A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO BEING A MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN
A HIGH STAKES TESTING ERA

by

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(Under the Direction of MARK D. VAGLE)

ABSTRACT

No Child Left Behind as well as current accountability mandates and policies have had profound influence on schools. Although the influence of these policies on teachers is well documented, the experiences of principals are not. This post-intentional phenomenological study was designed to explore the lived experiences of middle school principals in a high-stakes testing era. Four participants participated in four semi-structured interviews, sixteen interviews in total, which were 90-120 minutes long. In addition, publically available documents were analyzed to further my own understandings of the policies that each principal discussed. Each principal had experience being the leader of a school that had been identified as "Needs Improvement" or "Failing." This provided additional insights into their experiences due to the high stakes nature of their job. Principals willingly discussed the responsibility, pressure, stress, and loneliness of their jobs because of the mandates and policies that are required of them. This is important because it allows school districts and other educational agencies to get a better understanding of the experiences of principals in order to support them in a more effective manner.

Key Words: Accountability, High Stakes Testing, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Principals, Leadership, Middle School, Post-Intentional Phenomenology

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my wonderful husband, Jeff, who has supported me throughout this endeavor. Thank you for your love, support, loyalty, and time that you have invested with me into this degree. I am grateful for the joy and happiness you have brought into my life. I could not have finished this without you. I love you. And to Emma and Micah—you have brought countless joy into my life. I love both of you.

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CHAPTER 1

I walked into Eli's office and was surprised at the man in front of me. Shorter than average with chocolate brown eyes that glistened with fire, Eli eagerly gestured me to have a seat. Immediately the room was filled with stories of growing up. "My parents would pack me several sandwiches and send me to the park early in the morning on Saturday. I wouldn't come home until dinner time… and no one ever had to come check on me. It was a safe place. Everyone watched out for each other," Eli reflects of his experiences as a child. "By the time I was a teacher, the schools were changing. Poverty had its grip on the city and soon gangs would begin to enter our worlds." But Eli remembers the sense of community—even in those poor communities. Communities that took responsibility for the next generation and worked with teachers to ensure that students were learning, in school, and behaving each day. "When I came here, it was different. This was a school of haves and have nots and the division was palpable. I had to make a community while fighting with a school district that felt we were cheating. In some cases, that helped us, because it united us against 'them'." Eli continued reflecting on his experiences as principal in a needs improvement middle school during this high stakes accountability era. "You can't lose hope, because your job is to create hope. Hope for teachers, students, and parents. They must believe that the system isn't out to get them—out to keep them where they are. Our families, they must believe that no matter what the odds are, they can overcome them and be successful. Otherwise, all the stress, the never-ending pressure, the unrelenting burden to push harder that never lets up will defeat you. I will not be defeated, nor will I allow my students to be defeated by a system that had good intentions but failed." He pauses, wincing as if in pain as he thinks of students lost to the system that aggravates him. "I can't quit—everyone else already has."

INTRODUCTION

Students across Georgia sit anxiously in their middle school classrooms as they prepare to take the Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT) that will determine their promotion and guide their educational future. Teachers look at the faces of their students and feel the pressure of their success and failure falling on their shoulders. At the same time, principals circulate around the building making sure that students are present and focused on the test.

Principals also feel the pressure to ensure this day goes smoothly and that students have the best testing experience possible since their scores have so much influence on the school. The test scores return a few weeks later, and the principal's heart sinks—58% of the students failed math. The school will not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). This means more state involvement and a loss of teachers' positions. Funding is getting tighter and mandatory "intervention" programs will be handed down by the district. Tough choices must be made. Leaders are typically blamed and often the first to be let go. For many leaders in schools that have not made AYP, not meeting the mark could mean meeting the end of their tenure.

Principals of middle schools throughout Georgia are feeling the pressure of high stakes testing that schools face when schools are unable to make Adequate Yearly Progress. The first reform is usually intervention strategies such as after school programs and support classes during the school day and school choice is often the second reform before leadership is removed. Atlanta Public Schools serves as a prime example of what can happen under the stress of high stakes testing. Principals there both encouraged and led teachers to change answer documents and cheat (Addicks, 2012; Badertscher & Sarrio, 2011; Belcher, 2012; Cheating our children, 2011; Pell, 2012; Sainz, 2012; Strauss, 2012; Tagami, 2012). What extraordinary pressure!

This study took a different look at high stakes testing. Rather than simply focusing on the influences of high stakes testing on schools using quantitative data or the qualitative data using teachers' perspectives, I used a post-intentional phenomenological research approach (Vagle, 2010) to examine the lived experiences of principals in middle schools that have been labeled "failing" in regards to Adequate Yearly Progress. Qualitative approaches to inquiry help us to understand peoples' lived experiences by using narratives that reveal the truth and understanding of human existence (Riessman, 2008). Post-Intentional Phenomenology, in particular, provides a

tool to more fully understand people by listening to their stories and how they make sense of their experiences. A phenomenological study into the lived experiences of principals in Georgia middle schools will provide school stakeholders the opportunity to better understand the impact of high stakes testing on principals.

Purpose of the Study and Guiding Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore principals' experiences with high stakes testing in Georgia middle schools.

The primary phenomenological research question is : What is it to find oneself as a principal in the high accountability, high stakes testing era of education today, and in particular what is it like to lead a school that is labeled failing or needs improvement? Secondary research questions were developed to point to specific areas of the principals' lived experiences that I wanted to study.

Secondary research questions:

1. How do the requirements and criticisms of NCLB influence principals as they make decisions that impact the daily life of a school as well as its long term standing?
2. How do principals navigate their roles in the high stakes environment?

As I further state in my Conceptual Frameworks section, the research on high stakes testing and high accountability have primarily focused on the impact on teachers without adequately examining the experiences of principals.

My Subjectivities—An Initial Bridling Statement

In post-intentional phenomenology, the researcher is asked to bridle (that is, acknowledge and interrogate, following Dahlberg, 2006) her or his own views, perspectives and assumptions, in order to attempt to remain open to what can be learned from the phenomenon. Bridling was a way, then, for me to "reign in" my own subjectivities and acknowledge them and their impact on my research. In post-intentional phenomenological research, Vagle (2010) asks researchers to create a bridling statement as well as a continuous bridling journal to address the researcher's subjectivities throughout the study. Although this statement is typically included in the description of the methodology, I felt it was important to clearly articulate my own subjectivities from the start. I found that my own subjectivities from being a teacher under high stakes testing and accountability had a profound impact on me as a researcher. I felt that foregrounding my subjectivities here at the beginning of the dissertation would potentially allow the reader to see my own subjectivities from the start. This space allows the researcher to disclose assumptions and enter into the study. Before beginning my study, I developed a brief testimonial to address my own subjectivities as they relate to my research, to provide background for my perspective as a scholar, and to examine potential limitations for this study. My bridling statement was examined and re-accessed throughout the study, allowing me to continually challenge my own assumptions.

I am a white middle class female. I am married with two kids who are both preschoolers. I grew up in a middle class family and attended public school for elementary, middle, and high school. I always liked school and did very well. Although we took standardized tests in school, they were not high stakes, so I don't recall feeling the same pressure that I perceive students feel today. My memories of testing week included getting to bring a snack to school and watching

movies in the afternoons. Additionally, since I always performed well on tests, their influence on my life was rarely negative. However, I also felt no pressure to make a certain score to ensure my promotion. My memories of school are positive, and I enjoyed attending and learning.

I have taught in public schools for ten years working with middle school students particularly in the area of math. My entire teaching career has been under the *No Child Left Behind*, also called NCLB, (Department of Education, 2002) legislation——although during my first year NCLB did not seem to have the same impact as it was such a new policy. However, I remember vividly how the impact of the CRCT—Georgia's end-of-year exam for most elementary and middle grades students—crept into our school and started to influence teacher decision-making regarding what was taught and how it was taught. I have felt the impact of top-down control over exactly what is being taught in my classroom on a day-to-day basis including my principal criticizing me because she felt that I was spending time on something that would not be on the test. It was suggested that I move on, despite student interests and questions. I have experienced the roll-out of the old standards (Quality Core Curriculum) to Georgia Performance Standards (GPS), and now to the Common Core. I have felt pressure from administration as a math teacher in 8th grade to ensure that students are successful. Teaching 8th grade has additional stress because 8th grade in Georgia is considered a "gateway" year where passing the CRCT determines if the students are promoted to high school. I have been required to teach additional support classes that take students out of exploratory classes, tutor during lunch and after school, teach Saturday school, and teach summer school in an effort to ensure student success on the

CRCT. I have worked with at-risk students and gifted students and worked in schools that would be identified as Title 1 and Needs Improvement (NI) Schools.[1]

As a teacher, particularly a math teacher, I immediately felt the pressure of the accountability and high stakes that came with No Child Left Behind. This legislation and its impact on me as a teacher initially brought me to this research interest. However, as I began talking to principals I realized that my frustration as a teacher, often directed at administration, was misguided. There was so much going on behind the scenes that I realized I was not familiar with what I needed to understand. For example, I was frustrated with the implementation of certain computer-based interventions that my principal directed me to use, not realizing that it was a district mandate, not something that my principal had brought on and forced me to use. I pushed back against this directive consistently and only discovered years later that my principal's hands were tied.

As a white middle-class teacher, my attempts to phenomenologically understand the experiences of principals was both constrained and enabled. I often found my own experiences as a teacher and my interpretations of principal's actions impacting how I reacted to what principals' were sharing with me. In addition, my resistance to what principals have to do versus my own view of what is needed in my personal classroom often came to bear. However, I also realized that I embraced the intensity of their feelings and related to the pressures they felt based on my own experiences in the classroom. In addition, I felt that my knowledge of the system

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[1] Title 1 schools are schools where at least 40% of the students are from low-income families based on the United States census bureaus' definition of low income (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). A school is considered Needs Improvement when it fails to meet Adequate Yearly Progress two years in a row (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

they were operating in also contributed to my growing understanding of what it might be like to lead a needs improvement middle school.

Housed within me as a scholar is the desire to understand the experiences of principals of middle schools in this high stakes, high accountability era. What is the experience like for principals? Pursuing rich descriptions of principals' stories about living in a high-stakes environment and having to make choices daily as a result, will allow me—and others interested in this phenomenon--to trouble what we think we know about high stakes testing and accountability so that we might not only be more attuned to these lived realities, but also able to inform ongoing policy-oriented and practice-based decisions.

Orienting the Research

No Child Left Behind's laws have strict expectations that are only increasing over time in a goal for 100% proficiency in all subgroups by the year 2014—with consequences for schools, often starting with the principal, if these goals are not met (Azzam, Perkins-Gough, & Thiers, 2006; Ravitch, 2010; Smith, 2005). This adds pressure for leaders to ensure that all students in their school are being successful and meeting the standards of proficiency. One major objection to *No Child Left Behind* is that by complying with it, many states and schools have eroded their education policies, curriculum, and practices by obsessively focusing on high stakes testing, which is short sighted and ignores many other important aspects of education (Consiglio, 2009). Although schools like to belief they are not teaching to the test, their daily practices show otherwise. Programs are designed, after school programs created, and incentives given in an effort to increase test scores for students in those critical content areas. The assumption being that supporting struggling students (particularly in the area of math) is a good idea, even if the

support comes in preparing for the test. Studies have shown that when tests are less controlling, students tend to conceptualize the information better than when they are told there are consequences and must resort to short-term memory (National Research Council, 2011). In the high stakes testing and accountability era, it appears that policymakers have and continue to operate under and assumption that if negative consequences are in place then students and educators will perform at higher levels. I wonder how the requirements and criticisms of the public influence a principal as they make decisions, how they understand and recognize the statistical improbability of passing once they have failed once (Sunderman, Orfield, & Kim, 2006), and what it means to be the principal of a Georgia middle school during this era.

Principals face enormous responsibilities as a result of No Child Left Behind—in particular the tasks of determining how to use the data generated from standardized tests and how to implement policies that are handed down by the district and state (Evans, 2009). According to Evans (2009), principals are often being asked to analyze data and make decisions based almost solely on that data within their school. In some cases, principals implement compulsory policies that fail to consider the needs of the individual students that are in the school. Principals grapple with decision of how to follow the policies that are required of them while meeting the unique needs of the teachers and students in their school. There is more happening in the school that just the top down enforcement of policies as principals and teachers work to operate within their limitations to do what they feel is best. Understanding principals' experiences, particularly in schools that are considered needs improvement or failing, provides valuable insight into the pressures and responsibilities of leadership in middle schools today.

Most of the research conducted in regards to No Child Left Behind has been primarily focused on teacher performance and student achievement. For example, there have been

empirical studies (e.g., Evans, 2009; Finnigan, 2010; Goldberg, 2004; Gullat & Ritter, 2000; Jacobson, 2001; Mulvenan, Stegman, & Ritter, 2005), conceptual arguments (e.g., Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Ravitch, 2010, and newspaper articles (Pell, 2012; Popham, 2004; Sainz, 2012) that document how some teachers cheat, change the curriculum, focus only on the test, and face other implications (e.g., restrictions in teaching style, restrictions on how to teach) of NCLB. These studies, arguments, and articles tend to focus more closely on the teacher's role in influencing student achievement, as opposed to the principal's. Principals' role is often perceived as indirect, despite principals' larger influence on matters such as school culture, policy implementation, and resource allocation. Perhaps this perception has contributed to the focus on teachers rather than all stake-holders involved in education. Although there is an acknowledgement of the importance and influence of strong principals, little research has been conducted to understand the experiences of these principals (Brewer, 1993; Copeland, 2001; Davis, 2998; Donaldson, 2001; Eye, 2001; Finnigan, 2010; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Keller, 1998; Norton, 2002). Perhaps this is due to the difficulty in demonstrating a direct tie from principals to student achievement; however, it is concerning that principals' role has not been studied more. Although the leadership of principals has changed over time, their influence in schools has, arguably, never been more prominent. Principals in schools where making Adequate Yearly Progress is easily achieved probably have different experiences with the law than principals that have continued to face "needs improvement" status over the years. Without the fear of losing one's job always at hand, the way in which a principal runs his or her school will most likely be different.

In the state of Georgia, the rules for the certification of leaders have also changed--making it more difficult for leaders to gain certification. This change came as principals were

continually blamed for the struggle that schools faced in making AYP. This seemed to be an effort to improve the quality of leadership and indirectly deal with the issues of cheating. The newspapers contain many stories of schools with many educators who are losing their certification because they are taking steps to ensure their schools meet standards no matter the cost (Evans, 2009; Finnigan, 2010; Goldberg, 2004; Gullatt & Ritter, 2000; Jacobson, 2001; Popham, 2004). If one examines Georgia schools alone, one finds articles (Addicks, 2012; Badertscher & Sarrio, 2011; Belcher, 2012; Cheating our children, 2011; Pell, 2012; Sainz, 2012; Strauss, 2012; Tagami, 2012; Winerip, 2013) about Atlanta Public Schools, Bibb County schools, Gwinnett County Schools, and DeKalb County schools with instances of cheating on standardized tests. In each of these systems there were examples of discrepancies in the tests that were investigated, and it was determined that answer documents were changed or students were given answers under the direction of principals   Atlanta Public Schools in Georgia has received significant media attention because of the cheating scandals surrounding their district. The argument seems to be that some principals are willing to risk their jobs and possible jail time in order to have passing scores. This type of desperation can lead to poor decision making that can often be rationalized as "what is best for students." Unfortunately, there are also principals in central office positions involved with these scandals. The pressures of ensuring that a school makes AYP seem to be influencing principals' ability to lead effectively (Addicks, 2012; Badertscher & Sarrio, 2011; Sainz, 2012; Strauss, 2012).

Adequate Yearly Progress

Making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requires a certain percentage of students in each subgroup to meet or exceed standards on the math and reading portion of the CRCT in the state of Georgia. The percentage increases every year, and schools are expected to reach 100%

proficiency in 2014. Many studies (Brewer, 1993; Copeland, 2001; Evans, 2009; Finnigan, 2010; Donaldson, 2001; Goldberg, 2004; Hallinger & Heck, 1998) and conceptual arguments (Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Ravitch, 2010) critique NCLB and claim that one of the negative outcomes of high stakes testing is the erosion of "true education". Critics believe that true education, education that teaches students to think, love learning, and seek knowledge, has been diminished in an effort to prepare students for the state mandated tests that are considered "must pass" in order to ensure the security of the school. Teaching students to only memorize material and place them in classes to learn how to take multiple choice tests is arguably not a "true" education, but appears to be taking place in schools across the US . Perhaps policy makers could not see this as a probable outcome. Principals make decisions about things that are happening in the classroom, even under district mandates, and are responsible for ensuring those things are occurring.

Principals are also responsible for using the data generated by test scores, such as the CRCT, benchmark exams, and other sources to make decisions for the school. Principals who are focused on school change are often looked at as strategic in their efforts to find resources—money, ideas, resources, and the encouragement of people—for their schools (Finnigan, 2010). Principals' need for resources might lead them to compromise in order to get resources they feel are essential for student learning and success. Limiting a principal's range of instructional choice to ones that have been demonstrated to be effective seems like a good idea, but there are reasons to be concerned with this mandate (McDermott & Jensen, 2005). Expertise in this area seems to be trumped by which companies districts align with. Many schools and districts are limited by resources and interventions that the state and federal government have identified as "research based" even though their validity in every school in the nation may still be questionable. This makes the leader's decisions about what should and should not be included in the curriculum for

students a precarious one. Superintendents may have connections with people or might mandate particular programs despite concerns over their validity or effectiveness for the students involved. Although schools are required to comply with the Georgia Performance Standards in the state, how that looks in every school is different. Some schools may see this as following the state roadmaps and units, while others may stick to the textbooks that they have invested enormous amounts of monies into, and still others may use a combination of tools. Perhaps the flexibility and willingness to take risks with the curriculum taught comes from stability in AYP status or perhaps a desire to try something different to make an impact. Additionally, some subjects such as band, art, and other elective courses do not currently have Georgia Performance Standards and are not tested on the CRCT (Georgia Department of Education, 2012). Because those subjects are not tested, they are not given the same type of focus. Perhaps this is the reason so many of these types of courses are being cut in our schools, despite knowledge that they are good for students.

All these aspects are vital to understanding what it might be like for Georgia middle school principals to lead their schools in a high accountability, high stakes environment. Gaining further insight is needed in order to continue to improve education and provide students with the best schools available in order to secure their future. Such insights can be gained by better understanding the lived experiences of principals who must make daily decisions that impact the lives of teachers and students. Eli's experiences as principal are intense as he shares the never-ending pressures that fall to him daily. He reflects on the responsibility and pressure that he endures while trying to serve his school to the best of his ability. His motivation is clear—students cannot fail—no matter what the cost to himself.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Accountability is an important aspect of education, ensuring that students receive an equitable education no matter where they go to school. It has become a key issue in schools today as a result of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) (Archer, 2000; Jacobson, 2001; Knowles & Knowles, 2001). In 2001 the federal government passed legislation titled *No Child Left Behind*, an act targeted to increase student achievement through high stakes testing and accountability. In response to this policy mandate, many schools had to start creating policies in regard to testing and accountability.

Public schools have been the focus of policymakers as they attempt to solve socioeconomic problems through education reform. As a result, there has been a rigid, top-down accountability focus that scrutinizes the performance of public schools by using high stakes tests as the central metric of teacher and school quality. A shift to research that focuses on the impact of accountability policies on the various aspects of public education has occurred over the past five years. In order to fully understand these aspects, one must first understand the policies that have come forth and shaped accountability as well as high stakes testing. The focus of accountability research tends to be on *No Child Left Behind*, however, there have been many policies prior to this act that have implemented similar accountability programs. Although these policies are not as far reaching, they have helped to mold and shape No Child Left Behind. In addition, it is necessary to fully understand the components of *NCLB* in order to examine the impacts of it and how NCLB manifested itself at the state level, local school systems, and individual schools. State policies vary dramatically across the United States, which changes how

NCLB affects schools in each state. Because of these varying interpretations and understandings of this act, it was necessary for me to focus my study on the impact accountability has on principals in Georgia and their response to this accountability. In this section, I will look at the educational policies and No Child Left Behind, criticism of No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, Equity, impact on teachers and principals, and leadership.

Educational Policies and No Child Left Behind

Educational policies have been influenced by the notion of accountability and high stakes testing long before the *No Child Left Behind* act was passed in 2001. As far back as 1887, there is evidence that high stakes testing and student performance on those tests was used to determine teacher pay (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). Teachers' salaries and increases in pay were tied to student performance on certain tests and how well they performed at the end of the year.

Placing emphasis on using high stakes testing to make important decisions about students, teachers, and administrators in schools, as well as for evaluating schools and systems, is also clearly evident in the authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). ESEA brought federal funding to the forefront of education as a product of the civil rights and antipoverty agendas of the 1960s (Consiglio, 2009). This act was passed because the government was looking to call greater attention to the needs of disadvantaged students as well as the quality of America's schools. This caused greater awareness and attention to be placed on quality education in the American people's minds because of Russia's lead in the space race and the concern that students were not going to be strong enough to compete on a global scale. Concerns about American education continued to grow as international testing data indicated that American schools were not as good as those in

other nations (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). In 1983 the release of *A Nation at Risk* escalated those

concerns. This report stated that unless there was a major overhaul in American education and

expectations for student achievement were raised, the American economy would be

compromised (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The report further

warned:

> The educational foundation of our society was being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity
> that threatens our very future as a nation and a people. The report alleged that part of the
> responsibility of America's declining productivity in the face of accelerating foreign
> competition could be traced to the school's poor performance. The report went on to
> charge that our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic
> purpose of schooling and of the high expectations and disciplined effort to attain them.
> (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 3)

Because of this, many politicians began aligning themselves with the public outcry that

American schools were failing and something had to be done to improve them. In 1988 the

reauthorization of ESEA required Title I schools with stagnant or declining test scores to create

and file improvement plans with the district (National Research Council, 2011). This caused a

broad range of initiatives and policies to proliferate at the local, state, and federal level.

Americans appeared to believe that quality education was fundamental to the economic well-

being of the state and the democratic foundation of society, which further reiterates their concern

for education (Gullatt & Ritter, 2000).

One law in more recent history has had far-reaching effects on education in America. *No*

Child Left Behind was initiated in 2001 by the Bush administration. In January of 2002, George

W. Bush signed *No Child Left behind (NCLB)* into law (Georgia Department of Education,

2003). This act mandated that all states establish a statewide accountability system to ensure that

all school districts and schools make adequate yearly progress. Schools that fail to meet adequate

yearly progress would face possible corrective action including:

1. Replace school staff relevant to the failure;

2. Institute and implement a new curriculum;

3. Significantly decrease management authority at the school;

4. Appoint outside experts to advise the school;

5. Extend the school year or school day;

6. Restructure internal organization of the school. (U.S. Department of Education, Office

of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2002, p. 6)

Upon its enactment, *NCLB* had broad bipartisan support and continues to get its greatest support

from states, communities, organizations, and families who are sensitive to the mission of

improving academic achievement in the poorest performing schools to more closely align with

those in highest performing schools (Consiglio, 2009; Ravitch, 2010). Much of *NCLB's*

framework on accountability and standards was placed into law in 1994 through ESEA

(Consiglio, 2009). However, *NCLB* was a major piece of educational reform that for the first

time linked high stakes testing with very strict accountability measures that were designed to

ensure that schools receiving any government funding were performing at a certain level (Smith,

2005). Those outside the United States government felt that *NCLB* expanded the federal

government's control and authority over K-12 education to an unprecedented degree

(McDermott & Jensen, 2005). Even though the act appeared to be equitable in its intent, some

critics believed that high stakes testing and accountability-linked sanctions could label otherwise

successful schools as failing—which would be detrimental to the educational system (Smith,

2005).

The federal government was not alone in mandating legislation. State governments have also mandated accountability legislation in an effort to improve schools. In 1985, Georgia passed the Quality Basic Education Act, and the Education Review Commission was established. The purpose was to improve Georgia's educational system by studying the developments of other states (HB 1187, p. 4). Governor Roy Barnes created the Education Reform Commission in 1998. This commission's findings led to House Bill 1187, the A Plus Education Reform Act of 2000, which charged the Office of Education Accountability with the "creation of a statewide accountability program that is performance based (H.B. 1187)." This Act also charged the Office of Education Accountability with producing school report cards that contained grades reflecting schools' annual performances (Georgia Department of Education, 2003).

In addition to legislation that was mandated, *NCLB* is said to employ the "power of the purse" as it forces state and local governments to hold all students to high standards and end the bigotry caused by low expectations (McDermott & Jensen, 2005). Accountability with high stakes testing was not a new concept in the United States educational policy. *No Child Left Behind* reflects earlier legislation including statewide accountability protocols and testing regimes (Smith, 2005). In the 1990s many states had already introduced elements of statewide testing and accountability measures, although not as extensive, with testing procedures in place by 2002 (Smith, 2005).

NCLB required that all schools that receive Title I funding put into place standards for improving student achievement along with plans for how these standards would be monitored and met (Smith, 2005). In 2000, President Bill Clinton's administration passed the Goals 2000 program, which gave states federal money to write their own academic standards (Ravitch, 2010). At the time, many states struggled with writing standards that were vague in an effort to

avoid controversy and concrete descriptions of what students would be expected to know and be able to do (Ravitch, 2010). *No Child Left Behind* does not determine a state's education standards; however, it requires the state to adopt standards that are adequate and to document how the entire state is adopting those standards (Consiglio, 2009). In addition, *No Child Left Behind* requires all students, including all subgroups within the school, to reach proficiency by the year 2014 (Smith, 2005). Subgroups consist of groups that are comprised typically of twenty-five students such as English Language Learners, students with disabilities, gender, minority groups, and economically disadvantaged students (Department of Education, 2002). Additionally, schools must ensure that 95% of all students participate in high stakes testing. To ensure that these groups each are demonstrating proficiency in these high stakes tests, school districts and states are required to publish annual data reports that are subdivided to allow tracking of student performance based on race, gender, class, disability, and other indicators (Consiglio, 2009; Evans, 2009). Schools then must interpret the results, determine reasons behind those scores, and make recommendations for the future (Evans, 2009). Failure to meet any one of these parts results in the school being labeled as failing (Popham, 2004).

