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Florida's Adolescent Literacy Policy: An Alternative Reading and Response

by

Diane C. Kroeger

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Childhood Education and Literacy Studies
College of Education
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Dedication

There are several loved ones who made this project possible and my feeble words here inadequately convey what resides in my heart. I dedicate this project to my brother Pete whose resolute belief in the potential of public policy inspired me to take this particular approach to my studies. Pete, we miss you so very much. To my dear husband Tony who was so patient, steady and attentive through this long process. Tony, you are my most trusted advisor and my best friend. To my son Ryan who is, and has always been, wise beyond his years, and my daughter Kelly who never ceases to amaze me with her vigor and capacity for learning. I can only hope to be like you both when I grow up. To my parents, Jerry and Justine Chance, whose prayers, advice, encouragement, and financial support made this five-and-a-half year journey much sweeter than it otherwise could have been. Mom, thank you for being my biggest advocate, the source of my tenacity and for instilling in me a keen sensitivity to people who don't "fit in." Dad, thank you for sharing your intellectual curiosity with me. My head is filled with cherished conversations I've had with you that have shaped my thinking and this work. Also, it meant a great deal that you knew what I was going through during this process.

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Secondly, I want to thank the public officials and agency leaders who contributed to this study. Public service places an individual in a precarious position. It affords the possibility of directing policy while at the same time opening one up to critique. I admire the fortitude of each and every person who takes this risk in order to strengthen the quality of education for Florida’s students.

Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude to Lisa Adkins. Her technical support has been most appreciated as I navigated the final weeks of the university’s submission requirements.

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Abstract

In this qualitative case study, I constructed interpretations of the meanings conveyed by state-level discourse communities as they were manifested in the primary and secondary speech genres of Florida's adolescent literacy policy. Meanings (or values, beliefs and feelings) are highly tacit understandings embedded in the language, actions and objects of policy (Yanow, 2000), and are conveyed through informal and formal speech (Bakhtin, 1986). Results revealed (a) state policy meanings convey multiple versions of literacy with a heavy focus on receptive aspects of literate practice; (b) a typology of students and their fit within the institutional system; and (c) an emphasis on systems-based policy solutions. The combined effect of these results yielded two key dynamics (distance and resistance) that may signal challenges for Florida's adolescent literacy reform efforts.

Based on my interpretation of these meanings, I used complexity thinking (Davis & Sumara, 2006) to propose recommendations for reconfiguring Florida's approach to adolescent literacy reform at both the macro and the micro levels. In particular, Florida should move away from systems-based policy solutions and toward people-based policy solutions that enable bottom-up emergence, or system-wide learning.

Chapter I: Introduction

Policy influences practice. Government-sanctioned policy messages shape ideology, discourse, resource allocation and subsequently, the cognition, experience and practice of the implementing agents and their clients (Edmondson, 2000; McDonnell, 2009; Stevens, 2003; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002; Yanow, 2000). Policy artifacts (language, objects and actions) provide a framework and support for enhancing practice, but when ill-designed, they can create incompetence or other counter-consequences (Cohen, Moffit, & Goldin, 2007; Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). Whatever the result, policy, from conception to legitimation, administration, and implementation, is a value-laden endeavor (Colebatch, 2006; Weaver-Hightower, 2008).

As state policy is crafted, legitimized and administered by various agencies of the intergovernmental system, it is interpreted, reinterpreted, shaped and reshaped based on the values, beliefs, and feelings of various actors (Peters, 2007; Weimer & Vining, 2005; Yanow, 2000). Along the way, agency administrators act as policy maker-practitioners as they both receive and generate subsequent policy directives (Cohen, Mofit & Goldin, 2007). Ultimately, policy messages are interpreted once again: through a situated interaction of policy language, objects and actions and the complex cognitive structures and discourse communities of the implementing agents (Coburn, 2001; Kragler, Martin, & Kroeger, 2008; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). Rather than a faithful delivery of government directives, practitioners also interpret policy through their own situated

sense-making efforts (Coburn, 2001; Franzak, 2006). As in Rowe's (2004) "co-constructed" adaptation of Bakhtin's (1986) utterance linkages, the ways practitioners respond to policy informs subsequent policy responses. Practice influences policy.

Problem Statement: The Education Policy-Practice Dilemma

While it is common to configure practice and policy as polar opposites, as in the tension-filled "us-them" paradigm documented by Atkinson (2002), the two actually rely upon one another. Along with a host of external factors, social policy and practice exist more as a co-constructed, ecological relationship (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Schneider, & Ingram, 1997; Stevens & Wikstrom, 2007; Valencia & Wixson, 2004; Weaver-Hightower, 2008). What appears to help fuel the tension in this dynamic relationship is a propensity to underestimate the complexities embedded in and surrounding the micro-macro configuration. In the education sector, this tendency is most noticeable in terms of the primary functions of schooling: *teaching and learning* (Cohen, Mofit & Goldin, 2007; Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988).

Historically, education policy has made substantive progress in building and sustaining a bureaucratic stronghold via policy designs that utilize instruments such as resource allocation and regulatory mandates (Callahan, 1964; Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; McDonnell & Elmore, 1987; Tyack, 1995). More recently, these instruments have become more prescriptive and are now supplemented with deficit-driven tools such as sanctions based on quotas (Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009). *To date, however, macro-level (state and federal) policies have had little impact on the highly complex interactions that comprise quality teaching and learning at the micro- or classroom level* (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Cohen, Moffitt, & Goldin, 2007; Valencia & Wixson, 2004). Aptly

summing up this perplexing dilemma over twenty years ago, Milbrey McLaughlin explained: “policy at best can enable outcomes but in the final analysis it cannot mandate what matters” (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 173). And, while some progress has been made since then with respect to understanding the complexities of education policy design and implementation (Honig, 2009; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Valencia & Wixson, 2004; Weaver-Hightower, 2008), this conundrum is still at the crux of education policy and practice today (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Cohen, Moffitt, & Goldin, 2007). For this reason, some have called for policy research that links the macro and micro levels of the education endeavor (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Franzak, 2006; Valencia & Wixson, 2000).

Yet, policy cannot and does not wait for research, especially in “urgent” situations (Lindblom, 2005; Lindblom & Woodhouse, 1993; Shanahan, 2005). And, occasionally, policy operates in *spite* of research (Cross, 2004; Jimerson, et al., 2006). Driven by a discourse of crisis, policy actors have recently turned their attention to a particular aspect of teaching and learning: *adolescent literacy* (Christie, 2008; Jacobs, 2008; Moore, 2009; Stevens, 2008). Stirred by stagnating standardized test scores, mediocre international comparisons, a persistent achievement gap, disengaged learners, and dismal high school drop-out rates (Salinger, 2007), a “flurry” of activity has commenced with regard to a literacy crisis in America’s middle and high schools (Stevens, 2008, p. 70). And, with the enactment of state legislation in 2004 and 2006, along with multifarious agency initiatives both pre- and post-dating this legislation, the state of Florida has emerged as a front-runner in addressing adolescent literacy (Bates, Breslow, & Hupert, 2009; Christie,

2007, 2008; Berman, 2008; Snow, Martin, & Berman, 2008; see also Torgesen, et al., 2007).

Purpose of the Study

This research focuses on Florida's response to concerns about literacy teaching and learning at the secondary level. Based on the assumption that policy meanings are culturally situated and multivocal (Marshall, Mitchell & Wirt, 1989; Yanow, 2000), the purpose of this qualitative case study was to construct interpretations of the values, beliefs and feelings conveyed by state-level discourse communities as they were manifested in the primary and secondary speech genres of Florida's adolescent literacy policy (Bakhtin, 1986; Yanow, 2000). Supported by the results, and guided by complexity thinking, I proposed a model for reconfiguring Florida's approach to reform (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Stevens, 2006).

More specifically, I isolated the explicit and implicit meanings state policy actors conveyed about adolescent literacy through the language, actions and objects (Yanow, 2000) of policy reform. Because adolescent literacy policy is disseminated to local education agencies and ultimately teachers and students through both informal primary speech as well as more complex, secondary speech (Bakhtin, 1986), I used this framework to structure my analysis. Once these key assumptions and structures were identified, I reconfigured them in terms of the conditions under which complex systems flourish, with an emphasis on adolescent literacy teaching and learning (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Morrison, 2008; Stevens, 2006). The unit of analysis, then, was the design of Florida's secondary literacy policy, or the mechanisms created and disseminated by state level policy actors for implementation at the school level. Stated differently, this study

was situated at the macro, or state level, but conceptually, it was concerned with the micro, or classroom level. In this sense, it is policy research with a “pedagogical eye.” (Darling-Hammond, 1990, p. 340).

In particular, I was interested in complexity thinking, and the idea that highly complex systems “learn,” or constantly adapt to their environment by operating within the parameters of proscribed (as opposed to prescribed) conditions (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008). Complex systems are scale-free, meaning they are comprised of parts that resemble the system at large (Davis & Sumara, 2006). For this reason, complexity constructs are amenable to an entire organization as well as to various components nested within the organization. Thus, complexity thinking was the theoretical lens through which I examined the meanings housed in Florida’s adolescent literacy policy artifacts. Likewise, I used this conceptual frame to propose an alternative policy response to adolescent literacy reform in the state of Florida. I was guided by the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. What is the nature of the beliefs about adolescent literacy conveyed by state-level discourse communities as these meanings are manifested across the primary and secondary speech genres of Florida’s adolescent literacy reform?
2. How can Florida’s adolescent literacy reform policy be reconceptualized using complexity thinking
 - (a) as a model for policy design?
 - (b) as a goal for adolescent literacy teaching and learning?

Because I was interested in the qualities of the artifacts that house government-sanctioned meanings about adolescent literacy, I conducted a qualitative case study in order to construct interpretations of state level policy actors' values, beliefs and feelings about adolescent literacy reform vis a vis adolescent literacy policy (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Yanow, 2000). As a framework for data collection and analysis, I used Yanow's (1996, 2000) interpretive policy analysis (IPA).

Anchored by the premise that a policy's meaning is ambiguous and multivocal, IPA is particularly well-suited for a study of the policy-practice of Florida's adolescent literacy policy design. Yanow describes three dimensions of human meaning making: values (logos), feelings (pathos), and beliefs (ethos). These abstract, tacitly held dimensions of meaning are manifested more concretely in the language, actions and objects of human interaction (Yanow, 2000, p. 15). And, across the various communities of a system at large, these dimensions filter policy actors' interpretations as they make sense of policy (Cohen, Mofit & Goldin, 2007; Yanow, 2000). In this case, I was interested in the values, feelings and beliefs of a relatively small subset of policy actors who exert a heavy influence on the design of Florida's adolescent literacy reform (Song & Young, 2008). Along with others (Agnello, 2001; Edmondson, 2002, 2004; Peters, 2007), Yanow (2000) highlights the need to ask alternative questions of policy that step away from the realm of functional analysis (e.g., cost-benefit or decision studies) and engage in questioning that explores the meanings that under gird policy as they are conveyed by different communities of practice.

Rationale

Because this study addresses both system-wide and local concerns about adolescent literacy reform, the rationale for this study was multifaceted. Theoretically, it reaches across educational research domains, answering the call for policy studies, especially those informed by both literacy and policy expertise (Valencia & Wixson, 2004). In practical terms, this study addresses concerns about policy efficacy on both normative and functional grounds.

Crossing the domain divide. Education policy researchers have cited the need for the analysis of policy designs as they relate to teaching and learning (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; McLendon & Cohen-Vogel, 2008; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). In 1988, Elmore and McLaughlin voiced the need for more careful attention to how education policy is crafted:

Many of the conflicts that arise among elected policymakers, administrators, and teachers grow out of predictable differences in roles and incentives, not out of incompetence or political opposition. Reforms can't be expected to work well if they don't knit these roles and incentives together in an intelligible way (p. 9).

In essence, a more nuanced understanding of policy designs (i.e., their messages housed in goals, policy targets and tools) is needed in order to minimize implementation failure by supporting teaching and learning at the micro level (Honig, 2009; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002; see also Peters, 2007).

Likewise, literacy researchers have called attention to the paucity of knowledge about literacy policy design and content (Buly & Valencia, 2002; Conley & Hinchman, 2004; McGill-Franzen, 2000; Stevens, 2003; 2006; 2008; Song & Young, 2008; Valencia

& Wixson, 2000; 2004). For instance, Stevens (2008) laments the lack of policy analysis tools that go beyond traditional cost-benefit analyses. She also argues the need for relevant questions that interrogate the frames, practices and contexts of adolescent literacy policies. Stevens, along with others, emphasizes the impact of policy on the actions of teachers, and most importantly, on students; many of whom struggle and exit the system without graduating and/or acquiring adequate literacy practices for their future lives (Franzak, 2008; Haynes, 2007; National Council of Teachers of English, 2006; see also, Moore, 2009).

Researchers certainly play a role in answering questions about policy efficacy, and Weimer (2009, p. 93) distinguishes between two domains of research that can serve this purpose: “disciplinary research” and “policy research.” Intuitively, research related to education reform should be at its strongest when policy knowledge is coupled with disciplinary knowledge about the content to which the reform is directed. However, Valencia and Wixson (2000, 2004) explain that while literacy is one of many topics covered by state policy studies, it is difficult to find policy research grounded in a disciplinary (and in this case, a literacy) perspective. Instead, they contend, many policy researchers seem to operate under the assumption that subject-knowledge is irrelevant. On the other hand, literacy researchers who aim their work at policy change tend to eschew the systemic perspective that necessarily undergirds the work of policy makers and the policy research community (Valencia & Wixson, 2004). Further, many of the sources cited by literacy researchers and the venues they use to publish their work differ from that of policy researchers who may use literacy reform as a study context (Valencia & Wixson, 2004). The overall result is a type of “trade-off between general and in-depth

understandings” of literacy or policy, depending on the researcher’s orientation (Valencia and Wixson, 2000, p. 929). This dearth of literacy-informed policy research along with a persistent academic disconnect across domains is problematic, especially as it relates to education reform designed for struggling students who have been marginalized by the system (Alvermann, 2002; Franzak, 2006; McDonnell, 2009).

This study addresses the paucity of literacy policy research. Because it is concerned with the quality of policy design and implementation, this inquiry is an examination of Florida’s policy from an *organizational* approach (Floden, 2007). Although it falls within the domain of policy research, unlike many policy-oriented studies, this study is infused with research-based knowledge about adolescent literacy teaching and learning. In other words, this study has the potential to strengthen organizational robustness and efficiency (Davis & Sumara, 2006) because it is augmented by discipline-based knowledge about the end-users of adolescent literacy policy (i.e., students and teachers). End-users are those who, according to Stevens (2006, p. 304), either “take up, modify, reject, alter, ignore, overlook, put on pedestals or vilify” the government directives intended to strengthen learning.

This study was conducted by way of an emic (Patton, 2002) researcher perspective; one based on my own advanced graduate studies, doctoral research, K-12 and university teaching experience (all of which have been focused on literacy). This perspective served as an ideological counter-weight to the policy authority embedded in policy artifacts. Thus, this study is neither policy research from a literacy perspective, nor literacy research with a policy perspective: It is an amalgamation of discipline-based knowledge and policy expertise called for by Valencia and Wixson (2000; 2004).

The power, potential and scope of state literacy policy. There is no doubt that states have taken an increasingly active role in adolescent literacy reform (Berman, 2008; Christie, 2007; 2008; Snow, Martin, & Berman, 2008). Yet, this increased policy activity is also cause for concern. The International Reading Association (2004) has cautioned that many well-intentioned education reforms fall short of their goals. These failures, according to the International Reading Association, represent wasted revenue, human energy and worse, lost opportunities to help the individuals for whom the reforms are designed. Moreover, by their very nature, state policy artifacts carry government-sanctioned messages (both explicit and implicit) about what it is to be literate (Agnello, 2001; Buly & Valencia, 2002; Edmondson, 2004; Stevens, 2006; Vacca & Alvermann, 1998), and literacy policies have been criticized for marginalizing students who struggle academically (Alvermann, 2002, Buly & Valencia, 2002; Cummins, 2007; Dennis, 2008; Franzak, 2008; Stevens, 2003; Stein, 2001).

Edmondson (2000, p. 4) argues for “different readings” of policy that side-step common responses to teaching and learning challenges (see also, Edmondson, 2002). Alternative appraisals, she argues, can illuminate potential structural modifications that may offer support for end-users. For instance, borrowing from Alvermann’s (2002) discussion on the power of culture, if policies can be designed to marginalize students, it logically follows that policies can also be designed to be inclusive and supportive of these students.

The shelf-life of a given policy design can be extended and wide-ranging. Several policy writers have noted the tendency of policy designs to mirror related, extant policies, meaning they are typically generated and administered by way of inertia and common

scripts (Dorn, 2007; Peters, 2007, see also Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Additionally, it is common for states to adopt policy designs from other states in a process called policy innovation diffusion (see, for example, Cohen-Vogel & McLendon, 2009). Citing the lack of previously existing policies specific to adolescent literacy, Franzak (2006) and Stevens (2006) urge caution as new policy responses are crafted. Like Elmore and McLaughlin (1988), they advise that the present time is a critical opportunity to engage *thoughtfully* about roles: of policy, teachers, and young people as they relate to adolescent literacy.

This research provides an alternative reading *and* response to Florida's current adolescent literacy reform policy. The study is a systematic analysis of the government-sanctioned meanings housed in adolescent literacy artifacts. It is also a proposal for reconceptualizing policy as a method for leveraging complexity at both the macro and micro levels of teaching and learning. Thus, the justification for examining Florida's adolescent literacy policy is warranted on both *functional* and *normative* grounds as advised by social scientist Max Weber, as noted by Edmondson (2000; 2002; see also Peters, 2007; Woodside-Jiron, 2004).

Functional criteria were met by this research because it aims to strengthen organizational robustness and efficiency (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Edmondson, 2000, 2002); not only for the state of Florida, but for other states, that, through policy innovation diffusion (see for example, Cohen-Vogel & McLendon, 2009) may likely borrow part or all of Florida's approach to reform. Yet, this study can also be characterized as an analysis with normative merit because the acquisition of literacy is arguably a critical feature for both personal and societal sustainability and advancement.

Under girded by complexity thinking, this research considers the cognitive diversity and strengths students and teachers bring to the classroom as a prerequisite (Alvermann, 2002), it opens up possibilities for students who are experiencing failure under the current system, and it reveals the potential benefits of reshaping the standards by which we provide literacy instruction to adolescents.

Given (a) the dearth of literacy policy research; (b) the highly specialized, yet disconnected nature of the education policy and literacy research communities; (c) the potential of literacy policy for enabling the viability of struggling adolescents; (d) the fact that Florida is an early leader in adolescent literacy reform; and (e) the two related notions that states have a propensity to use their own related policy designs as templates and borrow innovative ideas from one another, there existed a clear justification to examine the language, actions and objects this state is using to craft its adolescent literacy reform.

Theoretical Framework in Brief

The notion of *complexity* is used by numerous writers to describe both policy formulation and policy implementation. From a policy perspective, Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993, p. 5) call attention to the disparity between human cognition and the complexities of social problems (see also Lindblom, 2005). They specifically note the ongoing reticence of western culture to acknowledge this disparity and argue the failure of social policy is due in large part to the initial lack of appreciation for the complexity of social problems as well as the limits of human capacity for understanding them. Lindblom and Woodhouse are joined by others who describe the complexities of policy formulation and design (e.g., Colebatch, 2006; Kingdon, 2003; Marshall, Mitchell, &

Wirt, 1989; Peters, 2007; Weaver-Hightower, 2008). These complexities are driven by both external and internal variables that render the entire process a dynamic, iterative network of unpredictable interactions and outcomes. Peters (2007, p. 7), for instance, explains that some policy tools (instruments) may be effective in some circumstances but not in others. Similarly, Honig (2009, p. 333) states that rather than the simplistic notion of finding “what works,” successful education policy is actually a much more nuanced matter of finding “what works for whom, where, when and why.” As for policy research and analysis, Gerstl-Pepin and Woodside-Jiron (2005) call for research methodologies that acknowledge the complexity of legislative and executive policy making.

Like policy development, quality adolescent literacy teaching and learning are also characterized as highly complex acts, which, in turn, are embedded in complex social networks (Ivey, 1999; Moje, 1996; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008; Stevens, 2006; Vacca & Alvermann, 1998). Effective literacy instruction involves the ability to “orchestrate complex academic tasks” and engage in “moment-by-moment instructional decision making” (Allington, 2002, pp. 28-29) with multiple students who possess differing dispositions, backgrounds, literate identities, reading preferences, literacy profiles, and language proficiencies (Alvermann, 2002; Buly & Valencia, 2002; Dennis, 2008; Ivey, 1999; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw & Rycik, 1999; Moore & Cunningham, 2006; Vacca & Alvermann, 1998). Add to this the multifarious abilities students must develop in order to become fully literate across various content domains and contexts (Jetton and Alexander, 2004; O’Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995; Sturtevant, et al., 2006; Vacca & Alvermann, 1998), and the complexities of adolescent literacy teaching and learning become quite evident.

Complexity thinking (Davis, & Sumara, 2006) offers a relatively new way to conceptualize education policy design and implementation (Honig, 2009; Mason, 2008; Stevens, 2006; Weaver-Hightower, 2008). This approach to policy analysis “provides the nexus between macro- and micro-research,” acknowledging the complexity within and across the levels of the policy-practice relationship (Morrison, 2008, p. 28). In other words, complexity thinking affords the opportunity for policy makers, practitioners and researchers to take complexity into account; to leverage it as a positive and communicative force inherent in a system that consists of disparate funds of knowledge, multiple stances and values, variability across settings, and dynamic, unpredictable interactions amongst actors. Drawing from a non-linear ecology metaphor, complexity thinking is based on the notion that highly complex systems are in a constant state of emergence; they continually “learn,” or adapt to their environment (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008; Mason, 2008; Morrison, 2008). This requires conceptualizing the act of learning in two ways: (a) as both an individual and a group endeavor and (b) as a process that occurs across all ecologies (levels) of the system.

One of the critical conditions necessary for system learning is the idea of enabling constraints (Davis & Sumara, 2006). At their outer edges, complex systems resist predictability, top-down hierarchical control, and thus, imposed order (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008, Morrison, 2006; Stevens, 2006). Importantly, however, they are still bound by rules. These rules, or constraints, are characteristically *proscriptive*, rather than *prescriptive*, meaning they are not lists of requirements necessary for survival, but *conditions to avoid* in order to flourish. Enabling constraints provide “sufficient coherence to orient agents’ actions and sufficient randomness to allow for flexible and

varied response” (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. 148). In a viable complex education system, local variability and knowledge would be seen from a strength perspective (Chapin 1995; Cooperrider, & Whitney, 2005); it would serve to inform emergence, self-organization, and would provide ongoing feedback of knowledge throughout the political and institutional system (Davis & Sumara, 2006; McDonnell, 2009). Thus, policy design would be conceptualized not as the result of a top-down effort to control teaching and learning (Bean & Readence, 2002; McDonnell, 2009; McGill-Franzen, 2000), nor as an idealistic bottom-up design that provides insufficient guidance or negates the realities of the political environment (Cohen, Moffit, & Goldin, 2007; Peters, 2007), but one that establishes, cultivates and sustains productive relationships within and across system levels (Honig, 2009).

Unfortunately, complex systems can also experience tipping points (Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2008). For secondary schools, one or both of these states of being appears to be currently evidenced in the indicators of the oft-cited adolescent literacy crisis (Alvermann, 2002; Jacobs, 2008; Kamil, 2003; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999).

Key Terms

The following terms are defined as I interpreted their use in this study.

Academic Literacy-The literacies required for “school knowledge of academic texts” (Alvermann, 2001, p. 2). These include receptive (e.g., reading, listening) as well as expressive skills (e.g., writing, speaking).

Adolescent-While there are several conceptualizations of this term as it relates to adolescent literacy (see Jacobs, 2008 and McCombs, Kirby, Barney, Darilek, & Magee,

2005, for example), I define an adolescent as an individual from 10-18 years of age (Vacca & Alvermann, 1998), who, if enrolled in school, is most likely in grades 6 through 12. In general, this age-range encompasses the middle and high school years of schooling (Alvermann, 2002; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw & Rycik, 1999).

Adolescent Literacy-For the purposes of this study, I will use the definition of adolescent literacy as it is described by Alvermann (2002) and others as one that includes adolescents' identities in conjunction with the instructional implications for educators who work with these individuals. Adolescent literacy, as a postmodern construction, acknowledges the socio-political nature of literate practice. It subsumes traditional, or what Alvermann calls "academic literacy" (see below), because it a) acknowledges students' in- *and* out-of-school literate practices as a combined means by which they b) interact both functionally and critically with text. This view of literacy acknowledges the identity of adolescents as factors that inform and shape interactions with text. Adolescent literacy also makes room for multimedia, such as the digital and video texts in which many adolescents engage in their out-of-school lives (Gee, 2003), and it acknowledges the variety of text structures and demands inherent in the symbolic modes within content domains and across particular contexts (Gee, 2004; Jetton & Alexander, 2004). Adolescent literacy asks the question of how to "address the implications of youth's multiple literacies for classroom instruction" (Alvermann, 2001, p. 2).

Constraints-for this study, constraints are the existing requirements as directed and prescribed by Florida's adolescent literacy policy.

Discourse Community- a group of people who “engage in...similar acts,” employ “similar cognitive mechanisms,” and “use...similar language to talk about thought or action” (Yanow, 2000, p. 10).

Enabling Constraints- a complexity thinking condition necessary for individual and system-wide learning (or emergence, or adaptation to the environment), which consists of proscribed guidelines that provide “sufficient coherence to orient agents’ actions and sufficient randomness to allow for flexible and varied response” (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. 148).

Literacy- Literacy encompasses the practices of reading, writing, speaking, viewing and listening as they are socially-situated and driven. I draw from the work of Moje (1996) and Alvermann (2002) to formulate this definition of literacy, which acknowledges, but goes beyond the boundaries of traditional school literacy. This perspective acknowledges the ever-evolving nature of literacy as well as the subtle and not-so-subtle variances across contexts and disciplinary domains at any given point in time.

Marginalized Adolescent Literacy Learner-I adapted this term from Franzak’s “Marginalized Reader;” a student who experiences “difficulty with school-based literacy, for a variety of reasons” (2006, p. 211). I worked under the assumption that a marginalized literacy learner frequently struggles with and is disengaged from academic literacy (see above). These students are also often at risk of becoming school drop outs, either figuratively or literally. Like Franzak, I too acknowledged that my use of this term is socially constructed and it frames adolescents in terms of my own interpretations of schooling (Franzak, 2006, p. 212).

Meanings-The values, beliefs and feelings embedded both explicitly and implicitly in policy artifacts (Yannow, 2000). In this case, I was concerned with the values, beliefs and feelings of policy actors as these meanings are associated with adolescents and their acquisition of literate practices, including academic and out-of-school literacy.

Organizational Approach to Policy Research This approach to policy research examines how policies are enacted in relation to goals, overall system operations and unanticipated effects. It examines questions of intention and implementation, including factors that influence implementation (Floden, 2007, p. 9) and often contains a “strong evaluative component” (p. 11). Organizational policy research can be written for either policy makers or the academic community; the former represents an audience that may use the findings in an immediate way, and the latter will consider the work as it contributes to theory.

Policy- the collection of language, acts, and objects used by persons in government to communicate their intent. This definition relies heavily on Yanow’s (2000) conception of the three categories of policy artifacts and simultaneously acknowledges the value-laden nature of policy formulation and administration so aptly captured by Colebatch (2006, p. 313) who writes that “policy is an exercise in the construction of meaning,” along with Weaver-Hightower (2008, p. 157), who proclaims “there is no moment in a policy process that occurs before the system is rigged.”

Policy Actor-This term denotes any person who interacts actively with policy either by creating, administering or influencing it in any way (Fowler, 2009). For this study, it was an individual who functions as a legislative or executive policy maker, or

one who influences adolescent literacy policy through a tertiary group such as research or support organizations, foundations, or advocacy groups.

Policy Goals-Goals, along with targets and tools (below), comprise the three elements of a given policy design (Honig, 2009). Policy goals are the implicit and explicit purposes of the policy. Subsumed within a policy's purposes is the overall scope, or breadth of change, and its ambitiousness, or depth of change, as it relates to adolescent literacy.

Policy-Practice Configuration- This term is adapted from Elmore and McLaughlin (1988), who describe policy, practice and administration as interacting spheres. It is important to stress, however, that the lines between these spheres are ambiguous. For example, a local administrator acts simultaneously as practitioner *and* policy maker as she both receives and initiates policy directives (Cohen, Mofit & Goldin, 2007). For the purposes of this study of state adolescent literacy policy, the policy-practice configuration is conceptualized as a systemic relationship of policy makers, administrators and teachers whose community of practice (Yanow, 2000) and relative influence spans to varying degrees within and across state and local levels.

Policy Research-Although the research method I used carries the moniker of interpretive policy *analysis*, I considered this study to fall within the domain of policy *research*. Policy research is related to, but distinct from the term policy analysis. As discussed by Weimer (2009) and Weimer and Vining (2005), policy research is directed toward policy actors as well as members of the disciplinary research community and is a means through which the "extent and nature of a condition that may be worthy of public attention" is examined (Weimer, 2009, p. 93). Policy analysis, on the other hand, is

“client-oriented advice relevant to public decisions,” and is aimed at a specific person or institution, such as legislative committee members (Weimer and Vining, 2005, p. 25).

While some writers use the terms interchangeably, loosely describing policy study in general as “analysis,” in this study I restrict my use to “policy research” in order to demarcate it from policy analysis in the “canonical” sense, which typically is understood to generate economically oriented cost-benefit studies commissioned by particular clients

Policy Targets-These are the individuals on whom a policy is focused (Valencia & Wixson, 2004); that is, the ones who are “specifically named in policy designs as essential to achieving policy goals” (Honig 2009, p. 336). In this case, it is assumed these individuals are the practitioners and students at the local school level.

Policy Tools-These are the mechanisms through which government conveys policy to those who are to deliver the policy. For the purposes of this study, these tools are mandates, incentives, system changes, capacity building initiatives and symbolic or hortatory language (this last tool is also called moral suasion by Peters, 2007) (Schneider & Ingraham, 1990; McDonnell & Elmore, 1987).

Primary and Secondary Speech Genres- Bakhtin (1986) used the terms primary and secondary as anchors in the continuum of speech genres. Primary speech is simple and limited to common, informal communications, such as speaking with friends or co-workers (whether in oral or written form, such as personal letters). On the other hand, secondary speech genres are more complex. They include and build upon primary speech genres, but are more formal and fully developed than everyday communication. Pertinent to this study, secondary genres typically take the form of written texts.

in order to solve particular policy problems (Weimer, 2009; Weimer & Vining, 2005; see also Floden, 2007 and Yanow, 2000).

Limitations, Delimitations and Assumptions

All research methods have strengths and weaknesses (Patton, 2002). The limitations of this study included temporal and situational constraints for conducting meeting observations, gaining access to interview participants and restrictions on document analysis (Patton, 2002). For instance, I was invited to attend a Department of Education Rule Revision meeting, but due to time constraints, I was unable to attend. Also, these data do not represent the perspectives of certain individuals who declined to participate but who likely would have provided valuable insight for this analysis. Many participants suggested that I speak with certain legislative “staffers,” due to their extensive and extended experience in supporting legislators as they craft literacy policy. Yet, these individuals did not agree to participate. Additionally, the policy documents reviewed in this study were restricted to those which were identified by the participants. This is because I was interested in the language, actions and objects state level discourse communities believed were the most salient carriers of meaning for the targets (end-users). I acknowledge there may have been other pertinent documents that were not included in the analysis simply because they were not identified by policy actors.

Two conceptual limitations exist as well. First is the nature of policy as a “moving target” (Evan Lefsky, personal communication, October 20, 2009). In essence, these findings are but a snap-shot view of adolescent literacy policy in Florida. Lastly, I call attention to the not uncommon skewing of the discourse that can occur during interviews (Patton, 2002). For instance, interview participants, being aware of my status as an

educator, may have consciously or unconsciously shown undue deference by responding in ways they assumed I would appreciate.

Although the policy-practice configuration includes a host of actors across the intergovernmental spectrum as well as many non-governmental organizations and individuals (Song & Young, 2008), the participants in this study were delimited to the state-level. This relatively small group of policy actors exerts a heavy influence on the design of Florida's adolescent literacy policy. Yet, it is important to note that the results in no way represent the face of policy as it enters the classroom. Secondly, by limiting my focus to literacy policies that affect middle and high schools (grades 6-12), I was able to address several areas of concern pertinent to this study: (a) the challenges of content area literacy, which, beginning in grade 6 is traditionally differentiated by teacher, subject domain, space, and time; (b) increasing high-school drop-out rates, (c) the decline in standardized test scores evident during these grades and (d) the intellectual, developmental (National Middle School Association, 2006) and social changes that occur across individuals as they grow through this span of life. Also, these parameters allowed me to take advantage of research studies that focus on both early adolescence (ages 10-15, as identified by the National Middle School Association, 2003), or on participants associated more traditionally with the high school years and setting (grades 9-12).

Interestingly, when case study research is juxtaposed against random control trial research, some might consider its lack of generalizability to be of concern, however, because policymaking is a socially constructed and unpredictable process, and because it is common practice for states to adopt the policy designs of other states (e.g., McLendon & Cohen-Vogel, 2008), this critique is not applicable. In fact, the merit of case study

research is the “thoughtful extrapolations” and connections stakeholders from other states may make to glean lessons and “potential applications” across various state boundaries (Patton, 2002, p. 584). Thus, *transferability*, a Constructivist analogy to the traditional notion of generalizability (Lincoln and Guba, cited in Patton, 2002), was indeed a strength of this research.

Finally, I mention four assumptions that under gird this research. I took it as a given that a primary source of the tension in the policy-practice configuration stems from an inequitable distribution of knowledge in relation to the system at large. Second, I made the assumption that the aims of literacy education stretch beyond the scope of economic productivity to include humanistic benefits (see Schoenfeld, & Pearson, 2009 and Pasco County FL, 2002). Third, although others have questioned the validity of educational crisis language (e.g., Berliner & Biddle, 1995), I did not question it here. This is because I wanted to work from the supposition that there are indeed weaknesses in secondary literacy teaching and learning (although perhaps not of the type implied by the prevailing discourse of crisis). Last, because this research is policy analysis from an *organizational* rather than from a critical perspective (Floden, 2007) I worked from the assumption that the primary intent of both policy makers and practitioners is to improve the quality of teaching and learning for all students toward these ends.

Chapter II: Review of Related Literature

In this case study I construct an interpretation of the values, beliefs and feelings held by state level discourse communities as they are housed in the primary and secondary speech genres of Florida’s adolescent literacy policy artifacts. Based on the results, I will use complexity thinking to propose a model for reconfiguring this state’s approach to reform at both the macro and the micro levels. I will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of the values, beliefs and feelings about adolescent literacy conveyed by state-level discourse communities as these meanings are manifested across the primary and secondary speech genres of Florida’s adolescent literacy reform policy?
2. How can Florida’s adolescent literacy reform policy be reconceptualized using complexity thinking
 - (a) as a method for policy design?
 - (b) as a goal for adolescent literacy teaching and learning?

The term *discourse community* is a group of people who “engage in...similar acts,” employ “similar cognitive mechanisms,” and “use...similar language to talk about thought or action” (Yanow, 2000, p. 10). *Primary* and *secondary speech genres* refer respectively to informal, everyday speech and formal, more abstract speech (often in the form of written text). Each of these terms is discussed in depth in other parts of this chapter and the next.

In order to anchor my data collection, analysis and policy recommendations, I examined related literature to inform my theoretical and practical understanding of adolescent literacy and education policy. Thus, this chapter opens with a discussion of the theory that supports my analysis of Florida's policy. I begin with complexity thinking as the overarching conceptual framework (Davis & Sumara, 2006). Next, I describe Mikhail Bakhtin's (1986) insights into primary and secondary speech genres as a way to categorize and describe the two key sources of data I will collect. Following the theoretical framework, I move to a discussion of research related to the present inquiry. There are several features of this study related to the research in the fields of literacy and education policy. First, I provide a background of the policy-practice dilemma as it relates to this study. Then, I discuss a review of empirical studies that encompasses two subfields of literacy education: Adolescent literacy and literacy policy analysis.

Theoretical Framework

Complexity. In this case study, I explored the meanings conveyed by state level discourse communities in terms of the characteristics of complex systems. I drew heavily on the work of Davis and Sumara, (2006) and Davis, Sumara and Luce-Kapler (2008) to enhance my understanding of the applicability of complexity for the classroom. These "complexivists" have written extensively about the application of complexity thinking in education.

To begin, Davis, Sumara and Luce-Kapler (2008) contrast complex systems with complicated systems. Complicated systems are mechanical. They are based on linear conceptions of efficiency, goals, predictability and input-output planning. In education, this conception of learning and system organization invokes the persistent influence of

the industrial era on public education, whereby inquiry drew heavily on scientific efficiency and a top-down, centralized and hierarchically imposed framework of order and control (Callahan, 1964; Tyack, 1974). Relying heavily on scientific determinism, theories of complicated systems are based on the notion that a system is *reducible*, meaning that if each of the system's parts are broken down and analyzed, one can also understand the whole and therefore successfully predict and create change.

Complex systems on the other hand, are nonlinear (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Morrison; 2008). Instead, they are framed around a decentralized architecture. Further, they are scale-free; that is, they are comprised of parts that also resemble the system at large. Another way to describe this notion is what I call "nestedness." Related to fractal geometry, nestedness is a structural characteristic, which might best be described in terms of the camera lens analogy. When viewed from afar, the educational system as a whole looks similar to that of a given classroom. Both are member-filled unities seeking their own form of emergence in relation to similar (but not overlapping) internal and external influences. The primary difference then, is the relative magnification of the lens (see, Gleick, 1987). For these reasons, complexity constructs are amenable to an entire organization as well as to various components nested within the organization. Complex systems consist of members, or "unities," whose capacity when viewed as a whole exceeds the accumulated total of each individual's characteristics and capabilities. Aphoristically speaking, "the sum is greater than its parts." The point here is that in a healthy complex system, individuals "come together to give rise to more complex, robust, and capable wholes" (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008, p. 192).

Additionally, members of complex systems interrelate locally, or across short-range spaces. They self-organize and operate, both individually and as a group, in a dynamic and open exchange with the environment (Davis & Sumara, 2006). Due to this constant interaction within and across their surroundings, complex forms are never static; rather, they vary and adjust based on random contextual occurrences. It is this ongoing interaction that keeps the system and its nested subcomponents in a continuous state of emergence. Put differently, because complex systems are open, they *rely* on disequilibrium to flourish. As Morrison (2008, p. 20) states, “local circumstances dictate the nature of the emerging self-organization.” And, it is precisely the “random contextual noise” that renders local behavior virtually unpredictable (Davis & Sumara, 2006; p. 149). In the process, however, this dynamic interchange simultaneously supports local emergence; or system learning (which, in an education system, also happens to be the overarching aim for its policy recipients). Importantly, however, complex forms are structured. They depend on coherencies such as organizational and behavior patterns to bring a certain stability to the subunits and system.

It is plausible to suggest that complexity thinking has an explanation for the swelling numbers of American high school drop outs, disengaged learners and low academic literacy levels: Complex social systems can be affected by *tipping points*, or instances of gradual change that ultimately cause a major shift in the composition of a social order (Davis, Sumara and Luce-Kapler, 2008). For instance, consider the present generation of young individuals who have grown up playing video games. These adolescents and young adults have a different set of belief systems about learning and problem solving than do earlier generations (Carstens & Beck, 2005; Gee, 2003).

Carstens and Beck (2005, p. 24) for example, explain the conditions that promote workplace learning for young adults from this generation. They include opportunities for trial and error, avoidance of “formal” instruction, an interest in learning from peers rather than authority, the seeking of information only when it is authentically needed, risk-taking within a safe environment, and task relevance. Many of these features of instruction are not evidenced in traditional classrooms today (Gee, 2004). Could it be that the adolescent literacy crisis is the result of tipping point such as the shift in learning preferences of students? If there is indeed an ecological explanation for the crisis, the complexity thinking notion of enabling constraints may provide a useful way to reconfigure our approach to adolescent literacy teaching and learning policy.

