**

Significant Events in the Study		
Phase One Interviews	July 29, 1998	Maggie
	August 17, 1998	Patty
	August 21, 1998	Rebekah
	August 26, 1998	Barbie
	August 27, 1998	Carey
Phase Two Interviews	August 19, 1998	Maggie
	September 8, 1998	Rebekah
	September 10, 1998	Carey
	September 15, 1998	Patty
	September 17, 1998	Barbie
Phase Three Interviews	September 23, 1998	Maggie
	September 16, 1998	Rebekah
	September 17, 1998	Barbie
	September 24, 1998	Carey
	September 29, 1998	Patty
July 1998-November 1999	Data Collection and Analysis	
February 2004-December 2004	Data Analysis and Writing	
October-November 2004	Follow-up Email Interviews with participants	

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE PARTICIPANTS

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief introduction of each participant and situate their participation in this study in a historical context through the sharing of their stories. Like the study of teacher lore with Ayers and Schubert (1994), this study is designed to share the perspectives of strong teachers, who are a “seldom tapped as valued resources for an understanding of teaching” (p. 114). The participants were all chosen for this study because of their common philosophical beliefs about teaching. Through the stories of these five participants, the reader can develop a sense of the experiences that provided the foundation for their professional practices and beliefs about teaching, particularly literacy instruction. Their stories can reveal “how past experiences, circumstances, and significant events may be related to the perspectives teachers bring to the classroom, the way they act in particular situations, and what they see as problems or questions to be asked about their work and the function of schooling” (Gitlin, et. al., 1992, p.29). Therefore, it is important to situate the conclusions drawn from the extensive interviews with these participants in a historical perspective of their lives and teaching experiences to better understand the conclusions drawn from the data.

Documentation of their personal stories and the journey through their professional lives can serve to inform educational research on issues of school reform and the teacher’s role in such reform efforts. Goodson shared his perspective on the importance of teachers’ stories in educational research.

Sharing their stories provides a fundamental understanding of the teacher's perspective which has been missing from efforts at research, development, reform, curriculum implementation and change during the last twenty-five or more years. We think that understanding how teachers, individually and collectively, think, act, develop professionally and change during their careers might provide new insights as to how one might approach the reform, change and improvements in education that are necessary to equip our students for a desirable future within a context that is rapidly altering the nature of teachers' work.

(Goodson, 1992, p. 51)

The stories of Maggie, Rebekah, Carey, Patty and Barbie will serve as one piece of research that can inform the larger body of research on school reform efforts.

#### Maggie's Story

As was the case with each participant, Maggie chose the location of our interview sessions. Maggie's interviews were conducted in her home. This was a setting where she felt comfortable to talk freely during the interviews. At the time of our interviews, Maggie was a veteran teacher with approximately twenty-eight years of experience. Her entire career had been spent teaching at the elementary level. She had spent most of those years teaching first and second grades.

Among her peers, Maggie was considered a leader. She had served on numerous school and county level curriculum committees. Maggie had a high level of interest in curriculum and instruction, particularly in the area of language arts. She was well known and respected by colleagues throughout the school system. Maggie had a solid reputation as a master teacher and parents often requested to have their children in her classroom.

Her colleagues also valued Maggie's teaching abilities and had voted her as the local school Teacher of the Year at which time she went on to become the county level Teacher of the Year.

To provide the reader with a sense of Maggie as a teacher of literacy, it is important to also represent Maggie as an adult reader and writer along with a historical view of her own schooling and early teaching practices.

#### Maggie as an Adult Reader and Writer

Maggie read professional literature regularly, particularly the IRA journal The Reading Teacher. Maggie focused most of her attention on articles about readers who struggle in learning to read. "That's my focus. My main area of interest right now is problem readers cause I know they can read" (Interview transcript, 7/29/98). Maggie wanted to know everything she could to help her students become effective readers. Through The Reading Teacher articles she was able to find out what other schools across the nation were doing to help students learn to read. This search for answers was a large part of her motivation in her professional reading.

For her personal reading, Maggie chose reading factual material. She was drawn to biographies and autobiographies, especially about people who had experienced a tough childhood. "When people are writing about their tough upbringing or how they struggled, it was like they were writing for me. They were telling my story" (Interview transcript, 7/29/98). Maggie also read historical and realistic fiction and stories about families, but avoided science fiction or fantasy books.

While she loved reading, Maggie had always been critical of her writing pieces. "Right now, I'm just in a turmoil with my own writing" (Interview transcript, 7/29/98).

Maggie was a gifted storyteller and captivated audiences of students and adults alike with her many tales of her life growing up. These same stories that flowed flawlessly when told orally became a source of struggle when Maggie attempted to record them on paper. Maggie received the most pleasure from thoughts of her writing instead of the actual writing process. “Sometimes at night, I can write the most wonderful stories and then when I try to put them on paper, I guess I just want it to be something that’s like what I’m thinking and it just doesn’t pan out. I guess it’s okay. Everybody has their own way of imagining stuff” (Interview transcript, 7/29/98).

When she did write, she wrote mostly about childhood experiences. These childhood experiences were still vivid in Maggie’s memory as she recalled her early experiences with literacy in school.

#### Early Literacy Experiences

Maggie grew up the youngest of eight children. She described her parents as farm people, country people. Both of her parents left formal schooling to go to work to help the family. Maggie’s mother completed the 6th grade and her father the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. During the time in which her parents were raised, public schooling ended at the 8th grade. According to Maggie, it was not the expectation of the community to finish school. Many in the community, like her parents, needed to go to work to help their families. Work and the needs of the family were a community priority, not schooling. This sentiment was still pervasive when Maggie and her siblings began school.

I don't think if we had quit school and gone to work - I think it would've been fine with my parents. Because they had never gone, we had surpassed them so many times over. What we were expected to do, whatever you do, if you get a job, you

do a good job with it. If you go to school, you do a good job in school. We were never allowed to be absent or disrespectful. Those kinds of values were set (Maggie, Interview transcript, 7/29/98).

Even though the emphasis was not on higher education, Maggie's parents did instill a strong work ethic in Maggie and her siblings. This was reflected in her work at school as a student. She worked hard, was compliant and wanted very much to please the adults in her life.

Maggie's recollection of her early literacy experiences in school consisted of reading groups. She recalled using the Alice and Jerry basals and having to work her way through the paperback books to get to the "hard cover" reader. Maggie's teacher sent the basal reader home with students the night before they were to read in class. Maggie recalls one such experience.

I had my little reader and I took it home and I practiced and I wanted a page with the rebus pictures on it, the little ducks and stuff like that. So, I knew my story and I think I probably knew all the words in the book, which were probably about 25 words. So, it came my time to read, and she [the teacher] said, "Read." I said, "Jip" and quickly turned the page to read more and she said, "Next." So, that was all I got to read that day. So, I didn't feel like I got enough reading time in school and that I always had to wait my turn. I was very anxious to read (Interview transcript, 7/29/98).

Maggie valued those first reading experiences even though she rarely got to actually read in class. She did not have a library in the school or many books at home. The basal readers were the only ones available other than the visits to the school from the Book

Mobile. Since she really did not have access to books at home, Maggie valued her contact with books at school and loved the basal readers. “Those were the only books we had. Those were real important. I mean I took pride in those books” (Interview transcript, 7/29/98). As a matter of fact, Maggie still owned her copy of her first grade basal reader.

Maggie's desire to learn to read was very strong. At home, her mother read cookbooks and the Bible, but Maggie never saw her dad reading. Her older brothers have told her that her father read the Lone Ranger comics, but she never actually saw him read anything. Other than those types of reading experiences, Maggie had no recollection of her parents reading at home or reading to her. “No parent ever sat with me and read. No, it didn't happen nor my brothers and sisters did not either. I don't remember ever being read to as a child” (Interview transcript, 7/29/98).

Although reading materials in her home were rare, Maggie recalled an occasional sneak reading of her grandmother's copy of *True Story* or *True Confession*, which was considered the "smut" literature of the time. The only other books she had at home were copies of the Little Golden Books that a fourth grade friend would occasionally give to Maggie when she was finished with them. “I treasured those books and I would just pore over the pictures” (Interview transcript, 7/29/98).

During her elementary years, Maggie associated fear with some of her early school experiences. She had vivid memories of some very impatient teachers, particularly in second and fifth grade. Her memories of these years had little to do with instruction or positive learning experiences. These experiences had a very negative impact on Maggie's willingness to participate in class: “I never volunteered information or I never

volunteered. I just sort of kept real quiet” (Interview transcript, 7/29/98). Attending school in this atmosphere made Maggie a very reluctant learner.

There were other elementary school years when Maggie felt much better about school. She described those teachers fondly and recalled their patience and smiles. Her fourth grade teacher especially stood out in Maggie’s mind because of her rich, southern dialect and the way she interacted with books in front of the students. Maggie and the students in her fourth grade class used to beg Ms. Abel to read to them. “Fourth grade was a year of a lot of growth for me in reading because Ms. Abel read to us every day. She loved reading and she could read the Uncle Remus stories and put in all the characters for us. She had a very southern, almost black dialect” (Interview transcript, 7/29/98). Ms. Abel made reading come alive for Maggie.

More than anything, Maggie remembered Ms. Abel’s genuine love of teaching. “She [Ms. Abel] always gave you the sense that she liked what she was doing and that she liked teaching. Most of all, “I remember feeling important in her room” (Interview transcript, 7/29/98). As a result, Maggie experienced a great deal of growth in reading that year and experienced success as a student. She contributed in class and felt comfortable to be something other than “real quiet.” At the end of her fourth grade year, Maggie’s parents decided to move.

Maggie had spent the first ten years of her life living in the country and attending a small, country school. This all changed the year she started fifth grade. Her parents’ decision to move became a pivotal point in Maggie’s life. Her family left the familiar farming community in the country and moved to the city. This transition became even

more difficult for Maggie because she was assigned to a teacher who once again instilled fear.

When you asked her [fifth grade teacher] a question, she would get very annoyed so you either asked the question and just took whatever verbal thing she handed out or you just didn't say anything. I felt very ill at ease with her. The classroom was very orderly and everything, but it was just that her mannerisms were very much that of impatience. It's the first thing I noticed about her (Interview transcript, 7/29/98).

Maggie believed the fact that she lived in the housing projects across the street from the school impacted how the fifth grade teacher felt about her and treated her in class. She recalled that "it took a while for them to realize I was even literate and that I could move up to the top group so to speak" (Interview transcript, 7/29/98). Once she finally got into the top group, Maggie was able to remain there. This difficult year of transition was challenging and once again left Maggie to use her strategy of keeping "real quiet" to cope and get through the year.

Early writing experiences in Maggie's schooling varied little from her early reading experiences. She recalled writing reports that were "just copied verbatim out of the encyclopedia and then it took a month in class for everybody to do their report" (Interview transcript, 7/29/98). Maggie described writing in school as a chore. It was not something she looked forward to or found enjoyable. It was not something she learned to do, but was an assignment to complete.

Later years brought a positive change in teacher assignments for Maggie. She described these teachers as patient, caring and sensitive to her as an individual. With each

positive memory or favorite teacher, Maggie related most to the classroom atmosphere created by that teacher. These teachers left a lasting impression on Maggie that was still apparent as she spoke of her experiences in their classrooms. Her fondest memories of school are those where she felt safe and important as a student, a classroom environment that today might be called risk free.

### High School Experiences

A significant factor that influenced Maggie's perception of her school experiences and continued to influence how she approached her own students was the fact that she was raised in poverty. This fact made her high school years particularly difficult after her family moved into the city from her country school.

I think because of just not being in a family where both parents were schooled. My parents just finished elementary school. I think that was very difficult. You compensate. You don't bring attention to yourself. So, there are a lot of hidden things there that you certainly don't want people to know about your illiterate home so to speak (Interview transcript, 7/29/98).

Although attending school in the city and having parents who were unschooled, rural people made life more challenging in high school, the city life also afforded Maggie opportunities and exposure to friends that she would not have had in the country. The experiences at her new city school played an influential role in Maggie's journey to adulthood. She was a good student in high school, which enabled her to "hang around" with the students who were college bound. She described it as motivating to hang around kids who had plans to go to college. "I think the expectations were probably a little higher with this school because you were mixed with the kids who were going to school

[college] and things like that” (Interview transcript, 7/29/98). When she reflected on her desire for higher education, she recalled that one of the biggest influences had been the fact that the students in her peer group in high school were bound for college.

Of the eight children in her family, Maggie was one of five who graduated from high school. Despite the fact that it was not commonplace in her family to attend college, Maggie continued her education after high school and pursued a college degree. She wanted something different for her own adult life. “I didn't want to pick cotton. I knew I didn't want to work in a factory. I didn't want to work in an office. I knew early on that I had to do something different to break out of the mold so to speak” (Interview transcript, 7/29/98).

#### Preparation for Teaching

Maggie knew when she went off to college that she wanted to teach. “I always admired teachers. I guess those were the people that I really looked up to most were my teachers” (Interview transcript, 7/29/98). Upon first entering college, Maggie claimed her major as Business Education due to her love of shorthand and typing. One class in accounting quickly changed her mind and she switched her major to Elementary Education.

She recalled her total lack of preparation for the teaching job she faced with her own class of students. Her reading course in her teacher preparation program consisted of trips to the bookroom to look at basal reader programs. She and her classmates just thought the basal reading programs were wonderful. “I think it was just their knowledge level of how children learn. Reading instruction was more of the reading terminology and things like that and not application. I felt very inadequate in that area” (Interview

transcript, 7/29/98). Nevertheless, Maggie went into her new profession with great pride and determination to become a good teacher.

### Early Teaching Experiences

Maggie reflected on her decision to become a teacher as one that made her proud.

I take what I have been given in life very seriously. I am so thankful for my college education. I am thankful that it got me into a profession that was very much respected. I guess it gave new credibility to my family. My family was very proud of the fact that I became a teacher (Maggie, Interview transcript, 9/23/98).

Maggie referred to her first teaching certificate as a gift. In some ways Maggie became a role model for others. She came from an impoverished background with great odds going against her and was able to fulfill her dream of becoming a teacher. She was determined to do well in her new position.

In Maggie's early days of teaching, reading took most of her time. She had 31 students and eight different ability groups of readers. By the time she met with each group each day, it was about 1:00 in the afternoon. She found it challenging to meet the needs of that many students and to remain engaged herself. "I would get so bored listening to the stories because there were not a lot of books. I did not have any books in my classroom other than the ones I'd buy at the dime store or something" (Interview transcript, 7/29/98). Maggie described her view of teaching during these early years as that of a "power person." She defined a power person as the one who set the rules and controlled everything that goes on (Interview transcript, 9/23/98).

On a whim, Maggie decided to let the kids write on a topic of choice each Friday. She thoroughly enjoyed this and so did the students. It broke the monotony of the week's

routine and Maggie enjoyed the creativity of the students' ideas and of their "invented" spelling. She described it as one of the early experiences with her students that she enjoyed most. Maggie could see positive results from this Friday activity, but really did not have an understanding of the value of the writing process or the invented spellings the students used in their writing. "Had I just known how to expand that and do it every day, but that was not something that was well known 28 years ago" (Interview transcript, 7/29/98).

When recalling her early years of teaching, Maggie described the first nineteen years as very, very traditional. "You had your reading groups. Everything was strictly out of the book, dittos, extremely traditional. I mean, how bored can you get, but I just didn't know how to put it all together" (Interview transcript, 7/29/98). The lack of alternative role models for teaching literacy in any other way made it difficult for Maggie to see another way to approach teaching. She struggled with her more traditional ways of teaching, but had no idea how to go about making changes in the way she taught.

Maggie believed she taught that way because she was taught that way when she was schooled. It was an approach that was most familiar and comfortable for her. "Sometimes we do things because it's the way we have always done them and for no other reason. A lot of people model after the people that they student taught under. They model after former teachers and they model some really ineffective practices" (Interview transcript, 7/29/98).

Maggie had experienced firsthand a lack of understanding of what else to do in the classroom and a lack of understanding of how to vary her teaching. "Some teachers use the textbooks "as the gospel" and don't question anything that's in there" (Interview

transcript, 8/19/98). This blind acceptance of traditional practices early in her teaching career had prevented Maggie from making substantive changes to her teaching practices even though instinctively she knew it was not working well. She had no knowledge or experiences from which to draw to take the first step in changing her practices as a teacher of literacy. Maggie was not the only participant in this study who had blind acceptance of traditional teaching practices. Other participants had very similar experiences.

### Rebekah's Story

Rebekah chose to interview at her school in her classroom. She was open with her peers about her participation in this study. She appeared very comfortable being interviewed in this setting and seemed to feel no intimidation about others' awareness, including that of her principal, regarding her participation in the interviews. Rebekah was a confident, master, veteran teacher of twenty-three years. She was a leader among her colleagues and considered to be a mentor. Oftentimes this was the role her colleagues chose for her.; they frequently came to her classroom to inquire, reflect and discuss school issues and instructional strategies. They valued Rebekah's advice and input about teaching.

The quality of her teaching was obvious to all who worked around her. She was selected as her local school Teacher of the Year, had been chosen as an Honor Teacher by several former students, and was recognized as an Outstanding Young Educator earlier in her career. Like Maggie and other study participants, she had served in leadership roles at the school and county levels. She had served on numerous curriculum

and textbook committees over the years in the area of language arts. She was respected in the county and in the community as an effective teacher.

Rebekah's story begins with her practices as an adult reader and writer. Next, a historical view of her literacy experiences at school as a student will be discussed followed by her early teaching experiences as an instructor of literacy in her own classroom.

#### Rebekah as an Adult Reader and Writer

Rebekah was an avid reader. She spent her summers at the pool reading. "I'd go out with three to four books to the pool and I just loved it. I consider reading a hobby" (Interview transcript, 8/21/98). Her reading preferences were varied and she often asked for new suggested authors on her trips to the local bookstore. One area of her reading that waned in recent years was her professional reading. Once her master's was completed, she did not find herself as drawn to the professional reading as she once had been. She attributed this lack of attention to professional reading to the demands on her time.

There's just not enough time. This is a rat race. I've got so much going on at school and that's bad because the reading makes you better and I know that from my own experiences, but there's just not enough time. I even cancelled the newspaper because if I'm going to read it, I'm going to read it here [school]. You know I don't have enough time to read it when I get home. The last 2-3 years have been very strenuous at school. I come home at 6:30 (Interview transcript, 8/21/98).

The increased demands on Rebekah's time as a professional had, in fact, decreased her opportunities for professional learning. A life devoid of multiple reading opportunities

was a difficult challenge for Rebekah as reading had been a central part of her life from a very early age.

Writing was also an integral part of Rebekah's life as a literate adult. Rebekah described herself as a writer who has to write down everything. "I can have ideas in my head but I have to put it down once, read over it and even when I'm putting it down, I'm already knowing how I'm going to change things. But I still have to put it down" (Interview transcript, 8/21/98). Much of her personal writing was used for instruction with her students. She often wrote about topics of interest to them or developed pieces used as a model for them.

She kept a personal diary to write about her family concerns and it was for her eyes only. The diary was not shared with her students or her family members. She wrote in her diary on a regular basis. At times, she used it to just jot down thoughts and at other times found herself writing multiple pages about topics that were important to her. When she was about to have surgery once and had some things that she just felt she needed to get on paper, she turned to her diary. "I felt so much better after I wrote it all down" (Interview transcript, 8/21/98). Rebekah called her diary writing a "release" and not only kept her diary secret from her family, but actually kept it hidden from them. There was once a close call when her husband almost found it at which time she moved her diary to an alternate location.

This love of writing had been one that Rebekah developed as an adult. However, her love of reading had been established early in her life. Rebekah was a voracious reader and those habits could be linked directly to her literacy practices as a child.

### Early Literacy Experiences

Rebekah was the younger of two children. Her mother was a schoolteacher and her father was an accountant. Reading was an integral part of her life while growing up. She recalled weekly Saturday trips to the library on her bicycle to get a new stack of books to fill her bike basket and then it was home to read them. On these trips to the library, Rebekah most often chose realistic fiction, biographical and autobiographical books to read. She enjoyed real stories about the lives of real people. Although she loved to read, had access to books at home and through the school and public libraries, Rebekah did not recall that her parents ever read to her. She developed a strong love of reading without modeling from her parents.

Rebekah described herself as a good student who developed a love of reading in her early school years because it pleased others for her to read well. “I guess I always wanted to please people so I guess I learned how to read cause it was a good thing, a positive thing in school. You know if you read and did things well, it was a good thing and I guess I just enjoyed being a good person” (Interview transcript, 8/21/98).

Rebekah did not recall the specifics of how she learned to read. She just always remembered being a reader. Rebekah’s third grade teacher stood out in her mind because she read aloud to the class. Rebekah did not recall that any of her other teachers ever read aloud to the class. Reading instruction was whole group. “Everybody opened their books to the same page and everybody read the same story. It was Sally, Dick and Jane” (Interview transcript, 8/21/98).

Rebekah never had the opportunities to write early in her literacy development. Therefore, it became a struggle when she was required to write as she got older. When

she had to write a book report or project, she recalled that her mother often “would usually end up sitting down with me and practically wrote things for me” (Interview transcript, 8/21/98). Rebekah attributed this to her own need to please others and to the strong personality of her mother. “I was just such a people pleaser and just wanted to do what everybody wanted me to do. I don’t think I really had a voice or anything. I think my mom was real strong and I think I was just kind of under her” (Interview transcript, 8/21/98). Rebekah assumed the role of the compliant, good daughter who worked hard to please others. This made writing a great challenge because she was uncomfortable with writing and did not know how to please others with her writing.

Rebekah never became as comfortable with writing as she did with reading. “I wanted to do things so well. I guess I was afraid that I wouldn’t ‘cause I was not comfortable with it” (Interview transcript, 8/21/98). She described the writing instruction in school as grill and drill. Her lack of knowledge about writing and how to write effectively caused high levels of stress for Rebekah when she was given a writing assignment. All of the insecurities about her own writing made Rebekah a reluctant writer.

Rebekah grew up “doing” school with her mother. She attended PTA and went to her mother’s classroom often. She was amazed at the things the students did at her mother’s school that were very different from her own school. “They had science and social studies all together with their reading. She worked things out so they would be doing centers and groups and carrying out some of the science and social studies after things had been introduced” (Interview transcript, 8/21/98). Rebekah recalled how this made her want to attend school with her mother. However, growing up as the daughter of

a schoolteacher did not inspire Rebekah to become a teacher herself. She attributed her lack of interest in a teaching career to the time her mother spent on her work as an educator. “She worked a lot and I knew she was doing all of those things instead of being with us. I guess I felt that” (Interview transcript, 8/21/98). As Rebekah made plans for college, her mother told her that she would have to go into teaching or pay for her own college expenses. Rebekah, being the good, compliant daughter, conceded to her mother’s demands to major in education even though she had pictured herself in other careers.

When Rebekah reflected back on her mother’s demand that she become a teacher, she found it to be a good decision after all. “As time went on and as I settled down more and got into the education courses, I think I realized that I was going to enjoy this and like it. I’d always liked to work with children so I guess that all just kind of fell into place. Maybe mother saw that I had a trait that I didn’t realize I had” (Interview transcript, 8/21/98). By the time she reached student teaching, Rebekah described teaching as fitting like a glove.

### Early Teaching Experience

Rebekah felt very unprepared for her first teaching experience. She was assigned to teach kindergarten and was at a loss about what to do with this age group. “Back then we had one experience with children and that was student teaching and that was in second grade. I had not a clue” (Interview transcript, 8/21/98). The quality of her preparation was not the most important concern at the time she began to teach because there was such a teacher shortage. “Our preacher was even teaching a class because they didn’t have enough teachers” (Interview transcript, 8/21/98).

Rebekah only taught kindergarten for a month before she and her husband moved and she took a fourth grade position at a new school. These students were grouped by ability and each teacher was assigned to teach a different subject. Rebekah taught reading to her groups. Each group was named after a letter of the alphabet. The students who struggled to learn to read were the “F” group. The teachers called them the F Troop. Of all her first students, Rebekah remembered these students the most vividly.

I remember that group probably more than any other because they were just so pitiful and of course we were still teaching them the same way. We had the same books and they couldn’t read them. I had no training to know what they needed that was different than what the manual said. Everything we taught was straight by the books, straight by the books (Interview transcript, 8/21/98).

Reading instruction was very unappealing to Rebekah and even less appealing to her students.

It was just a lot of repetition, not interesting at all, low interest, certainly those children weren’t attracted to it. Even the older ones, it was just a chore to get through reading. It was not exciting. It was not enjoyable. You did not see the results of turning anybody on to reading (Interview transcript, 8/21/98).

This was common teaching practice across subjects when Rebekah began her teaching career. She noted that there probably was a curriculum, but that no one followed it. “I didn’t even know what a curriculum guide was. It was just here’s your book. Go do it. We went straight by the book and that was it” (Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Rebekah did take her students to the school library once per week for a class checkout session. This was a free checkout time and she did not provide any input into

their selections of reading material. “There was nothing on my part to know what the books were that the children were picking or anything. You never knew the results of that unless you assigned a book report” (Interview transcript, 8/21/98).

In retrospect, Rebekah remembered that she questioned teaching. “This is it? This is all there is to teaching?” (Interview transcript, 8/21/98). The scripted textbooks were all she knew and all that had been modeled for her. Even though she felt dissatisfaction with teaching this way, she did not know how to approach it any differently.

During these early years of teaching, Rebekah had the opportunity to teach in several states and found practices in each state to be quite similar. When she and her colleagues encountered students with reading problems, they just worked around it. “We did a lot of reading aloud to them, but didn’t do anything about helping them learn how to read. We just got around it by reading to them” (Interview transcript, 8/21/98).

Writing instruction during her early years of teaching was virtually non-existent. When professional development was provided on writing in the early 80’s, it was coined “creative writing” where a topic was assigned and all the students wrote about the thing, often nonsense topics. “The writing was not relevant to the kids at all. It was like pulling teeth to get them to sit and write on those topics because they didn’t mean anything to them” (Interview transcript, 8/21/98). Rebekah and her colleagues felt the pressure to teach writing, but really had no idea how to approach it. The textbooks that they had come to rely on so heavily had nothing in them to support writing instruction. “We just weren’t comfortable with it. And everybody hated teaching writing. They were mandating that writing be taught but with very little help” (Interview transcript, 8/21/98).

Rebekah like many of her colleagues really did not see the importance of writing or writing instruction. “It was very uncomfortable for me cause I despised it. I had no joy in my life for writing either” (Interview transcript, 8/21/98). Her early reluctance as a writer had made her a reluctant teacher of writing.

At this same time in her teaching career, Rebekah’s school system began to develop a curriculum and began to provide professional development for teachers to learn more about effective teaching. One curriculum coordinator talked to groups of teachers about teaching the curriculum.

That was scary because we didn’t know how to do that. You know we didn’t know how to take the objectives and we didn’t know how to just teach objectives if you weren’t teaching the book; we didn’t know what to do. I think fear was the reason why most people didn’t get away from the books (Interview transcript, 8/21/98).

This was the first stage in the evolution of this young teacher’s career to teach in a less traditional manner. She knew she was dissatisfied with teaching and had the desire to do something different. A new focus on the curriculum in her teaching instead of the textbook signaled the turning of the first page in the next chapter of Rebekah’s teaching life.

The next chapter in the professional lives of other study participants evolved from similar events to those of Maggie and Rebekah. The parallels of professional change became most apparent as they lived similar experiences while working in the same school system.

### Carey's Story

Carey chose to have our interviews sessions in her home. She felt most comfortable talking in that setting. At the time, Carey had been teaching for about 27 years, mostly in third grade. Like the other participants in the study, she had served on numerous county and school level curriculum committees. She was considered a leader among her colleagues who had also chosen her as a Teacher of the Year.

Due to her leadership role with her peers, she was often called upon by her administration to lead school and countywide staff development sessions in language arts. Although she had developed a great passion for literacy in the classroom, this was not evident in her own literacy practices as an adult outside the classroom.

#### Carey as an Adult Reader and Writer

Carey does not choose to read novels or lengthy texts. "I wonder sometimes why I don't, unless I'm a little hyper, that I don't sit down and read novels. I've always wanted to do that" (Interview transcript, 8/27/98). If she were given a choice of reading material, she would gravitate to a children's book or magazine. She had recently begun to listen to books on tape and found that to be very appealing.

Carey's husband, on the other hand, was a voracious reader. Despite the fact that she could readily see the pleasure her husband gained from reading and the knowledge he acquired, Carey still could not make herself do the same. "Because of his [husband] reading, he's so smart. I know that and I know it's because of a lot of what he reads and how much he reads. I realize the essence of how important it is" (Interview transcript, 8/27/98).

Carey also stated that she struggled personally in the area of writing. While in school, she was never required to develop a personal piece of writing.” I just didn’t develop that skill and so now for me to do that is real hard” (Interview transcript, 8/27/98). Grammatical correctness was not her struggle. She had just never experienced the writing process. Carey Observed, “I write a lot like the children cause I’m really at that stage of writing and it has made them feel comfortable” (Interview transcript, 8/27/98). She recalled a time when adults shared their writing in a professional workshop she attended. When Carey heard the others read their writing pieces, she was reluctant to share hers.” I was like, I’m not about to share mine now. You can forget it. I know that’s how the children feel” (Interview transcript, 8/27/98). Carey’s own reluctance to read and write as an adult could be linked to her early literacy experiences.

#### Early Literacy Experiences

Carey grew up in a southern mill town. She described the mill as taking care of people that lived and worked there. The mill provided for the needs of its employees from medical care and housing to schooling. Carey attended the school provided by the mill. There were five mill towns and each town had its own school. She lived in the same three-room house until she went off to college. “I really was poor, but everyone around me was poor so therefore it didn’t make any difference (Interview transcript, 8/27/98).

Carey’s parents and others in the community were very loyal to the mill. They were proud of what they had and did not question it. This was part of the culture for those that worked for the mill and lived in the mill town. “They knew they were not making a lot of money, but they thought they couldn’t do any better. They thought, we’re just doing the best we can and they help us out. That was just the way they lived” (Interview

transcript, 8/27/98). She did not remember any particular stigma being attached to growing up in poverty although Carey did remember that others outside her community called those that lived around the mill “lint heads.”

Carey had one older sister and lived with both parents. Neither of her parents had completed high school. Carey’s grandparents had died at an early age, and her mother had to live with relatives, which her mother hated. She dropped out of school in 11<sup>th</sup> grade so she didn’t have to live with the relatives and could go out on her own. Carey’s father completed the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. He left school to help the family with sharecropping. Carey described her father as brilliant. Even though her mother completed higher levels of formal schooling, Carey believed that her mother may have had learning problems and had less confidence than her dad. Her mother had also missed a great deal of school while growing up due to illness and Carey knew that had had a negative impact on her learning as well.

Carey’s mother did not read often in front of her as a child. She observed her mother reading cookbooks or the newspaper. Her father also read rarely, but more often than her mother. When her father read, it was for the purpose of learning how to do something. His reading was driven by a need to know. “He went back to school even after he retired. He went back to a technical school and got a certificate in small motor repair. He could read and just learn things” (Interview transcript, 8/27/98).

Carey did not have access to books at home while growing up. She remembered a Sears’ catalog and one Bible storybook. She treasured that one storybook, looked at it and read it over and overcame remembered that once her dad had purchased one of the big showcase bibles, but they never read it.” I didn’t have any books to read. I was outside

turning cartwheels or climbing a tree or that kind of stuff. I had no role models for reading” (Interview transcript, 8/27/98). However, Carey’s parents had expected that she make good grades.

Carey had an older sister who struggled in school. Her sister frequently made low grades although Carey was not allowed to do so. Her sister had been very sick and Carey felt that her parents overlooked her sister’s bad grades due to her illness.

If I made lower than an A, mother and daddy would ground me. I couldn’t understand those types of punishment when she [sister] was making very bad grades and I was making what I thought were very good grades. If I fell down 2 points, mother and daddy used to have a fit (Interview transcript, 8/27/98).

Carey recalled always loving school, although she did not remember a great deal about elementary school. Her early reading experiences consisted of reading from the basal with Dick and Jane stories. The students were placed into small reading groups. In retrospect, Carey felt these reading groups were formed based on student ability, but she was not aware of the meaning of the “groupings” at the time she was in school. “I never had any trouble in school so I guess that’s why I don’t remember a whole lot about any of the ins and outs of what happened” (Interview transcript, 8/27/98). Many of Carey’s early memories of school centered around events that had little to do with instruction. She recalled the time she broke her arm or the time her mean second grade teacher made her cry because she forgot something.

Her first vivid memories of instruction were from her eighth grade year. Her eighth grade teacher was a recent college graduate who emphasized the parts of speech and loved literature. Carey connected with her teacher’s love of literature and came to

love it herself. She ended up quite grateful to her eighth grade teacher when she got to high school. “When I got to high school, I kept thinking if it had not been for my eighth grade teacher, I would not have made it” (Interview transcript, 8/27/98).

Carey also felt the appreciation for this teacher upon entering college. Carey had graduated at the top of her class in high school. She expected college to be easy. It was not and she felt the lack of preparation from her hometown schooling firsthand. “The kids from the big cities in the state came in and they just whizzed through it ‘cause they had had all the kinds of research papers, all kinds of writing experiences and it was nothing for them to sit down and whip out a paper or do writing for English 101” (Interview transcript, 8/27/98). Carey was never required to write in school in college courses other than an occasional research paper. “Even after I got out of English 101 in college, even as an English major, I never had to write” (Interview transcript, 8/27/98).

Carey recalled that all of her life she wanted to be a teacher, although like Maggie, leaving school prior to graduation was the norm in Carey’s mill community. Only five or six in the class of approximately 100 who graduated from high school went on to college. Most of the students went to work in the mill after high school, if they finished high school at all. Carey noted that the mill did support education in the sense that if anyone wanted to get a job there to raise money for college, the mill would put them to work so they could earn the money to pay for it.

“Education was not talked about a whole lot. I just loved my teachers. I loved being at school. It was so different from home. From day one mama and daddy said that was all I talked about. I wanted to go to school and be a teacher.” (Interview transcript, 8/27/98) The teachers in Carey’s mill town were highly respected and everyone knew

them because the teaching staff was a stable part of the community and rarely changed. The status of the teacher in the community may have influenced Carey's desire to become a teacher.

Only one older cousin in Carey's family had graduated from college. In response to Carey's desire to go off to college and become a teacher, her dad told her that she could stay home and go to school or find grants to pay for her schooling. Carey applied for everything only to find out in late summer following her senior year that her school had not mailed in her paperwork. She was devastated by this event and knew her parents did not make enough on their mill salaries to pay for college. Her dad promised Carey that he would pay for one semester with his tax refund if she would work in the summer and save enough to pay for the second semester. That was the plan they followed which allowed Carey to graduate from college debt free.