Sanctions occur when schools fail to meet their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two consecutive years. As of the 2012-2013 school year, some states, including Georgia, have received NCLB waivers as standards change, Common Core Curriculum is implemented in schools, and the government finds more accurate methods of measuring achievement. Although these waivers provide schools with a short reprieve from sanctions of the federal government, the accountability has not disappeared-- it is just changing shape. In Georgia, the NCLB waiver has eliminated AYP status, but has replaced it with school classifications such as Priority, Focus, and Alert schools (see Figure F) to signify exactly where the school is not meeting the required

standards (Georgia Department of Education, 2012b). Georgia is also using the CCRPI (College

and Career Ready Performance Index) to provide specific information about the schools in more

detail than an AYP status was able to do. In most states, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) does

not take into account value added measures, that is, the previous performance of students and

their background compared to present performance (Smith, 2005). These sanctions include, but

are not limited to, district level monitoring, school choice, additional tutoring provided for

students, replacing staff or aspects of the curriculum, or in extreme cases restructuring as a

Charter school or one that is privately run (Smith, 2005). Table 2.1 outlines the consequences for

not making AYP.

Table 2.1

Consequences for not making AYP

Year	Consequence
1	No Consequence
2	Needs Improvement Year 1 • Public School Option: Parents have option to transfer child to a higher performing public school in the district. • School Improvement Plan: Schools must identify the specific areas that need improvement and work with parents, teachers, and outside experts to develop a plan to raise student achievement. • Must receive technical assistance from the LEA to help it improve.
3	Needs Improvement Year 2 • Supplemental Services: Parents of students in Title 1 schools have option for requesting tutoring and other supplemental educational service. • Technical assistance and public school choice continue.
4	Needs Improvement Year 3 • Technical assistance continues

	• Public choice continues • Supplemental services continues • School is identified for corrective action and thus must change its staffing or make fundamental change.
5	Needs Improvement Year 4 • Plan for Restructuring: School must develop an "alternate governance" plan that includes converting to a charter school, replacing all or most of the staff, turning it over to a private management company, or have the state take it over.

Source: Georgia Department of Education

http://www.ganet.org/services.leg.ShowBillPre.cgi?year=1999&filename=1999/HB1187

In some schools, the approach has included school-level efforts to support and monitor instruction by making changes that emphasize the role of the principal as an instructional leader, promoting mentoring relationships among teachers, and providing coaching models to improve teaching (National Research Council, 2011). *No Child Left Behind* was purportedly designed to increase the urgency and provide greater stakes for the goals of rigorous academic standards and accountability that were placed into law in 1994 (Consiglio, 2009). Educational policies continue to be written and re-written in an effort to continue to improve schools and student achievement.

Criticism of NCLB

Diane Ravitch says, in her book *The Death and Life of the Great American School System,* that *No Child Left Behind* lacks any educational ideas but instead is full of a technocratic approach to school reform that only measures the success of a school by standardized test scores in two skill based subjects (2010). It is appalling that government officials believe that this limited approach could strengthen our nation's economic competitiveness with other nations when most of the successful school systems internationally do not impose such a narrow focus on their students and schools (Ravitch, 2010). While some people criticize No Child Left Behind

because of the perceived federal takeover of schools, other people believe that *NCLB* cannot be called a mandate because states can refuse to take the federal Title I money that comes with the requirements of it (McDermott & Jensen, 2005). Although the federal Title I money represents a small percentage of the total educational budget for each state and local district, the funds would be nearly impossible to raise in order to make up for this deficit. Some believe that the threat of withholding the federal education money from states that have always relied on it, coerces their participation—making it unconstitutional (Consiglio, 2009). If states choose to opt out of *NCLB*, they will be forced to raise taxes in order to compensate for the loss of federal funds that originally came from taxation (Consiglio, 2009).

Funding for *No Child Left Behind* in relation to its requirements for improvement has also been a major criticism (Klein, 2009). States and local school districts often feel that resources are not provided to schools in order to meet the stringent requirements of *NCLB*. Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, said that even with Congress' infusion of additional funding, it should not equate the infusion of aid in the bill with more money to meet the requirements of *NCLB* (Klein, 2009). Moreover, schools typically get their funding from property taxes—the higher the property tax, the greater the school funds (Smith, 2005). However, schools that have students who are living in high poverty, clearly have less funding from property tax revenues even though they may receive additional federal funds based on their Title I status.

The public, which initially supported *NCLB,* has grown dissatisfied with the act and want to see changes with the Act and the unintended consequences it brings (Consiglio, 2009). One major objection to *No Child Left Behind* is that by complying with it, many states and schools have eroded their education policy by obsessively focusing on high stakes testing, which is short

sighted and ignores many other important aspects of education (Consiglio, 2009). Studies have shown that when tests are less controlling, students tend to conceptualize the information better than when they are told there are consequences and thus resort to short term memory (National Research Council, 2011). When teachers know there is high accountability based on the few areas that can be measured on the test, the focus shifts to those areas at the expense of everything else (National Research Council, 2011). As the standards have been implemented, math, reading, and ELA always go first —typically years ahead of science and social studies. In many schools, students are pulled from connections classes or pulled out of science and social studies classes to get extra help in math, ELA, and reading. Growth in areas such as creativity, curiosity, persistence, values, socialization, and collaboration, as well as growth in advanced level of performance in areas such as reading and mathematics cannot be tested on a standardized test and therefore are ignored in assessing students and schools (National Research Council, 2011). Schools are responsible for educating students in a number of ways that the public and community rely on. This includes emotional and physical development, fostering cognitive skills, civic preparation, and readiness for work, health, and safety (National Research Council, 2011). However, none of these areas are assessed on high stakes tests and are often ignored in the curriculum as a result.

Research on school effectiveness conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom suggests that schools account for a small proportion of variation in terms of academic outcomes with the biggest outcome that affects it being the students' own background characteristics (National Research Council, 2011; Smith, 2005). When breaking down data from high stakes testing and adding the influence of background, such as race and socio-economic class, into the calculations, Smith (2005) discovered that many schools that were labeled successful are in fact

under-performing based on their students' backgrounds, whereas others labeled as failing are significantly out-performing based on their backgrounds. One of the commonly held assumptions that influence this statement is that middle-class students perform higher than lower-class minority students. Additionally, it is believed that the emphasis on annual testing and the elaboration of standards that comes from *NCLB* is not enough to effect real academic improvement without a focus on curriculum reform, teaching methods, and teacher preparation (Consiglio, 2009). Some stakeholders believe that other educational issues such as lack of funding, behavior issues and classroom management, and class size should be given more urgent status when it comes to increasing achievement (Azzam, Perkins-Gough, & Thiers, 2009; National Research Council, 2011). Distortions will clearly become an issue when the true value of the productivity of the school and the student are overlooked (National Research Council, 2011).

Another flaw in *No Child Left Behind* is that states are required to meet 100% proficiency for all students by the year 2014, a highly unlikely development considering how few schools are at that level today--which will virtually lead to all schools not making Adequate Yearly Progress (Azzam, Perkins-Gough, & Thiers, 2006; Ravitch, 2010; Smith, 2005). One concern that Smith cites in regards to reaching 100% proficiency is subgroups. The concern focuses on the educational experiences of students who are in various areas of the United States—particularly in America's largest cities (Smith, 2005). There are large pockets of poor and isolated groups all over the United States, and unfortunately these groups are not distributed evenly (Smith, 2005). There are major implications for *NCLB* and how this influences these schools. Diverse schools with large numbers of students with limited English proficiency are often being unfairly penalized. Only 33% of white students attend schools in the United States with African

American and Hispanic subgroups compared to 92% of African Americans and 91% of Hispanics who attend schools with the same subgroups (Kane & Staiger, 2003). The disparity in how African American students perform on standardized tests versus European American students has been well documented in the United States (Smith, 2005). Clearly, this disproportionate disbursement causes some schools to face increasingly harsher sanctions based on the demographics of the students they serve.

Trying to evaluate teacher effectiveness year to year poses another potential problem as students in teachers' classrooms change and could bring major challenges, such as achievement gaps, behavior issues, language learners, learning disabilities, or even problems within the home environment, with them (National Research Council, 2011). Schools are complicated places with many people working together for common goals affecting each other and interacting in ways that cannot be fully evaluated or understood just by looking at test scores (National Research Council, 2011). In order to try to protect themselves, states have lowered the bar for proficiency allowing more students to meet the requirement while not actually improving student achievement (McDermott & Jensen, 2005). State achievement test scores are increasing, and although some attribute this to new AYP requirements, others point to the states changing their policy requirements for what is classified as proficient (Azzam, Perkins-Gough, & Thiers, 2009). When National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test results are compared by states, student performance varies widely across state lines with no real improvement on this test (Azzam, Perkins-Gough, & Thiers, 2009; McDermott & Jensen, 2005; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Ravitch, 2010). Clearly, fundamental changes are still needed in order for *No Child Left Behind* to be effective and serve its purpose of bringing equality to education by raising the standards for all students.

Race to the Top

Race to the Top was created by the Obama administration in an effort to overhaul the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Klein, 2010). Race to the Top is a competition between states that provides grants ranging from $20 million to $70 million each to states that can make strides in four education redesign areas (Klein, 2010). Klein asserts that the focus areas for states include improving teacher effectiveness, ensuring rigorous collection and use of student and classroom level data, turning around low-performing schools, and increasing academic standards and student achievement (2010). Race to the Top has recognized the importance of effective principals increasing teaching and learning in schools ("School Principal as Leader", 2013). Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, has indicated that these assurances that states are making to qualify for Race to the Top are going to be the basis for the United States Department of Education's plan for the reauthorization of ESEA (Klein, 2010). Race to the Top comprises a variety of policy areas including the types of interventions used by states and districts in the lowest performing schools to how they decide which teachers to promote, which to retain and which to let go. Secretary Duncan wants to use the Race to the Top program to measure the quality of state's proposals as well as the extent that they follow them to determine what the right approach is to increase achievement (Klein, 2010). In addition, states will receive further funds for participating in the Common Core Standards initiative. Race to the Top could have a lasting impact on how student progress is measured under ESEA, which is believed to be replacing *No Child Left Behind*.

High Stakes Testing

Of course, testing of all sorts is certainly not a new concept in United States education. Educators have used various forms of formative and summative assessments throughout the years to gauge student performance, including high stakes tests such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), Stanford Achievement Series (SAT), American College Testing (ACT), and the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). For the past century, the use of standardized testing to measure achievement and aptitude has increased in the United States (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). Most people have faith that these tests are valid and reliable for the most part and that these tests have been successful in assessing student achievement. However, for most students and their families, these achievement tests simply provided *information* about the student but were not linked to consequences (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). For example, these types of assessments have not historically prevented students from obtaining a college degree but determined to some extent which college they may attend.

As previously mentioned, high stakes testing can be traced back to the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965 in response to the government's call for more attention to American schools, the quality of these schools, and the needs of disadvantaged students (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). Test based accountability continues to dominate educational policy as many see this as the solution to American schools' struggles to perform at an international level (National Research Council, 2011). It is important to note that while test based incentives may be effective for some teachers and make them stronger teachers with a more in-depth curriculum, it could have the opposite effect on other teachers by encouraging them to teach to the test without the depth or creativity their students need (National Research Council, 2011).

There are many problems with creating accountability systems based on high stakes tests. Research has shown that better standardized test scores are more likely to indicate shallow learning rather than deep understanding (Consiglio, 2009). This could signify that an increase in scores is actually cause for alarm. Furthermore, tests that are linked to these kinds of incentives and consequences clearly do not measure the performance in untested areas—this includes various academic subjects such as history as well as student characteristics such as curiosity and persistence. Because high stakes testing has a limited number of questions and question types (multiple choice), some material in the curriculum will inevitably be left out of such assessments. Schools feel that time should be spent on the content that weighs the most on the test and can be assessed in a multiple-choice fashion. As teachers become aware of how tests are written and what information test writers include, many teachers will move towards focusing on that material at the expense of other important information because of the consequences at stake (Newmann & Associates, 1996). In order for a test to provide good information about a student's learning, it must provide breadth and depth on the test, ask questions in a variety of ways, and have results that can be generalized (National Research Council, 2011).

In addition to the types of questions, the way the indicators are used and scored makes a difference in how a test is viewed (National Research Council, 2011). For example, some tests use the mean score. This measure includes all scores--meaning that extremely low and extremely high scores have an impact on the mean score for a school. For teachers in a high stakes environment, this provides equal focus on all students because of the benefit of increasing every student's score. Other tests use minimum performance levels. On a minimum performance level test, only those scores below the minimum become the central focus. Students who are right below the minimum line, often referred to as "bubble students," have to be moved upward

towards proficiency. For teachers, the focus on "bubble students" becomes standard practice at the expense of those already achieving proficiency or those considered too low for improvement (Newmann & Associates, 1996). The CRCT in Georgia is a test that uses minimum performance levels. In a recent story in the *Los Angeles Times,* it was discussed that "bubble kids" became the focus and received all of the school's resources and attention (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). Students who were performing less well and students who were performing extremely well received no additional resources because their scores seemed certain. In a local school district in Georgia, teachers were instructed to pick the one hundred students to invite to Saturday School and were given criteria that included a bubble score (standardized test scores that were within 20 points of passing) and not a score that was "unrecoverable." It is imperative that the indicators being used actually match the goals of the test-based incentive policy in order for schools to maximize the benefit. Neither of these situations actually compares a student's score from one year to the next to measure improvement and growth.

When high stakes tests are attached to incentives or consequences, the focus on test preparation becomes significant in classrooms. The focus on test preparation often distorts the scores with inflation due to this focus rather than true learning (National Research Council, 2011). The National Research Council indicates that one reason that teachers oppose the focus on testing is because of the various backgrounds (race, class, etc) that students come from and how that impacts their performance (2011). Teachers feel like more time should be spent teaching students skills and knowledge that is more practical to who they are and where they come from. Although schools can provide interventions such as tutoring, study time at school, and free meals, this typically cannot compensate for the home environment of the students. One study indicated that linking test scores to incentives actually decreased teachers' and students'

internal motivation (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999). Some experimental studies (Grolnick & Ryan, 1987; Ryan & Brown, 2005) with students have shown that when students know that there are high stakes consequences attached to tests, students demonstrate short-term, rote memory of information with a much lower level of conceptual learning. This may be a primary problem in why students who demonstrated proficiency on the test struggle in the next grade level and why material does not seem to ever be mastered. This may also speak to a deeper problem of students memorizing for a test without ever achieving mastery of the content. High stakes tests clearly do not produce the desired outcomes if they are only leading to short-term memory rather than true learning. Some evidence even suggests that high stakes tests such as the high school exit exam actually decrease the graduation rate without increasing achievement (National Research Council, 2011). Education's professional standards stress the importance of not using one test, such as the CRCT, to make important decisions regarding a student as other relevant information, such as class performance and portfolios, should be taken into account (American Educational Research Association, 1999). As the consequences for testing have become increasingly harsh, educators and other stakeholders continue to advocate for multiple measures of assessment in order to determine whether the student is proficient. As of yet, policy makers have not determined how to use test-based incentives to generate positive effects on education and achievement (National Research Council, 2011).

Unfortunately, because of this high stakes testing accountability that impacts students, teachers, principals, schools, and states, cheating has become commonplace. Atlanta Public Schools has been in the national headlines as 35 educators are being indicted on racketeering charges because of the cheating scandals associated with standardized testing (Winerip, 2013). The New York Times article (Winerip, 2013) also points leadership failure because

environments were set up for cheating. In Sharon Nichols and David Berliner's book, *Collateral Damage*, the authors examine how high stakes testing has warped the public's view of education. Comparing productivity of teachers with manufacturing productivity negates the fact that when inputs cannot be controlled, it is difficult to control the outputs (2007). It seems unreasonable to ask educators to control something that they actually have so little control of, yet with the high stakes testing consequences, that is precisely what happens. Nichols and Berliner believe that high stakes testing has become a norm because for advantaged people it is a way to use educational policy to preserve social status.

Donald Campbell, a well-known social psychologist, evaluator, methodologist, and philosopher of science created what Nichols and Berliner refer to as Campbell's Law (2007). Campbell's Law warns of the inescapable problems that come from placing too much emphasis on a single indicator when trying to understand a complex phenomenon. Student achievement is a complex phenomena that cannot be measured in a single high stakes test. Campbell's Law indicates that you can have high stakes and low validity or low stakes and high validity, but it is quite unlikely that you can have both high stakes and high validity because of how they will impact each other. The higher the stakes get, the less valid the assessment because of the tendency to falsify results in order to get the results needed. I believe this law plays itself out continually as schools continue to find themselves in trouble for different types of cheating.

Arguably, cheating has become common place because when there is an exaggerated emphasis on a single indicator that places educators' jobs or students' futures at risk, people are tempted (Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Winerip, 2013). Many feel it can be justified because of the circumstances surrounding the cheating scandal. By using test scores to measure a teacher's performance, principals are placed in the position of having to choose to fire teachers or do the

"right" thing (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). Educators feel enormous pressure to ensure that their students perform to a certain standard each year. School systems are often in the headlines for cheating scandals impacting their system. Atlanta Public Schools in Georgia has been in the spotlight since 2010 because of their cheating scandals on the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), which determines AYP status for their schools. Individual schools and school districts are not the only ones to cheat when it comes to high stakes testing—states cheat too. States manipulate data in order to show that their students are making significant gains and that schools are safe and orderly (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). Ravitch (2010) argues that it would be more valuable to give the test at the beginning of the year and the end of the year to determine a school's effectiveness. When teachers and administrators feel as if a test is informational and diagnostic, they will not feel pressured to alter the results of the test, but will embrace them as informative (Ravitch, 2010).

Equity

Equity is a term that is often used by educational policy makers, particularly those associated with *No Child Left Behind*. The underlying belief is that if we are going to help disadvantaged students succeed, we must first close the achievement gap by having high stakes testing and accountability. For these purposes, disadvantaged students are often considered to be those identified as minority students coming from low socio-economic backgrounds. Unfortunately, high stakes testing creates conditions where these same students are often denied access to a productive life (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). One of the ways this unfortunate outcome occurs is by excluding students from the test. Although AYP requires a certain percentage of students take the assessment, if students are withdrawn prior to the test, then they are no longer the responsibility of the school. Nichols and Berliner (2007) give several examples of schools

that withdrew students for "lack of interest" prior to a high stakes test in order to protect themselves from the consequences of *No Child Left Behind*. Another way schools exclude students from the test is through discipline infractions. Students who are considered more of a risk versus a student who will do well are not given the same consequences.

Students with disabilities pose additional problems to those who support high stakes testing for equality issues. Tests often cause students with disabilities to be further isolated as the test does not provide them with equal opportunity to demonstrate their mastery of content. Some students have serious cognitive disabilities, but because of rules on how many students can participate in the Georgia Alternative Assessment (GAA) versus the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), they are forced to take a test that is not written for them. Students with disabilities are often those who suffer the most by the rules of proficiency in a limited time frame. Nichols and Berliner cite countless examples of students who suffered at the hands of these tests that provide for few exceptions. For example, an eleventh-grader with dyslexia who failed the math portion of his graduation test twice and had to move to another state to attend high school there and try again; a student with cerebral palsy who is mute and blind that has worked his whole life to graduate on time and was unable to pass the exit exam; a student who worked hard to earn A's and B's in special education only to fail the exit exam four times and give up on his goal of college—these are all ramifications of high stakes testing (Nichols & Berliner, 2007).

No Child Left Behind currently only makes provisions for schools to allow 1% of their population with severe disabilities to opt out of high stakes testing (Department of Education, 2002). Many schools who are already struggling have populations greater than 1% of special needs students which further amplifies the problems that these schools face. English Language

Learners are another group of students who typically suffer at the hands of high stakes testing. Students identified as Limited English Proficiency (LEP) receive special Title III funds to go towards programs with two goals—English skills and subject- area content domains, which focus on math and science (Department of Education, 2002). How states choose to address these needs is unique and varies greatly across the country, however, all states feel the pressure to have these students demonstrate English proficiency quickly. This pressure often causes students to feel marginalized and creates a climate that is insensitive to their different cultural backgrounds (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). Because of these pressures, many of the LEP students are forced to take a test in English before they are ready. High stakes testing can make education cruel to some LEP students who work so hard and miss the cut off by a few points. It appears that a huge problem that stems from high stakes testing is the negative impact on students with special needs, LEP students, poor students, immigrant students, and minority students who are likely to hurt a school's AYP status and not help it. Policy decisions seem to have been made by elected officials who did not understand the limitations of high stakes testing or the devastating impact it could have on students and educators.

There are validity issues that affect high stakes testing as well. Construct validity deals with whether a test measures what it is supposed to measure (Ravitch, 2010). Abstract qualities cannot possibly be measured on certain types of tests—particularly high stakes testing which means they can never be accounted for or measured. It seems we can never truly see a person's intelligence, creativity, reading abilities or math abilities on a test. *No Child Left Behind* has required educators to invent tests so that we can infer things about a student's ability. Criterion validity refers to a test's ability to predict achievement now or in the future. Although some tests have proven to be valid in predicting things like a student's success in college, tests in grades 3-8

that *NCLB* has required do not have any precise known predictor (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). *Consequential validity* relies more on personal values than any other type of validity because with it we judge how test results get used—who gets hurt, who gets helped, is it worth it? This type of validity seems to be causing the most concern as more evidence emerges about the negative impacts of high stakes testing and how it is hurting students and educators.

I argue that there needs to be changes in high stakes testing. Dennis Van Roekel, President of the National Education Association, told Congress that *NCLB* needs to be reworked putting less emphasis on high stakes testing when it comes to accountability (Klein, 2009). Nichols and Berliner demonstrate throughout their book that there is sufficient evidence that proves that high-stakes testing does not work (2007). Cheating scandals (Winerip, 2013) because of high stakes testing further reiterates the need for changes. Testing that demoralizes students, shames educators, and closes schools cannot be a substitute for a solid curriculum and instruction (Ravitch, 2010). Changes must be made. Evidence clearly brings concern to how *NCLB* is being implemented and the impact that it is having on educators and students.

Impact on Teachers and Principals

Klein (2009) reported that some people believe that the extra money that comes from stimulus money leaves educators no excuses for implementing what they feel is necessary to ensure that all students succeed. Teaching and learning are changing as schools align to the academic standards set forth by the state and the high stakes testing that comes with them (Azzam, Perkins-Gough, & Thiers, 2006). School districts are becoming stricter about monitoring teachers' progress, reducing instruction time in some subjects to allow additional time in others, and providing additional services before and after school for students who are

struggling (Azzam, Perkins-Gough, & Thiers, 2006). Teacher qualifications have also been

impacted as additional coursework and degrees in their content area are now required to ensure

that teachers are highly qualified (Azzam, Perkins-Gough, & Thiers, 2006). Teachers are feeling

a great deal of pressure to ensure that all of their students are meeting standards no matter how

they start the year because their jobs depend on it. As previously stated, there are many factors

that impact a student's learning that a teacher and a principal have no control over (National

Research Council, 2011). According to the National Research Council, subjective measures have

the potential to provide a more comprehensive overview of a teacher's performance and their

overall contributions to their students and the school (2011). The difficulties with this come

when teachers feel that evaluations are arbitrary and they could lose their jobs because a

principal did not like them. Teachers have a wide variety of students in their classroom from year

to year; therefore their test scores could look dramatically different across a number of years

(National Research Council, 2011; Nichols & Berliner, 2007). This can be compounded for

teachers in low-performing schools as discipline issues and classroom management can consume

a teacher's day making it difficult to teach all of the standards when order has to be established

(National Research Council, 2011). Teacher morale is low as they feel that they are not valued as

professionals and policy makers do not understand what it is that they are trying to accomplish

on a daily basis (Ravitch, 2010; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; National Research Council, 2011;

"School Principal as Leader", 2013). Teachers' desperately need to preserve their own jobs,

protect their students, and protect their livelihoods—which, again, is leading to an unprecedented

number of cheating scandals throughout the nation (Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Ravitch, 2010;

Winerip, 2013). Presumably *No Child Left Behind* and high stakes testing did not intend for this

type of outcome.

Administrators are in a similar situation. Principals are often the face of the failing school. They try to set a tone and enforce policies that will benefit the school while still facing top down pressure from the school district and state to ensure that test scores increase and that their school makes AYP. For principals, they are often the first person replaced if a school continually fails to make AYP (Ravitch, 2010). *No Child Left Behind* has limited principals' instructional choices in how they feel their students need to be served by being forced to use a pre-determined fix (McDermott & Jensen, 2005). Principals can influence the entire dynamic of a school. They must interpret policies and ensure that those in their building not only understand it, but carry it out (Evans, 2009). In addition to interpreting it, principals implement policy and lead others to do the same, whether in whole or part (Evans, 2009). They determine how people, materials, and money will be used to work towards a particular incentive (Evans, 2009). Principals can influence teachers' work environment by providing them with autonomy and empowering them to make effective decisions for their students (Evans, 2009; Ravitch, 2010). Principals face such an inordinate amount of stress that there are many documented cases of principals killing themselves, cheating, quitting, and having physical manifestations of their stress (Nichols & Berliner, 2007).

Leadership

Educational leaders have many roles in schools. Principals of schools are recognized as the leaders of their schools. Under No Child Left Behind, the principal's role as leader has increased stakes. Instead of just leading the school, principals can now be held personally responsible for students who do not make standards. Principals in schools where this becomes a repeated issue are in danger of losing their jobs. Principals continue to be held accountable for student achievement even though research has shown they only have an indirect effect on student

achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Hallinger and Heck concluded that there was little

evidence of a direct effect of leadership on student learning, although there were some indirect

effects that research has not been able to measure (1998). The Wallace Foundation[2] (2013);

however, acknowledges that while most school variables have minor effect, when they work

together to reach critical mass it can be very effective. The principal's job is to create conditions

where this occurs on a regular basis ("School Principal as Leader", 2013). In light of the

pressures that principals now face, some research has been one to examine how high stakes

testing and accountability impact the principal. The literature that I examine looks at studies that

have been conducted since 2000. I limited my search to studies within the United States in order

to understand the impacts of No Child Left Behind. I looked for research studies that focused on

how principals dealt with the impact of high stakes testing, but did not limit the type of research

that was done. Many different types of studies were found and I examine the research designs

and methods, as well as look at the overall impact of the research on education and on my

interests in the field.