Enabling constraints. The paradox of random coherence, as described by Stevens (2006), is the essence (albeit a literal transposition) of the notion of enabling constraints. On the surface, it appears to be an oxymoron; however, Davis and Sumara (2006) argue that the condition of enabling constraints is actually critical for system learning (see also, Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008). At their outer edges, complex systems and their nested sub-components resist predictability, top-down hierarchical control, and imposed order (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008, Morrison, 2006; Stevens, 2006). Importantly, however, they are still bound by rules. These rules, or constraints, are characteristically *proscriptive*, rather than prescriptive, meaning they are not lists of requirements necessary for survival, but rather, *conditions to avoid in order to flourish*. Enabling constraints provide “sufficient coherence to orient agents’ actions and sufficient randomness to allow for flexible and varied response” (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. 148).

As a condition necessary for a complex emergence, the virtues of enabling constraints apply both to the system at large as well as to its nested sub-groupings. Put simply, enabling constraints apply to the individual classroom level as well as throughout the policy-practice ecology. For instance, according to Stevens (2006, p. 305), participants' self-organization prompts a learning context that cannot be remotely "predetermined or statically relegated" by a distant policy maker's purposes. By sheer necessity, it is the local participants who "craft, erase, recraft, and modify such purposes." Morrison (2008, p. 22) puts it more succinctly: "Order is not imposed; it emerges." In the following discussion, I explicate the applicability of enabling constraints as guide for teaching and learning as well as for policy design.

Enabling constraints for teaching and learning. The condition of enabling constraints is a adjective-noun combination which describes a setting or condition whereby constraints are crafted so they are enabling (rather than disabling) to the individuals and units within and of the larger system. The concept of enabling constraints consists of two necessary descriptors useful for the classroom, or micro level: a) proscribed rules; and b) openness to random noise. Or, distilled to an adjective-noun combination: "open rules." When both of these features are in place, the result is a dynamic, yet delicate balance between randomness and coherence (Stevens, 2006), which results in a combined effect of individual and group emergence.

In discussing the open rules that provide structure to complex systems, Davis and Sumara (2006, p. 148) explain they are composed of the shared explicit and implicit understandings that form the boundaries of social organization. These rules are not highly specified listings of desired behaviors, but rather "conditions to avoid in order to remain

viable.” They dictate the margins, not the content of agents’ behaviors. Davis and Sumara posit, for instance, that in any new class grouping, students and teachers are constantly “negotiating social positioning, establishing group norms, and inscribing a collective identity” (p. 146). In addition to explicit behavioral boundaries provided by individuals, groups and the setting, these tacit understandings form the very basis for individual and group emergence.

Importantly, however, the physical and conceptual boundaries of complex systems (and thus, their nested unities) are quite ambiguous. It is difficult to tell where the system ends and the environment or context begins. Vibrant complex entities must also be open to environmental input for learning, or emergence to occur. In classrooms, then, there must be a means by which group members (teachers and students) respond to and indeed, *take advantage* of what Davis and Sumara (2006) call random contextual noise (or environmental input). Whether this unforeseeable noise comes from the environmental context, the local group structure or the tripartite interaction of individuals, group and setting, the openness and flexibility given in response to the unpredicted, unplanned and unintended is critical; not simply in order for the group to survive, but in order for it to thrive. Put differently, when contextual noise is understood and acknowledged as a potential for emergence, it becomes a catalyst for a wide range of learning opportunities that previously did not exist or would not have existed had they been extinguished or ignored. This adaptive and flexible feature is one of the key differences between complicated and complex systems. In fact, Morrison (2008, p. 22) cites the enabling potential of random noise as a warning against “command and control” teaching that locks spontaneity and flexibility out of the classroom.

When the dual conditions of contextual noise and open rules are in place, learning is allowed to occur at the group level as well as at the individual level. And, as in a symbiotic relationship, diversified individual growth stimulates productive collective growth.

The successful collective is not just more intelligent than the smartest of its members, it also presents occasions for all of the participants to be smarter--that is, to be capable of actions, interpretations, and conclusions that they wouldn't typically achieve on their own. (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008, p. 192). Here, it is important to note that in a classroom, the teacher is considered as a group participant. This perspective of group learning recognizes the tension between student-centered and teacher-centered learning approaches (Davis & Sumara, 2006), because, like a camera lens that zooms in and out, the focus is simultaneously on individual *and* group emergence.

The interplay between individual and group learning points to a frequently cited mantra: "one size does *not* fit all." Random coherence imposes a balance between the chaotic and the fixed, so there is adequate room for local diversity, flexibility, creativity and individual response. In curricular terms, as Davis and Sumara (2006, pp. 148-149) explain, this is "not a matter of everyone does the same thing,' nor 'everyone does their own thing,' but of 'everyone participates in a joint project.'"

Enabling constraints for policy making. Because complex systems are scale-free, the same applications can be made at the policy level. Obviously, state policy actors must operate within certain constraints, such as resource levels and election cycles that bring ideological changes in policy foci, and a milieu literally filled with multiple viewpoints

(McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). Yet, they also must take advantage of random noise: for example, policy windows that provide an unexpected opening for a politically expedient agenda (Kingdon, 2003), or private interests suddenly willing to provide resources in the interest of certain goals (Lindblom & Woodhouse, 1993). Thus, state policy actors emerge and adapt to situational circumstances: individually by way of their elected or appointed positions, and collectively, for instance, as the image and strength of political parties wax and wane, or when agencies gain or lose funding or power (Lindblom & Woodhouse, 1993). Finally, based on the hurdles (some insurmountable) in passing legislation in a socially, economically and culturally diverse state (e.g., Florida), it is consistently evident that highly prescriptive policy is doomed to failure. Only ambiguously written policies are able to make it through the legitimation process (Evan Lefsky, personal communication, October 20, 2009; see also, Cross, 2004).

But what of policy design? Stevens (2006) argues enabling constraints would provide a theoretical application for adolescent literacy policy content. Literacy policy framed by a set of enabling constraints would approach the variety and randomness inherent in implementation as a *required* characteristic of schooling, rather than as a problem to try to overcome. Local variability and knowledge would be seen from a strength perspective (Chapin 1995; Cooperrider, & Whitney, 2005); it would serve to support emergence, self-organization, and would provide ongoing feedback of knowledge throughout the political and institutional system (Davis & Sumara, 2006; McDonnell, 2009). Stevens posits that neither prescriptive nor non-existent policies will provide the means for effective adolescent literacy reform. Instead, she suggests policymakers provide certain “generative structures” (p. 306), or constraints, that simultaneously allow

for synergy, divergence and creativity. This approach to policy design would appear to address the knowledge gap across the policy-practice configuration (Cohen, Moffit, and Goldin, 2007). Additionally, it could “transform interpretation of a policy from an exercise in obedience and/or resistance to one that is more participatory and holds potential for generating more relevant and inventive teaching” (Stevens, 2006, p. 307; see also Brooks, Hughes & Brooks, 2008).

Criticism of complexity. Complexity thinking is not without critique. Morrison (2008), for example, cites several philosophical barriers to the use of complexity thinking for educational decision making. In this section, I discuss those concerns which appear to be pertinent to the use of complexity thinking as a framework for adolescent literacy policy, teaching and learning.

Generally speaking, complexity is a post-hoc, descriptive approach to understanding social systems. Thus, Morrison (2008) argues, it is not suited for prescriptive applications (a primary aim of this study). Secondly, because complexity is a pragmatic approach to individual and group learning, it is inherently amoral. In other words, like earlier criticisms of Dewey’s educational pragmatism (Dillon, O’Brien, & Heilman, 2006) Morrison argues that in adapting to and making adjustments for local randomness, a given unity at a higher level of government hierarchy basically jettisons responsibility and accountability. Yet, Morrison goes on to claim that the very essence of education is based on moral, normative judgments about individual and societal needs. He thus argues that complexity is cursed by hypocrisy: while complexity boasts of the virtues of chaos, unpredictability and relativism, at the same time, it is governed by culturally-imposed determinism and absolutism.

Two other concerns arise. Morrison (2008) notes that several of the characteristics of complexity already exist in educational nomenclature (and I would add policy-making as well). For example, control, learning, emergence, creativity, feedback, and diversity are all typical features of educational policy-practice discourse. Also, a relatively new term, “non-negotiables,” is an administrative policy actors’ expression for those mandated requirements not open to interpretation or bargaining (Dr. Dave Scanga, personal communication, October 16, 2009). This notion bears some similarity to the idea of enabling constraints. Morrison’s point is if these characteristics have already been addressed, complexity thinking may not be necessary. Finally, and of equal importance, the idea of complexity assumes that individuals and groups prefer and function best under conditions of controlled disequilibrium and unpredictability.

I shift now to Bakhtin (1986), whose theoretical contribution to text analysis is of particular import to this inquiry of the values, beliefs and feelings held and disseminated by state level policy discourse communities.

Primary and secondary speech genres. Mikhail Bakhtin, the 20th century Russian social scientist and literary thinker, theorized that rather than two forms of language (everyday speech and literary texts), there actually exists a realm of speech genres that span a gradual continuum from informal to formal language types (Emerson & Holquist, 1986). In addition to defining the nature of speech more broadly as an “utterance,” Bakhtin (1986) challenged the prevailing discourse by offering an expanded and more sophisticated description of speech genres, which includes the realm of “permissible locutions in lived life” (Emerson & Holquist, 1986). Everyday speech, he argued, is governed by certain normative rules which dictate how, when and where one speaks. As

for written text (which up to this point in the discussion had been literary texts only), he continued this argument, pointing to other genres, such as scientific and political texts. Here, he called attention to the range and unique nature of various ideological genres.

Bakhtin (1986) used the terms *primary* and *secondary* as anchors in the continuum of speech genres. Primary speech is simple and limited to common, informal communications, such as speaking with friends or co-workers (whether orally or in written form, such as personal letters). On the other hand, secondary speech genres are more complex. They include and build upon primary speech genres, but are more formal and fully developed than everyday communication. Pertinent to this study, secondary genres typically take the form of written texts. In Bakhtin's (1986, p. 62) words, secondary genres "lose their immediate relation to actual reality and to the real utterances of others." While he distinguished between primary and secondary speech, Bakhtin (1986, p. 62) urged the analyst to carefully consider a blend of both forms in order to capture the complexities of a given utterance: "A one-sided orientation... leads to vulgarization of the entire problem." In this study, I will examine both forms: the primary and secondary speech of state policy actors.

Related Studies

Scholarly literature provides a more concrete look at a given issue, so I turn now to a review of studies and commentary related to adolescent literacy policy.

The policy-practice of education. Because an overarching aim of this study is to make connections across the micro and macro levels of adolescent literacy policy, a back-drop discussion of the literature as it relates to the education policy-practice configuration is warranted. Here, I provide a blend of the literature that spans both literacy and policy

scholar communities in order to explain possible sources of the tension in the policy-practice relationship. These sources, both theoretical and empirical, appear to revolve around issues of knowledge and stance.

Cohen, Moffitt and Goldin (2007, p. 516) argue that the lack of “policy potency” in terms of teaching and learning is partly due to a knowledge deficit (see also Peters, 2007). Utilizing their authority, prior experiences, and knowledge of policy goals, processes, and instruments, legislative and executive policy makers craft directives meant to influence teaching and learning. Seasoning this response, however, are electoral constraints, the ever-present political pressure to deliver on campaign promises or protect or gain agency funding and authority within the larger system (McDonnell, 2009; Cross, 2004). Also, Dorn (2007) and Peters (2007) note that many policy design choices are often made out of habit or simply due to inertia. Whatever the motives and means, the ultimate outcome is an authoritative and government-sanctioned response to a public problem. In this case, the outcome is one that is “based on the assumption that distant policymakers have adequate knowledge about what adolescents need” (Stevens, 2006).

Missing from the macro-level policy response is an understanding of the causes and complexities of public problems (Lindblom & Woodhouse 1993; Peters, 2007) along with an appreciation of the “practice-embedded knowledge and action” that influences teaching-learning policies at the classroom level (Cohen, Moffit, & Goldin, 2007, p. 517; see also Franzak, 2006). This micro-level, practical-technical knowledge about teaching and learning is quite variable and wedded to particular settings and participants’ experiences (Gerstl-Pepin & Woodside-Jiron, 2005; Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Yanow, 2000). In fact, Stevens (2006, p. 305) describes quality teacher-student

interactions as highly situated, “spontaneous” and “fickle.” And, it is precisely this tacit and extremely variable practitioner knowledge that adds local value to the resources and regulatory frameworks provided by the government (Allington, 2002; Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988).

From a policy perspective, teachers also may possess limited knowledge, which can result in distortions of policy goals designed to strengthen teaching and learning. Many have documented situations where practitioners modify or misapply instructional policy, whether intentionally or unintentionally, to the detriment of student learning (Dennis, 2008; Franzak, 2008; Kragler, Martin & Kroeger, 2008; McGill-Franzen, 2000). This misapplication of policy can occur due to limited knowledge about subject matter, ineffective pedagogical practices, beliefs, or other circumstantial factors (Valencia & Wixson, 2004). However, it must be noted that policies can also become the catalyst for practitioner incompetence when their designs are overly ambitious or when they provide inadequate implementation support (Cohen, Moffit, & Goldin, 2007; Dorn, 2007; Franzak, 2008; Hinchman & Zalewski, 1996). These findings indicate the need for a balance between overly prescriptive policy solutions and highly vague policy goals (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Stevens, 2006).

Rather than a broad, macro-view of the public education endeavor, practitioners have a laser-like focus and knowledge of the specific clients with whom they work. From this position, “front-line professionals” (Knapp, Bamberg, & Ferguson, 1998) hold a limited and sometimes ambivalent view of the multi-district trends and patterns so fundamental to the goals of state policy makers and administrators (Stevens, 2006). Peters (2007, p. 109) notes that practitioners who work especially with marginalized

clients are often prone to identify and empathize with particular individuals, resulting in “devotion to a perceived mission” that can differ from broader goals intended by legislative and executive policy. This phenomenon is taken up by Faulkner (2005), who describes a “back to basics” teacher whose rigid and narrow interpretation of the writing needs of her struggling student inadvertently reinforced his own dismal assessment of his ability to be successful in school. Similarly, teachers, due to a lack of knowledge about their students, can create learning environments that actually hinder the intellectual growth of the very individuals they are intended to support (Franzak, 2008; Langer, 2004; Moje, et al., 2004).

The work of others suggests the limited impact of policy on teaching and learning may be partially a result of the deficit stance typical of policy formulation and administration. Using the language of crisis, policy entrepreneurs (advocates) propel a public problem to the forefront of the legislative agenda (Edmondson, 2000; Franzak, 2006; Kingdon, 2003; Stevens, 2008; Peters, 2007). Buoyed perhaps by “punctuated equilibrium,” or “spasms” of activity occurring periodically across longer spans of stasis and/or gridlock (Kingdon, 2003, p. 226; see also Cohen-Vogel, & McLendon, 2009), the discourse of crisis spawns a surge of activity throughout government levels. This symbolic language enables interested parties to generate a “crisis mentality,” pushing the response into a multi-layer and, for some, a politically expedient effort to eradicate an invading force (Cohen-Vogel, & McLendon, 2009; Cross, 2004; Schneider & Ingram, 1990). The response is often highly prescriptive (Davis & Sumara, 2006), and often irrespective of the solution’s feasibility (Stone, 2002), appropriateness (Gee, 2004; Sharkansky, 2002), or negative effects (Schneider & Ingram, 1990).

For example, the powerful juxtaposition of America's NAEP scores and those of other, higher-scoring nations paints a compelling image of national slippage in global economic position (Allington, 2002; Blanton, & Wood, 2009; Moore, 2009). Bolstered in part by this image of economic failure, as well as due to other, more humanistic concerns (Schoenfeld, & Pearson, 2009), various policy entrepreneurs have succeeded in bringing adolescent literacy to the forefront of the education policy agenda (Cohen-Vogel, & McLendon, 2009; Kingdon, 2003) in order to address the crisis.

Essentially blaming the policy targets (Chapin, 1995), in this case what appears to be students and teachers (Alvermann, 2002; Franzak, 2006; Stevens, 2003), a deficit stance taken before and during policy design ignores the strengths of the local level, and frames teachers simply as policy conduits, who are positioned as lacking capacity and/or will (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Franzak, 2006; Smit, 2005), and students who are seen as struggling or who are disengaged only in terms of the inadequacies they bring to school-sanctioned literacy practices (Alvermann, 2002; Dennis, 2008; Gee, 2004; Franzak, 2006, 2008; Mahar, 2001; Moje, 2002). Guided by these assumptions, policy designs utilize instruments that often result in highly prescriptive, yet ephemeral solutions, which come and go without making any appreciable impact (Allington, 2002; Alvermann, 2002; Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Franzak, 2006).

Equally troublesome is the appearance that deficit-driven policy responses spawn additional problems (Dorn, 2007; Gerstl-Pepin, & Woodside-Jiron, 2005; McLaughlin, 1987) or encourage perverse incentives; a superficial form of compliance that simultaneously mitigates the overall effectiveness of policy impact (Dorn, 2007; McGill-Franzen & Allington, 1993; Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009; Preskill & Catsambas, 2006;

Stone, 2002). Additionally, policy based on negative sanctions violates core professional teaching norms (Gerstl-Pepin & Woodside-Jiron, 2005; Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009). This in turn results in practitioner alienation (Brooks, Hughes, & Brooks, 2008). Finally, when a policy issue is approached through a deficit rather than an asset-driven stance, the unique strengths and resources specific to the local level are not officially acknowledged, included or leveraged as a way to add value to policy (Chapin, 1995; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Gerstl-Pepin & Woodside-Jiron, 2005).

Adolescent literacy. In this section of the literature review, I turn to the heart of this study: adolescent literacy. While the meaning of this term is still emerging (Bean & Readence, 2002; Draper, 2002; Franzak, 2006; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008; Stevens, 2006), most interested parties would agree that adolescent literacy encompasses the socio-cultural nature of communication amongst adolescents and reaches more deeply and stretches more broadly than early literacy and traditional conceptions of secondary school literacy (Alvermann, 2002; Moje, 2002).

At its core, adolescent literacy is socially-situated; based on an *ideological*, as opposed to an *autonomous* model of literacy (Street, 2005). “Rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, [and] being,” literacy is embedded in and infused by the socio-cultural context (Street, 2005, p. 418). Unlike an autonomous model where literacy is viewed as a neutral tool by which an individual or group emerges intellectually, socially and economically, an ideological view acknowledges the role that culture plays in shaping acceptable notions of literacy, and in this case, an adolescent’s identity and position in society at large. To return to the camera lens analogy, the ideological view is capable of focusing on functional, labor-market literacy demands as well as broadening

the picture to include the roles of culture and power that intertwine and surround literacy (Wickens & Sandlin, 2007).

Supported by the socio-cultural understanding that authors of text position the reader in relation to manifest or latent intentions (Bakhtin, 1986; Blommaert, 2005), and the idea that readers bring their own purposes, identities, cultures and histories to the text (1986; Gee, 2004), adolescent literacy reaches more deeply on an intellectual level than traditional interactions with text to include a critical (as opposed to a passive) stance (Alvermann, 2001, p. 190; see also Jacobs, 2008; Underwood, Yoo, & Pearson, 2007; Street, 2005). This deeper, ideological view of literacy acknowledges individual strengths, choice, self efficacy, engagement and background knowledge as factors that inform interactions with text. Moreover, this perspective of literacy invites the critical interrogation of prevailing codes of power (Franzak, 2006; Mahar, 2001).

Adolescent literacy is also conceptually broader than the traditional print-based notion of school literacy: It includes the receptive and expressive modes of communication such as digital and video texts in which many adolescents engage in their out-of-school lives (Gee, 2004; Lam, 2009). Also, adolescent literacy acknowledges the variety of text structures and demands inherent in the symbolic modes within particular domains and contexts (Draper, 2008; Jetton & Alexander, 2004; Lam, 2009; O'Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995). It asks the question of how to “address the implications of youth’s multiple literacies for classroom instruction” (Alvermann, 2001, p. 2).

Historical foundations. Adolescent literacy began as a sub-field of reading and curriculum studies called *content area reading*. Because of the shift toward content, or subject-area learning that occurs about the time students transition to the middle grades,

early adolescent readers generally begin to use their literacy skills to a) attain content knowledge and b) perform certain tasks related to schooling, such as project work or laboratory experiments (Moore, Readence, & Rickelman, 1983). This emphasis on subject-related reading and writing continues throughout the middle grades and high school years, and for this reason, content area reading has been closely aligned with secondary literacy instruction.

In an historical review of reading literature which spans approximately sixty years, Moore, Readence, and Rickelman (1983) write that the field of content area reading emerged in the early 20th century from three basic discourse communities: humanists, scientific determinists and developmentalists. In response to earlier 19th century conceptions of reading as a method for encouraging morality, mental discipline and practice in articulation and recitation, the humanists called attention to the critical need for students to be able to derive meaning and see the applicability of what they read. The scientific determinists, like the humanists, also stressed the importance of comprehension. Through the methodological lens of efficiency and research, these thinkers propelled the notion of reading for understanding to the forefront of the reading education conversation. Developmentalists contributed the idea that reading growth occurred in stages that spanned far beyond the primary years. Their influence shifted attention from the assumption that all students could handle the complexities of assorted content area texts to the idea that students individually refine their ongoing reading development throughout the secondary years of schooling. While the notion of content area reading instruction took hold in the reading research community during these early years, Moore, et al. note that interest declined in the middle of the century.

Moore, Readence and Rickelman (1983) report renewed attention to content area reading in the 1970's with the advent of the cognitive psychology revolution and the publication of Herber's (1970) *Teaching Reading in the Content Areas*. In their review, these authors identified five long-standing "issues" concerning the teaching and learning of content-related reading. Most of these concerns centered on instructional matters: locus of instruction (reading teacher or content teacher), subject-area demands, study-skills and reading materials. Only one of these issues was related to the students themselves. However, even this component of content area reading seemed to be a surface concern, as it focused on defining the ages at which content area reading was of import. In relation to this issue, the authors cautioned their audience that content area reading was not just a concern associated with secondary students (see also Draper, 2008; Jacobs, 2008). In their brief historical account of adolescent literacy, however, Bean and Harper (2009, p. 40) keep the focus of the content area literacy discussion on "teenagers."

In the late 1990's, a post-modern, socio-cultural shift in conceptions of both literacy (Alvermann, 2002; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2006; New London Group, 1996; Street, 2005) and adolescence (Bean & Harper, 2009) prompted a conceptual move from content area reading to what is currently known as adolescent literacy. According to Bean and colleagues (Bean & Harper, 2009; Bean & Readence, 2002), Donna Alvermann and others solidified the shift via two primary events, which propelled adolescent literacy to the forefront of the literacy research agenda: a) the establishment in 1997 of the International Reading Association's Commission on Adolescent Literacy and b) the 1998 publication of *Reconceptualizing the Literacies in Adolescents' Lives* (Alvermann, Hinchman, Moore, Phelps, & Waff, 2006).

Since then, numerous voices have joined the initial call for policy attention to literacy instruction and literacy learning of adolescents (Bean & Readence, 2002; Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Franzak, 2006; Ivey, 1999; Kamil, 2003; Moje, 1996; National Council of Teachers of English, 2006). As in earlier conversations related to content area literacy at the secondary level, a review of the current adolescent literacy literature reveals various foci. Now, however, there appears to be an additional locus of analysis. As before, some foci tend toward instructional matters. Now, however, many (if not most) studies probe the socially-situated identity and practices of adolescents themselves, which corresponds to the student-focused description of adolescent literacy above. This shift appears to be an attempt to more clearly define the literacy learning of adolescents in order to build a body of knowledge capable of informing approaches to reform.

Research findings. In this section, I discuss the results of a review of adolescent literacy research. Using the term “adolescent literacy,” I found eighteen studies in my search of two education data bases (EBSCO Host and CSA Abstracts) and my own files and books. Although the research to date in this tradition emerged as a result of the events of 1997 and 1998 (discussed earlier), I included three studies conducted by anchor researchers which pre-date and most likely contributed to this pivotal point in literacy studies (Alvermann, et al., 1996; Hinchman & Zalewski, 1996; Moje, 1996). As one might guess, content-area reading appears to be a related concern in the adolescent literacy discussion; however, I excluded studies that relied heavily on the notion of domain-based discourses if they did not directly focus on our emerging understanding of *adolescents’* literacy learning. For instance, I did not include Draper’s (2008) exploration

of the interaction of literacy and the content-driven discourse of teacher educators. Although my concern in this study is with teaching and learning, I wanted to narrow my focus to research related to adolescents themselves; the direct recipients of education policy.

Commensurate with the conception of language and literacy as a social construction, the vast majority of adolescent literacy research is qualitative in order to capture the socially-situated nature of literacy as it occurs in a natural context. In general, the review suggests the failure of current policy (Cohen, Moffit & Goldin, 2007) to affect the teaching and learning of adolescents is related to two overarching findings: The first appears to be an autonomous and decontextualized approach to literacy instruction (Gee, 2004; Street, 2005). The second finding is the system-wide neglect of adolescents' agency and identity, both on an individual and collective basis (see, for example, Moore & Cunningham, 2006). Within and across these two major findings, four sub categories emerged from the literature: In-School/Out-of-School Literacies, Adolescents' Values, Adolescents' Social Nature, and Multiliteracies. Usually, more than one of these themes was woven throughout any given study. In particular, the influence of adolescents' out-of-school literacies was quite prevalent throughout the entire body of literature. For the purposes of discussion, however, I isolate each of these findings in order to explicate them.

Additionally, several researchers indicate the complexities associated with adolescents' literacy learning (Ivey, 1999; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008; Moje, et al., 2004), and there are copious instances where constructs of complexity

thinking can be applied to the findings. At the end of each subcategory, I address these connections to complexity thinking.

In-school/out-of-school literacies. It appears that a major contribution to the understanding of adolescent literacy is the acknowledgement of literate practices not in sync with the traditional views of literacy that depend on “page-bound, official, standard forms of the national language” (The New London Group, 1996, p. 1). In the findings and implications of several studies, researchers use the in/out-of-school dichotomy (or similar terms) to demarcate the often highly sophisticated literacies students use in their personal lives from those literacies that are privileged in the school setting (Alvermann, Young, Green, & Wisenbaker, 2004; Lam, 2009; Mahar, 2001; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008). As in the broader view of the policy-practice system, a salient feature of this sub-component of adolescents’ literacy practices is knowledge: students’ personal knowledge of family, community, peers and popular culture (Mahar, 2001; Moje, et al., 2004). For instance, Moje, et al. (2004), used the notion of “first space” for out-of-school “funds of knowledge and Discourse” and “second space” for in-school literacy practices. Faulkner (2005), in a study of a disengaged year 8 student and his English teacher in Australia, used the terms “public” and “private” literacies to differentiate school-sanctioned literacies from out-of-school literacies. She offers a description of the public-private literacies relationship as a continuum that progresses from mainstream/school-based literacies, cultural/linguistic diversity, technology, the “new world of work,” adolescent discourse/teen culture and ends with globalization of society (p. 110). Finally, Maher (2001) used the term “personal literacies” to describe the complex cultural and

social navigations an African American adolescent orchestrated in order to fit in at a virtually all-white middle school.

Regardless of how it is labeled, the question is whether or not this rich, individual and often highly applicable knowledge is invited in to school-sanctioned literacy practices. Moje, Overby, Tysvaer and Morris (2008) found that it was not. In their qualitative study of 30 Latino/a adolescents from working class or low income homes, this research team described the science-related knowledge emanating from students' out-of-school lives. (For instance, in an after school focus group interview, one student revealed the impact of water use on her father's work as a landscaper, which directly related to her classroom study of environmental issues). What emerged from the observations, surveys, interviews and document analysis was the fact that students used many funds of knowledge and Discourses, but primarily outside of the school setting; they rarely displayed their everyday knowledge in class. Instead, they made these connections in private, or in ways they felt were strategic, and in line with tacitly governed institutional constraints. In general, their first space literacies seemed not to be privileged by the school-sanctioned, second space literacies. Similarly, in compelling accounts of marginalized students' struggles with rigid English Language/Arts policies, Faulkner (2005) and Franzak (2008) document the resignation, disengagement, disdain, and superficiality by which students responded to classroom requirements that ignored their personal knowledge, interests and literate strengths. In both studies, the outcome resulted in these students' further marginalization by the institutional culture.

On the other hand, Maher (2001, p. 201) in an ethnographic study of marginalized seventh graders found that when she provided openings for students to read, write and

speak about their personal literacies, their communication was “rich with insight and perceptions of the world beyond school.” Also, while not conducted in the tradition of adolescent literacy, Langer’s (2004) extensive investigation of schools in four states that were able to overcome social and economic barriers revealed that one of the qualities of exemplary teachers was their frequent invitation to include students’ out-of-school experiences. Likewise, Behrman (2003) concluded that instruction that uses students’ out-of-school literacies to enhance their grasp of content literacy will result in deep rather than superficial learning.

The open structure of a complex system requires a dynamic and continual exchange with the environment in order for the components to thrive (Davis & Sumara, 2006). This feature of complexity thinking invites the question of how policy might enable classroom contexts so they are amenable to bridging the conceptual and physical divide between students’ families, communities, peers and popular cultures to that of the classroom. By creating a “third space” that utilizes and even honors students’ unique identities, strengths and funds of knowledge (Moje, et al., 2004), teachers would be able to support students as they make connections across time, ideas and space, as in Langer’s (2004) study of exemplary teachers from schools that “beat the odds.”

Adolescents’ Values. Closely related to the notion of out-of-school funds of knowledge are the personal values students bring to their academic literacies. The literature is clear, for instance, that adolescents value choice and relevance in their academic literate endeavors (Alvermann, Young, Green, & Wisenbaker, 2004; Behrman, 2004; Franzak, 2004; Ivey, 1999). In a study of four small groups of adolescents who participated in after school “Read and Talk” clubs at a local public library, Alvermann,

Young, Green, and Wisenbaker (2004) found that three of the four groups elected to have members individually choose the reading material they would discuss in their meetings (rather than using a common text). As the adolescents self-organized and negotiated the exact nuances of how they would maintain group cohesiveness despite each member's individual choice in texts, they consistently noted the value of and appreciation for the autonomy to make their own decisions about reading material. Moreover, despite several instances of disequilibrium, these three groups followed through with their decision to choose individual texts throughout the 15 week study.

In an in-school setting, Ivey (1999) investigated possible complexities in middle school students' performances and dispositions for reading by closely following three adolescent participants for a five month period. She chose participants purposively for their apparent diversity regarding in-school literacy practices. Ivey noted the students' reading performance and dispositions varied according to school context. She concludes these students' capacity and will to read was dependent on whether or not the task met their personal interests. She recommends reading programs that include student choice as a component. Later, and on a much broader scale, Ivey and Broaddus (2001) administered a survey to 1765 middle school students in two settings (urban and rural) in order to learn from adolescents what reading-related factors they value in the school setting. The findings once again revealed the complexity of adolescents' reading dispositions. Among other aspects, students reported the significance of reading materials that were personally interesting as well as the opportunity to choose texts. Students held a wide range of interests (many were, in fact, content-related) and were thus motivated by a diverse array of texts (magazines, scary stories, comics, book series, nonfiction, poetry).

The researchers conclude that young adolescents' beliefs about and motivation for reading is "not an all or nothing construct" (p. 366), and argue for instruction that responds to the complexities of students' out of school reading interests rather than supplanting them.

That students value choice in reading material leads to a related pattern across the research: Students also value relevant literacy practices in school. This finding is most aptly described in studies conducted by Behrman (2003), Moje (1996), and Franzak (2008). Behrman relates the results of an extensive integration of in-school and work-place literacies for a high-school applied biology class. To solve community-based problems, students engaged in literate practices through apprentice-type experiences with scientists at sites such as a water treatment plant and a forensic laboratory. Students were given the liberty to consult texts of their own choosing to complete their projects, and a notable finding was the types of texts students consulted: They relied on human resources and the Internet rather than traditional text book sources to solve situational problems. In other words, Behrman's findings show how students valued authentic texts in their efforts to solve real-world problems. Traditional text-books, the author explains, are abstract displays of content and are not amenable to operational learning. Moreover, he argues that meeting community based needs is a means by which educators and students can move beyond decontextualized learning (Behrman, 2003).

On the other hand, Moje (1996) showed how predictability, order and organization were used to link text-book literacy practices to content learning in a high school chemistry class. Importantly, however, Moje notes that both the students and teacher operated from what appears to be an autonomous view of literacy and content knowledge

(Street, 2005). That is, as a whole, the students were motivated toward school success as it fit within the institutionalized definition of literacy. They, like their teacher, held the same cultural perspective about the value of school achievement and college attendance. These students were not in jeopardy of dropping out; they were more than willing to adopt traditional, linear ways of reading and studying textbooks if, (as Moje quotes Myers, 1992, p. 308), it meant they could remain in the “achievement club.”

In contrast to Moje’s (1999) achievement-driven participants, Franzak’s (2008) five student participants were marginalized learners: They were disengaged, struggling, and generally out of sync with institutionally inscribed expectations of literate behavior. Her analysis of high school literacy policy implementation revealed a surprising lack of actual reading in the students’ English classes, primarily because students were required to study texts such as Shakespeare and Homer. For instance, the teachers believed the Shakespeare text was highly difficult, so they often avoided requiring actual reading. Instead, they had students listen to audio recordings or they directed highly controlled oral readings and whole class discussions that relied on accuracy as defined by the teacher as opposed to risk-taking on the part of the students. In all cases, however, Franzak’s participants found these texts inaccessible and/or irrelevant and read them very little if at all. The point here is not to question the virtues of canonical texts (Hirsch, 1987). Rather, it is to acknowledge what failed to occur in this situation: a consideration of literacy levels and struggling students’ need for relevancy.

In a middle school context, Dennis (2008) sought to determine how schools utilized assessment data to meet students’ academic literacy needs. Her case study findings revealed a striking lack of attention to the participant’s strengths in various

components of reading (decoding, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension). As a result of teachers' lack of knowledge about the nuances of students' reading abilities, all those who had performed below level on the state assessment were provided with the same instruction. In this case, what resulted was an irrelevant, one-size-fits-all remedy that only served to perpetuate the participant's marginalized status.

Choice and the related notion of relevance vary across individuals. In a complex system, diversity is the only constant, and this diversity is highly local. Distant policy makers, administrators and even teachers cannot predict the types of reading that will engage and motivate many students, especially those who do not adopt the culture of institutional literacy (Moje, 1999; Franzak, 2008; Mahar, 2001). In some cases, the very students who need the most support with developing in-school literacy practices are those who get the least amount of relevant academic support (Dennis, 2008; Franzak, 2008). Classrooms viewed as settings for complex emergence would most likely extend and open the boundaries of in-school reading to include the randomness of individual knowledge and preferences as opposed to generic and overly-prescribed constraints (Alvermann, Young, Green, & Wisenbaker, 2004; Franzak, 2008; Ivey, 1999; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008). Finally, like the apprenticeship project in Berman's (2003) study, a complexity approach would make room for adolescents to select relevant texts, including face-to-face human sources, as they engage with content-related concepts.

Adolescents' Social Nature. The "social" in the term social science forms the foundation of theoretical explanations of learning (Gee, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978). This social basis for learning is not lost on what we know about adolescent learning as it

occurs both individually and collectively. Adolescents, in their emerging independence, seek what I will call “group-ness;” a desire to belong as they negotiate their own identity (Alvermann, Young, Green, & Wisenbaker, 2004; Lam, 2009). In fact, Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris (2008, p. 31) explain that the out-of-school literate practices of adolescents “revolves around the maintenance of social networks, relationships, identity development and self-improvement and self-expression.” The literature shows that building relationships and engaging in group discussion are two methods of connecting students’ penchant for social interaction to their learning in the four content areas: English/Language Arts, Science, Social Studies and Math (Alvermann, Young, Green, & Wisenbaker, 2004; Langer, 2004; Lapp & Fisher, 2009; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008).

The chemistry teacher in Moje’s (1999) ethnographic study used relationship building to blend organization, literacy and chemistry content. Moje states simply that this teacher (Ms. Landy) was “committed to caring for people” (p. 180). Her students and even their parents reported that they knew she cared about them. They trusted her, appreciated her positive and motivating approach to learning, and were subsequently “willing to participate in the relationships [she] sought to build” (p. 187) as well as to use the learning strategies (such as SQ3R) she offered to help them gain understanding of the chemistry content. Moje suggests that without Ms. Landy’s strong commitment to build and sustain teacher-student relationships, students may not have used the literacy strategies she so dutifully prescribed.

In their study of a 10th grade global studies class, Hinchman and Zalewski (1996) found that teacher-student relationships were in place, but these participants’ group-ness

was dysfunctional in terms of student learning. Juggling conflicting measures of her own success, the teacher (second author, Zalewski), passed these multiple demands on to her students (i.e., her desire for students to obtain long-term understanding of the content versus high student scores on the end-of-the-year exit exam, which depended more on memory and abstract reading skills). Unsure whether to read for understanding, task completion, high grades or for the exit exam, students seemed confused, and reported that these demands were in many ways mutually exclusive. The authors conclude that although Zalewski cared for her students, this caring relationship was enacted in a confusing context, which prevented the establishment of a productive community of learners.

Productive relationships also occur across student-to-student interaction, and the literature reveals this most often within the context of content-related discussion groups. Alvermann, et al. (1996) conducted a multicase study in five sites that varied by grade level, geographic location, student placement and sociocultural setting. In essence, the students in these sites built relationships and a sense of group-ness through text-based discussions. Stating the value of listening to student perspectives, the team's overarching findings revealed a) students knew and followed the tacit constraints that were crucial to a productive discussion, b) they often chose not to follow prescribed, teacher assigned tasks in order to meet their own needs for participation and learning and c) they firmly believed participation in group discussion helped them understand what they read. In other words, individual emergence was supported by an overall group dynamic. In a related study, Langer's (2004) investigation of effective schools revealed the power of social interaction for individual and group learning. Calling it "shared cognition," she

explains that exemplary teachers supported students so they “not only worked together in physical proximity, but they also gained skill in sharing ideas, reacting to each other, testing out ideas and arguments, and contributing to the intellectual tenor of the class” (p. 1075). In these classrooms, the teacher counted as group member. As an illustration, Langer describes one teacher who explicitly invited students to challenge her thinking along with that of their classmates so she could learn along with them.

Finally, another example of individual and group emergence is seen in the work of Lapp and Fisher (2009). The authors explain instructional frameworks that enabled highly analytic, rich and motivating discussions in a diverse class of high school juniors. These discussions frequently led to further learning. In one group interaction, “bullying” was discussed. The students made intertextual connections across conceptual and physical sources, and the discussion culminated in transformative action as the group determined they would make intentional efforts to support younger students in a bullying situation. These students were not enacting an autonomous and institutionalized view of literacy; rather they were using literacy as an ideological tool for social justice (Street, 2005). Also, as Langer (2004) implies, this type of rich interaction requires a significant amount of time to implement, meaning it might not be associated with an efficiency approach to academic literacy.

As in other aspects of adolescent literacy, complexity thinking can be clearly applied to adolescents’ propensity for social interaction and group-ness. For instance, members of healthy complex systems interrelate in symbiotic fashion with other members who are within close proximity, as is evident in the studies conducted by Moje (1999) and Langer (2004). The result of these reciprocal interrelations enables dynamic,

robust literacy encounters. As in studies conducted by Alvermann, and colleagues (Alvermann, Young, Green & Wisenbaker, 2004; Alvermann et al., 1996), groups also self-organize based on tacit constraints that govern the acceptable terms of interaction. An example here would be the accountability of discussion group members in terms of fairness and participation, as noted by Alvermann, et al., (1996). Finally, members emerge and learn both on an individual and group level (Alvermann, Young, Green & Wisenbaker, 2004; Langer, 2004; Lapp & Fisher, 2009). The literature also provides examples of what could be defined as unhealthy or unproductive system functioning. For instance, although the group members in Hinchman & Zalewski's (1996) study tried to establish and maintain productive relationships, their efforts were negatively impacted by conflicting, more centrally derived system constraints that interfered with group and individual emergence.

Multiliteracies. Closely intertwined with adolescents' identities, values, and out-of-school literacies is the notion of multiliteracies. As described by The New London Group (1996), multiliteracies is a broadened conception of literacy teaching and learning associated with two major shifts in the social milieu: a) cultural and linguistic diversity driven by globalization and b) the multiplicity of text forms generated by rapid advances in information and multimedia technologies. The New London Group argues that literacy teaching and learning must address these changes in order to provide students with "access to the evolving language of work, power, and community," along with the habits and skills of "critical engagement necessary for them to design their social futures and achieve success through fulfilling employment" (p. 1). It is here that issues of content area discourses are applicable. Research in the field of literacy studies is beginning to

respond to the multiplicity of cultural, linguistic and multiple text forms (Behrman, 2003; Lam, 2009; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008; Pearson, Ferdig, Blomeyer, & Moran; 2005).