### Preparation for Teaching

Many of the details of her teacher preparation program were difficult for Carey to remember. The reading courses were text-driven and focused on the use of the basal reader. In her preparation courses for teaching, Carey did remember a whole semester of phonics, a new term to her.

I had to learn what a long and short /a/ were and she [the instructor] would stand up and talk in sentences and we had to write it, write only the phonetic part of it. We had to put the long and short and put all the syllable and accent marks and all that kind of stuff. I thought if this is what I have to teach, then I'm in trouble, bad trouble (Interview transcript, 8/27/98).

This introduction to phonics did not excite Carey about the teaching profession she was about to enter. In fact, it caused her to have concern about becoming a teacher at all. She remembered little about her preparation for teaching literacy and felt inadequately prepared after securing her first teaching job.

### Early Teaching Experiences

Carey was not married when she first began teaching. She led a fun life of single college graduate and often wondered why her principal even allowed her to continue to work. Her focus at the time was her social life and she often came in tired from late nights out with friends. She described teaching as just telling the students what to do. “We had reading groups and I remember wanting them to read, just sit there, just do what I tell you to-Do your seatwork. Now just sit there and do your seatwork and you would bring them back to the reading table with you” (Interview transcript, 8/27/98).

Teaching was a very unpleasant experience for Carey that first year. She thought teaching was a very difficult job and felt that her principal was “on her” all the time. Looking back, she certainly understood why he behaved that way and acknowledged how irresponsible she had been. At the end of her first year, Carey decided to pursue a career as a flight attendant. These plans were soon thwarted due to the decision to get married. She changed her plans to fly the friendly skies and moved to Florida with her new husband.

In Florida, she was hired to teach second grade despite the fact that she informed her new principal during the interview that she did not want to teach. She felt an obligation to teach because she had gotten married and needed the money. Instead of refusing to hire her, the principal became her mentor and took Carey under her wing.

Carey received a great deal of support from her new principal and began to like teaching. Over the next few years, she got very involved in professional organizations and took on various leadership roles. Carey was given many opportunities while in Florida to try some innovative approaches to teaching. After three years in Florida, Carey and her husband moved back to Atlanta.

In Atlanta, she once again experienced a very traditional setting in her new school. Carey was disappointed to return to a more traditional setting following her Florida experience. After two years, she left to teach in an open classroom setting with four teachers to each pod. They each had their own classes, but were all in one octagon-shaped pod together with only furniture to separate one area from the next. Carey recalled how noisy it was and how easily distracted the students were with so much going on around them. “We were supposed to move the students through the different classes, but what it ended up being was us putting the furniture so that it made walls and trying to define our little area.” (Interview transcript, 8/27/98)

Instead of small group reading instruction, the students were taught in centers, which Carey changed every week. She had a multiage group of students, which made it even more challenging to plan and provide new individualized centers each week. This was a difficult way to approach teaching, but Carey found that she enjoyed it far more than the more text-driven teaching she had experienced in earlier years. At the end of each school year, Carey moved up to the next grade level with her students until they reached fourth grade. Carey became very close to that initial group of students, some of whom who still called her on her birthday 23 years later.

This strong connection to students and the move to more hands-on, engaging, and individualized learning was a positive experience for Carey. She saw the positive results with her students and began to see that teaching could vary from the pages of the textbook. This glimpse into non-traditional teaching practices laid the foundation for future changes in Carey's teaching.

### Patty's Story

Patty was the least experienced of the teachers who participated in this study. She had been teaching kindergarten for approximately eight years at the time of our interviews. She chose to be interviewed in her home. Patty was a school leader and served on the Building Leadership Team, as grade chair, and had been selected as Teacher of the Year by her colleagues. She was well respected in her school community and was frequently requested by parents to be the teacher of their child. Patty especially enjoyed teaching early literacy skills to her five year olds. Patty wanted to know as much as she could about becoming an effective teacher across all subjects. The love of literature and literacy that she brought into her classroom was mirrored in her personal life as an adult.

### Patty as an Adult Reader and Writer

Patty read what she called "junk," books that she found relaxing. "I read other things out of necessity. I read school texts out of necessity to stay current in teaching practice just because I need to. I read the paper just to keep up with what's going on and that kind of thing. But I really just love to read for pleasure. That's what I prefer to do" (Interview transcript, 8/17/98). Patty stayed current on all the latest novels and read voraciously.

Patty had developed a sense of the importance of writing from her own schooling. She had not had positive writing experiences as a student and realized that it caused her to struggle with writing as an adult as well as a teacher of writing. She had made a deliberate effort to include writing as part of her life as an adult. “So I write in a journal and I try to be a role model to the children in my classroom. But I’m still not a great writer. I don’t see myself as a great writer. I find that writing in prose form comes real easy for me. But the other, I have to work at it” (Interview transcript, 8/17/98).

Patty attributed her ease with prose to her upbringing and the many discussions she participated in at home that centered on the family devotional time. Those in-depth conversations allowed her to express herself effectively in conversation or discussion and in writing. She indicated that her writing just flowed when she could write as she talked. The grounding for such ease with prose writing is situated in Patty’s early language and literacy experiences.

#### Early Literacy Experiences

Patty grew up the youngest of four siblings whose parents both worked outside the home. Patty described her earliest memories of learning as those with her older sister who was eleven years older than Patty. “She taught me the alphabet, she read to me every day and she sang songs to me. I just remember a tremendous amount of one-on-one time with her” (Interview transcript, 8/17/98). Patty’s sister had very high expectations for her learning, but was loving, nurturing and played a motherly. Patty did not recall her mother ever reading to her. Patty described her mother as busy. “When I was little, she looked at me as a responsibility and a duty and she made sure I was taken care of because I was her

child. She was real hard working, real dedicated, very protective and that kind of thing” (Interview transcript, 8/17/98).

However, Patty did remember learning a great deal from sitting in as her mother worked with her older brother, who struggled in school. Patty described the strong relationship between her mother and her older brother as being quite different than her own relationship with her mother. “It was never like flagrant favoritism or anything. She just had a real strong bond with Jack” (Interview transcript, 8/17/98). Patty’s relationship with her father was quite the opposite of that with her mother.

Patty was closest to her father. She described her dad as a funny man who was truly the patriarch of the family. “Dad and I had that real tight emotional, just easy rapport. I could just share anything with him” (Interview transcript, 8/17/98). Her dad read with her daily through the family devotionals each night after dinner. “We’d all gather in the living room and sit and then we would listen to his devotional and then we would talk about it. We’d share and discuss. Language, talking, discussion, sharing and that kind of thing was real important in the family growing up as well as reading” (Interview transcript, 8/17/98). Patty believed those experiences prepared her for teaching.

In school, Patty recalled the music, art and plays most vividly as positive experiences in her schooling. She made a strong connection to those activities. During reading time, she remembered reading Dick and Jane in small groups and how bored she felt. “I remember thinking, will this ever end?” (Interview transcript, 8/17/98). Patty was fortunate to always be in the top group. She felt empathy for those that were not. “I

remember the students who weren't [in the top group] and how they would struggle and feel so frustrated" (Interview transcript, 8/17/98).

She remembered more about the atmosphere of the classroom than she did actual instruction. She recalled her harsh second grade teacher vividly. This had a negative impact on Patty's feelings about the classroom. "It was always blatantly obvious who her favorite student was" (Interview transcript, 8/17/98). This made her classroom unappealing to Patty. More than anything else about her early years in school, Patty recalled that relationships were the most important aspect to her. "I look back on my experience and realize that's what really stood out. The things that really stood out were relationships, my relationships with the teacher" (Interview transcript, 8/17/98).

When she entered sixth grade, Patty had an experience unlike any other. The school's media specialist requested to keep Patty in the media center all day with her. She agreed to ensure that Patty kept up with her studies. Her parents never knew about it. Patty was grateful for the opportunity because she was able to accelerate academically that year. When she reflected on why the media specialist wanted to teach her in this way she stated, "I guess it's 'cause I would sit still and do whatever she said. I was one of those that just would please her and just be happy to be there. I was real happy, had a real good attitude, real cooperative and just a hard little worker" (Interview transcript, 8/17/98).

Her remaining middle school years were very positive and she was part of a peer group that really pushed each other academically. She found this to be the most positive memory of her school career. "We were so committed to each other that if somebody

made a C or a grade below a B, we would take them to the library and drill them until they wanted to scream mercy” (Interview transcript, 8/17/98).

Patty doesn’t recall any early experiences with writing. “Writing was never really emphasized other than just the mechanical side of it to learn the mechanics. You had to write correctly. I don’t remember any real creative writing experiences” (Interview transcript, 8/17/98). Patty did have one piece of writing published in her sixth grade year when she was being taught one-on-one by the media specialist, but had no other positive writing experiences in school.

Her only other experiences with writing in her early years occurred outside of school with her grandmother. Her grandmother was a letter writer. When Patty went to spend summers with her grandmother, she would have Patty write letters with her. “That’s where I remember some writing was actually letter writing. She would proof my paper and she would talk to me about spelling and grammar and punctuation” (Interview transcript, 8/17/98).

### High School Experiences

High school years were just something to get through for Patty. The high school she attended was huge and overwhelming to Patty. The engagement with learning that she had found with her middle school peers quickly diminished. “It’s [high school] not something I really look back on fondly, other than band. I enjoyed band. I just don’t remember any courses really standing out as being interesting or fun” (Interview transcript, 8/17/98). Her classes were textbook driven with students seated in straight rows of desks. After such a positive middle school learning experience, it was difficult for Patty to maintain interest in her high school courses.

Following high school, Patty never really considered becoming a teacher or even going to college. It was important to her to make her own way. “I just wanted to be independent, financially independent on my own scale” (Interview transcript, 8/17/98). Dropping out of high school was a rare occurrence among the students in her community. Upon graduation about half of the students went to college and the other half straight into the workforce or trade school. Patty chose work.

Patty went into the hospitality industry after a crash course in business. At the age of twenty-six, she began to contemplate going back to. By the age of thirty, she had moved back home with her parents and returned to school to pursue a career in teaching. Two of her three siblings had gone to college and gotten degrees as well. It was only after her decision to teach that an aunt shared with Patty that she thought she’d be a great teacher, which helped ease Patty’s worries about her decision.

#### Preparation for Teaching

Patty thoroughly enjoyed her teaching preparation courses. She knew she had made the right decision to change her career.

When I started college, I just absolutely loved it because people were really into what they were doing there. They wanted to be there. When I got into teaching, I was learning about something that was just in my heart of hearts that I wanted to do. I just couldn’t get enough kind of thing. I’m just a continual student of it because I love it (Interview transcript, 8/17/98).

During her preparation for teaching, Patty found that her reading courses consisted mostly of using the basal to teach reading. This seemed quite normal to her as that was the only kind of school reading experience she had known while she was a

student herself. She recalled one college professor briefly mentioning that students could be taught to read without using a basal. Patty and her classmates were astounded.

I remember we were all shocked and amazed because we were all products of basal readers growing up. I just remember this little thing in me coming on because I was always so bored in reading groups in elementary school. I just remember us being totally amazed, just blown away that you could teach that way (Interview transcript, 8/17/98).

This professor never elaborated on how teachers would teach reading without using the basal, but did plant a seed for Patty to which she would one day return.

### Early Teaching Experience

Early in her teaching career, Patty described herself as a dispenser of knowledge. Her kindergarten students were grouped by ability for reading instruction, which came directly from the *Getting Ready to Read* series. Throughout her reading instruction, her goal was to cover the book. She came to measure her success as a teacher by her progress through the book.

If you were really good, you would be able to get into this workbook. It was very much getting through that reading series, making sure I got all of those skills nailed down no matter how much they [students] said, “AHHHHH!” I was just driven to meet those goals set in that basal reader (Interview transcript, 9/29/98).

Her perception as a new teacher was that she needed to cover the text from front to back. The textbook was scripted and told the teacher what to say, what to do and which workbook pages to run off for each lesson. “It was just teaching everything isolated, just isolated and out of context and it just not making sense. We did not take the isolated work

and then apply it to something whole and meaningful. I was already bored with that after two years” (Interview transcript, 9/15/98). Patty wanted more from this teaching career she had worked so hard to have. She, like others in the study, longed for more from teaching than covering content.

### Barbie’s Story

Barbie chose to have our interviews conducted at her school. She was very comfortable with others knowing of her participation in the study. Barbie was a veteran teacher with approximately 25 years of experience that varied from teaching and administration at the middle school to teaching at the elementary level. Most of her teaching experience was at the elementary level teaching fifth grade. Barbie had taught fifth grade for many years at the time of this study and was well respected by her peers.

Barbie was a confident, outspoken, matter of fact advocate for effective teaching. She did not mind stepping on toes if she felt it was needed. Like the other participants in the study, Barbie was a leader among her peers. She had participated in district-level curriculum development and textbook adoptions. In addition, she had served as a school leader during implementation of various school level initiatives. She was respected by her parents and colleagues and, like all the other participants, had been chosen as Teacher of the Year by her peers. She was passionate about good teaching and had a particular interest in literacy instruction. Her love of reading and writing was evident in her own practices as a literate adult.

### Barbie as an Adult Reader and Writer

Barbie considered herself to be a voracious reader. “I cannot read enough. I just have to have something to read. When I go to visit my parents, I talk and watch TV with

them and read simultaneously. I just have to have it in my hand” (Interview transcript, 8/26/98). Barbie stated that about the only place she did not read was while driving a car. Barbie liked a wide variety of genres and varied reading experiences. “It’s almost like mind exercise. You don’t want to keep doing the same thing. You switch it around” (Interview transcript, 8/26/98).

Barbie also considered herself to be a good writer. “I like to write. I really enjoy it. It’s hard as hell, but I just enjoy it. I didn’t realize I had a gift for it. I thought everybody could do that” (Interview transcript, 8/26/98). It was later in life when she received positive feedback from others about her excellent writing that Barbie realized writing did not come as easily to others. Barbie had always put a great deal of time into revising her writing. “I just rewrite, rewrite, and rewrite constantly. I’m very competitive so that’s probably why I can’t leave it alone. I can always make it better. And when I hear someone else’s, I darn sure can make it better” (Interview transcript, 8/26/98). Barbie’s passion for reading and writing as an adult were well grounded in her early literacy experiences.

### Early Literacy Experiences

Barbie was the oldest of three children. Her mother went to college for two years and studied art before quitting to get married. Barbie’s father never completed high school. Barbie described him as a very intelligent man who had difficulty in school. She speculated that he may have had a learning disability. Despite his difficulties in school, he was very successful as an adult and owned his own company. Both of Barbie’s parents and her extended family emphasized the importance of education while she was growing up.

Barbie had fond memories of reading as a child. Barbie's mother took her to the library every week to get books that she had loved as a child and read them to Barbie. Barbie recalled the positive feeling she got in the big, old building that served as the public library. "It was old, but it was really interesting. I just loved the building. I loved the smell of it. Books were everywhere and it had low, little benches for the kids. I learned to love reading there, I think" (Interview transcript, 8/26/98).

There was a big age difference between Barbie and her two younger siblings making her an only child for the first part of her life. Her dad traveled a good bit so she and her mother spent a great deal of time together reading. She learned to love and enjoy books through those experiences with her mother. "Mother was always a reader. I think she just had a respect for education and the written word" (Interview transcript, 8/26/98).

Unfortunately, Barbie's experiences with reading at school were quite different. Reading groups consisted of round robin reading and waiting for a turn to get a chance to read. Barbie remembered it as boring. "You'd wait your turn. What you were reading didn't particularly mean anything. It wasn't difficult so it wasn't challenging" (Interview transcript, 8/26/98). Barbie attributed her boredom to some of the discipline problems she had at school. "You know back then, you didn't talk. You sat in your desk and kept your mouth shut. And I just couldn't shut up talking. I'd talk all the time" (Interview transcript, 8/26/98). Barbie was a demanding student. Neither compliant nor obedient, she expected to be engaged in learning and challenged by her assignments. As a result, she acted out in class when she became bored.

The reading material at school consisted of Alice, Jerry and Jip. The only positive early reading experience that Barbie could remember occurred in fourth or fifth grade.

She read a book called *Wagon Wheels*. It tied in American history and Daniel Boone traveling the Kentucky wilderness. She still remembered that experience because she found it so interesting. Early writing experiences were pretty much non-existent. “Mostly you wrote on a ditto or short answers. It was more like a report, that sort of thing” (Interview transcript, 8/26/98). She had no opportunities to write creatively or about topics of interest to her. Barbie was a naturally gifted writer and this gift was never realized or tapped during her school years. Barbie did not share a great deal about her early school experiences or high school. In her mind, it seemed to all be so traditional and similar that it did not warrant much time during our interviews.

Going to college was a family expectation for Barbie. “It was *when* you go to college. When I was a little girl, we would go and travel all over Kentucky and look at colleges ‘cause you know I **was** going” (Interview transcript, 8/26/98). The community expectations did not place an emphasis on women attending college. She had friends who got married right out of high school and some who pursued careers. At the time Barbie graduated from high school, the career opportunities for women were limited. “I can remember high school vocation day. You could go to the secretary group or the airline stewardess group or the teacher group or the homemaker or the nurse group. That was it for us” (Interview transcript, 8/26/98).

Barbie’s first inclination was to go into nursing. A brief stint as a candy striper ended that desire. She went on to college to become a high school English teacher just to find there were few jobs available in high school teaching. Barbie discovered through an uncle who served on a local school board that there was a great demand for elementary teachers. “There was just a plethora of jobs for elementary people. You didn’t even have

to have a certificate. You could even get a job, especially at the parochial school; you could get a job without a degree.” (Interview transcript, 8/26/98) Despite the fact that one of her college professors told Barbie it would be a waste of talent for her to teach at the elementary level, she followed the demand and joined the ranks of the elementary teachers.

### Early Teaching Experiences

Barbie began her teaching career in a school that served a population of students that lived in the local housing projects. When she asked what she was to teach, “They told me to just go down to the bookroom and pick some books you like. So I decided I like this book and I’ll teach this. I was the first teacher in the school to use a reading workbook. I just invented it as I went along and nobody ever stuck their head in, told me what to do, gave me suggestions or anything else” (Interview transcript, 8/26/98). Barbie did draw from her early literacy experiences as she chose the materials to use. She avoided books like those with Alice, Jerry and Jip and chose books more like the *Wagon Wheels* that she had so fondly remembered.

Barbie wanted to make good choices and had the desire to become a good teacher. Unfortunately, like the other participants early teaching experiences, good teaching for Barbie and her colleagues was not defined by learning outcomes of students. “You were a good teacher if you started at the beginning of the book and got to the end by the end of the year and you didn’t have to spank very many people and it wasn’t a big commotion. That’s how you got to be a good teacher” (Interview transcript, 8/26/98). Barbie described this early teaching as more behind the desk teaching, as more of being a manager.

After leaving Kentucky and coming to Georgia, Barbie changed to the middle school level. The middle school concept was new and she was interested in learning more about it. She was quickly frustrated with the middle school setting. "It was interesting because a lot of the teachers were junior high teachers and they wanted to teach their subject and they didn't want to teach the child. They wanted to teach in the old dictatorial way, the you will learn and you will memorize way" (Interview transcript, 8/26/98). Another source of frustration for Barbie while at the middle school level was the fact that she had a master's degree in reading and was hired to serve as the math specialist. Understandably dissatisfied with her middle school experience, Barbie returned to the elementary school. She wanted to teach language arts and use her expertise from graduate school in the classroom with her students.

Upon her return, Barbie found that elementary teaching remained very skills focused and fragmented. Writing was just an occasional fun activity that you did in class.

I pretty much looked at it [literacy instruction] as a systems approach. That's the way I was taught and I had never heard anything differently. I didn't think of teaching as being like a give and take between the student and teacher. I guess I was thinking in terms like I'm imparting knowledge and they're receiving it (Interview transcript, 8/26/98).

Barbie did not consider other ways of teaching because this was the way she had been taught and the way she was taught to teach others.

There was never any thought of doing anything on your own. You just weren't encouraged to do something. What was there to discuss when it was all laid out for you? It's like the commercial on television that goes right before that Michael

J. Fox show where everybody's just kind of in gray, black and white and they're marching into work. That's the way it [teaching] was, just lock-step, lock-step, lock-step, lock-step. You were so isolated there wasn't any discussion. I never even thought about reflecting on it or changing what I was doing (Interview transcript, 8/26/98).

It was difficult for Barbie and the other teachers to see the need for change from traditional practices. These practices were familiar and comfortable and the teachers had no experiences from which to draw to even realize things could be different with classroom instruction. Barbie and the other participants in the study were eventually able to recognize the need for change in a professional learning opportunity on whole language. With whole language came new paradigms about teaching and learning that they had not heard about previously.

Barbie and the other four teacher participants in this study were from very different backgrounds and had varying professional experiences. They all came together under a common philosophical belief about teaching as a result of their participation in professional development on whole language. For the first time, teaching became an art and they became the artists ready to go to work to create one masterpiece after another. The next chapter will provide a snapshot of their newly created portraits of professional practices as whole language teachers.

## CHAPTER FIVE: A PROFESSIONAL CROSSROADS

From these historical snapshots of each participant, we move with them through a “professional crossroads.” It began in June 1988 with three of the five women registering to attend a workshop entitled, “Whole Language.” The term had become the new buzz word among local educators, but few really knew much about it. A neighboring county had adopted whole language practices in many of its classrooms and the word had spread quickly. Each of the participants knew just enough to have her curiosity peaked. This curiosity prompted over 100 other teachers throughout the county to register for the course.

Curiosity mounted as the first group of teachers walked into Smith Elementary to learn how “to do” whole language. The participants thought it would be another great workshop to get some new teaching ideas for reading instruction. Everyone had “heard” that teachers who “did” whole language used a great deal of children’s literature. This alone sparked great interest in this initial weeklong workshop.

Silence permeated the room as the workshop presenters discussed the research that was the foundation behind the whole language philosophy. There was no lock-step manual to look over to know how “to do” whole language. The participants were intrigued by the new information while at the same time feeling inadequate for all they did *not* know about literacy instruction was brought to light. They were intrigued by the idea of teaching literacy in a different way, but wary; the “how to” was unclear. This new information was counter to all they had known and practiced as teachers of literacy.

At the end of each workshop day throughout the week, there were clusters of teachers in the parking lot and building asking, “Do you understand what it is we are supposed to do?” Many of the workshop participants then dashed off to the bookstore in groups to purchase the children’s literature that had been introduced in the day’s workshop or to order the professional reading that would help them understand more about the whole language philosophy.

They had become so accustomed to manuals directing their teaching, it was difficult and intimidating to envision how they might direct their own teaching without the teacher’s guide. It was extremely exciting and terrifying all at once. It felt risky to teach without the manual, yet it felt somehow right to the three participants in this study who attended. The unknown and the uncomfortable feeling among the large group was profound and even unsettling, yet it somehow made perfect sense all at the same time to the participants in this study.

For these three participants, it became the catalyst to learn more and fueled a determination to create whole language classrooms for their students. For some workshop attendees, the discomfort from not having a clear, step by step approach to follow became the reason to abandon the whole of the workshop. Others equated whole language with less teaching, defined whole language as “let’s have children read good books and let’s have children write and they will be good readers and writers.”

Unlike some of the others who attended the whole language workshop, the participants in this study did the work required to understand the philosophy, and embraced it to create whole language classrooms for their students. During the next year, the other two study participants also became involved in the county’s whole language

professional development. They were able to learn from the other participants who were their colleagues, from their own self-initiated reading, graduate study, and from the whole language workshops the following summer. They became part of a select group who not only embraced the whole language philosophy, but brought it to life in their classrooms.

The discussion in this chapter will address the seminal, recurring issues shared by the participants regarding their transition in becoming whole language teachers. This journey provided these five participants, for the first time in their careers, the opportunity to feel professional empowerment and to have choices about instructional practices in their classrooms.

Although the participants had diverse family backgrounds and varied levels of higher education and professional experience, one trait they all had in common was employment in the same school system and participation in the professional development on whole language. In turn, the whole language philosophy changed their underlying beliefs about teaching and learning. They welcomed this new philosophy due to another common trait among the group, which was the desire to change their teaching practices and the learning experiences of their students. This chapter will provide a glimpse into the professional transformation they experienced in becoming whole language teachers.

#### Catalysts for Change

Even with variance in the number of years of experience in teaching, the participants had one or more catalysts that motivated their change process. Diamond (1996) noted that “change is possible only when there is some understanding of an alternative to present practices” (Diamond, p. 49). All five had become dissatisfied with

the status quo. They were "ripe" for an opportunity to view instruction through a different lens. Some of the participants in this study realized the need for change through their teaching experiences while others chose to change in light of exposure to new paradigms through professional development.

None of these participants would likely have been willing to change their practices had they not understood there was a need for change and had that change not been openly supported by the administration. To be capable of considering alternatives, they had to be dissatisfied with existing practices (Sarason, 1990). Through analytic induction, I created four categories for their stated reasons to change: Professional Boredom, Not Meeting the Needs of Students and Family, Paradigm Shifts, and Administrative Support.

#### Professional Boredom

Four out of five of the participants had never openly "bucked the system" or deliberately been insubordinate. They had all been successful students in school and understood clearly how to "do school." They understood from an early age that compliance was highly revered and rewarded in school. Gitlin and Labaree noted how ingrained the view of the role of the teacher has become in the structure of schools. This mindset had been established early on and still prevails today.

Because of the growing numerical dominance of teaching by women during the late nineteenth century, teacher professionalization projects became merged with stereotyped views of women (devaluing their abilities, skills, and knowledge), which contradicted the view that, as professionals, teachers have a right to authoritative control over their work (Gitlin & Labaree, 1996, p.90).

This mindset was evident in the behaviors of the participants as students and on into their teaching careers.

As adults, they had continued this cooperative behavior in the role of teacher. They did as they were told and did it well. At the onset of their careers, they were each charged to teach children using specific materials and they did as they were directed. They all had a strong work ethic and wanted to be good teachers. A good teacher, at the time, was one who covered the book from front to back.

As compliant as they attempted to be, each participant discussed the boredom, which they experienced professionally while using these required textbooks. They could not, though, envision a different way of teaching. Maggie had become extremely bored with her teaching. She attempted to fit in various creative activities to add a bit of variety to her teaching for her students and for herself. The requirement to teach the text often superseded those desires and the need to "cover" everything in the book did not leave much time for other activities.

Everything was strictly out of the book, dittos, very, extremely traditional. But I guess whole language saved my teaching career because I just don't know how I could've been more bored than I was back then [before whole language]. I mean, how bored can you get, but I just didn't know how to put it all together. You know when you teach in a traditional manner for so long, you know something is not right, but you don't know what it is. I mean it's just, you sort of get bored yourself and you don't know why you're bored cause you've not experienced another way of teaching. I tend to get bored right along with the kids and then I'm not very effective (Maggie, Interview transcript, 7/29/98).

Patty had similar experiences in her teaching. Although she had only been teaching for a few years before being introduced to whole language, Patty had already grown bored with her practices.

They [school system] were very basal oriented. And we ability-grouped and we went through that workbook and I remember I would plan these lessons for my teacher assistant to do with the children that centered around a book, you know, and maybe a craft or whatever. And I remember I would be over teaching the workbook and looking over there longing to do what I had planned for her to do, you know, thinking, "I will be bored to tears if I have to do one more page in this workbook!" (Patty, Interview transcript, 8/17/98).

Patty, bored and disillusioned, observed her peers entrenched in the same practices; they seemed comfortable with the use of the basal. "And I would look at them [other teachers] and I would think, 'How can you continue to exhibit enthusiasm over the same fricking lesson you've done for some odd years?' I could never muster that face, doing that same pat lesson that many times" (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

Barbie, a veteran teacher, likewise had become bored with her current literacy instruction. She described her boredom and the need to reinvent herself as a teacher and as a professional. Like Maggie, the adoption of the whole language philosophy, for Barbie, was a pivotal point in helping her to remain in teaching.

You know there is nothing more boring than sitting in a reading group and listening to them [students] stumble through that. I mean, you know, if I was going to stay in this field then I needed a change. Linda one time said in a faculty meeting in our school that if you were going to stay in the field you would either

settle into mediocrity, you know, you could leave or you would reinvent yourself every few years. And I think it just evolved for me, you know, I wasn't going anywhere and it just evolved into reinventing myself (Barbie, Interview transcripts, 9/17/98).

Rebekah described getting through reading groups as a chore. She, too, was dissatisfied but lacked the resources and knowledge to change her instruction. Like the other participants, Rebekah had little autonomy in her day. "It was the kind where it told you what to say. You know, you would go in and it would tell you in dark print what you were supposed to say for the lesson. And I thought that was teaching and that was what I was exposed to" (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 8/21/98).

This same extreme boredom provided incentive for Maggie to attempt less traditional practices when given the opportunity, but she found it challenging to move away from familiar, comfortable traditional teaching practices. "You know I would just read a story to the students. Next, I'd go right back to the textbook. I didn't know what else to do with all this. I had been modeling what had been taught to me when I first started teaching" (Maggie, Interview transcript, 7/29/98). Maggie believed that we oftentimes teach in the way we are taught without thought as to why. "I think traditionalism in itself stems from the point that you don't know why you do certain things. Maybe a teacher is teaching this way because she was taught that way" (Maggie, Interview transcript, 7/29/98).

According to Smith (1986) such traditional teaching with programs and tests have become central to classroom life and that many teachers are dependent on these materials for teaching. He noted that "more than one teacher has asked him, 'Why would we be

required to do these things if they don't help students learn?"—as if the very presence of programs and tests is a guarantee that they work" (Smith, 1986, p. 242). He attributes this behavior to a lack of trust on the part of the teachers; the trust that their students will learn.

These text-driven teaching experiences left the participants feeling a void, but they had no experiences of their own or other resources from which to draw. It was that familiarity that Smith had discussed; the lack of knowledge to do anything different. Their doubts and boredom with current practices were never openly shared. In their push to "cover" material, students were often left behind or lost. This was a factor that did not resonate well with the participants, but again they felt helpless to change it. In their minds, they knew they were losing students, but had no idea how to go about changing that fact.

#### Not Meeting the Needs of Students and Family

The fact that students' needs were often overlooked in the harried race to cover the textbook became another important catalyst for change for several of the participants. This was particularly true for Carey, Maggie and Rebekah who had family members who struggled in school or who had their own negative schooling experiences that they did not want repeated with their own students. The dissatisfaction that accompanied not meeting the needs of the students became a source of frustration. They could see in their day-to-day interactions and lessons with these students that the students were not all learning as they should or could. Despite the fact that the need was perceived, these teachers were not sure how to change the fact that not all kids were "getting it."

Carey had experienced firsthand what it was like to not become a lifelong reader and writer. She wanted to do more for her struggling students. She described her desire to make things different for the students she saw struggle with literacy in her classroom. "I kept trying, trying to teach them, because I did not want them to feel like I did" (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98).

Carey was also motivated by her desire to make learning different in her classroom than it had been for her son. He had not struggled in school, but she desired for his schooling experience to be more than it had been up to that point (middle school). After attending the whole language professional development, Carey realized her son only knew one author and that was Judy Blume. "It just broke my heart that I had let him get that far and not know any children's literature or that he was having a hard time writing because nobody had ever taught him" (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98).

Upon her realization that there were other ways to teach literacy, Carey set out to make things different for her son and her students. Her son was in middle school at the time she learned about whole language and Carey inundated him with children's literature. At the time of these interviews, her son was 24 years old and she was still giving him two to three children's books for Christmas each year.

Rebekah's son was learning disabled and she lived his experience of trying to fit the mold of traditional schooling where all children were expected to learn the same way with the same materials. Through living this experience with him, she knew firsthand that this approach to teaching was not a "one size fits all." Her desire to have something better for her son often motivated her to seek something different for her students who also struggled to learn.

So, first of all, that made me aware from home base that there are children who aren't going to learn the way others learn, but he [son] *could* learn. And so could other kids learn. I think so much of the time when we were teaching by the books, you know, it was like they either got it or they didn't, if they didn't, too bad. So, I think he [son] taught me that you had to be willing to take the time to help kids like him. He also taught me patience with children and he taught me the value of going over something in a different way, a lot of different ways, you know and a lot of times. It made me a lot better teacher cause I did try different ways to reach my students (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Throughout her son's school career, Rebekah worked diligently to help her son as she watched him slowly fall through the cracks. "I read more about things that would work for him, little things, like highlighting things, just little things like that that helped me more with him. But still he was expected to perform in that framework that everybody else was" (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

When her son entered middle and high school, Rebekah made many attempts to get the schools to help her son, who was failing class after class. Rebekah described her heartbreak when the high school principal explained to her that her son would probably just drop out of school as many of the others did who struggled. No one was willing to try anything "different" for him to support his learning. This experience served as one catalyst of change for Rebekah when given the opportunity to transform her own practices.

Rebekah grew tired of others not meeting the needs of her son and she had also grown tired of "missing the mark" with her own students who were not successful in the

classroom. She had even approached the county office about providing a different curriculum for these students. At that time, she saw the "answer" in the use of different materials or programs rather than different teaching practices.

I was so frustrated because I knew I wasn't reaching kids. It really bothered me that I was doing what I was *supposed* to do, but I wasn't reaching kids and I could see that frustration and I had offered to work and develop another curriculum or to do something for those kids. You could see you were losing them and nobody was interested. I think probably at that point, I was so disgusted with everything that I was ready for a change. I think that was a big thing when I was frustrated because I wasn't meeting the needs of children (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 8/21/98).

Rebekah's request to the county office for change and assistance for struggling students fell on deaf ears.

As a result, she decided to explore other options on her own. She decided to change grade levels and moved from a third grade classroom to kindergarten. She believed that instruction in kindergarten "was relevant to the kids because you made it relevant to the kids and you didn't *have* to follow a book" (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 8/21/98). Through these experiences, Rebekah had made the connection between being locked into using the textbook and not being able to meet the students' needs. She believed the move to kindergarten might provide some answers for her as to why some students were not "getting it." She went to kindergarten to look for ways to make that happen.

Interestingly, Rebekah's perception was that kindergarten was the only grade level where teaching without a textbook was *allowed*. It was the only grade level where

she could have "permission" to move away from the textbook simply because there were no textbooks in kindergarten. Rebekah believed the change would enable her to learn how to better meet the individual needs of her students due to the lack of constraints on the kindergarten teachers to "get through" a textbook.

Kindergarten gave her the opportunity to approach teaching in a way she had never experienced previously. She was able to reach out to meet the needs of her students as she had never been able to before and attempt instructional strategies she had never used. Rebekah's determination to meet the needs of her struggling students motivated her to seek new experiences, which broadened and began to redefine her views on teaching. Other participants' views of teaching began to change as well due their own unique experiences.

Maggie experienced a childhood in poverty, which served as a change agent for her. Her school experiences caused her to feel left out of the mainstream. She was a good student, but struggled to learn at times and knew what it was like to be devoid of anyone reaching out to support your learning.