Under No Child Left Behind, all schools are subject to mandates for state testing that

have been quite controversial. The law represents major changes in the relationship between the

federal government and the state and local education agencies in regards to who is controlling

education (Sunderman, Orfield, & Kim, 2006). These changes are having profound implications

for what is happening in schools and classrooms every day. Principals feel a great deal of

pressure to ensure the success of their school. Unfortunately, principals in states that establish

high standards face more intense pressure than principals in states with lower standards who are

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[2] The Wallace Foundation is a national philanthropy that is based in New York City. The Foundation seeks to improve education and enrichment for disadvantaged children. The Foundation' tests innovative ideas for solving social problems and conducting research to find out what works and doesn't. They then work to fill the gaps in the knowledge and then communicate the results to others.

told they are doing a great job (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). Perhaps this is indicative to the issues of why there are objections to the use of high stakes testing to determine which principals should be fired and schools closed because there are so many misuses of testing.

Many of NCLB's provisions have important implications for principals because of the assumption that external accountability and sanctions will force schools to improve and motivate teachers to get better and thus increase student performance (Sunderman, Orfield, & Kim, 2006). Unfortunately, this law tends to place principals of low-achieving schools in the impossible position of trying to produce very large gains every year for every subgroup of students. This creates problems since statistically those kinds of increases are unlikely. Additionally, in order for teachers to be successful and help students increase achievement, principals have to find ways to help them believe that they are capable of meeting the difficult task of teaching students from poverty, minorities, and underperforming students (Evans, 2009). Principals face the task of determining how to use the data generated from standardized tests, and how to implement policies that are handed down by the district and state. Test based incentives for students and teachers become something principals have to deal with as they make every effort to help their schools be successful and meet the standards set forth (National Research Council, 2011). The new clause for "highly qualified" teachers makes the assumption that schools and principals were not trying hard enough to find the best teachers for their schools, particularly impoverished schools (Sunderman, Orfield, & Kim, 2006). The writers of NCLB seems to believe that if teachers and schools are labeled as failing and are required to make substantial improvements in student achievement, then the outcomes will be rapid and positive even though the resources are not there to assist in increasing achievement.

Additionally, there are no incentives for principals to choose to take on the challenges of high-poverty schools, but instead there are major risks associated with it as principals don't want to be faced with sanctions and the label of leaders of failing schools. When teachers were surveyed, they overwhelmingly believed that strong leadership was a key component of a school's success and ability to reform (Sunderman, Orfield, & Kim, 2006). It is up to principals to fight for the resources their schools need in order to help their schools, and get the community involved in helping ensure those changes take place.

The Principal's Work

When examining the accountability that falls on principal, it is important to understand what principals do on a daily basis. Principals' roles have changed over the years from a lead teacher to a disciplinarian to a manager of a school and now to instructional leader. As the formal leader of a school, the principal is the custodian of the system and the mission of the school as well as those individuals who are part of that school (Senge, 1990; "School Principal as Leader", 2013). Principals must be able to coordinate educational purposes, supervise personnel, manage their time across a wide variety of tasks, interpret public perceptions and community involvement, and evaluate impact of efforts toward meeting the needs of students (Eye, 2001; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Many school districts have adopted the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) as standards for principals, which give criteria for the responsibilities of principals. The principal has to look closely at the beliefs of the school, the system, and the community and ensure that the needs of the students are being met in the midst of all of that. The principal's role seems to be constantly changing with additional responsibility. In current restructuring initiatives as part of No Child Left Behind, the principal is

accountable to improve the teaching available to all students while also trying to change the responsibilities that teachers and leadership have (Kritek, 1993).

The principal is a key component of the school. According to studies on school effectiveness and student achievement, the quality of school leadership is a major indicator of school effectiveness (Norton, 2003; Leithwood, Lewis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; "School Principal as Leader", 2013). School leaders are the key to resolving the challenges that schools face today (Harris, 2003). Studies have pointed to how healthy school climate impacts higher student achievement and the positive or negative effect that the principal has on creating school climate (Newman & Associates, 1996; Winter & Sweeney, 1994). Brewer (1993) found that higher academic gains in schools occurred where principals held higher academic goals. Brewer also noted that principals had a major impact on teacher's and their goal setting in their classroom (1993). Many principals find themselves overwhelmed with meetings, paper work, discipline, and urgent daily demands that leave them with little time to focus on curriculum and instructional improvement (Goldberg, 2004).

Principals are constantly asked to do more with less-- resources are dwindling, paperwork is multiplying, facilities are in disrepair, public criticism and expectations are constant, demands of teachers and parents poses serious challenges, and the numbers of students with special needs is increasing (Davis, 1998). Principals have become one of the most visible and accountable people in the school. Principals who have left the profession have cited the mounting stress as their reason for leaving (Keller, 1998). Principals continue to find themselves in the hot seat as society demands the instant gratification of improved test scores from the latest reform movement (Copeland, 2001; Donaldson, 2002; Taylor & Williams, 2001).

Principals and Policy

Principals are compelled to follow the district, state, and federal policies that are set before them as part of their job security. Following these policies seem to lead to additional monitoring and redirection of funds in order to meet the sanctions that can take place when a school is identified as "needs improvement" or "failing". Principals are key parts of the school improvement process in this era of accountability as school face the challenge to improve or face the consequences. Principals must become policy mediators as they take federal, state, and district policies and interpret it for their schools and implement things with the teachers. It seems that ineffective leadership has been one of the critical components of schools that are labeled failing and ineffective.

Principals' roles are so vast and all inclusive. They are often thought of as the key to the success or failure of a school no matter what the student population looks like. Principals who are focused on school change are often looked at as strategic in their efforts to find resources—money, ideas, resources, and the encouragement of people-- for their schools (Finnigan, 2010). They must be strategic in order to get the resources they need in order to implement what the students need with fewer and fewer funds from the state and national level. Included in this strategy are intervention programs that many school districts identify as "research based." For the purposes of this study, the operating assumption of *research based* came from interviews with principals. I noticed that when principals referred to curricular programs as being "research-based" they interpreted that as an intervention with quantitative data indicating that student achievement improved on standardized tests--assuming the program was implemented with fidelity. Limiting a principal's range of instructional choice to ones that have been demonstrated to be effective seems like a good idea, but there are reasons to be concerned with this mandate

(McDermott & Jensen, 2005). Educators are supposed to be considered the experts in their field, and often their experience with programs and ideas provides more usefulness to their student population than the research. Principals and teachers should be consulted before district-wide mandates are implemented without consideration for the individual schools, student populations, schedules, and interventions already in place. These kinds of mandates seem to place undue stress on principals as they add something else that may or may not be effective. Educators know the stakes and are professionals—decisions should not be made without at least consulting those that really know what will work best in their classroom.

Principals are also faced with policies on how to meet the needs of diverse groups of students. Because so many schools that appear to be struggling to make AYP have very diverse student populations, policies are put into place in order to facilitate multi-cultural practices. Multicultural leadership believes that it is critical that principals start this work at the preschool level and continue throughout the school years in order to establish a school climate the supports diversity (Gardiner, Canfield-Davis, and Anderson, 2009). It is believed that this multi-cultural leadership will help improve the achievement gap of students of color in public schools in America. Perhaps initiatives like multi-cultural leadership should be provided alongside other training rather than in addition to so principals do not feel that it is one more policy that does not place trust and respect in the hands of the expert of the person hired to be responsible for the school.

Since the passage of NCLB, statewide accountability programs have expanded the use of standardized tests in order to evaluate student achievement. Many stakeholders involved in public schools have reported feelings of pressure to raise test scores and often complain that too much time is spent on tests and the tasks associated with taking those tests (Mulvenon, Stegman

& Ritter, 2005). Although large scale standardized testing has been part of the school system since the 1920s, the importance and weight of the test results has been brought to the forefront with federal funds linked to Title 1 and improvement in test scores (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). Schools are now required to do certain things (math support options, parent programs, technology programs, reading support options) with their money, even at the cost of other more beneficial things or risk losing. Rather than allowing schools the freedom to use federal fund to serve their students in the most impactful manner for that community, politicians are making decisions about education—despite their lack of understanding.

Principals and Teachers

Principals' roles in schools are varied, however, their work with teachers is extensive and often times the most influential in how principals impact students. According to some newspaper articles it seems the public believes that schools are not working hard enough, and with the proper motivation would be able to succeed by producing the test scores desired (Sainz, 2012; Strauss, 2012). However, under No Child Left Behind there is an assumption that negative sanctions will be enough incentive to motivate the staff of schools to focus their attention towards the desired outcomes of student achievement. In addition to that there is an assumption that the organizational context, including the leadership of principals, will facilitate schools meeting the goals set for by NCLB. The principal becomes a central component in a school's success or failure in making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as their leadership guides the direction of the school and the motivation of teachers. The principal's role is more indirect in the influence of students as they impact the school's climate, relationships, and resources (Finnigan, 2010). Additionally, principals shape teachers' beliefs as they plan staff development, motivate teachers, and align resources with the goals of the school (McDermott & Jensen, 2005; "School

Principal as Leader", 2013). There are numerous studies that have found the relationship between principal leadership and how long they are expected to remain at that school that show the important links between principal leadership behaviors in K-12 schools and teacher motivation (Finnigan, 2010; McDermott & Jensen, 2005, Mulvenon, Stegman & Ritter, 2005; "School Principal as Leader", 2013). Each study looks at various ways that principals lead schools—instructional leadership, support for change, teacher-principal trust, and inclusive leadership. Instructional leadership implies that the principal is involved in articulating a vision, monitoring performance, and setting high expectations (Finnigan, 2010). This also means that principals of effective schools must communicate high expectations for teachers, understand how students learn, and serve as a resource for instructional advice. The principal has to be the instructional leader of the school and be able to move fluently through each classroom and content level providing specific and appropriate support to the teachers (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; "School Principal as Leader", 2013). Trust is also a key component that influences motivation in schools as it is in most professions. Trust is considered part of respect, so in order for teachers to feel positive motivation to do their best, they must trust the principal (Finnigan, 2010). Inclusive leadership requires that control is spread out to everyone so that all employees feel personally invested in what is happening. Principals who use this type of leadership involve teachers, community members and parents in the decision making process to create a shared culture of decision making. Although this type of leadership can increase teacher motivation, principals in schools facing sanctions from No Child Left Behind seem to find this approach risky because of the high-stakes and accountability.

A quantitative analysis was done to examine Chicago Public Schools and the accountability in place there (Finnigan, 2010). In the early 1980s, Chicago Public Schools were

labeled the worst schools in the nation because of student poor performance. The Chicago

Schools Reform Act caused sweeping legislation providing Local School Councils the authority

to hire and fire principals, while principals gained the authority to select their staff and receive

new resources. Lowest performing schools were targeted in this time for change that required

improved based on norm-referenced tests like the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). The analysis

looked for links between teacher motivation and various factors such as the leadership of the

principal. One significant finding was that principals are less likely to exhibit the key leadership

behaviors that are associated the organizational change in schools that are failing.

Principals in schools identified as failing either are poor leaders or are limited in their

efforts because of federal, state, and district involvement because of the school's failing status.

Teachers who believed that their principals were providing strong leadership have higher

expectations and seem more willing to take risks and embrace the leadership. Teacher motivation

and morale strengthen in an environment where they feel trusted and valued and when they trust

that the leadership is equipped for the task of improving the school ("School Principal as

Leader", 2013). Failing schools require strong, effective leaders to bring about school

improvement.

Because of NCLB, principals tend to expect teachers to spend some time focusing on test

preparation to ensure that student's are ready for this high-stakes test. Principals often point out

specific students to teachers who did not pass the standard in math and/or reading to ensure that

they participated in additional instruction and tutoring activities while those who did pass

received enrichment (Gardiner, Canfield-Davis, and Anderson, 2009). Although this narrowed

the curriculum for students, it is believed to be necessary in order for students to meet the

standards so that schools were not in danger of state take-over for continually failing to meet

standards. Principals' professionalism and training in evaluating teachers was limited, because ultimately the measure of a school's success was going to be the high stakes test (Gardiner, Canfield-Davis, and Anderson, 2009).

Principals also acknowledged that it was important to improve teacher working conditions in order to retain teachers. Principals indicated that having staff appreciation awards, a hospitality committee, administrative support for classroom management issues, and collaborative planning time were keys to this task (Roellke & Rice 2008). This can be a complicated task for principals who are also facing the pressures of meeting standards and improving student achievement in the midst of accountability and sanctions. In one study (Roellke & Rice, 2008), principals at a school that had been identified as chronically low performing talked about the pressure and how it influenced his school's ability to retain high-quality teachers. Principals face the challenge, then, of trying to retain highly effective teachers in schools where the stakes are high and their professional training is not valued because of mandates to increase scores. Schools must take steps to assist teachers in promoting student achievement (e.g., literacy coaches and tutors in math and reading) as well as on site staff development, and the principals hope that by promoting teacher effectiveness, student achievement will increase (Roellke & Rice, 2008).

Principals' Experiences

In Gardiner, Canfield-Davis, and Anderson (2009), principals cited the stress of ensuring that their students had high performance because they were evaluated on students' performance with regard to learning outcomes which is the intent of NCLB. When principals were interviewed, they considered equity policies less important than raising test scores and math and

reading curriculum (Gardiner, Canfield-Davis, and Anderson, 2009). Although equity policies are important for long-term goals for students as they enter the workforce and become adults, the reality of passing the high stakes test and the problems schools face in math are becoming all-consuming. Educators seem to appreciate how NCLB has called attention to the achievement of all students, and the focus on students who had been traditionally underserved because of the lack of focus or even data to point it out prior to NCLB. Everyone was given a common language and responsibility in improving achievement for all students, not just principals and teachers. However, principals felt the punitive nature of NCLB and the threat of removing resources that are so desperately needed is an unfortunate side effect of this accountability law (Gardiner, Canfield-Davis, and Anderson, 2009). Some principals even admitted to counseling students to move into a more "appropriate" setting such as homeschooling or special programs schools in order to remove the impact these students had on the school's performance (Mulvenon, Stegman & Ritter, 2005). With the stakes so high under NCLB principals looked for strategies that would provide for the high impact (students who fell into more than one subgroup) students in order to reduce the negative effects of NCLB.

Although principals desire to embrace multi-cultural leadership, the primary challenge they seem to face is meeting the high stakes-testing requirements. Principals had difficulty connecting how multi-cultural leadership and multi-cultural education could help connect the students more to school and therefore improve their test scores (Gardiner, Canfield-Davis, and Anderson, 2009). Principals spent inordinate amounts of time and energy closing the achievement gap and resented the threats that NCLB made to them, their school, their teachers, and their students (Finnigan, 2010). Principals appear to be frustrated with the threat of state take-over when the state should be helping them from the beginning, not waiting three years and

then taking over. Principals felt that teachers needed to spend energy creating high expectations for all students in environments that were rich and multi-cultural, not segregated by test scores which in turn segregate by race (Gardiner, Canfield-Davis, and Anderson, 2009). This environment that desires so many things are done simultaneously while looking at test scores and improving those does not recognize that these varying policies sometimes contradict each other in exactly what work is done with students.

The "highly qualified teacher" provision in NCLB was meant to remedy the issues with teacher quality and ensure that poor and wealthy schools received teachers who were trained and prepared to teach (Department of Education, 2002). Although many programs are now available to ensure that teachers receive additional training, it is unclear how effective these trainings are in producing teachers that are indeed "highly qualified" (Finnigan, 2010). Teachers who are deemed highly qualified have to decide where they want to teach and what kinds of schools they want to work in. Many teachers get to consider wages, benefits, incentive payments, bonuses, school characteristics, and teacher support. Evidence suggests that many teachers in low performing schools choose to move to high performing schools at much higher rates than other teachers (Roellke & Rice, 2008). Teachers want to be valued for their expertise and experience and do not want to continually be belittled because of the performance of students, so they are choosing schools where students consistently perform. Schools are losing some of their strongest teachers because they are not being allowed to teach in the manner they know works well for students. With all these incentives available to teachers, it becomes a difficult job for principals to recruit and retain teachers in schools where making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is a challenge. Principals in one study (Roellke & Rice, 2008) felt that the teacher quality issues stemmed from the requirements of NCLB's "highly qualified" teacher requirements.

Interestingly, these same principals had varying views on the impact of the law. Principals seem to have a hard time defining "highly qualified" in terms of its essential meaning and how it aligns with state guidelines (Mulvenon, Stegman & Ritter, 2005). Principals tend to not be concerned with the overall supply of teachers, but do tend to be concerned with attracting the best candidates to their schools and work actively to recruit these teachers (Gardiner, Canfield-Davis, and Anderson, 2009). Principals have to create an environment where teachers want to come and stay and often times this requires creativity.

Gap in the Literature

The studies that I found demonstrated a clear gap in the literature. Although literature is available on principals and high stakes testing, it does not look specifically at principals' experiences. Principals' personal experiences as they are living in this high stakes testing and accountability environment are not considered from their perspectives. Although teachers' viewpoints are an essential part of what's happening, they are only one part of it, and cannot be the voice for the principal who is standing alone. Teachers provide the point of view from the classroom, often times without the full knowledge of district and state mandates that have most often been filtered—sometimes quite skillfully—for them by the principal. This creates a more skewed perspective by only understanding a limited point of view, which is why interviewing principals personally about those experiences adds a missing voice to the dialogue on high stakes testing and accountability. Additionally, most of the studies either used surveys to get large numbers of participants, or the media to find stories that clearly did not have a good ending. There is a lack of depth in really understanding from the principal how high stakes testing and accountability shape their experiences.

In my study, I have included principals of schools who are considered "at risk" or "failing" or "did not meet AYP." I interviewed them several times in order to ensure that I got a more robust picture of their experiences and allow them the opportunity to share their stories. Interviews allowed me the opportunity to get additional details and clarification from them without the limitations of surveys. Although this most certainly limited my sample size, I suggest that it provided rich data that could be useful in schools and districts that are similar to the ones my participants lead. Because schools that are not meeting the standard are such a concern, particularly in preparing students for high school and beyond, it was important that the principals who participated were in these sorts of schools, so that the data does not get intertwined with principals in schools who are easily meeting standards.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Post-Intentional Phenomenological Philosophy, Methodology, and Methods

In a broad sense, a phenomenon can be described as anything or part of the world as it is experienced by the subject (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008). When researching this way, the researcher is seeking to study participants' intentional relationship with the phenomenon (Vagle, 2010b). The lifeworld is phenomenologically understood as the world of one's immediate experience(s) as given and lived through, which are always, already there (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology takes up "the study of human experience and of the ways things present themselves to us in and through such experiences" (Sokolowski, 2000 p. 2). These experiences are the way we are able to catch those glimpses or fleeting moments of phenomena that need to be interrogated and troubled.

I employed Vagle's (2010a, 2010b, 2011b) *Post-Intentional Phenomenological Research Approach*, which leverages Heidegger's understanding of the manifestation of phenomena, a core philosophical tenet within phenomenology--intentionality, and a commitment to knowledge always and already being tentative, partial, and never complete. These moments where the phenomena manifests itself are never complete because those interested in the phenomena are constantly troubling them. The Post-Intentional Phenomenological research approach combines van Manen's (1990) six research activities for hermeneutic phenomenological research and Dahlberg's (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nyström, 2008) four research activities for descriptive phenomenological research. This process cannot be viewed as linear, sequential approach, but as a fluid one in which each activity is continually re-accessed and revisited throughout.

In phenomenological philosophy, intentionality is used to signify "the inseparable connectedness of the human being to the world" (van Manen, 1990, p. 181). Husserl (2002) described intentionality as the embodied experience that occurs as a conscious subject becomes conscious of an intended object. The experiencing subject or the experiencing object is not what is highlighted, rather the intentional relationship that is occurring between them. Intentionality "is the teaching that every act of consciousness we perform, every experience that we have, is intentional: it is essentially 'consciousness of' or an 'experience of' something" (Vagle, 2011b, p. 8). Van Manen (1990) echoed these sentiments when he noted *intentionality* describes that, "all human activity is always *oriented* activity, directed by that which orients it" (pp.181). Phenomenologists seek the phenomenological meanings of lived-experiences by studying the intentional relationships that are manifested within the lifeworld. In post-intentional phenomenology, "intentional meanings" are always contextualized and fleeting, allowing only glimpses and tentative understanding of any particular phenomenon of interest (Vagle, 2010a, 2010b), rather than essences or themes. In this way, a phenomenon can never be fully understood or resolved. Any understanding is contextually and historically situated (Gadamer, 2002), grounded in an orientation of openness so as not to make definite what is indefinite (Dahlberg, et al., 2008). Understanding, then, is always unfinished, and requires continual troubling and seeking, not passive and conclusive defining (Vagle, 2010a). Our immediate experiences, even as lived through experiences are only partial glimpses of understanding. We cannot stop with this understanding, but continue troubling it in order to understand it further. This orientation and approach of openness and active seeking, as opposed to conclusive defining, where phenomenology affords a critical and disruptive practice for the illumination of lived-experiences within the lifeworld (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nyström, 2008; Vagle, 2010a).

I followed Vagle's (2010) five-component process for conducting post-intentional phenomenological research (Vagle, 2010). The first component was to identify a phenomenon. It is important for the researcher to identify the phenomenon, although it may not be clearly identifiable until the study begins (Vagle, 2010b). In addition to clearly identifying the phenomenon, it is essential that the researcher bridle themselves throughout the process. The second component is to devise a process for collecting data appropriate for the phenomenon. The third component is to make a bridling plan. Bridling is an on-going aspect of post-intentional phenomenological research that requires that the researcher constantly reflects and interrogates her or his own understandings. Creating a bridling journal throughout the research process allows for the space to bridling understandings, biases, participants' experiences, and other important aspects of the research (Vagle, 2010b). I decided to do a combination of several things in order to bridle. I created a bridling journal where I would write throughout the process. I also had a spiral notebook that I would take notes in during interviews, so that I could bridle when I did not have access to a computer. Additionally, I planned to bridle after analyzing each interview and going through line-by line descriptions.

Component four is to read and write through the data in a systematic manner. Multiple readings of the data allow the researcher to focus on different things—getting attuned with the data, crafting follow up questions, examining the research in comparison to the bridling journal, and looking for tentative manifestations of the phenomenon as it appears in interesting ways (Vagle, 2010b). The final component of post-intentional phenomenological research is to craft a text that captures tentative manifestations of the phenomenon. Vagle (2010b) states that a "post-intentional text should move away from talk of essence and toward multiplicity, contexts, glimpses, and tentative senses" (p. 405). In post-intentional phenomenology, intentionally is read

as unstable, fleeting, malleable, and highly situated. Whereas in early phenomenology, the intentional relationship that always, already connects humans to and through the world meaningfully, seemed to be treated as more stable and accessible, those practicing post-intentional phenomenology assume that intentionality is much more slippery and messy (Pillow, 2003). Therefore, when crafting a "post-intentional text", the researcher should not feel bound to a particular way to describe or interpret "messy" phenomena. Instead, she or he should feel the freedom to use various forms to present their findings. I now provide a more complete description of the process that I used in to conduct my study.

Research component #1: Identifying a phenomenon in its multiple, partial, and varied contexts

Within this component I posed the *statement of the problem* by situating my study into the larger discourse in the literature within my discipline. I wanted to discover why the phenomenon, the lived experiences of principals in the high stakes testing and accountability era, is important and should be continually troubled. In later sections, I will outline this process further.

The phenomenon that interested me was the lived-experiences of principals in middle schools under the No Child Left Behind laws, high stakes testing, and high accountability. The primary phenomenological research question was: What is it to find oneself as a middle school principal in the high accountability, high stakes testing era of education today, and in particular what is it like to lead a school that is labeled "failing" or "needs improvement"?

Secondary research questions:

- How do the requirements of NCLB and criticisms influence principals as they make decisions that impact the daily life of a school as well as its long term standing?

- How do they navigate being a principal in the high stakes environment?

In short, I set out to open up glimpses of these principals' experiences under these regulations. By listening to the moments that principals chose to share, I hoped to gain some insight into their daily lives.

Philosophical Claim

Phenomenology is, first and foremost, a philosophy (Moran, 2002; Sokolowski, 2000). It is grounded in and informed by core tenets as it addresses more metaphysical assertions and questions (Christian, 2003). In addition to being a philosophy, phenomenology is a methodology for researching lived-experiences and provides guidance for how to organize that research (Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 2003; van Manen, 1990). As a critical approach to illuminating our lived, intentional experiences, phenomenology is disruptive in examining the world around us and how a phenomenon manifests itself to us (Heidegger, 1998; Vagle, 2010). The goal is to look openly[3] at the phenomenon to allow an individual's experiences and their expression of those experiences to provide the context and insight to inform understanding (Dahlberg et al., 2008; Husserl, 1970; Pillow, 2003; Vagle, 2010). This understanding is never finalized, but rather is continually interrogated. Continually interogating allows for understanding to grow and change as the context, experiences, and moments change.

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[3] The only way to look openly is to bridle throughout the process. It allows us to look at the phenomena, bridle our experiences and assumptions, and openly allow the experience to inform insight.

For this study, I attempted to illuminate the lived experiences of principals of Georgia middle schools in the high stakes, high accountability era. Using the concept of intentionality (van Manen, 1990), I sought to clarify the connectedness of principals with their world in schools today. Rather than highlighting the subject or the object, I examined the intentional connection that occurs between them (Husserl, 2002). In addition to the philosophical notion of intentionality, Husserl contented that when we experience the world, we normally experience it through something he called the "natural attitude." For Husserl, the natural attitude is what we normally operate in and what we typically find the most comfortable. This pre-reflexive, original, and "accepted as given" state is what Sokolowski (2000) described as the "default perspective" of being and knowing. For Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nyström (2008) the natural attitude is defined as "the everyday immersion in one's existence and experience in which we take for granted that the world is as we perceive it, and that others experience the world as we do" (p. 33). In the natural attitude, then, we often do not critically confront, challenge, or disrupt our thoughts, actions, reactions, or responses to the world. This is how we live and how we are. This is how we find ourselves "in" the world. Intentionality and our intentional relationship with things, situations, ideas, feelings, concepts, facts, and objects of the world embody our lived experiences within the lifeworld via the natural attitude.