As noted above, Behrman (2003) found that students selected non-traditional text types to help them solve community-based and science-related problems. In essence, these students utilized a variety of literacies to engage in purposeful learning. Behrman (p. 21) notes that “foregoing a textbook freed the students from the constraints of ‘covering the chapter’ and allowed them instead to focus on the learning requirements.” One student observed that textbooks “‘cover a lot of topics but don’t elaborate’” (p. 15).

Media-based and information technology has been implicated as a method by which schools can leverage students’ out-of-school literate practices to help them engage with various content domains. Lam (2009), for instance, documents the multifaceted linguistic repertoire of an adolescent girl who migrated to the United States from China. Lam provides an intriguing explication of her multilingual talk across cultural and linguistic boundaries, including Mandarin, Cantonese, Shanghainese (a Shanghai dialect), Standard English and Hip-Hop influenced vernacular English. Lam offers implications that illuminate the resource potential of transnational adolescents’ knowledge; a hybrid, of sorts, that blends the “textual practices associated with cultural and linguistic diversity” with various modes of multimedia (p. 393).

Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris (2008) note that “mysteries” remain however. In their mixed methods study of why adolescents read what they read, the authors sought to “complexify” adolescents’ out-of-school reading in order to determine how schools could support students’ development of “academic, community, and workplace literacy

practices.” Their findings revealed that the students (primarily Latino/a, living below the federal poverty line) engaged in reading associated with negotiating identity, establishing and maintaining relationships and in general, building social capital. The authors note that these types of texts (e.g., manga, television, movies, conversation and music) and social purposes for reading translated well to the domain-related discourse of English/Language Arts, but not necessarily to other content areas. They question how students’ attention to identity development and relationships can be leveraged as a way to help them access other discourses necessary for academic literacy.

Finally, in a meta-analysis examining the effects of technology on middle school students’ reading performance, Pearson, Ferdig, Blomeyer & Moran (2005) determined that “a wide range of digital technologies” influenced students’ reading comprehension. However, of several caveats, they note interventions were strongest for general populations as opposed to those with specific needs. Also, standardized, commercial programs were less sensitive to treatment effects.

In general, the importance of multiliteracies for adolescent literacy is connected to the notion of using the individual and collective strengths of members toward emergence. In other words, complex organizations rely on the unpredicted, random, and situational noise that emanates within and around the unity in order to capitalize on local strengths (Moje, 2002; Stevens, 2006). When multiple literacies are utilized to access and explore content, the strengths of students, teachers and community members can be blended and acknowledged as valuable resources (Behrman, 2003; Moje, 2002; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008). Ignoring or delaying our attention to community discourses, multimedia and information-based texts will only cause further dysfunction. Policy that

utilizes and extends students' and teachers' existing multiliterate practices is a strengths-driven approach that helps members traverse cultural, social and technological spaces (Lam, 2009; New London Group, 1996).

To summarize, the emerging research base conceptually foregrounds the “adolescent” in the term adolescent literacy. Studies have been concerned with and reveal the literate, linguistic and cultural strengths that adolescents possess and bring to the classroom. It confirms that they are, in many ways, complex and diverse in their interests, identities and literate practices (Alvermann, et al., 1996; Dennis, 2008; Ivey, 1999; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001, Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008). Like the “gamer” generation described by Carstens & Beck (2005) and Gee (2003), adolescents value tasks that are socially situated, relevant and amenable to individual choice (Alvermann, et al., 1996; Alvermann, Young, Green, & Wisenbaker, 2004; Behrman, 2003). Further, when these aspects appear to be absent in the classroom, adolescents become overwhelmed, disengaged and distanced from (and by) the system (Dennis, 2008; Faulkner, 2005; Franzak, 2008; Hinchman & Zalewski, 1996; Mahar, 2001).

Policy research. A search of education and political science databases (Google Scholar, *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, Sage Political Science, Academic Search Premier, ERIC, Education Full Text, ERIC, *Publius*, J-Stor) revealed an extreme paucity of scholarly studies that analyze literacy policy, and none that specifically examine adolescent literacy policy. Five analyses met the criteria for inclusion in this review (peer-reviewed literacy-related policy analysis conducted in the United States at either the local, state or federal level). Four of these studies were critical policy analyses (Agnello, 2001, Edmondson, 2000; Stevens, 2003; Wickens & Sandlin, 2007). The other

study was concerned not with policy content per se, but with influences on state policy formulation (Song & Miskel, 2005). It appears that no scholarly literacy policy research has been conducted from an organizational perspective (Floden, 2007).

Public education has indeed had its share of critics across history, and these voices have been disparate and wide-ranging (Callahan, 1964). This criticism accelerated and broadened with advent of postmodernism. In turn, postmodernism gave rise to critical theory (Edmondson, 2000); a tradition of questioning matters of social justice, in this case, related to the educational endeavor (Apple, 2004; Freire, 2004; Kincheloe, 2004; Kozol, 1991; McLaren, 2007). Naturally, this shift opened room for a critique of literacy and literacy policy (Allington, 2002; Cummins 2007; McGill-Franzen & Allington, 1993). Of the few authors who have empirically analyzed literacy policy, most have done so through a critical lens (Agnello, 2001, Edmondson, 2000; Stevens, 2003; Wickens & Sandlin, 2007). Two closely related themes dominate these critical policy analyses: Economic interests driven by market-based ideologies, and autonomous-functional approaches to literacy.

While not the earliest in terms of publication, Agnello's (2001) analysis of four federal policy documents from the 1980's and 1990's dealt with policy content predating the other three critical studies. Using critical discourse analysis in the tradition of Foucault, Agnello (2001) questioned the theories and discourses in these documents that carried significant meaning for literacy practice in American schools. Among other findings, her analysis revealed these documents promote a functional-autonomous model of literacy in order to prepare workers for the labor force in the interest of national economic welfare. In essence, they espoused the "reduction of literacy to skills mastery"

(p. 128). Additionally, she highlights a deficit-based discourse which blames teachers and students for low standards and international test score comparisons.

On a global level, and using neocolonialism as a theoretical frame, Wickens and Sandlin (2007) found a similar result in a study of UNESCO and World Bank-sponsored adult literacy program policy documents. In their literature review, these authors note the neocolonial propensities of large intergovernmental organizations to promote western formulations of literacy programs, regardless of local cultural norms and existing indigenous approaches. Through their analysis, the authors show that although the UNESCO documents signaled a shift toward a socio-cultural perspective, the World Bank literature was closely linked to an autonomous-functional view of literacy, primarily as a means of supplying human capital in emerging market economies.

In her analysis of America Reads, the 1997 federal literacy tutoring initiative administered by a state university, Edmondson (2000) focused on the influence of neoliberalism on literacy policy. As a political ideology, neoliberalism proposes free-market solutions to issues of social and individual freedom, valuing concerns such as economy, community, efficiency and equity (p. ivii). Contrasting her work with functional policy analysis, Edmondson rejects the literacy crisis language, choosing instead to interrogate the federal government's motives for promoting its form of literacy policy. From the federal to the school level, Edmondson probed policy actors' language and actions to determine the values housed within the America Reads program. Her findings revealed that while officially espousing the merits of efficiency in the form of higher standards and accountability along with discourses of equity, economy and community, this initiative also carried "hidden" values. At the policy design level,

Edmondson specifically noted efforts at normalization; an institutional process that moves individuals mechanically through a system regardless of their background and overall “fit within dominant, mainstream U. S. society” (p. 37). Second, this policy housed evidence of a subtle shift toward a more centralized control of literacy in the form of funding, program provision and regulation. Third, like the neoliberal tendencies highlighted by Agnello (2001), Edmondson noted the hidden value of marketization as a premise of the program.

In 2002, the federally mandated Reading First initiative promoted a scientifically determined solution to the reading crisis. Stevens (2003) critically analyzed the discourse at a conference to launch this program. Language used by the presenters revealed a highly prescribed, predictable, and linear approach to learning to read rather than a socially-situated, complex and integrated approach (e.g., Ruddell & Unrau, 2004). The presenters portrayed the young reader as static; one who simply decodes. Comprehension was relegated to older students. Additionally, the role of teachers in guiding early reading development was supplanted by scientifically-based reading programs. In essence, the teacher’s primary purpose was to embrace these prescriptive, one-size-fits-all programs and reject their own reflective practice as it was related to the particular students with whom they worked.

In general, government messages about literacy, at least at the federal level, appear to be primarily concerned with a link between economic prosperity and literacy. In a technical sense, literacy is defined as a neutral, autonomous means to achieve this prosperity. While this study is not a direct critical analysis of literacy policy, it is important to consider the questions raised by the studies in this section. For instance, is it

unjust for public policy to be concerned with economic prosperity given its relation to national stability on the global stage? Is the crisis in adolescent literacy due to deficits in students and teachers? Or, does policy play a role in the crisis? And, is it possible to create literacy policy that reaches beyond the autonomous-functional view of literacy?

Finally, using social network analysis, Song and Miskel (2005), studied the “influentials” of reading policy in eight states. Basing their inquiry on the assumption that the enclosed iron triangle metaphor of policymaking (i.e., interest groups, bureaucrats and legislators) is no longer pertinent, these authors documented the open, unpredictable, and self-organizing nature of policy networks. First, Song and Miskel found each state’s open network of influentials was of course comprised of government agency actors, yet they also included an even larger collection of diverse interest groups. These organizations ranged from “teacher organizations, education associations, higher education institutions, citizens groups, business groups, foundations, think tanks and the media” (p. 20). Second, within each network, there was a varying and wide range of influence across policy actors. Government actors occupied greater positions of influence than did nongovernment actors. Contrary to their review of the literature, teacher organizations were not found to be the most influential of the nongovernmental groups. While not explicitly stated, there are clear connections to complexity constructs throughout this analysis, such as local interaction, shared emergence, and responses to randomness throughout the policy ecology. The authors state that the implications of their study lie in the need for policy actors to be aware of the surrounding structures (i.e., constraints) in order to increase their influence in the political ecology. Song and Miskel advise education professionals to “expand their conversations” to include policymakers,

who, based on their analysis, are clearly open to pertinent and informed guidance in the design of policy (p. 31).

Summary

To conclude, adolescents are complex in their background knowledge, interests and grasp of multiliterate practices (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Lam, 2009; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008; Moje, et al, 2004). They respond positively to classroom discourse based on democratic relationships with their teachers and peers. They also seem to flourish when engaged in the open exploration of ideas and viewpoints (Alvermann, et al., 1996; Alvermann, Young, Green, & Wisenbaker, 2004; Langer, 2003). If, however, adolescents are marginalized and do not embrace traditional in-school definitions of literacy, or if they are overlooked or overwhelmed by the policy-practice configuration, adolescents become disengaged and often further distanced from policy-practice expectations (Dennis, 2008; Faulkner, 2005; Franzak, 2008; Hinchman & Zalewski, 1996; Mahar, 2001). Many drop out, and others enter post-secondary education underprepared for college success. Put simply, literacy policy and practice is not working for many adolescents (Blanton & Wood, 2009; Cohen, Moffit, & Goldin, 2007; Haynes, 2007).

The limited literacy policy research base consists mostly of critical studies, a necessary contribution to any domain of inquiry (Weber, 1947, cited in Edmondson, 2000). This review reveals that literacy policy appears to be primarily concerned with economic prosperity (Agnello, 2001; Edmondson, 2000; see also McLaren, 2007). Policy research also suggests an emphasis on traditional, narrow (and some would say out-dated) views of literacy, given the rapid changes in communication (Ehren, 2009; Gee,

2003; New London Group, 1996; Stevens, 2003). Most pertinent to this study, state policy actors interact in an open exchange with nongovernmental policy actors and appear to be amenable to “outside” input, provided it fits within their constraints (Song & Miskel, 2005).

This review shows we have a research-based understanding of adolescents’ literate practices and academic needs. What is lacking is a body of organizational policy research that addresses the question of how adolescent literacy policy and practice can work together to meet 21st century literacy challenges. In the following chapter, I describe the methods used in this analysis of Florida’s adolescent literacy policy.

Chapter III: Methods

In this case study, I examined the meanings (or values, beliefs and feelings) conveyed in the language, actions and objects of Florida's adolescent literacy reform policy. I merged the findings with complexity thinking principles towards the goal of suggesting ways in which Florida's adolescent literacy reform initiatives might be reconceptualized toward strengthening teaching and learning for marginalized adolescents (Franzak, 2006; 2008). In essence, I clarified and defined the policy as it currently existed and reconfigured it from a complexity perspective (Davis & Sumara 2006). This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of the values, beliefs and feelings about adolescent literacy conveyed by state-level discourse communities as these meanings are manifested across the primary and secondary speech genres of Florida's adolescent literacy reform policy?
2. How can Florida's adolescent literacy reform policy be reconceptualized using complexity thinking
 - a. as a method for policy design?
 - b. as a goal for adolescent literacy teaching and learning?

For the purposes of this study, *values, beliefs and feelings* were collectively operationalized as the explicit and implicit meanings policy actors conveyed about adolescent literacy in the language actions and objects of policy. A *discourse community* was defined as a group of people who "engage in...similar acts," employ "similar cognitive mechanisms," and "use...similar language to talk about thought or action"

(Yanow, 2000, p. 10). *Primary and secondary speech genres* referred respectively to everyday, informal speech and formal, more abstract speech (often in the form of written text). *Policy* is defined as the collection of language, acts, and objects used by persons in government to communicate their intent.

Design

Because I was interested in the nature, or the language, actions and objects that produce and house policy meanings, qualitative analysis was the overarching method for this study. Qualitative inquiry is an approach to problems that “produces a wealth of detailed information” about a particular unit of analysis (Patton, 2002, p. 14). In this study, the unit of analysis was the features of Florida’s adolescent literacy reform policy as it was manifested in the language, actions and objects policy actors created and disseminated throughout the system.

The case study is a particular genre of research common to qualitative inquiry that examines the relationship between specific details and overarching phenomena. It is particularly concerned with the context-dependent production of meaning (Dyson & Genishi, 2005), and, as is characteristic of all rigorous qualitative study, it openly and ethically relies on the researcher herself as an instrument for the collection, analysis and interpretation of data (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Patton, 2002). Augmented by a keen propensity for pattern recognition and informed by her own identity and knowledge of related inquiry, new insights are generated as the case study researcher engages in explorations of collected data (Patton, 2002; Saldana, 2009). In essence, then, the case study allows the researcher to “construct interpretations of other people’s interpretations” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 18). In this study, I constructed interpretations of state level

policy actors' values, beliefs and feelings about adolescent literacy reform as they were manifested across three speech genres that ranged from less to more formal texts (Bakhtin, 1986). (Less formal, or primary language was derived from interviews, more formal language was derived from observations of public meetings, and even more formal still was the complex and highly developed secondary language obtained from policy artifacts). Throughout this process, I viewed Florida's existing policy guided by complexity thinking. I drew heavily from an adapted version of Yanow's (2000) model of *interpretive policy analysis* to structure and direct my data collection, and to a lesser extent, my analysis.

Interpretive policy analysis. Anchored by the premise that public policy is an ambiguous and multivocal endeavor, Yanow's (1996, 2000) interpretive policy analysis (IPA) was a particularly well-suited framework for this qualitative analysis of Florida's adolescent literacy policy design. IPA is based on three dimensions of human meaning making: values (logos), feelings (pathos), and beliefs (ethos). These abstract, tacitly held dimensions of meaning are manifested more concretely in the language, actions and objects of human interaction (Yanow, 2000, p. 15). And, across the various communities of a system at large, these dimensions filter policy actors' interpretations as they make sense of policy (Cohen, Mofit & Goldin, 2007; Yanow, 2000). In this case, I was interested in the values, feelings and beliefs of a relatively small subset of policy actors who exert a heavy influence on the design of Florida's adolescent literacy reform.

Procedure

IPA is a systematic method, conducted in several distinct (yet iterative) phases. While I primarily used these phases as prescribed by Yanow (2000, p. 20), I enacted

certain modifications to better meet the goals of this investigation. In the following section, I briefly describe the phases and explain the alterations applied to Yanow's IPA methods. Then, I provide an overview of the study.

Modifications to IPA framework and study overview. IPA (Yanow, 2000) is intended for a broad sampling of actors across a given public policy ecology, from policy makers to implementers to recipients. In this case, however, I imposed a tighter limit on the participant sample than Yanow proposes: I was interested in a relatively small group of policy actors within the larger policy-practice configuration, who, because of their positions, exert a heavy influence on the design of Florida's adolescent literacy policy. For this reason, I applied a criterion-related, pre-study sampling of initial participants (Patton, 2002) in order to focus my inquiry (see Phase 1: Identification of state-level policy actors, p. 71). Thus, in this study, Phase 1 was the *identification of an initial set of state-level policy actors* who influence, create and interpret policy (and therefore, government-sanctioned meanings about adolescent literacy reform); in Phase 2 I *identified the policy language that carried salient meaning* for these state-level policy actors. I began with these participants and the artifacts they cited, but I branched out to other policy actors and artifacts (documents) through chain sampling (Patton, 2002); a process akin to the way policy ideas are circulated through policy communities (Kingdon, 2003), advocacy coalitions (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993) or web-like issue networks (Song & Young, 2008).

In Phase 3, I *identified the communities of discourse* in which similar meanings about adolescent literacy policy were constructed. In Phase 4, I *identified meanings in conflict*. These consisted of "the meanings that [were] in conflict between or among

groups and their conceptual sources” (Yanow, 2000, p. 20). My emphasis here was a combination of the *who* of these communities, along with the *what* of their shared ideas, both tacit and explicit. The goal of Phase 5 was to *explain and move toward intervention*. Here, I sought to explain the conflicting interpretations, and, based on the findings and adolescent literacy research, I explored the reconceptualization of adolescent literacy policy design in terms of complexity thinking.

Figure 1 depicts an overview of the phases of data collection and analysis. The first two phases represented data sources and data collection; the third and fourth corresponded with the data analysis and findings; and the fifth represented the discussion and recommendations.

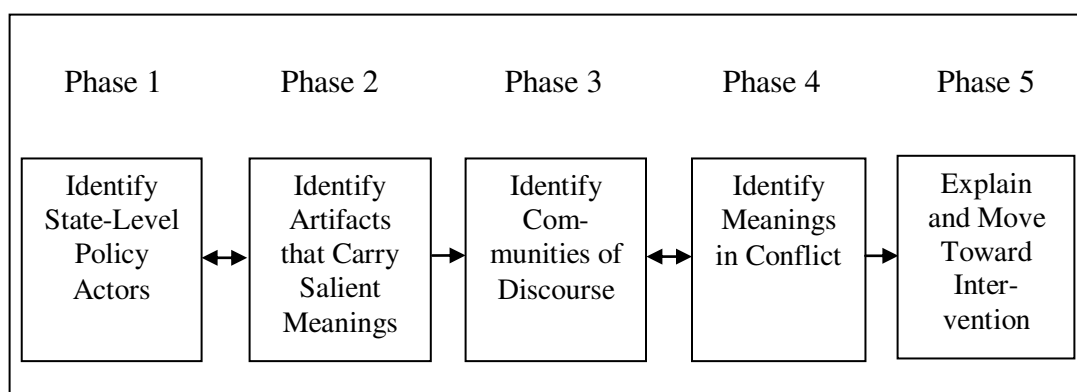


Figure 1. Phases of the study.

The double-headed arrows indicate the recursive nature of the first two phases, as well as the third and fourth phases. This reciprocity blurred the conceptual and temporal boundaries between more traditional notions of sample selection and data collection, as well as between data analysis and findings. The third and fourth phases were primarily driven by research question one: *What is the nature of the values, beliefs and feelings*

about adolescent literacy conveyed by state-level discourse communities as they are manifested across the primary and secondary speech genres of Florida's adolescent literacy reform policy? The last phase is primarily driven by research question two: *How can adolescent literacy reform be reconceptualized as a framework using complexity thinking both as a method for designing policy and as a goal for adolescent literacy teaching and learning?* In the following sections, I explicate each of the phases, augmented by descriptions of sampling, instrumentation, the logistics of data collection, and methods for data analysis.

Phase 1: Identification of state-level policy actors. The first phase in this study involved the identification of state-level policy actors who create, promote and disseminate policy and thus, government-sanctioned meanings about adolescent literacy. Prior to data collection, I used criterion sampling (Patton, 2002, p. 40) to arrive at an initial set of information-rich interview participants. This sample of policy actors comprised two, system-delineated communities: legislative and executive, and a third, less focused grouping, which I called tertiary communities.

Based on (a) readings from various Internet web sites maintained by State of Florida government branches and agencies, along with (b) personal conversations with Dr. Susan Homan (2009), University of South Florida professor and (c) Dr. Evan Lefsky (October 20, 2009), former director of Florida Department of Education's Just Read, Florida! initiative, I purposely selected participants who fell into the three broad categories of influence with regards to middle and high school policy (Legislative, Executive, Tertiary). Potential participants for the *legislative* and *executive* categories were fairly well delineated: I targeted the leaders, and members of the Senate Committee

on Pre-K-12 Education, and the House Pre-K-12 Education Committee. These individuals play a major role in drafting, introducing and moving education bills through the legislative process by way of committee and full legislative deliberation and negotiation. Because the Florida Department of Education is the means by which policy meanings are operationalized and disseminated to the localities, I targeted individuals from this agency who are directly involved with administering secondary literacy teaching and learning policy. Finally, Song and Young (2008, p. 17) found a heavy presence of influential policy actors “without formal policymaking authority” in the reading policy environments of nine different states, so I included this dimension in the purposeful sample. (Because the six participants from this group requested anonymity, the three organizations they represent are not provided in this report).

Commensurate with the recursive nature of qualitative inquiry, data collection and sample selection was a blended process. During interviews, I used chain sampling to expand my list of interviewees based on participant suggestions (Patton, 2002). I also used the interviews as an occasion to inquire about the dates and locations of public meetings that would yield pertinent information. Whether in interviews or meetings, participants identified adolescent literacy policy documents (secondary speech) they believed were significant carriers of meaning (Bakhtin, 1986)

The process of collecting this information resulted in an informant-generated criterion sample of policy artifacts.

Phase 2: Identification of artifacts that carry meaning. Phase 2 was intertwined with the first phase. It involved the identification of the language, actions and objects (documents) that carried salient meanings about adolescent literacy. Collectively,

Yanow (2000) labels these unities “artifacts.” This information was collected through three methods: interviews with policy actors, observations of public meetings pertaining to middle and high school reform and retrieval of policy documents cited by participants in the interviews and meetings. In each case, I collected both explicit and implicit data pertaining to the research questions. Figure 2 depicts the intermediate steps between Phases 1 and 2, which led from the selection of potential interview and meeting policy actors to the identification of policy artifacts. The feedback loops show that the accumulation of artifacts (language, actions and objects) generated the identification of additional policy actors to interview and observe. The double arrows indicate the recursivity of these intermediate steps; new interviews, meetings and documents arose from earlier interviews and meetings. The entire figure represents the totality of the data collection process.

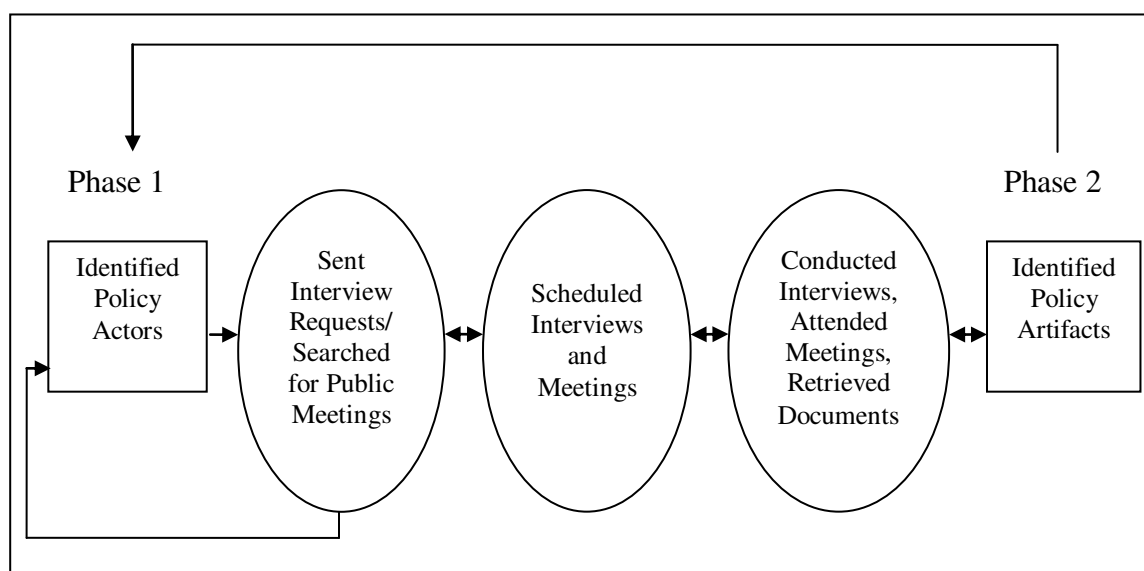


Figure 2. Data collection process. Intermediate steps leading from identification of policy actors (Phase 1) to the identification of policy documents (Phase 2).

Data collection began on March 20, 2010 and ended July 30th, 2010. This four and a half-month window was broad enough to accommodate scheduling and travel to interviews and public meetings. Also, it included more than half of the 60-day legislative session. In the case of legislators, this four and a half-month period facilitated the scheduling of interviews, because it included several weeks after the closing of the busy legislative session. Archival video and/or audio of public meetings dated from January 12, 2010 to May 18, 2010. I attended four legislative committee meetings prior to university Institutional Review Board approval, but I did not interact with any participants until the official start of data collection (March 20).

Interviews. Requests for interviews were staggered across the data collection period in order to manage scheduling and the time involved for cross-state travel. The first request was sent by post in early April 2010. Each request included two documents: (a) a formal letter of request, which detailed the purpose of the study and the procedures for the interview session (Appendix A), and (b) a listing of the interview questions. I included the interview questions because I believed this would alleviate any concerns potential participants might have about the specifics of the interview conversation and in turn, would improve the response rate. In general, participants were responsive to my requests for interviews. On occasions, I did not receive timely responses. In these cases, I followed up with one email to determine the interest of potential participants (see Appendix B). However, as I began to reach saturation with the interview data, I discontinued with this step.

Appointments were scheduled according to the method indicated by the participant. In the case of one agency official and all legislators, staff members handled scheduling. Rather than communicating by post, participants and staff members preferred to communicate by email. There were occasional telephone conversations as well.

Once interviews were scheduled, the individual sessions were conducted as follows: First I reviewed the Institutional Review Board consent form, which included the purpose of the study, the procedures, benefits, risks and participation guidelines. In particular, I explained that the interview would be audio-recorded in order to retain an accurate account of the interview session. Further, I described how the recording would be transcribed within one month and sent to the participant via email or post for his or her review. I explained that the participant would be provided with directions for reviewing, modifying (if necessary) and returning the transcripts with a statement confirming the accuracy of the revised document. Once the participant agreed to the conditions on the consent form, he or she signed the document. Next, using the Preferred Level of Participant Identification (Appendix C), I gave informants the opportunity to determine the level of disclosure they preferred. Then, I moved to the interview guide and followed the protocol (see Appendix D).

In most cases, interviews lasted from 40-50 minutes. The interview guide (Patton, 2002) consisted of nine open-ended questions about adolescent literacy, Florida's reform, and my quest for additional participants or public meetings (see Appendix D). The first question was designed to capture the participants' perceptions about the types of and causes for the challenges Florida faces with regards to adolescent literacy. The majority of the questions (items two through seven) were aimed at soliciting information about the

supports and constraints (or policy instruments) participants saw as necessary for reform (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987; Schneider & Ingram, 1997).

The remainder of the interview questions (questions eight and nine) were the means by which the process of chain sampling took place (Patton, 2002). At this point in the interview, I requested that participants share the names of prospective individuals and upcoming public meetings that would be helpful to my inquiry. For these last questions, I showed the interviewee a diagram (see Appendix E) which depicted the situated context of the Board of Education and the upper levels of the Department of Education. Using this visual depiction as a data collection tool, I asked the participant to sketch in the names or positions of other individuals he or she viewed as knowledgeable about or influential for secondary literacy decision-making (question eight, Appendix D). Also, this activity led to and supported the participant's thinking about question nine of the interview guide. In this last question I queried the informant about upcoming public meetings that might yield information pertinent to my inquiry.

In all, I conducted 17 interviews of 20 policy actors. (Three interviews were of two participants each). Eleven interviews were of legislators, four were of executive/agency officials, and six were from three different tertiary groups. Of the 17 interviews, 13 were conducted in person and four were conducted by telephone. A complete listing of interview participants is provided in Appendix F.

Public meetings. Across the four-month data collection period, I attended public meetings related to this inquiry. Obviously, this relatively short time-frame was not enough to capture the evolution of ongoing committee or organizational work relating to adolescent literacy. However, this feature of the study design provided an opportunity,

beyond interviews, to observe and document expressions that conveyed the values, beliefs and feelings state-level policy actors held about adolescent literacy.

Due to travel feasibility and limited suggestions by participants, I did not attend or analyze any additional meetings beyond the legislative committee and state Board of Education meetings. House, Senate and State Board of Education meetings were either video- or audio-recorded and made available to the public either online or in compact disc format. This was especially helpful for data collection for two reasons. First, I was not always able to attend these meetings in person and second, having recordings of the meetings allowed me to construct very detailed observation notes. In fact, I was able to transcribe certain aspects of the meetings word-for-word when participants' language was especially pertinent to my research questions. In all, I analyzed 15 audio- or video-recorded public meetings, dating from January 12 to May 18, 2010. I attended seven meetings in person. Thirteen of these meetings were legislative committee meetings and two were Board of Education meetings. A complete listing of meetings and dates is provided in Appendix G.

Documents. Documents were derived from references made by interview and meeting participants. The final collection of documents numbered a total of 16. A table of these documents is provided in Appendix H. Four documents were legislative sources (all state statutes) and six were agency sources (three Board of Education rules and three guidance documents). The remaining six documents were from tertiary sources (all adolescent literacy-related reports). Because the tertiary documents were from several different sources, these organizations are described briefly below.

One of the tertiary reports was published by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), a policy-oriented consortium of 16 southern states that “provides research reports and recommendations for action on critical issues at every level of public education” (Southern Regional Education Board, 2010). The SREB was cited in interviews as an influential organization, and a representative also spoke at a House committee meeting during the 2010 legislative session. Another tertiary document reviewed in this study was a report published by staff members of the Florida senate. I placed this document in the tertiary category because even though these “staffers” work under the umbrella of the legislature, they do not have formal policy making authority. The remaining four tertiary reports were published by the Center on Instruction (COI), a support organization for the federal Regional Education Comprehensive Centers. The Reading strand of the COI is housed in Tallahassee along with the Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR), an applied research organization whose primary mission is to support reading instruction in Florida (Florida Center for Reading Research, n. d.). FCRR has played a major role in the research, guidance and support of recent Florida reading policy, having been established by former Governor Jeb Bush in 2002 as part of his state-wide emphasis on reading. The four COI documents I used in this study were developed not for Florida, *per se*, but rather for use in all 50 states. However, because of the close proximity of COI and FCRR, there was reciprocity in both organizations’ activities. Table 1 depicts the full range of the data collected in this study.

Table 1

Overview of Data Sources: Interviews, Meetings and Policy Documents

Interview Participants	<i>n</i>	Meetings	<i>n</i>	Documents	<i>n</i>
Legislature	11	Senate	6	Statutes	4
Executive/ Agency	3	House	7	State Board of Education Rules	3
Tertiary	6	State Board of Education	2	Department of Education Guidance Documents	3
				SREB Report	1
				Senate Report	1
				COI Reports	3
	Total: 20		Total: 15		Total: 16

It is important to note here that aside from the three groups above and the speech genres, another distinct division in the data arose early in the data collection process. I called this distinction *knowledge specificity* as it related to literacy teaching and learning. This distinction was so obvious, the three categories (legislative executive/agency and tertiary) began to give way to this more prominent demarcation. I began thinking of the data as consisting of “two tiers” of knowledge. One group of data sources was simply grounded in a more sophisticated understanding of literacy than a second group. I called sources that evidenced specific knowledge about literacy “Tier I” sources and those that presented a more general knowledge I called “Tier II.” Because my data set was so broad in scope, I determined this was simply a byproduct of the differences in where the data originated (legislative, executive/agency, tertiary). I decided to use the tiers as an

heuristic to help me understand the data rather than reporting this as a finding or result of the study. A full explanation of my thought process regarding this occurrence is described in the following chapter.

Phase 3: Identification of communities of discourse. Because of the recursive nature of qualitative study, the first meeting I attended also marked the beginning of data analysis, which for the purpose of discussion, led to the third phase in IPA: identification of the salient meanings identified by various discourse communities. Throughout the data collection period, I accumulated interview transcripts, observation notes, and policy documents cited by policy actors as significant carriers of meaning for adolescent literacy. My overarching task throughout this third phase of the study was to uncover policy actors' constructions of meaning as they were embedded in spoken words and the more complex language, actions and objects of the policy artifacts themselves. I did this through a coding process using Atlas.ti6 software, a Windows-based qualitative data analysis program. Atlas.ti6 allows the user to code a collection of documents, and then manipulate, or "filter" the text based on categories, or "families." This filtering feature was especially useful for isolating differences in discourses.

Coding is a heuristic which bridges data collection and "extensive analysis" (Saldana, 2009, p. 4). For this study, a code was a word or phrase that captured the essence or salient attributes of the language, actions or objects of adolescent literacy policy. Saldana (2009) provides an in-depth discussion of qualitative data coding, and I relied heavily on his work for this portion of the data analysis. I began the coding process with analytic memo writing and pre-coding. Next, I moved to first and second cycle coding methods, which occurred iteratively. Finally, these codes were synthesized into

categories and then the three overarching findings which are reported in the following chapter. In the next sections, I describe the analytic process.

Analytic memos (journal). After each interview and during and after my analysis of recorded public meetings I composed journal notes on a spreadsheet by recording my immediate reactions as a researcher, citizen and former classroom teacher. I included my anecdotal remembrances from the interviews or meetings such as demeanor or overarching assessment of the interview (Saldana, 2009). As for documents, I recorded my thoughts directly on the pages. These thoughts represented the early stages of the identification of communities of meaning concerning adolescent literacy reform. I continued to add to these memos throughout the data collection and early analysis period. New reactions came to mind during the process of typing interview and meeting transcripts, and I used the memo-writing process as a way to openly acknowledge my personal and professional biases regarding the data. I used these memos to compose the reflexive journal in Chapter V.

Pre-coding. After the data collection and transcription period, I undertook the multiphase process of data coding. Pre-coding of the documents, interview and meeting transcripts involved highlighting words and phrases for further consideration. These were units of data that stood out from sections of the transcripts and documents in relation to the research questions (Saldana, 2009). For interview and meeting transcripts, I highlighted these words and phrases electronically. I highlighted documents manually. I continued the process of reading and pre-coding recursively until I reached a saturation point for new meaning (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The majority of the pre-coding process

took place after the data collection period due to the time involved in scheduling, interviewing, travel and interview/meeting transcription.

First cycle coding. Once all data were collected and I reached saturation with the early coding process, first cycle coding commenced. This process consisted of converting the pre-codes into more abstract terms and phrases that pointed toward the research questions. This was the point at which I loaded the electronic versions of the policy documents as well as the highlighted interview and meeting transcripts into the Atlas.ti6 text coding program.

Focusing on the pre-coded highlighted areas, I primarily used *structural* and *descriptive* coding strategies for first cycle coding. Structural coding is the assignment of codes specifically in relation to the researcher's questions (Saldana, 2009). In this case, I looked for segments of meaning related to adolescent literacy and associated initiatives. Descriptive coding is the assignment of codes by the topic cited by informants or authors. The final count of codes reached over 1,600 identified units of meaning. As in the pre-coding process, I revisited the data and codes iteratively, until saturation was reached (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Second cycle coding. Throughout the first cycle coding period and beyond, I found I needed to recode certain words and phrases, merge certain codes together, and drop others in order to gain specificity and clarification. For instance, I merged "FCAT" and "NAEP" to form a code I called "summative assessment." I dropped a code called "nuances of technology in the classroom," because here, there were only three codes. Moreover, these codes were related to technical issues with hardware and this was not pertinent to my research questions.

While this meta-coding process resulted in a clarification and reorganization of the earlier codes, I found I needed to physically manipulate the codes so I printed a code list in large font and cut each of the codes into strips. At this point, I was able to physically group the codes and see a more holistic view of the emerging categories.

Third cycle coding. Through this highly iterative process of evaluation and synthesis, I began to crystallize my understanding of the nature of policy actors' perceptions about adolescent literacy and the policy problems and solutions they valued. However, because the data set was so large, I found the second cycle coding to be insufficient. Larger categories were forming, but the patterns were still nebulous. At this point I used the Atlas.ti6 frequency count function, or *magnitude coding*, to determine the relative weight of the categories as they were represented in the overall data set (Saldana, 2009). I took the top ten percent of the reoccurring categories and filtered them according to the "families" of the two knowledge tiers and speech genres. At this point, I began to see patterns across the speech genres and knowledge tiers; however, they were isolated to policy problems and solutions surrounding the enactment of literacy policy. This was indeed meaningful (as it laid the groundwork for one of my three overarching findings), but I found that literacy-specific information did not emerge here.

It was at this point that I realized I had initially over-grouped the literacy codes under the name "nuances of reading and reading instruction." Here, I began a "side analysis" of this one category to determine the specifics of Florida's approach to literacy. While I saw patterns here, the Atlas.ti6 view of the policy documents (some consisting of over 100 pages) was restricted to one page at a time and once again, I felt I needed a more holistic approach. In order to be more certain about the overarching flavor of each

document, I shifted back to the hard copies and my time-tested method of summarizing key ideas in margins and combining these ideas by making “gist” statements on the first page of each document. In addition to the electronically-derived literacy codes, this process yielded a more definitive set of patterns for Research Question 1, as well as a second critical finding in this study.

Later, during the writing of the results, an unexpected finding emerged from the data; one that revealed policy actors’ perceptions about various student profiles. This theme became a third and critical piece of the overall results. I mention this here, because while this finding was not a result of my intentional a-priori methods as described above, it occurred as a result of my “openness” during the writing up of the data (Saldana, 2009, p. 47). This notion of openness to data is also taken up by complexity theorists Davis and Sumara (2006) in a discussion of the dynamic nature of social science research, which they argue “calls for a more flexible attitude toward both the posing of [research] questions and the articulation of a methodology” (p. 149).

As indicated, the entire coding process was highly iterative, meaning that I continually moved back and forth across the spectrum of coding steps, building toward the end results. In fact, late in the next phase (Phase 4), I merged two third-cycle codes after the writing process had commenced.

Phase 4: Identification of meanings in conflict. Phase 4 was the culminating phase of IPA data analysis. Using the emerging findings, I contrasted meanings from the interviews, meetings and policy documents across and within the Tier I and Tier II findings. While some differences in discourse were obvious (e.g., opposition to the accountability system) others were more subtle and did not initially surface (alternate

versions of literacy). Saldana (2009) states that occasionally, unfinished results seem “uninspiring” and superficial. For me, this was the case not only with the literacy-specific results, but with the problem/solution results as well.

Through a two-pronged process of “shop talking” with trusted individuals and reflexive thinking across several days about the emerging results, I stepped away from and “rose above the data” (Saldana, 2009, p. 187) to see a clearer meaning residing in the literacy-specific and policy-specific data. Given that different individuals and communities assign different meanings to policy, one way to conceptualize and contrast these meanings is through the mechanism of *framing* (Coburn, 2006; Yanow, 2000). While I was not overtly aware of it at the time, I used framing as interpretive device for determining what aspects of the literacy-specific patterns were brought to the foreground, moved to the background, or left out of the picture entirely (Yanow, 2000). Using framing, I was able to see differences in the literacy-specific data that yielded various versions of literacy advocated by the state. As for the policy-specific data, I continued with what I will simply call a fourth- cycle coding process whereby I looked for patterns of the patterns. This result was the third finding, which revealed an emphasis on Systems-Based solutions over People- and Resource-Based solutions. This culmination of the qualitative analysis process crystallized the existence of the three themes as well as their relationships to one another.