I felt insecure or inadequate. I knew I had problems learning, but I didn't know what they were and probably didn't know them until whole language and realizing that sometimes things were difficult and I was always staying in the background because I didn't feel comfortable. Through whole language, I realized that all children need to feel needed, wanted, and loved. They need to feel important. Their ideas and what they've written are very important no matter what they write.

Whole language goes beyond instruction. It's how you feel about children and what children can contribute to your classroom and to everybody else (Maggie, Interview transcript, 7/29/98).

Maggie had certainly never experienced this unconditional acceptance in her own schooling. As a child she attempted to blend in and not draw attention to herself. She struggled to be successful while trying to be like the others who came from backgrounds different than her own.

I'm ashamed of myself when I do plan things where all the kids aren't successful because I've been there. I know how it hurts to feel like you aren't quite as good as everybody else. If you work hard at it, all kids can be successful because when the big picture rolls around, it's not what you did on a test, it's what you can use. It's how well you are able to find out more. You want to go beyond the classroom and I think with my traditional way of teaching kids probably wondered about things, but that was it. They just wondered. They didn't go any further (Maggie, Interview transcript, 7/29/98).

Through whole language, Maggie came to realize how different schooling could be. She had reached a point in her career where she was willing to do whatever it took to change instruction in her classroom and provide a positive schooling experience for all students.

In the same way their own struggles, the struggles of family members and students in the classroom initiated thoughts of change for Carey, Maggie and Rebekah, there were other experiences for the participants that resulted in a mindset for change. All

participants underwent a paradigm shift about teaching and learning, which made them aware of alternative approaches to literacy instruction, and reinforced their perception that change was needed.

#### Professional Development: Paradigm Shift

In much the same way that Rebekah's kindergarten experience provided her with an expanded view of teaching, the participants experienced a paradigm shift with regard to their instructional practices through whole language professional development, which in turn became a catalyst for change. It was not until they began to understand and embrace a whole language philosophy that they really examined what they were doing as professionals and implemented change in their practices. While it was a time of renewal for each as whole language came to be the answer to their desire to change classroom practices, it also presented new challenges to conquer.

The whole language summer institutes were led by an assistant professor from a nearby university. Carey described the sessions as being "very hard because she [consultant] made us write and she made us read. It's real hard for me to sit and read" (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98). Carey struggled with the fact that much of what she was exposed to throughout the whole language in-service was nothing like what she had practiced in her classroom or experienced as a student herself. Carey did not enjoy reading or writing and felt uncomfortable in a room where adults were reading, writing, and discussing books and authors. She openly discussed her anxiety over participation in these sessions.

Well, first, I guess, when she [the consultant] talked about Georgia authors, I remember she did a thing on that and I guess I came to the realization then that I

didn't know any adult books. That was scary. I didn't know any authors because I didn't read that much. It was embarrassing, too. It was scary and embarrassing that I didn't know what she was talking about. And then she started talking about children's literature in general and I knew *one* book. And so I realized that I knew no books and just was petrified. I just thought, oh, this is awful that I know no children's literature (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98).

Whole language staff development brought into question everything Carey had known about literacy instruction and her own role as a reader and writer and how that influenced her literacy instruction in the classroom. However, this discomfort did not cause her to "tuck her tail" and run. Instead, it inspired her to change and improve, not only for herself as a reader and writer, but as a teacher of reading and writing as well. In addition to her own professional development, she set out to change things for her students.

Carey felt overwhelmed, but elated with her new opportunity. She recalled the experience, "I guess probably that was one of the most exciting years I've ever spent teaching because I was so excited about trying something new because there were so many children that were not turned on to reading, as I was not turned on to reading" (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98). Carey set out on a mission to make literacy instruction something meaningful for her students. She wanted her students to not only learn to read and write, but to love reading and writing and to choose to practice both as lifelong learners.

Additionally, Carey's enthusiasm was shared with a close colleague. Carey took it upon herself to teach what she was learning each day in the whole language staff

development to Barbie, who was unable to attend the sessions. Carey met with Barbie each night until 11:00 or 12:00 to go over what Carey had learned during the day. Barbie began to experience the same "ah ha" moments that had become daily events for Carey during this professional development.

Following her sessions with Carey each evening, Barbie read on her own to enhance her understanding of whole language. Barbie recalled, "And the more I read it, the more I got into it, and I couldn't stop reading about it. I did not want to be left behind. I thought, oh, this makes so much better sense than what we're currently doing" (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98). Barbie did this of her own volition because of her desire to change instruction. "I went and bought everything she [Carey] bought and we just kind of started out together. To me it just made so much better sense" (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98). It fit for Barbie and Carey. They felt an immediate sense of urgency to create this type of classroom environment for their students.

Until she had been exposed to the whole language philosophy through Carey, Barbie had been very traditional in her approach to teaching and her past experiences had looked much like those of her colleagues.

You know, you were told you will say this, the children will say that, run off six of these, write in this blank. I mean, you know, and it just really didn't require very much thinking on your part. You were a manager. You just sat at your desk and planned what they [students] were going to do and made them go through their paces, jump through the hoops, and then you graded the papers. But there wasn't any input, there wasn't any individuality, you know. Their idea of being an individual was if you did the suggestions for enrichment, you were a mover and a

shaker. You had really arrived. And you just weren't encouraged to do something different. And I guess I never thought about actually doing it. It never entered my mind that you would step out from there (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98).

Learning about whole language created a paradigm shift in Barbie's thinking about teaching and learning.

Each of these teachers could sense that things weren't quite right and that they did not always feel successful in their teaching practices. However, they didn't have the professional knowledge to make teaching any different. Once they had exposure to the information that would support change, they needed to feel comfortable with implementation of the whole language philosophy. Their desire to change was present, but they needed to feel they would have support in implementing these changes. The participants were able to comfortably explore changes in their practices because of administrative support, which became a key element in the change process for all of the participants.

#### Administrative Support

Of all of the other factors that served as catalysts for change for this group of teachers, support of the administration was key to enabling them to proceed from contemplating change to actually implementing it. "If attempts to transform schooling throughout the nation are to be successful, we will need a good deal of patience, wisdom and trust; more than a little luck; and considerable support and direction from all educational stakeholders, especially school leaders" (Murphy, 1991, p. 91).

Regie Routman found this to be true in her own change process in becoming a whole language teacher. She credits her superintendent and principal with making it

possible to take the risks she needed to take to be successful (Routman, 1996). Several of the participants defined this administrative support as having freedom for the first time to teach in a way that students needed to be taught. However, this freedom did not come without apprehension from the participants.

Carey discussed her own personal fear in giving up the textbooks that she had always used. She desperately wanted to change instruction in her classroom, but worried that her students might not get what they needed with these changes. The textbooks had given a sense of security that she had "covered" everything. It was because of her principal's encouragement that she was willing to jump in and attempt a different approach to teaching. Her principal literally removed the books from her possession.

She [principal] said she was afraid that I wouldn't go all out if she let me have some books and that I'd revert back because I'd been doing it so long. She thought that maybe it would be better if she just took all that away. She just kept the books and I went by the curriculum (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98).

In addition to removing Carey's textbooks, her principal requested that Carey not stop instruction to do any Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) preparation with the students. She told Carey, "I don't care about test scores. I know that your children are learning. I've been in your room and I know everything is okay" (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98).

Barbie and Maggie also served under this same principal and described the principal's role as that of a risk-taker. Their principal had confidence in them as professionals and was willing to take risks herself. In turn, she allowed her teachers the same freedom to take risks. Carey, Maggie and Barbie had the unconditional support of

their administration to go forward with their new learning. This empowered them to have the professional freedom they needed to be risk-takers.

Maggie remembered how the principal sat her down and they discussed whole language and the principal told Maggie that she was no longer required to use the basal. Maggie was elated over this news. “I had read out of that thing [basal] for about 10 years cause we didn’t use an adoption one year so all in all, I had read the same stories 10 years times 4 reading groups so you can imagine how many times I’d heard those stories” (Maggie, Interview transcript, 7/29/98). Maggie credited her success in implementing whole language to the support of her principal.

If anything is going to succeed, the principal needs to be very knowledgeable about it. I think the knowledgeable principals are very comfortable with themselves because test scores are not everything. It’s the easiest and the quickest and the dirtiest so to speak, but it’s not always the most effective way to assess the kids (Maggie, Interview transcript, 7/29/98).

Maggie also recognized that her principal’s understanding of whole language was largely a result of her visibility in the classroom. “She visited in the room a lot and she talked to the kids and they would tell her how excited they were about what they were doing. The parents also relayed it to her, the kids’ feelings about being in the classroom” (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98).

Barbie noted that the administrative support went well beyond the building level administration. She gave credit to the superintendent at that time for leading the system in a way that encouraged the faculty to think out of the box. “He was a little more enlightened. He was well read, up on what was current, looked at the research and not so

much in this mold of it was good enough for grandpa; it's good enough for me. He encouraged you to step out and do different things" (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98). Because of this support, Barbie was willing to step out and try something new in her classroom. The administrative support provided a risk-free work environment so she could feel comfortable trying to teach in ways other than traditional practices.

Additionally, Barbie credited the superintendent with empowering the curriculum directors who served under him to encourage "stepping out" with the teachers and with themselves. The Language Arts Curriculum Coordinator at the time provided the whole language staff development countywide and gave the teachers "permission" to try something different in their classrooms.

Rebekah did not experience the strong building level support that Carey, Maggie and Barbie experienced, but concurred with Barbie's thoughts on the role of the curriculum director in allowing teachers the freedom to change.

She [Curriculum Coordinator] worked alongside the teachers throughout the process. So, it was the teachers together in unison talking to the head of curriculum in language arts who let us go. And then we could do it. She had the decision making power and was backed by the superintendent at the time. Then we knew it was okay and that we would be supported (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Even though she did not have support from local school administration, Rebekah did feel comfortable with her buy-in to whole language because county administrators had created a low-risk opportunity for her and the others. She was well aware that this support was a key to teachers' willingness to implement the whole language framework.

There was always the question of, I guess it came down to, if we're brought up, if somebody objects and says that you're not teaching this or whatever, that we would have backing in our thinking. As long as we had that, we could go ahead, but if we didn't think we had that, I'm sure there are people who wouldn't do it (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Patty also credited the county office support with keeping her on track in her transition to whole language. "It was something that was offered through the county. The county supported it. They followed up with observations" (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98). The administrative support became the safety net that allowed the participants to take risks with their instructional practices and this fact became a key component in the change process for all of the participants.

In fact, administrative support may have been the single most important catalyst for change for this group of teachers. While they spoke of their desire to change, this desire was accompanied by fear and reluctance to abandon what was comfortable and safe. It is unlikely, as conscientious as they all were, that true change would have occurred in their classrooms without feeling they had permission from the administration. They had not previously been professional risk-takers. The administration's support provided the environment for professional risk-taking, which empowered them to make changes to their instructional practices.

#### Outcomes of Adopting the Whole Language Philosophy

As a result of their participation in professional development and with the support of administration, the participants adopted the whole language philosophy as the framework for their teaching. Their newly adopted philosophy and resulting practices

brought with them new outcomes. These outcomes, both positive and negative, came to further shape their developing philosophy and teaching practices. The next section will address the outcomes experienced by the participants as a result of adopting practices that fit within the framework of whole language.

### Whole Language: A Sense of Renewal

With support from the administration, the participants began to embrace the whole language philosophy. For each of these five teachers, this time of change provided a sense of professional renewal unlike any they had previously experienced. “Once it dawned on me that it was the process, not the product, then it seemed to just fill out. It just went everywhere in all subjects. You couldn’t help it. It just did” (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98). The participants were drawn to the whole language philosophy. It seemed to renew their teaching. Maggie could not recall any other experiences in her twenty-plus years of teaching where she had felt so engaged in her teaching.

Whole language gave me the chance to be...I’m not musically talented. I’m not talented with drawing. I have a perception problem that has kept me from doing some things that I’ve wanted to do. But I feel like whole language brought out the best parts of me as a teacher: the patience, the waiting on children, and the enjoyment of literature. I guess it has been the most wonderful event in my teaching career (Maggie, Interview transcript, 7/29/98).

Barbie was just overall more content as a professional after embracing the whole language philosophy. “I found I was a much happier teacher and a much happier person, too, because I wasn’t doing just monotonous, meticulous tasks. It just seemed to fit” (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98). Like Barbie, Patty’s appreciation of teaching only

deepened as a result of whole language. Even though Patty had been teaching fewer years than others in the study, she felt strong professional renewal from whole language and credited it with saving her teaching career.

I was so excited that I could hardly go to sleep at night. I was so excited to realize that I could tie in literature. And I was panicked because it was new and we didn't have a lot of materials to support it yet, but at the same time I was just so on fire to teach. I realized that's the kind of teacher I wanted to be. The children liked coming to my group. I liked teaching. I was amazed to see how quickly they learned. They had the whole picture. It was fun. It was thrilling. It made me want to remain a teacher, stay in the teaching profession, because with the basal, I really hated it. I could not have kept on (Patty, Interview transcript, 8/17/98).

Rebekah shared this enthusiasm for whole language. "The exuberance and the joy that I carried with me into the whole language classes was just unreal. Whole language hit the mark. Whole language had the children interested and they were learning" (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 8/21/98). Carey concurred: "The feelings that I had and the elation the first week of school. My principal would tell you about it, I'm sure. She still reminds me of it" (Carey, Interview transcript, 8/27/98).

Rebekah found that her students promoted whole language with the other students. They would tell their friends from other classes about the exciting learning opportunities they had in Rebekah's class. These students then asked their own teachers, "Why aren't we doing that?" (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Patty was elated with the response she observed in her students as well. She had not previously observed such enthusiasm for learning on their parts nor experienced such enthusiasm for teaching on her part.

It [whole language philosophy] just brings a whole different climate and spirit to your classroom. You know, instead of being, okay, we're coming to school today to do school, it's actually like this real place; this is a real place where we do real exciting things that matter to my teacher and matter to me. That's the difference I've seen. It's just a real climate (Patty, Interview transcript, 8/17/98).

Carey found that her students experienced this same excitement about her new teaching practices as well. It had a positive impact on their attitudes, her attitude and student learning.

Everybody was so excited and just said all the time how excited my kids were and how I looked so excited and how things were going so well in my classroom and everybody wanted to be in my classroom. And the teachers started asking, "What are you doing that's different?" And the kids learned a lot. All my kids came off the REP [Remedial Education Program] list that year and they did great on the ITBS [Iowa Test of Basic Skills]. The parents were very, very supportive. In fact, I have still kept those letters. I've kept them because they were so supportive.

"My child has learned more this year than I can ever remember them learning."

And I remember one saying that she thought her child could run a library (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98).

The other participants saw similar results with their students as their instruction became more child-centered. Carey summarized this new child-centered thinking. "I would try

something and if that wasn't what my children learned, then I would try something else. I would try to go with what was helping them" (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/24/98). This was a long way from just "covering" the book front to back as she and the other participants had done in the past.

Not only did colleagues at Carey's school notice the difference among the whole language teachers and the students they taught, but others from outside the county wanted to come and learn about whole language as well. Carey remembered having up to ten people at a time two to three times per week watching Maggie, Barbie and her teach. She even recalled visits from the local School Board members and the superintendent.

Carey not only felt the impact on her teaching, but with her own personal reading habits as an adult. She had always struggled to read adult novels, but found a new love of reading bound in the covers of children's books. "I found something that I could read. Rather than the adult book, I could sit down and read a child's book. And found out that a lot of the children's books were adult books. They were not all children's books" (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98). Carey felt connected and interested in reading independently for the first time in her adult life. She made strong connections to effective literacy instruction professionally and enriched her literacy practices on a personal level.

The participants all agreed that a key to their success in implementing whole language was due to the professional development they received from the beginning. Maggie credited JoBeth Allen, the Assistant Professor from The University of Georgia, with their solid foundation in the whole language philosophy. "The person who was our leader really knew her stuff. She was excited. We got probably the best training of any school system in terms of the research, the reading, the writing, and how children learn"

(Maggie, Interview transcript, 7/29/98). Barbie equated her experience in learning about whole language to that of religious study. “It reminds me very much of being a Christian, you know, you study your Bible and you attend church those types of things. And so you look for people to mentor you and bring you along. JoBeth was that person for us”

(Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/30/98).

Rebekah’s perception of the whole language in-service concurred with Maggie’s and Barbie’s. “You really learned, studied, developed, read research and developed opinions based on research about how kids learn. This was all part of the strategies and the methods that we used within the framework of whole language” (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/16/98). Carey remembers leaving the workshop each day and running to the bookstore to get the books that were shared in that day’s session. “We bought a lot of professional books and started to read about it. JoBeth gave us a bibliography to go by and we bought all those books” (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98).

With this sense of renewal for each of the participants came a tremendous amount of ownership, empowerment, accountability and just good old-fashioned hard work. Creating a whole language classroom was no easy task and the teachers found themselves facing the enormous challenge of putting it all together before their students returned in August.

### Whole Language: The Hardest Work You Will Ever Love

Consistently throughout the participants’ discussion about their journey into whole language, each discussed how difficult the transition was and how long and hard they worked to make it all come together. At the same time, they also alluded to their

sheer enjoyment of this hard work. They worked harder than they ever had before and put more time into their teaching than ever before, but enjoyed it immensely and felt highly engaged.

Rebekah felt overwhelmed in her attempts to find the time to get herself and her classroom prepared.

I realized really early on that it was a huge undertaking. I remember how overwhelmed we felt because we wanted to do everything. We had had one solid week of training and we would carry stuff home and we'd work on it. I would take stacks of children's books out to the pool and just stand in the pool and read children's books. It was hard work, a lot of work, pulling together your own units. It was a lot of fun, but it took a long time (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 8/21/98).

This in-depth planning required time, which was not provided by the county or school level, so the participants found themselves pulling together to plan on their own time outside of school. "We needed so much time and we weren't given any planning time or anything through the school or through the county to get together. It was all on our time and that was hard" (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Barbie knew adopting whole language was right for her, but she also knew it would not be an easy task. "It was interesting to me. It was much harder to do whole language, but, yeah, it was very difficult. But there was so much more back from the kids and you could just see the progress. Gosh, they just fell into it" (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98). Carey struggled to prepare for this new approach to teaching as well.

In many ways, it was like starting all over again affecting everything from her room arrangement to planning and material selection.

I had to do everything from scratch and I had to make sure that I had all my reading. I went to the library and got all my books, whatever I wanted to read. Made it into themes and did all my spelling, did all the math, did all –everything around a theme. I spent hours and hours and hours of doing that kind of work (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98).

This move away from traditional teaching presented challenges in making all the pieces come together in her classroom.

I wasn't comfortable with it. I struggled with trying to do it [create a whole language classroom]. But I wanted to learn myself so therefore I kept struggling with trying to get them to do it and trying to teach them because I didn't want them to feel like I did. I think that was maybe why I worked at it so hard (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98).

Patty also found whole language to be difficult and labor intensive, but exciting.

The children responded positively and this became a motivating factor.

They would *run* to reading workshop and they would get excited during author study. The excitement level was there. I was real excited about it so it was a driving force behind the work. There was a *lot* of work that had to be done but that was—just the excitement kept me driven to do it (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

For the first time the participants were allowing the needs of the students to inform teaching and planning. They did not have materials from which to pull to tell them what

to do or how to teach a lesson. They had no old plans to look through or whole language manual to follow. This presented time intensive preparation for each of them as they worked to become whole language teachers.

It's a lot of work to really do it right, to truly do it right. You have to be an ongoing student of the process. It's something you can never put on the shelf and say I've mastered it. It is a challenging way to teach. It requires a lot of hard work. You can't copy your lesson plans from last year and do everything exactly alike. You have to read your students and you have to see where they are and then adjust your instruction and challenge them as you see them grow and as they are ready for the next step. You know it's a lot of hard work (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

The children, not the textbook, were the center of instruction and the curriculum became the guide. The participants struggled to shift their thinking, planning and teaching, but the results in student learning, the sense of professional renewal, and the dissatisfaction from which they came kept them motivated to continue to create a whole language classroom. "When school improvement begins not with politics and large programs but with what teachers do in their classrooms every day, the minute the process of change begins, students and teachers benefit" (Temes, 2002, p. 23).

They could each also see the challenges of creating a whole language classroom. They could also readily see that not every colleague would develop this level of commitment to such a time intensive effort.

It takes time to reflect and look where your kids are and think about how much this child learns and how you can teach him the next day and stuff like that. It

takes time to do that. And if you are not putting that time in then it is a lot easier to just pick up a book and go by the book and say, “I did it. I’ve covered that”

(Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/16/98).

The tremendous investment of time, resources and energy paid huge dividends in the eyes of the participants. One of those dividends was their new sense of professional empowerment that resulted from adopting the whole language framework and the permission from the administration to adopt this framework in their classroom practices.

### Teacher Empowerment

The participants found a new sense of “freedom” as professionals, as they called it. It was professional empowerment. The move to expand the teachers’ role in decision making was at the heart of this school reform effort (Murphy, 1991). This new sense of empowerment was counter to the structure of decision making that has existed in schools for nearly a century and certainly was counter to the participants’ experience in schools (Kreisberg, 1992). Each observed the influence of their new freedom on the students’ learning and on the sense of ownership the students developed for learning as a result. “What has been most transforming about the whole language movement is this empowerment for self-directed, life-long reflection, learning and action—not just for students but for teachers too” (Routman, 1996, p. 147).

The freedom was associated with different aspects of teaching for the participants. “At one level, teachers in schools that are restructuring are taking on new responsibilities. They are assuming control over decisions that were historically the province of others, especially administrators” (Murphy, 1991, p.29). The freedom of choice played a big role in the new autonomy for the participants. “The freedom for me to know that I can do

what I think is right or what I think is best. I don't have to rely on a publisher. And the curriculum that we developed based on that was a good curriculum too" (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98). Maggie also attributed the freedom to knowledge of the curriculum. Whole language had empowered the participants to plan instruction in a way that taught the objective in ways that were meaningful to the students. The participants knew how to take the objectives from the curriculum and integrate these skills into meaningful contexts. "You know what they need, you know what they need to be a good reader, a good writer, and then you go and you pull materials they are interested in. It's just not something someone else has written to teach that point" (Maggie, Interview transcript, 7/29/98).

Another factor that contributed to the participants' feeling of empowerment and freedom was relief from the use of the previously required textbook and assessments. Berliner and Biddle found that the factory model for education was not the effective in improving instruction. "Therefore, the best ways to improve education are not those that are based on the factory model but rather are those that presume trust, grant autonomy, and seek ways to enlarge the lives of students and teachers" (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 194). The participants experienced this trust and autonomy for the first time as whole language teachers.

I think I really didn't feel it until they told us that we didn't have to test, give the tests that the book company gave that went with the books, that we could make up our own assessment. I think when that decision was made from a higher up level within the county and that came down to us I think that's when I knew, I can make up the tests. This is my basis for assessment. I can teach this way cause I

think it's what the kids will do best with and that's when it happened. That's when I felt released (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Barbie also felt a new sense of freedom. "We pretty much tossed out the textbooks. I mean, think of what was given to us. We were told we didn't even have to use the book unless we chose to. And we were trusted" (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98). Carey felt her principal supported her transition and was in fact the one who suggested that Carey attend the whole language professional development in the first place. "She was a whole language person and loved it as much as I did and is the one who sent me to the training. And she wanted me to do it and was there for me" (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/24/98). Maggie had the same principal, but believed the empowerment that was given to them was earned.

I guess I was free as a teacher. But I guess you have to earn that freedom to teach. You don't turn everybody loose with such freedom unless they have a good knowledge of the curriculum. The teachers who grew in their understanding of language arts are the ones when the principal felt comfortable in saying, "I think it's more important for children to learn to love to read and enjoy reading and be happy or be very encouraged by a school setting than it is for them to score certain percentages on the standardized test" (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98).

Kreisberg (1992) would concur with Maggie's perception that empowerment is earned. He stated that "empowerment is not a gift bestowed, but rather it is earned through risk and action" (Kreisberg, 1992, p. 138). She viewed her professional knowledge as the basis for her empowerment, but she certainly would not be empowered

were she not willing to take risks. Along with her new sense of empowerment, Maggie experienced a sense of loss of control in her teaching. She had determined that to be successful with her new philosophy and to give up the basal also meant giving up control. “You do learn to lose a lot of that control” (Maggie, Interview transcript, 7/29/98). Through her own empowerment, she was in turn empowering the students and providing opportunities for input and choice for them. The tradeoff was well worth the loss of control.

She could see the impact of her newfound philosophy on student learning and enjoyed her new awareness of the students and their needs. In her own classroom, she recalled a “very dedicated effort to expose children to lots of different types of literature, to get children to write, to give children more freedom in the classroom to be creative” (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98). She could also see the benefits to empowering her students more. “It wasn’t hard to give up that power. It just didn’t matter anymore” (Maggie, Interview transcript, 7/29/98). The children became the center of instruction and that focus made it easy for Maggie to give up her power as the teacher and empower the students as learners.

Maggie felt it not only freed her as a teacher and professional, but freed her from some of her long held personal inferiorities she had hidden during her adult years.

It’s [whole language] been a lifesaver. I’m no longer ashamed of where I came from. I now know that I have stories to tell about my childhood. I think the whole language philosophy has aided in that different types of storytellers are now being accepted. For instance, I love it when someone, like I read this book, *All Over But the Shoutin’* (Bragg, 1997), about a family in Alabama and I could relate to that.

All different types of literature to me have been more accepted. I don't know, in a way, when people write about their tough upbringing or how they struggled, it was like they were writing for me. They were telling my story (Maggie, Interview transcript, 7/29/98).

These personal connections to the whole language philosophy allowed Maggie to be herself, be proud of her upbringing and life experiences. She was able to situate them in the world of education and see their value, her value and her role as a teacher of students like herself in a whole new light. It validated her view of the importance of all children from all backgrounds and their need for success in school. It also validated the importance of her own childhood experiences and impacted her desire to make sure all of her students were successful.

Maggie's childhood as one of the poor kids greatly impacted her desire to meet the needs of all of her students. She quickly embraced the whole language philosophy, in part, because it reinforced her beliefs about the value of each child no matter what his or her socio-economic status or family life. Through whole language, Maggie came to realize that all students truly can be successful in the classroom. Additionally, she felt the responsibility to ensure that each student achieved. The empowerment that accompanied whole language provided the freedom, which, in turn, allowed her to structure her classroom for success.

In whole language classrooms, you reach all the kids because first of all you set them up for success. I mean your activities, you set them up to be successful. You and the students want to go beyond the classroom (Maggie, Interview transcript, 7/29/98).

The newly empowered participants focused on students' needs and took risks with their instructional practices that were previously prohibited. They found that being risk-takers was not an easy task because they had never been in a position professionally where risk-taking was encouraged or allowed. Barbie recalled that her principal "encouraged them to get out there and do" (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98). Barbie knew this was an awesome responsibility not only for her principal to provide this freedom, she also knew it was an awesome responsibility for her to take on this new empowerment as a teacher.

The textbook, although ineffective in Barbie's eyes, was safe. Barbie gave a great deal of credit to her principal's willingness to "share" her power. "She'd share her power. It was nothing to her, you know. But, you know, when she does that, she is sharing responsibility too" (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98). Barbie understood that this newfound freedom also increased her level of responsibility and accountability for student learning. She understood that shared power meant more autonomy on her part, but also more accountability.

Whole language heightened the level of responsibility the participants felt for the success of every student in their classrooms. Along with their new levels of professional empowerment and autonomy came an increased level of accountability. Richard Allington discussed the correlation between teacher autonomy and accountability. "Any reform plan that strips teachers of their professional autonomy in instructional decision making lessens the likelihood that teachers will accept professional responsibility for the failure of their instruction to produce positive results" (Allington, 2002, p. 36).

Patty felt a strong sense of professional empowerment to do her job. The expectations were clear and high regarding her professional work, but she was left to make professional decisions about instruction. She discussed her perspective on the strong message she felt was communicated to teachers from their superiors. “We expect you to know what objectives you need to teach the children and you’re a professional and how you go about that is your judgment. You know the territory you need to cover” (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

Rebekah was grateful for her newfound autonomy and the results she saw in her students’ performance in class.

We were told things like you are the boss, you shut the door, your name’s on the door. I remember that phrase. When we were told that we were free to pick the materials that would get them [students] excited and then bring them into it and do the skills through the materials that they were interested in. And that’s what happened with my son. By then, he was in high school, but I was reading him Shel Silverstein poetry at home and doing stuff with him at home and getting him to read that because now he was interested in that. At that point as teachers, we had the freedom to go and find the materials that would catch them and pull in even the most awkward learner. If you got it to grab their attention, then it helped (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

With whole language the participants were not only empowered to make decisions about their own classrooms, they were involved on county level committees where they had high levels of input into curriculum development and material selection.

Rebekah felt they were particularly empowered by the county level Language Arts Curriculum Coordinator.

Well, we just worked together so closely. I mean we were developing a new county curriculum for language arts and we had met and made decisions and really felt empowered to say what we thought and to let go finally of what we had in our heads; what we felt in our hearts was right for the children. We made decisions like third grade was too early to teach possessives. We made those decisions and they were put in print. I mean that was pretty empowering so it was the fact that as a group, we could gather with the person who was in charge and she listened (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Barbie noted this same level of empowerment from the county office coordinator.

We had a county coordinator at the time and she included us in a lot of her decision making. That was a pretty brave thing to do. And that was probably because she felt comfortable enough with her leadership to do that with the people that were backing her. But she let us share in a lot of the decision making, I felt. And it wasn't passing the buck. It was more of the idea if we helped make the rules then we would buy into it a little more (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98).

The leadership at that time supported teachers' efforts to adopt a whole language framework. They were given a voice and contributed to decision-making about curriculum content, instructional practices and materials. Empowerment as defined by Kreisberg (1992, p. 19) "is a process through which people and/or communities increase their control or mastery of their own lives and the decisions that affect their lives."

Empowerment provided just such control and decision making power for the participants and with it came the opportunity for risk-taking to those willing to accept the risks.

Patty knew that her new sense of empowerment was accompanied by risk-taking and was made possible through administrative support. “I think a lot of it was try and see if this makes a fit and be willing to take the risk. And the way to be willing to take the risk was to have a comfortable environment of support. Fortunately, I had that so I developed what I considered a well rounded language arts practice” (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/29/98). All of the participants felt empowered in new ways as instructional facilitators. This empowerment enabled them to take professional risks they had never before felt comfortable taking.

### Risk-taking

With administrative permission to try new approaches to teaching and with sound whole language professional development and reading under their belts, the participants still found it difficult at times to take risks in their teaching. “By not having been challenged to make important decisions about their teaching, they may have forgotten how to choose” (Diamond, 1996, p. 48) Although Diamond was referring to teachers in a different study, the results applied easily to these five participants’ experiences. Risk-taking was new for them and it may not be that they had forgotten how to choose, but that they had to learn to choose for the first time.

I think when we first went into this—I’m using plural here—we were almost like purists. And see, because of our mindset of being told what to do and how to do it, we just transferred that over to that philosophy [whole language]. And like I had to do everything Nancie Atwell did, the way Nancie Atwell did it. And then

finally, and I would feel so guilty if I didn't do it her way. I thought I was lazy if I wasn't doing it her way. And then it finally dawned on me. I was doing it my way and it worked just as fine for me. I think it takes time to reach that level where you feel comfortable doing that and realizing I have sense too; I can do, you know (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98).

Change is difficult even for those that seek change. "We all like comfort, safety, a predictable routine, and what has been successful in the past. We like what we know and what's familiar" (Routman, 1996, p. 55). Rebekah felt her teaching was at its best when she taught in a risk-free professional environment.

So I guess I feel like I was at my best back around 89, 90, 91. Around 92 like that but of course then we had the support of the school system too in everything that we were doing. And that made a difference too. And you didn't have to worry about if it didn't work, you know, that something was going to happen to you (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 8/21/98).

Patty felt the staff development was provided in a way that was designed to be supportive of the changes that the teachers were attempting to implement.

They [county office personnel] went out and observed and saw what was missing. They didn't slap teachers on the hand; they just thought, oh, well, they got this and this and this, but this needs more. And then they offered it another summer and I went there and then all of a sudden I began to feel like I had the whole picture (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/29/98).

Rebekah found that she also took risks in her personal literacy practices and carried that into her teaching. Rebekah had grown up feeling very inadequate as a writer

and was leery of putting herself on paper until she attended the whole language workshop.

Then after whole language, I remember we would all sit in the classes and we would all write every day. I think that was the beginning cause we had to do it. I mean we sat there with the paper in front of us and she gave us time and we had to write. I think that was the beginning and then as I struggled along with the children that I was trying to teach to write. You know I think that helped me to maybe understand certainly how they felt but also to put things right in my own mind as to how to do it (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 8/21/98).

By stepping out and taking risks in her own personal literacy practices, Rebekah was able to set up the conditions for her students to develop as risk-takers. “That is the cardinal value of experiment and innovation: not only that new ideas might be better than the old, but that in the process of trying to find out, people commit greater energy and concern to the work at hand. Experimenters do generally try harder and care more than the caretakers of the tried and true” (Temes, 2002, p. 20). This carried over to the willingness of the students to be risk-takers in their learning and allowed Rebekah to try new practices to reach all of her students.

I am comfortable taking those children, put them in literature that I know they can understand and that is on their level and get the same things from them that I am getting from the others in a different level where before I didn't have the skills or the ability or the backing to do any of that with those children. So, what I did with those children was struggle through the basal, struggle through whatever it was

that we were given and never branched out and never used anything different (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/16/98).

Through his study on power in schools, Kreisberg (1992) described that the empowered participants in his study were able to engage in dialogue with others to promote change, state their beliefs, listen to others, hold on to what seemed to work and let go of things that did not. The five participants in this study had similar experiences with their new levels of empowerment. They had a voice and could truly control the instructional practices in their classrooms. Through their newly structured classroom practices, the participants in this study not only witnessed success with their students, but could see a new sense of empowerment and voice develop among the students as well. “The emphasis in restructured schools is on the student rather than the deliverer” (Murphy, 1991, p. 20).

### Student Empowerment

As a professional, Maggie could see a lot of her beliefs about teaching and learning come together through whole language. “It allowed me to be more flexible with the kids. I think my behavior problems decreased because the kids had choices and they had many different things to do every day. They were not just sitting at a desk. I truly believe in the philosophy of whole language” (Maggie, Interview transcript, 7/29/98).

Through writing, Rebekah really felt that strong sense of community develop with her students. They had become risk-takers together and learned to communicate with others effectively through their writing. She recalled one student in particular that used writing to express grief in a way that he could not do in person. This particular student

had suddenly lost a grandmother. He was really angry about it and used his writing to express how he felt.

It was a powerful, powerful piece and I called his mother to let her know that he had these emotions because at home he wasn't showing that it affected him and they were really grateful for that. It's not easy and I think too to show them that it is taking a risk to put down what they are thinking. That's part of building that community and that environment in the classroom and letting them know they can write about anything they want to write about (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 8/21/98).