Principals often find themselves operating in the natural attitude. As they lead their schools they are dealing with the daily issues and policies and are typically responding to requirements. Often, they are operating in a non-reflexive way. Several of the participants even discussed the inability to stop and reflect because so much was coming at them constantly. Principals often discussed how they were making decisions based on policy without ever taking the time to reflect on why the policy required certain things or if there was a better way to

approach learning for students. Another example of the natural attitude occurs as principals discuss how policies are mandated by the district and they have to find a way to implement it within their schools. Interestingly, none of the participants mentioned reflecting on those requirements to ensure they were the best fit for their school, but rather only focused on how to make it happen.

In contrast to the natural attitude, is what phenomenologists refer to as the phenomenological attitude. Within phenomenology the attempts at adopting the phenomenological attitude are purposeful, denoting a 'shift' in perspective (Sokolowski, 2000). Everything is accessible; nothing is established, incontrovertible, and definite, except one's lived-experiences and the intentional relationships within the lifeworld. We attempt to understand a phenomenon as it is lived and experienced by others, and reveal its 'glimpses' as tentative and fleeting manifestations; instead of accepting the experienced phenomenon as given (Vagle, 2010a, 2010b). These moments can create more intricacy, and illuminate understanding of the phenomenon and the lifeworld, offering a richer, deeper, more nuanced appreciation of lived-experiences.

Taking time to reflect and attempt to understand a phenomenon can be most difficult. For principals who spend most of their time in the natural attitude, it seems almost impossible. However, Eli mentions his time of reflection that occurred over the course of the interviews and the realization that this reflective practice is imperative in leadership. He notes that without it decisions are made without reflection to really see the more intricate details. In addition, I found myself moving into the phenomenological attitude. I had to spend time really focusing on these fleeting manifestations in order to catch glimpses of the phenomenon without bringing my own biases with me. I had to interrogate every situation and not just accept that a situation was as

given. I had to constantly bridle my own biases. Each situation had to be interrogated so that I did not assume understanding based on my own subjectivities or initial thoughts, but rather continued to ask questions and examine further. This movement in the phenomenological attitude is not without challenges, but it does provide reflection and a deeper appreciation of the lived-experiences at hand.

Statement of the Phenomenon

The phenomenon that I studied was the lived experiences of principals in Georgia middle schools during the era of No Child Left Behind, high stakes testing, and accountability. Specifically, this study addressed the following phenomenological question, "What does it mean to find oneself as the principal of a Georgia middle school under No Child Left Behind, high stakes testing, and accountability?"

Contexts

The contexts, where and how my phenomenon of interest manifested itself within the life-world, were considered as I set up my study. In my pilot study, I worked with teachers and principals. I interviewed my participants and had them discuss their thoughts on and perceptions of No Child Left Behind and how it impacted them personally. From this I determined that I needed to focus on interviewing principals and allowing them to discuss their experiences. Teachers often referenced the principal's job and role in the school, but their understandings of what exactly the principal did and was responsible for often varied. Principals had different experiences from teachers and yet their own experiences seemed to be strangely absent in the literature. In addition, examining documents further enhanced my knowledge of this experience and open the doors to additional experiences. Documents such as No Child Left Behind

legislature, AYP requirements, Title 1 requirements, and documents principals felt were

important to share provided additional context to further illuminate the lived experiences of

principals in this high stakes accountability era.

Participant Selection

Initially I had intended to have one participant in my study. I was going to formally

interview that participant three times for 60-90 minutes and observe them weekly for 90-120

minutes for 8 weeks. During that time we would also have had informal conversations that would

also be recorded. I planned for the principal to provide me with documents that they felt would

help me to further understand their experiences as well. My desire was to be deeply immersed in

the experiences with the principal in the study. However, due to difficulty getting permission

from the school districts for those observations, I had to re-imagine my data collection. I felt an

increase in the number of participants and interviews would allow me to still have a rich picture

of the experiences of principals and would provide me with multiple contexts to examine.

In the end, then, I selected participants based on purposive sampling criteria: participants

were principals or assistant principals of Georgia middle schools, who were able and willing to

clearly articulate their experience of this phenomenon, and led a school that had been identified

as needs improvement. As I just mentioned, I originally planned to have one principal with

whom I would spent extensive time interviewing, observing, and have informal dialogues with.

Unfortunately, I was not able to obtain permission from the school districts. Perhaps this is

indicative of the pressure and stress that schools and districts feel to always be performing at

their optimum with no room for errors. This seemed to be indicative of the larger issue at play. I

changed course and increased the number of participants and the number of interviews, but

removed the observation component. Interest from participants occurred from formal requests to principals that I have connections with from teaching as well as from networking with other colleagues. I asked participants to participate in four 60-90 minute interview sessions and examine documents that reflect decisions and actions that may be connected to No Child Left Behind. The locations of the interviews were agreed upon by me and the participants, but the location also needed to ensure confidentiality. I ended up with four participants who were current or recently retired principals who had all served as principal of a Georgia Middle School that had been identified as needs improvement. All four of the interviews per participant took place in an eight-week period, allowing for approximately a week between each interview for reflection and transcription.

At the outset I was frustrated with the idea of having to increase the number of participants because I was concerned that I was not going to be able to get the rich data I was after. However, Dr. Mark Vagle encouraged me to increase the number to 3-4 and spend more time with them in interviews and follow-up. I decided to have four participants and increase to four interviews in order to keep the data pool larger with more opportunities to still capture important glimpses of the phenomenon. Having four participants actually provided me with more data than I could have anticipated and allowed me the opportunity to see the commonalities in the experiences despite the other differences that these principals held. There were 2 men and 2 women who participated in the study. All were Caucasian with ages ranging from 34-65. I was more focused on finding participants who were experienced with the phenomenon of being a principal in a Georgia middle school under the high stakes accountability era, so I did not attempt to have a wide range of racial backgrounds. The participants had varying years of experience as principal ranging from less than 2 years to 30 years experience. All of the middle

schools had been identified as needs improvement during the tenure of the principal, although one of the middle schools met AYP under the principal's leadership and maintained that status for several years. Each of the schools was identified as Title 1 with high (greater than 50%) numbers of minority, poor, and special education students. Initially I was hesitant to have this wide range of age and experience in my participants, but I found it added a rich component that I had not anticipated—common threads and notable distinctions.

I carefully crafted interview questions (Appendix D) to guide my participants through four 60-90 minute interviews. After the first interview I realized that my questions seem to strike a chord with the participants. The first interview with the first participant lasted 128 minutes. I initially thought this could be an anomaly, but after the first interview with the second participant (136 minutes) I realized that this was going to be the norm. I considered breaking the interviews up more and spreading out the questions, but as I listened to the interviews and reflected on them, I realized that the participants were sharing their stories without prompting from me. I did provide the participants with cues when they were getting close to the 60 and 90 minute marks, but they all willingly continued past those times. Although I guided them initially with the first question, they were answering my questions without prodding as they willingly shared their stories with me. They talked like it was the first time they had been given permission to discuss an issue that had held them captive and alone. I stayed with four interviews per participant, but allowed more time for them to continue to share their experiences without interruption. Because each interview had been constructed in a way to focus on specific aspects of leadership[4], I decided to keep the sessions intact and allow more time as necessary. On average, an individual

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[4] The first interview was the initial interview where I asked questions about their experiences with NCLB and accountability. The second interview focused on teachers, the third interview on students, and the final interview on curriculum.

interview lasted 131 minutes. Although this was much longer than I had anticipated, I decided this move was necessary as it allowed the participants to share and was initiated by the participants themselves.

Because the interviews took longer than I had anticipated, I decided to adjust how I used document analysis. I asked participants to provide me with any documents they thought would further my understanding, but if they did not provide anything, I did not follow up with them. Only one participant provided a document and it was an article he had written about how to better prepare future principals for the era they are entering. I decided that since nothing else was mentioned or provided, I would instead find publicly available documents that would further my understanding of some of the things the principals talked about. For example, several principals mentioned the minor distinction between a Title 1 School with Distinction and a failing school. Because I was unsure what that actual distinction was, I used the Department of Education's webpage to find the appropriate documents to distinguish between them.

Research component #2: Devise a clear, yet flexible process for collecting data appropriate for the phenomenon under investigation

Selected Data Sources

Vagle (2010) argues that although methodological decisions need to be made by the researcher at the onset of the study, the researcher should also remain open to thinking 'broadly and creatively' about what data is appropriate for the study and understanding of the phenomenon. Because of this openness in post-intentional phenomenological research, methodologies that traditionally belong in other fields can be used in data collection if they are the most appropriate for studying a phenomenon (Vagle, 2010b). In post-intentional

phenomenology, as in all research, it is important to be clear about the data that is being collected and how long it will take to collect it. That said, just as in qualitative research writ large, adjustments often are made along the way in post-intentional phenomenology as well. So it is important to plan to collect more data than is probably necessary to ensure that enough is collected. This also allowed me to practice, take time, and make changes as the phenomenon dictated. In order to accomplish this, I allowed for additional interviews.

I felt there were a number of ways that data could be collected in order to understand principals' experiences in this high stakes testing/accountability era. Most studies that have focused on principals have included surveys, and although surveys cover a large number of participants, they are often not able to capture the personal nature of experience. With this in mind, I decided to use interviews in order to more fully understand the principals' experiences. Interview questions were designed so that I could learn about the participants' lived experiences instead of receiving closed answers (See Appendix D). These questions guided each interview session, but there were times when not every question was asked. Through the stories and experiences that each of the participants shared, they often answered questions without being asked. In addition, each interview had questions added that served as follow-up questions from the previous interview. By the fourth interview I also asked principals to share advice for those interested in becoming a school administrator. This proved to be an important question for the participants as each of them took a significant amount of time to think about and share sincere advice. Secondary research questions help to focus the data collection towards the initial post-intentional phenomenological research question (Vagle, 2010b). Follow-up interviews were necessary to ensure understanding and ask additional questions based on the findings. Because there were four interviews, I was able to follow up in the following interview. After the fourth

interview, I emailed participants about anything I needed to follow up on to ensure my understandings. I found that the phenomenon was not clear until the interviews had begun, so it was important to have multiple interviews scheduled for gathering this data. I anticipated that the lived experiences of principals of Georgia middle schools, particularly schools identified as "needs improvement" would generate a surplus of data and potentially a more focused phenomenon to study. I was delighted and overwhelmed that the lived experiences shared with me provided me with such rich data on the phenomenon. Because of this, additional interview questions had to be designed with each participant in order to further explore and understand the phenomenon as it developed. I was grateful that I had conducted a pilot study that helped facilitate the process of designing interview questions and participant selection. I did a small pilot in the summer of 2011 that examined the lived experiences of teachers and principals in the high stakes testing and high accountability era. From that I learned that the participants that could best illuminate the experiences of a principal during this era were principals themselves. I desired more clarity on the phenomenon of the experience of being a Georgia middle school principal in the high accountability, high stakes testing era of education that is happening today.

As previously mentioned, document analysis was another data collection method I used in this study. Understanding what it is like to be a principal in this high stakes education environment can be challenging and documents were very useful in clarifying my understanding of salient points they emphasized. One of those documents provided by a principal was an article he/she had written on their experiences. Another document I obtained was a district level document of non-negotiable practices that the district embraced from the district's website. I was also directed to district websites by the principals to examine other documents that were considered policy. I spent approximately 12 hours reviewing the documents on the various

district website. In addition, I used documents on the Department of Education's website—particularly the documents on the NCLB waiver. These documents were important for me to clarify things that participants said in interviews. For example, I had to seek further clarification on the requirements of being a Title 1 school, being a Title 1 School of Distinction, being a Needs Improvement School (Georgia Department of Education, 2012b), and what specifically the waivers meant for Georgia schools this year.

I combined each of these data collection methods, interviews and document analysis, in order to study the experiences of a principal in a high accountability, high stakes environment. Document analysis often times did not take place in the school. Although I initially planned on having to analyze potentially sensitive documents in the school, most of the documents I examined were obtained from public forums such as school district websites and the Department of Education website. I pulled documents that were necessary to further my understanding of what the participants were referencing and analyzed those as well as documents that provided further understanding of policies. I typically used the documents each time I completed an interview. Often there were things mentioned in the interview about the principal's experiences, requirements, or a policy and I would go through the documents that accompanied those things that were publically available to provide myself additional insight. On several occasions, follow up questions were created from the document analysis.

In all cases, the identities of individuals not specifically in my study were protected (i.e. teachers, students, and other administrators). The time and location of interviews were scheduled with the participants based on their preferences due to their work schedules. I told all the participants that I was willing to meet them wherever they felt most comfortable and we met at coffee houses, volunteer centers, schools, regional educational offices, and restaurants. Although

I anticipated that participants may not want to conduct the interviews in their school, I found that in some cases the convenience of the location permitted them to spend additional time talking with me.

Research Component #3: Make a bridling plan

A bridling plan is important in a post-intentional phenomenological study. I recognize that I came into this study with opinions, some very strong, about No Child Left Behind as well as ideas about the influence on the education of students. In order to keep my biases from impairing my view point and compromising (too much) my openness, I needed to bridle myself constantly. The following excerpt is from my bridling journal[5]. I have included it here because I spent some time really wondering about my participants' willingness to talk to me. I had felt that it would be an issue, and it was not. This journal provides glimpses into my own biases as they were being bridled as well as me dealing with something unexpected in my research.

> Bridling Journal 1/24/13
>
> It has been interesting to me that people have been so willing to talk, and talk , and talk. I was somewhat concerned coming into this that the principals would not want to talk to me because it was a sensitive subject or they would feel defensive about being the principal of a school identified as failing. I could not have been more wrong. These principals talked, and talked, and talked. For the first time, I think I provided them with a safe space to actually talk about the issues they were facing. They talked about the isolation of the job because no one else had it, and even those with AP's said it still rested on their shoulders. They expressed that they could not always just be completely honest, because they had to rally the

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[5] Post-Intentional Phenomenologists use bridling journals to allow the researcher space to bridle his or her own assumptions and pre-conceived notions as the phenomenon manifests itself. In many cases this is an informal space for the researcher to write through these moments throughout the process. Ethnographers also use reflective and analytical memos (Crotty, 2003; Glesne, 2006). They are similar to bridling journals in that their intention is to prevent the researcher from lapsing into the natural attitude. These memos are a place for reflexive work to allow the researcher to think aloud and acknowledge their personal feelings during the research process. Rather than trusting their own understanding, they are to question and determine what further lines of inquiry are needed. This is a major difference in that bridling journals are not seeking to clarify understanding through additional inquiry, but seeks to continue questioning by allowing the researcher space to begin to deal with their own assumptions.

troops or follow orders. They talked about how unless you were in it, you could not understand and even if there were more MS principals whose schools were failing in their district, they still felt like they had to be guarded because they did not want something getting back to their superiors and costing them their jobs. They were so honest, so candid. I expected to have to sift through their stories and push to get truth, but instead they were honest and shared their concerns about everything from state mandates, to pressures on students and teachers, to district mandates, to their own jobs. Why are they not given a safe space just to talk about their concerns, their school, and what is happening? Would it not that make them more effective if there was an opportunity for them to be honest and really get feedback that could be helpful? It seems that principals really are in total isolation, trying to lead and motivate teachers and students, while filtering state and district mandates without anyone there to support them, give them ideas, provide them with encouragement, or even just to talk things out with. I am concerned that this is further creating problems for principals and for schools being able to keep them in their position that is already filled with stress.

This entry began with my intrigue that principals were so willing to talk to me and my notions of why they might have been resistant. Proving that I was wrong surprised me pleasantly, but I found that I needed to talk through it and ponder why that was. Through this wondering I found myself deeply concerned about what could be happening in the lives of principals and the isolation that they found themselves in. In one instance, I was shocked to discover through my bridling journal how strongly my reactions were to a principal stating that his influence was a big reason the school finally experienced success. I did not realize how prominently my own emotional response to such an assumption from a principal was coloring my viewpoint. Paying attention to my embodied, emotional responses helped me to begin to recognize them so that I could move into a more open, phenomenological attitude. This journal gave me the space to wonder through those things and think through my own thoughts about this issue. I needed this space to reflect so that I could continue moving forward. I found that I also needed to reflect on the reasons why I was not able to gain district approval to enter the schools and observe and talk with principals. By privately talking with them, I felt that the principals did not feel pressure to present a good district face, but rather felt the freedom to speak honestly. I feel part of the reason

I was denied access via the district offices was because of the sensitivity of my topic. It seemed to me that there was concern that the schools and district may come across in a way they were not comfortable with, so it was easier to deny access. Maybe there was even some fear of what I may see or hear and in turn publish.

I kept a bridling journal (see Appendix E) that accompanied me to interviews. I originally planned on using my computer for this task, but found that it was more disruptive for my participants. Instead, I used a spiral notebook for any bridling and note-taking that needed to be done during the interview, then followed up with my formal bridling journal following the interview and again when I listened to the recording of the interview. This allowed me to continue to bridle my assumptions, perceptions, intuitions, and feelings as I listened to the participants. I returned to my bridling journal after each interview as well as after I transcribed the interviews. Each entry was dated and identified with a pseudonym by participant and later entries were directly linked to raw data (i.e., interview transcript excerpts, as well as excerpts from my field notes) most likely in the form of a table. I continually interrogated my initial bridling statement. For example, my initial bridling statement discusses my acknowledgement that the teacher in my brings something very specifically to the study. I found that I had to consistently bridle those reactions and initial thoughts so that I could have a more open mind. I constantly interrogated my pre-understandings of the phenomenon as well as my developing understandings as the project continued (Vagle, 2010b).

Line by Line Bridling Journal Participant 3, Interview 3

1-3-13

Line Number	Transcription	Bridling Journal
24	P: Prior to when we were under No Child Left Behind there were a couple of things I had to do. For	Also, teachers are not treated the same even if evaluations of their classroom are the same. Teachers who are weak but are "good people" are moved into content areas that are not being held accountable. What kind of message does that send? Teachers who want to avoid the pressure and the accountability can move to contents like SS and Science or even Connections so that they can be weak or even average teachers, but they don't have the meet the pressure of NCLB and having certain test scores every year. The Math and Reading teachers continuing to face that challenge, but others can just smile and teach in other areas that don't answer to AYP. How is this fair to the reading and especially the math teachers? I can feel the math teacher in me really getting angry over this because I know what it felt like to constantly be there after school, required to teach in
25	instance, I had a teacher in Science, Social Studies, and Language Arts. He was teaching Language Arts.	
26	He was highly qualified, but his scores were horrible. I moved him out of Language Arts into Social	
27	Studies, because under No Child Left Behind, Language Arts and Math had all the pressure and that's	
28	where we were held accountable. We weren't held accountable in Social Studies. So, if I had a weak	
29	teacher who was basically a good person, doing the right thing, just not producing passing scores on	
30	CRCT he killed me in Language Arts, but he's not killing me in Social Studies. I had to look at it that way.	
31	Who is going to get me the results?	

		after school, Saturday school, summer school, and tutor before school. This "good people, poor teacher" idea frustrates me as I feel like you can't just shuffle weak teachers around to remove their accountability. It just adds to the stress of those who are strong!

It was important for me to understand who I was as a researcher as I entered into this study and embrace it as a human science researcher. In order to ensure that I was writing a bridled text I had to question my own understandings, question the traditions I was operating within, and understand the history I was coming from while examining each of my participant's experiences (Vagle, 2010b). With the help of the bridling journal, I was able to bridle in my interviews and document analysis with my participants as I worked to be reflexive and constantly questioned the traditions and beliefs that drove my assumptions.

Bridling Journal Excerpt from Participant 3, Interview 4

1-16-13

Growth without cheating—as huge accomplishment (line 7-8). Without directly saying it—we are proud we managed to grow without cheating. Interesting—sounds like the temptation was there. Why wouldn't cheating being an issue ever? How can that be considered? Hmm… clearly this is a personal issue for me. The stakes she must face are clearly more than I can imagine. I will take a step back and listen—because to be brought to a point where it is an accomplishment—obviously there is more happening here than I realize. She talks about doing the "right work" (line11). What work were they doing before? She identifies it as the wrong work which honestly sounds like unfocused work without looking at results. Is that what most schools were doing? Why would teachers be doing the wrong work? Aren't all teachers working to teach the standards to their students in the best way possible? Or is this my own experience. I can feel the math teacher in me resist this idea that I wasn't doing the correct work before. I always

worked hard—I always worked to increase student achievement and understanding in math. Doing that—maybe that is not typical? Or maybe the issue is really understanding the data and making changes based on that. I know I wasn't doing that until the CRCT started impacting my students promotion. Then I looked—to make sure I was teaching the content in the same way it was being assessed. I don't need to be defense about this—because even great teachers didn't look at the data the same way they did once NCLB came into law. That was important—the achievement gap had to be addressed. And that was the right work to be done.

I found myself hearing statements like this often—statements about cheating and being proud that they were not caught in that trap. I really resisted this statement. I could not imagine why cheating would ever be an option and did not understand why principals' abilities to avoid cheating felt like such an accomplishment to them. I realized that this was something I had to bridle because clearly I did not understand the pressure that these principals were under—particularly since, it came up repeatedly. This was not an isolated event, but a real struggle. In this same journal entry, I had to deal with a discussion about the right versus the wrong work. The teacher in me immediately felt resistance. It was important in my bridling journal that I was honest with myself and dealt with this issue. I could feel that strong reaction—so I knew this was something that I needed to deal with so that I could really listen to the principal without my own subjectivities causing me to shut her out. This allowed me to open up my mind as well. My own reaction was part of the problem and very likely part of the resistance principals felt as they were trying to "sell" this work to the teachers in their own buildings.

Bridling Journal Excerpt from Participant 1, Interview 1

12-15-12

There was no plan (line 78) for rolling it out at the state or district level. This seems so irresponsible. Shouldn't a plan be clear and specific to prepare schools for this federal initiative that was changing the way schools were doing things and changing the accountability? What an epic fail. No wonder there was so much

resistance! People don't like to embrace things that are not well thought out or well planned. It is shameful that the planning and roll-out was so inconsistent and poorly planned and executed. This could be the reasoning behind so many of the poor scores and struggles schools continued to have!! Schools with kids that are struggling don't have time to waste on things that are unclear or poorly planned. When they are done this way, those are the very schools that will suffer more!! Why am I so angry about this poor planning? Why? Because I was one of the teachers it affected. I was one of the teachers trying to talk to parents of struggling students, convincing them to trust me with a totally new set of standards (and curriculum), and praying that my hard work (as well as the students) manifested itself on the CRCT. I have clear memories of resisting this—and my frustration with the state.

I found throughout the interviews that my experience as a teacher, particularly as a math teacher under this era was something that had to be bridled often. There were times I resisted principals, and there were other times I was right there with them—frustrated in my own memories and experiences. However, my experiences as a teacher were not the phenomena of interest and they could be distracting at times as the elicited such strong reactions. In order to be fully present with the principal in their stories and experiences, I had to bridle my own and hear it from their point of view. This proved to be a much more difficult task than I had anticipated, but one that helped me see even more clearly the questions that I wanted to follow up on and have more conversation about.

Bridling Journal Excerpt from Participant 2, Interview 1

12-23-12

I find myself having strong resistance to statements from Participant 2. The over-confidence is almost more than I can take. He is so confident about his leadership style, the changes he made, and his strong impact to the improvement of the school. It is almost more than I can take. The math teacher in me is screaming in resistance. The math teacher in me wants recognition of the hard work the teachers played in the trenches improving student achievement. While at the same time the scholar in me recognizes the importance of strong leadership. I KNOW that the literature indicates that the key to a school's success is having strong leadership. It is the main way schools who have struggled can turn around. So

> while I find this over-confidence difficult to digest, part of me realizes that he probably was a major part of his school's successes. It wasn't like the demographics changed at the school. Nothing changed but the leadership—and the school made HUGE strides including making AYP and beyond. He made major changes, he became extremely involved, he was part of the PD and changes he was asking for, and he was willing to make tough decisions to have ineffective teachers leave. But I still want those math teachers to receive credit. I want an acknowledgement that those teachers who are putting in the time were also part of the successes.

This excerpt was one that really focused on my conflict as a scholar. I had reviewed literature and felt that I knew what it said. But that did not help me when I listened to a principal attest to his school's successes with his own leadership—no matter how true it was. I found this conflict quite unique for me. Up to this point the things I felt I had to bridle really had a lot to do with me as a teacher and in some cases who I am on a more personal level. It was this moment that I really felt the scholar in me weighing in on people's experiences and that was unique. It was at this point I realized that bridling was multi-faceted and would be done in the moment as well as throughout analysis of the data.

Research Component #4: Read and write your way through your data in a systematic, responsive manner

In order to complete the analysis of my data I used a whole-part-whole analysis plan that Vagle (2010) adapted from Van Manen's (1990) and Dahlberg (2008) processes for phenomenological analysis. To begin, I approached the analysis holistically. The first time I read through each data event or moment (i.e., interview transcript, field note, document) I looked at everything that had been collected in order to familiarize myself with the data. After I read through each interview transcript, I immediately went to my bridling journal and began to write

about what was happening based on what stood out to me. I found this to be informative of the things that were really jumping out as I read the text.

> Bridling Journal Excerpt Participant 4, Interview 1
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> How is a principal supposed to do everything well? How can they possibly manage a building, teachers, students, instruction, Title 1, etc all the time? Clearly something must suffer! She talked about being under pressure all the time. What does it mean to be under pressure all the time? Participant 1 and Participant 2 both spoke about how it never lets up and the pressure is constant. With pressure coming constantly, is there ever really time to step back, reflect, and determine the best course of action? If survival is what's happening with all the pressure, it seems like you would never have time to really research and think outside the box to find new ideas that might help your school and your students improve.

My first read of this immediately brought up the idea of pressure. After I read over the transcript and then went to the bridling journal, this is what rose to the surface first. The pressure, the constant stress, the lack of time, the struggle to survive, and the idea that it never ends and keeps building was so urgent that it compelled me to write and think back about other participants who struggled with the same idea.

Next I engaged in a line-by-line reading to really get into the data. At this point the note-taking was purposeful as I was identifying "initial meanings" of the phenomenon.