Phase 5: Explanation and determination of intervention. The final IPA phase in this study was an analysis of the implications of the conflicting meanings as well as recommendations for policy alternatives. Because I was particularly interested in how complexity is acknowledged in Florida’s adolescent literacy policy, I applied the

constructs of complexity thinking (Davis, & Sumara, 2006; Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008; Stevens, 2006) more directly in this phase to examine how policy actors frame the targets, goals and instruments of adolescent literacy reform. This evaluative process was also informed by my conclusions from the literature review. Based on these findings, I formulated a response to strengthen the interstices at the macro and micro levels of adolescent literacy policy.

Protection of Human Subjects

The risks for participants in this study were limited to social and economic factors; however, these risks were highly mitigated by several features of the study design. As part of the interview request and again during the informed consent process (both oral and written at the time of the interview), participants received a description of the study purpose along with benefits, risks and participant rights (see Appendix A). Also, they were given the option to have their identity held confidential (see Appendix D), other than being identified as part of the legislative, executive/agency or tertiary groups. The only foreseeable risk would involve the misuse of interview statements, should fellow employees or constituents obtain them; however, the nature of the interview questions did not tend toward information that could be used in this manner (see Appendix C). Additional measures, described next, were taken to avoid this occurrence.

Unless the interviewee chose to include a staff member or other individual, interviews were conducted privately. Because I was interested in discourse *communities*, the informant's specific identity was not needed in this study: Interview and meeting participants were identified by the group label of legislative, executive/agency, or

tertiary. In addition to assured anonymity within the three group labels, participants were given the opportunity to review and modify the typed notes after the interview as well as the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. Finally, interview data were stored on a personal computer with a password and fingerprint log in.

Because of the nature of public meetings as described in Florida's Sunshine Law (Office of the Attorney General of Florida, 2009), I did not need consent for meeting observations. Each of these meetings were open to the public and audio- and video-versions of the meetings were available by request or online.

Dependability and Credibility

Mechanically speaking, this study was strengthened by a design that included several processes to bolster quality and rigor. First, I used two methods of triangulation; one during data collection and the other by including three sources of data (Patton, 2002). For data collection, I applied criterion and chain sampling for both interview participants and public meetings (Patton, 2002). I formulated the criteria for participant selection based on my knowledge of the structures of Florida's state level education framework along with guidance from Dr. Susan Homan (personal conversation, October 9, 2009) and Dr. Evan Lefsky (personal conversation, October 20, 2009), both of whom held first-hand knowledge about the "influentials" (Song & Miskel, 2005) who impact Florida's literacy policy design. I augmented my initial participant sample with chain sampling; this method is appropriate for IPA because it mirrors the networking within and across policy design communities (Kingdon, 2003; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Song & Young, 2008). Secondly, as a triangulation of data sources, I examined policy documents,

interview and meeting notes across Florida's macro- education ecology in order to capture the meanings conveyed by state-level policy actors.

The procedure for this study included a highly systematic process for data collection and analysis. All procedures were carefully followed and documented throughout the course of the study through the use of data analysis tools and plans discussed throughout this chapter. As for interview data, I asked participants to engage in the process of member-checking whereby they reviewed the transcripts to revise and confirm for accuracy (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). This member-checking feature of the study design added to the trustworthiness of the findings (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Also, by allowing several weeks to elapse between the interview and the member-checking task, each participant was able to engage in reflexive thinking; a feature of dependability in qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002). The data analysis process was strengthened by ongoing attempts to cross-check for, report, and explain negative cases which did not fit emerging patterns (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In fact, the act of looking for alternate discourse communities enabled and augmented the search for negative cases. Additionally, while I was the sole analyst, I engaged in discussions with mentors and other trusted individuals in order to check for transparency and confirmability of the data analysis and conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Finally, I comment here on the notion of researcher credibility (Patton, 2002). In this inquiry, the understanding of knowledge as a socially constructed phenomenon prompted an open acknowledgement of my own perspective along with an appreciation of the perspectives of others (Patton, 2002). To assist in managing my biases, I expanded my analytic memo writing (above) to a journal format. This journal is presented as

Chapter V. I conducted this study with a stated awareness of the critical perspective I brought as an advanced graduate scholar, literacy researcher, instructor and experienced educator. Yet, I also brought an appreciation for a likely very different set of perspectives held by state level policy actors. This understanding of socially constructed meanings was well suited for the goal of exploring the meanings conveyed by macro-level actors to those individuals at the micro-level of the policy-practice configuration (students and teachers).

Chapter IV: Results

Using data from three sources, I examined the meanings housed in the state-level language of and surrounding Florida's adolescent literacy initiative. In this chapter, I present the findings of the analysis. I was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of the beliefs about adolescent literacy conveyed by state-level discourse communities as these meanings are manifested across the primary and secondary speech genres of Florida's adolescent literacy reform?
2. How can Florida's adolescent literacy reform policy be reconceptualized using complexity thinking
 - (a) as a model for policy design?
 - (b) as a goal for adolescent literacy teaching and learning?

These questions are conceptually hierarchical, meaning the results from Research Question 1 (RQ1) are necessary for a response to Research Question 2 (RQ2). The direct results from the first question are presented in this chapter. The second question is evaluative in nature, and although there are indicators throughout this chapter pointing toward a response to RQ2, this question is directly addressed in Chapter VI.

Categorizing the Data

There were two heuristic frameworks embedded in Question 1: speech genres and discourse communities. However, during data collection and analysis, a clear division in the data emerged: knowledge of literacy and literacy instruction. One group of

data sources were simply grounded in a more sophisticated understanding of literacy than a second group. I called sources that evidenced specific knowledge about literacy “Tier I” sources and those that presented a more general knowledge I called “Tier II.” Because of this third distinction, I analyzed the data by conceptually “slicing” it in three different ways (see Patton, 2002; Weinberg, 2007): by (a) Speech Genre, (b) Knowledge Tier, and (c) Discourse Community. That is, I first parsed the data in terms of the speech genres and two tiers of knowledge, yielding a two-dimensional matrix. Next, I probed the data for differences within and across the configuration to locate alternative beliefs, or discourse communities. Throughout the process, and because I wanted to examine ways in which complexity thinking might serve as a guide for bridging the policy-practice gap, I looked across the broader data set through this theoretical frame in preparation for RQ2. In the next sections, I provide an overview of how speech genres, knowledge tiers, and discourse communities (RQ1), were applied to the data for Question 1.

Primary and secondary speech genres. According to Bakhtin (1986), primary speech is simple, and limited to common, informal communications. Secondary speech genres are more complex. They include and build upon primary speech genres, but are more formal and fully developed than that which occurs in everyday communication.

Figure 3 is a visual display of the continuum of speech genres from informal to formal.

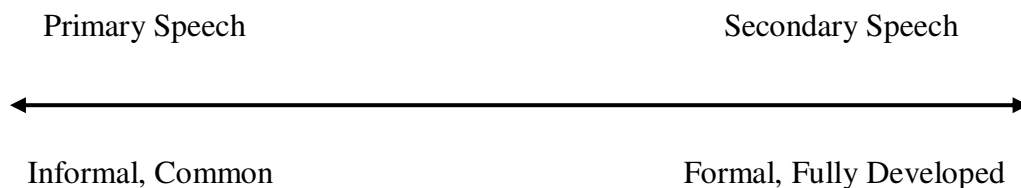


Figure 3. Speech genre continuum.

I did not place any of the data at the far left end of this continuum. However, certain forms of data were less formal and/or well-developed than others, leading to a relative placement for the data sources across the continuum.

Interviews. I placed the interview transcripts closer to the primary end, because all interviews except one were conducted in a casual manner. (One participant declined to participate in the audio-recorded interview, but agreed to type her responses to the interview questions. While the more formal nature of her language and close control of ideas was markedly different from the audio-recorded interviews, I placed this document with the interview data because, unlike the meetings, the participant knew this would not be a part of public record, and unlike the policy documents, it was not an official or expert publication disseminated to policy actors, districts or schools). A review of the interview transcripts shows that participants' language and discourse was not informal, but it was less so than that of meeting transcripts or policy documents. Interview transcripts reflected a free-flowing range of ideas within the general parameter of the interview questions. Often, a participant would amend his or her comments, share a personal anecdote, interject spontaneous humor, insert new ideas within sentences or thoughts, or would reveal his or her personal doubts or frustrations about certain issues.

Meetings. Data from meetings were more formal. This is because the meetings in most cases were conducted with a strong sense of organizational decorum. Committee or board chairs governed the pace and length of time for each speaker. Also, meetings were audio- or video-recorded for public record, and this no doubt added to the more formal nature of participants' language and discourse. In legislative committee meetings, members would occasionally reveal frustration with the direction of a given process;

however, they were ultimately silenced by the dictates of the committee chair. Likewise, opponents of particular bills, such as the heavily contested Senate Bill 6, occasionally drifted from the inherent formality. However, these instances were short-lived and occurred infrequently across the entirety of the meeting data.

Documents. Lastly, I placed the policy documents toward the far end of the continuum. These documents were designed for state and local policy actors and required or suggested an array of actions. Because of the official nature, intended audiences and the permanence of written text, the language of these documents was formal, focused and fully developed. A visual display of how I placed the three data sources is depicted in Figure 4.

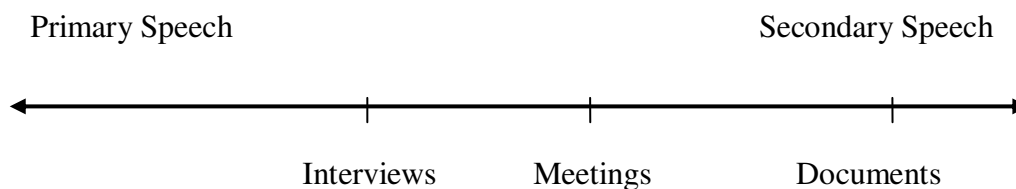


Figure 4. Placement of data sources across the speech genres from less formal to more formal.

Knowledge tiers. During data collection and analysis, an important and visible distinction arose in the data: *knowledge specificity* as it related to reading and reading instruction. I used the terms Tier I and Tier II to demarcate differences related to this construct. In interviews, most participants indicated the importance of being able to successfully read texts in school. However, six individuals by virtue of their roles within agency or tertiary organizations demonstrated a stronger understanding of established

knowledge of reading and/or reading instruction. For instance, rather than exhibiting a general understanding as above, these participants frequently referenced the structural and conceptual shifts in texts across subject domains as a distinction of secondary reading tasks and the important instructional implications for students exhibiting comprehension as opposed to word reading difficulties. Two agency and four tertiary participants were designated as Tier I sources because of their more sophisticated understanding of literacy. These individuals worked closely either with curriculum, instruction, professional development, research or analysis of reading-related policy at the state level. Anecdotal information revealed that at least three of these six individuals had secondary classroom teaching experience.

Additionally, the artifacts cited by the Tier I group were highly associated with the topic of adolescent literacy. They consisted of an array of guidance documents, Board of Education rules or reports related to secondary reading. Because the FCAT test was frequently referenced, I used a draft of the reading test specifications for FCAT 2.0, the latest version of this assessment. A second, larger group of 14 participants (Tier II) exhibited a more general understanding of literacy. These were mostly legislators. The documents cited by the Tier II group were pertinent to the overarching context in which Florida's secondary literacy reform is situated. Table 2 lists the documents used in this study according to the knowledge tiers.

Table 2

Documents Listed by Knowledge Tiers

Tier	Source	Document
Tier I		
	Center on Instruction	<i>Adolescent Literacy Walk Through for Principals</i> <i>Academic Literacy Instruction for Adolescents</i> <i>Assessments to Guide Adolescent Literacy Instruction</i> <i>Effective Instruction for Adolescent Struggling Readers</i>
	Senate Committee on Education Pre-K-12	<i>Senate Interim Report 2010-111: Review of Practices for Reading Intervention in Middle and High Schools</i>
	Southern Regional Education Board	<i>Making Adolescent Literacy a Priority</i>
	Department of Education	<i>Content Area Reading Professional Development Rule</i> <i>K-12 Reading Intervention Rule</i> <i>K-12 Reading Plan Rule</i> <i>Revised Reading Endorsement Competencies (Draft)</i> <i>Reading/Language Arts Standards, Grade 6 and 9-10</i> <i>Reading FCAT 2.0 Specifications Draft, Grades 6 and 9</i>
Tier II		
	Florida Statutes	<i>Enforcing School Improvement</i> <i>School-District Grading System</i> <i>Implementation of School Improvement & Accountability</i> <i>Secondary School Redesign Act</i>
Total: 16		

In retrospect, this division in knowledge specificity seemed natural given the fact that legislative representatives typically do not have expertise in a given policy area. As a consequence they frequently consult with advisors they believe to be more knowledgeable (Stephens & Wikstrom, 2007). The added dimension of knowledge provided for a more nuanced analysis both independent of and in conjunction with the analysis of discourse communities. And, because the differences in speech genres were more subtle than were the differences in the tiers, I gave preference in the discussion to the tiers, and then I included the genre when applicable.

Discourse communities. Recalling Yanow's (2000) description of a discourse community as a group of individuals who think, act and talk similarly about policy issues, I looked for distinct differences in discourses across the data in order to construct an interpretation of the different values, beliefs and feelings held by state level policy actors. This meant looking for discrepancies in beliefs or patterns of disconfirming cases. With two exceptions, policy actors were virtually unified in their values, beliefs and feelings. Yet, these differences in the state level discourse were important findings nonetheless. The two alternate discourses were applied to the data matrix to determine if there was an apparent explanation for the divergence in beliefs based on knowledge or genre. Figure 5 depicts a visual representation of the three heuristic frameworks embedded in Question 1, with the placement of the two alternative discourses as they were found within the tiers and genres. In the case of Alternate Discourse B, the contradictory beliefs were highly specified and limited to Tier II interviews and meetings. On the other hand, Alternate Discourse A was more diffuse, both conceptually and in terms of its location within the matrix. It is important to note that a third discrepancy arose as well. While it was initially

unclear if this conflict was indicative of differences in knowledge or of discourse, further analysis revealed knowledge specificity (Tiers) provided a better explanation than did differences in discourse. A detailed discussion of each of these instances is provided later in this chapter.

	Interviews	Meetings	Documents
Tier II	<i>Alternate Discourse A</i> <i>Alternate Discourse B</i>		
Tier I	<i>Alternate Discourse A</i>		<i>Alternate Discourse A</i>

Figure 5. Discourses across the speech types and knowledge tiers. Alternate Discourse A was dispersed throughout Tier I and Tier II data. Alternate Discourse B was found only in Tier II data.

Question 1: Overview of Results

Now, I move to a brief overview of the results of RQ 1. Following this overview, I provide a detailed description of the data that supported these results.

Research Question 1 asked: *What is the nature of the values, beliefs and feelings about adolescent literacy conveyed by state-level discourse communities as these meanings are manifested across the primary and secondary speech genres of Florida's adolescent literacy reform policy?* Three overarching findings resulted from the analysis: (a) Reading as Literacy; (b) Institutionally Imposed Student Profiles; and (c) Policy Solutions and Problems. In this section, I provide a wide-angle, albeit brief view of the overall results. In the following section, I provide a detailed description of each of these

findings, including the two alternative discourse communities which arose from findings (a) and (c) above.

Reading as literacy. The first finding was literacy-specific. Because I was interested in how adolescent literacy was viewed by state level policy actors, I conducted an inductive analysis, focusing directly on literacy-specific segments of meaning. In general, I found reading and literacy were viewed as the same construct; literacy *was* reading. Three beliefs were associated with this finding. First, reading was valued as a tool for accessing content-related knowledge. Without the ability to read and understand texts, students were blocked from learning. Second, reading was viewed as an ongoing process of development. Noticeable statutory, agency and research effort was aimed at helping students develop areas of reading weakness. Third, standardized test scores as measured by the annual Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) were highly valued as a measure of students' reading development. This was the means by which state policy actors determined the quality of literacy teaching and learning. Within this three-pronged view of literacy arose an alternate, albeit conceptually diffuse discourse (Alternate Discourse A): There existed a set of subtly different but potentially confusing meanings about the types of literacy valued by state level policy actors. The specifics of this finding are discussed in the "Detailed Results" section below.

Institutionally imposed student profiles. Based on policy actors' beliefs, a second finding revealed a typology of four different categories of adolescents in terms of their academic fit within the institution. They ranged from students who were meeting institutional expectations to those who were, due to a combination of four factors, quite distanced from institutional expectations.

Policy solutions and problems. Because my inquiry of adolescent literacy was comprised of both Tier I and Tier II data sources, the data provided for a wide range of perspectives. This broad scope of beliefs resulted in a third finding: solutions and problems as they related to students who were not meeting institutional expectations. Solutions dominated this discourse and were comprised of System-Based, People-Based, and Resource-Based remedies. Problems were related to students' academic and agentive diversity as well as the belief that they in general were not prepared for college and/or the workplace. Some solutions and problems were valued across both tiers of knowledge and all speech genres; others were differentiated by knowledge tiers and/or the speech genres. Additionally, the second set of conflicting results (Alternative Discourse B) arose within the solutions and problems valued by policy actors: An alternate discourse community opposed the nature of the test-driven accountability system. The specifics of this finding is discussed in the following section.

Question 1: Detailed Results

I turn now to a detailed description of the findings from RQ1: (a) Reading as Literacy; (b) Institutionally Imposed Student Profiles; and (c) Policy Solutions and Problems. Figure 6 is a visual depiction of how these results were manifested in various conversations and topics during the data collection period.

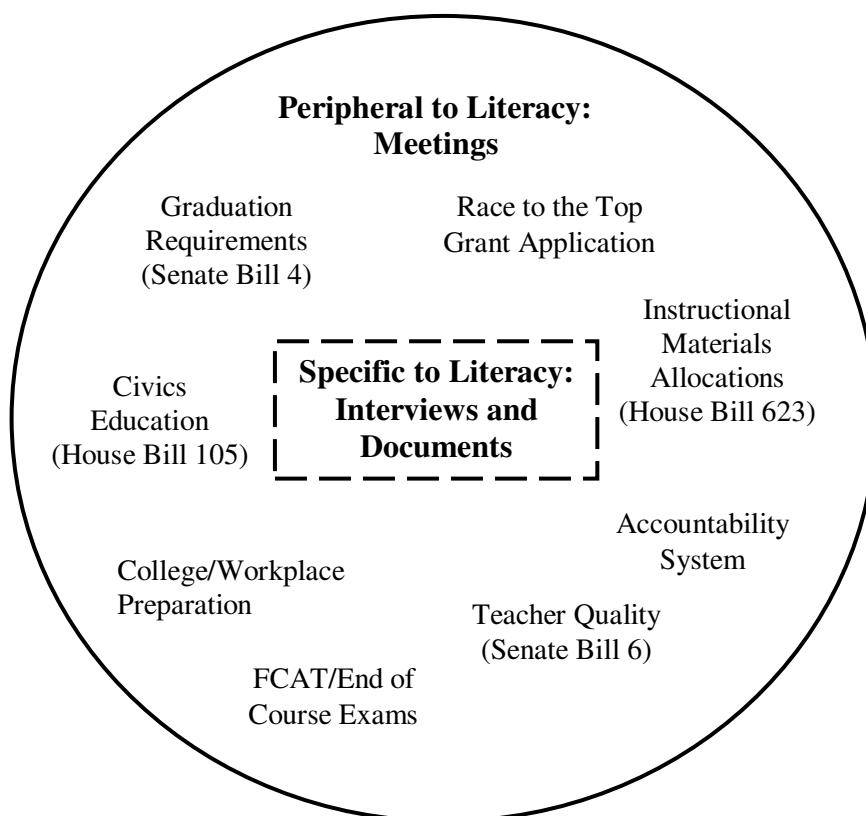


Figure 6. Data topics and conversations in meetings. These surrounded and permeated interview data and the content of policy documents.

In large part, the literacy-specific information resulted from interviews and the policy documents, however, the broken inner line represents the way literacy-specific information was both explicitly and implicitly gleaned from peripheral conversations and topics in the public meetings. Interviews were highly focused on secondary level literacy policy, as I used an interview guide with questions aimed toward this end. Additionally, the documents were carefully selected based on participant recommendations as they related to RQ1. In contrast, the meeting data represented outside of the box were the least

controlled of the three data sources and they subsequently yielded a broad range of information that was related to the policy context in which literacy is situated. Put simply, meeting data were almost void of direct references to literacy. Because of the content of the data sources, most of the information necessary for determining the specifics of Florida's adolescent literacy beliefs were couched within the least and most formal aspects of the data (interviews and documents). However, meeting data confirmed one key aspect of the findings: the importance of standardized tests as an assessment of students' literacy sophistication.

Reading as literacy. In general, Florida's approach to adolescent literacy placed a high priority on academic reading as a tool for the acquisition of content knowledge. Reading ability was believed to be an ongoing process; and, as mentioned above, and it was demonstrated by students through their scores on statewide assessments. In most cases, the terms literacy and reading were used interchangeably. For instance, the goals for adolescent literacy instruction described in the Center on Instruction (COI) report *Assessments to Guide Adolescent Literacy Instruction*, were to (a) strengthen students' reading proficiency in preparation for college and the workplace; (b) to help students acquire the increasingly difficult reading standards required in the middle and high school years; and (c) to facilitate and expedite struggling readers' reading development (Torgesen and Miller; 2009, p. 11). In essence, these three goals for literacy instruction were specifically related to reading.

Adolescent literacy as described in the scholarly literature represents a socially-constructed view of receptive and expressive communication that reaches more deeply and broadly than traditional school-based conceptions of literacy. Adolescent literacy is

under girded by the idea that readers actively bring their own purposes, efficacy, identity, culture and history to the text (Alvermann, 2002; Gee, 2004), as well as the notion that traditional page-bound texts are just one of many text types, including computer and visual texts (Alvermann, 2001; Gee, 2004; New London Group, 1996). Further, this broader view acknowledges the socio-political nature of literacy; it attends to questions of whose form of literacy is privileged as well as the underlying reasons for that deference (Alvermann, 2002; Street, 2005).

The deep/broad conception of literacy for adolescents was infrequently represented in the data collected for this study. Instead, as noted above, Florida's state-level approach to literacy was focused almost exclusively on academic reading and the demonstration of students' reading ability as measured by standardized tests. While this description calls to mind Alvermann's (2001, p. 4) conception of academic literacy (which is concerned with reading, writing and other "modes of symbolic communication" across the various text structures typically found in school curricula), Florida's approach was more focused than Alvermann's notion of academic literacy in that it appeared to be restricted to reading, or the *receptive* aspects of literacy. In general, receptive literacy skills consist of reading and listening, whereas expressive literacy skills involve writing and speaking.

It is important to explain that aspects of adolescent literacy as described above *were* found in the data, but they were limited in comparison to the description above. For instance, Florida's K-12 Reading and Language Arts *Next Generation Sunshine State Standards* evidenced a broader, and hence, more balanced view of the receptive and expressive aspects of literacy than was found in the entirety of the interviews, meetings

and policy documents. Also, many participants and documents indicated attention to motivation and student engagement; aspects associated with the notion of agency as it is described in adolescent literacy literature (Alvermann, 2002; Moore & Cunningham, 2006). Finally, legislators and tertiary participants in particular were mindful of the digital literacies and their role in preparing students for the 21st century workplace as well as their potential for helping students engage with learning tasks. However, in general, Florida appeared to espouse a view of literacy that foregrounds reading and thinking skills associated with understanding academic texts.

Reading as tool. Within the parameters of Florida's focus on reading academic texts, there were copious instances where policy actors indicated their belief that reading was an enabling tool necessary for the acquisition of content knowledge. For example, an official from the Department of Education used FCAT test scores to illustrate how an increase in reading scores (or by proxy, reading growth) had brought about a positive change in math scores: "...Even our math scores are up *wonderfully*. A lot of that has to do with the fact that they can *read* the math problems" (Interview, 5/18/2010). Because students were reading better, they were better at math. Similarly, consider this legislator's description of the challenges faced by struggling readers:

...a *student* that is in high school, and still has not learned to read... maybe that child...would understand the science problems, and the math problems if he could *just* read them. So these are not students...that are not *smart*, they just haven't been able to...totally understand...They haven't *learned how to read*. (Interview, 6/2/2010)

This participant took a slightly different stance. She believed reading and knowledge were not mutually dependent (“these are not students...that are not *smart*...”). However she, like many others, expressed her belief that reading was a tool that would enhance students’ understanding of subjects such as math and science.

Reading as process. Reading was also seen from a developmental perspective. This belief, however, was differentiated by the two knowledge Tiers. While several Tier II participants invoked Chall’s (1996) division of reading into two primary stages (“learning to read” in the primary years and then “reading to learn” thereafter), Tier I participants espoused a more nuanced version of the process of reading. For example, a Department of Education official explained:

I *know* that oftentimes it may be said that... the kids learn to read, and then read to learn, and while that’s *somewhat* true, we need not...forget that students *are still* learning to read throughout secondary school. And even...today as an *adult* ...we’re *still* making use of strategies and maybe coming up with different strategies to help us navigate text that’s difficult for *us*. And so, I don’t know that even as *adults*... we’re *ever* finished with learning to read. (Interview, 5/5/2010)

The notion of continual development in reading sophistication was confirmed elsewhere in Tier I data. For example, in the COI publication *Academic Literacy Instruction for Adolescents* the authors Torgesen, et al. (2007) state:

...learning to read hardly comes to an abrupt halt at the end of third grade. Our current understanding of reading growth indicates that students must continue to learn many new things, and acquire many additional skills, in order to maintain reading proficiency as they move from elementary to middle and high school. If

they do not acquire the new skills specific to reading after the initial period of learning to read, they will not leave high school as proficient readers (p. 4).

These authors continue by describing “six areas of knowledge, skill and attitude” (p. 10) of development that can be influenced by instruction: reading fluency (sight words); vocabulary knowledge, content knowledge, higher-level reasoning and thinking skills, cognitive strategies specific to reading comprehension, and motivation and engagement” (p. 6).

Finally, this developmental perspective was manifested in Department of Education objectives for professional development for reading teachers. The first guiding principle of the state’s *Reading Endorsement Competencies* draft reads, “Teachers will understand and teach reading as an ongoing strategic process resulting in students comprehending diverse text” (2010, p. 1). In support of the early 19th century reading developmentalists described by Moore, Readence and Rickelman (1983), the data revealed a belief held by many policy actors that reading and understanding content-area texts was a process of ongoing development throughout the middle and high school years.

Reading as test. Florida’s definition of reading included an additional dimension. As in other aspects of the data, subject-area reading abilities were closely dependent on the demonstration of these capabilities on standardized tests. This understanding was consistent across both Tiers of knowledge. In the policy document *Academic Literacy Instruction for Adolescents*, authors Torgesen, et al. (2007) described their approach to adolescent literacy as a more focused version. Because their stated goal was to support states and districts as they sought to “improve reading outcomes as measured by state accountability tests,” the authors used the term “academic adolescent literacy” as a

defining moniker (p. 2). While they acknowledged and affirmed adolescent literacy as it is found in other sources, the authors contrasted it with their conception of academic adolescent literacy. They described academic adolescent literacy as a form of literacy specific to “content-area texts and literature encountered in school” (p. 3). It includes:

...the kind of reading proficiencies typically assessed on state-level accountability measures, such as the ability to make inferences from text, to learn new vocabulary from context, to link ideas across texts, and to identify and summarize the most important ideas or content within a text...

Continuing, they explained,

[Academic adolescent literacy] includes not only the ability to read text for initial understanding but also the ability to think about its meaning in order to answer questions that may require the student to make inferences or draw conclusions (p. 3).

The authors stated that the policy-practice enactment of this definition of literacy should produce an increase in students’ acquisition and demonstration of complex content-related knowledge as well as an improvement in “student performance on state-level accountability measures in reading and on the reading portion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress” (p. 4). These tests, the authors affirmed, are measures of students’ “ability to understand and think productively about the meaning of expository text and literature” (p. 4). In essence, this version of literacy was one that transferred to high reading scores on standardized tests. This finding was also observed by Peterson (2006) in the Hoover Institution’s Koret Task Force report; an independent evaluation of

Florida's education reform: "...the State of Florida has defined as its primary objective the enhancement of a student's performance on the FCAT" (p. 61).

Alternate Discourse "A": Multiple versions of literacy. A close analysis of the data revealed a set of fine-grained definitional variations that signaled the existence of alternate literacy discourses. Couched within the discourse of literacy as reading were four distinct varieties of reading that were advocated at the state level. I labeled them: (a) FCAT Reading, (b) Standards Reading, (c) Academic Reading and (d) Academic Literacy. In some cases, the differences were subtle (e.g., between Standards Reading and Academic Reading), and in others they were more distinct (e.g., between FCAT Reading and Standards Reading). Variation existed nonetheless, and given the capability of seemingly minor discourses for creating large impacts across time and space (Blommaert, 2005; see also Gleick, 1987; Taleb, 2007), these differences necessitate further consideration.

The first and most heavily weighted version, FCAT Reading, was concerned with a portion (approximately half) of the reading competencies (or benchmarks) the state had identified as important for students to know and be able to do. Because of the high stakes nature of the test, this view was highly dependent on the text as authority. Students needed to read and provide a sufficient number of correct answers in order to exceed the designated cut-score, which designated acceptable proficiency with the benchmarks included on the test. If they did not, students were provided with instructional intervention support aimed at increasing performance on the assessment the following year. Depending on additional diagnostic assessments these students would be provided with an array of instructional interventions by individuals who had been trained

according to the state's guidelines. While these interventions included oral language, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension, they appeared to be intended for all students across the K-12 spectrum. Secondly, FCAT Reading was demonstrated exclusively through product-related means. Proficiency here assumed students had developed the process-related skills necessary for determining enough correct answers on the test to warrant graduation. While the results of FCAT Reading provided the state with a snapshot view of students' growth from previous years, the high stakes nature of this summative test seemed not quite congruent with the state's stance that reading development was an ongoing process and was highly contingent on students' experiential knowledge.

A second version, Standards Reading, was comprised of the broader range of reading-related benchmarks that were not measured on the annual summative assessment. Examples here were: the ability to listen to, read, and discuss familiar and conceptually challenging text; the ability to analyze and evaluate similar themes or topics by different authors across a variety of fiction and nonfiction selections; or the ability to select a topic for inquiry, formulate a search plan, apply evaluative criteria and select appropriate resources (*Florida K-12 Next Generation Reading and Language Arts Standards, Grade 6*).

A third view, Academic Reading, was highly valued by state level policy actors. This version was closely affiliated with the totality of the skills found in Standards Reading above; however, a heavy focus on two particular aspects of Standards Reading rendered this version conceptually separate. First and foremost, this version drew heavily on students' prior knowledge of content in order for them to be successful in various

disciplinary courses. In fact, concept knowledge was critical, as Academic Reading was the version most closely associated with the notion of “reading to learn.” Without a lexical and conceptual background, these texts were very difficult to understand, and this was a primary source of difficulty for certain students. Secondly, as in Standards Reading, the differences in texts across subject domains were a factor, however in this version, facility in navigating these differences was important for students’ success. Even though this version was represented prominently in the data and to a certain extent in the Language Arts Standards, no aspects of Academic Reading appeared to be included in the content standards of other subject domains. This is an important finding, given the heavy connection in the data between comprehension of text and success in content area learning. As for the locus of authority, both Standards Reading and Academic Reading appeared to be weighted toward the text, although not to the extent found in FCAT Reading. Both included limited attention to expressive aspects of literacy, such as discussion-oriented understanding of texts. Also, the data related to Academic Reading yielded some instances where motivation and student engagement were considered as an area of student development.

Academic Literacy arose solely from the *Next Generation Sunshine State Reading and Language Arts Standards*. This version subsumed both FCAT Reading and Standards Reading, but it extended to include a full array of composition, communication, information and media literacy standards. For instance, the standards for 6th grade Language Arts contained a broad range of communication skills including listening and oral presentation skills, the use of digital technologies and tools, and the writing process (including generating writing ideas and plans based on the audience or genre, discussion,

primary and secondary sources, personal interests and prior knowledge, as well as revising and editing for clarity by using peer-review or rubrics, and sharing the end product with the intended audience). Here, the locus of control included text as authority, but it clearly also included the potential for shared authority in the form of discussion, composition, production and presentation. Other than the Reading and Language Arts Standards, however, this more comprehensive view of literacy was quite limited in the overall results. One of these limited instances was located in the draft of the revised *Reading Endorsement Competencies* (Florida Department of Education, 2010). Here, writing, a text-based form of communication, was valued as a way to enhance students' development of other components of reading, such as oral language, phonics and comprehension.

Summary. The state level version of literacy at the secondary level foregrounded reading and understanding content-related texts. Reading development involved two key goals: (a) the acquisition of content-related knowledge, and (b) the demonstration of this ability by performing at expected levels on state and national accountability measures. In general, literacy (reading, composing, speaking, listening) was represented as a process in the literacy-related standards (task authenticity, use of a variety of tools, emphasis on the phases of project completion, collaborative revision), but state level interviews and statutory documents revealed a value primarily for the product-related aspects of reading; that is the types of knowledge represented on standardized tests.

Like the re-emergence of content area reading in the 1970's (Moore, Readence & Rickelman, 1983), Florida's view of adolescent literacy was concerned almost

exclusively with matters of curriculum and instruction with a focus on the reading of subject-area texts. The primary authority resided in text. As in this earlier version of content-area literacy, the use of the term “adolescent” served as a mark of the reader’s age and his or her location within the K-12 progression structure. In the broader version of adolescent literacy found in the scholarly literature, the term adolescent refers to *more* than age; it is a consideration of the adolescent’s individual identity, including interests and out-of-school literate practices as a key aspect and influence on those matters of curriculum and instruction. Authority is shared between student and text.

Thus, Florida’s understanding was not the same “adolescent literacy” as defined by Alvermann and others in the late 1990’s when they established the International Reading Association’s Commission on Adolescent Literacy. It was not the same as Alvermann’s (2002) conception of “academic literacy,” which includes a balance of the receptive and expressive aspects of academic communication. If word order is taken in to consideration, Florida’s version of adolescent literacy also did not appear to be consistent with the moniker of “adolescent academic literacy,” which places the adolescent first. This would indicate that the starting point for literacy instruction would honor the students’ identity, interests and motivation. In other words, Florida’s version would fit only those students whose identity is aligned or at least closely aligned with the institutionally inscribed ways of defining and doing literacy; precluding many who were either marginalized to begin by virtue of their socio-cultural backgrounds (Moje, et al, 2004), or those who had somehow become marginalized by a history of school failure (Franzak, 2006; 2008). To conclude, the state’s emphasis on content area reading as

measured by standardized tests appeared to be more suited to the label “academic reading for adolescents.”

According to Davis & Sumara (2006) constraints serve the function of providing “sufficient coherence to orient agent’s actions” (p. 148). In complexity terms, Florida’s restricted view of literacy as academic reading for adolescents could clearly be considered a policy constraint; that is, it was designed to focus Florida’s districts, schools, teachers and students on an arguably critical aspect of literacy acquisition: content area reading. Delineating the standards and benchmarks indicative of content-area reading and thinking ability and assessing those standards would be a logical means for providing a form of coherence for local level efforts toward this end. Yet, according to the national discourse of crisis (see Moore, 2009; Stevens, 2008) as well as the data in this study, many adolescents were not making test score gains (see also Peterson, 2007).

Importantly, the coupling of the complexity notions of system nestedness and ambiguous boundaries (Davis & Sumara 2006) reveals that state policy actors operated under their *own* set of constraints. Consider the externally imposed requirements for standardized testing embedded in the federal 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (U S Department of Education, 2004), the challenge (stated by several legislative and tertiary participants) of increasing the test scores of students whose native language was not English, or the ongoing demands of both the business and post-secondary education communities for ever higher scores. (This influence is discussed later in the current chapter). Put simply, Florida both received and administered a test-driven definition of literacy (Kroeger, 2008).

Aiming Florida's literacy focus primarily at receptive literacy skills (which are undoubtedly amenable to standardized tests and data systems), appeared to be a logical response to the state's own constraints for required improvement. In support of this logic, one policy actor poignantly explained that the state was able to correct only those aspects of students' literacy that fell within the realm of its capability. However, this focus on reading as measured by standardized tests created a tension, not only in terms of the broad/deep conception of adolescent literacy represented in the scholarly literature mentioned above, but also within the state's own beliefs about literacy as stated in its *Next Generation Sunshine State Standards* (2007).

In essence, state policy actors portrayed a laser-like focus on reading tests as an indicator of state level progress, and this focus appeared to eclipse the other (mostly expressive and process-oriented) skills Florida had designated as important for the acquisition of literacy. Of critical importance, the expressive and process-related skills embedded in the states' Language Arts standards were more compatible with adolescents' identity and self-expression of their identity, as was found by Mahar (2001) in her study of marginalized seventh graders. Afflerbach, Ruetschlin, and Russell (2007) remind us that "high-stakes test scores are one indicator of what teachers and students have accomplished..." They are "...contrived in nature, focused on the products of reading strategies (rather than the reading strategies themselves), and temporally removed from teachers' decision making and teaching" (p. 179).

With the aforementioned understanding of how literacy was viewed, I move now to a brief but conceptually critical description of the four types of students that were characterized in the data.

Institutionally imposed student profiles. Based on policy actors' beliefs, a second finding revealed a typology of four different categories of adolescents in terms of their academic fit within the institution. I pieced these profiles together based on bits of data across all the tiers and genres.

The first student profile consisted of students who are progressing academically and are engaged in meeting institutional expectations. The other three categories were of students who did not fit within institutional expectations: students who are capable of progress but are not engaged in the system, struggling students who are not progressing but are engaged, and lastly, struggling students who are disengaged. This last type of student was seen as being farthest away from the expectations of the institution.

Students who were distanced from the institution did not perform as well as others, and, as seen in the following section, considerable policy effort was aimed at resolving this distance. Similar to the reciprocity between policy and practice (Coburn, 2001; Franzak, 2006; McDonnell, 2009; Yanow, 2000), the distance between various students and institutional expectations resulted in a demonstration of how policy influences targets and how targets influence policy (Schneider & Ingram 1997).

Because the student profiles above were woven throughout policy language related to the subtopics in the next section, I call specific attention to them there, rather than using certain quotes here and again as they applied in the next section. An extensive discussion of the student profile finding is provided in Chapter VI.

In the next section, I present the policy-oriented beliefs about adolescent literacy reform. First is a discussion of four universally-valued solutions and problems. This is

followed with a discussion of one problem and several solutions that were differentiated across the tiers and speech genres.

Policy problems and solutions: Universal beliefs. Given the role of government as social problem solver (Lindblom and Woodhouse, 1993), it is not surprising that problems and solutions would come to the forefront of the data (see also Kingdon, 2003). As indicated in Figure 7, there were four categories of agreement that crossed all speech genres and knowledge tiers of the data set. These four beliefs were: (a) a strong and pervasive emphasis on standardized summative assessment scores; (b) the importance of adolescents' individual agency; (c) a focus on struggling readers/learners; and (d) an acknowledgement of students' varying academic literacy needs.

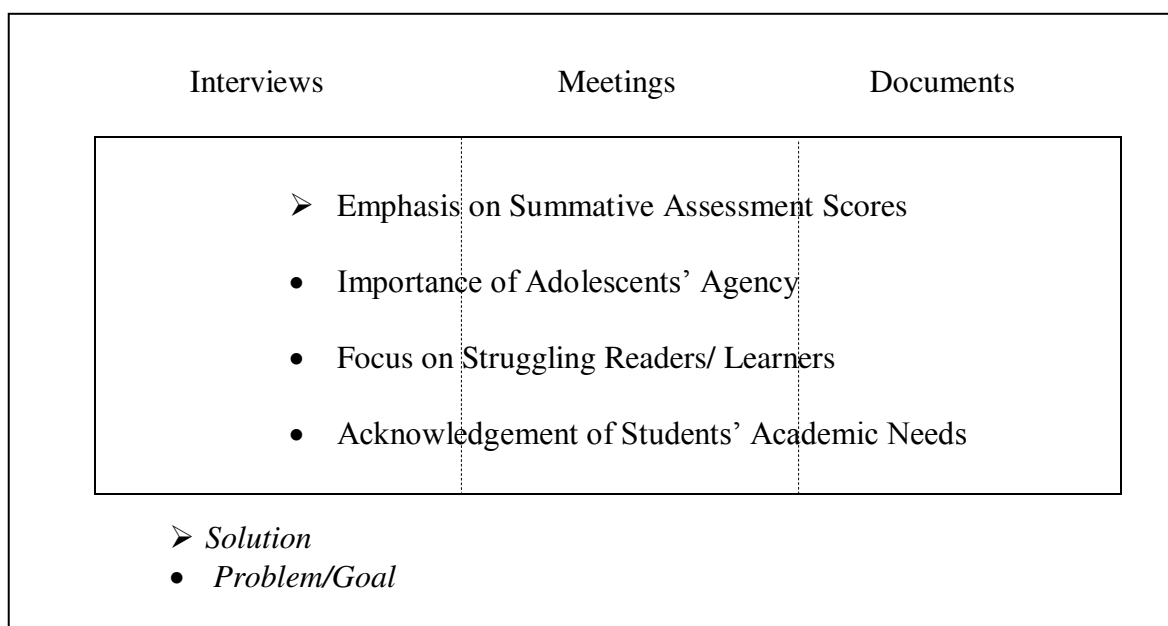


Figure 7. Universal beliefs found across all data sources and knowledge tiers.