Patty could see her perspective of the student's role as a learner evolve over time. "That is something that I evolved into because I learned to relax and to invite the children to make a heavy contribution toward our learning" (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/29/98). She saw that this new student empowerment went beyond the classroom walls. She could see how the whole language framework provided learning conditions that mirrored the work environment that students would one day experience.

Companies are willing to make it known what they need and they are doing it.

And I felt like we were addressing it a lot through the whole language movement in branching out, involving critical thinking, involving teaching children to make decisions, make choices, to be independent but at the same time interdependent. If we go to too much directed teaching and not allowing them to develop, not allowing them to learn actually, it is not developmental; I think it is a learned skill to know how to work as a team (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/29/98).

The participants began to see students who were motivated to learn and carried learning from the classroom into their lives and brought their lives into the classroom. Kreisberg defined voice as “an internal process—tied to feelings of self-confidence and self-worth and to the feeling that one has something to say” (1992, p.116). He also called it an external process in that it was reinforced when others listened sending the message that something valuable was being said (Kreisberg, 1992). As a result of this new classroom structure, the students were empowered as valuable members of the class. As with the teachers, the students’ voices emerged in the classrooms.

Rebekah recalled one student from her whole language class of third graders. In high school, he chose her as his Honor Teacher at the high school awards ceremony. He reminded Rebekah of how she always made them read all the time. Her told her that he still read as a young adult because of that experience. Rebekah was able to see the lifelong impact her third grade whole language classroom had on this former student.

In a democratic society, it is necessary to support the empowerment of teachers who are capable of unleashing the power of their students to discover their own strengths and abilities, to take responsibility for their own learning, to care for the rights of others and for social justice in our society. Empowered students collaborate with others and at the same time take on leadership roles where they live and work (Goodman, 2004, p. 287).

As a result of student empowerment, a strong sense of community began to develop in the classrooms of the participants. They also experienced this same new sense of community and collegiality in their work with their own peers.

### Collegiality/Community

Whole language brought about a new kind of collaboration among the participants and their peers. In the past, they followed the textbook and there was no reason to discuss instruction with colleagues. There was an occasional exchange of an idea for an activity or a comparison of page numbers with other teachers, but nothing more. Whole language brought teachers together to discuss and reflect upon instructional practices. “The first step toward a more professional culture is the development of collegiality among teachers” (Rallis, 1990, p. 198). This collegiality led to enhanced professional development in their practices as evolving whole language teachers. Some of the collaboration happened as a naturally occurring result of a new paradigm about their professional practices, and other support for developing this professional collaboration was built into the professional development follow up sessions.

As part of the whole language in-service, there were follow up group meetings to support the implementation process.

We had teacher meetings to share ideas and concerns. There was a lot of support. That made a big difference for me. You got new ideas, what’s working, what’s not working, that kind of thing. And really what turned out to be a real sharing session. We were supporting each other and building the curriculum together that we were using in the classroom. We discussed books and themes and themes that we could use and literature that applied to the themes and skills that we found that we could teach, incorporate into that literature, that worked well. There was a core of us and we met religiously once per month. Before [whole language] everything was just said. I mean you knew you needed to be through the book. The only

conversations I'd had before about language arts was what page are you on in the workbook. Where are you in *Getting Ready to Read*? Or are your kids out of the reading readiness? And it was just a matter of what page are you on (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

Removed from isolated teaching for the first time, the participants felt whole language had caused them to expand their sources of support for their teaching. This professional collaboration was a new experience for the participants, but was key to their growth as whole language teachers. Barbie on several instances related her whole language experience to that of developing religious beliefs.

It is almost like proselytizing. You tell it to other people and you win them over and, you know, and pretty soon it got to be the big buzz word. You talked about it all the time. But really I had never remembered being together with teachers, talking with teachers about actually teaching. You were mostly talking about individual children or things at large in the school building, but never about what you were doing in the room all day. You never discussed it with anybody. Well, what was there to discuss when it's all laid out for you? There's no—you don't question it; you don't do anything (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/19/98).

The other participants could relate to Barbie's experiences of whole language bringing them out of their isolation as professionals.

It brought me out of my isolated environment and caused me to go and talk with other teachers in my own school; it caused me to network with other teachers in other schools in the county. It caused me to want to go to workshops that dealt with what I felt like I needed. So, I think it brought about a lot of change for me

as a teacher, whereas I think if it had not been provided, I probably would have just stuck with “Okay, well hand me what you want me to teach. Give me what you want me to teach and I’ll teach it” (Patty, Interview transcript 9/29/98).

Many of their colleagues did maintain the mentality of, just tell me what to teach and I’ll teach it, even though they had been through the same in-service as the participants. They did not seem to understand what whole language was all about or perhaps they did understand and were not willing to invest the time it took to create a whole language classroom. The participants all believed their own continued professional development beyond the whole language in-service was paramount to their success in creating whole language classrooms. Professional development was a key component for those who were successful in creating whole language classrooms.

### Professional Development

The process of becoming a whole language teacher did not stop for the participants at the end of the weeklong workshop. The participants all seemed to understand that upon leaving the workshop that they had just begun their journey. They each discussed their efforts above and beyond that week to learn more about the whole language philosophy. “I don’t think it happens naturally unless you think and reflect and read and continue to grow. And you don’t even have to go to graduate school, you know. I mean, you could do your own reading” (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98).

Some continued studies on their own while other participants went on to graduate degrees. Whatever their course of action, all participants took action to learn more and understood that a philosophical understanding and adoption of whole language did not occur in a week.

You know, you don't take a weeklong workshop and become a whole language teacher. And I think maybe that was the perceived thing, where you do take this workshop and you go out and you apply it to what you're doing. It has to be a real commitment. And because I enjoy it so much, then I am a student of it on my own time and in my own way. I'm not waiting for another workshop or for somebody to tell me a new thing to do. I'm studying it. I'm talking to other teachers. I'm reading material and studying it (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

Like the other participants, Rebekah knew that a big part of her success with whole language came from her continued studies in graduate school. "It came time for me to start my master's and that's when I started reading more professionally. Whereas I had been exposed to everything and thought I was doing things the way they were supposed to be; I really still didn't have the underlying philosophy" (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 8/21/98). It was through her graduate studies and expanding her knowledge of the research behind whole language that Rebekah felt she finally developed a deep understanding of the framework. It was a process that did not stop at the end of a week.

It's a growing process for you as an individual and it's painful sometimes because it's hard and you're not clear and you have to go learn—and you make mistakes and have to back up. It's a lot of work. It's commitment. It's a learning process. It's, for me, going to be a lifelong learning process (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

Regie Routman had developed a similar view of learning about whole language. "I now realize that the journey of putting whole language theory into practice is lifelong" (Routman, 1996, p. 45).

Maggie also credited the quality of her whole language professional development with giving her the strong foundational background she needed to make the first step in changing her instructional practices and to deepen her understanding of alternatives to what she had always known. “I guess I got started with a really good background in whole language. So I was real fortunate to be in that situation to take part in that because if I do something, I want to know why. Whole language helped me examine my teaching practices” (Maggie, Interview transcript, 7/29/98). She also continued her professional development far beyond the workshop. “I want to know more. I want to confirm that what I am doing is appropriate. And then I began reading. And then I worked on another degree and that’s when it all really fully fell into place” (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98).

Unfortunately, continued professional development did not occur for all who attended the summer whole language workshop. “Many teachers nationwide grabbed onto the term whole language before understanding it” (Routman, 1996, p.37). Church (1996) found that many teachers did not want to hear about the theory, but wanted someone to tell them what they were to do in their classrooms each day. All five participants in this study observed a distinct difference between the workshop participants who seemed to “get” whole language and those that did not.

The five participants attended the summer workshop again when it was offered in subsequent years and eventually became the instructors for the course and had the opportunity to teach their colleagues about whole language. “Our group went out and taught the other teachers so therefore we had to understand it more. We dug more; we did

more professional reading; we tried more. We had to or we couldn't have gone out and taught it to other teachers or tried to" (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98).

There is no wonder that so many struggle to make whole language work since adopting a whole language philosophy and having new roles as empowered professionals was a huge task. What they came to discover is that not all participants perceived the information from the course equitably.

That was a problem with whole language. The instructors that we had certainly knew what they were saying but how we all received it. I guess because of all the different experiences and where we were in our lives and who could spend the time doing the reading and who couldn't because of families (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/16/98).

The commitment and time required beyond the whole language workshop may have presented too great a challenge for others who attended the same sessions as the participants in the study. "It [whole language workshop] gave them an introduction to the philosophy and some teachers, because of their own abilities or interest or whatever, just stopped right there at the week. They did not go any further" (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98).

Routman (1996) estimated that about 20 percent of education professionals truly understood the whole language philosophy thoroughly enough to implement it successfully. The initial strong professional development for the five participants was a key component to the success for the participants in developing an understanding of whole language and motivated the participants to continue to investigate further and learn

more about whole language. This continued learning was paramount to their inherent understanding of whole language.

Others who attended that same workshop did not seem to reap similar benefits. “I always marvel at how you can say something to somebody and then they can walk away and not really have what it was you meant to say to them. You know, that has happened. It happened with the whole language structure, obviously, it has happened with a lot of things” (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/16/98). As a result, practices that were implemented in the name of whole language resulted in misguided understanding of the philosophy.

#### Misconceptions About Whole Language

As teachers worked to implement whole language, it became evident that some did not have a full understanding. “I think they [other teachers] thought it was going to be an easier thing to do. And therefore, when it turned out not to be an easier thing to do, they reverted back to going to the books page by page” (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98). In some cases became an excuse not to teach. “Changing beliefs and materials without providing ongoing professional development and support for teachers and administrators is doomed to failure” (Routman, 1996, p. 23). The resulting instructional practices became a mechanism for prevalent misconceptions about whole language and its impact on teaching and learning.

#### Whole Language: Misdefined

The participants recalled how overwhelmed they felt when they attended that first weeklong workshop on whole language. They were unclear about exactly what it was they were supposed to do. They had begun to get a sense of the theoretical

underpinnings behind whole language, but felt unsure of how to create that in their own classrooms. Groups would gather in the parking lot following each session to discuss what whole language really meant.

It was so overwhelming and even when we thought we had it, we didn't. And there was so much more to do with it. And you stop and think, if people stop at that first level that we were at and never went another level as far as in depth of understanding all there was to it, I mean, no wonder we lost them. No wonder people didn't understand it. It takes a few people in proper positions to start saying things that are misconceptions or whatever and it doesn't take long (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/16/98).

These misconceptions began to spread and prevail over the less prominent experiences with whole language that the five participants were having. "All I know is that a lot of people went into the training and came out with different perceptions. Or perhaps they went in thinking it was going to be one thing and then it wasn't. I honestly don't have an answer. I don't know how it could have been done differently" (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

Whole language slowly became redefined by those who lacked understanding of it. "Some of them professed to be whole language teachers, in essence, they just had the children reading and writing while they did other things" (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98). Practices were labeled as whole language that had little or nothing to do with the underlying philosophy. Routman (1996) found that some educators believed if they set up the environment, establish a community of learners, and do lots of reading and writing activities, learning would take place naturally and automatically.

Not only did classroom teachers misdefine whole language, but some researchers in the field of reading also misdefined whole language practices and their influence was powerful as they were viewed as professionals with expertise in literacy instruction. Jean Chall (2002) described the prevailing ideology of reading during the 1980's and 1990's as that of a child learning naturally to read.

This view holds that a child learns to read as naturally as he learns to speak. He or she will learn if only we provide the books and the time to read them. Reading skills—especially those related to print and the sound of words—are to be treated lightly, if at all, since they distract from the naturalness of the reading process and the acquisition of meaning (Chall,2002, p.68).

Routman (1996) attributed some of the lack of understanding of whole language to those in influential positions not providing a clear definition. This led to those less knowledgeable about whole language to define it for themselves. McQuillan (1998) stated that such cases consisted of imprecise labels of whole language. Whole language quickly became associated with fun activities that had little to do with teaching the curriculum. “Like finger painting with chocolate pudding and reading *The Chocolate Touch*. You know those are activities. That is not teaching” (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98).

Maggie observed a lack of willingness on the part of others to do what was really needed to understand whole language.

I try to improve my reading instruction each time I learn something new. I mean, that's why we have a brain to improve our knowledge of our profession. And I don't think some people are truly interested. You know, the attitude is give me

what's there. I don't want to go to the library and read. I don't want to check out a book. I don't want to take a class. It's just give me, give me, give me (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98).

Routman stated that "moving from a skills-based model to whole language is a profound shift. Deep, meaningful changes in thinking and practice take more time than teachers, administrators, parents and communities have realized" (1996, p. 38).

Patty concurred with the view that whole language was far more challenging than many expected and that many misunderstood whole language and how to use that framework to inform classroom practices. She also acknowledged that it was not easy to understand; it was not black and white and something that could be put into a manual in the way teachers were accustomed.

It's just kind of like the interpretation of whole language. I think in a lot of people's minds it was an ambiguous thing as far as what it was and what you were supposed to teach and what you were supposed to do and that some teachers did it very well and became students of it and grew with it, and I think had the right concept. And then there were others that took their first exposure to it and whatever stuck is what they taught. You know, kind of like, you read a book to the kids and you read good literature to the kids, you decorate the room up nice and you do some cutesy things and you've done whole language (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

Unfortunately, the misconceptions about whole language may have actually resulted in less effective teaching in classrooms. Routman (1996) noted in her research

that anthologies used during this time period were rich in literature, but may have lacked enough support for the teaching of basic reading skills.

I think people who expected to go to that first introduction into whole language and get a whole language basal, came out with, “Oh, as long as I use children’s literature and come up with a cute activity, then I am doing whole language.” And then you do that and you are going to have a lot of gaps in your instruction (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/29/98).

The participants in the study concurred that the gaps in instruction and student learning that were associated with whole language were very real. However, they believed those gaps had nothing to do with whole language, but with the misconceptions some teachers had about whole language and the practices that resulted from those misconceptions.

They [administration] saw teachers going into their classroom and they saw them having children read for thirty minutes, write for thirty minutes and then doing something else. It’s like having free time, and not carrying through what they were supposed to be carrying through. It [whole language] became just making it easier, which indeed it was not easier (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98).

It became a situation more of what was done and not done under the guise of whole language.

It was a dirty word for a couple of years and now they mention it but usually mention it in the wrong context. You know they’ll say well, you have to teach skills; you can’t do whole language. They don’t understand that skills are taught with whole language and that big thing on phonics. We taught phonics. People

who never understood whole language didn't understand that phonics was part of whole language. I mean reading is reading and you're gonna have phonics; you're gonna have decoding; you're gonna have literature; you're gonna have comprehension skills. It's just part of it, but people don't understand whole language and there are many who don't understand that (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

This negative perception resulted in outward whole language bashing by local education professionals, community members, the media, leaders and politicians.

You know that's why I resent so much the comments that I hear cause I know what I went through to understand it and I know the majority of the people did not take that step. You think about the teaching that I did and the groups I had that we taught and everything and I mean even all that helped me. And most people didn't go through that. There's just no way they could have that level of understanding. And then a lot of them never bought into the underlying philosophy in the first place (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 8/21/98).

All of these misconceptions eventually resulted in the rejection of what had previously been acceptance of whole language as a framework for teaching and learning in the county where the five participants worked. Susan Church (1996) feared that whole language had come to mean so many different things to so many different people that it was in danger of truly meaning nothing at all. This misunderstanding by so many resulted in whole language soon becoming a scapegoat for educational woes in literacy (Routman, 1996).

### Whole Language: The Fall From Grace

The demise of whole language in the school system where the participants taught was almost inevitable. The commitment to the philosophy was not there from some key people, including teachers who “misdefined” it. The inability of so many to truly embrace the philosophy occurred for several different reasons according to the five participants. This was similar to what was occurring nationwide. “We vastly underestimated—and even failed to consider—how difficult it is to create curriculum for every subject and teach without teachers’ manuals or guides of some sort. Many teachers become exhausted to the point of burnout” (Routman, 1996, p. 39). The participants felt that others did not understand whole language, that others were unwilling to invest the time needed to successfully understand and create whole language classrooms, there were administrators that were unsupportive, and some of the practices that took place in the name of whole language negatively impacted student achievement.

Routman had similar findings in her writing about the perceived failure of whole language. “It was not whole language that failed. It was the implementation of a set of practices without adequate funding, staff development, community support, and understanding” (Routman, 1996, p. 22).

I think people that went into it more as a fad and didn’t actually think it through and it wasn’t a real internalized change for them or philosophical change, people that saw it more as a methodology, then they didn’t feel any compulsion about going back and doing something else. It’s like you get bored with this, you go over and do this awhile. But I think when it’s, it’s quite, it is very much to me like a spiritual thing, like a religion, like when you make up your mind as to what your

values are, mine don't change back and forth that easily (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98).

Maggie saw eye to eye with Barbie about her colleagues lack of connection to whole language due to the fact that they did not understand it. "I think it's knowing the big picture. Where does this all fit in? Some people just see the fragments of the curriculum instead of the big picture in terms of what the children need" (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98). Patty speculated as to why so many teachers were uncomfortable and had difficulty buying in to whole language.

So, I think for some people who like safe tracks, secure packages, and I don't mean it in a derogatory way, who want somebody to set expectations for them and have a track to follow, you know what I'm saying. I think for some people they are much more comfortable in that zone than flexing out and doing things on their own. Whereas for me, it's a real turn on. I think for other people, I think it's a total turn off (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

Some of that lack of buy-in was not on the part of the teachers, but on the part of local school administrators as well. This lack of support may have sabotaged the success of whole language before it ever got off the ground.

It also was the first case I'd had of something that was so good that was working and I could see that it probably wasn't gonna make it. If we didn't have everybody working toward the same goal, it wasn't going to work, especially if the administrator isn't part. I remember at a particular workshop where we introduced what we had learned in whole language that summer to the principals at an administrator's workshop that we had a part on to talk about whole language

and to talk about the new grading and my principal in particular and some others sat in the back and laughed during the presentation. It didn't matter what we were doing and how great it was, they weren't for it and they weren't going to listen to it (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Perhaps these administrators reacted this way due to their own lack of understanding of whole language or due to their being uncomfortable with these teachers as leaders.

In locales where teacher leadership is actually emerging, backlash factors are heavy. Teachers undermine other teachers who violate the myth of equity; administrators feel threatened by loss of authority and power; some teachers and administrators long for the comfort of autocratic leadership (Lambert, et. al. , 1996, p. 9).

Rebekah felt that was certainly the case with her administrator. "I think it made him uncomfortable. He didn't understand it and he couldn't explain it" (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

On the other hand, perhaps these administrators could see that some children were not being taught the skills needed to be successful in the next grade level. Some of the practices that occurred in the name of whole language certainly seemed to leave gaps in student learning. Church (1996) expressed her very real concerns about the literacy learning of many children for these very reasons. "My concern, however, is not that whole language theory is lacking, but that many children are not learning to read and write because of the way that theory has been enacted in practice" (Church, 1996, p. 34).

Rebekah and the other participants could see that this very thing had happened in their own school system.

I think because when we taught whole language, when whole language was being taught, we had people who did it halfway. We had people who never understood it at all. We had people, teachers, who never knew what they were doing and those that couldn't or wouldn't do the extra work it required to make it work. So we did have children who were not being exposed to what they needed to be exposed to. So I guess we were turning out kids who didn't have what they needed to be exposed to. So, I guess we were turning out kids who didn't have what they needed to spell and so forth by the time they got to the upper primary and then on into middle school grades. So, I guess that's where the outcry came from (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Regardless of what really occurred in classrooms, whole language seemed to be the root of all the evils in education.

Whole language is blamed for poor test scores, bad spelling, reading problems, illiteracy, you name it. The truth is, whole language hasn't been around long enough to accept responsibility for all the ills of education. More important, the principles on which whole language stands are research-based, sensible, and child-centered. Unfortunately, these principles have been misunderstood, maligned, and misused (Routman, 1996, p. 35).

The participants' experiences mirrored Routman's views on the post-whole language climate. They felt the emotionality and blame firsthand. "We were told we would not use the words whole language. We were told that was not a concept that we would use. That there were too many children that could not read and they blamed that on

whole language and the whole language concept” (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98).

Maggie’s views on misconceptions about whole language were similar.

I think whole language got the blame for anything. If the scores were down, it was whole language. If the children couldn’t write, it was whole language. Everything was blamed on whole language. And I can’t understand why. I want someone to show me what it is about whole language that is negative. It’s very frustrating.

Whole language this and whole language that. It got the blame for everything (Maggie, Interview transcript, 9/18/98).

The participants consistently stated that whole language was over in their school system. They could see no evidence that any support for the philosophy still existed. They all experienced high levels of frustration over this because they knew what it had done for their students, yet they felt powerless to change the pervasive negative perception of whole language. They did hold on to hope.

I think that those who truly embraced it have it and I think they are few and far between. So, as a movement, I think it is dead and gone. But as being a part of people and being woven into their teaching for the people who really embraced it, I think it will be there until those people are gone. Then we can only hope what we impart to a class will resurface one day. You know, if you truly created a significant number of readers and writers, surely that has got to come back around. You’d like to think. We get so caught up in all this other extra stuff that we have got to do and that has become the trend (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/16/98).

The participants knew how easy it was to lose sight of what was important in the classroom. The pressures from external forces seemed to increase daily as the participants worked to continue to support a whole language classroom while those around them openly rejected these practices. “Whole language has become a loaded, emotional term in some places” (Routman, 1996, p. 35).

For Carey, the rejection of whole language was certainly more than professional or philosophical differences, it became personal.

I guess I probably felt it more than anybody else or more than other people. When I would hear them discussing the whole language philosophy and putting it down so badly, I always felt responsible because I had taught the course in the county.

Therefore, I felt responsible for that—what was going on. When they would say it was being used irresponsibly, I felt responsible for that (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98).

It became a stigma to be a whole language teacher for Carey and the other participants. Rejection of whole language was largely based on false perceptions of what whole language practices really were. This fact made it even more difficult for the participants to bear. “I think it [whole language] was misinterpreted, misused, and because of that there was a perceived need to get on track where things were consistent, more of the same, you know, where there was more of a consistency (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

The pressure to move away from whole language began to emerge from all directions including pressure from the participants' closest colleagues and peers. The change process in this school system had failed. “If change or movement is to occur, it is

possible only when there is a framework or perspective within which it can take place” (Diamond, 1996, p. 50). The framework had been solidly established for the participants in the study due to their continued study of whole language.

Given the current organizational infrastructure and political culture of schools, education has a tremendous capacity (and need) to deflect improvement efforts and to respond to change in a ritualistic fashion. Even when goodwill and commitment are widely distributed throughout the system, change is not a foregone conclusion. When new ideas do penetrate the system, they are more likely to be massaged to fit existing conditions than vice versa (Murphy, 1991, p.94).

That was the experience of the participants as they watched their peers make little change to their classroom practices and witnessed others who left after the weeklong workshop never to study whole language again, the framework from which they would draw upon for their new practices was missing. They took what they liked from the professional development and used what would fit into their already existing paradigm of good literacy instruction. For the participants, it became a complete paradigm shift with real changes in their instructional practices. These changes did not always fare well with their colleagues.

#### Pressures from Colleagues

The participants found that many colleagues did not “buy-in” to whole language. This new framework for teaching had been the highlight of their careers. To many of their colleagues it was perceived negatively. “Advocating for changing the system can feel like unfamiliar territory and sometimes puts a teacher at odds with others. Here the

challenge of clarity and courage comes into play—remaining open to others, not sacrificing oneself and one’s beliefs just to get along” (Lambert, et.al., 1996, p. 61). The participants struggled to find balance between successfully interacting with colleagues and holding fast to their beliefs about teaching and learning. Carey continued her role on countywide language arts committees. At times, she struggled to remain on the committees due to her philosophical differences with what was currently happening on these committees. At other times, she struggled to participate due to interaction with her colleagues. “When I was on the committees, I was there and I had to hear it over and over and over, how bad it [whole language] was” (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98).

Maggie also discussed her struggle to fit into a professional group of colleagues where she was once a member and now found herself an outsider. Maggie found the need to seek out others who believed in whole language to get the support she needed as a developing whole language teacher.

For me, it [whole language] pulled a lot of the beliefs I had together and then we would meet in forums, you’d meet another teacher who felt exactly the same way.

In a faculty of say, 40, you might have six or seven who truly believed the way you do and because sometimes you just feel like you’re all by yourself in these beliefs (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98).

Their colleagues were uncomfortable with the philosophy and did not wish to relinquish their perceived control from use of the basal and other textbooks. “Teachers uncertain of how to do their job adequately tend to prefer pathways that are clearly defined, especially teachers who have been trained to rely on programs and tests” (Smith, 1986, p. 150). The pressures from colleagues brought on feelings of isolation for the participants.

Despite her strong commitment to whole language, Maggie found herself giving in to pressure from her colleagues to do things differently. They were pressuring her to use a phonics approach and the reading textbook. “Sometimes you feel like you’re alone in your way of thinking and I get very upset with myself when I drift back, so to speak, and I just go along because it’s easiest. I just get very annoyed with myself cause I know what good reading instruction includes” (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98).

Maggie was experiencing what Hampton described in detail about the experiences of teachers who “go against the grain.” Hampton described the difficulty of being an innovative teacher in the context of the status quo.

Innovative teaching methods are threatening to classroom teachers who are vested in the status quo, and those teachers react very quickly to any and all who might unsettle the routine of the schoolhouse. One effective way advocates of the old order move against change is to discourage the innovator by alienating him or her from the community of other teachers (1994, p.123).

Rebekah also found the pressure from colleagues regarding her whole language practices caused a great deal of tension in her work environment.

It brought resentment and it was really bad resentment. And that’s what made me change schools basically over the years of dealing with that. I left the school I was teaching in. Oh, they were mean. They made me cry. I had one teacher come into my room and said they all hated me in the grade level. She came back later and said, “I came to you that day cause I was so upset.” But because I did all these things and they didn’t do them, I was ridiculed. We had some teachers who were real harsh and fifth grade teachers would come in my room and just make

comments about whole language, just blatant in front of the whole class. You know, something like, if that's whole language then why don't we all just jump in the bandwagon and do it and have a great time. They didn't understand and they made comments and it was just not, not a very fun place to teach (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Rebekah wanted to share her knowledge of whole language but was reluctant after her experience at her previous school. She felt such negative pressure from those colleagues about whole language that she ended up leaving the school. At her new school, Rebekah found new pressures and felt out of energy to continue to try and bring others on board or to get them to buy-in. "So, I mean I feel pressure to do what others are doing and at the same time I do what I think works for the kids. I don't know if I've got it in me to teach others again. You know, I don't think I've got the support from the administration for one thing" (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Rebekah's experience with the resistance from her peers was not a novel response when change occurs in public schools. There is oftentimes resistance to change and new instructional initiatives because it is difficult to move away from what has been so strongly engrained in the culture of American schools. "Often we teachers fight hard to maintain the status quo. It seems a lot easier to be told what to do (by a teacher's manual) or to continue doing what we've always done than it is to reexamine our teaching and make changes" (Routman, 1996, p. 58).

Pressure from colleagues was only the beginning of what the participants would experience as it became more evident that whole language had fallen out of favor. The pressures they faced from administration, colleagues and the public increased with each

passing day. The next chapter will provide a summary of the strategies used by the participants to cope with new pressures and mandates while struggling to hold fast to their philosophical beliefs, practices and professional empowerment.

## CHAPTER SIX: COPING WITH MANDATES

The discussion in this chapter will focus upon a second time period, which includes the aftermath experienced by these teachers in what I will call Post-Whole Language, which occurred between 1995 and 1998 (the time of the interviews). I will discuss key aspects of the ways in which these teachers coped with dramatic changes in power, status, acceptable instructional practices, external mandates, public perception, media, levels of administrative support and a renewed emphasis on accountability as measured by standardized testing.

### Obstacles to Change

An important factor in the change process for all five participants was their comfort in knowing they had administrative support for implementing a whole language framework in their classrooms. As they described it, they were empowered by local and county administration to make decisions about instruction, materials and assessment of student progress. Just as the support from those in leadership was an important catalyst for their adoption of the whole language philosophy, the lack of that administrative support also became a catalyst in the system's move away from whole language.

### Change in Leadership

The superintendent who had supported whole language left the school system for a superintendent's position in another system. His replacement, who had been an open advocate of whole language, was hired from within the local school system. She had been the director over curriculum and instruction and had been at the forefront of bringing whole language to the school system. After a very short tenure, she suddenly resigned.

She was truly in office one day and gone the next. The reasons for her dismissal were never publicly shared and those working in the school system at the time still do not know why she left or was removed.

This resignation brought another change in the superintendent's office. Again, someone from within the school system was appointed as interim. Unlike his predecessors, he was not a whole language advocate. With his appointment, key leaders vacated their positions including the Language Arts Coordinator who had brought whole language to the school system. All of these county level changes in leadership brought with it sweeping changes in the direction of the school system.

The leaders in these key curriculum positions knew the new leadership would not support their initiatives, including whole language. The new superintendent had been promoted from within and he had been very vocal about his views on curriculum, instruction and teaching. "Superintendents, even in decentralized systems, act as gatekeepers for change at the district and school levels. Without their endorsement and support, their willingness to commit valuable tangible and intangible organizational resources, the seeds of restructuring are likely to fall on barren ground" (Murphy, 1991, p. 92). His views on teaching and learning were antithetical to those currently in leadership positions in the curriculum department and it was evident that whole language would no longer be in favor.

It was like we were heading in one direction in this county and then all of a sudden that direction changed. When the people approved of it [whole language], we had a superintendent that approved. We had leaders at the county level that

approved of whole language and of allowing the children to be first and didn't worry about test scores (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/16/98).

Now the pressures felt by the participants to abandon whole language came not only from peers, but from the very top of the leadership hierarchy. The change in the Superintendent's position and in the Language Arts Coordinator's position brought about additional pressures to move away from whole language.

The leadership further up, as years went by, questioned the whole language philosophy and would send out notices or things that he [superintendent] found in professional journals that would sort of say whole language is lacking this and I think some people started to see the writing on the wall so to speak (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98).

Those in leadership positions and peer relationships who avoid moving away from the status quo "are afraid that matters will get worse, and even out of control, if something radically new is tried" (Smith, 1986, p. 246). It was obvious to Maggie and the other participants that whole language was quickly being abandoned and that the support system that had been so strong was now going to change.

The participants experienced frustration that those most knowledgeable about whole language were no longer in leadership positions. The participants who had experienced empowerment and developed a strong sense of self-efficacy due to their experience with whole language found it difficult to think about relinquishing that empowerment and giving up their ideals of effective teaching. It was hard to accept that others' lack of understanding would force them to give up all they had worked so hard to accomplish.

And then I look at our county and it's through ignorance; it's through leaders who didn't know. They didn't know what they were talking about. It's kind of like the revelation I had when I was getting older that a doctor doesn't necessarily know everything. When I knew what I had studied in whole language and I knew what I had read and what I had proven in whole language and to sit there and watch people who were leading me make asinine statements out of ignorance, it really does something to you. I think that did a lot to empower me too and make me feel like my job is with the kids and this works (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

The battle to rid the school system of whole language centered around power issues; the teachers in this study felt a distinct loss of power as the new administration took the helm. It was hard for them to submit to the demands of leadership that had no credibility in their eyes.

It just seems like there is nobody up there to clue people in on research and to be an authority on research-based information or anything. I guess the people who are in a position maybe should have that coming with them, but I haven't seen it if it did. And it is bad to work with your quote "supervisors or leaders" and you don't have a feeling that they know what they are doing. That is a bad feeling (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/16/98).

In Barbie's opinion, the new administration cared more about controlling others than empowering them to have autonomy to do their jobs effectively.

I don't think it's really about what's the best way to teach. I think it's an issue of power. I think if you view your leadership as managing and being in control, then

you can't very well let people be doing what they feel is best. Everyone has to be doing the same thing. If you feel like you have to justify your job by managing others, you can't manage unmanageable people. People that are being autonomous and making decisions on their own don't want your management (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98).

It required a specific philosophical view of the role of instructional leadership for those in authority to be willing to empower others and the new leadership did not share that view. "If a condition of having power is that I have to reduce yours, then we may feel that we need to force our will on others and reduce their choices. This scenario of power over has been played out in schools for several decades" (Lambert, et.al., 1996, p. 124). This climate of leadership seemed to be pervasive, not only in this school system, but across systems. "Current policy development seems headed in the direction of less and less professional autonomy paired with more and more accountability—the worst case scenario" (Allington, 2002, p. 32-33).

Rebekah credited the change in county level administration and their mindset with having a huge impact on the whole language movement in the county. "We changed power figures as far as the county goes and we had our politicians as well as there were articles coming out as well as the administration took its cue from a leader that did not support whole language and did not support teacher empowerment" (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98). It became obvious that local school administrators were not going to support whole language when the top levels of administration did not.

The change in leadership at the county level clearly brought about an absence of support for the participants. When asked about what more they could have done to avoid having these changes, Rebekah and others offered their thoughts.

Maybe have been more vocal but you know when you know your administration is not supporting you, it makes a big difference. You know, when you gotta work and it's the same old thing and you *gotta* have your job. If you stand up and are vocal, well I know like our past superintendent who was gonna be vocal with him. I mean that's the bottom line. I caught myself several times wondering should I say the word whole language. When we interviewed for our current principal and we were able to make the questions out. All the questions about whole language were nixed [by county office leaders] except for the one that asked how do you feel about whole language. It was let known to the people who were interviewing; it was let known to them that that was not something we were looking for, that we were not looking for someone who was whole language oriented (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Barbie's experience in attempting to be vocal about her concerns over whole language resulted in a similar response. She felt like she had no one in leadership to whom she could turn to voice her concerns over the changes. The past practices of administrators openly collaborating with teachers and empowering teachers to make professional decisions was over.

I don't know if I have anyone to go to. That is just it, there isn't anyone. It is not that they [county officials] are doing evil. Or that they feel they aren't doing their job the correct way. They really do. It is like I said, it is just that mindset is

keeping them from seeing that. I've tried convincing decision-makers closer to where I am, but that hasn't always worked out because when your boss tells you to do something different than your employees are telling you, you are not going to do what your employees want and get in trouble with your boss (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/30/98).

Even if there had been local school administrators who were advocates of whole language, no one would have known due to their precarious position under the new administration. The influence to move away from whole language began to hit the participants from all angles. It became evident that this was bigger than the recent change in administration. The public at large had joined in the battle to have whole language banned from schools. These outward sources of pressure came from the public, which were fed by the media, legislators and textbook companies.