Line-by-Line Bridling Journal Participant 4, Interview 4

Line number	Transcription	Initial meanings
175	… It was rough having the State in here all the	Rough having the state—why rough? What does that mean—rough? Difficult, restrictive?
176	time. When the State came in they were telling you what to do and they're not invested in the school	Not invested—people who are not invested providing the

		leadership.
177	except from a State point. So that was difficult. And it's much better not having them there.	Only interested in score to make state look better. Such an improvement to have them gone. Their presence did not provide security or positive influences on the school. And the state is not credited with the school's turn around.
178	It is super frustrating to be doing everything you can and then still not meeting the	Frustrating- exasperated— doing everything you can and failing
179	standards so to speak. While you've got these other schools across town that are exceeding the	Competition with others— speaks to the influence of the District as well
180	standards and not working near as hard, just having different populations from a socioeconomic	We work the hardest and still can't make it. Our population is the most difficult.
181	standpoint. There's tons of research on all that stuff to single parent homes versus intact families.	Red flag—understanding of research.
182	There are so many things that we deal with here that can affect that test score that someone else is not	Reality of things impacting student achievement outside the realm of control.
183	going to have to deal with. That's extremely frustrating.	Frustrating to feel like you are compensating for that. Frustrating to not have that taken into account. Frustrating that some places don't have to deal with it and don't understand those that do— including policy makers.

Line-by-Line Bridling Journal Participant 2, Interview 2

Line Number	Transcription	Initial Meanings
32	P: Another thing I think about, it never ended. You were never ever able to bring anything to closure.	Nothing comes to closure—nothing ever ends—that has to weigh on you heavily if you aren't getting reprieve.
33	As soon as the results came out for school year such-and-such immediately you were already looking	Non-stop process—from one year to the next.
34	towards the next year. That part really takes a toll on you. It doesn't ever end.	Added stress—taking a toll—I imagine in more ways than one. There it is again—never ending.
35	It doesn't ever stop.	Never stopping. The intensity is there. The weariness.

At this point some of the initial meanings like the constant pressure, the never ending nature of the accountability, the alienation of feeling alone when you are failing with no allies in sight—these were things that began manifesting themselves in each interview with each participant over and over. It made me stop and take notice and really start digging into this data.

I interrogated the initial meanings of the phenomenon and noted questions as they arose and were to be addressed later.

Line-by-Line Bridling Journal from Participant 2, Interview 2

Line number	Transcription	Initial Meanings/Questions
8	As I look back on it it seemed to become more intense, more focused as each year passed.	Intense, more focused—Why more intense? More focused?
9	It really did. I think that may have been connected with the ever rising expectations. Initially it was all	Was it just the expectations that made it feel so much more intense?
10	of a sudden there. There had always been a sense of accountability but never to the degree that No	Suddenly there—no prep. What would have helped you prepare more? What issues did you face from your lack of understanding of what was coming? What were the differences in the accountability?
11	Child Left Behind brings. All of a sudden, without much introduction, it was there and you're looking at	No introduction
12	where your school ranks or falls and it was a bit surprising at first because nobody had truly prepared us	Surprised by where your school ranks. Why? Too high? Too low? What surprised you the most? What did you not realize? Would you have rather been in the dark?
13	for what was coming, at least not in my situation. With each passing year, even as the stakes got higher.	Unprepared—Why were you so unprepared for what was coming? What had you been prepared for? Every year—high stakes. Intensity constantly increasing. How did the increasing stakes impact you?

I used the questions that came in these line-by-line initial meanings and interrogations to follow up with additional questions with my participants as well as to continue to question my own understandings. During this stage I continued to bridle my own assumptions and understandings in my bridling journal by thinking through ideas, thoughts, and meanings of the data as I interrogate it.

Bridling Journal from Participant 2, Interview 2
(drawn from Bridling Journal that went with aforementioned transcription).

> Once again the idea of intensity and NCLB being "suddenly there" comes up. Despite the idea that this idea was rolled out and that schools and principals were prepared for it, I continue hearing that they were not. They continue to reiterate that it came about suddenly without much introduction (line 11) and that they were not truly prepared. And with each passing year that stakes got higher and higher and they continued to work to try and prepare and get their schools on track to pass. Participant 2 continued talking about defined autonomy and the importance of ownership in what happens. He expressed concern that the more directives and initiatives that come from the district, the less ownership teachers have of their work (line 243). I think this is a common problem. While I understand that schools labeled failing of teachers who are struggling need some assistance, overarching district mandates don't seem to be the answer. They don't take into account the specific needs of that school, those students, or even those teachers. Why then, do we have a system in place that uses mandates and directives that are overarching as what happens after years of failure—if they had a solution, why are they sharing ideas instead of waiting for continued failure?!!! And why are they assuming that they can do something that hasn't already been tried? Or that change can happen in a year? Or that those not familiar with or invested in the community where the school is, knows more about the students needs than those who are in it ever day?! I struggle to see how these mandates are the right things at all or why the state thought they were! Are they that arrogant that they truly believe they have the best solution?!!!!!
>
> NCLB gets more and more intense with every passing year. The reoccurring theme that keeps coming up is "suddenly there" (lines 10-11). Something with such huge long-lasting impacts shouldn't have just appeared. There should have been training and preparation considering the high stakes impacts and long lasting implications. Why did is just appear? Why was the state and federal government more intentional with laying everything out and ensuring that everyone was prepared for NCLB? It seems that over and over principals are talking about how it just appeared and they were unprepared for it (line 12). They should not be

unprepared. I am concerned at the lack of preparation and how it seems that so many principals were unprepared and did not have what they needed to ensure success. Additionally, I am surprised at how this sudden appearance gave results that were surprising to principals and they had to deal with on the defense instead of having some offensive preparation. It never stops, it never ends, there is never closure (lines 32-24). What a toll it must take to have something that never ends and continues to get more intense. I am concerned that since it never ends and there is no relief that principals are just having their stress levels increase.

Then I included notes from document analysis to add to my transcriptions to further interrogate my phenomenon and add to my data collection. The notes from my document analysis revolved around Georgia's NCLB waiver and what that means for Georgia's schools now, including the new designations to indicate the schools status as far as meeting standards. I went back through my transcripts and made notes next to places where principals made reference to things that I know are understood to be part of Georgia's new policy and explained those things further. For example, one of the participants made a reference to her school being a reward school, which I did not recognize the meaning of initially. Now I understand it to mean that their school is a Title 1 school that is performing in the top 10% in Georgia, which is very impressive since they were failing a few years earlier.

At the end of this stage, I started looking for meaning that was gleaned from the data. I created documents for each of my participants where I placed excerpts, notes, quotes, documents, and line references from transcriptions to allow me to examine potential parts of the whole. I went through my bridling journal as well as the transcriptions highlighting portions that appeared to be parts of the whole. I continued to read through all data sources as I looked for manifestations of the phenomenon and I paid close attention to things that really stood out and those that did not. As particular phenomena manifested themselves I moved in and out of analysis to ensure that my initial thoughts were bridled and the process is important in my reasoning.

Research Component #5: Craft a text that captures tentative manifestations of the phenomenon in its multiple, partial, and varied contexts

Upon completion of my analysis, I crafted a text that expressed tentative manifestations of the particular phenomenon. I restated the varied contexts of the study and reflected on those and the final manuscripts. I brainstormed potential expressions of the text and determined which discourse was the best for the final representation. Through the inspiration of some various writing activities in a writing course, I was able to craft a text that I think best represents the phenomenon. I decided to create composite characters based on what individual participants shared in interviews. I feel as though the final product coherently represents the phenomenon and can help readers to understand some of the lived experiences of principals of Georgia middle schools in this high stakes/high accountability era.

Composite Characters

In order to represent the phenomenon, I carefully analyzed all the interview transcripts across all four research participants and have included excerpts of the transcripts into the dissertation. I wanted to ensure that the reader had the opportunity to experience the phenomenon in the most original form possible. To provide more background to each section, I added a narrative description. Pseudonyms (Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, and Participant 4) were initially used in order to protect the participants' identities. However, in order to preserve the rich descriptions, capture some of the deep and fleeting tentative manifestations, while also protecting the anonymity of the participants, I chose to create composite characters (Berbary, 2011; Ellis, 2004). This decision came through discussions with my writing partner. These characters were created in order to tell the principal's story in a more personal manner so

that readers would become more personally involved with the text. After reading texts that explored the use of composite characters (McRobbie & Tobin, 1995; Tippins, Tobin, & Nichols, 1995), I decided that these characters would be most effective in portraying the phenomena. Each character talks through a specific phenomenon that had manifested itself in some way across all of the participants. I designed the composite characters (Berbay, 2011) to have specific traits of principals that mirrored traits from the original participants. I felt that by using these composite characters I was able to open up the tentative manifestations of the phenomenon in a more real and effective manner--reflecting the larger commitment in phenomenological research that the unit of analysis is the phenomenon and not the subjective lived experience of the participant. That is, I felt that crafting composite characters drew focus to the tentative manifestations of the phenomena and not necessarily directly to the principals as individuals.

Additionally, composite characters provided me with the opportunity to carry out creative non-fiction methods. Gutkind (2012) says that creative non-fiction is "true stories well told (pg. 2)." Caulley (2008) also indicates that the aim of writing creative non-fiction is to tell the truth without exaggerating or distortion. I chose to present the finding of my research in this manner. I found that by writing in this way, the tentative manifestations of the phenomenon were more clear. In addition, the stories of the principals seem to be stronger when they were told in this manner. I had to take special care to ensure that the creative nonfiction did not mislead readers by ensuring that all quotes were direct from participants and that the ideas they were discussing did not get skewed from my own assumptions. I took care to bridle through this process and worked with my writing partner to ensure that the text was an authentic representation of the participants in my study. This was especially challenging as this piece of writing straddles the line between create non-fiction and fiction in that the quotes themselves are direct quote and

completely truthful, but the composite characters are created from the original characters. Although this was challenging because it was a difficult style of writing, it seemed to be the best way to present the data in a way that opened up the phenomenon.

I organized the transcript data into three major ways the phenomenon presented itself— the *responsibility*, the *uncontrollable*, and *the pressure*. I decided to create one character to illustrate each of these issues. It is important to clarify that the names I associated with each character do not represent particular research participants. Rather, there is one name associated with each tentative manifestation, so that the text will read clearly. The collective lived experiences opened up glimpses of the phenomenon to allow the reader to engage in this through questioning, reflecting, and analyzing. My desire was to allow the reader to experience alongside the principal the lived experiences that influenced them. I wanted the reader to reflect, engage with, and interrogate the decisions, policies, and challenges that the principals are faced with daily. Throughout the descriptions, I talk through additional thoughts that I felt continued to aid in providing a glimpse, or fleeting moment of the lived experiences of principals in this high stakes testing and high accountability era. I use a creative non-fiction to set up each section in an attempt to help the reader to find themselves sitting in the school, hearing the sounds, smelling the smells, and really experiences the place the principals were in.

Throughout these sections, I include my reactions to these pieces. The rationale behind this was that teachers get a different sense of what the principal's are dealing with. In post-intentional phenomenology, it is important that I explicate my understandings, assumptions, and interpretations. I found that this was important as my experiences as a teacher was something that I had to bridle so consistently. This type of writing is reflexive in nature as it causes me to analyze how I shape the analysis as well as how I represent it. Finlay (2002, 2012) indicates that

reflexivity is a disciplined, overt, and self-aware reflection. It is important for me as a researcher to contemplate my actions and role in the research process by examining it with the same scrutiny that I use with the data (Finlay & Gough, 2003). At the same time, I found, as Pillow (2003) argues, that my reflexivity was uncomfortable as I worked across multiple types of reflexivity (self, others, truth, and transcendence)--creating a type of messiness within the text (Pillow, 2003). In order to try to capture some of this messiness, to allow the reader to see some of my bridling throughout, and because principals' lived experiences are often something teachers are not as familiar with, it seemed appropriate to include reflexive commentary throughout the findings. My reactions and thoughts are set off in boxes throughout each section.

The interviews were not identical. Although each one focused on a similar topic (initial, teachers, students, and curriculum), their personal experiences were different. Each of them had varying perceptions of the school district and the districts involvement in each individual school. Perhaps because of their various years of experience or even the particular schools they were working in, districts did things differently. Additionally, they had specific stories that they all felt compelled to tell about their experiences as principal. Although their stories were all important to them, the subject of the story was different each time. Even with this unique factors, there were clear similarities in their experiences.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Her confidence was evident as she stepped out into the office. Her striking navy blue business suit was set off by her sparkling green eyes that immediately invited you to trust her. She nodded to the assistant at the front desk and greeted a student waiting to sign in. The principal here at this middle school, treats everyone like they were family. I rose to greet her and she moved towards me with her hand extended. "Welcome to our school!" she said. "It's my pleasure," I said as I followed her to her office. Without much introduction, her experiences as principal began to spring forth. I was overwhelmed with the stress that dripped off her tongue with every story. I felt burdened for her and her school as she shared the struggles, the victories, and the constant feeling of defeat that had to be masked. She continued sharing with me. "Although the rules have changed and things changed every year under No Child Left Behind, depending on whether you made AYP or not, it has been very stressful balancing pushing your teachers, providing the support they needed, pushing the students, providing them the support they needed, and then balancing everything under all of the requirements we have to provide for our students. Then add being a Title 1 school and all of the things that you have to do and the paperwork with Title 1. If you accept that money then you're obligated in a certain way to use that money. You have to use it in a certain way and then you have to document everything that you did. I don't know any different than to be under pressure all the time because I came in after No Child Left Behind. I hear the stories of you used to only manage the building, you worried about the hiring and the firing, and you worried about the building maintenance, but you didn't worry about achievement. That was the teacher's problem. Now everything in achievement and professional learning, everything is a part of the Principal's requirement. It's our problem now. And it never stops—never. But you can't let others feel it—too many things depend on you."

Phenomena are complex, intricate, and interconnected, and are lived and experienced in the lifeworld. Every phenomenon is a combination of contextually situated parts that are all working together. Phenomenology seeks the meaning of a given phenomenon, but this meaning "cannot be revealed to us in another way than in its totality and its relationships with its particulars . . . always understood against its horizons, [its] inner and outer horizons" (Dalhberg, Dalhberg, and Nyström, 2008, p. 250-251). Gadamer (2002) defined the phenomenological concept of horizons as "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a

particular vantage point" (p. 334). Meaning is created from these horizons and originates from a particular vantage point. Horizons can often be situated subjectively within an individual person. These horizons influence and create understanding and meaning. Horizons seem to create the backdrop in which particular meanings may be foregrounded and situated. The knowledge gained from them is always partial and incomplete because horizons are situated contextually, historically, and spatially. Forwarding emergent and gleaned moments to integrate what is strange and unfamiliar with that which is familiar and known to open up and reveal new meanings is the goal of phenomenology.

The horizons of meaning will begin moving away from purely scholarly work and begin gleaning from the lived-experiences of the principals under the high stakes testing, high accountability era. Accessing rich and descriptive vignettes from participants' transcripts, I begin to identify and work across experiential qualities of the phenomenon, addressing both the particulars and the whole. Trying to organize manifestations in this reflexive, analytical, and discursive way is problematic because of all the complexity that it involves. Often times we read lived-experiences compartmentally, especially when they are complex, blurring the boundaries representing the messiness of the lifeworld and experiences of the participants. This compartmental reading is a limitation of human science research and must be continually disrupted, confronted, and addressed. My goal was not to refine, reduce, or abstract, but rather open up the phenomena. Consequently, it is important for me to loosen the reins (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, Nyström, 2008) of theorization, conceptualization, and organization of these tentative manifestations (Vagle, 2010a, 2010b, 2011a). Instead, I invite you to read and listen across them, witnessing the complexity in which the phenomenon of the lived experiences of principals in the

high stakes testing, high accountability era is expressed and understood by those who live in and through the world in this way.

The lived experiences of principals under the high stakes accountability that started with No Child Left Behind and has turned into new policies that come in the form of waivers are compelling. These individuals are living in a world where they are isolated, in a career that many do not understand, and are often underappreciated and undervalued. Hear the complexity of their stories in these fleeting moments where you can catch a glimpse of the lifeworld they endure.

Responsibility (Eli Adams)

"I can't quit—everyone else already has."

Eli Adams was not the imposing figure of a male principal that many people might imagine, yet his confidence controlled the room without a word. Eli's experiences are familiar stories to many principals who are working in areas where poverty has a firm grip. Yet you can hear his determination—he is not going to quit, but rather keep fighting until the job is complete. His resistance to the system that seems to be failing resonates with those of us who are struggling with finding what is best for our schools, but his will to rise above is contagious.

> *I'm constantly thinking about it [No Child Left Behind] because in a role of principal there is so much to do every single day. In school leadership you just can't assume anything. You have to be cautious, skeptical, wary, inquiring, and questioning-- all those things are important. You're the hub with district, state, parents, attorneys, community groups, businesses, kids, teachers. All of them have an idea about how you ought to do things and what they think is research based. Again, you have a tremendous job of filtering it. If you're not smart or curious about what might work it's not going to happen. So one of the real jobs for Principals is to create belief, to build belief.*

Eli reflects on being "cautious, skeptical, wary, inquiring, and questioning." He does this not out of mistrust of those in leadership positions over him, but out of a desire to be a strong leader for his school. Eli recognizes that the ultimate responsibility falls at his feet, and he must

do the job to the best of his ability. This means that he must carefully interrogate the mandates he

receives, programs he is told to implement, and policies that he is instructed to follow. He must

filter out the things that are not useful for his school, including filtering mandates in a way that

they will be best received by the faculty. In the midst of the responsibility of leading the school,

he must also filter out things in a way that best serves the school as well. One of the strongest

statements that Eli makes is: "a principal's job is to create belief." Eli demonstrates an

understanding that belief is necessary in order for the school to continue to move forward. If

teachers, students, parents, or the community don't believe that these students can be successful,

then the school no longer serves a purpose. Yet, in the midst of the high stakes testing and

accountability era, Eli must create this sense of belief as discouragement seems to plague the

minds of those involved with the schools. While Eli feels pressure from all sides, he must still

lead in a way that brings people up—shows them the hope that they can have, and the belief that

it will make a difference.

> *I'm trying to think of the right way to describe this. The high school education insured*
> *that graduates had 50% of what eventually would become their full knowledge base. Now*
> *it's 3%. You have to understand how to learn now. It's not just learning and retaining*
> *and forgetting the rest. You have got to learn how to take the competencies that you*
> *learned to use later. The world is just so much more complex. The Principal is often the*
> *hub that sits among the spokes of a wheel that come from the state, the district, parents,*
> *teachers, kids, the community, and everybody has an opinion about what should be going*
> *on in your school. Now teachers feel that, too, I know. Since Principals are accountable*
> *for everything that goes on in that school a lot of that pressure falls on Principals. Good,*
> *effective communication needs to happen in all directions. You can't be a good Principal*
> *if your teachers love you, but the community hates you or the community loves you but*
> *you don't work well with the district. That may seem so obvious now, but I remember so*
> *clearly when this started happening being a Principal and some of the Principals saying,*
> *"What are you talking about?" and "What does this mean?", you know? And I do my*
> *thing at my school and I could tell you how it works but then I'd have to kill you. It was*
> *that kind of thing where every school had its own idiosyncratic way of doing school*
> *improvement, of doing accountability, of assessing work, of assessing students, and there*
> *was no way of measuring that. So, all of that is part of the world of Principal. So, you sit*
> *at the hub of all this and how the hell do you decide what's important and what you need*
> *to filter out? That's a major role that Principals needs to play. If Principals took all the*

stuff that came from the state and the district and just brought it undigested to their staff there's going to be a revolt. So you have to decide. It's important to be smart. I'm not saying I am, but you had to know what's important and what's really going on and what's the purpose of the whole enterprise and how do you take all those pieces and filter and refine and then figure out a process not only for sharing it but also for doing it and making it happen and then reporting it back to the power that be in a way that really helps kids learn and also satisfies all the external measures, which may or may not always be a valid measure of how good you are. You have all those pieces and you sit at the hub of that. And it's amazing that anybody wants to be a Principal given all that.

Eli uses powerful imagery as he describes the responsibility of being principal as the "hub." Eli recognizes how intricate his job is and how all the parts of being principal work together and impact one another. He demonstrates wisdom in recognizing the important balance that a principal must play with school, district, parents, and community. Being the person who is accountable for everything—including things that are outside their personal control has to be exhausting. Each day the knowledge that you are responsible for every single thing that happens in the school is a heavy burden to carry. The longer principals work under this kind of pressure, I imagine the more disillusioned they become with their profession. Complicating this burden is the necessary task of filtering all the mandates, policies, and other information that comes down from a state and district level. Eli reflects on the needing to be smart about what information is disseminated to teachers and how it is that information is provided to them. Having to think about the whole enterprise and the parts simultaneously, refine whatever policy is coming down the pike, and then making it happen in short order in the midst of disruption—the task seems like more than one person should be undertaking. It seems that Eli is recognizing himself the enormity of the task that has been handed to him.

I wonder how all this is accomplished during a school day filled with other responsibilities and disruptions. I feel like despite the best efforts, it will never get done. There is too much work that is labeled "urgent."

Eli has shown that he understands what it means to learn. He struggles with the recognition that school no longer provides the largest amount of knowledge for students, but rather a small percentage. That burden is aggravated by the intensity of high stakes testing and the mandates that come from the district, state, and federal governments. Eli acknowledges that there are external measures that must be met even if they are not valid measures.

> I wonder what kinds of measures he would consider more valid. Perhaps an assessment that allowed for the various learning styles of students that was not completed in one three-hour sitting would be considered a more valid measurement of student learning.

He reflects on making choices—choices to take the pieces and filter them before putting them together in a refined package that is more suitable for his school. He understands that he must play by the rules, but has accepted the reality that ultimately he must have his school meet the external measures placed on them, even if they do not truly reflect the accomplishments of his school. There is so much complexity that is always bound together, influencing the decision and choices of the other. Eli appreciates the reality as he states later in the interview—"the job is hard, harder than many out there; you'd have to be crazy to choose to be principal under these circumstances".

> I struggle with this acknowledgement that "you'd have to be crazy" to choose to enter this profession given the demands, expectations, and responsibilities. It seems that schools, and really the entire population, benefits from the strongest principals leading a school. Yet, many times the best qualified seem to be leaving because of the lack of control and unreasonable expectation. This mentality of being crazy to come into it has become widespread, and I am concerned that if it is not altered, soon, there will be more schools than principals to serve them.

Prior to when we were under No Child Left Behind there were a couple of things I had to do. For instance, I had a teacher certified in Science, Social Studies, and Language Arts. He was teaching Language Arts. He was highly qualified, but his scores were horrible. I moved him out of Language Arts into Social Studies, because under No Child Left Behind, Language Arts and Math had all the pressure and that's where we were held accountable. We weren't held accountable in Social Studies. So, if I had a weak teacher who was basically a good person, doing the right thing, just not producing passing scores on CRCT… he killed me in Language Arts, but he's not killing me in Social Studies. I had to look at it that way. Who is going to get me the results? Another thing I did because of the way it made me look at our personnel was to start hiring special education teachers who were content area specific then got a special education add-on because my special education teachers are just as responsible for the content area they're teaching as the regular education teacher is. Used to special education only provided support to a regular education teacher. Now they're just as much held accountable for student achievement and the content. So, we had people who were really good special education teachers with behavior and accommodations, but didn't know the Math and they ran a Math classroom. They couldn't help as much. So I hired teachers who had Math certification and then added on special education degrees. I need that content support. Obviously as a Principal, when it came to looking at standards, those high impact issues made a huge difference, the high impact courses. But, when I went into a classroom I always believed that every teacher was equally important in making a great school. I know that sounds like pie in the sky. I promise you it was not.

Eli's struggle with test scores manifests itself with teachers and students. Although we typically think of students and retention when we think about high-stakes testing, teachers like this (who are weak in the content, but great everywhere else) are often forgotten. Eli toyed with different ideas, but ultimately had to choose to move a teacher he felt was "killing him" in Language Arts. The teacher is classified as a good person, doing the right thing, but unable to produce the test scores needed for the school.

> I wonder what would make a teacher a good person, but still appear to be failing at their job.

Eli was faced with a dilemma and chose to move the teacher to a content area that would not hold the same degree of accountability as Language Arts and Math do. Math and Language

Arts (Reading) hold the most accountability as a schools' AYP status is measured on those two subjects. Literature (see Chapter 2) suggests that this hyper-focus on these two content areas has caused other content areas to suffer and points to a general lack of value in those areas. His language and tone indicate that he ultimately felt the teacher was a positive addition to the staff; yet because of the mandates of accountability and high stakes testing, he had to make a judgment that would be beneficial for the school and teacher. Perhaps the value placed on Language Arts (specifically Reading in the state of Georgia) and Math are due to our Nation's desire to compete on an International level with other countries. The space race caused a push towards standardized testing and the need to push students to increase test scores. However, it seems that the push has devalued other content areas that are equally important for our Nation as well as for those students who are interested in them.

I feel that the focus on Math and Language Arts has another outcome in schools—unequal status for all teachers. The teachers in these high accountability content areas feel the pressure every day and are constantly under scrutiny to improve test scores, meet benchmarks, and make AYP. Perhaps principals feel they are doing what is best for the school, and even those teachers, by moving teachers to a less impactful content area, but is it possible they are sending a message that those subjects are not as important? In addition, I wonder how principals view those teachers who are in the high impact content areas. Perhaps these are the teachers they feel are the strongest in the school.

Special education scores seem to be a major struggle for many schools as they are consistently "costing schools" an adequate score for AYP. Eli was not immune to these struggles. However, he took that struggle and took proactive measure to attempt to improve math scores with teachers who were not only qualified in special education, but also in math. Eli is not

alone in this endeavor. All the participants in the study spoke about the need for special

education teachers to know the math content fluently and needing that dual certification. The

ability to serve those students with accommodations was no longer enough and Eli had to

accommodate that need by hiring teachers with higher qualifications.