The first aspect, standardized summative assessment scores, was a system-based solution; this finding was valued as both a means and as an end for strengthening the

system. This result was pervasive throughout the data and was frequently implied in the discourse, indicating the way this feature had become naturalized within state level language (Woodside-Jiron, 2004). Most likely due to this naturalization, most of the other findings, both universal and differentiated, hinged on summative assessment as an a-priori assumption. The remaining three universal findings listed in the figure were equally prominent in the data and were highly interconnected in several ways with one another and/or with the first finding (standardized summative assessment scores). These three aspects were based primarily on policy concerns, or problems, and were almost always stated directly. They varied in strength depending on the tier/genre combination. Thus, they are not listed in any particular order.

Emphasis on standardized summative assessment scores. The criticality of standardized assessment scores became apparent very early during data collection. The presence of state-wide standardized test scores were woven throughout Florida's conception of literacy, and this is perhaps one of the clearest indicators of their ubiquity. Moreover, in virtually every interview, meeting or policy document, there was an explicitly or implicitly expressed belief that the scores from summative tests such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), or the yet-to-be-developed End of Course Exams (EOCs) were indicators of individual and collective progress. At times, the importance of test scores was directly stated, such as when policy actors compared Florida's NAEP scores to those of other states. Yet, even when tests and/or scores weren't directly mentioned, their presence was implied, and these subtle indications were frequent. Examples here would be the use of words "student performance" or "struggling schools," both of which were

designations that hinged on test scores. Typically, the coterminous nature of reading and summative test scores was revealed through the use of terms such as “reading performance” or “reading ability.” These words, used repeatedly by state policy actors, took on a tacit and accepted status as a way of talking about reading.

The data clearly indicated that policy actors believed an increase in summative scores was synonymous with student learning. They believed that when scores increased, this meant that policies, teachers and students were making progress. The numbers generated by state and national assessments were cause for celebration, comparison and consternation. They were also tightly coupled with accountability mechanisms and future initiatives. At a State Board of Education meeting, the Education Commissioner offered an upbeat description of Florida’s performance on the recent release of the NAEP results:

I would like to just highlight the NAEP scores...The fireworks should have gone off in Miami-Dade and we should have had the band out in Tallahassee...

Statistically, there was no progress in 4th grade reading. In reality, there was a two point bump in reading, but again they have a statistical range that they work on.

They have a seven point bump which is really kind of a bow wave in students going through our system that benefitted from reform. A seven point jump in reading in 8th grade. One of a handful of states that made dramatic increases...

What’s important about this is that when you disaggregate the data, you’ve got to really take a second and just take pause on this. We worked to close the gap in achievement to make sure that all of our children from all backgrounds have opportunity and doors open in life. As an educator for 30, too many years...this is like Nobel Prize work. I keep saying, this is Nobel Prize work that deserves that

kind of acknowledgement, that in Florida, for Hispanic children, we surpassed or equaled the performance of...30 other state averages for all children...For African American children we equaled or surpassed eight other states. Dramatic...our little 4th grade babies, African American babies that are out there reading in Florida surpassed the average performance in Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, and New Mexico. Proud of that work, [it is] consistency. [It is] consistency of effort and focus, so I hope it can settle in on some people...(State Board of Education Meeting, 3/26/2010)

This example reflects several beliefs about the prominent placement of standardized summative tests in the overall thrust of Florida's education reform. The increase in NAEP scores was cause for celebration; it was used to compare Florida with other states; it was linked to students' potential for life success; and to highlight the state's policy concern about low-performing students and the achievement gap between Minority and White students. Most importantly, and as found across all of the tiers and speech genres, each of these meanings were underpinned by the belief that the increase in scores was an indicator that students were learning and education in Florida had improved.

Florida policy actors were indeed motivated by state-to-state and global rankings, and summative assessments were frequently the means by which these comparisons were made. For instance, a Department of Education official reminisced about Florida's standing in the national rankings a decade ago and contrasted this with the state's current placement: "Thank God for Mississippi, because if we hadn't had Mississippi we would have been the *bottom* state in the NAEP, and now...we are of course, are *over* the states'

average; the national average” (Interview, 5/18/2010). From this perspective, summative test scores collected and reported by the federal government were actually seen by state-level participants as a formative evaluation of Florida’s progress toward the goal of increasing its national standing. In other words, while the NAEP appeared to be an accountability tool from the perspective of the federal government, it simultaneously served as a formative tool for Florida, as the scores allowed policy actors to mark growth and gauge the success of policy initiatives.

Summative test scores were also viewed as a method for holding the local level (i.e., students, teachers, schools and districts) accountable for progress. The notion of accountability in the form of the 1999 A+ Plan frequently co-occurred with statewide summative assessment. While I describe the notion of accountability and the A+ Plan briefly here, these topics are discussed in detail in the Tier II differentiated beliefs section. Instituted by then Governor Jeb Bush and the Florida Legislature in 1999, the A+ plan is centered on the statewide administration of the FCAT. The plan requires the state Department of Education to grade schools based on students’ test scores and their improvement on the test scores across time, as well as on high schools’ graduation rates, student participation in Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses, college dual enrollment and Advanced Certificate of Education courses. Participants noted the gains in elementary grade FCAT scores across time and attributed the presence of the test and the concordant accountability measures as the reason for the gains. There was a clear belief that without this mandated use of test scores, Florida’s reform efforts would soon lose momentum.

As described above, the use of state-wide summative assessments and the scores they generate were woven throughout existing state policy. For instance, student test scores were a primary consideration for the allocation of reading coaches in the Department of Education K-12 Reading Plan and they were a key basis for determining students' reading intervention needs in the Board of Education's K-12 Student Reading Intervention Rule requirements. Of course, these and other state-wide measures were buttressed by requirements of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (U S Department of Education, 2004), which increased test-driven accountability measures required of states by the federal government. A principal emphasis of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is to close the gap in achievement scores separating minorities and children of poverty from their more socially advantaged counterparts (U S Department of Education, 2004), and the key mechanism is the use of standardized assessments to propel progress toward that end.

State-wide tests and the scores they generated were also considered both as the end and the means for new policy initiatives. During the 2010 legislative session, House and Senate Pre-K-12 policy committee members deliberated the merits of a bill amending Florida's Secondary School Redesign Act (see Carrouth & Matthews, 2010). Among other provisions, this bill revised the requirements for high school graduation by phasing out math and science FCAT in grades 9 through 11, and replacing these comprehensive tests with content-related End of Course exams for Geometry, Biology I, Algebra II, Chemistry, Physics and other courses. Like the FCAT, these exams would be "high stakes," in that students would be required to earn a passing score on each exam in order to graduate from high school. Committee members' concerns about the rigor of this plan

were met with assurance from various actors that students would benefit from this approach. In one meeting, an agency official clearly articulated the underlying belief of the logic of test-driven policy: “You will see low scores that quickly become much higher a couple of years after the test is given. You will see much higher quality instruction at that point” (House Committee Meeting, 1/20/2010). A visiting district official stated it thusly: “Our End of Course exams have played a really crucial role in strengthening our instructional program...” (House Committee meeting, 1/20/2010). Suggesting that the course-linked assessments could easily be tied to newly created curriculum standards, a representative from a business-oriented governmental advisory group (Florida Council of 100), urged lawmakers to vote in favor of the bill:

The Florida Council of 100 would recommend that the legislature adopt the Common Core standards, or similar standards as recommended by the State Board of Education...Now, these rigorous standards of course are meaningless without rigorous assessments. Once again, Florida is taking the lead. The state has put together a ten-state consortium...to develop assessments to go along with the new standards that are coming down the pike. While the Florida Council of 100 supports this effort, it is important to ensure that the resulting assessments enable the performance of Florida’s students to be compared both nationally and internationally. Additionally, I would like to make clear that the Council continues to support the continued use of the FCAT as an assessment tool as well as the use of End of Course examinations whenever appropriate.” (House Committee Meeting, 1/13/2010)

In these three instances, the presence of secondary level high stakes tests was viewed as a pathway to higher scores, improved instruction, stronger standards and better learning by students. Note also the reoccurrence of the notion of score comparisons to those of other states and nations.

Summative test scores were also the center-piece of state-level efforts to strengthen the quality of teachers, and this was evidenced directly in meetings where the federal Race to the Top program grant was a topic. Stevens and Wikstrom (2007) contend that the bulk of the intergovernmental conversation is related to fiscal matters, and this notion was evidenced quite prominently in the meeting data. In many ways, the Race to the Top grant was a centerpiece of the 2010 legislative session. Much time and conversation was devoted to the promise of being awarded millions of federal dollars to fund state and local efforts for education reform and the changes that would need to occur in order for Florida to receive this revenue. For instance, in a Senate meeting where this grant application was being discussed, a legislator cynically observed, “We’re chasing dollars as usual (1/12/ 2010).” Pertinent to this study is the fact that the use of test scores as an evaluation of teacher effectiveness was a primary component of the grant application. State-wide assessment scores were viewed as a means for making teacher evaluation more objective. In the words of an agency official,

...the issue of teacher quality is the number one point getter for scoring these grants...the clear message from the US Department of Education is that they expect a successful grant from the state to aggressively deal with the issue of teacher quality and they expect that issue to link student performance in a

predominant fashion to student achievement and to their evaluation and compensation. (Senate Committee Meeting, 1/12/2010)

Here, the influence of the federal government on state policy was made clear (in this case, by way of the promise of funds).

Summative scores were also an indicator of poor teaching as well as the answer to the question of how to strengthen the caliber of teachers in Florida's classrooms. In a lengthy discourse about teacher quality woven throughout the meeting topics of Senate Bill 6 and the Race to the Top initiative, policy actors advocated the use of test score gains as a way to determine teacher effectiveness. A more detailed discussion of this proposal is provided later in the chapter in the Differentiated Beliefs section.

Summary. State-wide summative test scores appeared to serve as a framework for adolescent literacy, both directly and indirectly. From the view in Tallahassee, the numbers generated from state and national achievement measures were perhaps the most critical mechanism for the enactment of Florida's education policy. Scores from these tests were the source of celebration when they went up, they were the means by which Florida was compared to other states, they were the key component in Florida's accountability initiative and they were used as a primary indicator for determining when reading intervention was needed. They were perceived as the goal for improving the life prospects of struggling learners, a measure of quality instruction, and a conduit for moving policy in new directions.

Florida's emphasis on summative assessment scores (in particular, the FCAT) served a dual purpose: These scores were used as a summative accountability tool aimed at the micro-level, but at the macro-level, they played more of a formative or diagnostic

role in order to help gauge policy effectiveness. This observation (summative assessments used as formative assessment) warrants further consideration, as it leads to a discussion of two features of complex systems: nestedness and system feedback.

Complex systems are nested. They are “composed of and often comprise other unities that might be properly identified as complex” (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. 5). Additionally, complex systems are scale-free; that is, they are comprised of parts that also resemble the system at large. Florida’s state-level emphasis on standardized assessments was not unlike an English teacher’s emphasis on an end-of-the-unit test on Shakespeare. Both measures point to the extent to which the “test takers” prepared for the exam. At the classroom level, students are accountable for interacting with and integrating the concepts into their existing knowledge and then demonstrating that knowledge on the exam. The state of Florida used the FCAT similarly to hold districts, schools and teachers accountable for their responsibility to interact with and integrate the reading components of the *Next Generation Sunshine State Standards* into their work with students. However, summative tests are also an indicator of instructional effectiveness (Caldwell, 2007). Carrying the nestedness analogy further, the test scores were simultaneously a formative indicator of state policy effectiveness.

Building on the idea of nestedness, statewide summative tests also serve as a form of feedback throughout various layers of the system (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Morrison, 2008). In other words, school administrators, district and state officials used the data generated from summative tests as a form of feedback about the effectiveness of state policy. Subsequently, they make organizational adjustments according to overarching goals, in hopes that members of each nested unity (i.e., school and classroom) will

engage in a form of bottom-up emergence or learning that yields higher scores on next year's exam. Yet, as Black and Wiliam (1998) argue, certain data are more suited for local emergence than others, and state-wide, summative tests provide little in the way of "helpful diagnosis" (p. 142). As well, the methods by which data conclusions are communicated to nested unities may or may not be suited for enabling local emergence.

Formative assessment (discussed in depth in the section entitled Differentiated Beliefs), when conducted as intended, provides a more suitable method of promoting local emergence based on highly specific knowledge about the test taker, short-range relationships, shared goals and collaboration (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Torgesen and Miller; 2009; Wood, Taylor, Drye, & Brigman, 2007). Formative assessment is qualitative or descriptive, rather than evaluative. It is conducted under conditions of trust and open discourse which includes information about individual strengths and weaknesses. Most importantly, formative assessment is effective, in particular, for "low achievers;" not only in terms of performance but also as it relates to motivation and self-esteem (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 141). For the complexity-thinking policy analyst, the question arises: If state policy actors are using standardized tests as a macro level form of system feedback, how might the principles of formative assessment be used to more effectively enable bottom-up emergence?

The next three findings shifted from that of policy mechanism (or solution) to the values, beliefs and feelings policy actors held with regards to the targets (or end-users) of adolescent literacy policy (Schneider & Ingram, 1997). They included the importance of adolescents' agency, an acknowledgement of students' academic needs and a focus on struggling learners/readers. In general, these beliefs about adolescents were problem-

oriented, in that they were viewed as obstacles to overcome in order to increase test scores. In this sense, these three findings appeared to simultaneously serve as statewide goals.

Importance of adolescents' agency. A second area of convergence across the data configurations (albeit not as ubiquitous as that of state tests) was a keen awareness across all groups regarding adolescents' agency. The term *agency* represents a coupling of one's inner self with the act of asserting that self through behavioral expressions, which are guided by self-direction and free will (Moore & Cunningham, 2006). In relation to literacy, an adolescent's agency both permeates and transcends literacy learning (Moore & Cunningham, 2006). In this section, I discuss policy actors' perceptions of the adolescents themselves, as they were perceived both in and out of the school context. During data analysis, this meant looking underneath topical discussions (e.g., teacher quality, literacy instruction, instructional materials allocations or graduation requirements) to see how adolescents were characterized in terms of their identity or fit within school structures as well as how they were viewed as individuals in their own right. In most cases these two distinctions (in- and out-of-school characterizations) were subtle and often intertwined. In general, adolescents were characterized by policy actors as self-determined agents who define relevance in their own terms and act on it accordingly. An important sub-component of this finding was the belief that adolescents' identities are influenced by their predisposition for digital technology.

While no participant or author used the term "agency," per se, this notion was borne out in statements concerning the importance of factoring in students' interests, motivations and level of engagement in academic tasks. Oftentimes, participants used the

word and notion of “relevance” to make their point; if structures and provisions weren’t seen as relevant by students, policy actors believed students would not engage, learn or perform. These statements were most often couched either within the context of preparation for college and the workforce or more specifically within the context of curriculum, instruction or assessment. For instance, a legislator, speaking hypothetically to a struggling student, juxtaposed the role of student agency against the eventuality of post-secondary employment and the seemingly unrealistic requirement to study classical texts:

So, young man, let me tell you. Let’s look at what you *want* to do and what you have capabilities of *doing* and desire to do, and let’s see how we can do that.

Rather than say, “Look Pal, you’re going to have to take Chaucer, and in fact, we’re going to do *Old English* in Chaucer, and we want you to be able to recite at least the first page in Old English because it’s really going to help you.” And they’ll look at you... again, they go, “Oh, man, you know... you’re in *space*.”

(Interview, 6/16/2010)

Another legislator invoked the notion of individual agency more generally by linking it to reading instruction, materials and programs. Again, there was a sense that students’ proclivity for certain activities or career interests was a key macro/micro-consideration.

I also believe [that] to encourage reading, the materials used must be relevant to the lives of the students. A successful reading program is one that is tied to some highly motivating experience, such as job preparation, an internship, a special student interest or some other real-world activity. Here the student learns the

importance of reading in the context of some other activity that they value.

(Typed interview response, 6/10/2010)

An allusion to individual agency also appears in the text of the 2006 *Florida Secondary School Redesign Act*, also known as the A++ Plan (Crocco, Linder & McClamma, 2007). The purpose of this statute is to ensure that ninth grade students are prepared for success throughout their high school years and subsequently for college and/or the workplace. The following principle, which captures a key essence of the statute, is one of ten guidelines required for annual school improvement plans: “School is more relevant when students choose courses based on their goals, interests, and talents.” The implication here is that relevance, as defined by student choices based on individual motivations, is an important policy provision for helping students progress through institutional processes. Finally, this notion was captured by a legislator who thoughtfully considered the influence of generational differences on education policy making:

...it’s a *crazy* generation. We’re gonna to *have* to figure out how to let them learn in a new *less* rigid way. Because my *previous* stance used to be, “You need to shape up and fit in, because nobody’s gonna to *create* a job to suit your *personality*.” But then, when they all started working for *Google*, I thought well maybe they *are*. Maybe this is a generation that’s gonna work from their home in their pajamas...on a computer...at 2:00 in the morning. You know? When they started assigning people to working out of their home, they figured everybody would goof *off* and they found out they worked *more*. They didn’t *stop* working. So, I think we’re *in* a funny...decade where we’re in a transition from one generation to another and it’s just a *different type* of kid. So we *can’t* just say,

well these kids didn't *blend*, they didn't *perform* the way we expected them to and we're writing them *off*. Maybe they're *good* at something *else*. I don't know. I think we probably, to get them to be successful, to foster their creativity and to make them *literate*...just try to appeal to them in a different kind of way.

(Interview, 5/25/2010)

In this instance, the policy actor called attention to a particular profile of students who do not “blend” into existing system structures and who thus appear to be unsuccessful. In reality, these students were clearly capable when seen outside of institutional structures and descriptions of success.

In many cases there was an underlying sense that students' agency interfered with the institutional schedule for school completion. In other words, certain students might not stay within the traditional boundaries of space and time if their interests and identities were not acknowledged in curriculum, instruction and program design. This concern was evidenced in statements about students who chose to leave the traditional school setting, either for an alternative form of schooling, such as virtual education, or by simply dropping out altogether:

Well, I do really believe that *some* of the dropouts we've seen, it's like a new generation of dropouts (and we do have the highest dropout rate in the United States), but the new...bunch of dropouts are dropping out 'cause they're bored...because everyone is just spending all their time training for the FCAT. That leaves the brighter kids or even the, you know, above average kids having to wait while everybody catches up, and pretty soon they just give up or they just figure out and go online or do homeschooling. (Interview, 5/25/2010)

Here, the policy actor portrayed disengaged students as individuals who were capable of meeting institutional expectations, but who were not motivated to stay in school. She also called attention to what she perceived as an unintended consequence of the FCAT testing. This was another instance of Alternate Discourse “B” (discussed later in this chapter) and one of the few references to state-wide assessments that co-occurred with findings related to student agency. Later, the same legislator continued with a discussion about the importance of including music and art in the curriculum. She ended with this statement about the role of agency and school attendance:

So that’s important, and it’s drop-out prevention as far as I’m concerned. Well, I consider *football* drop-out prevention. If you can give a kid a reason to come to school every day, it’s drop-out prevention. (Interview, 5/25/2010)

Another policy actor stated his beliefs about the external influences on adolescents’ agency as it related to school membership and tasks:

Young people come to school...one parent’s in jail, one parent just went to jail last *night*...Mom’s in, you know, trouble...financially...we don’t know where our food is coming from, didn’t even get *dinner* last night, and I’m supposed to be...you know, worrying about...what I’m gonna do in *school* tomorrow? You know, or, other things, I’m being *bullied* in school... they’re picking on me...I have...fifteen earrings in my *face*, and I got *green* hair, and I got a terminal case of *acne* and the *teacher hates* me and, and...I just don’t want to, you know, I just don’t want to participate. I just want to drop out of school. And...you know, there are just all these kind of societal kind of things going on in these young people’s lives.(Interview, 6/16/2010)

Indeed, a state-level concern related to students' agency was the numbers generated by students who collectively chose to take an early exit from the school system. Speaking in a legislative meeting, a representative from Achieve, an "education reform organization" (Achieve, 2010), called attention to Florida's comparatively low rank across the nation with regards to drop outs: "Florida ranks behind the national average in almost every demographic category...[for] on time graduation rates-ninth graders who graduate four years later" (Senate Committee Meeting, 1/12/2010). And, during a legislative pre-session workshop, a legislator asked an invited representative of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), "Do you have any recommendations for incentivizing high schools for drop-out recovery? To go after those students who have dropped out and for going out and getting them back into the system" (House Committee Meeting, 1/13/2010)? The concern for drop-out rates was also evident in formal texts, in the form of state law. According to the *Assessment and Accountability* section of the *K-20 Education Code* (2002), beginning in the 2009-2010 school year, 50 percent of high school accountability grades was based on a combination of factors, including schools' graduation rates (with the remaining 50 percent related to various FCAT score calculations).

In some instances, the data revealed a specific link between reading and the student choice to drop out. In *A Critical Mission: Making Adolescent Reading an Immediate Priority in SREB States*, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) stated, "By ninth grade, many struggling readers are destined to become high school dropouts (2009, p. 2)." A legislator drew a more alarming connection between literacy,

dropping out (and, by assumption, student agency), by taking this line of logic a step farther:

...We know that if students are not reading in third grade or fourth grade, the chances of them becoming a drop out...[inaudible] speaking very frankly, is very, very high. And so, you know, how can we as a *society* be sitting back and letting life *prejudge* eight and nine year olds because they haven't learned how to read? You know, we've *got* to do *something* about that. (Interview, 6/2/2010).

Note the way in which the legislator directly invoked the societal mores that define individuals by their literate and educational status. This connection was found in other instances of the data, and is discussed later in the chapter. Important for this discussion, however, is the rhetorical step from limited reading ability to dropping out in both the SREB quote above and this statement. Here, reading difficulty was believed to be a causal factor in a student's choice to disengage from school. Following this logic, if students could learn to read well, they would exercise their agency differently, stay within the temporal and physical boundaries of secondary school, and not drop out. Housed within these two examples are portrayals of two types of students who were different from the capable, but disengaged learner discussed earlier. Here, one characterization was of an adolescent struggling reader who, due to a disconnect between institutional reading expectations and his individual agency, would choose not to work within system boundaries and would therefore leave before graduating. This was a portrayal of a struggling reader who was so disengaged from the conventional system that he would literally leave and not return. The other description was of an adolescent struggling reader who would direct his or her efforts toward school if his reading abilities

could somehow rise to fit better within system expectations for reading. Put simply, if he could become better at reading, he would choose to stay in school. The following excerpt from a Tier I tertiary participant provides a more detailed description of this type of adolescent. Here, the participant spoke directly about student agency and the classroom measures that might prevent struggling readers from remaining disengaged:

...the other thing about interventions at the secondary level is that you have to engage students and motivate them, and I don't mean making them just *feel good* about themselves because success breeds them feeling good about themselves and when you provide high-quality direct instruction, they can see the progress they're making and [in] my personal experience...students don't *need* a lot of motivation beyond that; once they begin to experience success and believe in themselves, then they'll work even harder for you, but that needs to be an issue that's considered at high school, because they've had a lot of experience with lack of success in reading and so they need a lot of encouragement in the beginning to take that chance in reading. (Interview, 4/19/2010)

In this instance, the policy actor described a student who, like the ones above, was disengaged precisely because he struggled with reading. She believed that if students could somehow be externally motivated by their reading success, this motivation would produce a positive influence on their previously limited level of engagement. This in turn would result in the student's hard work toward institutional expectations. Like the legislator above, this tertiary participant believed that reading ability (or, in this case, reading growth) was a mechanism for merging students' identity with system goals. Further, this example provides an answer to the legislator's implied question above about

what to do for struggling readers before they drop out: Someone close to the situation, presumably a teacher, would need to bridge the interstices between the student's agency and institutional expectations in order to connect these two aspects of academic literacy development.

Digital natives. A subcomponent of adolescents' agency surfaced in the data. This finding was so prominent, it warranted a separate section in the results. In meetings and interviews, participants emphasized the way digital technology was woven into adolescents' identities. Drawing a metaphorical distinction between students' out-of-school identities and their in-school lives, one policy actor stated: "...these kids...literally, they live in an iPod world and our classrooms are a *record player*" (Interview, 6/8/2010). The impetus for this and many other similar comments was House Bill 623, which was intended to authorize flexibility for categorical expenditures for instructional content. In essence, this bill allowed school districts to use a portion of their Florida Education Finance Program funds for instructional hardware, such as iPads, interactive white boards, or laptop computers. Consider the following statement by a school district lobbyist during a legislative meeting where law makers were deliberating the efficacy of allowing funding flexibility for districts:

Our students live in the 21st century, but rely on delivery of instructional materials that are 19th and 20th century means...In *my* opinion, we can't continue to ask students who are digital natives, they're *born* into a digital society, to come into the classroom and power down and unplug...(House Meeting, 3/10/2010).

A legislator who taught high school students in an urban area articulated his belief about the importance of integrating digital technology into classroom instruction. Note

his mention of the potential for “losing” students based on their determination of the relevancy of instructional delivery:

If you walk into a classroom and you’re not familiar with...mp3’s, and you’re not familiar with the music videos, or if you’re not familiar with video games, you know, 21st century technology, 21st century terms, you’ve already lost. So if you know that that is the case, then you sort of have to cultivate the way in which a student learns *to* what’s available. If you know that they’re tech-savvy, you know, you’re gonna have to incorporate PowerPoint presentations; you’re going to have to incorporate *use* of multiple medias; whether its *music*, whether it’s...*video*, you name it, all those things have to be incorporated into a successful *secondary* level.

(Interview, 4/27/2010)

Another legislator linked students’ “digital native” identity directly to her own evolving beliefs about technology-based learning. She, along with others, mentioned the role of social interaction via digital platforms. The emphasis in the following example alludes to not only adolescents’ technological identity for social interaction, but also to technology as a mechanism for learning.

We’ve got to go in and meet them where they’re all texting, they’re all on Facebook... We’ve got to integrate technology into the core curriculum. It has to be a part of it. And, I love books...I do...but I have dragged my feet and finally gone “Okay, I get it, I get it.” We’ve got to look at that technology component and make it more readily available for those students because that’s how they learn. (Interview, 6/7/2010)

In agreement with Carstens and Beck (2005) and Gee (2004), there were many instances where participants stated that policy decisions should acknowledge adolescents' digital identities, primarily because today's students were believed to learn differently. According to these and other researchers, adolescents and young adults have a different set of belief systems about learning and problem solving than do earlier generations, and this learning is enacted primarily through digital means. In many ways participants here were showing concern for those students who were capable of meeting system expectations but were disengaged due to instruction that did not acknowledge their "new" way of learning.

Occasionally, however, a participant would articulate concerns about the influence of digital technology. The central meaning in the following two excerpts (legislators) acknowledges adolescents' digital identity, although in these cases, this propensity was seen in a more negative light.

They play a lot of video games, so we've got the technology factor, and then, you know, *really*, they start down the road to *technology* as four year olds with little hand-held games and video games and computer games, and then they *continue* on through high school with *texting*, so...you may call it a different *kind of literacy* but it's not the kind of literacy that *I'm* used to. I expect them all to be terrible *spellers*, don't complete a *sentence*...don't have the patience to read- because of the interactive *games* that they're used to playing. (Interview, 5/25/2010)

One legislator saw the visual aspect of the new literacies as a cause for concern. Noting a cultural shift from traditional, written carriers of meaning toward literacy as an image-

based practice, she described the impact of this change on children and adolescents in negative terms:

Well, we have *moved* to...almost a completely visual society...Our culture, the *dominant*... delivery of information is now visual...children are raised from the time they are *born* to...to be stimulated *mentally, intellectually*...from a visual delivery, and so...I think it's changed their *brain patterns*, and...it has changed their *appetite* for a...particular method of entertainment. It's extremely, *extremely* stimulating, the type of entertainment that children are receiving. So by the time they reach middle school and high school...the ability for them to...as a *whole*...to derive the kind of *entertainment* that *previous* kids have been able to derive from reading, it is...at an *extreme disadvantage*...because of the dominant culture. (Interview, 6/1/2010)

Finally, digital literacy was not considered as an aspect of adolescent identity for all students. This was evidenced in discussions about students who did not have access to the Internet or computers at home. This distinction in the discourse was often referred to as the “digital divide.” As one tertiary interview participant put it, “... there’s a *huge* sensitivity about the gap...we’re trying to level the *playing field*” (Interview, 7/8/2010). A legislative committee member stated it thusly: “Children cannot compete without the hardware. The *reality* is that teachers and children who are the *least* likely to have access to hardware are low-income minority students who cannot compete with middle class/upper class kids” (Senate Committee Meeting, 3/2/2010).

Summary. Data from both tiers of the three speech genres revealed policy actors’ belief that adolescents are self-determined individuals who choose their level of

engagement in school. The extent of students' school engagement was contingent upon their individual determination about whether or not school activities were relevant to their own identity, or inner self. Policy actors also believed most adolescents' literate identities were infused with the influence of rapid technological changes in information delivery.

In general, the priority state policy actors placed on students' agency appeared to serve as a counterweight to the hegemonic influence of institutional structures such as time frames for school participation, locations for learning and the determination of curricular foci. Stated differently, the success of the system was contingent upon students' agency. If the goals were to prepare students to meet graduation, post-secondary education or work-place requirements, system structures needed to be flexible in order to accommodate students' interests, motivations and identities including their propensity for digital learning. Also, instruction and materials had to, by necessity, match students' interests and motivations. Otherwise, students might exercise their free will and choose to mentally disengage and/or physically exit from the school system without earning a diploma.

In complexity terms, the presence of students' agency was an internal feature of the system that demonstrated the interdependency amongst system unities. Further, students' agency kept both micro- and macro-levels of the institution from becoming too coercive or constraining. Responsiveness to students' need for maintaining their identity in the form of flexibility and choice depended on a blend of short-range relationships, system feedback and bottom-up emergence. When these features were not in place, members of the system disengaged and withdrew as viable participants.

An important aspect of these findings was policy actors' portrayal of certain categories of students in terms of their agentive fit within institutional structures. Policy actors believed that some students were capable of system-defined success, but that they exercised their agency by disengaging cognitively and/or physically due to lack of interest in institutional goals or instructional delivery. Other students were struggling, but were seen as willing to engage insofar as they could be convinced of their progress toward system expectations. If these students could somehow be persuaded to perceive their potential for school success, they would more likely see the relevance of and be motivated by school-related tasks. Lastly, some struggling students were so distanced from the system they left school. Thus, the data related to adolescents' agency revealed four types of adolescents in terms of their fit within the academic system. The first type, students who are progressing and engaged, was not mentioned directly, rather, the existence of these students was implied. The other three types were indicated more directly: students who are capable but are not engaged in the system, struggling students who are not progressing but are engaged, and lastly, struggling students who are not engaged.

Focus on struggling learners/readers. The third and fourth areas of convergence (focus on struggling learners/readers and academic diversity) were closely related to one another. Initially, this pattern was combined with the next; students' academic diversity. However, because the state-level focus on students who struggle was so pervasive in its own right, I separated this finding as a stand-alone category. Even after these data were divided into two groups, both categories remained in the top ten percent of the overall results; an indication of the strength of each of these findings. Many of the differentiated

policy solutions regarded by policy actors in interviews, meetings and policy documents co-occurred with discussions about struggling learners and readers.

In meetings, references to literacy and reading were limited. Participants typically indicated concerns for struggling *learners* rather than for struggling readers, per se. In particular these references were related to students who could not master content-related requirements. During deliberations of Senate Bill 4, which, among other things, increased the course requirements for high school graduation to include Geometry, Biology, Algebra II, Chemistry or Physics and another equally rigorous science class, a committee member asked, “What do you do with the kids who are the ones that no matter what we throw at them, this is as smart as they’re going to get” (Senate Committee Meeting, 3/10/2010)? Here, the legislator’s concern was for students who wouldn’t be able to meet the increased requirements necessary for high school graduation. Note too, that “smart” was defined in terms of institutional success.

On the other hand, interviews reflected a strong concern for struggling *readers*, however it must be noted that the interview guide questions were almost exclusively related to this topic. Many interview participants noted existing statutes designed to improve instruction and program delivery for struggling adolescent students, including “accountability” measures such as the administration of the FCAT and publicly assigning grades to schools based on their improvement on this assessment. Also amongst the interview results were participants’ perceptions of additional ways to improve students’ reading ability and their test scores. These included professional development aimed at embedding reading into the content areas and the provision of intensive intervention for students who were far behind state reading expectations. Interview participants also

indicated the importance of instructional materials such as reading programs and the use of technology as a teaching tool. Formative assessment was cited by interview participants as an emerging component for the provision of ongoing feedback about students' progress. Finally, there was a belief that school-level administrators needed to play a major role in creating a culture of literacy both for their faculty and students.

One of the most visible aspects of Florida's focus on struggling readers was embedded in Florida law; the most formal of the three data sources. The *General Requirements for Middle Grades Promotion* (2006) and the *General Requirements for High School Graduation; Revised* (2006) mandated that districts use FCAT scores as a determinant for middle and high school student placement in reading intervention classes the following year. Agency guidance for these statutes was provided in State Board of Education's *K-12 Student Reading Intervention Requirements* (2008), which required districts to use additional assessment criteria to determine the "intensity" of the intervention. Elsewhere, in the 2006 *Secondary School Redesign Act* (also known as the A++ Plan), Florida law delineated several guiding principles for the development of schools' annual improvement plans. Of the ten principles, two were aimed directly at struggling learners: "Struggling students, especially those in failing schools, need the highest quality teachers and dramatically different, innovative approaches to teaching and learning...Intensive intervention in reading and mathematics must occur early and through innovative delivery systems." Other principles were indirectly supportive of struggling learners. For example, "Master schedules should not determine instruction and must be designed based on student needs, not adult or institutional needs." Finally, and on a broader scale, Florida law reflected a concern for low performing schools, and thus,

by proxy, the struggling students who were enrolled in them. The 2002 *Implementation of the State System of School Improvement and Education Accountability*, the 2002 *Authority to Enforce Public School Improvement*, and the 2002 *School Grading System, School Report Cards, and District Grade* statutes each placed a heavy emphasis on the improvement of low performing schools as defined by school-wide scores on the FCAT. Clearly, as found in Florida law, standardized assessments were seen as the central element of Florida's focus on struggling readers.

Other, non-statutory policy documents revealed a prominent focus on struggling learners/readers as well. A large portion of *Academic Literacy Instruction for Adolescents* (Torgesen, et al. 2007) was devoted to students reading below grade level, and the SREB advised states to "establish statewide reading intervention programs that schools can use to assist struggling readers in the middle grades and high school" (2009a, p. 7).

Rationale. The rationale given for Florida's focus on struggling readers was varied. Occasionally, this rationale was centered on the needs of the individual student, and in other instances it was aimed at the collective. Economic and fiscal concerns were cited most often, but societal issues were named as well.

The ability to read well was valued as a skill necessary for students' future success and the achievement of personal ambitions. Headlining the "About Us" page of the The Just Read Florida! division of the Florida Department of Education (2005a) was a quote from former US Secretary of Education Rod Paige:

"Reading is the foundation of all learning. Our children must learn to read well if they're to excel in life and achieve their dreams. The Just Read, Florida! Initiative is helping to ensure a brighter future for all the children in Florida."

In this quote, reading is seen as a critical component for learning without which students are unable to succeed according to their personal ambitions. Another example of concern for individual students is seen in the following statement from a legislator who drew from her prior experience teaching high school. In a meeting where members were discussing the merits of increasing graduation requirements, this legislator revealed her concern for struggling learners by indicating her interest in providing students with an opportunity to opt-out of college prep courses:

...I know that there are some kids that you can...just encourage them and tell them, "You can do it," and raise their expectations and...they will fling themselves against the wall and still not be able to do it. So I want to make sure that we give those kids some place to go so that they can have a future and a hope and have a great life also in good blue collar fields, if that's where they want to go and where their interests are, so I'm interested in the opt-out provisions. (Senate Committee Meeting, 1/12/2010)

Here, the legislator drew a characterization of students who do not fit within the traditional academic expectations. She appealed to the idea that policies should afford struggling students the opportunity to find success outside of the realm of college-track coursework that lined up with their interests and goals. She also subtly indicated the role of policy and students' earning potential, and this connection was repeated elsewhere. For instance, in the Southern Regional Education Board report *A Critical Mission: Making Adolescent Literacy an Immediate Priority in SREB States*, a pull-out quote from a guest speaker reads: "If you don't have a literacy program, you're essentially eliminating a significant percent of a population in your school from ever being successful. You're

sentencing them to a lifetime of marginal employment and second-class citizenship.” (Riddile, cited in Southern Regional Education Board, 2009a, p. 21). Similarly, a legislator stated her concern for students’ post-secondary status while she grappled with the proposed increase in graduation requirements under Senate Bill 4. In the following excerpt from a committee meeting, she explained the concern of a constituent:

I’ve had a teacher in my district corner me and say, “Okay, for my ESE students, we help them...on the FCAT as far as giving them accommodations and providing for them a different type of diploma, but for the student who is not an ESE student, but has difficulty passing even that foundation, ends up either dropping out or just struggling for many years.” And she’s saying, “You’re dooming them to a job at McDonald’s for the rest of their life.” And, my philosophy is, raise standards and students rise to the occasion. What would you say to a teacher, how could we address that student who doesn’t qualify for ESE but seem[s] to not be able to make that mark?” (House Committee Meeting, 1/13/2010)

Enacting her role as a representative of the citizenry, this legislator voiced a constituent’s concern. However, in a later meeting, the question about the effect of high graduation standards on struggling students surfaced again in an apparent acknowledgement of her own apprehension. Here, after she once more recounted her conversation with the teacher, she queried a Department of Education official, “I want to make sure we don’t miss that one group of students. How can we address that” (House Committee Meeting, 1/20/2010). Finally, in an interview, a legislator cited recent changes in job demands to the importance of literacy skills for individual earning potential.

The concept is that if you don't have those basic skills in literacy....you will not be successful in a global market...what we see in the job market is, the way it's developing is, if you don't have those *basic literacy skills*, your ability to problem solve, your ability to understand, your ability to function *independently* and collectively (because we're becoming more of an *independent* worker too, we're not working in a *factory* any more, they're assigned a job and they never come in to the actual workplace, and they'll have to follow instructions) that if they don't have those *basic literacy* skills...they won't be competitive. So that's more of an *economic* incentive, I guess. (Interview, 5/26/2010)

In the report *A Critical Mission: Making Adolescent Literacy an Immediate Priority in SREB States*, the Southern Regional Education Board (2009a) explained the matter thusly, (bold text included):

Education researchers are not the only ones citing reading deficiencies as a regional and national crisis. So are business leaders. For the first time, **more than two-thirds of new U.S. jobs require some type of postsecondary education**, according to an Educational Testing Service report. An American Management Association survey, cited by the Center for Workforce Preparation, showed in 2000 that **the percentage of job applicants lacking necessary reading skills doubled from 1996 to 2000, from 19 percent to 38 percent** - not only because applicants lacked basic skills, but because on-the-job reading requirements had increased rapidly (p. 4).