#### Pressures from the Public

The participants found there was discussion among parents about whole language and the dangers to their children of having a whole language teacher. The media contributed heavily to the parents' perceptions about whole language. As with previous media blitzes of the 1980's, the public believed what the media printed. "Good-natured Americans have come to believe that the public schools of their nation are in a crisis state because they have so often been given the false message by supposedly credible sources" (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 3). There were articles and news reports about declining test scores and low student achievement in reading achievement and whole language was at the center of the blame. "Bad news in education captures the public's interest and sells newspapers" (Routman, 1996, p. 4). According to Goodman (2004) this was all part of

the continuing attempt to privatize education by ensuring through a media campaign that the public lost faith in the system of public education.

McQuillan (1998) in his research on the perceived “literacy crisis” in the United States demonstrated that not only were students achieving as well on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) as they had historically, but actually were scoring higher in some areas. McQuillan (1998) showed that if there is currently a literacy crisis then there has always been one since our students are performing relatively the same now as they have historically. The nation read multiple reports that U.S. students were illiterate, yet the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement showed our nine year olds ranking second in world in reading achievement (McQuillan, 1998).

Since the early 1980s, Americans have been subjected to a massive campaign of criticism directed at their public schools and colleges. We have been told that student achievement in those institutions has slipped badly, that our achievement lags behind that of students in other industrialized countries and that these judgments are confirmed by numerous studies (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 64).

Once such false idea about reading achievement had been printed in the local papers, it was difficult to counteract that affect on a local level. “When it is in the paper, then it goes to the public putting pressure on you. Then the parents get angry because they see the school at the bottom of the heap and they don’t want their kids at the bottom” (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98).

The media had presented its case against whole language with dwindling test scores, particularly citing studies from California who had been a pioneer in the whole

language movement. News reports led the nation to believe that literacy education was in dire straits due to whole language and needed to be *fixed*. “California has become a national test case in reading instruction, and since many of the skills-oriented solutions to our current reading “crisis” are in large part a reaction to what happened there...” (McQuillan, 1998, p. 12).

“Teacher education is portrayed as unnecessary—even damaging. Reading instruction can only be effective when teachers are required to use “proven programs” and follow scripted lesson plans” (Allington, 2002, p.31). The language used in the media became one of control, one of getting public schools under control. “I think parents, especially the ones that are not involved in education are led by what they read and by what they perceive and by what is discussed in their community” (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/29/98).

This media frenzy stirred up a back to basics movement that seemed to spread throughout the country. Parental pressures for a move away from whole language and back to traditional teaching gained momentum. “Parents are particularly susceptible to this kind of reasoning because any attack on traditional curriculum or methods can be perceived as an attack on what they know” (Hampton, 1994, p. 124).

Temes (2002) noted in his research that despite the overall sweeping message that schools are failing, most parents, when asked, believe their own schools are doing fine. This is not to say that some of the concerns over whole language were not legitimate. Some very destructive practices had taken place in the name of whole language and teachers were sometimes their own worst enemies. “Many teachers could not explain

their new ways of teaching to the satisfaction of parents, so community confidence waned even further” (Church, 1996, p. 22).

The participants felt the backlash from this firsthand in their local school system where they began to witness a move back to text-driven teaching practices. “There is no freedom for that [innovation]. So, I don’t see things loosening up. I see things as the attitude of the public and everything being we have to get a hold of education. The words they are using are control words” (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/30/98).

One way to be able to control what the teachers were doing in classrooms was to mandate the use of the textbook. In the eyes of those outside the classroom, this seemed like an easy way to fix the problem and the public seemed to support it. Using the text was comfortable and familiar to them and had worked for them when they were students. Of course the textbook companies took advantage of this opportunity for capital gains. They came out with language arts textbook series designed to keep the best parts of whole language, i.e. the use of literature and integrate the things that whole language supposedly neglected, i.e. spelling and phonics.

The participants had become knowledgeable about the publishing industry through their professional development on whole language and knew the driving forces behind the push for a new textbook adoption. They were well aware that the textbook and test publishers were going to greatly benefit from new text adoptions and new mandates for testing (Allington, 2002).

It [whole language] got a bad rap. It got a bum rap because people didn’t understand it that were in powerful positions. I think the publishers, the textbook companies, would’ve died. The textbook companies would’ve died out. They

would've become dinosaurs because they sold texts and we didn't need them. I guess money talks and organization talks and I guess somehow I guess it was, somehow it [whole language] was undermined is my feeling (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Yetta Goodman's research provides support for Rebekah's thoughts on the role of publishers and publishing companies in the demise of whole language.

It's no secret that publishers of commercial programs and tests worry that the success of outstanding teachers might diminish their power and profits. They are concerned that administrators and school districts might rely less on the sales of commercialized programs if the word got around that teachers do not need to rely on single textbook or text adoptions to be successful in the classroom (Goodman, 2004, p. 120).

When the time came to adopt new language arts textbooks, Rebekah became very frustrated during the language arts textbook adoption. She attempted to ask questions during the publisher's presentation. Her questions went unanswered. She tried to preview materials from the perspective of a new teacher and what would best support his or her needs. It became apparent to her very quickly that there were other issues that would drive the textbook adoption. She got to live firsthand the politics behind text adoptions.

They were the ones who said, JoBeth, I think who said that the book company was just a bunch of people. Publishers were just a bunch of people who were putting together a book and the bottom line was to make money. That's when it really sank in that maybe they don't know what's right. You know, because it sure doesn't fit. I'll never trust a book publisher again. Never. Especially after, when

you go to those meetings where they have publishers and representatives and all. They don't know what they are talking about. They are just trying to sell their product and that's all it is in a nutshell. And they're trying to make their bucks cause they are gonna make a big hunk if they sell to a county. It is so obvious in their presentations. This book, this manual that we adopted was THE most confusing manual, two manuals, two inches thick to have with you during the year. It is so confusing. You have to take sticky notes and mark the pages to know where the skills were in the lesson. So and that's what they chose cause they gave the county the best deal (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Maggie felt the same way as Rebekah that the textbook companies were not a sufficient resource for meeting the needs of the students.

I don't really know the people who wrote my language textbook. They were writing for a general population and some of the skills I feel are not presented in a way that I think second-graders or children could understand. But some people take the textbook as the gospel and they don't question anything that's in there (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98).

Unlike the participants, the county administrators and the public sure bought into the promoted need for a new language arts adoption. Afterall, the media was certainly promoting a move to get education under control. "As usual, the public wants a quick fix to complex issues" (Routman, 1996, p.3).

Attacking the public schools has long been a pastime in this country so these public attacks were not new (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). However, this attitude had actually become quite pervasive over the years following the whole language movement.

I think the public who as far as people who are not steeped in educational practice or haven't had an opportunity to really learn a lot about educational practice and how children learn and things like that. I think they rely on what they read in the newspaper and what they hear over the news. Whatever is out there in different forms of media, what's been said to them (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

Parents can also have a powerful impact on change in education as an outside force. Unfortunately, their agendas are sometimes informed by inaccuracies. Patty in particular found her local school quickly giving in to parent pressures to make changes at her school. The focus shifted from the children to being politically savvy with the public.

The only way I can see it is from a real political sense that they [parents] are the taxpayers, that their children are in school, and they are perceived evidently by superintendents right on up above them as holding the power. Because the teacher can complain and point out areas of need and it would be ignored all day long.

But have a group appearance of parents and all of a sudden it is hopping on it. If there is a parent complaint, it has to be addressed; it has to be dealt with and the expectation from administration is that you are to do what is necessary to satisfy that parent and pacify that parent and for God's sake don't bring any publicity on the school. Don't bring any unpopular attention onto this school. Bring all the popular attention you want (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/29/98).

Additional pressures came with the increased demand for accountability based on a new emphasis on test results that were to be used to determine the success of a school and school system. Test scores became the public fervor and gauge by which schools were judged.

The realtors and that in the county show people houses based on test scores from certain schools because they are such and such. It doesn't matter that there's been teaching of the test going on and all that. Nobody mentions that so test scores are driving everything. They are publishing it in the paper (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

With the publication of test scores came a shift in focus from whole language and instruction from within the local schools to the preparation of students for the test and an emphasis on raising the test scores. Patty acknowledged the role of the media in perpetuating the importance of standardized test results. "Because it's something that's published and the public likes it if their school has real high test scores. I think it's just a real political issue. I think it's very political" (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

The focus on curriculum and instructional practices was lost to a renewed focus on accountability as defined by the legislators through test scores. In his discussions of similar climates in school systems across the nation, Allington stated, "the mandates aren't really about improved curriculum materials as much as they are about asserting external authority and ideological control over the educational process" (2002). These types of mandates and this kind of control were something that legislators and the public could understand.

That [test results] is something that people can understand; it is black and white. It is figures whereas true learning as far as the broader scope of learning, lifelong learning just involved, just that personal involvement in your learning and things like that. I don't think it is something that can be measured the way people want it to be measured (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/29/98).

The pressures from so many different areas of the public fueled a back to basics movement in the schools. The *push* to move away from whole language quickly became a *shove* as the participants found themselves fighting to hold on to the principles that informed their classroom practices.

### Back to Basics

It was difficult for the participants to accept a so-called back to basics movement when it all appeared to be a fallacy. The participants had never abandoned the basics but had only changed *how* they taught them. “The cry of “back to basics” implies that we stopped teaching the basics; knowledgeable whole language teachers never left them” (Routman, 1996, p. 43). Patty recalled how frustrating it was to witness the change in focus from the students and their learning to issues that had nothing to do with teaching and learning at all.

You know, suddenly, someone comes in and tells you, “Hey, this is fluff. All this is fluff. I want you to get back to the basics” when you never left the basics in the first place. You teach more basics than you ever taught in your entire career plus more. Children are also turned on to being in school. All you hear is that we are here for the children. We are here for the children, but everything that is coming down the pipe has to do with everything but the children. There is a lot of focus on maintenance and the buildings. Shiny floors, shiny walls, “spic and spanness” to the point that there is one teacher I was talking to in a particular school in the county, their kindergarteners are not allowed to paint in the classroom. They want a spic and span school (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/29/98).

The participants believed the school system was moving in the wrong direction. Regie Routman's (1996) experience was similar to that of the participants' view on the back to basics move that was taking place at the same time across the nation. "Despite public outcry that we are not teaching the basics, the irony is that we are overfocusing on discrete skills and superficial learning at the expense of not teaching our students how to interpret, evaluate, analyze, and apply knowledge for Information Age learning" (Routman, 1996, p. 6). Rebekah and Barbie both described the current direction of the county as "going backwards, taking steps backwards just as fast as we can get there" (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98). The participants expressed frustration about the fact that the back to basics movement was driven by those who had no understanding of whole language.

The fear of the unknown seemed to be driving instruction in the county in the direction from which it had come less than a decade earlier.

There was a great deal of fear over Outcomes-Based Education, you know. It was like it was a form of communism, I guess. I don't know. It [back to basics movement] reminds me of that fear. And that there is a conspiracy somewhere in the schools and we just get, it's back to basics stuff again. But if it worked (traditional teaching), then how come there are people out there that don't read and write? See, that doesn't make sense to me. It's not thought through; it's not logical (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98).

The fear exhibited by the public that Barbie experienced was central to other times of reform in education where politics and religious ideology drove initiatives and legislation in education. James Moffett documented similar fears by the public in the case of a

controversial textbook adoption in West Virginia. He noted, “Precisely parallel to the fear that children may repudiate the parents’ teachings if exposed to authors holding other values is the fear that citizens of our country will jettison national principles if made aware of other ideologies” (Moffet, 1988, p. 232). The participants in his study spoke openly of their fears of communism seeping into their community through the texts.

In this study, such fear drove the back to basics movement among conservative groups. “The call for a return to traditional education encompasses a variety of conservative reforms, ranging from the disestablishment of the public schools to the discontinuation of innovations such as the use of portfolios and cooperative learning (Paterson, 2002, p.179). “The deification of phonics and the fulmination against communism both serve to maintain in-group unity, the one by limiting knowledge and the other by limiting identity” (Moffet, 1988, p.232).

“Unfortunately the press, the public and often educators themselves have not understood the evidentiary shortcomings of this massive, critical attack against public education” (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 64). Administrative mandates forced teachers’ hands in using the text. When a new language arts series was adopted, the recently hired Language Arts Coordinator mandated that all teachers use the entire book the first year. When the teachers met for countywide grade level meetings, the mandates for the use of the textbooks were given.

That’s when things were said, that “there is an expectation to teach this and we know you have all these wonderful units and things that you’ve enjoyed teaching but change is good and if you don’t like these themes maybe it’s time for you to change grade levels and try something new if you think these are going to be

boring.” One thing is said one time and then it’s changed to another; where one thing is said at one time and then it’s changed later. But I don’t know what’s happening in between that causes the changes (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

The mandate from the Language Arts Coordinator that teachers were required to use the textbook was fully supported and encouraged by the coordinator's superiors. Teachers were required to forfeit autonomy for text-driven teaching. “But there is a long history of research that indicates that teachers, and teacher expertise, matter much more than which reading series a school district might choose” (Allington, 2002, p. 6).

Despite what research clearly showed about teacher expertise and student achievement, the district mandated the use of another packaged program. They had communicated clearly that their expectation was to create an instructional environment where students could move from one school to the next without missing instruction. Everyone was expected to not only use the book, but the expectation was set that all teachers would be on the same page on the same day across the county. “The message is also coming down from the Superintendent and Associate Superintendent for Instruction that they want people at the same place at the same time. That countywide is better” (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Patty shared the explanations that were given to her for the move to more traditional teaching. As the student population became more transient, administrators wanted to make sure students were not missing content as they moved from school to school. Another reason shared by her administration was the need to stop parent comparisons of teachers. “It is supposed to quell parent comparison. Everybody is

teaching the same thing then we won't have all these requests and demands for certain teachers over other teachers and things like that. So that was another reason given to us (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/29/98).

The move to get back to basics mirrored the participants' description of their early days of teaching and the practices they were so elated to abandon. “Programmatic instruction—where someone outside the classroom who cannot see either learners or teacher decides what the teacher should do next—has never been successful beyond its own prescribed and limited objectives” (Smith, 1986, p.69). This was a known fact and still the push to move back to prescribed programs was once again the focus. “The assumptions embedded in this approach suggest that the conditions of schooling contributing to poor student outcome measures are attributable to the poor quality of the workers and the inadequacy of their tools and that they are subject to revision through mandated, top-down initiatives—especially those from the state” (Murphy, 1991, p. viii).

Now, the focus on using the textbook had returned and the cycle would begin once more with a new crop of beginning teachers. “I think my perception if I was a new teacher would be, boy, I better teach that textbook front to back (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98). The participants grew leery and fearful of what lay ahead for language arts instruction in the school system as the textbook and testing became the driving forces behind instruction.

I'm worried that we are gonna be back where we were in 1988 when we first embraced whole language. I think that's where we are going. I see people coming out of school and going right to that manual. That way I see the curriculum disappearing. The county curriculums are disappearing into the background and I

see the manual and the ITBS as being the focus. ITBS for survival and the manual cause that's all we got. The kids and their interests are squashed again just like they used to be (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

The push to have outside agents determine classroom practice brought a culture of sameness to teaching in the county. The participants felt pressure to be just like every other teacher. Differences were not promoted, innovation was dismissed and the proposed need for the teachers to be the same was touted as being in the best interest of the students.

### Generic Teaching

The participants along with their colleagues were mandated to use traditional teaching methods. It was difficult to witness the practices that had so electrified teaching and learning become bland and mundane once more. Their expertise was overlooked and they were expected to use packaged programs to teach the curriculum. According to Allington, "it is the less-expert teacher who relies most on packaged curriculum products" (2002, p.29). The participants had worked hard, often on their own time and at their own expense to learn about whole language and to create whole language classrooms. Their expertise was now being dismissed, overlooked and devalued.

Patty best described the pressure to move in a different direction in teaching practices. The push was definitely guided toward sameness.

It came from a directive from our principal that he wants us all to be teaching the same letter, the same theme out of the textbook. He doesn't want to look in our lesson plans and see a great page variance in the teacher edition pages that are in there. He doesn't want to see a big variance with other grades where the grading

system is a real factor. He wants grading procedures the same. He wants our homework to be the same. If we are expected to be stamped copies of each other in the classroom, if we are expected to follow a dictate, a *generic* dictate, I don't know how to put it other than that, then we are asking for mediocrity. You're not asking for consistency and continuity and whatever. You're promoting mediocrity because when you take the individualism—you know, I mean that teacher's individual style and just way of teaching, if you try to remove that and make everybody the same, then you're going to have mediocre performance in the classroom. It was disappointing. I felt discouraged. I felt my creativity lapse. I felt generic, if you can imagine my feeling generic. It's an emotional thing. I just felt Stepford teacherish. It was just a big emotional thing because I take teaching; teaching is so personal. It is not a job. It is not a career. It is my life. It is my heartstrings. It was more of an emotional thing than even a professional thing (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

If she were made to teach in the way that the county desired, Barbie described the materials she would be required to use in her teaching.

I would be made to do the book and workbook and lock step and really it's a watered-down program. There's nothing in it. I mean, you could go through the step after step after step and they wouldn't have half of what they'd have if when they're actually reading and writing. But you can't get anybody to listen. The book is hodge-podge. I had to go through it and index it myself to make any sense of it. You couldn't find anything and they tried to say the big thing was an interrelated book. Well, big whoop. What it is they didn't put the spelling words

in for that week in a separate teacher's edition. But it's in no way related to anything you're doing in the book. It just, it was a bunch of junk is what it is (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98).

The literacy program they were being mandated to use was not solid in the eyes of the participants. Not only did the participants find that an inadequate program of textbooks driving their teaching, they also felt the pressure to produce increased test scores as the central driving force behind currently accepted instructional practices and materials.

#### Accountability and Testing Mandates: Test-Driven Teaching

With the new Superintendent came a new emphasis on the importance of test scores and he became a driving force behind the focus on test scores. "The superintendent was hired on a premise to increase test scores, to bring test scores up. The focus on academics is what they call it, but it's really a focus on test scores. So he was hired based on that" (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98). Frank Smith (1986) noted that these types of requirements are handed down from administrators who fail to trust teachers to do their job of teaching.

Maggie felt this was the focus because it was easy and got quick results. "It gets results test wise the quickest. We can mandate it for a lot of people at once without taking into consideration child development, appropriate teaching methods for young children" (Maggie, Interview transcript, 9/18/98). Frank Smith (1986) described such mandates for testing as a form of control. "The tests control teachers far more effectively than occasional visits from inspectors and other supervisors. Through tests, teachers can be controlled without anyone ever entering their classrooms" (Smith, 1986, p. 150).

The pressure for higher test scores was driven by the county officials and reached all the way down to the classroom teacher level. The participants and their colleagues felt the constant pressure to raise test scores.

It is very much arranged to me military style now. It is like very much a chain of command. So, then you go to that person, gets the word put to them and in a very intimidating meeting and then they come back and attempt to put it to you. I really think some of the principals have a fear they may be fired. Like it is produce [test scores] or get out. It is like we are the bottom layer. We are the coal. But you know, really, we are not the bottom layer. You know who the bottom layer is, the kids (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/30/98).

Barbie provided insight into how this trickle-down effect from administrative and public pressures or mandates ultimately impacted those that mattered most, the students.

Maggie described the increasing pressure to return to very traditional teaching methods and she could clearly see testing as a driving force behind those efforts. "It's just an attitude. I can't describe it. But I can assure you that within the next five years, we will go back to the very traditional method of teaching reading. And it's the idea that I have to teach this because it's going to be tested. That's where we get into a lot of trouble" (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98).

Barbie found it intriguing that so much emphasis was placed on test scores when there were items on the tests that weren't even valid. She noted the item that still remained on standardized testing about the use of the card catalog. The media centers had been electronic for years, yet the test item still required the students to know how to use the card catalog. Instead of questioning the validity of the test item, the teachers

scrambled for ways to teach the students about a resource that no longer existed in the lives of the students and which they would never use.

Maggie also felt the testing process and quality of test items needed to be examined.

I know it is just how it is presented and it might just be inappropriate, which is what I think. But if it could tell me or if it would help me work with those kids who can't read but it doesn't. I just get really frustrated with the testing situation because you are judging a whole year's work on one test. By its name, basic skills, it doesn't give you a lot of good information (Maggie, Interview transcript, 9/23/98).

The participants did not find that the results of the tests were particularly useful nor were the test items themselves always valid. "Many tests that claim to report school accountability do not provide information that helps the school to determine its own progress" (Lambert, et. al., 1996, p. 41). Yet, the tests became the driving force behind the instructional decisions made by teachers.

The test items regardless of their validity continued to be posed to students. No teacher input was provided to the testing process, which would have provided valuable feedback on the quality and appropriateness of the test items. The push for high stakes testing became a part of the reauthorization of ESEA beginning in the Clinton administration and continuing in the Bush administration with NCLB legislation. "Even when the test results conflict with the perceptions of all involved and the day-to-day performance-based assessments in classrooms, the NCLB considers the scores on paper and pencil, one-shot tests to be more credible" (Shannon, 2004, p. 31).

Unfortunately, the students were the ones who were losing out as a result of this new focus on getting results. Without ever really examining the student achievement results of the engaging instruction promoted by these whole language teachers, instead whole language was quickly forced into the background as testing moved to the forefront. The achievement levels of students in these whole language classrooms were not examined and the move to improve test scores by mandating the use of texts and test preparation materials became the driving force behind instructional practices.

This perception of diminished student achievement persisted despite the fact that reading achievement on the fourth grade NAEP had actually increased since 1988 and the achievement was highest in districts that invested in professional development for its teachers (Allington, 2002). The results of the NAEP were often inaccurately reported or not shared at all with public. Locally, the impact of the whole language professional development was not evaluated before the county moved to require new mandates that moved away from whole language practices.

I think there is a swing back instead of looking at the research, instead of being professional in our profession, I think people are just knee-jerking back to something else. I don't know if it is back to a comfort zone. Everything is very focused on standardized testing and when the focus is getting test scores up, the focus is teaching the test which means skill drill stuff where children experience rote learning. It is that feeling (Patty, Interview transcript 9/29/98).

Routman noted similar moves across the country to focus on standardized test results and the power it had on educational decisions across districts. "Test scores and testing programs continue to rank schools and school systems, drive school curriculums,

determine our special education populations, and influence educational policy” (Routman, 1996, p. 14). The focus on test results began to supersede the importance of the students’ needs for good teaching. “We worry about is it on the ITBS, is it on the ITBS? Well, that should not mandate good teaching. That should not mandate good reading instruction. I would rather not give a second-grader that test, but since I’m mandated to do it, then you make the best of the situation” (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98).

The county even went so far as to create materials for use in the classrooms to support test preparation at each grade level. “It is like we are putting all of our eggs in one basket, this one test, and I see it more and more and more. Everything you do is based on how well the kids do on the ITBS, how well the county does, how well we compare with other schools within the county” (Maggie, Interview transcript, 9/23/98). The focus countywide was on testing and test results. “Much can be gained by looking at test scores and taking them seriously, but in too many American schools today education itself is being displaced by test mania” (Temes, 2002, p.176).

The county accepted the results of the tests without question. Like other systems throughout the nation, test results are seen as infallible. Yet, in reality, this is not the case. “Like any other measurement tool that produces a number—whether a simple blood pressure reading or a complex laboratory test—tests contain error. The widespread belief in their precision does not admit this inherent fallibility” (Rhoades & Madaus, 2004, p. 232).

In an effort headed by the county Language Arts Coordinator, the school system spent thousands of dollars to have the ITBS objectives keyed to lessons in the textbook.

They developed a set of benchmark assessments to correlate directly to the ITBS. An outside consultant was hired to assist in the process. Carey served on the committee that had the charge of correlating the ITBS to these locally developed assessments

Evans Newton [hired consultant] discussed the fallouts and all the things we had to do to bring up our scores. They wrote things to go in the fallout. Then we wrote a parallel test for the ITBS. And all this is together now. Instead of having a language arts card now, we have benchmarks that you teach, so many things in benchmark one and then you give a test. And it's an ITBS thing (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98).

Instead of investigating the match between the core curriculum and the objectives to be tested, the coordinator had the ITBS correlated to the textbooks she was requiring all teachers to use. Following the correlation, it was discovered that the language arts textbook only covered about 30% of the objectives tested on the ITBS.

So, in her wisdom, she decided that they would develop a manual to fill in the gaps for everything that the reading book, teacher's manual, did not tell them that they needed to teach about the ITBS, totally forgetting the county curriculum guide. So, first of all it created all kinds of confusion because those of us who've been around a while raised our hands and said, "What about the curriculum?" The book doesn't teach everything and this manual is basically fill in for the ITBS. What about the curriculum? So there was a big to do about all that. That's when she told us, we were told to teach by the book. Basically what it is, what it boils down to, if the ITBS tests complete and non-complete sentences by having a question with a period left out then they're saying that's the way we need to teach

that skill cause that's the way they are going to test it on the ITBS. That's what the manual [county created] guides you to do. We've been given a manual, we've got, you wouldn't believe the manuals we've got now. Now we must have 8 manuals that we are supposed to look at when we make our plans. We've got THE curriculum guide, THE target teach manual, we've got the ITBS Benchmarks Guide, I mean, it goes on and on and on and on. We have the book that the Language Arts Coordinator keeps saying we have to use. So, we've got all of this and then we've got these benchmark tests, we've got theme tests (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

It was overwhelming to the participants to have so many required assessments when they felt the information from them was not useful. "Pressure for higher test scores continues to be fueled by media ranking schools and publishing scores. Some schools spend way too much time teaching for the test" (Routman, 1996, p. 141). The participants experienced this firsthand as they were required to use materials which all focused on increasing test scores. "My assessments tell me what I need to know about my children and no other assessment can tell me that. So the way I look at it is the other things [assessments] are just things I do to satisfy requirements but what tells me what I need to know about my children are my assessments" (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Like the other participants, Maggie knew and had experienced the benefits of more authentic approaches to assessment of her students.

The assessments in our textbook on reading are very inappropriate. The vocabulary, the new vocabulary, the children soon figure out that if this word looks very different, it's one of our new vocabulary words. They'll choose that

word sometimes not even being able to know what the word is, but they've seen it on the charts, and they've seen it in other material. So, they know; they're very clever at choosing the correct word (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98).

She preferred assessing students in a context where they have to apply the skills to real situations and by assessing them one-on-one. "In conversations with a child one-on-one, listening to them read and asking questions, you can find out more information than you can with that very expensive test that doesn't tell you very much" (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98). Barbie also felt the testing requirements were unsubstantiated. "I get the impression we are just creating documents that can be used for validation. See we tried to do this and here's the proof. It is almost like it has gotten so legalistic" (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/30/98).

Nevertheless, it was an expectation that teachers would use this manual to prepare students for testing. The results of the standardized tests became the focus in each school. This was despite compelling information even from the test companies themselves about the limitations of norm-referenced testing as a measure of student learning. To have 100% of students scoring average or above is statistically impossible. "By definition, half will always be below and half above the mean. If all improved, the mean would go up. Items are thrown out of the test if everybody gets them right or wrong. And new items are added to spread the test-takers out" (Goodman, 2004, p. 196).

Carey shared her concerns over the talk among politicians about using test results for merit pay for teachers. She was concerned that this would impact how schools and teachers viewed the students. She felt the pressure from such a system would result in negative attitudes from teachers toward certain types of students.

Now I will not take anybody that's low income, that has a problem of divorced parents; if they live in two households, no. If they have a history of any kind of sickness, I do not want them. If they made bad grades last year just don't give them to me. If they're a behavior problem, I do not want them. I will only take the good students because I want to eat this year (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98).

Berliner and Biddle (1995) discussed the failure of such extrinsic sanctions to promote learning other than rote memorization. Carey also believed this undue emphasis on students' performance on a one shot test would wreak havoc on the educational opportunities for these students. Carey's fear became reality in some school systems across the nation as they worked to ensure they met AYP. In Texas, in the name of No Child Left Behind, many minority students have been driven out of school, but not counted as dropouts. "Unfortunately, some states have lowered the bar of expectations to hide the low performance of their schools" (Goodman, 2004, p. 39).

In the school system where the participants were employed, at the very least, school wide standardized test scores were examined and in some cases individual teachers were addressed regarding their classroom results.

We, as teachers, had a copy of our contract and a copy of our test score results this year came back in a folder. You know how you sign a copy of your contract and it's sent off to the superintendent to sign and then it all comes back. Well, we didn't get our copies back for a long time and then we got our copies back in a folder with our test scores. We were told that if our scores, we were given a graph, and it showed the highest teacher in the grade's scores; it showed the

average of the grade and it showed the county average. If your scores were 10 points less than either, the highest teacher in the grade or county, you had to write a plan explaining how you were going to improve these scores next year. That's from the superintendent down through the principal down to us. He [the principal] was told to prove how we were going to bring our scores up. The only way he knew to prove it was to get the teachers to say what they were gonna do (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

The participants felt very real pressure to produce high standardized test scores. For some, it was more of a school wide pressure than as individuals. Ironically, the test scores of all the participants in the study were actually already high. However, no one bothered to look at that fact. "You know I wonder why didn't anyone ever put that together. Why didn't they ever look at our scores as whole language teachers if scores are becoming a big emphasis" (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98). All of the participants' students had performed quite well on standardized tests. This fact became a source of frustration because no one in leadership had bothered to examine that fact. It was troublesome that no one acknowledged that these "whole language" teachers had some of the highest achieving students.

On the other hand, these high test scores also provided some relief for the participants from some of the administrative pressures to prepare for the test. Barbie believed her high test scores actually bought her some autonomy in her classroom.

Because I produce results just as high as anyone else, no matter what their methods are, and because I guess I have a reputation, you know, because I've been in the school so I don't have to worry about establishing myself. I have

established myself. I'm pretty much allowed to do what I think is best and I'm left alone. I mean when my scores come they're fine. I'm left alone. In fact, my principal told me whatever it is you're doing, keep doing it. I didn't have the heart to tell her, well, I'll do it differently next year cause it's different kids, but I'll do it just as well (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98).

Even though the county had lost sight of the students and the curriculum, the teachers in this study remained true to their convictions to let the students and curriculum drive their instruction. They worked to be constant reminders to their superiors of the need to teach the curriculum, not the text.

So, if it weren't for us being around to remind and to say what about the curriculum. I don't think there would be any mention of the curriculum. That's what I think. I think that if we weren't there to say what about our curriculum that nobody would mention the curriculum. That they would be happy if all we taught was the ITBS objectives (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

According to Frank Smith (1986), testing is seen as quality control of education in an effort to have teachers teach more and students learn more when in fact it produces two opposite and negative outcomes. "Children do not learn better as a consequence of increased testing; they learn not to learn. And teachers do not teach better as a consequence of testing; they learn not to teach" (Smith, 1986, p. 129). The experience of the participants and the pressure to focus instructional time on test preparation concur with Frank Smith's findings. The reauthorization of ESEA has required that schools focus time and resources on standardized testing. It has stripped education professionals

of their ability to evaluate student progress in the classroom in ways they find meaningful.

No Child Left Behind does not trust teachers to teach and evaluate their students. Rather, the NCLB accountability system substitutes technology (scripted lessons and paper and pencil machine-scored tests) for teacher judgments on these matters. Although it is part of a century-long effort to discover the one best method to teach all children, this substitution obscures the human decisions behind the legislation and devalues the people involved in public education (Shannon, 2004, p. 27).

“Somehow, we doubt that most Americans are interested in promoting school learning that is narrow, test-specific, standardized, superficial, and easily forgotten—but that is exactly what accountability programs promote” (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 197). This focus on the standardized testing was also accompanied by a renewed emphasis on phonics instruction. Phonics became a central factor in the push away from whole language. Those outside whole language believed that phonics and whole language were diametrically opposing teaching practices. Whole language was often considered to be no more than the look-say method of teaching reading. Routman (1996) felt the media fed the whole language versus phonics controversy that served to misinform the public.

#### The Great Debate: Phonics vs Whole Language

At the center of reform issues related to reading instruction was the phonics versus whole language argument as though the two were mutually exclusive. Carey felt much of the debate on reading instruction centered around the perception that phonics was not taught in whole language classrooms. “All of it fell back on phonics. All of it

was we had not taught phonics and the children did not know how to decode words. They had no phonics instruction” (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98).

This was a certainly a legitimate perception on Carey’s part when researchers like Jean Chall supported such misconceptions about whole language and phonics in her professional writing. “Concern with the phonological aspects of reading was seen then—as it is now, unfortunately—by whole language proponents as pulling the reader away from understanding and toward rote learning. Therefore, it was to be avoided” (Chall, 2000, p.66). Kenneth Goodman noted that whole language was a prime target for such debate and was not viewed as rigorous or sequential methodology and researchers were willing to go to battle to fight in favor of sequential skill instruction including phonics (Goodman, 2004).

Regie Routman (1996) found the opposing views publicized about whole language being exclusive of phonics instruction forced professionals to take one side or the other to defend their views. She did believe that some school districts believed that phonics instruction was not needed in whole language classrooms.

Patty, as a kindergarten teacher, felt the pressures from her superiors to use a packaged phonics program.

Right now the focus is on reading. The buzz word now is phonemic awareness. That’s like the big buzz word right now. And still phonics. You know, phonics, phonics, phonics. You hear it on grade level, a lot of other kindergarten teachers talking about word skills and getting that phonics component in your teaching. So, that’s what I’m around the most. And then I hear it from the principal. Focus on

reading. I expect you to have groups; I expect you to make sure you're covering that skills instruction (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

This push for phonics was across grade levels as the local schools adopted phonics programs to address perceived deficits in reading achievement. "That's where the monies are going, you know, for phonics type instruction and things like that. And I'm talking more for the countywide than I am for my particular school" (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98). The push for phonics was rooted in the belief by many that whole language teachers had failed to include phonics in their reading instruction.

It goes back to the parents' understanding. They think if a child knows all these different sounds that they're just going to be able to read. I think groups of people who promote phonics instruction to the extreme, they, through not being educated on good reading instruction, have joined a bandwagon and they are insistent (Maggie, Interview transcript, 9/18/98).

There was widespread concern that children had missed out on phonics and that fact needed to be remedied. "Well, the county of course agrees with the phonics because that's been a thing, countywide thing. They've said well you're not teaching phonics. People who didn't understand whole language said you don't teach phonics; you need to teach phonics" (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

This reflected a nationwide renewed emphasis on explicit phonics instruction. As a matter of fact, in the 1990s, many bills were introduced as legislation to mandate phonics instruction. Many of these bills contained very specific language about the type of phonics instruction that was required to be used by school systems in those states. These legislative bills were most prevalent in states with significant Christian Right

influence (Paterson, 2000). Many associated with the Christian Right viewed phonics as the answer to the problem of illiteracy. “The New Right, quite simply, wants to turn back the clock and in recent years it has had unopposed success in labeling as blasphemous anything which could be even remotely considered liberal let alone leftist” (Scatamburlo, 1998, p. 53).