> *It [No Child Left Behind] affected most everything from scheduling to ability grouping to sub group emphasis to planned interventions to teacher assignment. I look back on it, there's a professional article I read recently, that said one of the major shortcomings of this era of testing and accountability is that the gifted students have been lost; not necessarily lost but the emphasis on bringing up the lower performing sub groups has been so strong that there's been somewhat of a lost emphasis on the high achievers. As a result I think that there's actual data that shows that the high achieving student has not progressed at expected levels. And I can understand. I really can because if you have a particular sub group which almost always was a minority sub group or a special education sub group you're trying to get them to where they need to be so that your school and your system make AYP. You want to do right for the others, but you can't say they're your emphasis or focus. It, unfortunately, didn't make the greatest sense. You celebrate their accomplishments, but day to day, week to week, the conversations that are taking place and collaboration, the ongoing focus was on the underperforming students. And if you have a [special education] sub group of 50 and 5 of those kids have major cognitive disabilities, we're talking about 10% of your total numbers. That is really frustrating. You had to create a serious strategy in order to try and get that subgroup to pass. It came down to the individual student. In February we develop a list of students that we expect would not meet CRCT whether they were special education or not. We would regularly discuss the progress of each student and which of those students would receive additional interventions. Unfortunately, the fact of the matter was if we were going to serve 10-15 kids with some additional time and support we were going to focus on the kids it might truly make a difference for and get them over the top. If we had a student that made 750 on the CRCT for the past three years they probably were not going to be in that group of kids that were getting extra time and support. Because you know in those kinds of settings, like in connections Math or something like that, if you can keep that number really manageable the chances are much greater that you're going to have an impact. We don't want 20 kids in there with 5 of them that were there because they just had a past. We wanted to focus on the kids that we felt like we could really make a difference with.*

Eli talks through the strategy of deciding who was going to get additional support and

who was not. He acknowledged the lack of support that was provided for students who were

gifted because they were not costing his school the valuable goal of making Annual Yearly

Progress (AYP). AYP identified schools as failing or not, forcing schools to make the CRCT a

priority, even at the expense of some students. The nature of this problem was complicated by the reality that students just had to make the passing score, so the focus was pushing kids over passing, not accelerating them to their highest potential. Although they may not be performing at the highest levels they were capable of, their general successfulness often times made them disappear in the priority of the underachieving students. Eli's voice indicates his struggle as he acknowledges that it didn't make sense, yet he didn't see a way to work around it. He was stuck in the reality that he had to increase test scores, and with limited time and resources, someone had to suffer. The special education students were the biggest challenge—they were the students that seemed to be suffering the most, and Eli could not find a solution.

Eli further identifies other unfortunate side effects from this law. Consistently, students had to be ignored. If everyone could not be helped in the allotted time with the resources allowed, then those that "had a chance" were the ones that were focused on. He sadly recounts having to create lists of students—individual students who had to be closely observed and prioritized with regard to who would receive assistance and who would not. The task was not easy; Eli labored through it. But despite his desires for change and his desire to do what is right by the kids, he found himself choosing who was going to get extra support and who was not. Eli recognizes the conflicting nature of this task, but admits that it becomes necessary as research indicates that a small class is needed to make the most impact. A student whose score was 750 was too low to warrant assistance because the sad reality was the score was unlikely to climb to the passing mark of 800, even though that student may be in the most desperate need of help. Eli's journey through this process is agonizing as he works with teachers to make tough decisions in order to remain in compliance with the accountability mandates and requirements.

I am struck by how students become referenced as "subgroups" instead of individual learners. Perhaps this is an unintentional side effect of talking in the language of No Child Left Behind, AYP, and accountability; but it seems unsettling. Education is about educating individual learners, but now they are being herded into the subgroup that defines them, and the type of education or even the supports they are provided are influenced by the subgroup they are a member of. I am concerned that the identity of students is getting lost in the complexities of test scores and subgroups. The individual learner cannot be accommodated because accountability policies must be met. This gives me cause for concern. When did this shift occur? Is it possible that educators do not even realize they are doing it? I find myself reflecting through my own teaching practice and I am frightened by the number of times I can hear myself referring to students by their subgroup.

So you've got to really zero in on those standards in Algebra because you know that's half of the test. Whereas you have another standard that may only be one or two questions so we're not going to spend six weeks on an area that we know is only going to be one or two questions. I hate to even bring up the CRCT because I don't think that we're geared towards teaching the test. We're teaching the standards that we know they're going to be held accountable on, but we're teaching the standards that Georgia requires us to do and now Common Core requires us to cover. But that's how we're measured for AYP and that's why I refer to CRCTs because that's how we're measured in the public's eye. When I go in to observe science, social studies, math, language arts, I look for the exact same things. Every single class has the same non-negotiables. Every single class needs to be using the standards, referencing the standards, using the language of the standards across the board. Where I will say I'm guilty is I don't have the same expectation for P.E., art, band, or my Connections classes. I don't have the same expectation for them. That's my fault, but they don't make or break me. It's the honest truth.

Eli's internal conflict with the CRCT is evident. He is striving to ensure that his teachers are not "teaching to the test," but comprehends that the CRCT is how the school is measured and will be used to evaluate their school. His conflict is evident as he states that "he hates to even

bring up the CRCT." His desire is not to discount the test in and of itself, but to cling to the notion that education is not solely about the test. Yet, the test is the central focus.

> I wonder how this is reconciled. How is the test the focus, yet everything is not about the test?

In one statement he has pointed to his beliefs that more is happening than what the test can measure, but those things won't be evaluated to measure the school. This reality has impacted Eli's expectations for classrooms as well. Although he expects the same non-negotiable practices, he admits to a lower expectation(poor classroom management, low test scores, lack of consistency in what is taught for the Connections[6] classes that "don't make or break me." What might it be like to use the CRCT as the measure for what is valued? His desire to lead without the CRCT influencing his decision is coming into a direct conflict with his practice. Eli's leadership capabilities are limited by the policies and requirements. He is participating in the very system that he does not want to be a part of without even realizing it. Perhaps he does not realize what has happened, or even what his actions and statements really mean. Eli takes the responsibility of that decision, but in his acknowledgment admits that nothing will change in the system we are currently in. His evaluation and expectations won't change because he is just trying to keep his school from failing—to do that he only needs math and reading scores to be proficient.

> I wonder how students perceive this inequity. Is it possible that the Connections classes and teachers are devalued because of the accountability system that is in place?

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[6] Connections classes are the non-core academic classes. Examples include but are not limited to art, P.E., health, band, orchestra, business, computer science, family and consumer science, and foreign languages.

> Is there a greater concern in play that seems to devalue all things that are not math and reading? It is interesting that these other content areas, including Connections classes have become an after-thought of education. Perhaps the desire is to create young people who are better prepared to enter into college and the competitive work force. I wonder what happens to areas that need more people who are strong in the areas that have been devalued. Perhaps those students become disenfranchised with education and eventually walk away—unprepared for the world. Why does policy get to dictate what content areas are important? I fear we are not educating the whole child, but only those that can make us look elite.

Other things with No Child Left Behind; really it became more of a focus. Our after school program; instead of it just being a fun after school program about clubs and things like that we had to have that Math focus and we had to have that Language Arts/Reading focus. Everything became very specialized and targeted. We started running, because of No Child Left Behind and us being behind in Math, a special math program lab and a Study Skills class during Connections time. And students that were struggling, they only got to go to one Connections instead of two, because they needed that extra support. But, students had to give up a Connections so that we could target them. For many of our kids the reason they would be in school was because we had a fabulous art teacher or they liked P.E. or they connected with a teacher in another Connections class. This was a heart-breaking reality that I couldn't fix. It was out of my hands. It is important to use some good, common sense and to not be such a slave to the numbers especially artificially created numbers when making decision about the lives of kids. You had to look at what kids were actually doing. You had to know your kids and see them in action and get the whole picture of the kid. And taking some meaningless test and using that as a determining factor was an outrage.

Eli's tensions never seem to end. In addition to impacting content area courses, No Child Left Behind (and the accountability measure that have been put into place as part of the waiver) are influencing other areas. Eli's torn between trying to keep students engaged in school with the art, physical education, or band class and ensuring their math score increases on the CRCT. He

talks through the reality of having to place students in only one Connections class instead of two in order to provide them with extra support.

> I wonder how this was received by students and parents as well. Perhaps students viewed it as an opportunity, but I fear that more viewed it as punishment for not being smart enough. I wonder where he found the staff to teach these courses. The requirements under No Child Left Behind require a highly qualified teacher, but the Connections time would have been the content area teachers' planning time. Perhaps Connections teachers were highly qualified in one of these subjects as well, or perhaps the math teacher had to lose planning time in order to teach this class as well. I feel like there had to be additional consequences to these decisions. I wonder if there was an increase in discipline issues during this time as well. Did this Connections class actually improve student achievement? I fear that schools were locked into doing specific types of interventions based on the money that they received (such as Title 1) and they implemented programs even if they did not always serve students.

Eli acknowledges some of this as a "heart-breaking reality I couldn't fix." Is that really true? As the principal of the school it seems that he would be in the position to find a solution to this problem, yet the agony of his decision indicates otherwise. It points to another problem—people not invested with the school making decisions for it without the input of the most influential person in the school, the principal.

Although Eli doesn't want to admit that they are focused on the test, his actions seem to be in direct opposition to this. His heart break is evident as he has to make gut-wrenching

decisions to eliminate clubs in the after school program in order to provide math and reading support. Eli points to the importance of common sense, and "not being a slave to the numbers." However, he admits that his actions are telling a different story. Test scores are forcing him to make decisions that will increase the passing percentage of his school. Perhaps he sees this as minor in an effort to have more control of his school. The realities of having a school identified as repeatedly failing brings on consequences such as state intervention and even the firing of personal who are identified as "at fault." The realities of the job are clashing with his beliefs about education. His desire to not make decisions based on the test scores is genuine, but the system he is operating in does not allow that.

> What the school would look like if test scores were ignored? It seems that that is equally irresponsible as basing everything on the test scores.

Eli battles himself as he has to move students from the very classes that bring them to school every day and keep the engaged to place them in another class for the very subject they are struggling in. Eli is in a losing battle and he recognizes this reality. It is interesting that he refers to the test as "meaningless." The test is full of meaning, but how that meaning is interpreted and used is what should be examined closer. Eli feels that it is "an outrage" that the test [CRCT] is used as a determining factor. Perhaps because the test is only a small glimpse in a single day, or even because it is multiple choice and limited, but the outrage is there. However, the outrage has not been put into a public forum. Rather he has been sequestered into isolation raging against a test he feels powerless to defeat. The test in and of itself is not bad or even meaningless, but it seems policy makers have assigned too much meaning to it. Instead, the test should be a glimpse into a student's learning, the instruction they have received, and even the

effectiveness of interventions provided. It is unclear on how any one of those factors can be examined singularly since they effects are intertwined together. It seems that it would be impossible to truly know every piece that was effective because of an inability to measure it. The same is true of students as all of their abilities and knowledge cannot be measured on a multiple choice test. Perhaps principals should have some responsibility in being part of the assessment process to allow students to demonstrate mastery in additional methods. Eli's voice is not one of defeat, but one that continues seeking solutions, desperate to make a difference in the lives of students.

Uncontrollable (Catherine Philips)

Catherine Philips managed to demand control of every room that she entered. Her entire presence was authoritative and in charge, while at the same time comforting and approachable. Catherine had endeared herself into the lives of the community she served as principal. Her eyes twinkled green as she greeted students each morning, masking the stress of her chosen profession. "Education is my calling," Catherine said. "Nothing else in the world would leave me satisfied. It has changed a lot since I started, but I am here, fighting…fighting because I believe in these kids. Someone has to push back against things that don't make sense. And that requires that we stay in it and fight for change." Her words were powerful—she was a leader, leading a school that had many obstacles to overcome, yet her biggest obstacle was not at the school—it was the things she couldn't control.

> *I was part of No Child Left Behind from start to end. As I look back on it, it seemed to become more intense, more focused as each year passed. It really did. I think that may have been connected with the ever-rising expectations. Initially it was all of a sudden there. There had always been a sense of accountability but never to the degree that No Child Left Behind brings. All of a sudden, without much introduction, it was there and you're looking at where your school ranks or falls and it was a bit surprising at first because nobody had truly prepared us for what was coming, at least not in my situation. With each passing year, even as the stakes got higher, I tried to begin to feel more*

qualified at meeting those high stakes and leading others in that work. There wasn't at the state level or the district level a good, consistent plan for rolling out No Child Left Behind and AYP. A lot of it was hit and miss. And, of course, partly because of that but also because it was a change and also because it was a little scary because it was accountability.

Catherine's words are poignant as she describes how No Child Left Behind came into being—"intense, focuses, all of a sudden, without introduction." Her words do not voice that of someone who feels the idea is poor, but rather frustration with the sudden appearance of an accountability program with high stakes and no preparation. Her "surprise" at where her school fell points to a clear misconception in the performance of the school up to that point. Catherine is an intelligent principal, so clearly there was more at play here than ignorance. Now Catherine, a Georgia middle school principal, is trying to keep up with a new set of rules, with incredibly high stakes, that keep changing every year. In Georgia, the accountability requirements changed each year. For the first few years the percent of students passing remained lower and consistent, and then with each passing year the percent of students passing increased until it reached 100%. Georgia also took this a step further and added to the accountability by requiring that if students in grades 3, 5 and 8 did not pass the math and reading sections of the CRCT, they would be retained in that grade level. This additional component has clearly added increased intensity as the accountability becomes more personal and impacts students as well. Perhaps this intensity further complicates the test scores' validity.

> I believe that with a test being so high-stakes for so many different individuals connected with the test, it seems that there would be ever increasing numbers of cases of cheating.

Catherine has no choice but to comply, but she is also faced with the dilemma of how to lead in the midst of all these changes. She points to failures across the board—local, state, and

federal level, for not having a clear plan for rolling this out. Notice her tone and her language here—she is not blaming these entities for these failures, but rather is noting that this created additional challenges. She continues by expressing understanding for people's resistance to change and accountability. Her insights pose a dilemma as she expresses her concerns that the general preparation and initiation of this major policy was done poorly, but that there would have been resistance no matter what. Catherine's voice of bewilderment and disappointment at this poorly executed policy initially was not alone—all of the participants shared this same concern.

> *There was a lot of resistance. Some of that resistance was also based on the fact that people thought that this was another fad or that it was totally unrealistic. And, in part, it was. When it said in 2002 or 2003 that by 2014 every child will be above average, it is not only statistically impossible but really impossible because there are students who have profound learning issues and social issues and family issues and again, as you know very well, that we're going to get in the way of doing that despite everybody's best efforts. It's a nice target to have to say we want everybody to be doing great. Maybe that was the intent of it that our reach should exceed our grasp. But, it also made people very cynical about it because it looked like it was being put in place by people who had no idea what really happens in schools. To say that that kid in the 8th grade who is reading at a 2nd grade level or a 3rd grade level was going to somehow be on level or above within a relatively short period of time. It just wasn't going to happen. So a lot of that created resistance. So as a Principal I know I struggled with, and probably tuned out to some degree, because if I didn't have clear direction I tended to dismiss some things as not real.*

Catherine brings real concerns to bear as she points out some major issues with No Child Left Behind and the accountability era that it initiated into her school. She recognizes the inevitable— "people were resistant because they thought it was another fad." Her words are matter of fact, without the intensity of the words that follow. The perception of another fad seems this point to a pattern of new initiatives and mandates that force schools to make major changes. Perhaps the resistance is due to experience that these fads tend to come and go quickly. The resistance could also speak to the pattern of education where we jump onto whatever fad promises smarter students and a solution for struggling students without ever giving anything the

time it needs to work. It seems that every three to five years schools are adopting new policies that are the next big thing without considering the long term consequences of this type of sudden change. Catherine speaks about the "statistically improbability" of every child being above average by 2014 and how it was "really impossible" because of the nature of student's cognitive disorders that are impacting their education. Perhaps the goal of policy writers and law-makers was to create an idealistic goal, but the reality was that those involved with education realized this was never going to happen and it lessened the credibility of the new policies.

> I wonder how this lack of credibility has influenced the implementation of standards and high stakes testing.

Catherine is struggling with these numbers because of the realities she sees in her own school. Rather than only seeing the test scores and the desire for all students to be proficient, she sees individual students that she recognizes will likely never make that mark.

> I wonder why students with cognitive disabilities were never a consideration for law-makers or even how much time it would take to bring students below grade-level up to target.

Catherine struggles as her core belief is coming into conflict with the state mandates. She believes that all students can learn, but knows the realities may not place all students on an equal playing field. Perhaps there should be an implementation of tracking students' growth from their starting point.

> I struggle with feeling like students should be given the same opportunities and recognizing that students are different, want different things, and should be provided with the education that is the best possible education for them.

At the same time, I wonder who decides what is best for students because I am not comfortable being the authority on that nor do I feel the government should be. Perhaps students should be, but my own experience tells me that what we may desire for our lives changes over time, and I do not want students to leave school without the skills needed to be able to make choices about what they want to do with their lives.

People writing the policies who "have no idea what was really happening in schools" are another frustration Catherine struggles to overcome. She admits how this impacts her desires to lead and implement policies, but also notes that she knows things must be done.

I wonder how you reconcile your core beliefs with the requirements when you feel that the people who have ultimate control really do not understand what is happening in schools at all. Perhaps law-makers feel their own experience as students is enough, but I wonder if their school experiences mirror the experiences of the students and educators who are so negatively impacted by these policies.

Catherine's attitude towards them are the same as teachers—wary and cautious, and often times not vested. Catherine's last statement illuminates her continual toil with the district and the state as additional mandates and policies continued to influence her school. She acknowledges that when the plan is poor, she often tunes things out and no longer listens. She reveals vulnerability here as she identifies a weakness in her leadership. Catherine admits that her need to have a clearly formulated plan is important before she has to lead others to follow the same plan. Unfortunately, this is another aspect that she is not able to control and is forced to implement without clarity. Perhaps if the policy-makers were recognized as experts in education,

or if principals and teachers feel more invested in the creation of these policies, or even if there was a clear, consistent plan from the beginning, things would be different. However, it seems that there is a continual struggle with feeling that those in charge should not be, so there is no reason to trust them since everything will change anyway.

> *Also difficult was the fact…as the standards were being written there was a great deal of inconsistency in how they were written. And it's very hard to sell any inadequate product to folks. And many teachers who were veteran, successful, acclaimed teachers were very frustrated in being told they now needed to teach something different or teach in a different way. And the problem was then, as it continues to be, that legislation and new regulations often precede our knowledge on how to do those things or what it really looks like.*

"Inconsistent" and "inadequate" are two words that Catherine uses to describe the implementation of new standards in the middle school. In addition to these new standards adding a new level of vigor and competency, they were not written in a consistent manner. For Catherine, this made her job more difficult as she had to work with teachers to convince them that the inadequacies that they were witnessing were not indicative of the entire product. This was an issue that she had to continue to grapple with as different standards were implemented in consecutive academic years. Catherine had to battle this inequity on both sides as she had to struggle with it internally while externally convincing others to "buy-in" with a hope for improvement over time.

Catherine identifies a clear problem with the legislation that will continue to plague school policy. She notes that "new regulations precede our knowledge on how to do those things or what it really looks like." She is pointing to a larger issue of non-educators making policy decisions without the understanding to know what the final outcome will actually look like. She points to this as not just a current problem, but rather a problem that has been going on for some time and will continue to do so under our present system.

Districts need to be careful. They need to provide guidance and leadership. They need to provide the support and the service. But, every school has a different dynamic and every school has different needs and so the district thing is a challenge, an interesting topic. Now I have a new person [superintendent] who is bringing in a lot of new initiatives. Then I have to manage my staff to get on board with those things in the midst of everything else.

School districts bring an added level of accountability to principals and schools as well. Catherine quickly concedes that the responsibility of the school district is difficult, but offers words of caution. Her concern, stemming from personal experience, is that school districts often fail to recognize the unique make up of each school. The challenges they face are great, but a critical part of their job is an understanding of the make-up of each school under their jurisdiction and the unique components that make it an individual. Catherine's desire is not for the district to stop being involved in the schools, but that instead, they move beyond a general plan that is forced on everyone to personalized attention for each school. Her ultimate desire is a joint effort to increase student achievement to meet the needs of the school.

Superintendents can bring additional change to the district as well. Catherine points out the added difficulty of having new leadership with new initiatives. Although she does not openly oppose this, she notes how it creates an added challenge for her, as she has to "manage my staff to get them on board with those things in the midst of everything else." Listen to what Catherine does not say. She makes no indication as to whether or not these initiatives are positive or negative. Her words are carefully chosen to avoid explicitly saying one way or the other, but her words do imply that not everything is positive or she would not have to manage her staff to get their support.

It [No Child Left Behind] was trying to improve achievement with decreasing resources as well. We are supposed to do more with less. And no one even considers the progress we have made—only if we have met the target. With so little resources, it is amazing that

we can make progress with our populations. These students need support, and without the funds, it becomes difficult to provide all that is needed.

Catherine's irritation with the system in place is gaining momentum. She is faced with multiple dilemmas that are outside her control—funding and progress in particular. She wants her school's progress to be duly noted and not just the final score. This comes from a desire to show that there are positive things happening in her school. She has pride in the work she is doing and wants others to see the evidence of that hard work. Additionally, she notes that she is being asked to do more with less. Although funding cannot be controlled, she notes that it is impacting achievement as well. With class sizes increasing and extra programs being cut, Catherine is working overtime to see student achievement growing. Her pride in what is being accomplished comes through in her words, but the sadness that it is not recognized is intertwined as well.

> *I see a lot of good stuff about closing achievement gaps between maybe white student sub groups, black, Hispanic, and ELL, but you don't really see lots of success stories with students who have cognitive disabilities.*

Catherine's words here resonate and give implications for additional work to be done— "you don't really see lots of success stories with students who have cognitive disabilities." She is not offering this up as an excuse for low special education scores, but rather as an observation. She has examined the research that is available and has taken note of the good work being done to close the racial achievement gaps. Her concern is expressed in what information she cannot locate—special education success stories. Her distress is genuine as she struggles with the same issues that many principals face—how to increase the achievement scores of special education students.

Pressure (Andrew Lee)

The cool crisp morning was invigorating as it signaled the start of the school year. Students excitedly entered the school building and began walking the hallways that would be their second home this school year. There was so much activity and excitement! No one thought to mention or even ask about the truth—the school once was again labeled failing. This title was one that the school had difficulty getting rid of despite their best efforts. Everything possible was being done to increase achievement, but it seemed that the subgroups continued to be "costly" as they could not quite meet the required criteria. Standing on the front lines greeting everyone as they entered the building was Dr. Andrew Lee, the principal here. His smiling face and positive demeanor were a perfect mask for the pressure that he felt on a daily basis.

> *Our school has a significant achievement gap between the highest and lowest performing subgroup. Teachers are frustrated as much or more than anybody else. The general public so often has a very broad view of this so they can be thinking, well, that school needs to work harder or they need to get busy over there. Well, the schools that were failing were working just as hard and just as smart and just as focused as everybody else. Of course there were some schools that probably weren't that were failing. That's always there and that's always at the root of everything that you're doing and talking about. You feel like it's a cloud over you. Anytime schools are designated like this all they want to do is find out what they have to do to get off of this list. You're even then looking at not necessarily what's best for all the kids in your school as much as being strategic in taking steps to get off of the list. That's when those extra interventions are being focused on the bubble kids. Ultimately you do everything you do for the kids. Hopefully if you're doing what you're supposed to be doing and working hard at doing the best you can the scores are going to come out right. But when they don't—it is so… **defeating**.*

His words echoed. Defeat. Principals who are working hard and are left with a sense of defeat. He recognizes the pressure and the identity that has now been bestowed upon his school as he attempts to lead others. Honesty resonates as he admits that you are just trying to "find out what you have to do to get off the list." Getting off the list becomes the target because staying on will mean more sanctions and additional consequences for the school and ultimately the principal.

Notice the language here—"You're not even looking at what best for all the kids in your school as much as being strategic in taking steps to get off the list." Andrew recognized that he is now engaging in strategy and no longer focused on educating. Despite his desire to educate students and do what is best for the students, he has to be strategic in order to protect his school and his job. This is a conscious recognition that who he was as an *educator* has been replaced with an identity of *strategist* attempting to play the game.

Andrew has to work smarter in ensuring that they are meeting the requirements of the accountability in place while trying to make AYP and satisfy all the district initiatives that come from failure as well.

> *If there's so many directives, initiatives, requirements, at a certain point you don't feel like you have ownership in your work. Whether you're the principal, in teaching or working in business or whether you're a whatever if you don't feel like you have some ownership in your work your levels of motivation are diminished and so your production is not going to be what it could be. I think that there's a real balancing act here. I think the leaders have to be able to, at the district level and at the school level, still find ways for there to be some autonomy among the schools, including the teaching staff. Another thing I think about, it never ended. You were never ever able to bring anything to closure. As soon as the results came out for school year such-and-such immediately you were already looking towards the next year. That part really takes a toll on you. It doesn't ever end. As a teacher you have students for a school year and you can in fact sort of bring it to closure because you begin a new year with new students and possibly a new course that you're teaching. As a Principal in this era, even though it's not No Child Left Behind anymore, it's still Race to the Top or whatever you want to call it--**it doesn't ever stop.***

Hear the words there—directives, initiatives, requirements—all things that are controlling how Andrew leads without allowing for any of Andrew's leadership to influence these decisions. He is losing ownership. The history of politics running schools seems to be critical in Andrew's responses. He no longer looks at the school as "his" but rather feels a "loss of ownership" from all the mandates that are taking place. The strengths of his leadership are no longer being

utilized, but instead are replaced with requirements that he did not have input on and feels no investment in. Andrew reflects on the immediate impact—"levels of motivation are diminished." With decreased levels of motivation, it becomes even more challenging for a principal to lead his/her staff to work at the levels needed to bring a school out of a failing status.

The second part of his statement speaks to the intensity that Andrew find himself in constantly. The pressure "never ends." A constantly cyclical pressure that only gains momentum each year as test scores come in and new initiatives and strategies must be implemented in order to improve and meet an always increasing standard. This is an era where the principal's job never gets a break—no Christmas vacation, spring break, or summer vacation because there is a constant pressure to improve, no matter what. Even the strongest leaders, like Andrew, cannot withstand this kind of non-stop strain without ever feeling a sense of completion. Eventually, principals will crack under the pressure as is evident by the cheating scandals that plague our country today. I think Andrew points to this when he talks about the never-ending pressure. What compounds this is the isolation—Andrew is alone in his job with no one else responsible for his school other than himself.