Policy actors cited the cumulative effects of limited literacy skills as well. In a few instances these concerns were related to issues of equity, as in references to the

ongoing efforts to narrow the gap in test scores between African American and Hispanic students and their White counterparts (noted earlier in this chapter). Another belief was related to the societal impact of low literacy skills and its effects on class structure. While reflecting on the recently passed Senate Bill 4, which increased Florida's graduation requirements, a legislator stated, "...We're going to have a *serious underclass* that is *permanent*, and/or...we will not have enough space in the *prisons* to put them" (Interview, 6/16/2010). In a meeting, this same participant bridged the societal concern (large underclass and prison population) with fiscal matters related to grade retention. Here, he questioned the direction of policy and the unintended consequences for struggling students as well as for public expenditures:

"My concern is the 111,000 kids who have failed two or more times right now, which costs us about 1.7 billion. What do we do, with that cohort of kids--young people who are destined to be permanent underclass in the state of Florida? How do we deal with that? And I just keep thinking about how we deal with that with getting them a career or getting them some kind of job when right now...they're not going to pass. And we have 152,000 kids in detention centers right now. I am concerned about that group of young people so that we don't pay for them in our societal miss. Now, I don't know how to do that..." (Senate Committee Meeting, 3/10/2010)

Fiscal concerns were also voiced more directly. An interview participant stated, "55 percent of the students entering Florida's colleges and universities require remediation in reading, writing and math, costing \$130 million in 2005-2006. This is because schools

are not adequately preparing students for college” (Typed Interview Response, 6/10/2010).

Finally, and most prevalent, were concerns relating the cumulative effects of struggling learners/readers to matters of the state’s private economy. According to the SREB (2009a),

Low reading levels also cost states money more directly. The Alliance for Excellent Education and others have shown strong links between poor reading skills, low graduation rates in high schools and the economy. High school dropouts in America from the Class of 2008 alone will lose an estimated **\$319.6 billion in lifetime income** because of low education levels. The potential economic benefits for the SREB region of helping more students graduate, earn higher wages and pay taxes run into the **tens of billions of dollars** (p. 3, bold text included).

Notice here the subtle indication of reading levels, which appeared to reference standardized test scores. Also, the report blended the individual and the societal impact of limited reading ability by first indicating the loss of income, then connecting that loss to the failure to generate tax revenue. In a legislative committee meeting, a representative from the Consortium of Florida Education Foundations (an association for local education foundations) called members’ attention to the following quote from the meeting packet (handout). Again, the argument is based on “achievement levels” as measured by standardized tests:

“If the United States had in recent years closed the gap between its educational achievement levels and those of better-performing nations such as Finland and

Korea, the GDP in 2008 could have been \$ 1.3 trillion to \$2.3 trillion higher. This represents 9-16 percent of GDP” (House Meeting Packet, 3/3/2010).

For these policy actors, the value of supporting struggling readers and learners was justified, because of the belief that standardized test scores were associated with economic prosperity and the nation’s placement in global rankings.

Summary. Florida policy actors believed strongly in focusing on struggling learners and in particular, struggling readers. This concern was reflected directly in Florida law, and was influenced by the federal requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or NCLB (2001). Yet, this concern was also reflected in language used in meetings and in the less formal discourse produced in interviews. The rationale for Florida’s focus on struggling learners/readers ranged from ethereal (“achieving dreams”) to economic matters. Some policy actors viewed limited literacy ability in terms of its impact on the individual, but many scaled up the result to cite its effects on the public. When policy actors referenced struggling learners as a collective, they were usually described with terms such as “low-performing,” or “low-achieving,” indicating two underlying assumptions: (a) Standardized test scores demarcated struggling learners from those who do not struggle, and secondly, (b) while reading was not always mentioned directly, previously established beliefs about the importance of reading as a tool for learning and the demonstration of knowledge on standardized tests revealed that the underlying difficulty faced by struggling learners was limited reading ability. Among the primary reasons for Florida’s emphasis on struggling learners were a continued effort to improve Florida’s standing in national and global test score comparisons, diminishing the achievement gap between Minority and White students,

concerns about class structure and the relation between drop-outs and incarceration, the increase in fiscal costs for college remediation courses, the link between school achievement and earning potential, and the cumulative effects of a non-competitive workforce resulting in loss of tax revenue and a diminished gross domestic product.

Like the notion of adolescent agency, Florida's focus on struggling learners/readers is best represented by the complexity construct of interdependency (Page, 2007). The effectiveness of the system as determined by NCLB (2001) was contingent on the extent to which struggling readers showed Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Struggling readers needed the system to help them overcome their weaknesses with reading in order to increase their post-secondary opportunities, but the system needed their gains as well: to improve its status vis a vis progress toward issues of equity, and to increase inter-state rankings. Students' reading success was linked even more broadly to revenue expenditures and the overall social and economic health of the state.

Diversity of students' academic needs. In complex systems, whether social or otherwise, diversity does not "happen" in the way that bottom-up emergence or system feedback do. Rather, diversity is an attribute (Page, 2007). Put simply, diversity *is*. In confirmation of this principle, the last area of convergence across the tiers and speech genres was a belief that students have distinct and diverse academic needs. Academic diversity is similar to (but not the same as) Page's (2007) description of cognitive diversity, or "who we are inside our heads" (p. xxviii). The data showed policy actors held an awareness of students' academic individuality and its implications for policy and practice. This was evidenced in both general and reading-specific terms. It included students who did and did not struggle with academic expectations as well as those who

were and were not engaged in institutional goals and objectives. The antithesis of diversity was sameness, and aside from the focus on raising the test scores of all struggling students, the data showed policy actors believed students needed instruction and programs that differed according to students' academic abilities. The "one size fits all" maxim was cited either directly or indirectly as an indicator of lack of attention to students' academic diversity. Consider the following statement from a legislator:

...students learn differently. You've got *visual* learners, you've got *auditory* learners. As teachers, we have to be very, very *careful* that we don't *present* information in *one* way, and expect all students to *get* it....We've *got* to be willing to change with the student's *needs* and that's *hard*, that's *challenging*...[the students are] different. (Interview, 6/7/2010)

Here, the participant noted the importance of teachers' knowledge of individual learning preferences and the subsequent adjustment of instructional delivery to meet given preferences. Although she did not mention the "one size fits all" notion, she indicated the difficulty (and yet criticality) of attending to students' varying needs. Similarly, several policy actors shared the belief that digital learning (by way of virtual education and other new technologies) would enable a more individualized approach to students' diverse needs. One legislator stated that Florida's current approach to students' academic diversity was outdated and likened it to a "1950's cookie-cutter" approach found to be boring by many students. Later, he continued,

...our classrooms are *way* behind...and completely *obsolete* in the...manner in which they're individually *tailoring* education to the *child*. And we *have* the *ability* to do it. The *technology* exists. *Every child learns differently*. This concept

that everybody learns in the same fashion is *not true*, and there are technologies *out there* that *very quickly* identify...how the *specific student learns* ...and you can *tailor-fit* that curriculum to *that student* as opposed to just having a one-size-fits all approach. (Interview, 6/8/2010)

This individual, along with others, saw virtual learning and technology in general as a mechanism for allowing students progress at their own pace. Accelerated learners could move more quickly through the curriculum unfettered by those who needed extra time on a given topic; struggling learners would be able to move through the curriculum more slowly without being rushed. Also suggested by the excerpt above was the linkage of academic diversity was frequently linked to the notion of student agency. Whether or not it was directly stated, there was an underlying belief that students' academic needs were closely connected to their agency. In particular, school-related tasks needed to be within the realm of students' existing abilities (Vygotsky, 1978).

Additionally, students' cultural or social identity, or their limited "fit" with system expectations was a consideration for policy actors. Much of the dialogue was related to students considered at-risk for dropping out or students whose native language was not English. Also, in two separate instances, legislators brought up the unique academic needs of teen mothers.

Another indicator of the awareness of academic diversity was revealed in discussions regarding instructional materials. For instance, a tertiary interview participant described attempts by the publishing industry to provide for students' diverse academic needs. "...all these companies are trying to provide "*the solution*." You know, here's a

product for your struggling *reader*, here's a product for your *AP* kid, here's a product for your teacher who needs *this* kind of training" (Interview 7/8/2010). Later, she stated,

Today, you know, the class-classroom teacher is *compelled* to provide individualized instruction. *That's* the *charge*, and so the materials will have *something, lessons, all* related, but you know, all kinds of activities for each of those different *levels* of readers-or whatever they might be-students. So, and you know, *verbal learners*, and *visual learners*, I mean, there's all kinds of stuff that's included. (Interview, 7/8/2010)

The importance of attending to academic diversity was revealed on a grander scale in terms of state-wide policy and program design. The data revealed a sentiment that ignoring students' particular academic needs in program or instructional delivery was a barrier to policy success. Some policy actors advocated the expansion of state policies designed to provide an "alternate route" to graduation for overage students who did not fit within institutional boundary of time. A related and often overlapping concern was for students who were unable to meet rigorous graduation expectations. For instance, an invited speaker from the SREB urged legislators to consider the efficacy of opening up differentiated pathways to graduation. Citing recommended principles for high school reform described in a recent report *The Next Generation of School Accountability: A Blueprint for Raising High School Achievement and Graduation Rates in SREB States* (2009b), he stated "...one path to graduation doesn't fit all students.... accountability programs should recognize a range of paths to high school graduation, all of which have high standards and lead students to a standard or high school diploma" (p. 19).

Diversity in reading ability. The notion of academic diversity was conveyed in reading-specific terms as well. Recall that reading was thought of as a continual process of development throughout the high school years. This led to a determination of students' varying reading needs in order to provide appropriate instruction. For instance, *Florida's Secondary School Redesign Act (2006)* listed several requirements designed to focus districts' attention on students' varying needs. Listed among them was the requirement to provide "creative and flexible scheduling designed to meet student needs." (Related to this, several Tier I participants noted concerns about poor scheduling that resulted in students missing out on credit-bearing courses as well as classes students found motivational, such as band or art because they had been assigned to reading intervention classes). The following excerpt reveals a legislator's view of how schools might design a program specifically for struggling readers, which includes one-on-one instruction and non-traditional classes.

So in a *perfect* world, what we would do is there would be a lot more intensive, almost one-on-one instruction with those students. Because *I* think, that as a *non-expert*...that *ideally*, that would happen *after* school or in *summer* school in a time that's not pulling out...the student from *science* class to learn how to *read* science, because I *still* want him to learn the science *problems*... so *ideally*, that would happen in... a *non-traditional* school class. (Interview, 6/2/2010)

Some data (mostly Tier I) were more fine-grained and related to specific instructional implications for reading. For example, the K-12 Reading Plan revealed a belief in the value of data analysis so instruction could be differentiated for various types of struggling readers. In general, struggling readers were viewed as either (a) fluent

readers, but lacking in comprehension abilities, or (b) they were not fluent and had word-level difficulties. In the Center on Instruction publication *Assessments to Guide Adolescent Literacy Instruction*, authors Torgesen and Miller (2009) briefly note a further diversification of struggling adolescent readers, but suggest the two-pronged conception is useful for “assessment and intervention planning purposes”:

One group has primary instructional needs in reading comprehension and cannot meet grade-level standards on the end-of-year accountability measure, primarily because of weak vocabulary and comprehension skills. These students can read grade-level text with reasonable fluency and accuracy (not too far below average) but may not be skilled in using reading comprehension strategies or in performing certain kinds of inferential reasoning processes, or they may lack specific vocabulary required for understanding grade-level text...The second, usually smaller, group contains students with severe and pervasive reading difficulties. Their challenges extend to basic problems with reading accuracy (usually caused by weak phonics/word analysis skills); they are almost always dysfluent readers and frequently have all of the other more complex reading problems involving weaknesses in content knowledge, thinking/reasoning skills, reading strategies, and vocabulary (p. 15).

The Department of Education characterized struggling readers similarly, but as designated in the State Board of Education rule, *K-12 Student Reading Intervention Requirements* (Florida Department of Education, 2008), a given student’s most recent FCAT score was used to delineate a different distinction as well as instructional implications for these students. In this excerpt, an agency official referred to the State

Board rule above, which houses a lengthy and detailed set of instructional requirements for secondary students who score at Level 1 or Level 2 on the FCAT.

Our lowest level readers...those students that scored at Level 1, are required to be enrolled in a complete and intensive reading class the following year. Our students that scored at Level 2...(if they're *fluent* readers)...can receive intervention in the midst of a content area course, such as their social studies class or their Language Arts class, provided the teacher has completed some professional development...that will help him or her be proficient delivering...comprehension and vocabulary strategies, because that's where those students normally struggle. Those students that are *not fluent readers*, whether they scored at Level 1 *or* Level 2 have to receive additional instructional time, because we know they're struggling with *word* level skills...(Interview, 5/5/2010)

Here, students were provided intervention courses based on a combination of their level of fluency and their scores on standardized tests, yielding an apparent array of four general varieties of struggling adolescent readers (Level 2-fluent; Level 1-fluent; Level 1-not fluent; Level 2-not fluent). These students were required by law to be monitored regularly for progress toward the meeting a minimum FCAT score of 3. Importantly, placement in a given category and the resulting instructional implication was contingent on the reading score from the FCAT, essentially positioning this assessment as a screening tool. Before placement into a reading intervention course, students were given "additional diagnostic assessments to determine the nature of the student's difficulty, the areas of academic need, and strategies for appropriate intervention and instruction" (Florida Department of Education, 2008). Again, this finding revealed the prominence of

state-wide summative test scores in Florida's adolescent literacy policy. Also, students assigned to reading intervention courses were required to be taught by teachers who had earned the Florida Reading Endorsement or who had a certification in K-12 Reading.

The data collected in this study revealed that differentiated instruction was valued as a way to meet students' diverse reading needs. Differentiated instruction is described as a set of individualized or "personalized" learning opportunities that lead all students in a given classroom, regardless of their academic differences, to the same end-goals (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 12). This notion is similar to the complexity thinking condition of enabling constraints. According to Davis & Sumara (2006), enabling constraints provide "sufficient coherence to orient agents' actions and sufficient randomness to allow for flexible and varied response" (p. 148). In essence, differentiated instruction both enables and constrains in that it involves a consideration of what students bring to the learning situation and then enables, or capitalizes on those individual qualities as a spring board for helping them move them toward pre-established curricular goals, or constraints. The data related to students' academic diversity revealed an acknowledgement of students' varying reading profiles. This was evidenced prominently in the revised draft of the Florida Reading Endorsement Competencies (Florida Department of Education, 2010, pp. 6-7). In fact, one of the five competencies for this professional distinction was devoted solely to differentiated instruction. Candidates seeking to earn the reading endorsement for their Florida teaching certificate were required to "understand the stages of English language acquisition" so they could "differentiate reading instruction for students at different levels of English proficiency." Also, they were required to demonstrate

knowledge of language and cognitive development across student ages, abilities (including those of high-scoring readers), and socio-cultural differences.

Summary. To conclude, Florida policy actors indeed believed students possessed differing academic abilities. In particular, there appeared to be a concern about forcing a “one-size-fits-all” approach to secondary reform. Sometimes the notion of diverse academic abilities was closely related to students’ sense of identity, including their unique linguistic, cultural and social backgrounds. Even instructional materials solicited to and adopted by the state Department of Education reflected the diversity of students’ academic needs. Finally, policy actors believed that large-scale and school-level programs should enable differing paths to learning and goal attainment and that struggling readers needed a different, focused form of reading support so they could earn higher scores on the state-wide summative assessment (FCAT) and successfully master content-related coursework. As in other aspects of the data, the state-wide, standardized test (FCAT) played a role in determining the type of coursework students would be required to take.

Policy solutions and problems: Differentiated beliefs. Depending on the knowledge tier or the formality of speech, the solution and problem data showed some differentiation. In general, these findings were comprised of solutions policy makers believed would improve test scores, help struggling learners/readers, meet students’ diverse academic needs, and prepare them for college and the workplace. These foci ranged from a relatively consistent belief primarily in the value of people-based solutions in the Tier I data, to a somewhat more varied set of primarily systems- and resource-based solutions across the Tier II genres.

Not all of the differentiated findings were solution-based, however. In Tier II meetings an additional problem arose: The belief that Florida students were not being prepared adequately for college or the workplace. Table 3 depicts these differentiated, yet prominently represented solutions for reform as well as the additional problem of college/workplace preparation.

Table 3

Policy Solutions and Problem: Differentiated Beliefs

Genre	Tier I	Tier II
Interviews	Professional Development Formative Assessment Instructional Leadership	Accountability System Instructional Materials Technology for Teaching
Meetings	N/A	Accountability System Teacher Quality <i>College/Workplace Preparation</i>
Documents	Professional Development Formative Assessment Instructional Materials	Accountability System Formative Assessment Technology for Teaching

Note: College/Workplace Preparation was viewed as a problem/goal rather than as a solution.

To clarify, the differentiated beliefs were not indicative of the presence of discourse communities. Rather, the differences were highly nuanced foci related to the

vantage points from which particular data were drawn (knowledge tiers, speech formality). This conclusion was confirmed in two ways. First, an examination of the results beyond the most frequently occurring patterns (top 10 percent) showed that many concerns and solutions would have been repeated in other locations of the matrix had I included results from a slightly larger proportion of the data. This repetition indicated an agreement in beliefs, although not necessarily the relative value placed on a given focus. For instance, Professional Development was valued by Tier II interview and meeting participants, but its position relative to other foci was not strong enough to justify its inclusion in Table 3. Second and most importantly, all differentiated foci were highly supportive of the four primary areas of focus, meaning the differentiated findings were closely intertwined with the four universally-held beliefs (emphasis on summative test scores, importance of adolescents' agency, focus on struggling readers/learners, and acknowledgement of students' academic needs).

Tier I genres. In the Tier I group, minimal differences existed in the policy solutions valued across the less-formal and more formal texts. In other words, the beliefs Tier I participants indicated in the less formal interview setting were consistent with the official policy documents they referenced. In particular, Tier I data revealed a fine-grained description of academic reading as means for improving test scores, helping struggling readers and in general, meeting students' diverse academic needs.

Formative assessment. While standardized summative assessments were believed to be the primary means for moving policy forward, Tier I policy documents and participants valued another type of assessment: formative assessment. (This preference was also reflected in the Tier II policy documents, which were exclusively related to

Florida law). Far from being an assessment that is “temporarily removed from teachers’ decision making and teaching” (e.g., standardized summative assessments) (Afflerbach, Ruetschlin, & Russell, 2007, p. 179), formative assessment is highly contingent upon the complex interrelations of the end-users of literacy policy: students and teachers. This description is compatible with Allington’s (2002a) observation that effective literacy instruction involves the ability to “orchestrate complex academic tasks” and engage in “moment-by-moment instructional decision making” (pp. 28-29). Using the language of complexity, Black & Wiliam (2007) state: “An assessment is formative to the extent that information from the assessment is fed back within the system and actually used to improve the performance of the system in some way” (p. 31).

In distilled description of formative assessment, Torgesen and Miller (2009, p. 3) noted the difference between assessments *of* learning (summative) and assessments *for* learning (formative). Formative assessment is frequent, ongoing and highly integrated with informed instructional practices. It promotes learning and student engagement through descriptive, rather than evaluative means. Moreover, it is highly collaborative, in that students and teachers share rich discussions related to the learning criteria (See also Black & Wiliam, 1998; Wood, Taylor, Drye, & Brigman, 2007). These features bear repeating, as they are pertinent not only to the micro-level, but for macro-level as well: The most effective use of formative assessment is as an ongoing, integrated, descriptive, collaborative, and discussion-based process. In sum, the features above render formative assessment distinct from summative standards-based benchmark assessments, screening tools, or even norm-referenced diagnostic assessments (Torgesen & Miller, 2009), primarily because they are based on reciprocal interactions amongst individuals who

partner together in a shared goal. Taken as a whole, these features of formative assessment invoke several elements of complexity thinking: short-range relationships, interdependency and system feedback. In essence, formative assessments appear to enable bottom-up emergence, because they rely heavily on interactive, moment-to-moment decision-making that occurs at the nexus between teaching and learning at the micro level.

One rationale cited for the emphasis on formative assessment was due to “feedback from Florida’s teachers” described in the *Senate Interim Report 2010-111*, written by staff of the Senate Education Pre-K-12 Committee (2009, p. 2). A second reason was research-based: According to the assessment guide composed by Torgesen and Miller (2009, p. 5), who cite Wiliam and Black (1998), the use of formative assessments show “significant potential to increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning in adolescent literacy.” A third rationale was the influence of the federal government (which did not surface in the data but was noted in other readings). The use of formative assessments were emphasized in the 2001 NCLB Act (Wood, Taylor, Drye, & Brigman, 2007), and they also played a prominent role in the U. S. Department of Education Race to the Top initiative (Goertz, Olah, & Riggan, 2009). For these reasons at least, the Just Read Florida! office of the Department of Education, in collaboration with the Florida Center for Reading Research had invested heavily in developing an electronic formative reading assessment system for use in all grades (the Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading, or FAIR), and many participants including agency officials, saw this as a promising tool for improving students’ reading abilities:

Also...we developed in association with the Florida Center for Reading Research an assessment tool, the Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading...that is...very valuable especially to our secondary folks who have *not* had an assessment tool in the past they can use to assess those students. The students that score Level I or Level II [on the FCAT] are required to be progress-monitored at *least* three times a year. The FAIR assessment can be used for that, and was developed with the teacher in mind, providing instructional information *for* that teacher so they can really *target* their instruction to the needs of the students, so that's something that we've... implemented throughout the state this year. Over two million students have been assessed with that system, so we're excited about that. (Interview, 5/5/2010)

Here, the participant explained that students who score below expectations on the FCAT needed additional monitoring. Additionally, teachers needed student-specific information to guide instruction. FAIR enabled this monitoring and served as an impetus for instruction aimed at meeting the particular needs of the student; this specific finding is consistent with the universal beliefs above that Florida's adolescent literacy reform was focused on struggling learners/readers and acknowledged their unique academic needs. Also, the participant used the term "progress monitoring" in connection with the use of FAIR. This term was used in the Board of Education rule delineating the assessment requirements for schools' K-12 reading plans. Of the four types of assessments listed in this document, (screening, progress monitoring, diagnosis, and outcome measures), progress monitoring assessment appeared to be most closely associated with the notion of formative assessment as defined above.

FAIR assessments for secondary students were comprised of three components: (a) reading comprehension passages and questions, (b) a maze task (students read short passages and supplies a choice of three missing words), and (c) a word analysis (or spelling) assessment (Florida Center for Reading Research, 2009). Depending on the students' score on the reading comprehension assessment, he might or might not be directed to continue to the other two components. For intermediate and secondary students, FAIR was administered via computer and was available at no cost to districts. Unlike the FCAT, which measures grade-level benchmarks only, Florida's formative assessment system was computer adaptive, meaning the difficulty level of a given passage was automatically adjusted as students read and answered questions. According to the Florida Department of Education (2009a; 2009b), this feature strengthened the validity, reliability and usability of the results, especially in the case of struggling readers who tend to merely guess at questions if the text is too difficult, thus yielding an inadequate representation of a student's proficiency with state reading benchmarks. With computer adaptive testing, teachers would be able to "know whether the student [did] not grasp the benchmark or simply could not read a grade level passage" (2009a). Instruction could then be planned accordingly. For schools using FAIR, the resulting scores were automatically reported to the state-wide Progress Monitoring and Reporting Network (PMRN) for macro-level tracking of progress toward the benchmarks measured by the FCAT. Lastly, and consistent with other findings in this study, the results of the FAIR assessment were used to predict student outcomes on the FCAT for students in grades 3-11 (Florida Department of Education, 2009b).

At their outer edges, the nested unities of complex systems resist predictability, top-down hierarchical control, and thus, imposed order (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008, Morrison, 2006; Stevens, 2006). Consistent with the complexity thinking notions of short-range relationships, interdependency and on-going system feedback, formative assessment (when used in a non-evaluative context of collaboration and rich discussion), appears to be a more appropriate means for bottom-up emergence than does summative assessment. Administered with an appropriate level of frequency, and embellished with the local knowledge and interdependent actions of the immediate participants, formative assessment is indeed an important tool for providing feedback for teaching and learning. In other words, a student and teacher, working in tandem toward a shared goal of a higher summative reading assessment score, might use formative assessment to focus and scaffold their efforts. The question for policy makers is: How might the use of formative assessment, with its potential for encouraging bottom-up emergence, be used to enable the highly complex interactions that occur at the teaching-learning nexus?

Professional development. Another key distinction in the differentiated beliefs of Tier I participants was the value of professional development for teachers. This focus held true in interviews as well as in the policy documents cited by participants. In particular, there was a sense that content-area teachers were reluctant to integrate reading instruction into their teaching, partially due to limited knowledge about content-specific reading demands. Many participants believed this knowledge deficit originated from a lack of attention to content-area reading in pre-service education programs, and it is important to note that this concern also arose in Tier II data, although not to the same extent. This perceived gap in teachers' skills in turn created additional difficulties for

students who had trouble comprehending subject-area texts. For instance, in the *Senate Interim Report 2010-111* (2009) which reviewed the reading intervention practices of Florida middle and high schools, the authors concluded:

In the past, it was widely accepted that the teaching of reading was primarily the task of elementary teachers. Based on this accepted practice, coupled with the rapidly accelerating literacy demands at the secondary level, it was not unusual to find that secondary teachers feel inadequately prepared to support students' literacy skills within their academic content areas (p. 2).

A tertiary interview participant, indicating the influence of pre-service education, stated the concern thusly:

Content area teachers are typically not trained in how to help their students access their texts. There are unique things about each subject area, and so content area teachers are challenged with how to *address* those unique areas, but yet help their students access information from texts that they're required to read, and so I think that's an area that *really* needs to be strengthened. (Interview, 4/19/2010)

Perhaps because content area teachers were perceived to be inadequately prepared, inservice professional development, with an emphasis on embedding reading instruction in content classes, was seen as the primary way to strengthen the post-secondary preparation and test scores of Florida's adolescent students. Attention to school-level professional development was a required component of each school's annual improvement plan as described in the Florida Secondary School Redesign Act. The Department of Education sponsored professional development through the provision of optional reading endorsement certification courses or content area reading professional

development courses. Also, “Intervention Academies” were held in various locations across the state during the summer, where content teachers worked together with their reading coaches to develop their skills in meeting the needs of students in reading intervention courses.

In particular, reading or literacy coaches were highly valued as a means for professional development. Based on the work of Joyce and Showers (2002), Florida and other districts across the country have embraced the idea of coaching in order to provide on-going, internal support for teachers in the K-12 setting. Joyce and Showers demonstrated the profound differences between various teacher training models and the amount of transfer to practice. In particular, they differentiated between theory-driven training delivered through (a) lectures, readings and discussions and (b) training that adds job-embedded coaching to the initial theoretical format. The latter method, they contended, is remarkably more effective in producing transfer of learning to classroom practice. Job-embedded professional development is more effective than “one-shot workshops provided by external trainers” because it enables the on-going construction of a teacher’s skills and knowledge through the social support of a peer (Duessen, Coskie, Robinson & Autio, 2007, p.1). In the following excerpt, an agency official described the value the state placed on professional development. In particular, she noted Florida’s organizational shift toward coaching as a method of teacher professional development in contrast to the traditional work-shop type sessions that typically take place out of the classroom context.

...the *most* important thing around *all* of that, is your professional development, and your training and your reading endorsements and the coaches that come in

and do the training... So, we're trying to move professional development out of that "come out and get a dose." (Interview, 5/18/2010)

The state's commitment to the reading coach model was supported by funding allocations. The provision of reading coaches received high priority in the *K-12 Reading Plan*, which was required of districts in return for reading-specific funds. An agency official described the cooperation between the legislature and the Department of Education on the provision of funding through the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) for reading coaches:

...*statewide most* reading coaches are funded through that source [FEFP], and that source right now in this year's budget has remained virtually the same as it was last year... which is about a hundred and two million dollars statewide... that has *continued* to remain in place, so that's a *very big plus*. (Interview, 5/5/2010)

In his concluding thought, this policy actor revealed his firm belief in the efficacy of reading coaches for the delivery of reading professional development.

Instructional leadership. In Tier I interview data, the notion of instructional leadership also received a high priority. Instructional leadership, or the extent to which building administrators established and maintained a culture of literacy within the school, was valued as a variant of embedded professional development by this agency official:

One other thing that we really try to work with administrators on is the creation of a reading leadership team at the school, and reading leadership teams are a *requirement* statewide... they *really truly can* change the *whole culture* of the school, when they look at the data for the school in terms of literacy, *determine* the concerns in areas that they are having in their school, and work to *address*

those as much as they can. And I've seen some *very effective* reading leadership teams be able to *really* turn schools around if they're in place and used effectively, so again, it's getting that message out to administrators on how impactful these groups can be and really what kind of a change agent they can be for their school. (Interview, 5/5/2010)

In connection with reading coaches, the work of Joyce and Showers (2002), supports the notion of instructional leadership. They contend that strong, committed administrators enable effective training to take place; school leadership is crucial to the establishment of an organizational climate that facilitates receptivity and success for embedded professional development.

It is important to note the emphasis on instructional leadership surfaced in formal speech (policy documents) as well: The K-12 Reading Plan required principals to establish and assist in the direction of Reading Leadership Teams comprised of an array of instructional personnel, and the Center on Instruction devoted an entire document to the notion of instructional leadership in *Adolescent Literacy Walk-Through Guide for Principals: A Guide for Instructional Leaders* (Rissman, Miller & Torgesen, 2009).

Instructional materials. Tier I actors also believed in the value of resource-based solutions in the form of traditional, page-bound instructional materials. In most cases, these materials were viewed as a support mechanism for enhancing scaffolded instruction. Some materials were heavily regulated and required professional development for implementation, others, although required, appeared to be more amenable to local discretion. Also, limited evidence revealed the potential for tension between the people-based solutions discussed in the previous section and the fidelity

required of the state for reading program implementation. In general, at least two primary forms of resources emerged: pre-designed reading programs approved by the state and purchased by districts; and classroom libraries, with an emphasis on texts leveled by difficulty.

The use of Florida's instructional reading materials was regulated by the "partial preemptive" nature of NCLB (Stephens and Wikstrom, 2007), which stipulated that federal funding for states' reading programs was contingent upon the use of "scientifically based" materials (see, for example, the 2000 Report of the National Reading Panel). According to NCLB, states and localities have discretion in purchasing specific reading programs, but they must choose from those designated as meeting federal scientifically-based criteria. Thus, Florida's State Board of Education emphasized the importance of research-based reading programs, and for middle and high schools this pertained primarily to programs designed for struggling readers. An agency official described these as intervention programs as a "more *extreme* form of intervention that requires probably more direct *instruction* and more *time* for students to be able to get those *final* things that they're not...really being able to do..." (Interview, 5/18/2010)

According to the *K-12 Comprehensive Research-Based Reading Plan Rule* (2008), a chart describing how localities planned to integrate research-based programs was required of each district. Three co-occurring codes surfaced within the category of instructional materials: research-based, professional development, and fidelity. For instance, one of fourteen requirements of a reading coach was described this way in the rule: "Work with teachers to ensure that research-based reading programs (comprehensive core reading programs, supplemental reading programs and

comprehensive intervention reading programs) are implemented with fidelity” (p. 5). This attention to program adherence was very different from the job-embedded professional development as described by Joyce & Showers (2002).

Clearly, the term “research-based” was frequently used in reference to instructional materials. However, it was not clear from any data collected in this study how districts or the state determined if materials were indeed based on research. A brief analysis of the Florida Department of Education website (2005b) suggested that the determination of a scientific basis for the three program types above originated with the publishers of these programs. In the *Florida Department of Education 2006 Reading Specifications* (Florida Department of Education, 2006, p. 5), research-based materials are described as those which are consistent with “current and confirmed research.” Further, publishers were directed to consider research conducted before and after a given program or strategy description and to investigate the efficacy of approaches for various types of learners. In particular, the “fundamental skills” (phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) were listed as important features for inclusion in a proposal submission. Once the proposals were submitted, the State Instructional Materials Committee, which included “district school officials, professional and educational associations, and civic organizations” (Florida Department of Education, 2005b), presented a list of research-based materials to the Commissioner. Upon approval by the Commissioner, the materials were available to schools and districts for purchase from a state catalog (Florida Department of Education, 2005b). It is unclear from this analysis if a systematic set of criteria or procedures existed for verifying the authenticity of a publisher’s research-based claims.

Given the state's requirement for research-based materials, it was thus important to stress to schools and teachers the conditions under which they had been demonstrated to be successful. The term "fidelity" was used to convey this notion. According to the Florida Department of Education's *2010-11 K-12 Comprehensive Research-Based Reading Plan Guidance* document, fidelity of implementation:

... is of utmost importance when using research-based programs. The research evidence that most programs use to support the use of their program is based upon strict adherence to a particular model. Failure to utilize the programs under the same conditions as the original research will limit the success with the program...For programmatic interventions, this would include fidelity to both the time and class size recommendations that the publisher used in developing their evidence-base for the program (p. 8).

The primary means for ensuring fidelity of implementation appeared to be the provision of professional development. As explained earlier, this task was a key responsibility of the reading/literacy coach. Yet, with the emphasis on fidelity to programmed material, a logical concern arose. To what extent would a given teacher's allotted time for professional development be dedicated to a generic, wide-ranging emphasis on the development of sound literacy teaching practices versus program-specific training? Commenting on this, Center on Instruction authors Torgesen, et. al (2007) stated,

...it is important to consider the potential utility and applicability of both approaches in different situations. One approach advocates a sustained and deep commitment to professional development with a view to helping all teachers

become literacy experts able to provide high-quality literacy instruction on the basis of their personal knowledge of important literacy goals and instructional practices. Another approach emphasizes the selection of curriculum materials and instructional programs that can serve as a scaffold or guide for literacy instruction... Teachers still require extensive professional development to help them use these materials or programs with fidelity, and to adjust their use with specific children, but this professional development may not need to be as wide-ranging as that sought in the first alternative. A third alternative might combine some elements of both approaches (p. 138).

Here, the authors subtly suggested a blended approach to professional development as it was related to instructional materials and program fidelity. In other words, rather than adhering strictly to a program manual, teachers might be encouraged and coached to integrate their own critical thinking skills to judge the site-based appropriateness of particular aspects of program materials and their accompanying instructions for implementation (Kroeger, 2008). This notion was also included in the Florida Department of Education's *2010-11 K-12 Comprehensive Research-Based Reading Plan Guidance* document:

Given that there is no such thing as a "one size fits all" program, teacher judgment through analysis of formal and informal assessment should guide instructional adjustments to the program when it is determined that the desired effect may not be occurring for individual students (p. 8).

Teachers and schools appeared to be given more liberty in the design and use of classroom libraries, although there were some general stipulations in the data with

regards to their contents. The Board of Education rule for the *K-12 Comprehensive Research-Based Reading Plan* (Florida Department of Education, 2008) required districts to show evidence of the provision of classroom libraries by content area teachers in order to “extend and build discussions of text in order to deepen understanding” (p. 3). Further, the rule stated that districts “must include a description of the utilization of leveled classroom libraries and independent reading practice” (p. 3). That leveled libraries were written in to the reading plan is evidence of the belief found in all subcategories of the data that students brought a diversity of academic needs to the classroom. In this case, a given classroom library needed to contain materials across a range of difficulty levels. A different example of the emphasis on classroom libraries was evidenced in the June 3rd 2010 draft of the revised *Reading Endorsement Competencies*. Delineated as a performance indicator in the second of five competencies required for teachers earning a reading endorsement was the use of “resources and research-based practices that create information intensive environments (e.g., diverse classroom libraries, inquiry reading)” (p. 5).

Texts in classroom libraries were intended more for students’ independent reading practice rather than for direct instruction. The provision of a variety of materials, including motivational texts, was frequently cited as a catalyst for facilitating student engagement through individual choice. This stipulation was in agreement with the focus on students’ agency as described earlier in this chapter, as well as studies reviewed in Chapter II (Behrman, 2003; Moje, 1996; Franzak, 2008). Mandated time for daily independent reading practice through the use of classroom library materials was required in the State Board of Education *K-12 Student Reading Intervention Rule* (2008), both for

middle and high schools (for students scoring at Level I or II on the FCAT with evidence of decoding and/or fluency difficulties).

There was evidence of a slightly different type of resource; one that appeared to lie somewhere between programmed materials and open-ended classroom libraries intended for students' independent reading choice. Here, there was an emphasis on providing developmentally appropriate content-related texts for students' ability levels. These texts are commonly referred to as leveled texts; they are selected for classroom use in order to expand the array of difficulty levels beyond traditional text-books, which often serve as an obstacle for struggling readers (Allington, 2002b; Brabham & Villaume, 2002). In a collection of comments by literacy experts regarding the provision of resources to schools and districts, authors Torgesen, et. al (2007) included the following advice submitted by motivation expert John Guthrie:

“Provide students with texts they can read. In every classroom, students should be capable of reading their texts and textbooks aloud proficiently. Unable to make the simplest sense of their texts, students are barricaded from knowledge. Schools should invest in a new storehouse of texts.” (Guthrie, cited in Torgesen, et al, 2007, p. 139)

Here as elsewhere, policy actors believed in the importance of stocking classroom libraries with texts that enabled readers to access subject-related concepts by way of leveled texts.

Tier II genres. As opposed to the homogeneity of the solutions offered by the Tier I data, the Tier II speech genres (with the exception of the collective belief in the value of the accountability system) produced a wider range of policy solutions. They

differed from Tier I solutions slightly in that these priorities tended toward Systems-Based solutions. Notably, however, the perceived importance of the accountability system occurred as a valued solution across each of the three Tier II genres. There was however, an emphasis on People-Based and Resource-Based solutions as well. As found in the Tier I data, these included formative assessment and instructional materials (respectively), but here, they also included teacher quality and technology for instructional delivery (respectively). Also, not all findings in this area of the data were solution-based; one result took the form of a policy concern: the perception that Florida students were inadequately equipped with the necessary knowledge for success in college or the workplace.

Other than the four universal beliefs described earlier in this chapter, there were two other areas of overlap across the Tier I and Tier II data. Tier II policy documents (state statutes), revealed a direct emphasis on formative assessment and Tier II interview participants valued instructional materials as policy solutions. Because both of these solutions were discussed at length in the Tier I data, they will not be covered again here.

Accountability system. Pervasive throughout all three Tier II genres was an emphasis on the accountability system as a carrier for Florida's policy. While tests and the meaning given to the composite scores at various levels were seen as critical (universal beliefs), in these subcategories of the data, it was the *context* of accountability that was credited with producing the improvements in test scores.

As described earlier, the A+ Accountability Plan was initially established in 1999 by then Governor Jeb Bush and the Florida Legislature. Comprised of several statutes, the Plan was comprised of an array of policy instruments including mandates, incentives,

capacity building measures and symbolic language use (Schneider & Ingram, 1990). The A+ Plan was centered on the statewide administration of the FCAT (a mandate). It required the state Department of Education to publically grade (symbolic language) and compensate schools based on students' test scores and their improvement on the test across time as well as on high schools' graduation rates, student participation in Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses, college dual enrollment and Advanced Certificate of Education courses (incentives). Schools, districts or school boards requesting or designated as needing improvement were given support (capacity building) in the form of training and technical assistance in "conducting needs assessments, (learning tools) developing and implementing school improvement plans, or implementing other components of school improvement and accountability. The Koret Task Force, in an independent evaluation of Florida's A+ Plan states that it was a "bold, innovative...pace-setter for the nation." Moreover, this group describes this plan as a suitable model for NCLB (Peterson, 2006. p. 49).

The 2006 A++ Plan appeared to be a fine-tuning of the A+ Plan for secondary grades. Among many provisions, it included an increase in requirements for middle school promotion and high school graduation, along with mandated interventions for students scoring below expectations on the FCAT reading assessment (Florida Department of Education, 2006). Together, these initiatives formed the backbone of Florida's reform.

The key role of the accountability system was articulated by the Education Commissioner: "We've addressed the importance of what students should know and be able to do. We've done that through one--standards, two--through accountability, three--

we've done that through a strong, forceful practice of school grading" (House Meeting, 3/25/2010). This statement is one of many that demonstrates the naturalization of summative tests and their scores in state-level language (Woodside-Jiron, 2004). While the test goes unmentioned, its important role in the accountability structure placed the FCAT at the forefront of his message. In his overarching statement about the state's progress, this policy actor revealed the state's tacit belief about students' knowing and doing: they were demonstrated by test performance. Yet, as noted earlier in this chapter, there was a disconnect between the 2007 *Next Generation Sunshine State Standards* (i.e., what Florida's students needed to know and be able to do) and what was actually tested. In this statement, the policy actor made a rhetorical leap from the broader standards to a standardized test, essentially equating them as congruent components of the overall reform initiative. In essence, the standards and the test were being represented as congruent, but in reality, they were not.