In 1997, a panel was commissioned to assess the research-based knowledge on reading instruction. The results of the National Reading Panel, while touted by many researchers to be flawed, was fuel behind a renewed focus on phonics and back to basics in the teaching of reading. Joanne Yatvin (2000), after having served as a member of the National Reading Panel (NRP), writes in her minority report that ethnographic studies were excluded from the assessment and states that “the NRP Report’s coverage of beginning reading is narrow and biased” (2000, p. 6).

She further predicted that the results of the report would contribute to increased pressure by local Boards and legislators to require the use of commercial programs by professional educators (Yatvin, 2000). Jim Cunningham (2002) considered the efforts of the NRP determine what was considered science in reading research dangerous. He expressed concerns that “the philosophy of science that begins and permeates the NRP Report may have a chilling effect on the funding, publication, and influence of all reading research that fails to follow the positivist methodological standards as it prescribes for our field” (Cunningham, 2002, p. 56). This same pattern of mandates based on inaccurate information continued with NCLB legislation. “Faceless bureaucrats in Washington are telling local schools which commercial programs and tests they may and may not use” (Goodman & Goodman, 2004, p. 8).

The pendulum swung once more and the movement to revive phonics instruction not only continued but became the focal point of reading instruction, particularly in the primary grades.

We have been full circle twice over now as far as decoding and then we went through whole language where the comprehension was coming along nicely and then they started complaining about the phonics and decoding and now we are back to that. But you can bet at the meeting I went to this summer, even though they said, “This [phonics] is just one part,” that is the THE only part they emphasized” (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/16/98).

In their panic to fix reading instruction and incorporate explicit phonics instruction, many schools and school systems across Georgia received grant money to fund the implementation of Reading First. “Our principal and other schools have received grants for this program [Reading First] and there’s a real focus and emphasis on it, then the way I interpret that is, that’s a swing. It’s just that old pendulum swing. It’s kind of like there’s nothing new under the sun kind of thing” (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

Federal funding became available to support only those programs that the NRP and other reports had deemed scientific research. These reports eliminated much of educational research in the area of reading based on faulty criteria of what is deemed scientific research. “Through a series of panels, laws, and mandates, the federal government has defined what is science so narrowly, that 95 percent of scientific study in education has been swept aside as unscientific and decades of research has been wiped of federal websites such as ERIC” (Goodman & Goodman, 2004, p. 9).

As a result of the mandates for schools to use packaged programs for literacy instruction, many school systems in Georgia adopted Reading First. It was a state-endorsed and funded program to improve reading instruction in Georgia schools. Many systems jumped at the opportunity to earn the funding for Reading First and viewed it as the answer to their reading test score woes. This local climate was a snapshot of the climate at the national level that pushed for explicit phonics instruction.

In present times, “NCLB mandates phonics as the national reading methodology. And those who review state proposals reject anything that doesn’t fit the narrow interpretations of the law” (Goodman, 2004, p. 63). This narrow definition of reading as defined in the reauthorization of the ESEA has impacted many classrooms, especially those that applied for and received Reading First grant monies.

### Reading First

The jump into the adoption of Reading First by many schools and school systems quickly followed the move away from whole language to a more traditional “back to basics” instruction. This was evident nationwide as many states developed mandates to require coursework in phonics instruction as part of the certification program (Routman, 1996). All five participants' schools adopted Reading First and they observed firsthand this new emphasis on phonics. Four of the five participants did not buy-in to the Reading First. It did not fit with their whole language philosophy about teaching and learning and it did not have credibility in their eyes.

I watch all these people and these things get started and all these trends and all these ideas. Whole language to me made sense cause it was based on research and it was proven before we started it but things like Reading First and all of these

other things, they are just something that somebody who was at the right place at the right time started (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

With the emphasis on phonics instruction through Reading First also came a new timeline for phonics to be taught for at least an hour each day and the use of phonics by the students in ways that veterans had never seen prior to this program. “If we define reading as getting meaning from print and not just reading the words, overemphasis on phonics is not necessary, and it is inordinately time-consuming. If you spend twenty to forty minutes a day on intensive phonics instruction, there will be little time to actually read books” (Routman, 1996, p. 93).

They say that’s the key of it [Reading First]. Their premise in Reading First is that it’s great for children to love literature and it’s great for you to teach children with literature but they say you cannot teach decoding with literature. And they say you need a program to teach it. And they say that by the time they [students] come out of first grade, they can mark vowels, they can know short and long; they can do accent marks. They act like that is the big goal for them to be able to do those things and that then they’ll want to read and enjoy reading and only then. That’s what they say (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Maggie on the other hand, felt Reading First was acceptable due the renewed focus it brought on to reading instruction.

Now the concept of Reading First is absolutely on target. We have to make an effort at teaching—do a better job of teaching reading. I mean, I am in total agreement with that. The monies need to be put into good reading instruction and putting people in classrooms who are good reading teachers. I’m very optimistic

about the change because if we can change minds about that reading must come first. Good reading instruction must be foremost in our school day in the elementary school, then things will fall into place (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98).

Rebekah did agree with one aspect of the Reading First program in that it did promote the use of good literature with students. Rebekah found that Reading First also had a strength in the Basic Literacy Test (BLT) that was used for assessment. She felt it would make the teachers more consistent in identifying students' needs. "It makes people do what whole language did which is look at where they [students] are and know where you are going with the kids and teach to their weaknesses and use their strengths to do that. If that works, it could be a plus for Reading First. Even first year teachers can do this" (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Maggie and Rebekah both could see some value in implementing Reading First. They had both been asked by their principals to serve in leadership roles in the implementation of Reading First, which may have also impacted their perspective in finding value to the program. Both agreed it did not replace the whole language principles they had adopted. They also believed Reading First was founded based on misconceptions about whole language.

It seems like Reading First came along with this big outcry that said whole language didn't teach phonics and that's what was wrong with reading and like I said before, that's not true. If you are a whole language teacher, you taught phonics but it's almost like so the Reading First included a core part of phonics

and they say one hour a day of phonics instruction (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

This requirement for phonics instruction to be taught for long periods of time out of context did not fit with whole language practices and the research on the effective use of phonics. “Unless children and teachers understand phonics is a necessary cueing system to be integrated in the process of real reading, phonics knowledge is meaningless” (Routman, 1996, p. 98).

### Negative Consequences of Mandates

With all of the new mandates and the push to abandon whole language, the participants felt many losses. They had once felt a strong sense of empowerment, which enabled them to take risks. They felt strong professional ties to their colleagues and developed a community of professional learning as well as developed a strong sense of community with their students in the classroom. Now, those things were slowly being removed from their professional lives and the participants had to adjust to these changes.

#### Loss of Empowerment/Loss of Voice

While not all teachers in the system bought into the whole language philosophy, many did get a taste of empowerment and a new sense of professionalism. The trends of back to basics brought strict mandates for classroom practices and the pressure to measure up on the tests affected all teachers, whether they were whole language teachers or not. Frank Smith (1986) noted, “programs and tests are also demanded when outside authorities do not trust teachers to teach” (p. 150). These factors impacted morale in a pervasive, negative way. “Extrinsic sanctions tend to destroy these commitments and

interests and thus may have the unintended effect of driving the best teachers out of the profession” (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 192).

It has kind of gotten to where eye rolling has gotten to be a high art form around here. It’s like, “Oh God, help us, now what?” you know. And it is really a struggle every day, you know, I can’t keep my mouth shut about this. It’s [morale] never been lower even when we were at the recall petition point, it was never lower than it is now. I think before people were asked their opinions they really didn’t even think they had a right to express them, you know. That was the atmosphere in the schools. But you can’t put the bird back in the cage after it has flown free. You can’t do it. So, maybe we will get a whole bunch of young teachers when the older ones leave (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/30/98).

In many ways, the participants felt powerless to change anything. In their view, the power for systemic change lay in the hands of others. Their sense of loss of professional empowerment was evident throughout their interviews.

In such circumstances it is difficult for teachers—as it would be for any professional—to accept much individual professional responsibility for student outcomes. When you are told what to teach, how to teach it, and when to teach it, it is unlikely that you will see bad results as anything other than the responsibility of the system that mandated the instructional plan (Allington, 2002, p. 35).

The experiences of the participants in the study aligned with Allington’s research. They felt little empowerment, little autonomy to make changes and felt little responsibility for the outcomes.

I think the administration wields a great deal of power over teachers and I think parents wield a great deal of power over administrators. And I think teachers, unfortunately, this is my perception, are kind of the bottom rung. We are the ones out there on the limb and we are having to juggle a lot of things and in the meantime try to keep our faith up for the children and what their needs are (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/29/98).

While the participants felt that teachers were on the front line doing the work that mattered most, they felt that their concerns either went unvoiced or unheard. In such cases, Frank Smith (1986) noted that teachers are given responsibility for student outcomes, but are not allowed the professional empowerment to control what takes place in the classroom. No one wanted to know their thoughts about teaching. "See, if you want to really accomplish something, then you'd have to have an honest exchange of ideas. So they'd have to really want you to state your opinions" (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98).

This left the participants feeling powerless, much as they had prior to whole language.

Classroom teachers are not in a position of having any power. You just pretend you do, okay. And we're not in a position to make the policy decisions, see, which we probably ought to be making. So, we're the last to be asked. Now we're not asked anything, not a damn thing. We're just told whatever. When the bulletins come, I laugh and laugh. Make a copy, put it in a file and just move right on (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98).

Barbie, although powerless in terms of creating policies, was indeed wielding power by ignoring the bulletins with mandates that were given to her. She wielded the power that she had by choosing which mandates she would follow or to what extent. At the same time, she felt powerless knowing that her small attempts to maintain control of her classroom had little impact on the real issues at hand. This top-down governance over the participants' and their colleagues began to take its toll. They resisted the changes, but at the same time felt hopeless to maintain what they had so strongly once believed in.

It seems to me that less and less is being left up to us decision-wise, just the everyday management of your classroom is being dictated to you so I don't know if I can continue to teach. I don't know if I could make the transition back to manager. The people, to my way of thinking, that are left with all the problems then have no power to fix it, make changes, make adjustments. We can't do anything. We can't solve it; we just have to deal with it (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/30/98).

Rebekah was hopeful that whole language might still have positive influence in her school when she was asked by her principal to conduct an in-service on writing instruction for her faculty. As she prepared to conduct the workshop, she was only then made aware that she had to conduct the workshop with restrictions imposed by the principal.

I had to do it [workshop] with restrictions on it. He would only let me talk about the writing process cause that was what the curriculum said for them to do. He didn't want to go into the whole language aspects of writing. He only wanted me to teach about the writing process and what it was and that was it. He did not want

me to explain writing workshop. He didn't want me to talk to them about children being in different places at the same time, on one day, everybody doing their own thing in writing workshop. He only wanted what the writing process was, the definition of the writing process, that was it. Whenever I would venture toward my philosophy and what I am thinking, he would raise his hand and bring it back around to the points that he had clearly stated to me that he wanted to make (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

In addition to new mandates for use of instructional textbooks, it appeared that every attempt was being made to "teacher proof" instruction. The county spent a great deal of money on a computerized program called CCC that students were to use for a set amount of time each week. Barbie served on the committee that reviewed it.

I was on the computer. I said it was an electronic worksheet and then I was replaced from the committee with a person that didn't have bias. But it was the person that had the correct bias. They jangled another computer lab in front of our faces and told us we could make our own decisions as to the use of the program. And we voted to do it and then they wouldn't let us do the program the way we wanted it done. They turned in three written plans (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/30/98).

The teachers at the local schools were given the opportunity to serve on a committee to submit a plan on the use of the new CCC software. The plan had to be resubmitted numerous times before the county office administration would approve it. Afterward, the teachers were upset that the plan they had submitted was not accepted. "It gives the appearance of we had a committee, we studied it, but not a damn thing changed.

We just made it appear as though it changed” (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/30/98).

When the teachers tried to make the argument that they did not have enough time to teach the curriculum objectives and have their students on CCC as much as the county required, the county formed another committee to see what could be dropped from the curriculum to allow time for students to be on CCC.

Barbie felt a sense of loss and sadness at her new role in the move away from whole language. She felt very real professional consequences for her strong association with having had a voice in her professional practices. When asked about the consequences she had felt, she described them in detail.

Removed from committees. Removed from formal leadership positions. Ignored, I don't know, it is really sad. It really is. It is not that I am in the position of knowing everything there is to know, but anybody with an education background could tell you that we are going the wrong way. It is very much like the Emperor has no clothes. But you just can't say it. And if you do, you are asking for it. Of course, what are they going to do? I am not going to lose my tenure. But it is like you speak and no one hears you (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/30/98).

### Loss of Risk-Taking

The lack of empowerment resulted in less willingness to take risks on the part of the participants. “Risk taking is dangerous in a setting where prescribed outcomes are expected and where conformity, rather than curiosity, is valued” (Lambert, et. al., 1996, p. 7). The participants knew risk-taking would not be supported by the administration and they were reluctant to take professional risks as they had in the past.

Remember, we used to tell our people some things you bring home on papers, some things you bring home in your head and some things you bring home in your heart. We are cutting that heart out. I don't think they [teachers] are going to be willing to attend workshops and go out on a limb the way you have to do when you learn something if you have been taught that the limb is going to be sawed off (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/30/98).

The strong sense of professional development and community had vanished. "I am afraid that we are getting away from letting people be professionals, from encouraging people that are intellectuals from getting into this too. And intellectuals don't like to be told what to think" (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/30/98).

With the lack of professional autonomy came the push for all teachers to be the same, teaching the same textbook, teaching the same skills in the same way throughout the county. Risk-taking, individuality and difference were not encouraged. AYP had first been imposed in 1993 and treated learning as something that was easily predictable and mapped out over grade levels (Shannon, 2004). AYP assumed that if all teachers would follow scripted materials and use the same instruction with students, then all students would make Adequate Yearly Progress. This mindset about teaching made its way into the classrooms. "The Stepford teacher point of view was like being stamped copies of each other. You are all teaching on the same page; you are all sending home the same homework, doing the same things in sync. That is very quaintish. That is depressing; it's suppressing individuality" (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/29/98).

The participants truly grieved over their loss of empowerment to run their classrooms in ways they knew were best for the students.

We teachers went through this thing of being empowered and of being told that our names are on the door and that was practically shouted at us over the last ten years. We have got this idea that we do have sense and we do know what is best for our children. That is in some of us and it is not in others because they didn't go through that. I can call it a revolution or whatever, but no, they didn't go through that. And so they are very insecure. When they [new teachers] come out of school, they are very insecure and they don't know what to do. They would like to be given a book that says do this, do this, because that makes them more confident (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/16/98).

Rebekah also felt the future loss for the professional risk-taking of the newly hired teachers.

They were brought in and immediately given in-services on how to follow the teacher manuals. In-services that we have to attend to learn how to use the new manuals that we are given that are not even, I don't mean teacher manuals, I mean manuals the county has developed. The new teachers come in and they sit there and they hear all of this and they are like me when I first started and they think this is the gospel. This is the way it is supposed to be done and it bothers me that nothing else, that they have nothing else to be exposed to because when they come out of college they haven't really had a taste of the real thing yet. They get into the system and the system starts giving out these edicts. They are going to be just like I was when I first started and think this is the way to do it and if I do it this way, I'm doing it right and there is no other way. That's not right. That's not the way it is (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

With the push for "Stepford" teachers, there came a loss of professional collaboration, discussion and work that focused on instruction. This professional sense of community came to a close.

#### Loss of Community/Collegiality

Instead of collaborating to improve instructional practices, the time teachers spent with each other focused on managerial issues or ensuring that they were doing the same types of things in their classrooms. "Before teachers got together to share ideas that strengthen and taught curriculum. And that is the difference. Now in the county, the teachers get together to discuss how they can best teach the skills in the textbook" (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/29/98).

This pressure placed on teachers to be the same caused increasing tension on Patty's grade level as they were forced to do everything alike.

Just tension and talking about what do we do to be consistent. And we're all individuals so we all had different ideas about what should and shouldn't be done. So there was a lot of back and forth. It was traumatic because we would sit there and spend a whole hour on the homework issue. And we didn't have time for that. We're all highly respected teachers. There's not a weak link on our hallway. Everybody is into what they are doing and devoted you know. So I would sit back in my mind, take a step back and look at all of us and go, "My God, what a waste of excellent talent and energy!" (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

Where there had once been collegiality, Maggie struggled to fit in with her colleagues, but was unwilling to give up on her beliefs and principles to do so.

It was a lonely go at it in teaching because you did—I was labeled. I was sort of a rebel, so to speak, without meaning to create a problem in the teaching profession. But we do things just because someone says it's right and because we've been doing it a hundred years. I don't want to teach the way I was taught. It was not fun. It was boring. I didn't get any special attention or anything of that nature. No one ever asked me what kind of books I liked to read or things like that. And I don't want to teach the way I was taught. I mean, it was totally inappropriate in some cases, just totally inappropriate. A waste of my time (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98).

Her experience was similar to that of the teachers who worked with Susan Church to develop a literacy framework for their school system. When it was rejected and negatively associated with whole language, “the teachers involved in the project bore the brunt of this rejection and negativity. They felt silenced not only by their colleagues, but by the institution. They wanted to engage in professional conversations with teachers on their staffs, but they recognized that they were perceived as a threat” (Church, 1996, p. 26). Maggie held steadfast to her convictions to teach in a way that served the needs of her students, while simultaneously attempting to find a common ground with her peers. She did not want to be the rebel or outcast, but found it challenging to hold on to her beliefs and her collegial relationships all at the same time.

Rebekah also struggled to be a team player while fighting to hold on to the principles and practices that she knew were best for the students in her classroom. Right now, we have a principal who will go along with you if it's working and my scores show it works. I was thinking the other day, the teachers keep talking about

well, we could do this and we could do that. And I don't really want them to think that I think I'm above them or better than them which was the feeling that I got the way people thought I thought from the harrassment I got from before [previous school]. But I know it works but it's just so complicated to try to teach them how to do it without the background (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Barbie contemplated that part of the professional isolation they felt was due to the positive recognition they had received as whole language teachers. Each participant had been recognized by students, parents, superiors, and colleagues for their dynamic teaching practices after becoming whole language teachers. Each was recognized as Teacher of the Year following their adoption of whole language principles and practices.

I've wondered if it was a backlash because they felt like you had a chosen few and you were favorites you know. I know one of our teachers that was a core teacher [whole language], every time she gets up to speak in faculty meetings, she gets rolling eyes and things. It's like, shut up and sit down, we don't want to listen to you. They're not hearing what she's saying. They just—it's like a resentment of her (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98).

When Patty was faced with new mandates from her principal that the whole grade level was required to do things exactly the same way, she and the others struggled to make it work. "Everything was negotiated right down to when we would start homework and what we were going to do on homework" (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98). Patty discussed the change in group dynamics within her grade level after whole language. She also felt she had changed personally as a result of these dynamics. She felt defensive and

felt the need to stand her ground as she resisted the mandate to do exactly what others were doing. She not only resisted this mandate, but her colleagues did as well.

The grade level had been directed to do the same things in the same way at the same time to ward off parent comparisons of teachers. The weekly grade level meetings became a battleground for whose ideas were going to be used. “I will talk with them about what I am putting in my newsletter. It has made me more assertive and it has made me an uglier individual than I like to be and what I mean by that is just saying, I am not going to do that! And then you are perceived by the grade level as, “Well, she is not a team player” (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/29/98).

The participants all found themselves in similar situations as they fought to hold on to beliefs and practices that had become defining characteristics of who they were professionally. Hampton (1994) stated that it is impossible for a teacher to close the door and conduct the business of learning in a way that is independent of the traditions that have so long been established. “Sooner or later, the central office or other teachers will, either directly or indirectly, undermine or trivialize the work of the nonconformist” (Hampton, 1994, p. 123). The participants certainly felt the pressure to conform and experienced others devaluing of their work. In an attempt to survive the pressure to abandon what had come to inform their teaching, they all developed various forms of coping strategies.

### Coping Strategies

Allington (2002) discussed the effect of mandates on the professional lives of teachers across the nation and its impact on the teaching profession. “Teachers see besieged professionals attempting to work responsibly and effectively under impossible

conditions, including mindless, often conflicting, and ever-shifting mandates and directives issued by policy makers who are pursuing a particular political agenda” (Allington, 2002, p. 35). The participants in this study found their experiences to be very similar to those Allington discussed in his research.

With all of these new external pressures and mandates to change their professional practices and attempts to force the participants to abandon their whole language practices, the participants had to develop ways to cope with these new mandates and pressures. Goodson and Hargreaves, in their study of teachers’ professional lives, documented their observations about teachers coping with mandates. “When we look at teaching as lived experience and work, we often find that seductive rhetorics of change pronounced in policy, break down into cynical, contradictory or resistant voices within the lives of teachers themselves” (Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996, p. 22).

Throughout their interviews, the participants consistently spoke of several key strategies they used to cope, and at times, resist impending change. The most prevalent coping strategies were Compromise, Giving Up, Direct Compliance, Appearance of Compliance, Close the Door and Do As You Want, and Leave the School System.

### Compromise

The most common theme throughout the participants' discussion on strategies for coping with change was that of compromise. It was their attempt to do as their superiors mandated, but do it in a way that they could accept and maintain some semblance of the beliefs and practices, which they embraced so tightly.

With the pressure to teach phonics using a direct instruction model, Patty found herself looking for strategies to address this mandate without giving up what she knew

engaged the students most in learning phonics. Patty attempted to use phonics instruction in fun ways so that the students would remember the sounds. She used a great deal of movement to associate a movement with each sound. The students had fun and remembered the sounds of each letter.

I find myself thinking well, how can I incorporate direct skills instruction but still keep this global and whole, you know. I find myself thinking more along those lines. I mean I don't solely do that, but I do a lot of little quickie, you know, that kind of thing. I probably incorporate more skill drill type things. I have to say I do incorporate more of that. But I still make sure that I'm doing it within a context. I think in my soul I'm doing things that I can live with and that the children enjoy (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

Those were strategies she could use and feel comfortable that she had taught what she was mandated to teach and had taught it, for the most part, in a way that was meaningful to the students. She also had included her paraprofessional to do the phonics workbook from the reading series with the students during group time. This allowed Patty to keep her reading workshop in tact as it had always been. Carey dealt with mandates to use the textbook in a similar fashion. "I had to use their literature or their stories. But then what I tried to do was take their stories, find other stories that also went along with that them and use those to teach also (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98).

When asked how the push for phonics instruction would change her classroom, Maggie elaborated. "I guess, I will have to do things a little bit differently. I will still continue to read a lot of books. I will still continue to write. I guess the knowing of where

I'm going with all this, I can do it in a way that the children are interested in learning but I will never let it control the curriculum" (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98).

Sometimes participants used time as a form of compromise. They did complete the mandated tasks, but adjusted the amount of time spent on the mandates as a compromise. When county mandates were passed down to the teachers, Rebekah often found herself in that compliant role she had grown up doing so successfully. As a result, she often grieved for the loss of teaching strategies that she had to forfeit due to the mandates.

I really do what the county tells me to do. They cramp my style when I have to do like the Scoring High books but I've done it and sadly, sometimes it's taken time out of my writing time and I hate it. Sometimes it's taken some of my read aloud time away and I hate it and I've lost that. Because they are things that have been mandated, I've done them. I might've cheated on the time I've given some of these things. You know, I'm doing what they say to do, but I'm hanging on to as much as I can of what I know that works. Frequently I would just read the story [in the required text] to get them done. By the end of the year, I could do a whole theme in like two weeks because I was just getting rid of the stories to say I did them, tested them over it and then did my own thing (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

For Maggie, it was easier just to follow the mandates when they were set and get them out of the way so she could move on to other things. She saw this following of mandates as a means to an end. If she could just get the requirements met, then she could move on to other things that she felt were best for the students. "If I'm required, then of

course, I just go ahead and do it. But that's just one thing I have to do. Then I go back and do the things that I feel are quite important" (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98).

Rebekah found a strategy for dealing with the multiple county required assessments. The timeline was in place for the teaching of specific skills. Along with the pacing chart for instruction came the required benchmark and ITBS preparation assessments that had been provided by the county office. In addition to these required assessments, each teacher was required to complete a language arts card to record each child's progress on the mandated language arts assessments.

Rebekah knew she was required to complete the assessments, but found a way to complete the requirement without giving up what she felt was best for the students. "They have not said that by such and such that you have to do it [assessments] and do a card at the end of the year. So I may wait until the end of the year to give it all. I don't know. I did last year. I gave parts of it and when I taught other skills, I'd do that" (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98). She had a plan to meet the requirement, but planned to complete it in a way that did not take away from her teaching and student learning as much.

### Giving Up

After so many years of battle to defend their teaching practices and philosophical beliefs, the participants began to grow weary and wanted to just give up at times. Berliner and Biddle documented this response in many reform efforts over the years. "Damaging programs for educational reform have been adopted, a great deal of money has been wasted, effective school programs have been harmed, and morale has declined among educators" (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 4). Giving up for the participants meant several

different things. Sometimes it meant a refusal to continue to battle with others about the merits of whole language. “I just sometimes want to throw my hands up and say, duke it out boys, forget it. It’s just not worth it. You know. It’s irritating; It’s aggravating” (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98).

Although Rebekah refused to give up whole language practices in her classroom, she did see others surrender to the pressures to teach the textbook. She also found that she had grown tired of fighting the battle to try and keep others on board with whole language.

So I guess the pressure from the system or from the authorities or whatever. I think time; I think a lack of hearing about it and being refreshed by it and reading about it. I think all of those things. All of those things that go with the fallen philosophy or fallen way of doing it. I think it just wears you down. I think it has more to do with it is a losing battle so why bother. Let’s face it, it’s much easier to teach by the book. So here you are busting your hiney to do all of these things and you are not even getting the support of anybody (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/16/98).

Frank Smith would suggest that teachers need to take a stance in such circumstances and “educate people outside their classrooms, starting with the teachers of neighboring classrooms and the administration of the school” (1986, p. 245).

Maggie experienced feelings similar to those of Rebekah. She wanted to hang on to her beliefs, but felt conflicted that she did not have the energy to fight for it.

I don’t hear the word [whole language] mentioned too much anymore. Sometimes I hear it in the negative tone and I just have to bite my tongue. I feel like after ten

years—I suppose it's been ten years—I'm tired of the battles and I can only go by my own example in my own classroom. I think people tend to do things without really having an understanding of them and they will do what is mandated without question. I guess that's the biggest thing that upsets me. We do things without wondering why are we doing this? Is this sound? I guess that's the biggest thing I have to deal with. Sometimes we do things in the world of teaching because it's easy (Maggie, Interview transcript, 9/18/98).

Other times giving up came in the form of throwing in the towel and just leaving the profession through retirement.

I used to wonder how anybody could talk about walking away from this [teaching], because I loved it so much. And you know, on the best days, it is just the best job in the world. When you really connect and things are getting done and you can see the wheels turning, there is nothing better. But those days are becoming fewer and fewer. And it seems to be beyond my control to do anything to change that. So, I am thinking in terms of, you know, I will have my thirty years in three years and I guess it is time I hit the road. But I just hate the thought of that (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/30/98).

Yetta Goodman discussed the impact of a lack of teachers' voices in reform and education research and the lack of input teachers have about their own practices..

In the present climate of No Child Left Behind, with restrictive laws at the national and state levels, I see respect for teachers and public education waning as we hear more about underperforming schools than we do about outstanding teachers. At the present time there are those who would do away with certification

and make decisions about teacher quality by simplistically testing bits of knowledge. As a result, I see teachers become disheartened about teaching (Goodman, 2004, p. 113).

Disheartened teachers are those that feel a sense of hopelessness to change the conditions in which they work. At times the participants grew weary and wanted to “throw in the towel” on their efforts to maintain control over their professional practices. At other times, giving up meant giving in and outright compliance on the part of the participants.

### Compliance

Probably one of the least favorite strategies for the participants was that of direct compliance with mandates. Each participant at one time or other complied with directives despite their convictions that the mandates were not in the best interest of the students. Oftentimes it added to their frustration that they had to spend time meeting these requirements and the time spent did not improve instruction or learning for students. “One of the most frequent complaints of teachers is that the school culture forces them to adhere to a curriculum from which they do not feel free to deviate, and, as a result, they do not feel they can, as one teacher said, “use their own heads” (Sarason, 1996, p. 48-49).

Maggie worked to make these requirements “fit” into her classroom in the least intrusive ways. The most frustrating part of it was that many of the things she was required to do had little impact on instruction or her students’ learning. “I know I have to do this. I know I have to give the end-of-theme tests. I know that’s a given. I give it. But the information I get from that is not information that is really super beneficial that would lead me to say, “aha,” this child needs this. It’s just not there. The material is just not there” (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98).

Rebekah felt compelled to use the reading textbook as she had been mandated to do. She clearly understood that administrative support of risk-taking was no longer available.

They [new county administration] did not support that teachers would be doing their own thing in the classroom with that beginning the filter down effect became that we weren't going to get the support for doing our own thing. It bothered me to the point that this past year when we adopted a new reading series and we were told you have to use the book. I did go back and use the book for the first time in years. I used the book from front to back, the stories in the book instead of choosing my own literature. I was not pleased with the end result of it (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Maggie, like Rebekah, could see the writing on the wall with mandates for reading instruction, especially phonics. "And sometimes you have to, in order to pacify a group of people, then you go against what you think is right and you just let the other come in. The phonics instruction is very much, is going to be very much a big part of our instruction now" (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98).

Carey believed there were certain things she just had to do that were required by the county or school. "There are some things I do because I am a teacher in this county and I will do what I am supposed to do. There are just some things that they tell you to do now and you have to do them, like the benchmarks. You have to do them. You don't have a choice" (Carey, Interview transcript, 9/10/98). Patty also felt an obligation to do as she was told when given the directive that the entire kindergarten grade level was to be doing

the same thing at the same time. She was not willing to be directly insubordinate to these demands by her administration.

I am teaching that letter that everybody else is teaching because that is the expectation. And not only do I love teaching, but I do need my job! If I were Ms. Philanthropist, I would say take this job and shove it! This is how I am going to be, but I am going to make sure that when I am told to stay on track with my grade level on letters, I am going to do it (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/29/98).

Diamond documented change processes in teacher behaviors and demonstrated that teachers want to blame others for what they may indeed contribute to through their silence.

If they [teachers] had been for so long as voiceless technicians, they may have simply accepted silence as their fate. This explanation raised the uncomfortable possibility that teachers themselves might thereafter be determining their fate to be thought of as already determined. Teachers might be digging the very graves, which they claim are threatening to swallow them up. But there may be even worse to come if they dare to step outside and go beyond the safe and familiar (Diamond, 1996, p.48).

The retreat into compliant behavior was familiar and in some ways easier for the participants. Oftentimes it was less stressful than the possible wrath from colleagues or consequences from the administration. At times, the participants refused to comply, but very strategically portrayed an appearance of direct compliance to mandates.

### The Appearance of Compliance

The participants often put on appearances of compliance, but truly did not comply with mandates at all. Instead of openly refusing to comply with requirements, they represented themselves to others as following the mandates when in actuality they did not in practice. Allington (2002) noted that few teachers openly resist mandates, but there seems to be a more substantial number of teachers who resist mandates in quieter, more subtle ways. In a sense this was one way of holding on to some of the empowerment they had experienced as whole language teachers. Berliner and Biddle noted similar behaviors when teachers had unfair mandates imposed on their practices. “And when teachers learn they have little ability to change unfair accountability systems, they become alienated—passive aggressive members of a community, acting as obstructionists like a good recipe for improving American education” (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 196). Instead of others empowering them, they made decisions to empower themselves in small ways as a way to have the final say about their classroom practices.

Well, you remember Shirley McClain in *Terms of Endearment* when Jack Nicholson was going to give her his big excuse for not doing what he was supposed to be doing? And she went, “Blah, blah, blah.” That’s pretty much the way I just go. I say, “Uh huh, okey dokey, I’ll be sure to do that.” And then I don’t. I’m just, like I said, I’m just doing what I’m doing and it’s working. You know, nobody’s in here anyway so what would they know what I did down here. I believe I could sit naked down here and nobody would know (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98).

Barbie was probably the participant most willing to blatantly avoid the mandates with which she disagreed. She refused to complete the language arts assessments and place the students' scores on the language arts assessment card. She did not feel the assessments provided information that was informed her instructional practices. Therefore, she marked the cards with the scores she thought her students would score and filed them away. She gave the outward appearance that she had complied with the mandate when she had not.

When asked what she thought about the future of whole language practices, Patty felt it was something she would not be willing to surrender. "I would hate to see it [whole language] thrown out the door. I say and I believe that I will not do that but I don't know to what direction I will have to go to avoid having to give it up. I don't know. That is where the big question is" (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/29/98).

Rebekah found it difficult to follow the mandates set by leaders she did not respect. She had little faith in their ability to make sound decisions in the best interest of the students.

I am talking about where you sit in these meetings and we listen to these people talk and you know where these people came from who are the leaders of all this. It doesn't have any credibility to me. It means nothing to me. I guess I trust myself on some of these issues more than I trust these people who are my peers who, but who in my mind don't have as much the pre-thought, preplanning, or whatever into the setup of this (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/16/98).

Therefore, she and the others oftentimes nodded their heads in agreement in front of their superiors and colleagues. They completed the necessary paperwork to appear compliant

and attempted to continue to teach in ways that were best for their students. These circumstances frequently led the participants to quietly choose to do what they knew was best for the students when they were in their classrooms behind closed doors. The participants found they did not have to put on appearances of compliance or deal with conflict with colleagues if they simply shut the door and did what they wanted.

#### Close the Door and Do What You Want

There were certain practices that the participants simply refused to change or abandon. “Teachers create ways to circumvent ugly aspects of the system every day, though these small innovations are generally kept from view, lest they be discovered and quashed” (Temes, 2002, p.18). When it came to certain requirements, the participants refused to submit to change.

I still do the other things like keeping things in context and making sure that I’m using whole pieces of literature and that the children are seeing the whole picture just all of those things. I’m making sure that I’m doing that because I’ve worked hard to know how. And so I’m not going to change that. The children aren’t losing out. They aren’t losing out because I’m finding other ways to meet the demands. I felt very strongly about issues and I found myself being real assertive and just going, no, and not backing down from things that I did (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

Rebekah got fed up with pressure from her administration and colleagues to give up her whole language practices. As a result, she found it was easier to cope if she just isolated herself from colleagues.

I shut my door and did what I wanted to do cause I knew it was what was best for the kids. And I didn't respect them [other teachers] and what they were doing in their classrooms so it wasn't real hard for me. I felt it was right and I had a taste of empowerment and I knew that my kids were learning. I have a principal that didn't even like it [whole language] either. He made jokes about it. I got a memo that said to Rebekah from the hole in whole language meaning himself.

Maggie especially felt a need to "close the door" when it came to expectations for testing preparation.