> *Although the rules have changed and things changed every year under No Child Left Behind, depending on whether you made AYP or not, it has been very stressful balancing pushing your teachers, providing the support they needed, pushing the students, providing them the support they needed, and then balancing everything under all of the requirements we have to provide for our students. Then add being a Title 1 school and all of the things that you have to do and the paperwork with Title 1. If you accept that money then you're obligated in a certain way to use that money. You have to use it in a certain way and then you have to document everything that you did. I don't know any different than to be under pressure all the time because I came in after No Child Left Behind. I hear the stories of you used to only manage the building, you worried about the hiring and the firing, and you worried about the building maintenance, but you didn't worry about achievement. That was the teacher's problem. Now everything in achievement and professional learning, everything is a part of the Principal's requirement. It's our problem now. What I did not like about it, what I don't like about it is the way it takes; it doesn't look at growth or it didn't look at growth. It had the standard that you had to*

meet and if you didn't meet it there was this perception that you were a failing school. You know? You could have your parent meeting, but what the newspaper showed, what the tv showed was just this list of schools.

Reflect as his frustration spills out—"things changed every year." Before he could fully get his minds wrapped around one set of requirements, the rules were changing again. The passing requirements increased, and the specifics about what should be happening were in constant flux. Perhaps this was an attempt to allow the changes to take place slowly, but it seems that it just continued to add confusion as to the expectation. With this confusion came the same resistance because of the appearance of a lack of cohesiveness and understanding about what was supposed to be happening.

> I wonder if it would have been better for schools to set the bar and then give them a certain number of years to attain it before accountability started. However, what continues to concern me is the lack of acknowledgment that schools are not starting in equal positions and do not have the same resources to attain the same goal.

Title 1 schools principals faced additional requirements in how the money allocated to them because of their Title 1 status. Monies had to be meticulously documented and used in specific pre-conscribed manners to meet yet another set of policies. Andrew notes that if you accept the money, you are obligated to use it in a certain manner. The power of money continues to manifest itself—even in subtle ways.

> I wonder if there is a way to remove the power of money.

Although some advocates of high stakes testing and accountability point to the ability to say no to money, it seems that there is such a desperate need for funding that there really is no choice. Perhaps if schools were able to get money without being obligated to use it in specific

ways—although I see other potential dangers there with the misuse of monies. During a time where funding was clearly problematic, Andrew was forced to spend additional time trying to ensure that all documentation was done correctly to receive a small portion of additional funding in order to attempt to provide much needed resources for his struggling students.

Interestingly, Andrew points to a past where principals' only worries about the building and hiring and firing teachers without the same kind of concern for achievement and instruction.

> I resist this idea. I have known and worked with many principals who took the responsibility of instructional leader quite seriously.

Perhaps this perception is coming from the intensity of the constant focus on the test. The romanticization of the past could be a way of providing evidence for his complaint about "what is going on today." The role of the principal has changed over the years with an increased intensity on the role of instructional leader, but it seems that at least some principals have owned the responsibility from the beginning of their career—even before the stakes were high.

Andrew further expands on his overall frustration with a lack of recognition of progress—"it doesn't look at growth." He recognizes the reality of needing to meet standards, but resists being labeled as failing without the acknowledgment that the schools is making improvements--they just haven't increased enough yet. This is further complicated with an ever rising proficiency bar. Even if the school improved enough to meet the requirements of the previous year, the new requirements have caused them to be identified as failing. Public perception is that you are failing—without any acknowledgement to the strides the school made. Andrew is clearly frustrated by this because the image of the school he loves and cherishes is tarnished by a reputation that the general public does not fully understand. It is challenging for

him to work within a system that is not recognizing the accomplishments that he is making or the great strides the school has accomplished in their efforts to close the achievement gap.

Constantly spinning their wheels in an attempt to keep up with the ever increasing standards, principals sometimes find themselves in the precarious position of state involvement.

> *It was rough having the State in here all the time. When the State came in they were telling you what to do and they're not invested in the school except from a State point. So that was difficult. And it's much better not having them there. It is super frustrating to be doing everything you can and then still not meeting the standards so to speak. While you've got these other schools across town that are exceeding the standards and not working near as hard, just having different populations from a socioeconomic standpoint. There's tons of research on all that stuff to single parent homes versus intact families. There are so many things that we deal with here that can affect that test score that someone else is not going to have to deal with. That's extremely frustrating.*

What is important to hear as we attempt to experience this with Andrew is the audacity of the State to send in "experts" to fix a problem that they are not invested in or personally involved in. Listen to his frustration. Why would the state hold back on solutions while a school is struggling for years? How do these experts know what should be done when they lack the investment in the school and community? Andrew's aggravation is further complicated by his desire to protect his students from something else that could harm them when they are already dealing with so much failure.

Andrew resists the idea that all schools receive students on an equal footing and wants there to be an acknowledgement that his students are coming to him at a disadvantage in situations that he cannot control. He states that there is "tons of research" on single parent homes versus intact families. He reiterates that his school is dealing with so much that can impact test scores that other schools may not be dealing with and it seems unfair. I assume the underlying issue that Andrew is addressing here is socio-economic class—in particular, poverty. In Chapter

2, I address some of the issues of poverty and that can influence schools and students' test scores. This is an interesting position, because while I understand that students in poverty typically come to school at a disadvantage, I resist the notion that they will forever be behind their middle class counterparts. Perhaps Andrew is referring to some of the side-effects of poverty such as homelessness, hunger, or a lack of clothing. These things could impact a student's performance in school, and thus their score on a test. Interestingly, the very same issues that Andrew feels his school has extra issues with can have an even more profound impact due to socio-economic class being a subgroup that is probably impacting his school's performance.

> I wonder what is different about schools who do struggle with high poverty and still manage to meet the requirements for achievement.

I have to keep in mind that I'm working with a lot of young people who have young children and have other responsibilities outside the schoolhouse. I need to be sensitive to that. Just because I'm working until 6:30 or 7:00 doesn't mean that if somebody doesn't do that from time to time they're not a good educator. That's something I have had to come to grips with. My expectations are high, but I don't ever want them to be unreasonable. And I do want to embrace the fact that we do have a life outside of school. I can't be hiring teachers who need me to inspire them. I need to be able to hire teachers who have a sense of internal accountability to where they're getting the job done whether I'm watching or not. They're getting the job done with a high degree of pride and motivation. You have to be perceptive as a leader.

Listen to Andrew. He is working harder and longer than everyone and has had to remind himself that everyone can't work well into the evening because of the families and additional responsibilities that they have outside of school. His internal struggle is evident as his desires for the school to achieve are in direct conflict at times with the reality that he can't require teachers to work around the clock. There has to be a balance—he "can't be unreasonable." The expectation of working until 7 PM is unreasonable, yet the realities of the job, the pressure to

increase achievement seem to demand it. Andrew needs teachers who are internally motivated and do not need a strong leader to keep them inspired. Although he does talk about the importance of them having internal accountability to get the job done whether or not they are being watched, it seems that is statement is in conflict with the research. This is interesting as research indicates that strong leadership is key to a school's success. Perhaps Andrew is speaking to the reality of not being able to be everywhere at once.

> I wonder if he recognizes the key importance of his leadership on the teachers in his building. What does strong leadership look like in Andrew's school and would he agree with that definition? It is possible that he has a different view of what strong leadership is. Perhaps Andrew knows the power of a strong leader, but is not clear on what that looks like in the daily application of his work. I feel like all these things could be working together creating an even more complex situation for principals to lead in as they must wade through these murky waters.

Leadership does need to be strong—but what that means and how it plays out on a daily basis may be different in each school. In reality, Andrew is correct with the statement that he cannot be watching all of the time.

Although Andrew is providing his teachers' with the guidance needed, he is aware of the need to have staff who can work in the midst of the pressure and struggles of the outside perception of failure. Perception—a trait that Andrew deems worthy of classifying as an important quality in a leader. Perception is necessary to hire the right people, lead the school in

> I wonder how principals feel their perception is used and needed on a daily
>
> basis.

the right direction, deal with the pressure of the job, and know what needs to be done in order to

be successful. Perhaps perception to know which policies to resist and which to embrace is a key

characteristic of effective principals.

> *As a Principal you are literally juggling a dozen balls in the air every day. You want to have this meaningful, thoughtful conversation about curriculum and instruction but often in mid-sentence you get interrupted by somebody coming in to report a fight or an overflowing toilet or a call from the superintendent or an upset parent or some political leader or an attorney or a meeting you have to go to. How do you knit that all together in a way that doesn't drive you crazy? That's another key part of Principal leadership. How do you manage all that you know you should do without getting overwhelmed by it? Everything you do has a profound impact on the lives of kids. It is hard being labeled a failing school. It's frustrating because we knew we were doing good things. You can't let it defeat you. I realize now that there are some things that you just don't have to worry over or spend so much time over. I don't let certain things get to me anymore. I used to try to please everybody and meet everyone's needs. I've realized that's not my job, to have to worry about every single little detail. I've learned how to delegate better. At first I tried to have my hand in everything and support everybody. I've learned that it is ok to delegate. What you have to realize is there's always going to be work on your desk, there's always going to be emails to answer, and there's always going to be a deadline to meet, but ask for help.*

Imagine juggling all that responsibility daily. Imagine having more to do than you have

hours with constant interruptions that require immediate attention. Andrew is so busy juggling all

of his responsibilities he admits that he is missing the opportunity to reflect and have

"meaningful, thoughtful conversation." Knowing that everything does have a "profound impact

on the lives of kids" can only add to the stress. Andrew is attempting to find his way through the

requirements of the job without an opportunity to reflect on what really needs to be done with

others invested in the same students. The waters are further muddied when he has to deal with

the daily maintenance of a building or the politics of a public school. He expresses the importance of "knitting it all together in a way that doesn't drive you crazy."

> I wonder what this really looks like. How does one knit together varying tasks and responsibilities when some of them appear clash with one another?

Perhaps it speaks to the importance of the work and how nothing can be left undone. It seems to imply that everything must be working together, weaving together in a way that creates something amazing. It implies to me that nothing can be ignored, left out, or even labeled unimportant because it is coming together to create one final product. To try to maintain a sense of control in a system where he clearly lacks the ability to control very much, Andrew established a system to work through his days, prioritize the work, and leave the rest to another day. No easy task in a high stakes testing, high accountability era where every move is under scrutiny.

Despite Andrew's desires to be all things to all people, he realized that it had to stop. The job had to get done, and he couldn't make everyone happy while doing it. With the ultimate responsibility resting with educating students, Andrew had to learn to delegate tasks—tasks that were still his responsibility, but had to be done by others. There was always work left undone. This touches back on the issue of it never ending—the pressure never letting up. He keeps pointing to a larger issue of the pressure continuing to build without a reprieve. There was always more to be done, always work piling up on the desk, and never an opportunity to have a sense of completion.

> *One of the frustrations that Principals feel[is] that very often innovation, [that occurs] when they do step out of the lines, is not always supported or appreciated. They're told why it costs too much or is met with cynicism or people assume there is some kind of*

ulterior motive. I'm not asking for the pat on the back, but very often as Principal you
tend to get kicked in the butt for what doesn't go well. There's less acclaim for the out of
the box efforts that are made. You have to find some inner belief to make it successful.

"Stepping out of the lines is not always supported or appreciated." Andrew's voice raises with

each syllable as the aggravation shows its impact. Stepping out of the lines has consequences.

When Andrew tried to implement a new program to increase professional development by

promoting opportunities for teachers to discuss the work they were doing, he immediately faced

external resistance. His cynicism towards this is not directed towards the initiative, but rather the

lack of freedom to really be creative in an effort to improve achievement. Andrew desires the

space to really think outside of the box and try something without facing negative consequences

if interventions and initiatives do not have an immediate and profound impact. He recognizes the

risk associated with such an endeavor, but notes that sometimes you have to take risks in order to

achieve greatness. Andrew's disheartening testimony of the lack of acclaim further amplifies the

intensity of the job he works through daily. Internal motivation has to be the fuel that keeps

Andrew working around the clock in order to increase achievement, because the outside world

only sees the failure.

> *It's hard, but when you know the good work that you're doing, and you know the kids*
> *that you have and where you've brought those kids, when you know you've got 80% of*
> *your kids on free lunch, or you know that your kids are making improvements, and you*
> *get to look at the data that nobody else gets to look at, you have to hold on to those*
> *things. Walking into classrooms every day, being in classrooms, seeing the good work*
> *teachers are doing, seeing the difference that teachers are making whether it's showing*
> *up in the newspaper or on TV, you still have to know and be able to face yourself in the*
> *mirror. You have to be the one to walk out the door and close the door behind you and go*
> *home knowing that you made a difference that day, knowing that your teachers made a*
> *difference, and that your teachers are qualified to do what you've given them the*
> *opportunity to do. You just have to know that you're putting forth and you're providing*
> *the best you can for those kids. I have to provide the best professional development that I*
> *can for my teachers. I have to provide the most support that I can for my teachers so that*
> *my teachers can then go in and provide for the students every day. And it can't be about*

us. It has to be about the kids and what we're going to do different for the kids and all of our decisions. We've had to create that culture of when I do this am I doing what's right by the kids or is this what's good for me? If we're doing what's right by the kids in the long run we're going to turn things around… we're going to win. You also have to put into perspective who your kids are, what population you serve, and what their capabilities are. I'm very proud to be the Principal here. It's an honor to me and it's almost like a badge that I feel like I get to wear that they've honored me to let me be here because I get to be a part of just a great group of teachers that truly care about kids and those kids later in life know that we stood by them and we did right by them and we're going to make a difference. That will be my legacy.

Andrew's struggle is tangible. You can hear his desire for others to really see the amazing things that are happening at his school. He wants to create an environment where others will look in amazement at the accomplishments of kids with so much stacked against them. Andrew says "you have to be the one to walk out the door and close the door behind you and go home knowing that you made a difference that day, knowing that your teachers made a difference, and that your teachers are qualified to do what you've given them the opportunity to do." This seems almost prophetic as Andrew is speaking to the future he sees, and not the one he is currently living in. However, his words portray the recognition that at some point you have to be satisfied with doing your absolute best and trusting that those around you are doing the same thing. Perhaps Andrew is not just speaking of principals, but is also reminding himself of what must be done. Sometimes, it is necessary to make a difference in the life of a child, even if every goal is not attained.

Andrew recognizes the unfortunate reality that he is currently in—right now he must be satisfied with the knowledge that he is leading a school that is making a difference. He wrestles daily with the public perception of his school and these moments of greatness that those outside the building will never be privileged to see. There is a reality of poverty that Andrew deals with daily—students who come with so many disadvantages that are having to overcome more in

order to be labeled adequate. There are a few underlying assumptions here. It is believed that

students in poverty are coming with disadvantages—they are behind in their academics, they do

not have the appropriate resources to compete with their middle class peers, and they likely do

not come to school highly motivated to meet the requirements daily. Even the achievements

these students do make (even if they are making great strides in their academics) often still fall

below the passing bar so they are ignored. Another assumption is that their socio-economic

status places them in a category of people who tend to not value education. This assumption

typically comes from the lack of education of the adults in the lives of these students and the

belief that it indicates their views on its importance. Students in poverty are an identified

subgroup according to AYP and are likely one that is costing Andrew's school a passing status.

Andrew likely is working with families trying to convince them of the importance of daily

attendance and how coming to school and working hard can provide a better life. Students in

poverty come to school with additional disadvantages as well. These students are often hungry,

lack the appropriate clothes or supplies, and possibly are unsure where they might sleep that

night. These issues can have a dramatic impact on a student's performance in school which can

in turn influence teachers and principals. Yet Andrew perseveres. He pushes forward because

each day he looks in the mirror and sees the reflection of a man who is still giving everything he

has to the cause—the cause of education. Andrew has accepted that public acclaim or even

understanding may never happen, perhaps because of the politic backlash, but he find assurance

in knowing that each day he is doing everything he can do change the lives of students. Listen to

his language—"It is his legacy." His legacy rests in the knowledge that at the end of the day he

has done everything possible to improve the lives of the students he is responsible for by

investing in them, their teachers, and their school. Perhaps this is the best principals can hope for

because of all the uncontrollable aspects of their profession. It seems that looking at individual

students, rather than speaking of them in terms of subgroups, might be a place to begin a

conversation to create schools that were safe environments of learning rather than testing and

accountability.

Documents

I had to examine numerous documents in order to have a clear picture and ensure myself

that I understood the language that each of the principals used during their interviews. The first

document I examined was the No Child Left Behind policy on Georgia Department of

Education's webpage. Here I was able to closely examine how Georgia was interpreting the

mandates coming from NCLB as well as see what the expectation was in compliancy. This led

me to focus on exactly what was included in the waiver that Georgia submitted. The waiver to be

exempt from the mandates from NCLB did not remove the accountability, but rather, Georgia

had to show that they were creating a system that would hold schools accountable. I was

surprised to discover that Georgia now had new labels for schools. Rather than identify schools

as failing or passing, Georgia had levels of failing and additional status for Title 1 schools (see

Appendix F): Rewards School, Priority School, Focus School, and Alert School. Although these

titles sound promising, I discovered that only the Rewards School is a school that is meeting the

requirements. I felt that the language was misleading and wondered if this was done in an effort

to cushion the reporting of how schools were doing. There is an extensive list of requirements in

each of these categories as well.

> The names of how schools are classified are interesting to me. Without prior knowledge of what these labels mean, there is ambiguity in the titles. I wonder why they used the names they did and if there are reasons that they did not just go with the system that had been in place of passed or failed.

I also wonder how the measure of the CRCT in middle schools will continue to be used. The test is changing over the next few years as the standards have moved from the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) to the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS).

> In an effort to compete nationally and internationally, I fear that this labeling of schools gives potential misconceptions about what is really happening.

Included in the waiver is the acknowledgement that Georgia receives greater flexibility in how federal funding is spent, but I wonder if schools actually experience this flexibility. Perhaps the goal was to provide the illusion of gaining some control back, but it appears that power still rests outside of individually schools.

Along with understanding this waiver, I wanted to understand what classified a school as a Title 1 school. With all of my participants mentioning the slight distinction between a Title 1 School of Distinction and a Failing School, I wanted to be sure I knew the difference. Title 1 Schools are identified when at least 40% of students are from low-income families. Schools then have to apply for this status and are given additional funds that must be documented carefully in order to continue receiving them and remain in compliance. Schools can choose to be a part of "school-wide" Title 1 status or "targeted assistance" Title 1 status. In "school-wide" status the funds can be dispersed more flexibly to the entire population of students, whereas in a "targeted

assistance" school students must be identified as failing. The only difference in a Title 1 School of Distinction and a failing school can fall literally to one student. If the school meets AYP and are Title 1, then they qualify as a School of Distinction. If not, then they are failing. Perhaps the intention was to demonstrate that Title 1 schools with just high poverty rates could still meet

> I wonder if the School of Distinction title might be better served with higher qualifications.

requirements, but it seems it could be frustrating for schools as it begins to come down to one or two students.

Summary

I get to be a part of just a great group of teachers that truly care about kids and those kids later in life know that we stood by them and we did right by them and we're going to make a difference. ***That will be my legacy.***

The four principals of failing middle schools in this study are struggling to meet the standards. Each of them talked through their lived experiences as principals during this era while reflecting on the impact it had on them daily. The pressures bear down on them with an unrelenting constancy. The responsibilities of this high stakes calling are overwhelming as they must daily make decisions that impact the lives of students. Many aspects of their jobs are outside their control, and yet they choose to persevere. These four principals have made a choice. They are investing their lives into students. Although the details and burden of the job may one day be more than they can continue to accept, today they choose to stay. They have hope. Hope that they are making a difference in the lives of students no matter how many faults the system

has. Hope that they will be able to change the system so that it will better meet the needs of their schools and their students. Hope that their legacy will not be in leading a failing school, but making a difference in the lives of students. Hear their experiences. Listen to their voices.

The primary phenomenological research question was: What is it to find oneself as a principal in the high accountability, high stakes testing era of education today, and in particular what is it like to lead a school that is labeled failing or needs improvement?

Secondary research questions:

How do the requirements of NCLB and criticisms influence principals as they make decisions that impact the daily life of a school as well as its long term standing?

How do they navigate being a principal in the high stakes environment?

Being a principal in the high accountability, high stakes testing era is complex. Leading a school that is identified as failing adds to the complexity of the job. Each of the principals that participated in the study spoke of the challenges, the stress, the pressure, the responsibility, and the things that were outside of their control. The told stories and anecdotes to provide a glimmer into the world that they lived on a daily basis. Their job is challenging and unique with responsibilities that have long term consequences as they are impacting the lives of students who will go on to influence society in some fashion. The requirements of NCLB (and now Race to the Top and other state requirements) are making daily impacts on principals and not always the most positive impact. Often, it seems, district decisions are being made without a complete understanding of a school, the community, or the needs of the students being served. This complicates the principal's job as they are forced to work within the confines of the regulations while at the same time trying to do what is right by their students. This is a complicated endeavor

without clear boundaries or solutions. Principals face so many additional challenges when they are identified as failing due to the requirements of 100% proficiency by a certain time-line. The sanctions that come from the inability to get all students on target in the time period allotted puts additional pressures on the principal and can lead to desperation and poor choices.

Chapter 5

Summary, Implications, and Recommendations

How do I write this phenomenon? The task in front of me was huge, but I knew that it was work that needed to be done. I decided to proceed carefully, respectfully, cautiously, and watchfully. The experiences of my participants were intense, shared moments full of a wide range of emotions. Many of these moments were things participants said they had never told anyone. I contend that they were sharing with me because for the first time they had been given a safe space to really talk about something that was so important to them. I experienced deep sharing. Vulnerable and honest, these moments were crucial to me. I wondered, and pondered, troubled by how massive the task in front of me seemed. The problem was so great—I did not want to diminish the experiences that the participants shared. So, I decided to create a picture of the phenomenon. I decided to "paint a picture" of what the lived experiences of principals looked like in an effort to really take the reader on a journey alongside the participants. The composite characters project a picture of the unity that was within the interviews themselves. I was careful to ensure that the composite characters did not project unity where it did not exist. This work is the peak of those efforts. Although it may be partial and incomplete, this was my best attempt at what was happening in that moment where I sat mesmerized, engulfed by their stories.

Structure of the Work

I decided to set up the stories that the participants shared by creating characters based on them. In order to protect their identity some characteristics had to be changed, but the core of who they are remained true in order to represent each principal, through the composite characters. Their stories hit on three major issues that impacted their work constantly. So, I wrote

my way through these experiences by organizing their stories by these three major

components—responsibility, uncontrollable, and pressure.

Through my post-intentional phenomenological approach to opening up the phenomenon

my desire was to allow the reader to look along these experiences. Additionally, I anticipated in

part to achieve what van Manen (1990) saw a phenomenology doing—"To do phenomenology is

to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some

aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any

explication of meaning can reveal (p. 18)." My "awareness" of this complexity informed the

intricate structuring and construction of this text and its assortment of voices.

In Chapter One I situated the study within the lifeworld and addressed the principal's

roles in school and accountability policies. This was accomplished through a review of books,

articles and stories from the newspaper, and experientially as I situated my own experiences of

accountability and in education more broadly. In Chapter 2, I reviewed the educational policies

that have influenced schools and principals and helped to create this high stakes testing and high

accountability environment. I examined the literature that looked at ESEA, NCLB, Race to the

Top, and other policies that address similar issues of accountability and testing. Additionally, I

examined the literature on principals in middle schools and the influence that these policies have

on their day-to-day lives. Chapter Three grounded this work philosophically, specifically taking

up post-intentional phenomenology as both a philosophical and methodological approach for

explicating the phenomenon of the lived experiences of principals under the high stakes testing

era. I revealed how I used Post-Intentional Phenomenology (Vagle, 2010a) to create, develop,

implement, analyze, and represent this project. Next, I spent time situating the phenomenon of

the lived experiences of principals under a high stakes testing environment. By forwarding

different horizons of understanding, I further endeavored to provide vantage points for the reader

to look along this profoundly significant lived experience. Finally, in Chapter Four, I offered

three tentative manifestations of deeply significant experiences that resounded with the

principals of the Needs Improvement middle school. Each of these manifestations was

empirically supported through the participants' words and briefly grounded either

methodologically, theoretically, or philosophically to offer "the possibility of plausible insights

that bring us in more direct contact with the world" (van Manen, 1990, p. 9). Each piece offered

partial glimpses of this lived experience.

I intentionally created a complex structure for the presentation of my work for a few

reasons. To begin with, lived-experiences are complex and are lived complexly with interwoven

parts. Therefore, I chose for the presentation and representation to be complex in order to

demonstrate the interwoven nature of the life world. Second, as this dissertation served to both

clarify and enlighten my scholarly enterprise with this project, I wanted the written work to

mirror the complexity I felt concerning the task I had undertaken and the experiences I engaged

in throughout this process. It was imperative to me that I invited the reader to engage as a listener

to the stories of the lived experiences of principals while they bridle their own experiences in

schools with principals. Through this structured complexity, I attempted to conduct this project

in adherence to the principles of quality post-intentional phenomenological research as to reveal

and afford glimpses of the partial and tentative manifestations of this lived experience (Vagle,

2010a).

Conclusions and Discussion

The job of the principal has never been easy. Being responsible for a school filled with

students and teachers can create complex dynamics to sift through. However, under this new era

of high stakes testing and accountability, principals' jobs have become even more difficult. Research has shown that principals face new challenges as they are trying to increase test scores in order to protect their jobs and their school, which at the same time trying to preserve aspects of the school that are key for students. In Chapter 2, various studies are cited that point to the pressure the principal is under and the choices they are forced to make in order to remain in compliance. Now the performance of every single student can impact a principal's job security as well as their reputation in the profession. Principals of schools that have been identified as failing face even greater challenges as they attempt to climb an uphill battle and get their students on level. Principals pointed to difficulty in finding highly qualified teachers and how policies continued to aggravate this issue. There are no incentives for principals to enter the more difficult schools, yet principals who do are expected to create huge gains despite the statistical realities. To meet these ever increasing challenges requires an extraordinary amount of work and focus, and mostly, sacrifice. However, the sacrifice is rarely recognized in the job. Principals are expected to continue working around the clock doing whatever is necessary to bring about change. Principals are expected to do whatever it takes in order to have a passing school because the common belief is that every school can pass no matter what challenges they face. They are required to wear many hats as they operate a building and lead instruction. Previously in Chapter 2, I pointed to how principals' leadership guides the direction of the school as they are considered the most influential factor in a school's success or failure. Their decisions and beliefs are further complicated as the responsibility for achievement rests squarely on their shoulders. They are isolated, alone and drowning in a sea of policies and regulations. This re-occurring thread of being alone and isolated is definitely something that needs to be acknowledged and

explored further. I think asking questions like "what is it to find oneself alone?" and "what does it mean to be isolated in your profession?" might be good places to start.