Policy actors believed the accountability system brought a certain clarity to the educational endeavor. Here, as in the statement above, the integration of standards, assessment and public accountability were woven together into an overall strategy for planning and improvement by a legislator:

I think in *any* industry, education, or any other, when you *know* what's expected and you know how to meet that challenge, and then you're measured to whether or not you've meet that challenge, I think is a positive. And it lets you kind of know kind of where you *are*, where you're *going* and what needs to be *accomplished*. So I think some of the accountability things that have been put in *place* that *measure* where we are, where we need to be, what, you know, those

types of things that are pretty standard and *clear*, I think has been a *benefit* to education (Interview, 6/30/2010).

Policy actors' rationale for the accountability system was multifaceted, but it was related to their belief about the importance of using summative test scores. The notion of holding districts, schools, teachers and students accountable was perceived as the way to ensure that public expenditures were being used properly, to influence test scores and enforce social efforts at improving equity, to compel teachers and students to do their respective jobs, and ensure that students would be better prepared for college and the workplace.

As in the argument proffered by Senator Robert Kennedy prior to the enactment of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, policy actors believed accountability was a necessary component of fiscal responsibility (Cross, 2004). Like Kennedy, Florida policy actors believed in the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of educators' work in the interest of efficient use of public tax dollars. Fiscal responsibility was a priority, and the means of evaluation was the employment of a universal measurement tool. As indicated by a Tier II interview participant, "I think... we need to *measure* in order to make sure that we're actually... investing our dollars properly" (Interview, 6/8/2010).

Some participants, like this legislator, pointed to the positive impact of testing and the larger context of the A+ Accountability Plan on Florida's reading scores:

...prior to 1998, there was no real *mechanism* by which to measure (standardized across the state), students' achievement and then to *hold* that student and that school accountable *for* that measure, i.e., the FCAT. And when the FCAT came

out (people say both good and bad), however *all* the independent research has shown...that the literacy and the reading levels have *increased* significantly in the last 10 years. (Interview, 6/30/2010)

Note the interchangeable use of literacy and reading, as well as the implication that FCAT and the larger context of accountability had strengthened the reading ability of all of Florida's students. In the next example, a legislator made a similar argument, however he prefaced his comment with a subtle but important caveat. In contrast to the previous participant, he suggested a limited impact of FCAT-driven accountability on secondary score improvement:

While there's been a, a push to *reform* the FCAT at a high school level, which we've done with end of course exams, that dialogue *stops* when it comes to primary grades. Because the view is when it hits [the] *primary* grades, if you *remove* that accountability...reading scores will go down, and if the reading scores go down, the rest of the scores will soon follow. (Interview, 5/26/2010)

The observation that FCAT-driven accountability was not successful in producing higher test scores at the secondary level appeared to be one impetus for Senate Bill 4. This bill included a provision to move the state toward course-specific accountability exams as a measure of teaching and learning in middle and high schools. The reform was seen as a way to make students' learning efforts more relevant because the exams would be specific to a particular course unlike like the FCAT, which covered cross-curricular concepts. With this plan, accountability would be more specifically tied to courses and teachers.

As described earlier in the chapter, improved test scores were associated with social equity issues, such as in efforts to narrow the achievement gap between Minorities and White students. Consider the use of “all students” in this statement by a legislator: “...the FCAT has served a great purpose in *raising* the level of accountability, and we’ve seen test scores go up. We...have. And...from *all* students” (Interview, 6/7/2010). In this example, the participant focused on the increase in the reading levels, however, in the following example, an agency official took a more humanistic, albeit more forceful approach to the FCAT and the increase in test scores:

...a lot of people feel it’s been *draconian*; that it’s been *pushed*; they don’t like FCAT... get over it. You should like the fact that we had *hundreds* of thousands of children that weren’t reading, and they were *hidden* and no one cared.

(Interview, 5/18/2010).

Importantly, in both of the two previous excerpts, policy actors acknowledged an existing discord about the tests and how they were used as a policy lever. While this notion is discussed in depth later in the chapter, these interview excerpts indicate evidence of the only alternate discourse community revealed in this study.

At the classroom level, the accountability system was valued as a way to ensure students and teachers were simply doing their respective jobs. In fact, for some policy actors, there was a personal comfort in knowing their own children and their children’s teachers would be held to certain standards for teaching and learning. For instance, in a meeting, an agency official described new textbooks that were directly aligned to Florida’s *Next Generation Sunshine State Standards* in Reading/Language Arts (2007).

I sure hope my grandson's elementary school decides to adopt this series, because I would have all the confidence in the world that that child's being taught the content that they need to be taught and will be held accountable for. And, the teacher will have in her hands a tool that she will also be held accountable for. And-we have a very strong accountability system in Florida-everyone should be held accountable. Therefore, the student and the teacher should have a tool in their hands to help them be successful. It's taken a while for us to get here.

(Senate Committee Meeting, 3/2/2010)

Although her comments pertained to her elementary school-age grandson and his teacher, her belief in the broader accountability system as a means of motivating teaching and learning was clear, along with the assumption that the materials were infallible.

With its tightly coupled arrangement of standards-based testing, school grading, rewards and sanctions, the 1999 A+ Plan served as the foundation for Florida's accountability system. The 2006 A++ Plan clarified earlier secondary school requirements for student progression and graduation as well as intervention for struggling readers. Whether in interviews or in more formal (meeting) settings, Tier II participants cited the accountability "system" as the carrier of Florida's reform for adolescents, reading and education in general. And, because the accountability framework was codified into state law, this notion was solidly placed within the formal genre of policy documents. Accountability provided assurance. Assurance that money was being properly spent, that teachers would remain faithful to their work, that students were doing their part, and that Florida's test scores would continue to improve.

Certainly the accountability system can be considered as a constraint within the realm of the enabling-constraints framework. However, Davis & Sumara (2006) warn that the condition of enabling constraints is predicated upon a “delicate balance” between constraining and enabling features (p. 148). In carrying this logic a bit further, I shift to the complexity notion of system nestedness, beginning at the micro-level. As Black and Wiliam (1998) argue, a classroom culture predicated on rewards, competition and grades forces students to “spend their time and energy looking for clues to the ‘right answer’” (p. 142). This situation relates to the notion of students who are driven by a performance approach to goals, as opposed to a mastery, or learning approach (Jetton & Alexander, 2004). In other words, students who are driven by a performance goal orientation are motivated by competition and/or their image in relation to what others think about them. (In the vernacular, this tendency is called “grade-grubbing”). In contrast, students whose goal-orientation is mastery-driven seek to learn all they can about a given topic because they are internally motivated by simply learning for the sake of learning.

Now, zooming back and away from the micro-level view and out to the macro-level, the high-stakes test accountability system is situated at the forefront of the state’s education reform environment (Torgesen & Miller, 2009, pp. 11 and 26). As in the classroom described above, the FCAT and other standardized exams are used for inter- and intra-state rankings, rewards, sanctions and publicized grades. The data from this study revealed policy actors’ strongly positive perceptions of the consequences of the accountability culture. Yet, any policy analyst would be remiss in not asking how this climate of competition and external rewards might also encourage perverse incentives. Would policy based on “short exercises taken under the conditions of formal testing”

which are “quite unlike those of everyday performance” encourage a culture of grade grubbing (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 148)? Would it encourage a rich instructional repertoire of receptive and expressive literacy activities for all students as represented in the Sunshine State Standards or in the adolescent literacy approach to teaching and learning? Contrast this possibility to a more internally-driven system where mastery is the primary goal and a collaborative, process-driven work ethic is the norm. These questions and others like them appeared to be the impetus for Alternate Discourse “B.”

Alternate discourse “B”: *Opposition to the accountability system.* Even though the accountability system was codified in law, it was not universally embraced by Tier II participants. A limited set of negative beliefs about the test-driven aspects of the accountability system arose from a relatively small community of individuals. This dissonance became the second of only two competing discourses found in the data. The existence of this alternate discourse was not found in any of the formal texts reviewed in this study; nor was it found in State Board of Education meetings. Rather, these beliefs were suggested in interviews, and were revealed most prominently in legislative meetings. Thus, it is important to emphasize the relative placement of this alternate perspective within the overall discourse about the test-driven aspects of accountability: While disconfirming evidence for the value of test-driven accountability was present in the data, it was eclipsed by the dominant beliefs described above in the previous section. In other words, the accountability system as a policy mechanism was so valued that even with the existence of a set of negative beliefs, it remained as a prominent policy solution across all three of the Tier II genres. In effect, it was quite limited in comparison to the dominant discourse.

While not directly agreeing with the alternative discourse outright, one legislator acknowledged the existence of an alternate perspective relating to the FCAT. She described this summative test as somewhat of a necessary evil, which had served the purpose of strengthening instruction and subsequently reading ability, including that of minority students.

...We can just take a minute to hate on the FCAT for a second. So we'll all hate on it, you know, simultaneously, we hate it, okay, but... the *truth* of the matter is...the second *part* of that is that FCAT has contributed to a whole host of motivation for *reading*. And I look at the statistics across the board and we have seen, you know, a *dramatic* increase in reading, in *percentages*...of kids reading *on level* as a result of the *intensive* reading attention that kids have received... from the *third grade* FCAT on up through *high school*. So...I *do* think that this is a *direct* result of the consequences of FCAT. And so say what people *will* about the hostility people *feel* about FCAT, we *have* seen *reading* gains and we've seen reading gains particularly for *minority* students (Interview, 5/25/10).

Dissent about the accountability system surfaced whenever test scores were used as a mechanism to set policy. For instance, legislators expressed their beliefs that the system was a punitive and unfunded mandate, especially for students who came from disadvantaged backgrounds. One senator reminded her peers that her constituents' children only knew the street as their front yard and many had never taken part in educational outings that their more "advantaged" counterparts enjoyed. Other legislators called attention to the ongoing family crises encountered by many low-income students. The accountability system was also linked to teachers' frustrations and the added burden

of doing a difficult job without needed support. This last notion surfaced quite forcefully during debate on Senate Bill 6 (or, “Teacher Pay for Performance”), described later in this section.

The fact that negative beliefs about test-driven accountability were evidenced almost exclusively by a small number of legislators and practitioners warrants further consideration. One explanation for this situated difference in beliefs is as follows: During the tenure of former Governor Jeb Bush, the authority for gaining a seat on the State Board of Education was constitutionally changed from an elected position to one of appointment by the governor. In turn, board members appointed the Commissioner of Education. Thus, through his power of appointment, the Governor had control over the ideological composition of the Board of Education. As for policy documents created, used and disseminated by the state, it seems intuitive that they would be aligned to the test-driven accountability approach; the most obvious reason being the federal NCLB testing mandate. Legislative meetings and sessions, on the other hand, are a forum for expressing the concerns of the citizen body; elected representatives speak on behalf of their constituents. And, it was here that the alternate discourse about test-driven accountability measures was revealed most fully.

Aside from the high regard given to Florida’s accountability system, there were four other Tier II policy solutions. In general, these findings represented a blend of People-Based, Resource-Based and Systems-Based solutions.

Technology for teaching. Much of the discourse related to the use of technology for teaching was similar to that found in discussions about students’ “digital native” identity. However, in this category the emphasis was on the potential for technological

delivery systems to literally “teach” content to students. In the following excerpt, a tertiary participant described the instructional features of a technology-based program that accompanied a secondary literature and language arts series:

One of the *coolest* things that was *embedded* in this literature and language arts selection (that we didn’t buy), if you’re a middle school reader, you’re reading *Romeo and Juliette*. You’re reading it online, you *click* on something and it comes up here and tells you the *historical context* of what that meant so that you’re not *stymied* by this very unfamiliar *phrase*; “What did this really mean?” ...What the *literature technology*-based programs are *doing* is *helping* the reader as they read. For example, it’ll actually automatically *highlight* the big idea, you know, and, you know, give you a little number. “This is the supporting evidence. This is the supporting...” “Start here...” So you can *see* where a *kid* who *hates* to read might be *advantaged*, with those kinds of tools. (Interview, 7/8/2010)

One benefit of online or digital delivery was the potential to help students improve their performance by allowing them to work at their own pace. Another rationale for using technology to teach was the ability to provide students with current content in certain subject areas. This was explained by an agency official:

If we go digital, or if some of the content is presented digital, we can update some things almost constantly. Have real-time content for students in some areas, and I think in mathematics...probably...we would not need to update the content as frequently as we would in American History class because American History is going on every day. (Senate Meeting, 3/2/2010)

Policy actors also noted the necessity of preparing students for the technological aspects of the workplace, and the crucial role of technology as an important aspect of obtaining a high school education. Consider the following statement by a legislator:

Technology is a critical element. And it is not a complete menu of education and academic delivery without that critical element. You will not receive a complete education without digital delivery today, period. You will not be considered an educated individual without that key component (Senate Meeting, 3/2/2010)

Perhaps because of the belief articulated above, the potential of the Florida Virtual School, a public online K-12 learning school, was frequently mentioned. This system was seen as a means for meeting the demands of technological learning as well as a way to compensate for weaknesses in “traditional” delivery methods. Here, a legislator explained the concept of virtual education:

There’s a new development, it’s dealing with *virtual* education... What we see is that... virtual education is probably becoming a greater equalizer in the education field... it allows [students’] needs to be met, *despite* geographical boundaries. And there is more independent study being done and more research being done on how can virtual education assist at that secondary level more efficiently than perhaps the traditional model... But I would say virtual education is probably a new resource, or a new tool that I think will cause a sea change in the secondary level. (Interview, 5/26/2010)

This participant predicted a shift in teaching and learning that would soon occur via online learning systems. No matter their location, virtual education would be an efficient way to meet students’ academic needs.

Finally, and pertinent to students who were struggling, online learning was seen as a way to provide non-traditional programming for overage students, for those hoping to earn a GED and for the purpose of “credit recovery,” which allowed students to retake certain courses they had failed. Another purpose was to provide online reading and math intervention coursework. Credit recovery and reading intervention via online learning were built into the 2006 Secondary School Redesign Act. During the 2010 legislative session, Senate Bill 4 revised this act to require all students to take at least one online course before graduating.

College/workplace preparation. In addition to the three problems that were cited across all tiers and genres, a fourth policy problem surfaced in the Tier II differentiated data. This was a concern that students were not being adequately prepared for post-secondary endeavors. Policy actors believed many students might be meeting institutional expectations (i.e., they were capable of earning a diploma), but were not being prepared for the needs of Florida’s private economy or for college success. This perspective was most often articulated by members of the business community; however legislators and agency personnel took up this concern in meetings as well. For instance, an agency official described a gap between high school graduation and being “college ready.” The state was not being “transparent to our parents about what a diploma in Florida means,” and she argued that a Florida diploma would not guarantee students a reasonable wage or success in college (House Meeting, 1/20/2010).

Of the four organizations whose representatives spoke most frequently in legislative committee meetings, two of these four were tied to the private sector: The Florida Chamber of Commerce and the Florida Council of 100; both business advocacy

organizations focusing on state policy. (The remaining two groups were non-profit organizations: The Foundation for Florida's Future, founded by former Governor Jeb Bush, and the Florida Education Association, commonly known as the "teachers' union"). Consider the following comments from a representative of the Florida Council of 100 at a legislative meeting:

Florida faces an emerging talent gap; an urgent shortage of a resource that is critical to success in an innovation economy. And by innovation, I mean not only an economy will attract and develop businesses of the future but an economy that has innovative ways of strengthening and growing the traditional businesses that have been the backbone of Florida. Thus, the talent gap represents a vast and growing and unmet need for a highly skilled and educated and educable work force: our state's most important resource for driving sustainable economic development in a diversified economy. And while predicting the future of such economic development is never exact, one fact is certain. The leading companies and business clusters that will emerge over the next 20 years will locate themselves wherever, wherever they have access to a top quality workforce. Unfortunately, Florida today is not leading the way; is not winning the race in providing its workers with the professional skills and education that they need to compete and to succeed in the economy of this century" (Meeting, 1/13/2010).

Within this statement, the speaker articulated his organization's belief that Florida's schools were not preparing enough students to support the needs of the state's economic system. Interestingly, he invoked a Marxist image whereby schools supplied resources (i.e., graduates) for the economic base (See Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006; Faber,

2008). Continuing, he succinctly clarified his point, by stating, “We want to continue implementing changes that will make Florida’s economy second to none.” Clearly, this speakers’ motivation for education reform was driven by his concern for Florida’s economic stability, similar to that found by Agnello (2001) in her analysis of four federal policy documents from the 1980’s and 1990’s. This perspective distilled students to one of only two categories: They either were or were not prepared to contribute to Florida’s economy. This finding invokes the four-student typology described earlier (students who are capable and engaged, students who are capable but not engaged, struggling students who are not progressing but are engaged, and lastly, struggling students who are not engaged). Here, however, due to the perceptions of the business community, there was an additional dimension to add: prepared/unprepared. Tier II policy actors believed that many students, presumably those designated as capable from the first two categories above, were unprepared for success in college and/or the workplace.

Here, as in other areas, testing was seen as a way to remedy the problem of students’ limited preparation for their post-secondary lives. In a discussion of Senate Bill 1096 (a variation of House Bill 105, or the Middle School Civics Education Act), a Senator argued, “We understand that civics is slipping through the cracks. Employers know this. And we know that “that which isn’t tested isn’t taught” (Senate Meeting, 2/16/2010).

Teacher quality. In meetings, much discussion was aimed at the issue of teaching quality. In some cases, one might argue that this solution was viewed as a concern: Policy actors cited the quality of Florida’s teachers as a problem to be solved. However, because a solution offered in the form of a legislative bill (Senate Bill 6, or “Teacher Pay

for Performance”) was also a key component of the federal Race to the Top grant application, I labeled this component as a policy solution. Driven by efforts to win the competitive grant funding, state leaders used the testing mandate to design a bill-related proposal for evaluating the effectiveness of teachers (Senate Bill 6). In essence, half of a teacher’s salary would be based on the results of the learning gains of his or her students. This plan generated considerable consternation outside of the state policy circle, and resulted in a groundswell of unrest throughout the state’s cadre of teachers, several of whom came to speak at committee meetings. This bill was also the site for revealing many of the opposing viewpoints about the accountability system from within the legislature. However, these voices were never enough to turn the momentum of the legislation.

Buoyed by research presented in pre-session legislative meetings and the primary emphasis on test scores and teacher quality in the Race to the Top grant, legislators and speakers articulated their belief about the critical role of test scores in the determination of a given teacher’s effectiveness. Arguing for the use of test scores as a way to connect student performance (test scores) to teacher evaluations before members of the House Pre-K-12 committee, the agency official expanded his rationale:

The next critical piece for Florida in addressing these issues [of what students should know and be able to do] is the issue of teacher quality. Currently, we have 99% of our teachers across the state evaluated as being satisfactory. We don’t have the ability to differentiate between teachers that are high performers and those that need additional support, and those that perhaps need to be exited out of the profession. Of the 71 lowest performing schools in the state, 66 of those

schools have 100% of their faculty evaluated as satisfactory. In the bottom 10 schools in the state, 100% satisfactory faculty; reading proficiency ranges between 9% proficient and 16% proficient. We must find a way to have high expectations for every child from every background, but we must find policies and practices that require us to put effective teachers in front of every classroom in front of every group of children. (House Committee Meeting, 3/25/2010)

In this excerpt, the Commissioner criticized the present teacher evaluation system due to its incongruence with summative reading scores. In essence, summative scores were both the indicator of poor teaching as well as the answer to the question of how to strengthen the caliber of teachers in Florida's classrooms. In a Senate meeting, this official stated (again, within the context of the Race to the Top initiative) that summative test scores were also indicative of the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs. Here, the policy actor indicated his belief that teacher preparation programs should also be held accountable for test-based learning gains:

...it's more than just a teacher evaluation issue. It is a teacher preparation issue; those that we seek to bring into the profession; our universities and state colleges, our alternate certification programs, or other organizations that we might bring to the state that can prepare and produce high quality teachers; are they doing a job worthy of their funding; of their operation? Or, should the state of Florida, Department of Education perhaps decertify some of these programs because their graduates cannot produce learning gains? (Senate Committee Meeting, 1/12/2010)

In many instances, this category revealed the differences in knowledge specificity.

Whereas Tier I data valued professional development as a means of instructional

improvement, Tier II data preferred a revision of the teacher evaluation system using test scores as a means to the same end. The difference between these two groups was a formative, developmental approach (through ongoing professional development and reflection) versus a more summative, definitive approach (through standardized summative test scores).

There was some discussion (albeit limited) of teacher quality that occurred outside the realm of test scores. Often, as in this legislator's comment, there was a sense that good teachers were "in it for the kids:"

And...you know, there are just all these kind of societal kind of things going on in these young people's lives...and...if you get a poor *teacher*...who...isn't you know, isn't in there for the right *reasons*...then [it] causes young people to lose interest and become disinterested in the subject matter and what's going on.

(Interview, 6/16/2010).

Some policy actors believed good teachers "put in more time" than others, some believed good teachers were effective classroom managers and others emphasized the importance of teachers' content knowledge. Across all the data, however, there was consensus that good teachers were at the crux of a good educational system.

Summary. Before drawing conclusions about the differentiated results, it bears repeating that these differences were not considered evidence of communities of discourse. This is because many solutions would have been repeated in other locations of the matrix had I included results from a slightly larger proportion of the data. I viewed this repetition of solutions as an agreement in overall beliefs, with a difference in the relative value placed on a given focus. More importantly however, all differentiated foci

were highly supportive of the summative assessment scores solution. *Thus, any differences discussed below must be tempered by the fact that all data sources placed a priority on the value of summative assessment scores as a measure of quality literacy teaching and learning.*

A review of the differentiated policy solutions showed that sources highly knowledgeable about adolescent literacy (Tier I) appeared to value People-Based policies to a larger extent than Tier II sources. Notably, the Tier II faith in the accountability system was not represented as a priority in the Tier I differentiated results. In complexity terms, three of the four solutions valued by Tier I participants tended toward means that were reliant on bottom-up emergence via short-range relationships: formative assessment, which is heavily dependent upon student/teacher collaborative interaction, professional development in the form of classroom-embedded reading/literacy coaching and mentoring, and the importance of school-level leadership in establishing and maintaining a culture of literacy. In terms of the speech genres, minimal differences existed between the less-formal and more formal texts (although there were no Tier I meeting data). In other words, the beliefs Tier I participants cited in the less formal interview setting were consistent with the official policy documents referenced by all of the participants. This finding corroborates the legislative and agency “consistency of effort and focus” emphasized by a Department of Education official in a Board of Education meeting. Table 4 displays these broader findings.

Table 4

Systems, People and Resources: Solution Types

Genre	Tier I	Tier II
Interviews	P-Professional Development P-Formative Assessment P Instructional Leadership	S-Accountability System R-Instructional Materials R-Technology for Teaching
Meetings	N/A	S-Accountability System P-Teacher Quality
Documents	P-Professional Development P-Formative Assessment R-Instructional Materials	S-Accountability System P-Formative Assessment R-Technology for Teaching

S=Systems-Based Solution; P=People-Based Solution; R=Resource-Based Solution

The Tier II sources showed a higher value for System-Based solutions, with a secondary emphasis on Resource- and People Based solutions. This preference was revealed in the priority placed on the accountability system, which occurred across all levels of text formality. Complexity thinking would designate the heavy presence of both Florida's emphasis on summative test scores as well as the accountability system in general as an example of a system constraint. Other solutions were varied across the speech genres. Interestingly, there was a noticeable emphasis on Resource-Based solutions as well as an absence of People-Based solutions in Tier II interview data.

Obviously some of these solutions could arguable be assigned to another of the three types (for instance Technology for Teaching might also be considered a People-Based Solution if there was ample interaction between a teacher and student. However, for this analysis, I selected the solution type that seemed most prominent based on the data.

One explanation for the Tier II emphasis on the accountability system as a solution may simply be that these data sources, unlike Tier I sources, were simply not as knowledgeable about the nature of reading and reading instruction. Individuals' roles as policy actors were dispersed across a range of responsibilities across the broader institutional context. Indeed, a survey of Legislative committee and School Board agenda revealed a wide array of issues from teen suicide prevention to funding allocations to charter school hearings. Thus, Tier II policy actors' knowledge about literacy teaching and learning was limited both in substance and attention by virtue of their roles within the system. Perhaps this is why the accountability mandate was seen as a clear and direct means for reducing variation in the quality of education students received across the state above solutions designed to build capacity of individuals at the micro level (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). Couple the preference for an accountability mandate with the state's ability to collect vast amounts of numerical data on easily measured exercises that do not necessarily reflect authentic, everyday learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998), and it is easy to see how this test-driven solution might be heavily valued by Tier II participants as a way to strengthen limited literacy acquisition. In sum, perhaps the limited knowledge about the highly complex human interactions involved in literacy teaching and learning produced, as Mintrop and Sunderman (2009) argue, a preference for centralized control,

made possible by system feedback through Florida's digital data collection and warehousing capabilities.

Summary of Results

Research Question 1 asked: *What is the nature of the values, beliefs and feelings about adolescent literacy conveyed by state-level discourse communities as these meanings are manifested across the primary and secondary speech genres of Florida's adolescent literacy reform policy?* Three overarching findings resulted from the analysis: (a) Reading as Literacy; (b) Institutionally Imposed Student Profiles; and (c) Policy Solutions and Problems.

In Florida, literacy was seen as a combination of various versions of reading. The most narrow version, FCAT Reading, was restricted to the kinds of reading skills amenable to standardized tests. Other versions grew progressively broader and more balanced across the receptive/expressive continuum. Secondly, policy actors revealed the existence of four student profiles in relation to their "fit" to institutional expectations. A given student's profile varied based on her or his academic skills, progress, and level of academic engagement. Finally, policy actors believed strongly in the value of standardized summative tests as both a means and outcome for adolescent literacy reform. At the same time, the data showed a concern for students who were not meeting the test-driven expectations due to their academic diversity, their individual agency or their status as a struggling learner. Policy actors proposed various solutions for increasing test scores with Tier II actors placing a high value on maintaining and strengthening the authority of the test-driven accountability system. Tier I actors preferred People-Based solutions. Each of these results is discussed more fully in Chapter VI.

Chapter V: Research Journal

I have thus far reported the results of my inquiry of state level adolescent literacy policy, which was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of the beliefs about adolescent literacy conveyed by state-level discourse communities as these meanings are manifested across the primary and secondary speech genres of Florida's adolescent literacy reform?
2. How can Florida's adolescent literacy reform policy be reconceptualized using complexity thinking
 - (a) as a model for policy design?
 - (b) as a goal for adolescent literacy teaching and learning?

Using the genre of formal speech, I described the results of the three forms of data I collected during a window of time in a particular setting. Yet, no researcher is ever fully objective or completely removed from the unit of analysis. Nor do these results exist simply as a set of stand-alone facts, disparate and separated from the researcher (see for example, Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Patton, 2002). Research and researcher are intimately intertwined. In this section, I turn my discussion inward to describe the results of this study as it relates to my "lived experience" during data collection and analysis (Patton, 2002).

The purpose of this section is two-fold and these two purposes are tightly woven and interdependent. Both are related to standards of quality. First, in addition to

describing the *outward* results, it is equally important to explicate the *internally* “lived through” results as they became a part of my thinking throughout the data collection and analysis phase of this study. Secondly, this section is a description of my ever-present efforts to acknowledge my own biases as I entered into the culture of state policy. In a sense, this chapter serves as a description of the internal fabric through with the data filtered as I wrote Chapter IV.

Heteroglossia

I wanted to come to this research with an etic perspective (Patton, 2002). In Trekkie terms, I wanted to be the Spock-like analyst, who would be unfazed by emotion in my observations and examinations. I failed on both counts. Instead, I experienced the data collection and analysis through a bricolage of my own values, beliefs and feelings, shaded by the values, beliefs and feelings of others that swirled within the data. Each perspective in this multifarious blend served to counteract others, effectively placing me not quite as the impartial observer, but more like the impassioned insider, open to anything and everything. Ideas that might just make things better for marginalized students during their last few years in school (or that might even alleviate the idea of marginalized students). In so doing, I was reminded more than once of that interesting Bakhtinian concept that I latched on to (or did it latch on to me?) three years ago in Jenifer Schneider’s research in writing class: Heteroglossia (n.) The notion that we each have within us an array of competing voices.

I started out by simply “casing the joint;” the title of one of the first books I purchased as a doctoral student (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). I attended public meetings and just absorbed. I sat in busy Capitol building hallways between meetings, watching and

listening to bits and pieces of the state policy culture. It was tempting to just stay at home and use the audio/video recordings of the meetings, but I needed to get an up-close feel for the folks I'd be interviewing; to hear in real-time their reactions to the agenda items; to see their faces first-hand and watch how they interacted with one another. All of these opportunities fell outside of the offerings of the audio/video recordings. I attended as many meetings as I could from February to June; a total of seven. My observation notes during the meetings were limited; I spent my time mostly just watching, listening and thinking, grateful that I could leave the more systematic note-taking for later, at home.

In combination with policy makers at the district level, these were (at least figuratively) the people who had impacted so much of what I had experienced as a classroom teacher. Sitting there on that first day in Morris Hall in the Capitol, I flashed back to that moment years ago, when, as a new teacher in Florida, I had clearly realized the extent of that influence. After having spent an inordinate amount of time on a series of required paperwork, I remember looking up at my mentor-teacher from my computer station and asking, "Where does this come from?"

She began describing where the forms were located in the front office.

"No," I interrupted. "Who requires that we *do* this? Is it the Feds? The state? The district?"

"Oh," she answered. "I think it's a state requirement, but it could be a combination of the district *and* the state."

There are other defining moments that shaped my interest in both literacy and education policy, but perhaps this was the instant when I first became sensitive to policy as it affected me and my teaching peers. And, the hundreds of students who cycled

through our classrooms year in and year out. So, the fact that I was sitting in the Capitol building, enacting that early curiosity--by embarking on the data collection phase of my doctoral dissertation--was duly momentous.

The rooms were formal. Podium. Seal. Flag. Gavel. Recording equipment. Drapery. Roberts Rules of Order. "This is the meeting of the Pre-K-12 Policy Committee. We will come to order. Will the administrative assistant please call the roll?" "You have one minute remaining, Mr. Lewis." "All those signify by saying aye...Opposed have the same right." Officials were typically surrounded by an array of support personnel who delivered documents, whispered information or tended to myriad other tasks. This was indeed important work. Still, I wondered if they realized the impact of their decisions.

In an early House committee meeting, every member voted in favor of House Bill 105 (a.k.a. The Justice Sandra Day O'Connor civics Education Act), which would require middle grades students to demonstrate their mastery of American Civics on an end of the semester exam. As I observed the discussion, into my head popped angry Joe Wilson. "You lie!" I saw President Obama pause and turn toward the dead silence, no doubt taken aback at this proclamation in the middle of a joint Congressional session. Sitting there in Tallahassee that day, I remember thinking that a more rigorous focus on the principles of civics might help tone down the disrespect; the vitriolic discourse that seemed to be dividing us as a nation. I remember thinking, "Our kids needed to be more informed so they would actively and civilly participate in our democracy." I pushed Wilson away. In his place came the teachers. I thought about how this civics test requirement would affect them and their students. With a high stakes exam, other topics would by necessity need to be pushed aside, watered down. In my observation notes, I typed "I just wonder how

much more they can fit into the day for teachers to do without taking something out.”

How would I have voted?

It didn't take long for me to realize two things. One; literacy was not the lifeblood of the legislative or state board policy discourse; at least not during my snapshot view; and two; test scores were the primary means of indicating the quality of teaching and learning. Although somewhat disappointed by these conclusions, I wasn't surprised.

Meetings provided precious little in the way of literacy-specific information. For the last five years, I'd been counting on the idea that state policy actors were as interested in literacy as I was. With Just Read Florida! and a national discourse about an adolescent literacy crisis, I assumed I'd hear more at least about reading in these government chambers. But, meeting discussions were aimed at other, more peripheral considerations. These folks had other issues on their plates: Graduation requirements, college/career readiness, End of Course exams, teacher quality, Race to the Top, Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten, teen suicide, even pancreatic enzyme replacements. My interview questions were aimed more specifically at literacy-relevant information and after a few meetings, I began looking forward to collecting pertinent data from a reasonable array of policy actors.

As for test scores, I knew it was not feasible or accurate for policy actors to dwell on anecdotal data or report card grades as indicators of progress. They had to use *something*, and for these individuals, the FCAT and NAEP was that something. But, I was torn. Weren't there other indicators? Data gained from site visits...performance assessment data...drop out rates...drop out recovery rates...student and parent surveys...teacher-attrition rates... The extent to which their language was infused with

assessment terminology was simply amazing to me: “Students’ proficiency; students’ performance; students’ ability; students’ gains; teachers’ performance; teachers’ quality...All code words for test scores. I wondered how (or if) their language might differ if their *own* effectiveness were evaluated based on a similar accountability mechanism. Yes. A committee of citizens could determine a cut-score for the number of bills introduced and passed each session, by each legislator. Then, an objective determination could be made about which legislators were and were not proficient. Would they ask for exceptions based on “external circumstances beyond their control?” Or, from a completely different angle, how might the football fans in this group feel if they were somehow sequestered from watching or listening to a year’s worth of their favorite team’s games in lieu of receiving a brief list of statistics at season’s end: Final scores, yards rushing, yards passing, turnovers and sacks? Would these numbers sufficiently represent the richness of the experience of watching each game? Of the totality of each one of their team’s performances? At the most, they would enable a rudimentary description of the team’s productivity and the ability to compare their team to others. That’s *something*, I supposed.

Soon, I started lingering a bit after meetings were adjourned. I watched the patterns of social interaction. A few times I approached individuals and asked questions related to their comments or presentations. All was in order. I slowly but purposely built up to the next challenge—requesting interviews.

After blitzing the Senate and House office buildings, and contacting some tertiary participants, I found people were actually interested in meeting with me. I was relieved. I needed their perspectives. The communicating, scheduling and interviewing were

incredibly time-intensive. Many days were consumed with some or all of these tasks, but in the process I built up a comfort level for contacting and interacting with people who make decisions that affect the experiences of teachers and students. I knew if I was going to pursue the goal of working at the interstices of policy and practice I needed to feel at ease initiating contact and communicating with these folks. I truly did not think I would land many interviews, and of course there were individuals I didn't get to talk with who no doubt would have provided excellent input, but in general, I was energized by the overall response. I ended up conducting 17 interviews out of a total of 32 requests. And, I found I really liked these folks. Well, most of them.

Some of the participants came across as arrogant, some were nervous, some were reserved and others were incredibly forthcoming with their opinions and beliefs. There were times when I wondered if they were pandering to my persona as an educator. ("I know we should have done things differently with Senate Bill 6..."). But most of them seemed to care about kids in their own way. And, no matter their perspective (traditional, progressive, pragmatist, institutional-minded, pro- or negative-accountability), I could usually see their point. I suppose that's one way of understanding what Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) mean about the complexities of public policy. Although I rarely inserted my own opinions (if I did, it was after the interview), I occasionally found myself nodding my head in agreement; I know this is a good interview technique, but it made me feel uncomfortable when my head nodded in spite of my personal beliefs. On these occasions, I felt I was being duplicitous. Did they see me as an ally? Deep down, I hoped they did. Perhaps some day they might listen and consider my perspective as sincerely as I was considering theirs.

I did grow an affinity to many of the participants. And part of that arose out of the fact that they took the time to stay with me after going through the consent form process. There's a certain vulnerability that comes with sharing your thoughts in a research study, even if the questions are isolated to shop-talk. These folks graciously accepted that vulnerability, but I couldn't help but feel a sense of anxiety on their behalf each time I pushed the "record" button on the recorder. And, this vulnerability wasn't a one-shot deal. When I sent them their transcripts, it surfaced again. Looking back, I wish I had not been so dogmatic about typing every repeated word, every grammatical error, every "you know." Several participants responded with concerns about how their statements would look if used in direct quotes. One playfully stated that reading her transcript made her want to slash her wrists. I assured each of them that I would be glad to "formalize" their statements if I used any direct quotes. And...thankfully, no one decided to withdraw from the study, although a few requested that I not disclose their identity. Others requested that I refrain from using any of their language whatsoever.

In many cases, the interviews provided an added dimension to the audio and video meeting observations. I watched and listened for hours upon hours to the interactions in meetings through the lens of my interview conversations. I tried to put myself in the participants' positions and again found that most of them each had their own convincing reasons for their particular solutions for education reform.

My critical perspective crept in occasionally. One of my more memorable reactions came when a speaker from a business-sector advocacy organization presented a report about the connection between education and Florida's economic prosperity. "Economics, economics, economics. Education = Dollars," I typed in my notes. He

presented his organization's "Talent Supply Chain" model as a way to represent the entirety of the educational system, from pre-K to college graduation. In his terms, education was simply a resource delivery system that, when operating properly would keep the economy strong (Florida's wasn't, he claimed). The system was divided into zones that would respond to market demands. "Are you kidding me?" Reveling in my judgment, I wrote, "Zones?" "Market-driven education?" This was incredible. Whatever happened to learning for the sake of learning; the liberal arts...? His voice was monotonous but authoritative; he seemed to be reading the report. Before long, I saw little pre-K boys with their spritzed hair parted on the side and girls with ribbon-tied pig tails and light-up sneakers. They lined up eagerly. Smiling, wiggling...and stepped on to a moving conveyer belt. Like little Lemmings, they moved through the zones. Knowledge was poured into their heads along the way by faceless technicians until they were ready to step off the Talent Supply conveyer belt and into the economy and a different conveyor belt.

But, wait-- In flew that pesky gad-fly of a question: the one that always seems to interfere with my self-righteous indignation when people start talking of education in economic terms. The one that even had the audacity to appear all dressed up in the proposal for this research: "Is it unjust for public policy to be concerned with economic prosperity given its relation to our national stability?" I shifted, as I always do when it comes to the question of education aims. Really, I reminded myself, aren't we still, after all these eons basically trying to gain and/or keep a position of collective power? To protect our most basic interests for survival? How will America (that is, our tribe) maintain our current state of relative peace and prosperity unless we can compete

economically (and otherwise) with other countries (tribes) who would like gain control over us? How can we secure and maintain our space (resources, democracy....) unless we can compete on the global stage? Shouldn't someone be monitoring large trends in our educational system in relation to those of other nations? With the best tools we have at a given point in time? And reacting when there is a downward shift? In that instant, the adolescent literacy crisis made sense. The monotonous voice had accomplished its mission.

I'm fairly certain one of the committee members noticed I had gone into a trance, because after the Talent Supply Chain presentation, she publicly questioned the assumption that all people are motivated by future earnings. I was grateful for her comments and shifted to a more comfortable place in my mind.

On a different occasion my personal biases surfaced again. This occurred during the contentious Senate Bill 6 deliberations, when I twice witnessed a lock-step vote against various amendments aimed at softening the "Teacher Pay for Performance" bill. One amendment was designed to restore compensation for teachers who continued their professional development by earning a graduate degree or National Board Certification. The argument presented was that advanced degrees or certifications do not produce higher test scores. To those members and guests not convinced that test scores measured authentic learning, this was a form of twisted logic which basically discouraged teachers from continuing their education. This logic was certainly incomprehensible to me and it was one perspective I just couldn't understand. I tried, but to no avail. Did every last one of these legislators really want to de-incentivize educators (of all people) from continuing their education? To discourage history teachers from engaging in further study of the

U.S. government? To dissuade chemistry teachers from engaging in a nationally respected and rigorous process of self-reflection and professional effort in order to strengthen their pedagogical skills? I got the feeling that some authoritative voice had dictated a mandatory unified front in order to push the bill through. Independent decision making was clearly absent from this group of legislators. Later, in interviews, I sensed that some participants regretted the way the bill had been handled. I wondered again about a possible hidden pressure that was placed on them and how these people managed to reconcile the fact that they appeared to have voted against their personal beliefs. Not knowing for certain, I came to one sure conclusion: politics was *not* for me.

While my experiences with conflict were many, three interviews were especially pertinent to my lived experience with the data. Two of these were instrumental in providing balance to my thinking about standardized tests. It was not *what* these individuals said; it was *how* they said it. Unfortunately, due to consent stipulations, I cannot share either comment. And, perhaps even if I could, a transcription would not carry the impact these statements had for me as I sat there in the interviews and later listened to the recordings. In each case, however, these individuals poignantly described the impact testing had made for children from economically disadvantaged homes. Suffice it to say, they each made a compelling and convincing case. Throughout data analysis and the writing of the results, it was these comments that served as an ideological counter-weight to my concerns about standardized testing: Each time I found myself feasting on a cogently presented critique of test-driven accountability, their voices would sound, and rein me back in.