I am not going to pressure these children. I'm not going to do any unnecessary reviewing or anything like that. I think I do a good job in teaching. I feel very comfortable with what I'm doing. But you know, I would rather take the sacrifice of lower scores or whatever and then have the children have a love of school and reading and everything. I think that's—I'm willing to make that sacrifice (Maggie, Interview transcript, 8/19/98).

The lack of monitoring by the administration gave Barbie confidence to do things the way she knew was best for the students. As much as they attempted to dictate about her classroom practices, the more tightly she clung to what she believed was best for students.

They tried to dictate the order, you know, when you could do things. And the look on everyone's face seemed to be pretty, except for those people that like to have that, the look on their faces was, go ahead, put it in any order you want and I'm going to do what I want when I want to. You won't know and you won't care (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98).

Patty also tried to stay focused on the students and their needs as the instructional tide turned away from whole language. She tried to keep what was most important first and foremost in her mind as she made instructional decisions.

I realize that the climate is always going to change. And sometimes the climate might be kind of favorable to the way I see things, sometimes it may not be, but what really matters is what I am doing. Am I truly offering the best that I possibly can to the children under my care. I just try to keep it simple like that (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

Rebekah agreed that the focus in her classroom needed to be on the needs of her students and she was not willing to budge on that premise of her practices. “You know when you get to be my age, it’s just kind of like, I’ll do what I know works and that’s what I’ll do” (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/8/98).

Another important reason that the participants felt confident to move forward with their practices behind closed doors were their high test results. The emphasis was on test results and they had already accomplished that and knew they had gotten those results through whole language practices.

I have the scores. That is what I said to myself last year when they told us to do the book. But I was thinking, but my children did well without the book. I mean I would never be ugly to an administrator, but in my own classroom with the door shut, I am going to teach the way I know is best for the kids and that is a combination of all those experiences with whole language because of all it was. It was not a program. It is something within you (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/16/98).

Barbie moved forward with what she knew worked and hoped the test results would bide her some time to continue her practices. Laying low and closing the door were less visible and less risky coping strategies. “I’ve tried to keep my mouth shut and just lay low. And I’m hoping that I’ll be allowed to do as I please until I leave” (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98).

Even with all the mandates and the many ways these five teachers tried to cope with them, their sense of self-efficacy in many ways remained strong. In his discussions about teachers and reading mandates, Allington (2002) noted, “Expert teachers simply ignore mandates and go about teaching all their students to read” (p.17). It was particularly strong in their ability to trust themselves and their own professional judgment. They were no longer willing to accept mandates unconditionally. Although they may not have openly and outwardly questioned or opposed the mandates, they did so within their own classrooms where it mattered most to their students where they felt they could control what happened. “Closing the classroom door has its advantages when the demands and requests from the system do not make sense; one can armor oneself to gain a sense of control over situations” (Lambert, et.al., 1996, p. 125). Empowerment may have outwardly been stripped from them in terms of administrative supports, but they chose to remain empowered when it came to meeting the needs of their students. The participants, realistically, remained empowered in many ways, but did not seem to view their own choices to maintain certain professional practices as empowerment.

It has to come back down, it is almost like you can’t look at it from that huge scale, you have got to come right back down to the classroom. It boils down to that teacher and what that teacher is willing to do. Your wide-reaching influence

because of all of the restraints in that may be nothing, but yet what you do in your room is what you can do. It kind of boils down to one-on-one, one teacher with one class and what goes on in that class (Rebekah, Interview transcript, 9/16/98).

At times, the participants attempted to hold on to their practices by educating others about whole language. But rallying support from outside parties was often futile and others did not seem to realize that what they were doing was powerful and should continue. It was exhausting to try to win the battle of the impending back to basics move, which caused the participants to consider leaving the school system.

### Leave the School System

Four of the participants openly discussed leaving the school system altogether to work in an environment where their ideals would be supported. In some instances, the participants felt it appeared they were condoning the new move back to basics by continuing to teach in the school system.

I was brought up that if you really don't feel good about your boss, then you go find somewhere else to work. You are kind of lending yourself to that unethical type of behavior yourself by participating in it, you know. Just go somewhere else. So, I've about decided that's what I need to do rather than complain because complaints and the comments are regarded as bitching. It is just do as you are told. Yeah, you know, like the man that opened the window in the movie and screams, "I can't take it anymore!" I am just hoping to get out of here before that actually happens. I'm taking my medication and hoping for the best. You know, you have to find a way to deal with it that you can live with it I guess. And I'm struggling with that right now (Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/30/98).

Goodman's research supports the experiences of the study participants consideration to leave the school system. He stated, "The tactic of censoring teachers and forcing conformity on them neutralizes the more professional teachers, driving many out of the classrooms, while providing a cover for their less competent colleagues" (Goodman, 2004, p. 97).

Patty struggled to decide whether to continue to teach in the school system or not. Her sense of loss at the thought of leaving was very strong.

I am thinking it may happen this year. See, that is where my thinking is now; that is where my sadness is now because I have taught in this county; I've loved this county; I live here; This is my sense of community, my sense of belonging, but I am not sure I can continue to [teach in the county] because I am feeling this intuitively. I am just sensing that line being drawn where I am coming to the point where I say, "The overall functioning philosophy of the county goes so against my personal grain that I can no longer be happy here and I have to find somewhere else to go" (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/29/98).

Barbie experienced concerns similar to those of Patty's, saying maybe it was time to "cast around and look for someplace else to go that'll be more willing to stick it out there and take the risks and be on the forefront"(Barbie, Interview transcript, 9/17/98).

When she reflected on what she would do if the county mandated a skills-based explicit phonics program, Patty also contemplated thoughts of leaving the system.

If it does, I've thought in the back of my mind, well, if it does, that's where I'm going to have to make a decision as a professional. Can I continue to teach in this

county? If I cannot be allowed the flexibility, can I continue to teach in a county that I have loved teaching in for some time (Patty, Interview transcript, 9/15/98).

These considerations to leave the profession under the pressure of mandates that contradicted their beliefs about effective teaching were similar to those many teachers have experienced with NCLB legislation. In their discussions on NCLB and its effect on schools and teachers, Goodman and Goodman (2004) found that mandates from NCLB forced teachers to leave the profession. “Many highly professional teachers are leaving teaching or taking early retirement to escape being required to conform to aspects of the law that they believe make it impossible to teach in the best interests of their pupils” (Goodman and Goodman, 2004, p. 8).

In the end, leaving the school system became the choice for four of the five study participants. Barbie is the only participant who remained in the county. She retired and continued to teach part-time. Maggie retired and went on to become a consultant. Rebekah, Carey and Patty and this researcher left the system and are now employed in neighboring counties. Carey has recently retired from one of the neighboring school systems and returned to the school system to teach part-time. Neither Barbie or Carey returned to teach in classroom positions after retirement. They serve in support roles as Early Intervention Program teachers. With the passion that each of these teachers had for teaching and with the impact they had on students’ learning, it certainly seems feasible that each might have continued to teach in the system longer or continued to teach full-time had they been able to openly teach in a manner that worked well for the students.

With the support of administration, the participants adopted the whole language philosophy, and as a result, came to view teaching through a very different lens. The

power structures that had always existed in schools began to shift. For the first time, they shared in decision making, had a voice in curricular and instructional issues, felt empowered to take risks in their classrooms, developed a strong sense of self-efficacy, developed child-centered classrooms, focused on professional development and collegiality and had what several of them described as "freedom" in a newfound sense of community with their colleagues. Their journey of change paralleled the changes they worked diligently to create in their classrooms, which empowered students for the first time as well.

All five participants had reached a point in their professional careers where they longed for alternatives to their teaching practices and as a result of common professional development, came to embrace the whole language philosophy. They each studied and adopted the whole language philosophy, which came to inform their classroom practices. It became a time of professional change and renewal for the participants. It also became a time of reward and recognition.

Each was rewarded by the positive impact that resulted in student learning due to the changes in their teaching and their own increased engagement in their professional practices. Each participant earned professional recognition as Teacher of the Year as selected by colleagues for their teaching practices following their adoption of the whole language philosophy. It became a professional crossroads as described by each as the best time in their careers. Their journey provides insight into the role teachers play in school reform efforts and the need to have teachers' voices represented in those reform efforts. In the next chapter, the implications of this study are discussed.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The focus of this study was to formulate an answer to the following research question: How did one group of whole language teachers resolve conflicts that arose between their philosophical beliefs about language arts instruction and district mandates? Through data analysis, I was able to identify six coping strategies that the participants used to resolve conflicts between district mandates and their philosophical beliefs about language arts instruction. I have labeled those strategies as: Compromise, Compliance, Appearance of Compliance, Close the Door and Do What You Want, Giving Up, and Leave the System.

The most common strategy was that of compromise. The participants wanted to please their superiors while maintaining some of their power to make classroom decisions. At times, they opted to compromise on the required tasks themselves and at other times, they compromised by adjusting the time spent on these tasks. Sometimes the participants would complete the paperwork just so they could move on to other tasks they deemed to be more important. An example would be to give all the reading theme tests at once to the students so they could verify that they administered the tests as required. However, they had not spent the time teaching the themes prior to the tests. This allowed them to document theme test scores as required while saving the time on teaching the themes for something more beneficial to the students. This was one example of how they negotiated a compromise on mandates.

At times, the participants found they could not compromise. A mandate was issued from their superiors and the participants knew they would have to follow it. This

strategy was the least favorite of the participants because it required them to relinquish the empowerment they once had as whole language teachers. Most often this compliance could be seen in the requirement to teach phonics for one hour each day or at least initially to use the reading textbook as mandated. All of the participants stated their frustration over these mandates and the little value in them for the students. The bottom line for the participants was their understanding that they needed a paycheck and there were certain mandates they would have to accept to continue to work in the school system.

Along the same line as compliance were the times when the participants wanted to give the appearance of compliance without actually meeting the mandate requirements. This strategy was used most often with paper tasks that had little merit or value in the eyes of the participants. They did what was needed to give superiors the impression that they had met the mandated requirements when, in reality, they had not done them at all. One example was Barbie's practice of marking the required language arts assessment cards, without testing the students, at the performance level she believed students would perform and then she filed them away. Her marks on the cards gave the impression that she had tested the students and recorded their scores when she really had not done either. This coping strategy was used when there were practices that the participants could not support and did not enhance learning for the students. This strategy allowed them to maintain power to make instructional decisions they felt were best for the students.

Another *refusal* strategy used by the participants when they could not support a mandate was that of closing the door and doing what they wanted. The participants did not present information that would make others think they were doing one thing and not

another. Instead, they just chose to *lay low and keep their mouths shut*. They believed this would allow them to quietly do what they knew was best for students without getting into trouble. They were empowered, took autonomy for their choices, and refused to be like others. These were instructional practices from which they refused to back down. The participants had a strong sense of self-efficacy, which had only been reinforced by their students' high test scores on standardized achievement tests. They believed that the high test results actually bought them some of this autonomy as their superiors would leave them alone if their test scores were high. The focus was on high test scores throughout the county and they were producing those scores. This, in turn, bought them some autonomy.

In the end, the participants talked of fatigue and were discouraged by their efforts to keep whole language alive and well. This made the participants want to give in to pressures to move away from whole language. Most of the participants felt that *giving in* to the demands of the mandates would just be easier than continuing to battle and resist. They became very disheartened by their hard work and efforts just to see no results from their efforts to change others' perception of whole language. In this sense, they were relinquishing power to those who opposed whole language. They were prepared to walk away instead of continue to fight for the practices they so passionately adopted. The participants felt powerless to change the system.

The ultimate choice for coping for four out of the five participants was to do just that, walk away. They chose to *leave the system*. They left the system for neighboring towns in an attempt to regain some of the empowerment they had enjoyed to be able to teach the children in the ways they best learn. The push for more skills focused

instruction and the concerted effort to move back to basics was the line in the sand for the participants. They were no longer willing to tolerate it. They felt that to remain in the school system would be quietly condoning traditional classroom practices. The direction of the leadership to move to instructional practices throughout the county where teachers were expected to all teach the same way, on the same day, across the school system was the last straw for the participants. They had to move on. As a result, four out of the five left the school system in the end. The strategies were not effective enough that they felt comfortable staying.

These six strategies were the common link for the participants in how they coped with county mandates that attempted to control their teaching. Their stories and the coping strategies developed as a result of their experiences have several implications about which I will now focus my discussion.

#### Implications of the Research

With the 1980's came the largest sustained effort in history to reform public schools (Murphy, 1991). "As far as the public was concerned, the Manufactured Crisis began on April 26, 1983—the date when, amidst much fanfare, the Reagan White House released its critical report on the status of American Schools, *A Nation at Risk*" (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 139).

That report made two main points. The first was that Americans must compete with the educated citizens of many other nations and that the standards for schooling in other nations seemed to be higher. The second point was less practical but perhaps more important. We have to improve our schools, the report

said, to keep faith with our nation's fundamental commitment to individual liberty (Temes, 2002, p. 34).

*A Nation at Risk* gave the conservative right the support they desired for their views on education. Such reports did not end with *A Nation at Risk*. During the next two decades, numerous reports and analyses of the state of public education were completed and shared with politicians and the public. As Berliner and Biddle (1995) discussed in their book, *The Manufactured Crisis*, "over the past decade, educators and others have made hundreds of recommendations for improving the organization, staffing, curricula aims, and procedures of our public school systems" (p.28). Reform efforts were driven by lagging economics in the United States and schools were viewed as the culprits by not turning out enough literate, capable adults into the workforce. "When the system was laid open to review, the basic infrastructure was found to be in need of serious repair" (Murphy, 1991, p. vii). The need for low skilled workers was decreasing and the need for a higher skill level among graduates was becoming necessary in the workforce.

The move to improve education focused on expanding local control of education and the changing roles of central office staff, principals and teachers (Murphy, 1991). The bureaucratic structure of schools was called into question and found to impede reform efforts more than support it. "The significance of this conclusion is that it invalidates the commonly held view that the change process is a social engineering one that requires you to follow a step-by-step recipe that will lead to a final goal or product. Such a "how-to-do-it" view effectively obscures a complex of "how-to-think-about-it" issues" (Sarason, 1996, p. 78).

Teacher work was redesigned on several levels according to Murphy. Teachers had expanded responsibilities, new professional roles and new career opportunities (Murphy, 1991). Teachers became part of school-based management and were empowered to have more input into local school decisions. “What made site-based management a rallying cry was that it stood for a dramatic alteration in the allocation of power in school management” (Sarason, 1996, p. 336). While these reforms addressed the bureaucratic structure within the schools, moving to a school-based management model in reforming schools was not the total solution.

According to Murphy (1991) like other reform efforts before, this one also seemed to fail to bring about the desired results. Sarason (1996) stated that repeated attempts at change which fail reflect the difficulty of change as a cultural one where the culture is highly overlearned. The bureaucratic structure was only one of the many elements of schooling that needed reform for schools to improve. “Reforms that seek to correct symptoms without first addressing causes are doomed” (Sarason, 1996, p. 358).

These along with many other reform efforts have been attempted and have subsequently failed. Attempts at school reform have focused on issues of poverty, prejudice, equity in funding, school size, school curriculums, innovative teaching methods, content of curricula, evaluation of achievement, heterogeneity, parent, teacher and community involvement and professionalism in education to name a few (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). For the purposes of this paper, I have focused on professionalism and the involvement of teachers in reform as that aspect of reform, which has been most overlooked and is at the heart of my study. “Unless everyone has a reason to feel respected, listened to, involved, and committed, you may be able to change structure but

not the ineffective use of the human resources that make up the organization” (Sarason, 1996, p. 324).

One of the important missing links in reform efforts has been research from the perspective of the teacher on change and reform. The key player to reform in schools is the teacher. “The road to better schools may well rest on our understanding of how best to combine decades of formal knowledge with the personal and practical knowledge that teachers develop themselves” (Wideen, et. al., 1996, p. 191). This body of knowledge has only sparsely been documented in the professional literature.

By documenting the experiences of these five participants, I attempted to inform the area of research centered on teachers’ experiences in school reform by capturing their lives during reform. These classroom teachers were deliberate in their efforts to reform classroom instruction and learning experiences for the students in their classrooms. Their efforts were bottom-up in that whole language was a grass roots effort nationwide. It was also bottom-up in the sense that they each knew the change began with them. Unlike other reform efforts of the past where outside forces determined what and when would happen in reform, what and how curriculum would be taught and assessed, this reform effort was teacher-driven and the teachers had ownership of the change and how it occurred.

Although the experience of these five participants centered around the implementation of whole language, it mirrored reform efforts of the last century as one plan for reform after another has cycled into the educational forefront, some leaving behind changes, but most cycled out again. Over the last century, early reform efforts that

focused on ideas like the Progressive Movement or Open Education, failed to produce long lasting reform results or to bring about significant changes in classroom instruction.

School reform is a complex issue upon which success is reliant on many variables historically and politically, the bureaucratic structure and culture within individual schools as well as the individual stakeholders of schools. I believe this study serves as a snapshot of the possible experiences of teachers in reform efforts and why their experiences can shed light onto the success or failure of reform efforts and why it is imperative to center the focus of reform on the classroom and teaching and learning. “What is crucial to remember is that as much can be learned about educational change from examining unrealized reforms as success stories” (Duke, 2004, p. 51).

I will discuss the implications of this research in the area of teacher involvement in reform as well as the role of professional development in teacher change. I will address the need to document teachers’ perspectives and lived experiences within the larger context of school reform efforts and why their perspectives and input are necessary to sustained change within schools. Secondly, I will discuss the need for educators to abandon their passive roles as professionals and become advocates for their own professional practices.

#### Implication #1: Teacher Perspectives Must Be Represented in Educational Research on School Reform

In reviewing the research literature on effective teaching, it is not difficult to find articles and books on the practices of teachers in the classroom. Many researchers have spent countless hours in classrooms collecting data on teacher and/or student performance in reference to teaching strategies or programs. However, the research is

nearly devoid of the stories of teaching from those that teach and what happens to them in the process of change or reform. “Traditionally, the study of teachers has been more akin to the study of or study about others, as interesting phenomena to be reported on, in much the same way that ethologists might study baboons” (Ayers and Schubert, 1994, p. 107).

The voice of the teacher has been only sparsely represented in the professional literature, particularly as it is related to issues of school reform and change. “All too often, in their haste to reconfigure the organization and governance of schools, these reformers have paid insufficient attention to the core activity of education—the teaching-learning process” (Murphy, 1991, p. 71). Teachers have been regarded as instruments in school reform rather than participants (Wideen, et al., 1996).

The literature on effective teaching is most often reported from the viewpoint of an outside perspective of those observing teaching practices rather than those who live it each day. “Of the various strategies to transform education, restructuring teaching and learning has received the least amount of attention, both in reform reports and in state, district, and school-level efforts to restructure schools” (Murphy, 1991, p. 50). Although teachers are central to implementation of reform efforts, they rarely have any say on the course of implementation of reform efforts and their role in the success or failure of reform efforts seems overlooked.

Of all the ugly assumptions of the Manufactured Crisis, two of the worst are the ideas that useful improvements in American education can be initiated by scapegoating those who labor in America’s schools and that education for poor and minority students doesn’t matter. Time and again, those responsible for the crisis told us how rotten our schools were—how the performance of those schools

had declined, how they had lost direction, how their standards and discipline had been debased—and that this was all the fault of the untalented, poorly trained, unmotivated teachers and administrators responsible for those schools (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 348).

This has possibly become the most prevalent reason behind the absence of teacher voice in school reform. Many of the public view educators as the cause for the needed reform rather than the solution.

Ayers and Schubert (1994) conducted a study involving teacher lore in an effort to share the stories and insights of teachers about their own teaching practices and to seek “the meaning of teaching for those who lived it and practiced it” (p. 114). Not only is educational research lacking large quantities of teacher perspectives on teaching, schools and reform, the traditional school structure often places the teacher in the silent majority. Teachers are highly responsible for reform implementation, but are rarely consulted on their thoughts about instruction and curriculum and even less about their views on change or school reform. “Education as experienced by teachers and students, rather than education measured in the aggregate, is the only sensible place to begin to make education in the country better” (Temes, 2002, p. 39).

Reform efforts are more typically a responsibility placed upon teachers rather than initiated or actively sought by teachers. “Structural reforms have too often been built on teachers’ backs, mandated without their involvement or consent” (Hargreaves, 1997, p. 58). Instead of having vested ownership in reform efforts, teachers have experienced repeated efforts by outside forces to control their practices in the name of improvement. Sarason (1996) stated that the ideas of those most impacted by change are not taken into

account in reform efforts. “Americans have had personal experience with the public schools, they seem to think of themselves as “experts” on educational topics; hence, they feel little need for guidance from research on education when making decisions about schools” (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 346). Others, outside education, have seen it as their role to designate what changes should occur to those inside education.

The current structure of reform efforts is a reflection of many years of male control of a largely female profession. “Teaching, especially elementary school teaching, is still a gendered profession, and policy makers and administrators are still predominantly male” (Allington, 2002, p. 148). Its roots are firmly planted in a patriarchal structure as an institution. Grumet (1988) discussed the gender influence on the teaching profession and the role of teacher behaviors. The notions of the “ideal” teacher were that of politeness. Sarason also discussed the non-confrontational nature of those in the teaching profession and how this passive stance can impede change and learning. “Neither polite places nor covert places ever manage to build the kinds of coherent educational programs that truly develop more of their students’ potential” (Sarason, 1996, p. 352)

This omission of directly involving teachers and their perspectives in reform efforts reflects historical treatment of the female participants in the teaching profession. “When issues of power are raised, it is clear that those studied are silenced, that their experiential or practical knowledge is discounted, and their potential claims of expertise are denied” (Gitlin, et.al, 1992, p. 179). This remains the case despite the fact that the true burden of change will fall most predominantly on the shoulders of these same teachers. This may be one significant reason why many reform efforts have failed in the past.

Documenting teachers' perspectives through the process of one reform effort can provide insight into at least one aspect of school reform success or failure in that these teachers, as in the case of most reform efforts, were essentially responsible for implementation. The difference in this study was their role as actual change agents vs. the more traditional role as mechanisms used by outside forces to implement change. "One's capacity to influence the system requires the ability to understand the relationship of teachers and individual classrooms to the larger educational system" (Lambert, et.al., 1996, p. 33). Without documentation of their lived experience during these reform efforts, what was successful and what was not, one piece of the reform puzzle will continue to be missing. "The crucial players needed to transform, reform, or improve schools are teachers and other educators. Literally nothing good will happen in our schools unless the professionals who run those schools make it happen" (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 336).

Dewey (1938) showed that we come to understand a phenomenon by interacting with it. Teachers have interacted most with teaching and student learning and the mandates that accompany reform efforts that impact what teaching and learning looks like in their classrooms. The teachers' experience at the forefront of the implementation of reform initiatives gives them insight that others outside the classroom do not have. Without their firsthand accounts, reform is only documented from the perspective of those outside of teaching.

Politicians and others outside of education will continue to drive their own agendas for what public education should be and what reform should include, but little will succeed if the role of the teacher continues to be ignored. It will be not be possible to

change a century-long pattern of outside efforts to reform schools overnight, but it will be impossible to ever change this pattern without teacher input. If teaching is to be recognized as the profession that it is, teachers must have the opportunity to determine the direction of professional practice in schools (Murphy, 1991). Without research that includes teacher perspectives on teaching and learning and the change processes that accompany reform, little change is likely.

What happens in the classroom with teachers and students determines the success of any effort to reform schools. The focus of reform and the many players in reform efforts will still continue to have outside influence since public education is just that, public. “But no matter how important all these other factors are, it is in the schools and classrooms that the rubber meets the road, and no improvement will occur unless the educators who run our schools are able to perform *their* decisive parts” (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 337). Without documenting teachers’ perspective of the change process, the research is devoid of a pivotal piece in efforts to change schools, teaching and learning.

No reform effort can be successful without consideration of the context in which the change is to occur (Sarason, 1996). “Decisions are based on information other than that gathered by teachers in their own classrooms as they engage with their own students” (Allington, 1996, p. 148). With reform efforts that focus on putting requirements and stipulations on the professional practices of teachers from outside forces with little input and so little voice into their own professional practices, teachers can hardly be held accountable for reform efforts. Teachers have been typically viewed as mechanical transmitters of change (Sarason, 1996). They are only doing as they are told, so failure,

from their perspective, and rightly so, does not reflect on them as much as on the reform effort or program that was imposed upon them. This gap between mandates and classroom practice must be closed to gain a full understanding of the success and failure of reform and to identify the areas of public education that truly need reform.

In their book on Teachers' Professional Lives, Goodson & Hargreaves believed "that to confront and critique emerging rhetorics of teacher reform, we shall have to develop distinctive forms of educational study which stay close to the everyday life and work of the teacher" (Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996, p. 22). It is through the assessment and documentation of those lives and experiences that rests at the heart of school reform. Through dialogue about their work, teachers will become truly empowered to control their professional practices and what takes place in the walls of *school*. "The power of teachers' discourse is in its elevation of teachers' own work and in the way it connects teachers with one another" (Allington, 2002, p. 149).

Teachers will not make behavioral or attitudinal change that results in lasting reform if they continue to be told what to do and how to teach. "Top-down attempts to change schools have a notorious record of failure. If top-down change does not work well in other professional fields, it is surely inappropriate in education, where we are trying to teach and model the values of independence and responsibility for our students" (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 337).

Hargreaves (1997) discussed the importance of understanding school culture in order to understand the work of teachers. "Any attempt to introduce change in the school culture requires changing existing regularities to produce new intended outcomes. In practice, the regularities tend not to be changed and the intended outcomes, therefore,

cannot occur; that is the more things change, the more they remain the same” (Sarason, 1996, p. 116). The school culture is so deeply engrained in those that live it that it makes substantive changes difficult. This strong cultural sense of what is normal and what should be impedes the possibility of something different. It is the understanding of that culture that supports understanding why teachers choose and are willing to do what they do each day. “Those who attempt to introduce a change rarely, if ever, begin the process by being clear as to where the teachers are; that is how and why they think as they do” (Sarason, 1996, p. 232).

While teacher involvement in reform efforts and research documenting those experiences are not a *simple* solution to school reform, they are factors that will continue to contribute to the failure of school reform efforts.

They give teachers an opportunity to tell their stories and, importantly, can release them from the cycle of compliance. When this occurs, they often see value in what they do and know and then can use this new confidence to take risks, to look critically at themselves and their world, and to protest what is narrow and constraining about schooling. This development of voice, in turn, allows them to take some initial steps in posing questions about schools and teaching as well as to consider what actions they might take to remake the education offered students (Gitlin, et.al, 1992, p. 51).

Without knowledge of their experiences with change and reform efforts, a deep understanding of efforts to change schools and instructional practices is viewed out of a meaningful context and is incomplete at best. “After all, it is the teachers who ultimately hold the key to the success of the educational enterprise and it is surely time that we

began to see the world of schooling from their viewpoint” (Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996, p. 24). It is also teachers who hold the most powerful influence on student achievement and why investment in teacher development is imperative.

#### Professional Development in Teacher Change

There is abundant research to support the fact that there is a direct link between student achievement and teacher effectiveness. Yetta Goodman (2004) noted that teacher quality is the single most important factor that influences student achievement. Routman (1996) stated that the role of the excellent teacher, the teacher’s knowledge and her relationship with the students is far more important than the program, philosophy or method used. Sarason (1996) noted that the success of federal educational reform projects were directly linked to the quality and behavior of the staff. Quality teachers are a significant determinant in the success of reform and of student achievement. Routman noted that a key factor in teacher development and change comes through quality professional development.

Just as the participants in this study stated, professional development was a catalyst for their change in professional practice. “Professional development must be viewed as a necessity not an option. District after district expects teachers to make massive changes without the necessary support” (Routman, 1996, p. 39). In his research on change in schools, Sarason (1996) documented the important role of serious and active participation on the part of teachers. Through ongoing, focused professional development experiences, teachers can not only make real, sustained changes in professional practices, they can develop the skills and knowledge needed to implement such changes in practice.

With the understanding of the crucial role of effective teachers in the classroom and their impact on student achievement, it seems only logical that one of the largest investments of any school or school system would center on sound professional development. If we want the best results in student achievement, then those students should have the best teachers. Teachers are the key to the success of reform efforts in schools. If the teachers do not possess the knowledge to implement the needed changes, little lasting change will occur in the classroom. Sarason (1996) stated that change in teacher practice can only come through teachers unlearning that which is extremely familiar and relearning something new. This can only be accomplished through extensive, focused professional development. Vaughan (1993) found in her research on teacher change that teachers could not change when the changes were too inconsistent with the ways they normally behaved. Teachers will also resist implementing changes if they are not knowledgeable enough to see the need for the change. Vaughan (1993) also noted that change requiring a marked alteration in what teachers normally do required individual support to establish the change.

The effectiveness of the teacher greatly depends on his or her knowledge of and implementation of best practices. Serious efforts to restructure teaching and learning in schools require “bringing the structure of classrooms and schools into conformity with the best available knowledge about teaching and learning” (Elmore, 1989, p. 15). In these professional times, there are volumes of research on effective classroom practices upon which teachers can draw. They will not do so without time and opportunity to learn about these practices and implement them into their classrooms. “Thus the focus in schools that are restructuring teaching and learning is on helping all students master similar content

using whatever pedagogical approaches seem most appropriate to different individuals and groups” (Murphy, 1991, p. 53). Professional autonomy to implement best practices would allow teachers to determine the use of best practices based on students’ needs. Autonomy is built on professional knowledge of best practices. This level of professional development will require support from those in leadership and revisions to the typical school day and yearly calendar will be needed.

Reform involving teacher practices is not easy. The participants all discussed how difficult it was to evolve into a whole language teacher. They discussed the lack of time and their efforts that went way above and beyond in learning about and implementing whole language. In the case of the participants, they were willing to do the extra work required; others were not so willing and as a result never adopted a whole language philosophy.

There’s no question that teachers see reform as extra work. Some teachers are willing to spend their own time to move ahead. Others are not. To ensure that all teachers continue to move ahead professionally, staff development days must be built into the school calendar. I am not talking about the model of staff development that relies on experts from out of town. I am talking about lots of time for all educators to work, talk, share, and plan collegially, at grade levels and across grade levels—what is more aptly termed professional development. In many places, including my own district, this has been very difficult to accomplish. While change is never easy, being professional demands that we continue to grow and continually reexamine our beliefs and practices (Routman, 1996, p. 171).

The new level of work required for implementation of change often comes as a surprise to educators. “Teachers and administrators who expected meetings to abate when planning stopped and implementation commenced discover that they continue to spend excessive amounts of time in conferences, troubleshooting sessions, coordination groups, and staff development workshops” (Duke, 2004, p. 163). Changes to the organizational structure of the school day and calendar must be put in place to support the level of time and professional development necessary to bring about sustained, meaningful change in classrooms. Duke (2004) noted that failure to provide changes to accommodate time and workload requirements will leave teachers overworked and resentful.

Part of that focus must turn to those that are successful and determine what is working well with the students. “The first step is to realize that enduring change lives with the teacher, and to begin looking for teachers already doing great things to celebrate” (Temes, 2002, p. 29). America’s schools overall are doing a good job. It does not mean there is not room for improvement, but the data do not support a crisis in education. Instead, they communicate that educators are doing quite well, especially considering the many challenges they face in today’s classrooms. Part of moving forward is examining the practices of those in the field who are most successful. “Our schools are dynamic places where teachers are always developing new curriculum and evaluation techniques that meet all students’ needs. America’s success reflects the success of great teachers” (Goodman, 2004, p. 283).

The daily interactions between teachers and students are key to determining what works well and what does not. Meaningful professional development should center on the successes of effective teachers and research on effective practices. “This entails providing

teachers with the time, opportunity, and expectation to work with their colleagues in critically examining the important matters of their work—teaching, learning, schooling, subject matter, and school” (Lambert, et. al., 1996, p. 146). Sarason (1996) documented positive outcomes in change efforts where teachers and administrators worked together through professional dialogue to plan and implement the changes collaboratively. These efforts in collaborative professional development and planning led to intended outcomes.

Murphy attempted to “direct considerably more of the discussion about restructuring toward the connections between teachers and students and to argue that powerful new conceptions of teaching and learning should guide structural efforts at transforming schools” (1991, p. 77). Educators must stand in the way of outside mandates that attempt to make the business of teaching and learning belong to the government. These mandates often require that teachers follow scripted programs in an effort to control their teaching practices in the name of school improvement. “This conclusion should be alarming because if the scripts worked as planned, then mastery would already appear where the scripts have been in place for years. But no school following the scripts has attained that promised outcome” (Shannon, 2004, p. 30).

Quality education for our students begins with quality teachers and the attempts to deskill teachers through the use of mandated programs must end. “Any program, no matter how well thought out, must be implemented by a first-class, experienced teaching staff. Unless, teachers are allowed to do the job they have learned to do, free from the strictures of NCLB, students are going to have difficult time learning” (Goodman, 2004, p. 97). First class teachers are developed through focused, meaningful professional development.

These professional development opportunities do not have to come from outside agencies. Many times the expertise that is needed for meaningful professional development resides with staff members in the building. Teachers develop expertise through continued professional studies as well as through experiences. Traditional professional development often overlooks the teacher as expert and relies on outside sources to provide these opportunities. Instructional leadership has to occur at other than the administrative level. Teachers have to become leaders of professional development and become members of professional learning communities that exist within the school itself. “Only when the school community is itself a learning community as a result of constructed knowing and shared meaning will the contribution of teachers be considered leadership” (Lambert, et.al., 1996, p. 120-121).

If teachers are the single most important factor in determining student achievement, this places teachers in a powerful position. Due to many years of others telling them what they should be doing, there are probably many teaching professionals who do not realize the power of their impact on student achievement. As a result of the knowledge on the crucial importance of effective teachers, that the wisest and most important investment for schools would be outstanding professional development. This is the only way to ensure that the teachers’ powerful impact on student achievement is based on best practices.

Educators must take ownership for their practices, the results, and their professionalism. Others are not going to serve as the advocates for educators or rally for a change in the professionalization of teaching. It has to happen from within. There is no time like the present to begin when there is a teacher shortage and the demand for

teachers could provide some leverage for increased professional autonomy. “A documented crisis in the teaching force has led to nearly universal calls for the professionalization of teaching and the organizations in which they work, for a restructuring of schools to develop the type of work environment that empowers teachers and promotes continuous professional development” (Murphy, 1991, p. 11). The challenge will be in getting the educators to see the need for this change. It will be a challenge to get them to step out of their traditionally passive role and into a more active role as professionals.

#### Implication #2 Educators Must Abandon Passive Roles and Become Advocates for the Professionalization of Teaching

The teachers in this study were empowered to choose professional practices based on the needs of their students. They were informed practitioners who had a strong sense of self-efficacy and professionalism. Sarason (1996) showed the link between a teacher’s strong sense of self-efficacy and positive student outcomes. Yet, when it came time to fight for their beliefs and practices, most often, this self-efficacy seemed to vanish and they chose to do so quietly resist instead of openly challenging mandates from outside parties who set forth to control their practices. The reform effort to move to whole language failed in the participants’ school system for various reasons. One important reason rests in the very nature of the institution of public education itself.