Principals' jobs are incredibly important for the success of a school. They are seen as a key factor in whether a school will be successful. Given this, why is so little attention paid by supervisors to the job that is required of them? It is important to recognize that principals of schools, even schools that are failing, must be given the opportunity and time to do the work in order to be successful; as well as the freedom to take risks and fail. Principals in schools that have been identified as needing improvement are isolated in their leadership and are forced to make difficult decisions daily to protect their own job and reputation, as well as the school's and the futures of the students. Often principals of these failing schools face sanctions and requirements from people who are not invested in their school or community, and may even lack educational experience. Given that, are we really doing what is best for student achievement if we are not doing what is best for these key leaders? It appears that the aspects of the principal's job needs to be further explored in order to provide stronger support and that policies need to be examined to ensure that the best decisions are being made for schools and students. Principals play a critical role in the success of the school, and they must be operating at optimum performance in order to bring a school out of the ashes on to greatness.

Self-Reflective

It was very difficult to study something you are extremely close to and from which you draw significant meaning and importance. This "closeness" had implications for how open I was and required an ongoing, self-critical, bridled (Dahlberg, et al.,2008) orientation. I never felt I could ever fully get myself out of the way as who I was as a teacher, specifically a math teacher with experience in schools identified as needs improvement and failing. I often felt like I had to

bridle my own experiences and worried that it could possibly compromise what I saw, found, or was revealed. On the other hand, maybe this helped me present this piece more effectively to better assist others to look along as I felt I understood the intensity. I am not sure. It was also difficult for me to share this experience with others. I found that I was quite defensive about my own writing because I felt that these experiences were so important that I did not want anything to distort them. I had a tremendous amount of anxiety sharing it with others because I was also afraid that others would be critical and see no value in what I worked so hard to create. I am continuing to work through this even now, but have experienced feedback from trusted colleagues and friends who continue to push me forward. Additionally, while I am most appreciative for the last year to devote more time to focused work on this project, I admit the process has been challenging. Having to move in and out of this type of scholarly work while juggling a full time teaching career, personal commitments, and then having two children has made it difficult. I found that I needed time to really get into my data and immerse myself with the inquiry without the distractions of having to move my mind in and out of so many various things.

Limitations

Like all studies, this study has limitations. To begin, it was carried out with four specific principals in a specific moment in time. Each of these principals led a failing middle school in Northeast Georgia. Although these four principals were different genders with various levels of experience, they were all Caucasian. These were choices that I made based on the principals that were available to me at the time. This study obviously does not capture the innumerable tentative manifestations of this phenomenon, rather opens it up some important insights into the what it might be like to lead a needs improvement middle school in this high stakes testing era. My

hope is that future studies will examine more principals' (in many different contexts) experiences in the high stakes testing and high accountability era, thus providing an even deeper and broader set of perspectives regarding this phenomenon.

Implications

To be honest, I really had no idea what the study would offer, other than an opening up and troubling of this lived experience. As mentioned in Chapter 2, there is research literature that focuses on No Child Left Behind and its influence on teachers and students, but much less that explicitly addressed the lived experiences of the principals leading in this accountability era. When I began this study my desire was not completely to just fill this gap in the literature, but to really ponder this experience as it was something that was important to me. My intent was to explore, trouble, and see what rose to the surface. To proceed scholarly, not academically (as a practicing K-12 teacher)—that was a new challenge, a new experience for me. As a teacher, I was accustomed to the academic world. I was able to focus on being a teacher and what was needed to be successful at that. However, in order to be scholarly, I had to do more research, understand philosophies, and think more openly about the topics that interested me. In order to contribute to the field I had to embrace all areas of it, and not stay in the isolation of my own experiences. I desired to completely immerse myself within a specific inquiry and a guiding philosophical and methodological approach to unravel and reveal an understanding. This was my chance to really dig in, get after, and immerse myself in something in a scholarly way. Implications were not my intent, but a welcomed outcome.

One area of implications concerned what this work might afford to those who have read, or will read, it (either in the present form or in future presentations and publications). Van Manen (1990) noted, a good phenomenological description is an adequate elucidation of some

aspect of the lifeworld – it resonates with our sense of lived life. The 'phenomenological nod' is a way of indicating that a good phenomenological description is something that we can nod to, recognizing it as an experience that we have had or could have had. As a reader it resonates with you as familiar and personal. In other words, "a good phenomenological description is collected by lived experience and recollects lived experience – is validated by lived experience and it validates lived experience" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 27). As a reader you can identify with what is being said and find yourself "nodding" towards that. My desire was to write a text that allowed the reader to have moments like this—all readers, not just principals. For something to resonate and make an impact in the life of another. I then desire that the reader use those understandings in their lives in ways that ring forth. The nod points towards a connection and validation of those moments that we experience and live within the lifeworld.

Why does this need to be studied? There are three groups of educators that this study is designed for. First, this work is written for educational leaders. The work of the principal is multi-faceted and complex and this work hoped to provide a glimpse into the experiences of these principals. My desire is to help principals and educational leaders understand what is happening in schools in an effort to make them stronger. This text provides glimpses into the internal tensions that principals grapple with on a daily basis. Those who prepare school leaders need to acknowledge that this tension exists between ideals and requirements. Perhaps if principals knew the tensions that existed and were able to have honest conversations with practicing principals, burn out would not occur so rapidly. What if principals were allowed to openly and honestly share what their work was like, their experiences with school districts, and what they would do if they were allowed to do whatever they wanted in their school?

In addition, this work was written for teacher practitioners. This text represents a dialogue between teachers and principals. Tensions emerge between teachers and principals as well. This text initiates these conversations in a difficult context. By opening up these difficult conversations, it can serve as a starting place for these conversations to begin to happen within schools for teachers and principals. If teachers understood more of the principal's job, a deeper understanding could be developed that could create strong, working relationships. As teachers, I feel like it would be beneficial for us to engage in this difficult conversation and acknowledge these tensions as they emerge. As teachers, we struggle with feeling like principals have "good reasons for poor choices." This text is an attempt to open up that conversation. The realities of what is happening in schools today creates tensions for all those involved. This must be opened up and explored further.

A third area of implications I discuss highlights the impact this study had on the participants themselves. Throughout the study I was surprised to learn that depth of appreciation that my participants felt about being part of the study. Each participant continued to express their appreciation for the opportunity to really be provided a space to talk about their experiences. I received emails and phone calls after interview sessions where participants wanted to share with me why they were so grateful to be a part of the study. These moments were so personal and fragile I felt it was important to note the vulnerability they were willing to express in regards to this. One of the participants noted how throughout the interviews he had shared things he had never spoken about before. He said that he was afraid that just uttering the words would be admitting weakness and he may never recover. Another participant discussed how lonely it is to lead, particularly in an environment where the stakes are raised constantly and there is a level of competition between the schools. She talks of a lack of support, allies, or knowledge about who

can even be trusted. Still another participant spoke of finally having the opportunity to talk about something that is so important, so personal, and so high stakes. He said he has never been able to speak of it because he is truly alone in his position and there really isn't anyone there to talk too. The fourth participant noted that she was relieved to see work was finally being done that would look at what was happening so that maybe the conditions would improve. The intensity of their thanks astonished me and demonstrated that this was a need and valuable.

The experiences of these principals, through the creation of the composite characters, allows us to have a glimpse at the experiences of principals in failing schools in this era of high stakes testing and accountability. The intensity of their work has additional implications in the field of education. The work of principal's has never contained more pressure. As these types of pressures and responsibilities increase, the work of principals will change. In order to keep principals in these types of high stress leadership positions, the incentives and benefits will have to change. Otherwise, schools will begin to experience difficulties in finding the right people to lead because no one will want the job. The work of teachers is also changing. No longer are teachers just teaching the subject they love. Now there is additional responsibility to ensure that students prepare for the test and that schools continue to make AYP. Teachers cannot ignore this reality and must work with principals to create common goals to operate under the restrictions they have been given. This is not to say that teachers cannot be creative, but rather that must be more intentional conversations with principals and teachers to work together in this endeavor. Principals need to get teachers in place to work with them in leading the school and support other teachers so that the goals can be accomplished.

If schools are forced to continue to operate in this manner, then cheating scandals will continue. Principals will leave the profession and their replacements will never come. Schools

will continue to struggle as funding continues to decrease forcing personnel to decrease and class

size to increase. These principals are sounding an alarm—a warning. There must be a change.

Principals operating in this type of stress will not remain forever. The responsibility, the

uncontrollable, and the pressure—it must be relieved and dealt with in a way that serves

principals, teachers, and students in the most beneficial manner.

Recommendations

The nature of the work discussed by the principals and their desires to talk and find

support demonstrates a need for more work in this area. Although literature is clear on the

important of strong leaders, what is unclear is the impact of high stakes testing and high

accountability on those leaders. I feel it is important to understand the impact in order to prepare

others as they enter into leadership and provide support for those that are already there. Perhaps

with greater understanding would come trust in the individuals who have shouldered the massive

responsibility of leading a middle school, particularly a failing middle school. Because strong

leadership has been recognized as the key factor in a school's success of failure, it would be

pertinent to examine schools with the most challenging populations to understand how their test

scores and achievement improve each year. I would recommend further research be done to

clarify what is actually going on in schools and in various settings. As a scholar, my desire is to

not just know that principals are key, but to train those leaders to flourish in the field they have

prepared for. My hope is that strong leaders who are equipped for the challenges that face them

can work together to create strong middle schools that are working to nurture the whole learner

and create strong, educated, well-rounded students. Additionally, I hope that these principals

would be given a voice to change the way student achievement is measured in order to find the

most accurate method to assess students. My desire is to create a safe place for strong principals to use their voice and experience to do what is best for students across our country. Additional work should focus on principals in middle schools that have been identified as failing, needs improvement, or whatever equivalent identifier the state has adopted. Principals from various types of middle schools need to be included to get various perspectives and accounts of the experiences. Perhaps further work in this area could help to create strong leaders that would stay at schools longer to ensure the right work is done so that schools will continue to become stronger and do what is right for student to achieve. In addition, conversations need to be opened between teachers and principals about the very issues that are complicating things. Perhaps research could be done that included principals and teachers as they discussed these tensions together. By having teachers and pre-service teachers read this work, they may better appreciate some of what goes on in schools that they resent and resist. Considering how high the stakes are, it seems foolish to ignore the problems in this area without addressing them in a way that could better support the most influential component of a successful school. More conversations are needed and the conversation must be opened up to have these difficult dialogues about the realities of being a principal.

"In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing. The worst thing you can do is nothing." Theodore Roosevelt

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Appendix A

CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study titled " A Phenomenological Inquiry into being a Middle School Principal in a High Stakes Testing Era" conducted by Stephanie Wells from the Department Elementary and Social Studies Education at the University of Georgia (770-235-8187) under the direction of Dr. Mark Vagle, Advisor, Department of Elementary and Social Studies Education, University of Georgia (612-384-2262). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at anytime without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. If I decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as mine will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless I make a written request to remove, return, or destroy information.

The reason for this study is to understand the lived experiences of principals in Needs Improvement Georgia Middle Schools. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

1. **Participate in 4 formal face-to-face interviews (1-1.5 hours each)**
2. **Have informal short conversations with the researcher, at my discretion.**

I understand there are both risks and benefits associated with participating in this study. For instance, the principal attrition rate is growing higher and higher. This could be due, in part, to increased demands and pressures in the high-stakes testing era. Unfortunately, there are few studies that aim to understanding the experiences of principals. This study has the potential to help others get a deep, rich account of what it is like to lead a school under these conditions—which, in turn can help society at large get a better sense of the effects and implications of current educational policies have on principals.

At the same time, I understand that because I am being asked to discuss a topic that involves high stakes testing, politics, and money there is some associated risk. In order to minimize risk, I understand that my identity will be kept confidential by using a pseudonym and all distinguishing data will be removed. I also understand that I can choose to not respond to any question (or request for informal conversation or document) for which I am uncomfortable.

No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the individual interview portions of the research, will be shared with others, unless required by law. If the researchers use any direct quotes from my interviews or observations in any professional presentations or publications, the researcher will alter or delete any information that could identify the quotation as mine or be affiliated with my place of work.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

Stephanie Wells   _____   _____
Researcher   **Signature**   **Date**
Telephone: 770-235-8187

Email: smwells@uga.edu

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   **Signature**   **Date**

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.

Appendix B

Recruitment Email

Dear _____,

My name is Stephanie Wells and I am a PhD candidate at the University of Georgia. I am

currently working on my dissertation. I am looking for principals to participate in my research. I

got your email address from your school's website. The name of my study is *"A*

Phenomenological Inquiry into being a Middle School Principal in the High Stakes Testing

Era." I am seeking to understand the lived experiences of principals in this high stakes

environment. My hope is that by interviewing you I will have a better understanding of what it

means to be a principal in this era. Ultimately, I hope what I learn from you can be used to better

support and serve principals. If you choose to participate you will be asked to participate in:

4 interviews (1-1.5 hours/interview)

I would love the opportunity to work with you. I know that your time is valuable and your

schedule is very busy.

Thank you for the opportunity to work with you!

Stephanie Wells

University of Georgia, PhD Candidate

770-235-8187

smwells@uga.edu

The Institutional Review Board oversees research at The University of Georgia that involves human participants. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to Institutional Review Board, Office of the Vice President for Research, 606 Boyd Graduate Studies Center, The University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602-7411; Telephone 706-542-3199.

Appendix C

Principal Recruitment

Dear Principal:

I am writing to request your participation in a dissertation research study titled
"Phenomenological Inquiry into being a Middle School Principal in a High Stakes Testing Era".
The dissertation research is being conducted as the final requirement for my Doctorate of
Education degree in Middle Grades Education from the University of Georgia under the
direction of Dr. Mark Vagle, Associate Professor & Adjunct Faculty member, Department of
Elementary and Social Studies Education, University of Georgia, Aderhold Hall, Athens, GA
30602, 612-384-2262

The dissertation research focuses on the experiences of the principal under the implementation of
No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). This study focuses on the
principal's experiences in an effort to understand and support principals as one of the key factors
in a schools success. The selected participants will be principals from a school districts in the
state of Georgia.

Your participation is strictly voluntary. However, I would hope that you see the potential benefit
in this research dissertation and choose to participate. There are no school district, school, or
educator identifiers in the interview questions. The interview questions will contain open-ended
questions regarding the lived experiences of the principals. It will take 90 minutes for each of the
4 interviews. I will provide the principal with a copy of the transcribed notes from the interviews
for them to review and ensure that everything is accurate.

Thank you for allowing your school to participate in the dissertation research. If approved, email

me so that we can proceed. If additional information is needed to help complete this request,

please do not hesitate to call me at 770-235-8187 or email me at smwells@uga.edu.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Wells

The Institutional Review Board oversees research at The University of Georgia that involves
human participants. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be
addressed to Institutional Review Board, Office of the Vice President for Research, 606 Boyd
Graduate Studies Center, The University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602-7411; Telephone 706-
542-3199.

Appendix D

Initial Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experiences as a principal in this high stakes testing, high

    accountability era.

2. How do the requirements of NCLB influence the decisions you make as a principal?

3. Do you feel NCLB is improving education? Explain.

4. Did you have leadership experience prior to NCLB? What was that like?

Interview 2-Teachers

1. Tell me about your experiences supervising teachers.

2. What challenges do you experience when attempting to facilitate teachers.

3. What is it like to observe teachers in high impact areas versus other areas?
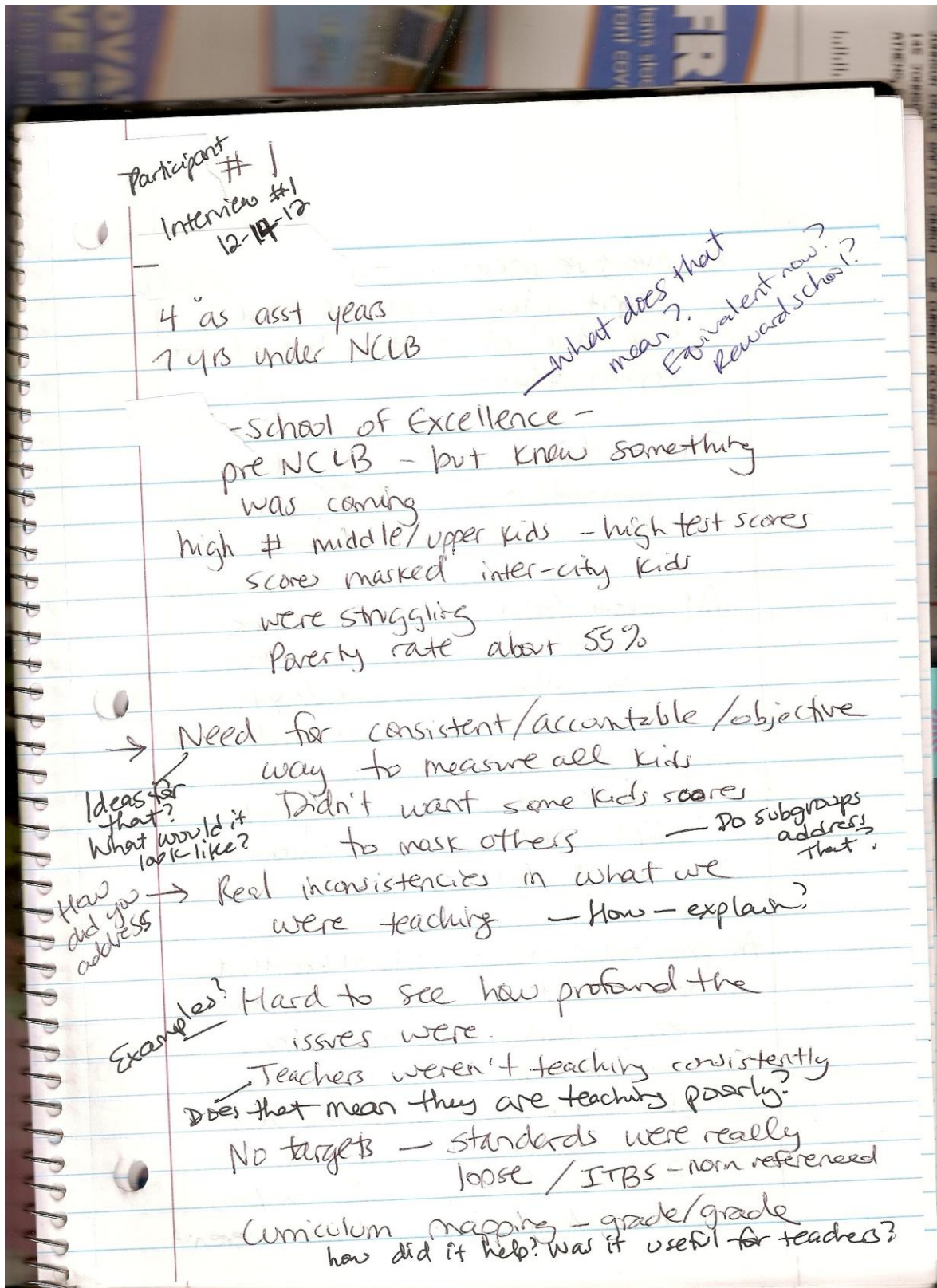
Interview 3-Students

1. What is it like to find oneself having to make choices about a students' future because of

    a test score?

2. What is it to find oneself in disagreement with teachers and/or parents over what is being

    taught in the classroom, the placement of a student, or what interventions a student may

    or may not need?

3. What is it like to lead a school that is labeled failing?

Interview 4-Curriculum

1. What does it mean to make hard choices about what is taught and what is left out?

2. What is it to find oneself having to make hard decisions to cut programs because of NCLB pressures, despite their benefits to students?

3. How do you prioritize curriculum to meet mandates?

4. What does it mean to choose a research based intervention and ensure that it is used to fidelity?

Appendix E

Participant # 1
Interview #1
12-14-12

4 as asst years
7 yrs under NCLB

What does that mean?
Equivalent now?
Reward school?

-School of Excellence-
pre NCLB - but knew something
was coming
high # middle/upper kids - high test scores
scores masked inter-city kids
were struggling
Poverty rate about 55%

→ Need for consistent/accountable/objective
way to measure all kids

Ideas for that?
What would it look like?

Didn't want some kids scores
to mask others — Do subgroups address that?

How did you address

→ Real inconsistencies in what we
were teaching — How — explain?

Examples? Hard to see how profound the
issues were.

Does that mean they are teaching poorly?

Teachers weren't teaching consistently

No targets — standards were really
loose / ITBS - norm referenced

Curriculum mapping — grade/grade
how did it help? Was it useful for teachers?

Appendix F

Georgia Waiver for ESEA Requirements 03.08.12

Dr. John D. Barge, State School Superintendent
"Making Education Work for All Georgians"

Reward Schools – Title I Schools	Priority Schools – Title I Schools	Focus Schools – Title I Schools	Alert Schools* - Title I and Non-Title I Schools

Definition:
• 2 ways to be identified:
  o Highest Performing
  o Highest Progress
• Based on 2011 composite of:
  o CRCT: Reading, ELA, Math
  o CRCT-M: Reading, ELA, Math
  o GAA: ELA, Math
  o EOCT: 9th Grade Lit/Comp, American Lit, Math I, Math II, Algebra, Geometry
 	
Highest Performing
• 5% of Title I schools (78 schools)
• Highest performance for the "All Students" group (n size ≥ 30) over 3 years
• High schools with the highest graduation rates
• May not be identified as a Priority School or a Focus School
• Must have made AYP in 2011
 	
Highest Progress (156 schools)
• 10% of Title I schools
• Highest progress in performance for the "All Students" group (n size ≥ 30) over 3 years
• High schools that are making the most progress in increasing graduation rates
• May not be identified as a Priority School or a Focus School
	Definition:
	• 3 ways to be identified:
	  o SIG School – 1003 (g)
	  o Grad rate less than 60% over 2 years (proxy rate)
	  o Achievement of the "All Students" group (n size ≥ 30) and a lack of progress on achievement over 3 years
	• Based on 2011 composite of :
	  o CRCT: All Subjects
	  o CRCT-M: Reading, ELA, Math
	  o GAA: All Subjects
	  o EOCT: All Subjects***
	
	• 5% of Title I schools – lowest achieving (78 schools)
		Definition:
		• 2 ways to be identified:
		  o Grad rate less than 60% over 2 years (proxy rate) and not identified as a Priority School
		  o Largest within-school gaps between highest achieving subgroup** and the lowest achieving subgroup** and the "All Students" group achieving over 3 years
		• Based on minimum n size ≥ 30
		• Based on 2011 composite of :
		  o CRCT: All Subjects
		  o CRCT-M: Reading, ELA, Math
		  o GAA: All Subjects
		  o EOCT: All Subjects***
		
		• 10% of Title I schools (156 schools)
			Definition:
			• 3 ways to be identified:
			  o Graduation Alert
			  o Subgroup Alert
			  o Subject Alert
			• Based on minimum n size ≥ TBD
			• Title I and Non-Title I schools
			
			• **Graduation Alert:** graduation rate is below 3 standard deviations from the mean of the state's subgroups' graduation rate
			  o Based on 9 ESEA subgroups**
			• **Subgroup Alert:** achievement rate is below 3 standard deviations from the mean of the state's subgroups' meets and exceeds rate (CRCT, CRCT-M, GAA, and Grad Rate)
			  o Based on 9 ESEA subgroups**
			• **Subject Alert:** subject achievement is below 3 standard deviations from the mean of the state's meets and exceeds rate for each subject
			• Based on 2011 composite of :
			  o CRCT: All Subjects
			  o CRCT-M: Reading, ELA, Math
			  o GAA: All Subjects
			  o EOCT: All Subjects***
			• Does not include Priority Schools and Focus Schools

• Reward Schools initially identified in September 2012 • Reward Schools designations will replace Distinguished Schools • Reward Schools will be identified annually	• Priority Schools will be identified in April 2012 and will be served for 3 years • Supports and interventions will begin in June 2012	• Focus Schools will be identified in April 2012 and will be served for 3 years • Supports and interventions will begin in June 2012	• Alert Schools will be initially identified in April 2012 • Alert Schools will be identified annually • Supports and interventions will begin in June 2012

Approval of the waiver allows/requires Georgia to:

1. Continue development and refinement of the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) during 2012;
2. Identify Reward, Priority, and Focus Schools as prescribed by US ED;
3. Identify Alert Schools, which are unique to Georgia, and provide greater emphasis on subgroup performance and issues;
4. Use all state assessments in the identification of Priority, Focus, and Alert Schools;
5. Set Performance Targets to trigger Performance Flags (Performance Targets replace the Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) under AYP);
6. Exercise greater flexibility with federal funding;
7. Authorize districts to provide Flexible Learning Programs (FLPs) in lieu of Supplemental Education Services (SES) providers;
8. Follow state law (O.C.G.A. 20-2-2130 – 20-2-2031) relative to school choice;
9. Include Reward, Priority, Focus, and Alert status on the CCRPI public reporting structure;
10. Implement Teacher Keys Evaluation System (TKES) and Leader Keys Evaluation System (LKES) statewide;
11. Provide initial CCRPI report to systems by December 2012;
12. Submit refined CCRPI for US ED review in March 2013 (US ED deadline for submittal is May 24, 2013);
13. Implement CCRPI (which includes the continuation of Reward, Priority, Focus and Alert Schools designations) as Georgia's Single Statewide Accountability System in 2013.

* Unique to Georgia's ESEA waiver request
** ESEA Subgroups: Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaskan, White, Multi-Racial, Students with Disabilities, English Learners, Economically Disadvantaged
*** 9th Grade Literature, American Literature, Algebra I, Geometry, Mathematics I, Mathematics II, Biology, Physical Science, US History, Economics