Woven throughout discussions of school restructuring is the belief that schools are so deeply enmeshed in a regulatory swamp of rules and prescriptions that, even if schooling is decentralized and teachers are empowered, local attempts at improvement are likely to be choked off. There is considerable agreement that, as

currently constituted, degrees of freedom enjoyed by schools are heavily constricted by union contracts and state and federal regulations. Since freedom from external controls is a key piece of transformational reform, both of these organizational-environmental constraints are receiving a good deal of attention in discussions about restructuring the American educational system (Murphy, 1991, p. 41).

Educators have grown accustomed to attempts by outside mandates to determine their practices and have grown to learn to expect that these mandates will come and go if they wait them out. The concept of school is so ingrained in the minds of educators and parents opportunities for change often bring about a loss about what to do (Elmore, 1988).

Many educators refer to efforts at school reform as a pendulum swing and have grown to expect that it is natural in our profession to move in one direction, fail and move back. It has become an almost passive expectation with professional educators. Perhaps this is why so many do not take an active stand against outside controls of their practices. “Change poses a direct threat to behavior patterns that have developed over years of practice and that constitute a comfort zone for individuals. Resistance is particularly likely when they feel that these behavior patterns have been responsible for their successful practice” (Duke, 2004, p. 127). Garan calls the acceptance of the pendulum swing dangerous.

I have come to the conclusion that the familiar pendulum metaphor is not only wrong, it is dangerous. First, the idea assumes that we leap onto some methodological extreme, discover it doesn't work, and then naturally drift back to

some middle ground before we swing in the opposite direction. The idea of the pendulum suggests that if we just wait out the latest fad, we can maintain our own philosophies and in time, the force will again be with us. In other words, the pendulum metaphor assumes a natural, almost irresistible cycle (Garan, 2002, p. 86-87).

It has become a “wait them out” mentality and they will soon focus on something else. “Educators need to realize, however, that sustaining change cannot be allowed to become an end in itself. A particular change should be regarded as a means for improvement, one that itself is eventually subject to change” (Duke, 2004, p. 178).

This attitude can impede a teacher’s desire to change. When there is the mindset that everything will just eventually change back, there becomes no motivation to change in the first place. It is like the boy who cried wolf. After a while, no one saw a need to flee when he cried out because there really was no wolf or in the case of reform, there was really no real need to change. “Whatever the reasons, playing the role of bystanders has meant that educators frequently react to calls for change with caution or resistance” (Duke, 2004, p. 52). This brings the discussion to another important reason why this particular attempt at reform probably failed to sustain long term affects.

The fact that so few teachers really understood whole language and adopted the theoretical underpinnings in their classroom practices in the first place played into the failure of the reform effort. Many took from it what they liked and ignored the rest that they could not readily assimilate to their existing practices. The participants all went above and beyond the professional development on whole language to develop their own understanding of the philosophy. They discussed the years of reading, attending graduate

school, and other professional development opportunities to develop an understanding of whole language. Their colleagues were not willing to do this. The lack of long-range, integrated professional development for all participants was needed.

In her own school district, Regie Routman (1996) estimated that only about 20% had enough understanding of whole language to apply it to practice. This is reflective of this study and its long-term effects on the system wide changes to instruction. When given the opportunity for change, it can be difficult for many to accept it due to the fact that it goes against what they know as school and they have grown to assume the new approaches will all soon change back to the familiar.

“Schools are not places for surfacing and debating the issues that have and will continue to impact on schools. The culture of the school is one which makes it unsafe to bring up controversial issues that implicitly or explicitly are critical of existing practice and call for change” (Sarason, 1996, p. 328). There oftentimes seems to be lack of recognition on the part of the teachers that they can prevent the swing back and the return to what was previous practice. It merely seems to be accepted as inevitable. This passive attitude toward reform can be dangerous and in essence can make teachers their own worst enemies in developing professionalism and impacting school reform.

And educators are a relatively passive group, often from working- or middle-class backgrounds, who have an embattled professional status and who are also likely to be women—a traditionally unempowered group. And if these weren't reasons enough, American teachers actually set themselves up for attack because of some their most responsible, professional conduct (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 147).

Their passivity toward reform almost predetermines that they will once again fail in the eyes of the public.

Garan (2002) also emphasized the powerful political forces behind the current move to restrain teacher autonomy under the guise of accountability and scientific research. “I believe these forces are so powerful and so insidious that we can no longer do as we have done in the past—just shut our doors, maintain a passive aggressive stance, and wait for it all to go away” (Garan, 2002, p. 87). Efforts to reform schools are most often situated in religious and/or political agendas under the guise of improving public education. “To begin with, efforts at reorganization—despite the prevailing rhetoric—often have more to do with politics than with greater efficiency and enhanced quality” (Murphy, 1991, p. 76). The motives for reform are insincere and use teachers as scapegoats. This causes teachers to shut their doors and just tend to their own classroom needs. It is difficult, painful, and risky to step into the fray of reform. It is safer and more comfortable to withdraw. Lambert, et.al., (1996) propose that change will occur when the model for schools changes. “Given our belief that schools need to change and that teachers are the best situated to drive that change, we propose a different model for schools—one that is characterized by a nonhierarchical kind of thinking” (Lambert, et. al, 1996, p. 34).

The teachers in the study experienced genuine change in their classroom practices. Their experience with whole language was not the case of a fad or bandwagon for them. It produced permanent philosophical changes in their beliefs about teaching and learning and permanent change in their classroom practices. As a result, they were committed to holding steadfast to those beliefs and practices. Yet, when new mandates

were handed down, they did not openly rebel or present a case for continuing their existing practices. They were in the minority and they worked quietly as the mainstream political agenda made its way into their school system and individual schools. The agenda grew until its claims reached far beyond bashing whole language. “In the beginning it was sufficient to blame and blacklist whole language, a popular pedagogy among innovative teachers and teacher educators. But having declared the reading wars of phonics vs. whole language over, it became necessary to marginalize the entire educational establishment” (Shannon, 2004, p. 40).

Whole language, about which they were so committed and so passionate, became the scapegoat for all the ailments in education across the nation. Politics as usual was behind the move away from whole language. Instead of participating in their own dialogue and debate about best professional practices, professional educators have instead allowed others to settle disagreements about their professional practices.

Whole language is now the catch-all term for anything not supported by sanctioned research and is a heresy to be eliminated on penalty of law. The motivation is political as it always has been: 1) to settle by law what cannot be settled by scholarly argument; 2) to secure the power for those whose power is challenged by the findings of research; 3) to marginalize those who persist in conducting and publishing the results of research which threaten dominant theory; and 4) to protect believers from new ideas (Shannon, 2004, p. 45-46).

The continued silence of educators to politically motivated attempts to control their professional practices could be viewed by some as condoning or agreeing with such

mandates. With it also comes professional responsibility to become informed practitioners.

Sarason believes that for this to occur “that schoolteachers accept the obligation as a *group* to develop a forum specifically devoted to their growth and development, a forum that acknowledges that there is a world of ideas, theory, research, and practice about which they should be knowledgeable (which is not to say expert) if they are not to wither on the vine, if they, like their students, are to avoid passive resignation to routine (1996, p. 369)

Silence also could reinforce the beliefs perpetuated in the media that incompetent educators are to blame for the ailments of education. This premise is built on a lack of trust and respect for educators.

The power of good classroom teaching has been ignored in mandates for school reform. NCLB has ignored quality teaching and the professionalism of teachers and reduced learning to standardized test results. With NCLB are sanctions that will be imposed on schools that do not measure up, as defined by the state, on these standardized tests. “In regard to federal efforts at educational change there can be little doubt that many federal programs had as their goal an alteration in the distribution of power” (Sarason, 1996, p.89).

The lack of respect and value of teacher expertise in reform efforts undermine the success of those efforts. “Above all, we should bear in mind that the best ways to improve our schools are those that enhance the dignity of parents and the autonomy and professional status of educators” (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 342). This cannot be accomplished without activism on the part of education professionals and restructuring of

current power relationships. “If teachers are to save our schools, then relationships built on dependency in hierarchical associations must be changed to relationships that support greater resiliency and a greater sense of community” (Lambert, et. al.,1996, p. 126).

Educators have contributed to their own lack of professional status. “Teachers who disagree with decisions complain in private and ignore the decisions in practice” (Sarason, 1996, p. 352). According to Routman (1996), “we know more than we think we know. It’s just that our knowing cannot be measured and quantified, and we feel uncomfortable speaking out without hard data. Because we don’t value our experiences and intuition enough, the public doesn’t value it. We need to rethink what and how we know and revalue it” (p. 165). Educators have to contend with so many issues beyond their control that reflect social conditions, but greatly impact their work each day. This may make it overwhelming to consider advocacy for such interwoven, complex issues.

Despite the fact that teachers recognize the larger social issues that impact student learning such as poverty, health care, unemployment, etc., they quietly and passively bear the blame for the failure of the schools that are expected to solve social problems that are beyond their control. According to Berliner (2004), most of this outwardly imposed accountability focuses on teachers, students and administrators as the causes of educational problems and “dismisses the everyday problems that communities of poor people face. Many of these problems can be addressed by our government if we demand that it do so” (Berliner, 2004, p. 181).

Teachers must become leaders in their professional practices and move away from outward controls and mandates on what they do each day. “But here one runs smack into the obstacle of another characteristic of the school culture: there are no vehicles of

discussion, communication, or observation that allow for this kind of variation to be raised and productively used for purposes of help and change” (Sarason, 1996, p. 109). To become leaders, teachers will have to become more politically savvy. “Knowledge of change, school organization, and the politics of schooling are all necessary for teachers who lead” (Lambert, et.al., 1996, p. 154).

Americans have high expectations for schools and what they can accomplish. “But Americans seem to attack schools in particular because they have such unrealistic expectations of those schools, and become disgruntled when the schools cannot meet those expectations” (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 146). Public perception of the role of schooling in the larger challenges of society are misguided. “The public perceives that public education has more to do with rates of poverty than other factors” (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). Truth is being defined by federal law and mandate and imposed by a federal bureaucracy through funding on every state, district, school, classroom, teacher, and pupil. And it is being done in the name of improving education (Shannon, 2004, p. 46).

It is worth asking if NCLB can ever improve the schools that serve our poorest children when the programs offered to fix schools identified as failing do not address the social and economic factors that affect those schools or the inadequate support they are getting. Rigorous standards, increased testing, withdrawing resources from failing schools, and other features of NCLB cannot solve the problems caused by devastating, community-destroying, family-stressing economic poverty (Berliner, 2004, p. 177-178).

Educators must become vocal about mandates that hold them responsible for larger social problems that are beyond their control and expect the government to become accountable for the mandates they place upon schools to fix social problems. The government is not held accountable for its unwillingness to address issues of poverty or other social problems, which greatly impact education in this country. They merely continue to impose new demands on schools in the name of school improvement that have little to do with schooling and have a great deal to do with economics.

In the same way teachers do not feel accountable for the results of government imposed mandates, the government dodges accountability for social issues that greatly impact schooling by using schools as the scapegoat. The responsibility for social failures cannot be carried by the schools. School reform first and foremost must be based on sound data not manufactured data to fit a political agenda. Any plans for improvement must be based on honest evaluation of available evidence (Berliner & Biddle, 1995).

Either we must fund our schools adequately, or the nation will have to spend far more tax dollars on the welfare systems, prisons, hospital emergency rooms, and drug-rehabilitation programs needed to deal with the broken lives of those whom our underfunded education system has failed (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 86). These issues will continue to fall on the shoulders of teachers in the public view until educators stand up and vocalize the realities. “If we sit and wait and do nothing, the pendulum, if that’s what you are comfortable calling it—or the forces robbing us of our rights as teachers—are not going anywhere. Unless we speak out, we lose. And children lose” (Garan, 2002, p. 88).

The public school system in America is one of its strongest assets. We are the only nation to provide educational opportunities to all students. Despite the shortcomings of the government to support rather than undermine true educational improvement efforts, our educational system has done remarkably well. Nevertheless, educators must take the lead in educational improvement and reform. “The only way these changes will happen is if we work for them—by becoming political: speaking out, knowing the research, writing proposals, experimenting in our own classrooms and schools, and sharing our results with local and national audiences” (Routman, 1996, p. 165). Educators must become their own best advocates. “One of the worst effects of the Manufactured Crisis has been to divert attention away from the real problems faced by American education—problems that are serious and that are escalating in today’s world” (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 4).

Educators must focus public and professional attention to the real problems faced by educators. Public education is an ideal for which we should fight. We must demand that we receive the support we need to be successful and to move our public schools to new heights. “While we can’t do the job well without a lot of support, we can become politically proactive about the changes we seek and the support we need. Maybe then we can transform our schools into democratic communities of intellectual excellence” (Routman, 1996, p. 143). As professionals, the passive role we have assumed gives permission to perpetuate the status quo and substantive changes will not occur in our schools.

We can sink into the learned helplessness that those outside forces have come to count on. We can quit teaching, which they would also welcome. Or we can fight

back. Will we win? Maybe not. But maybe if enough of us resist, we can win.

And when all is said and done, we will know that we tried” (Garan, 2002, p. 88).

In the next section, I offer personal thoughts and reflections about the failure of the reform effort central to my study. I have also integrated the after thoughts and reflections offered by the participants as a result of their member checks. I provided an electronic copy of the study for the participants to read and offer any thoughts. The participants live in various locations throughout Georgia so it was most feasible to do the member checks over email. I received responses from all of the participants except Barbie. None of the participants objected to any of the content included in the study or asked that any part of their interviews be deleted from the manuscript. Most of the reflections from the participants were brief and centered around their current experiences and how whole language continues to guide their teaching practices and professional beliefs. I have included a few excerpts from their responses in this section.

#### The Structure of Schools and the Challenges of Change

Teachers are key to the success or failure of school reform. They alone are not the only factor that determines success or failure, but are an important piece of reform efforts. After all, they are the ones responsible for implementing changes involved in reform. Sustained change in the classroom does begin and end with the individual teacher. One of the first challenges for teachers to become change agents is to examine their own paradigms of school and teaching (Lambert, et.al., 1996). The participants in the study were able to bring about lasting changes in their practices by examining and questioning existing practices.

The participants in this study implemented authentic changes in their individual classrooms. It was real and sustained change for each of them. Reform did occur for these five individual teachers in their individual classrooms. They bought into the changes and implemented them very successfully. If this reform effort is viewed from their perspective, it was successful. The classroom practices of the participants who bought into whole language were forever changed and their beliefs about effective teaching went unraveled despite pressures to abandon these practices.

The overall results of this effort to change classroom practices and create democratic learning environments can be situated in the literature on the power structure and culture of schools. In this study, power began to shift from the traditional hierarchical structure so ingrained in the culture of schools. Those who typically wield little power, the teachers, were empowered to change the climate of their classrooms and their teaching practices. The participants in this study restructured their classrooms to reflect democratic learning communities. They did not make changes fit into existing structure as Sarason notes is so typical of failed reform efforts. They changed the structure within their classrooms and used their new empowerment to take charge of their teaching and use professional discretion to make instructional decisions.

As a result, when it became evident that the demise of the acceptance of whole language was forthcoming, they then found themselves trying to fit required traditional practices back into the democratic classrooms they had worked so hard to create. Their new classroom structure did not fit with the traditional practices that outside forces were bringing to the forefront in the school system. The participants had to develop what I called coping strategies in my study. A more appropriate name may have been

navigations for power as each teacher tried to navigate through the bureaucracy to maintain the empowerment they had as professionals with whole language while working in a bureaucratic, top-down environment.

These teachers were no longer willing to accept the traditional power relationships that Sarason (1990, 1996) has documented to be a central part of the seemingly unchanged culture of schools. For this group of teachers, the familiar had become unfamiliar and they did not want to return to traditional power relationships. The strength in the tradition of these traditional power relationships within the culture of school continued to thrive around them because the whole language reform movement, like reform efforts before, failed to consider the consequences and vulnerability of teachers associated with changes in these power relationships (Sarason, 1996). “Any non-trivial effort at institutional change that is insensitive to the issue of power courts failure” (Sarason, 1996, p. 89). The empowerment of teachers is viewed as less power for others. Those in power do not readily hand it over to others.

The data in this study confirm literature findings that there are structural blockades that impede change efforts, not only by those in power, but by the system itself. Traditional methods of controlling classroom practices in the form of power structures, social forces, legislated mandates from the reauthorization of ESEA, mandated textbook use, standards and standardized testing, and parent pressures impeded the ability of the participants to sustain their classroom practices. Their efforts to change were confronted at one time or other by all of these forces. “The problem of change is the problem of power, and the problem of power is how to wield it in ways that allow others

to identify with, to gain a sense of ownership of, the process and goals of change” (Sarason, 1996, p. 335).

The bureaucratic structure within which schools do business prevents true and lasting change. Those wielding power view solutions to problems as simplistic answers and impose those solutions on those at the bottom of the hierarchy, teachers and students (Lambert, et.a., 1996). This allows those at the top to maintain control much as they did with county mandates imposed on the participants and their colleagues. This power structure allows for little input from the subordinates who are expected to implement the changes. No one asked for their input or actively sought to find out what had happened to student learning as a result of whole language implementation. If they had, they would have had to acknowledge the positive results and the need for change to existing structures.

It was in their resistance to these top-down mandates that found the participants developing coping strategies to maintain power within a system where those higher in the hierarchy were unwilling to share power. Fraatz (1987) noted that this lack of change on the part of others was the result of teachers working in an isolated environment with lack of systems of support to do otherwise. This makes the status quo appealing as it is risk-free and stable in comparison to changing without the appropriate knowledge, skills and support in place. Tyack and Cuban discussed the lack of understanding of the structure and culture of schools in reform efforts leaving unsatisfied results like those with the whole language movement.

“The highly individualistic and isolated nature of teaching is at the heart of teacher attitudes, values, and behaviors and encourages conservative responses to

demands for change”(Cuban, 1979). This was evident in the behavior of the colleagues of the participants who did not readily embrace whole language practices. Duke (2004) noted that such resistance to change is common in reform as teachers are fearful of failure or are committed to the status quo. The structure of schools does not encourage risk-taking and prevents such behaviors in teachers. Sarason (1996) stated that without changes to the existing school culture, change will be defeated as it was in this study.

### Researcher Reflections on Reform

For the vast majority of the teachers in the school system, their experience in adopting whole language was unlike that of the participants. Real change did not occur in their classrooms and the foundation for lasting results were not laid. The overall efforts to reform classroom instruction through the implementation of whole language countywide failed. I share my thoughts about why I believe this reform effort failed for some, but not for others, like the participants in this study. What I deemed to be the largest contributing factors to the failure of this reform effort, I addressed in chapter one. The additional reasons I have addressed in this section with regard to the failure of this reform effort are the role of Professional Development; Diminished Quality of Teaching; Leadership Change; the Whole Language Basal; and the Lack of Teacher Input into Reform.

#### Professional Development

The participants discussed the impact of their efforts beyond the weeklong whole language workshop to learn about the theoretical underpinnings of the philosophy. They knew what they had learned in a week would not provide an understanding at a deep enough level to create a whole language classroom. They read, went to graduate school, attended additional professional development and taught it to others in an effort to

understand it better. Other teachers attended the same initial staff development along with the participants, but failed to branch out with their learning beyond that week-long course.

They were content to let the one-week workshop serve as the foundation for developing whole language classrooms. As Sarason discussed in his research, such significant changes in practices must be approached as having the teachers unlearn that which is so familiar and relearn the new. It is impossible to develop a deep theoretical understanding of this philosophy in a week. Much of this was a factor of time and opportunity. While there were follow up sessions, there lacked enough time for learning the philosophy, planning and ongoing implementation. The participants created this time and opportunity for themselves. Others did not. This lack of professional knowledge due to limited professional development opportunities and lack of professional initiative to learn more (on their own time), led to misunderstandings about whole language and whole language practices for teachers in the school system. These misunderstandings led some to use instructional practices that were in no way related to whole language, but went far in damaging others' perspectives of whole language. Even worse, these practices probably had damaging effects on student learning.

#### Diminished Quality of Teaching

As a result of unclear definitions and understandings of whole language, some teachers clearly used whole language as an excuse to not teach. Students were not taught phonics, spelling, reading or writing in some classrooms. Some had grown to define whole language as simply handing out books for reading and paper for writing and students were to become good readers and writers. Others developed thematic units

around fun topics that had little to do with developing the language arts skills in the curriculum. These units led some to believe that whole language was fun and that students would just *naturally* learn the skills needed to be effective readers and writers simply by practicing reading and writing.

This led to fear on the part of the parents, administrators and the public. The fear developed in some cases out of real concern over the instruction some students were *not* receiving in the name of whole language. Although whole language had nothing to do with the lack of teaching, it quickly became the scapegoat for the diminished quality of teaching practices and became associated with diminished student achievement.

Some of the fear originated from other sources such as the Far Right who were determined that exposure to such a wide array of literature would poison the minds of young students and break from their traditional values. The perception of whole language as secular humanistic approach struck fear in many conservative minds. Educators who could not explain their practices contributed to the escalation of this fear among those who did not understand whole language. Additionally, whole language became associated with Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) that had also become prominent in the school system during that time period. The opposition to OBE came to include opposition to whole language. The two became almost synonymous in the eyes of the public. They were associated with lower standards for student learning and with the demise of traditional values. The public pressure became so intense that the superintendent was in office one day and out the next, literally. This brought about a change in leadership in the superintendent's position, which ensured the failure of the reform effort.

### Leadership Change

The newly appointed superintendent could not have been more anti-whole language. He openly and publicly spoke about the ills of whole language and it was obvious to all in the school system that the efforts to develop whole language classrooms were over. The previous curriculum leaders left the school system, in addition to the fact that any materials and professional development opportunities related to whole language quickly vanished. It became a “dirty word” that no one wanted to say out loud and became associated with practices that no one wanted to publicly admit they were using.

The superintendent’s mission was to calm the hysteria that arose over whole language and OBE and he did just that. He actually extinguished the storm in one fell swoop by proclaiming publicly that such practices were no longer in use in the school system. He sent articles to administrators and teachers about the ineffectiveness of whole language and how the move back to traditional practices would save the children lost in whole language shuffle. His goal was to have every student across the county on the same page in the textbook on the same day.

For some teachers, this shift did not involve any additional changes as they had never abandoned their traditional practices. For others, like the participants, whole language became something they did in the quiet of their classrooms. They refused to abandon their practices, but their refusal was quiet. Either way, no teacher would publicly claim to be a whole language teacher. This change in leadership pulled the plug on an already sinking ship. When the former superintendent and those in curriculum leadership positions left, their innovative leadership left, and the whole language ship slowly sank to the bottom of the instructional sea. There were no “known” survivors, but some

resurfaced under a new name, most often termed balanced literacy. Sarason has noted that the importance of leadership at the local and central level on the effects of the successful implementation of innovations should not be underestimated.

### The Whole Language Basal

In the true tradition of making a profit, textbook companies jumped on the whole language movement and produced what became known as whole language basals. The participants in the study knew that their underlying beliefs as a whole language teacher could not be put into a basal for others to follow. Those without understanding of whole language never realized that the title in and of itself is an oxymoron.

This was another attempt by text publishers to turn a profit. It was also another way to deskill teachers and package their whole language teaching into a book. For those who did not understand whole language, they believed the whole language basal was whole language teaching. It was a version of whole language simplified for those that did not understand it so that everyone could become a whole language teacher. Again, this was a simplistic solution to a complex change process. While the participants noted they were glad to have the copies of real literature, it was not a trade off for what they did as whole language teachers.

As whole language fell out of favor, the media, the public and the system leaders pushed for back to basics and phonics instruction, the textbook companies capitalized once again on this opportunity to make money. They designed and published basals, which included what they deemed to be the “good parts” of whole language, i.e., the use of literature and the writing process. Within their new textbooks, they included these elements and called it balanced literacy. It was an effort to simplify and prescribe good

teaching. Effective teaching cannot be packaged and sold. It has to be learned and developed over time through professional development opportunities. Someone outside of teaching decided what the teachers needed to be successful whole language teachers. The solution did not match the intended outcome, which Sarason is so often the case with educational reform movements.

The participants in this study, who were outstanding whole language teachers, were never consulted about their ideas on how others might develop those same teaching skills. Anyone who had bothered to look at their students' achievement would have quickly been able to determine their success with student achievement. While student achievement should have been the driving force in determining the success or failure of whole language, it had little impact in the long run. No one ever examined the achievement of the students in these classrooms and made the connection between their high achievement and the teaching practices of the participants. The outcome may have been very different had they taken the time to make the connections.

#### Lack of the Teacher Input into Reform

It is hard not to wonder how differently the results of this reform effort might have been if someone had documented firsthand the learning results of the participants' students. If someone had told their story about whole language, the outcome may have been completely different. If someone had publicized the events in their classrooms and the community of learning that was inside, others may have developed a deeper understanding of whole language and the underlying research. If they had been that someone who was willing to stand up and fight for what they believed.

If someone had analyzed their incredibly high test results, whole language might have gotten the recognition it deserved. There is no denying the power of standardized test results in the current accountability based climate. The teachers who were closest to this reform effort were never consulted about their thoughts, practices or perspectives on the reform effort. This is a clear example of what has historically transpired in reform efforts and supports the need to involve teachers in reform efforts. The outcomes of reform efforts are highly unlikely to differ much from this one as long as those outside classrooms drive the decisions that determine what should go on inside the classrooms. I leave the study with many unanswered questions and it is difficult not to speculate on the “what ifs.” It is my hope that this study might enlighten others to anticipate the “what ifs” ahead of time in future reform efforts and possibly avoid future revocation of teachers’ autonomy to exercise the professional discretion to teach their students in ways that are most effective.

If the key role of the classroom teacher in reform is understood through documentation, we can have a better understanding about where and why reform efforts do not work. This demands that teachers have professional autonomy to teach in ways they deem appropriate and effective. Then and only then can they truly be held accountable for the outcomes of their professional practices.

The participants in the study held fast to their whole language beliefs even when they were unpopular and no longer recognized as acceptable practices. The overwhelming response from the participants’ member checks focused on their efforts to maintain their whole language practices. This evidence is supportive of the notion that real reform takes place and sustains itself at the teacher level in the classroom. The

participants have found that not much has really changed and that the pendulum does keep swinging, sometimes just to hit you in the head.

### Reflections of the Participants

In the final section, I have included reflections of the participants regarding their current practices and how whole language has continued to influence those practices as well as some of their hopes for the future.

#### Whole Language by Any Other Name

Throughout the reflections of Carey, Patty, Maggie and Rebekah, they all stated that they really believed whole language is still around, just under another name.

I feel that the real philosophy of whole language is actually still being espoused, certainly not under that name. I hear balanced literacy a lot. Balanced literacy includes word work, read-alouds, shared reading, independent reading, guided reading, etc. and the same for writing, much the way our reading and writing workshops ran under whole language. I am constantly amazed at the leaders who talk of these parts of reading and writing as though they are new or novel, when it's the very things we were doing in whole language (Rebekah, Email transcript, 11/2/2004).

Carey found her experience to be similar. She left to teach in another county where she was introduced to the Four Blocks model of literacy instruction.

“At first glance, I thought I had not taught this way, but after I started studying, I realized that it was whole language with a different slant. The only difference was that I had to use the basal as I had done in my last county. We had writing, spelling and phonics components also” (Carey, Email transcript, 10/21/04). Patty also went to a neighboring

county to teach. She found that she was able to hold tight to whole language principles that had become such an integral part of her classroom. “In Garrison County, when we received the REA grant, my grade level used trade books to rewrite our science and social studies curriculum with an integrated approach much like whole language. Naturally, I ate that up! The students scores went up in reading, science and social studies” (Patty, Email transcript, 10/30/04).

One aspect of whole language influence that the participants could currently observe was the student assessment component. They noted that there was a distinct push for teachers to know their students well. “Teachers are learning how to look at student work and plan instruction based on that information” (Maggie, Email transcript, 10/31/04). The students’ needs drove instruction in whole language classrooms and this seemed to be a direction that the participants were seeing resurrect in current practices.

Truly knowing your children and their needs was also an integral part of whole language. At my school we have just spent an entire year trying to teach our teachers how to know their students and where they are in reading development through the use of running records, etc. Many had never given a running record correctly, and those who had given them didn’t know how to interpret them for use in instruction. Assessing and knowing your children was integral to whole language (Rebekah, Email transcript, 11/2/2004).

These four participants had all gone to different counties to teach when they became dissatisfied with existing mandates. In their new locations, they were able to continue to use those practices they believed in and knew worked for the students. For

Carey and Rebekah, they even received praise for their teaching practices as others admired what they knew and did.

I have remained successful, had positive impact on my children, kept test scores high, and still managed to turn most kids on to reading and writing by NOT abandoning the teaching principles I knew to be sound and knew to work. The funny thing is most principals/evaluators always have such positive comments about observations or things going on in my room, yet they don't recognize that everything I still do is founded in the beliefs of whole language (Rebekah, Email transcript, 11/2/2004).

Carey found herself in the role of mentor in her new school and was able to influence her grade level in changing their practices.

We started off using the basal, but found again that the children were just going through the story for a week and taking the test on Friday. We decided to try another method of teaching using reading concepts and strategies and doing this with trade books. Of course, I dug out my whole language books, etc. and was so excited to once again see this philosophy being embraced. Of course, we didn't mention the name, but my girls were made aware of what it was (Carey, Email transcript, 10/21/04).

Maggie became a reading consultant and has had the opportunity to work in a variety of schools, mostly low income struggling schools. She also expressed her belief that whole language has continued to influence literacy instruction. In addition to her observations on the focus on student assessment, she also noted other influences of whole language to state supported programs with which she is affiliated. "Writing is finally

taking off and schools are involved in study groups to learn more about good instruction” (Maggie, Email transcript, 10/31/04). When she served as a literacy coach for Georgia’s Choice, Maggie had the opportunity to teach other teachers about the very practices she used as a whole language teacher.

They were no longer called whole language, but reading and writing workshop and other whole language practices were central to the initiative. In looking at the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) website, which is the national organization that funds America’s Choice and Georgia’s Choice, the foundations for the professional development of its trainers are some of the same theoretical and practical sources that shaped whole language practice. There is first and foremost a strong emphasis on professional development and the development of collegial learning communities much like that of whole language professionals. The development of community within the classroom to promote thinking and risk-taking can also be found on NCEE website as part of the research that informs the model. The literacy block in each America’s Choice classroom includes 30 minutes of skill instruction and a one hour Reading Workshop and a one hour, WritingWorkshop. Reading and Writing Workshop were an integral classroom structure in whole language classrooms. The emphasis of these workshops, according to the NCEE, is to develop the students’ reading and writing skills across genres. The components, while called a “complete approach” to literacy instruction are practices very clearly grounded in the same research that informed whole language classrooms.

While Patty initially experienced an opportunity to develop integrated units that centered on literature, mandates have once again swept in to her county forcing her to

make tough choices about instruction. Patty teaches in a low performing school system and the NCLB mandates have made their way into her classroom under the guise of Reading First.

Our county is now in up to our necks in the basal again because of the Reading First grant. Last week, I thought I was going to have to give up the writing process instruction, alias writer's workshop, because the Reading First "Feds" said the program wasn't focused on writing, but on reading and that for the entire 135 minutes (called the Red Zone), of basal driven instruction, we were to have the students engaged in reading instruction—part of the instruction being whole group using the on grade level reading program and the rest of the time in small group instruction with an emphasis on needs based instruction (red birds, blue birds, buzzards). They don't want to see guided reading instruction if the students are weak in phonics. The students must reach 110 wpm reading fluency by the end of the year. And everything must come from the core program first before using any outside source (such as all of that lovely literature we already have in place) to teach reading. So, here I am again going from hot to cold...wondering, okay, where do I go from here? (Patty, Email transcript, 10/30/04).

While the other participants are in positions where they can quietly use what they learned through whole language to continue to be effective in their classrooms, their reality is really not that different than where they were when we interviewed together in 1998. Unlike that time period, they are seeing a resurgence of whole language practices albeit under another name. Patty, on the other hand, has not been quite so fortunate in being able to maintain her whole language practices. She found herself right where she

left off in 1998, the time of our first interviews where she is trying to find strategies to cope with the changes and hang on to what she knows and believes about effective literacy instruction.

Needless to say, I've become the flagrant shrew voice. I tweaked my schedule so that I have time for teaching the writing process, which happens to be included in the core component. I really pissed off a Department of Education "Fed" when I opened my basal and showed her how the core programs included "Writer's Craft" and that I truly was being "true to the core." Next, they'll probably have us say a pledge of allegiance to the core. And I sneak in read aloud right after lunch, and have started teaching science and social studies in the afternoons so that everything really fun is, for goodness sakes, outside the 135 minutes Red Zone" (Patty, Email transcript, 10/30/04).

As Sarason so eloquently puts it, the more things change, the more they stay the same. Much of the current experiences of the participants was much like it was in 1998 in that whole language could not be discussed. Unlike the tone of their interviews in 1998, their follow up emails were filled with hope for the future and the sustenance of the practices they so strongly embraced.

### Conclusion

Whether they continued to feel the pressure from mandates or not, the one thing all participants agreed upon was the reason for going to work each day and the fact that each still held out great hope for the future of good teaching. "After thirty-four in the teaching profession, I can honestly say that I still get excited when I was into a classroom and see those little kids eager to learn (Maggie, Email transcript, 10/31/04). Rebekah

stated a similar appreciation for whole language and what it has continued to do for her work and her students. “I’m grateful for my experiences with whole language, the inquiry it inspired in me to learn more about the process of loving to read and write and has allowed me to give my children year after year” (Rebekah, Email transcript, 11/2/04).

After her experience in mentoring her young grade level, Carey held out great hope that whole language would persevere after she was gone. “I retired at the end of the year with knowing that they would continue and maybe, just maybe, so would whole language” (Carey, Email transcript, 10/21/04).

The influence of whole language can still be seen in many aspects on the professional development being promoted currently in school systems and classrooms. The professional conferences requested by my staff members are balanced literacy workshop aka whole language. The county where I work invests tens of thousands of dollars each year to host a Writing Institute for teachers to become well versed in writing workshop. Guest speakers at the institute include prominent researchers like Ralph Fletcher and Lucy Calkins. Our local staff development supports whole language practices under every other name but whole language. It is still alive and kicking, but it is kicking under an alias or several aliases for that matter.

The influence of the participants on future teachers through their classrooms will hopefully have a long-standing influence on future classrooms. Those future teachers will have a whole language model from which to draw upon in their own practices. The influence of the philosophy is still apparent in current trends. There is hope that, even with current federal mandates associated with NCLB, that these practices will continue and gain momentum. The key to their survival will come through quality professional

development and teacher empowerment that allows teachers to develop professionalism and take charge of their profession and their classrooms.

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