After these two interviews, I drove home from Tallahassee thinking about the two classes of third graders who had worked so hard to pass the FCAT when by all accounts they were predicted to fail and thus repeat their third grade year. The special scheduling and placement, a small class size, the additional support, and rich, focused instruction designed to help them catch up to their peers: None of these provisions would have been available to me and those students if the accountability system had not been so stringently mandated. Across both years, all but three successfully passed the test and were promoted. I wondered how they were doing now-five years later. Was the accountability system still treating them as well as it had in their early years?

Finally, my thinking about the data was noticeably impacted in another way by a different interview participant. It came in the form of a request by a thoughtful legislator, who seemed truly concerned about making a policy impact in the interest of struggling readers. (In my post-interview notes, I typed, "I love her! She's sharp, sincere"). But, it was her invitation to share my results with her that stayed with me through much of my analysis and writing:

"I'm gonna give you *full permission*, Diane, to...to harass me after ...your report comes out to make sure that I implement some of your good ideas." And, later, after a long impassioned discussion of the difficulties experienced by struggling readers she said, "You know, we've *got to do something* about that. And so anyway, that's my soapbox. I want you to call me after your report is out."

Politi-speak, maybe, but I did not take it as such. In fact, two other participants gave similar invitations, but it was this one that became the most authentic audience I could possibly imagine as an "emerging" researcher seeking to influence policy

development. My work would be read by at least one policy actor who was interested in my results. Yeah, baby. The ultimate reward would be to see this work being used to directly influence Florida's education policy. I thought about incrementalism as the typical means of policy change (Lindblom & Woodhouse, 1993). I thought about the self-serving side of policy actors who knew little about the complexities of teaching and learning but inserted their hegemonic influence anyway. I thought about advice I had received from members of the education policy research community about not being overly critical. I thought about all the perspectives I had heard in the meetings and interviews and policy documents. I thought so much I froze.

I began data collection and analysis with certain experiences, opinions and ideas. I encountered others during the process. Sometimes, I stood *with* these ideas; sometimes I stood *against* them. Yet, throughout the process, I found myself striving to see other sides and understand rationales I previously had not fully explored. As I wrote, I came to rely heavily on the act of moving from stance to stance to achieve a feeling that I was doing justice to each perspective, including my own as a literacy researcher. The constructions and interpretations in the following chapters are a result of these multifarious stances.

Chapter VI: Discussion, Recommendations, Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to determine the meanings housed in the state-level language, actions and objects of Florida's adolescent literacy reform. I was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of the beliefs about adolescent literacy conveyed by state-level discourse communities as these meanings are manifested across the primary and secondary speech genres of Florida's adolescent literacy reform?
2. How can Florida's adolescent literacy reform policy be reconceptualized using complexity thinking
 - (a) as a model for policy design?
 - (b) as a goal for adolescent literacy teaching and learning?

In this chapter, I describe the overall results of Research Question 1 with a specific emphasis on the dual goals of Research Question 2. Then I provide a set of recommendations for the design of Florida's adolescent literacy reform as this state moves into the second decade of the 21st century.

Adolescent Literacy: Multiple Versions of Reading

The language analyzed in this research showed that Florida's adolescent literacy reform places a priority on standardized reading scores. While state policy actors acknowledge ongoing reading development throughout the adolescent years, adolescent literacy is heavily weighted toward receptive, product-related interactions with academic

texts with the aim of improving standardized test scores. “Literacy” and “reading” are used interchangeably. Yet, as this analysis showed, these terms are not synonymous.

Four distinct varieties of literacy emerged from the analysis of Florida’s policy: (a) FCAT Reading, (b) Standards Reading, (c) Academic Reading and (c) Academic Literacy. Figure 8 shows a conceptual display of these varieties as they are related proportionally. Adolescent Literacy, although not represented in this study is included as a reference point. The dotted line encompassing Adolescent Literacy indicates the openness of this approach to students’ out of school literacies and identities. Because this version makes room for students’ out of school lives, it naturally allows for students to share authority with the text, indicated by the arrow on the right. The largest shaded box, Academic Literacy, represents the full range of the literacy skills cited in the *Next Generation Sunshine State Standards*; a version that appears not as broad or deep as Adolescent Literacy, but does include ample opportunities for students to share authority with text nonetheless. Academic Reading is the next in size. This is a restricted view of literacy, in that it is comprised almost exclusively of reading skills; however there are some indicators of limited shared authority in this version. Academic Reading and Standards Reading overlap, but Standards Reading appears less amenable to the shared authority than does Academic Reading. The most restricted version, FCAT Reading, is comprised of approximately half of the reading-related benchmarks represented in the *Next Generation Sunshine State Standards*, and it is heavily dependent on the text as authority (selecting the “correct” responses is critical to students’ institutional success). This version and Academic Reading are discussed at length in the following paragraphs.

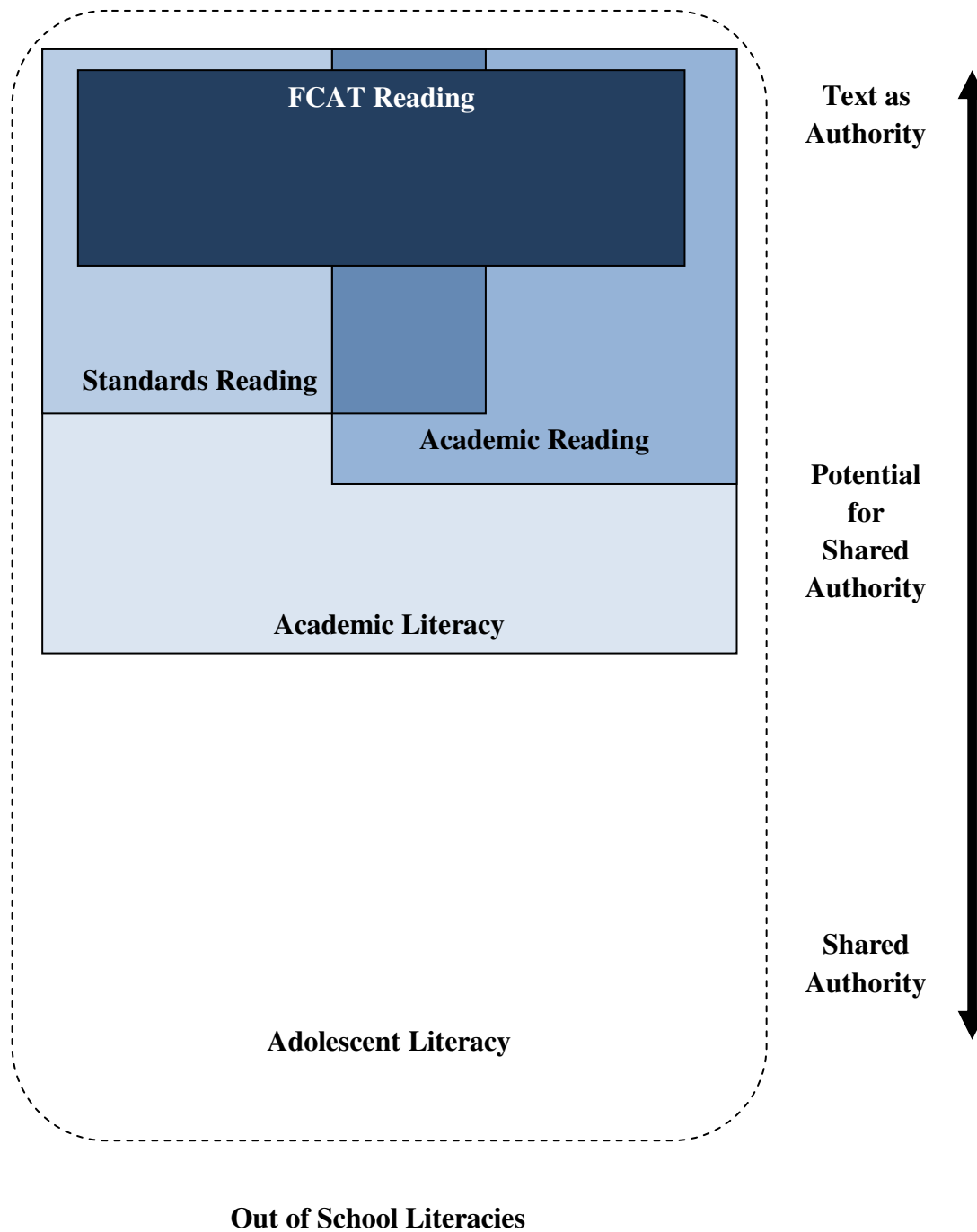


Figure 8. Four versions of literacy with authority continuum.

Two forms of reading as literacy were highly valued by the state: FCAT Reading and Academic Reading. The first of the two most heavily weighted versions, FCAT Reading, was concerned with a portion of the reading competencies the state had identified as important for all students to master. These were product-related aspects of reading and thinking about academic texts, or the types of knowledge easily measured by standardized summative tests. The annual score on the FCAT represented the extent to which a given student had advanced his or her ability to use reading as a tool for learning increasingly difficult content. This perspective was most likely due to the strongly-held and naturalized beliefs about standardized summative assessment as a macro-level measure of micro-level activity, combined with the prevailing emphasis on quantifying the acts of teaching and learning and the propensity for using these numbers to make national and international comparisons. Yet, as this research reveals, these test scores were not representative of the full range of literate abilities Florida had determined it wanted students to have.

FCAT Reading was highly dependent on the text as authority, as it literally served as a determinant of a given student's daily class schedule. And, eventually, students needed to exceed a designated cut-score in order to earn a diploma. Particularly for struggling students, this form of reading was relatively more impactful than for students who did not struggle. A low score brought focused intervention aimed at bolstering reading skills, but along with this benefit, this score potentially removed students from courses they might find motivating. It also served as a warning that the student might not earn a diploma. While the results of FCAT Reading provided the state with a snapshot view of students' growth from previous years, the high stakes nature of this summative

test seemed not quite congruent with the state's stance that reading development was an ongoing process and was highly contingent on students' experiential knowledge.

While Academic Reading was not associated with a single annual score that led to modifications in course schedules or graduation, it was highly impactful to students nonetheless. Academic Reading was seen as the primary means of learning, effectively placing students who struggle in reading at a double-disadvantage. Students not only needed to achieve *more* than a year's worth of reading growth each year in order to catch up, but they also needed to "keep pace" with daily subject-area demands in all their classes (Torgesen, et al., 2007, p. 67). Moreover, this dual challenge was compounded by differences in texts across subject domains.

Thus, the Academic Reading message struggling students might hear was, "Catch up and keep up." This is no doubt a daunting request, for at least two reasons. First, Florida's content area teachers were still in the process of learning how to be "teachers of their texts." The state emphasized professional development to train content teachers to embed reading instruction into their courses, but as the data in this study showed, policy as a whole was far from meeting this goal (Several interview participants suggested part of the problem lay with preservice education). Moreover, the content area standards did not include Academic Reading as an aspect of the curriculum. Second, because Academic Reading drew heavily on prior knowledge of content in order for them to be successful in various disciplinary courses, students who did not have the lexical and conceptual background were effectively barred from learning. In essence, struggling students were being told to catch up and keep up even though many teachers and students did not

possess the tools to do so. The end result for many students was failure or early exit without a diploma.

Importantly, Academic Reading hinted at shared authority (for example, through the use of leveled texts, provisions for motivation and the inclusion of expressive skills in the way of discussion-oriented learning). However the emphasis on vicarious learning through a text-as-authority approach appeared to preclude opportunities for expressive and experiential learning. Yet, these opportunities are the very type found so effective by Behrman (2003), who documented students' literate engagement outside of the de-contextualized realm of the traditional text book as they worked to solve community-based problems.

In defense of the test-driven approach, many policy actors indicated the prominent role composite reading test scores had played in helping to pinpoint schools and districts suspected of providing ineffective instruction. The associated A+ Accountability Plan (1999) was credited with calling out low performing schools and districts that could not produce annual gains so they could be monitored and supported towards higher scores. Yet, an analytical view of Florida's test-driven approach to literacy must also call attention to the fact that many of the expressive and process-related skills valued as components of literacy are not amenable to standardized tests (Afflerbach, Ruetschlin, and Russell, 2007; Black & Wiliam, 1998). Eclipsed by the ubiquity of the state-level concern about standardized reading test scores, a comprehensive view of literacy was relegated to a limited portion of the overall results. A disconnect existed between the state's standards and the measure believed to be the indicator of quality teaching and learning. Thus, while the test had served the purpose of highlighting problem areas across

the state, it also carried an associated meaning for state-level policy actors: The literacy that mattered at the state level was that which was measured by standardized summative assessments (FCAT and NAEP).

Certainly, an emphasis on reading, understanding and thinking about academic texts is a valid emphasis, given the goal of educating students for post-secondary endeavors that require knowledge of the soft and hard sciences, mathematics, history and the language arts. This approach is effective in terms of students who are personally motivated and invested in meeting system expectations (Hinchman & Zalewski, 1996). However, for many students who do not fit within institutional expectations, the text-as-priority, text-as-authority perspective seemed unlikely to ignite a cognitive and/or attitudinal conversion (e.g., Franzak, 2008). Importantly, adolescents' agency was indeed a universally-held belief that emerged from the inductive analysis; however this subset of the findings did not emerge as a priority in the deductive analysis of Florida's approach to adolescent literacy. Instead, student agency and identity were generally viewed as problems to be overcome rather than as strengths to be integrated into micro-level activities.

The ability to read and analyze content-area texts is arguably a critical component of the literacy definition. The (at least basic) mastery of canonical forms of knowledge accessed by way of traditional texts is arguably an important component of the identity of any 21st century citizen. And, the necessity of collecting macro-level data and monitoring the performance of schools and districts is undoubtedly a responsible way to ensure public trust. *Yet, this alternate perspective suggests that Florida's state-level approach simply distilled adolescent literacy to reading, and reading to test scores.* Viewed from

this angle, several concerns come to light that should be recognized as sources for unintended policy consequences, especially in relation to students who do not meet institutional expectations. Like Lorenz's innocuous flutter of butterfly wings that serve as a catalyst for storm systems half a globe away (see Gleick, 1987), this narrowed, test-driven approach to literacy might well be a contributing factor to the adolescent literacy crisis mentioned in the opening chapter of this report (Allington & Dennis, 2007; Salinger, 2007). In particular, Florida's approach seemed at odds with stated concerns for meeting the diverse needs of students who do not fit within institutional expectations. As well, it appeared to be an over-reach of Systems-Based policy solutions resulting in a source of possible confusion and/or tension at the micro-level.

Marginalized Readers: Distanced from the Institution

In this study, policy actors portrayed adolescents as possessing certain institutionally imposed profiles in relation to their academic and agentive fit with institutional structures. Each student appeared to possess four characteristics that positioned him or her in relation to the institutional expectations for grades 6-12. Figure 9 depicts a possible configuration of the four struggling student profiles and their distance from institutional expectations. This figure shows the institutional expectations as a solid line, which represents the definitive nature of the cut-score on a high stakes exam, whether an FCAT or End of Course Exam. Within this box is student-type "a." This adolescent is generally academically equipped, engaged and is meeting expectations such as minimum test score expectations and classroom-based criteria. According to some participants in this study, she or he may or may not be prepared for college or workplace success due to the disconnect between K-12 and post-secondary expectations.

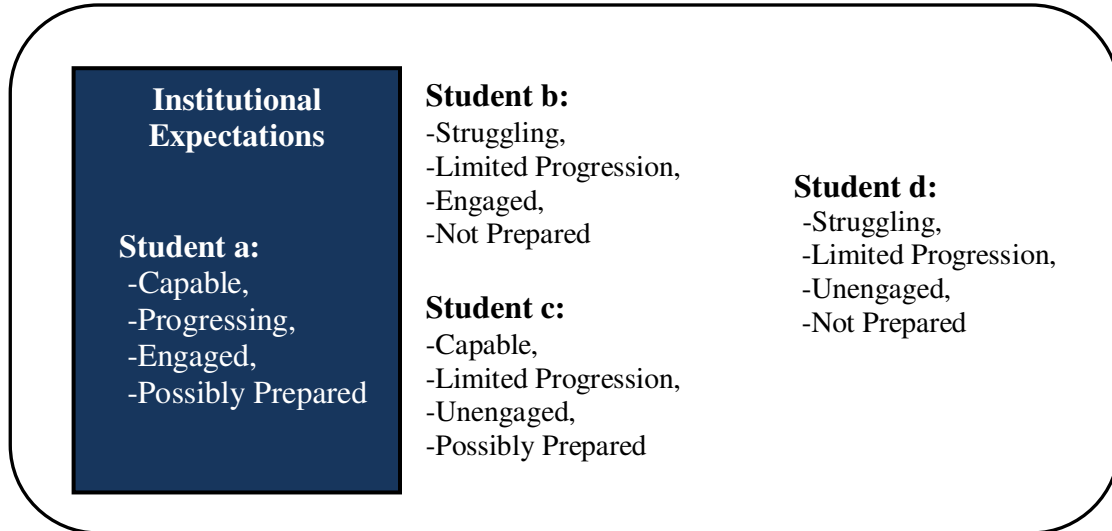


Figure 9. Policy actors' perceptions about students' academic and agentic profiles in relation to institutional expectations.

Student “b,” while struggling academically, is generally engaged in trying to meld to institutional expectations (e.g. attending well to interventions in preparation for the FCAT, completing homework and classroom assignments). Student “c” is academically equipped, but is generally uninterested in institutional versions of literacy. This student may be an avid reader and/or composer in her or his out of school life, but for various reasons, she or he is not cognitively engaged with school-related tasks. (This type of student invokes the story of Albert Einstein’s limited success in school, or as cited by a legislator, the unconventional student who works for Google at home in their pajamas). Again, however, this student may or may not be prepared for post-secondary success. Conceivably, student “d” exhibits a quadruple set of deficits that places her or him so far from policy goals, values, interests and expectations, she or he is unlikely to identify with

the institution at all. These students' agentive goals, values, interests and abilities would most likely be at odds with policies aimed at academic reading intervention in order to strengthen their test scores.

Obviously, most students do not fall into clearly-defined categories such as the descriptions above. Instead, it is more likely that at a given point in time (and across a given school day), all students might be less or more proficient and less or more engaged with a given school-related task. However, the data in this study pointed to these *general* characterizations of the policy targets and their fit in relation to institutional structures.

When the student profiles above are merged with the high stakes notion of FCAT Reading or the "catch up and keep up" view of Academic Reading for adolescents, a possible explanation arises with respect to Florida's drop-out rates and limited growth on FCAT reading scores. These views assume that the student, by virtue of his or her age and grade must "come to" a particular level of text. (For instance, a given student would be expected to read and understand Chaucer, as mentioned by a legislative participant, or to spend time practicing with irrelevant pseudo-text such as the randomly selected, de-contextualized passages often used to prepare students for high stakes tests). For students who have the academic aptitude and attitudinal dispositions for scholarly endeavors, this seems a reasonable, albeit narrow request, given the range of literate practices offered by the *Next Generation Sunshine State Standards*. However, for students "b", "c" and "d," a gap, sometimes quite large, exists between institutional expectations and the abilities and identities these students bring to the classroom. With this approach, the message students "a" "b" and "c" might hear is: *Your abilities are not sufficient and you need to push your*

identity and values aside and adopt these institutional values as determined by the state (e.g., Wickens & Sandlin, 2007).

On the other hand, a different view of literacy would be one that is more amenable to perhaps all student profiles, but especially those who may be at odds with institutional expectations. This approach would position students as both consumers and producers of text, allowing for more of a balance in literate authority. Students would not only be required to read, but *do* something with what they read: through discussion, presentation or defense, either in writing or orally; thus taking them beyond the one-sided institutional authority of the text/teacher/test and into the realm of student-driven analysis, synthesis, and critique. This is the kind of thinking that is highly situational and personal. Marginalized students would be invited to bring in their own beliefs and feelings about given texts (Mahar, 2001; Moje, et al., 2004).

Academic texts would be relevant in terms of students' academic abilities as well as their individual identity (Moore & Cunningham, 2006). Student motivation and interest would take prominence in the selection of academic texts buttressed by the research-based principle that motivation plays a role in compensating for and serving as an impetus for both reading accuracy, comprehension and amount of text read (Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 2006; Stanovich, cited in McCormick, 2007). Students needing word-level practice would work not in isolation or as continual recipients of authoritatively delivered direct instruction, but in socially-situated, dialogic learning opportunities where authority (and thus cognition) was shared amongst all participants (Langer, 2004). *Here, the message students "b," "c" and "d" might hear is: Your*

identity, values and abilities are important; let's work together to connect them to institutional values and develop them through engaging in literacy practices.

Certainly, the reader might argue that the best teachers make just these types of provisions for their students. Another might say that elements of Florida's policy encourage this kind of teaching (for instance, consider the requirement to use leveled texts and high-interest classroom libraries). Both arguments are justified. Yet, a reminder is in order.

The data from this study indicated that policy actors universally valued summative assessment scores first and foremost as an indicator of quality teaching and learning at the micro-level. They believed that excellent instruction would yield excellent test scores and that the mere presence of the test would generate better teaching. Yet, this belief appears to be duplicitous: If excellent teachers are those who make the provisions for their students as described in the paragraphs above, *these would be teachers who were enacting a belief in a broader and deeper version of literacy than FCAT Reading and Academic Reading for Adolescents*. Thus, excellent instruction as might be delivered by a high quality teacher was not in agreement with the version of literacy it so highly valued.

Continuing with this logic, districts, schools and teachers might hear this message as it relates to students "b" "c" and "d:" *Provide high quality intervention instruction to the extent that it is revealed on summative high stakes tests*. This message, supported by the authoritative mandate of the accountability plan, appeared to indicate that shared teacher-text-student authority across the activities, types and uses of resources and classroom interactions were luxuries that might only be designated for those students who fit within institutional expectations and were expected to exceed the minimum cut score

on the test. In other words, the “literacy habitat” (Guthrie, cited in Torgesen, et al., 2007, p. 120) for struggling readers would by necessity need to be aimed specifically at the more narrow, receptive version of literacy measured by high stakes tests in order to prepare these students for the next test administration; an event that had significant impact on students as well as the reputations of teachers, principals and districts.

Solutions and Problems

Aside from Florida’s beliefs about literacy and adolescents’ profiles, several policy solutions along with a fewer number of problems surfaced. Based on the orientation of the specific quotes, these results were mostly characterized as solutions to the problem of low test scores, the diversity of academic needs, the fact that students exercised their individual agency, and were often not prepared for college and/or the workplace.

Systems, people, resources. A deeper analysis of the solutions offered by policy actors revealed that they placed their strongest priority on Systems-Based Solutions in the form of summative standardized tests, and their role within the larger accountability system. A secondary solution type was what I called People-Based Solutions, and these were valued primarily in the Tier I data by those participants and documents that were linked specifically to secondary literacy policy. People-Based Solutions were manifested in discussions about weaving formative assessment results into instruction, professional development by way of reading or literacy coaching or the instructional leadership offered by principals who established and actively maintained a literacy-focused school environment. A third approach was through the provision of certain tangible resources, or Resource-Based Solutions. In this study, I considered these to be primarily the allocations

designated for instructional reading materials and digital hardware intended for student use. Importantly, Morrison (2008) states that resources are only valuable to the extent that they are used by people. In this respect, Resource-Based Solutions are closely tied to People-Based Solutions.

Resistance. The specific problems valued by state-level policy actors resulted in an instructive conceptual arrangement. A fundamental resistance occurred in addition to the distance between students “b,” “c” and “d” and institutional problems (or goals). As depicted in the box on the right side of Figure 10, students brought a vast range of academic abilities to the classroom. Policy actors revealed their belief that meeting these diverse needs was indeed a challenge, especially as it related to improving test scores. Secondly, students brought their entire selves to school, including their values, beliefs and feelings about literacy and school in general. This notion is confirmed by Moore & Cunningham (2006) who argue that an adolescent’s agency both permeates and transcends literacy learning. Yet, for various reasons, policy actors believed that many students’ identities are not in sync with institutional expectations (represented in the box on the left). For marginalized students, a fundamental push-back, or resistance appeared to occur between institutional values, goals, interests and abilities on the one hand, and students’ values, goals, interests and abilities on the other. The opposing arrows provide a visual depiction of this dynamic.

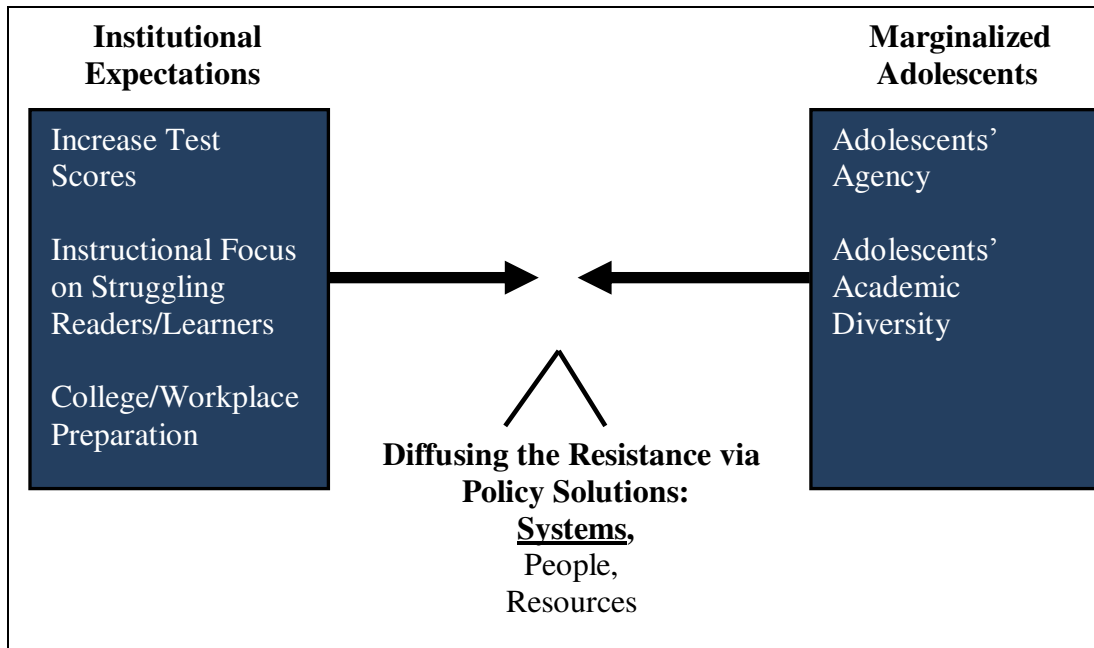


Figure 10. Perceptions about the resistance between institutional and marginalized adolescents.

The joint emphasis on increasing test scores of struggling readers/learners and preparing them for college and the workplace conflicted with the variation in adolescents' agency and academic abilities. Student agency, especially in its most extreme form (the choice to drop out), appeared to be a counter-weight to the hegemonic pressure of the institution. Like the competing voices of Bakhtin's heteroglossia (1986), policy actors were keenly aware of students' agency, but seemed torn between honoring students' individuality and setting standards that required a certain uniformity in order to be deemed successful by the institution. Additionally, this notion of resistance confirms the aforementioned conflict in state policy actors' value of both academic reading for adolescents (as a way

to achieve higher test scores), and one more compatible with adolescent literacy (as a way to honor students' identity and agency in literacy instruction).

In general, there were two dynamics at play with regard to the problems and goals identified in the values, beliefs and feelings of Florida's adolescent literacy policy. One was *distance*, which was represented by the gap between institutional expectations and adolescents' various profiles. The second dynamic, resistance, was created by differences in values, goals, interests and abilities as they were represented across the system. While the data did not delineate an interaction between certain student profiles and the notion of resistance, it was clear that what some adolescents could or would do on one hand, and what the institution wanted on the other hand was frequently a source of conflict. The bottom of the figure shows that the primary method for mitigating this resistance was a System-Based solution: the mandated use of standardized tests embedded in an accountability mandate. People-Based and Resource-Based solutions were valued as well, however they were frequently offered as methods for increasing the scores on reading assessments. (One example of these would be the use of the FAIR assessment to predict FCAT scores).

The Complexity Link

No matter the organization or level of analysis, complex social systems are comprised of certain behavior-defining features. They are open, meaning they influence and are influenced by the ecological context in which they are situated. The boundaries that surround them are ambiguous at best. Complex social systems are simultaneously nested within broader systems, such as community, cultural and societal systems. They are comprised of members who are individually and collectively diverse, interdependent

and who exhibit unpredictable behavior. These qualities keep members' actions and the activities within the system in an ongoing state of disequilibrium. Rather than responding to top-down or centralized control, complex systems are bottom-up emergent, meaning they self-organize, and learn spontaneously and naturally at a locally situated, micro-level. This combination of self-organization and spontaneity results in an environmental state of enabling constraints, or as Stevens (2006) puts it, a paradoxical condition of random coherence. Davis and Sumara explain that enabling constraints provide "sufficient coherence to orient agents' actions and sufficient randomness to allow for flexible and varied response" (2006, p.148). Within the constraints and unpredictability, and by way of positive, relevant feedback and localized, short range relationships, system members make minor but meaningful adjustments toward emergence. Complex systems thrive on this balance of randomness and organization.

In this study, I identified the presence of many features of complex systems. In particular, People-Based policy solutions aimed at the micro-level embodied and enabled the principles of complexity thinking most closely. This is because these solutions made room for short-range relationships, collaboration, communication, adjustments for unpredictability, frequent positive feedback, and room for process-driven analyses of teaching and learning. Each of these characteristics facilitate bottom-up emergence. Consider the state's investment in providing reading coaches for job-embedded professional development. Funded appropriately and implemented effectively, this approach to building instructional capacity relies on localized, short range relationships and relevant feedback in the interest of bottom-up emergence. A teacher-to-student or student-to student example would be the philosophy of classroom-based formative

assessment; a highly situated interplay of assessment, instruction, positive feedback and collaboration toward mutually shared goals (Torgesen & Miller, 2009).

Given policy actors' version of literacy that appeared to deemphasize the individuality of marginalized students, along with the distance and resistance that characterized the relationship between many students and the institution, the potential for People-Based Solutions to mitigate these tensions seems especially valuable. For instance, a potential drop-out might choose to remain (even engage) in school if someone close to the situation were able to bridge the interstices between her or his agency/identity and the institutional expectations. Rather than seeing this student's deficits through an institutional lens, a teacher or reading coach, using the lens of complexity, would acknowledge and leverage the cognitive and agentive diversity the student brings to the system by way of communication, relevant and positive feedback, minor but meaningful adjustments for unpredictability and openness to collaboration. Morrison (2006) states, "Complexity theory stresses people's connections with others and with both cognitive and affective aspects of the individual persona" (p. 25). A legislator put it this way: "I think the teacher-student relationship is very important, it's one that has to develop, so you know, the teacher has to be seen as someone...that is *trustworthy*, that is *open*..." (Interview, 6/2/2010).

Complexity thinking provides a way to leverage and work with, rather than against the complexities inherent in public education. This research suggests that it is *people* in close proximity to students who are uniquely positioned to mitigate both the distance and the resistance between institutional expectations and marginalized adolescents. Policies that place people-oriented solutions at the forefront enable these

individuals to adjust for and *leverage* unpredictability and academic diversity, to build short-range collaborative relationships, provide critically important positive feedback, focus on process above product, and integrate cross-disciplinary concepts. Like the chemical transfer that occurs across the interstices between brain synapses, people solutions provide the context-specific impetus for bottom-up emergence, thus allowing individuals and groups to flourish, learn, and generate system-wide synergy. Yet, policy cannot just assume that people (teachers) will fill in the blanks at the local level, because the bureaucratic policy press is indeed real (e.g., Hinchman & Zalewski, 1996; Kroeger, 2008). Policy constraints are only helpful to the extent that they enable the elements of complexity to occur at both the micro and the macro system levels. In complexity terms, this is the essence of enabling constraints: those conditions that enable the system to flourish, not merely survive.

The Policy Instrument Link

Florida's accountability system is built upon a tightly woven combination of policy instruments. Policy instruments (or tools) are mechanisms embedded in policy designs that prompt specific behaviors by implementing agents who then convert government goals into action. In other words, policy instruments are a conduit through which policy is transposed into practice. They consist of mandates, incentives (under which both rewards and sanctions are classified), system changes, capacity building initiatives, symbolic or hortatory language and learning tools (Schneider & Ingram, 1990; 1997; McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). The use of a given policy tool relies on particular assumptions about the implementing agents and policy recipients and they carry

important messages and consequences for agents and targets. In other words, policy tools “define the...experiences” of teachers and students (Schneider & Ingram, 1997, p. 96).

Of all the policy instruments, *mandates* depend most heavily on coercion (Schneider & Ingram, 1997; see also Heise, 2006; Manna, 2006). Mandates carry the assumption that the required actions are ethical and “good” for society. Yet, they are antithetical to complexity thinking because they are designed specifically to create uniformity and reduce variation. Policymakers have a tendency to use mandates because they are clear, direct, and are typically cost-effective; yet Schneider and Ingram (1997) note that this type of authority tool is often ineffective. Mandates signify that “those at the top of a hierarchy have more information, or are wiser, than those below them” (Schneider & Ingram, 1997, p. 93). They also generate “adversarial relations” across the policy-recipient spectrum (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987, p. 141).

Incentives rely on coercion as well, although not to the extent as found in mandates. They assume that teachers, schools and districts have the capacity to perform but must be prompted to act in certain ways. Thus, they provide either rewards or sanctions, under the supposition that the promise of money or punishment will encourage better performance (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987; Schneider & Ingram 1990; 1997).). *Capacity-building instruments* assume that investments must be put forth to build the “knowledge, skill and competence” of agents primarily because they do not possess these qualities in particular areas (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987. p. 141). It is often difficult to justify investments in these initiatives because the benefits of capacity building efforts are often intangible and delayed. *System-changing instruments* operate under the assumption that the existing organization is not producing the desired results. Thus, the current

authority structure must be fundamentally changed in order to achieve the desired outcomes. *Hortatory or symbolic tools* are aimed at encouraging certain values by way of rhetorically persuasive symbols and language. Stigmatizing is but one of several hortatory methods used for this purpose (Schneider & Ingram, 1997). Finally, *learning tools* are mechanisms used when policy actors are not sure how to solve a given problem (Schneider & Ingram, 1990). They rely on local agents to engage in questioning, reflection, research and collaboration, and in general, these policy instruments honor the formative experiences and choices of micro-level system members (Schneider & Ingram, 1997). In pedagogical terms, learning tools are based on the concepts of inquiry and discovery; and because they are aimed at bottom-up emergence, they are highly situational.

In terms of Florida's adolescent literacy reform, one need not look farther than the test-driven accountability system to see a multi-faceted example of the aforementioned policy instruments. The requirement to administer the FCAT or End of Course Exams and use these assessments as high stakes tools for determining promotion and graduation is mandated by the state. This mandate prompts a degree of uniformity, intended to reduce the variation in students' performance (as students are required to earn a passing mark based on a state-designated cut-score). Financial incentives are provided to schools that produce score gains; capacity-building and to some extent, learning tools are represented in the form of teacher professional development through the provision of reading coaches who work with teachers to analyze data in the interest of increasing test scores. Through a dual application of the hortatory language of equity and the associated stigma assigned to students, teachers, schools and districts that produced low scores, the

requirement that all students reach a certain score threshold is cemented within the value structure that forms the basis of the 14th Amendment of the U. S. Constitution. Notice that woven throughout this entire description is the ubiquitous presence of summative tests (and the associated FCAT Reading version of literacy).

In complexity terms, mandates might be equated most closely with the idea of “system constraint.” The mandate to administer and answer publicly to standardized test scores was a prescribed requirement the state had placed on the local level in order to encourage a focused effort toward literacy goals. With this constraint, the state fully expected the localities and their students to work within the realm of this constraint in order to raise test scores. Yet, McDonnell & Elmore (1987) explain that mandates disincentivise agents from exceeding the designated requirements. Again, this prompts the question: How might the heavy focus on standardized test scores at the state level as found in its language, actions and objects, coupled with the miss-match between what the test scores represent and its broader requirements for literacy learning perpetuate the distance and resistance across the policy-policy target configuration in Figure 10?

Secondly, the test-driven accountability framework was highly contingent upon students’ ability to read and understand content-area text; and this is arguably an important goal for public education. Yet, the data in this study show that policy actors believed students are very diverse in their cognitive and attitudinal composition. This means that certain students, depending on their profile, or distance from institutional expectations, are at a disadvantage in attaining the goal of reading and understanding content-area texts. As noted more generally by McDonnell and Elmore (1987), Schneider and Ingram (1997) and more specifically by literacy scholars, mandated high stakes

testing is ineffective in prompting increased reading proficiency (Allington & Dennis, 2007). High stakes assessments are related to increased drop-out rates, and based on the results of this study as well as other sources, Florida carries a high dropout rate (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009; Allington & Dennis, 2007; Lawton Chiles Foundation, 2009) According to the Center for Labor Market Studies (2009), Florida's dropout rate is the second highest of the 12 largest states in the nation, with one in five students leaving school before graduation.

Learning tools appear to show promise for state education policy designs because they rely on agents and policy recipients to generate their own plans for solving problems (Schneider & Ingram, 1997); a notion quite amenable to bottom-up emergence. They enable the flexibility to use feedback, collaboration and reflection to make localized adjustments toward individual and system-wide emergence. Currently, Florida's policy tools are skewed toward authority instruments with a tacit assumption that teachers and students will naturally engage in generative, bottom-up learning tools. However, tacit policy assumptions will most likely not be realized, especially in a coercive climate (Schneider & Ingram, 1997). Honig states that rather than the simplistic notion of finding "what works," successful education policy is actually a much more nuanced matter of finding "what works for whom, where, when and why" (2009, p. 333). Learning tools in particular seem to be suited for Florida's highly-situated classroom contexts and the individuals within them.

Recommendations

Florida should be commended for looking for a reliable way to specify and alleviate voids in the quality of teaching and learning across the state, especially as it

relates to adolescents' reading. The data show Florida is moving toward a definition of adolescent reading that is separate and distinct from the nature of early literacy. From a complexity thinking perspective, the state is enacting several important policy foci that, with time for development should make a difference in the quality of literacy teaching and learning at the secondary level. These efforts should continue to receive priority in the way of funding, guidance and technical assistance. In particular, the state should continue:

- refining the difference between early literacy and middle literacy at the secondary level. This work has begun, but refinement is still needed, especially for students who struggle with “word-level” skills. Although no documents state it directly, some imply the need for instruction in phonemes and phonics for these students (e.g., K-12 Reading Plan, Reading Endorsement Competencies), rather than morphological word study, which is more appropriate for the vast majority of readers who struggle with decoding (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton & Johnston, 2008).
- adding expressive forms of literacy (e.g., writing, oral language and discussion-based instruction) as well as student motivation and engagement to statutes, rules, guidance documents and state-level professional development. This effort has begun and should continue until it is consistently found in all relevant policy language (Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 2006; Langer, 2004);
- encouraging the use of a wide range of leveled texts for instructional use and for classroom libraries (Allington, 2002b). This means either local- or state-level funding allocations, perhaps through the FEFP;

- discouraging blanket scheduling of reading intervention courses that remove struggling students from the classes that motivate them, as found in the 2006 Secondary School Redesign Act. This is an especially harmful System-Based practice that may benefit school structures but causes unintended consequences for students (Interview, 5/5/2010). The state should look for models to assist schools and districts with scheduling.
- encouraging bottom-up emergence in the form of embedded professional development (e.g., reading coaches) and instructional leadership (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Rissman, Miller & Torgesen, 2009);
- studying schools that “Beat the Odds” (Langer, 2004). This is bottom-up emergence and system-feedback at its best, because the macro-level is “learning” from the emergence taking place at the micro-level (Davis & Sumara, 2006). Caution is in order, however: The state should realize that context-specific emergence is not necessarily amenable to being “scaled up” to other situations and locations. Each site needs to be given the freedom and support to work out its own solutions.
- asking what “teacher quality” means (beyond test scores) and collaborating with teachers and teacher educators to determine how teaching quality might be measured and supported. Further, the state should continue to encourage districts to place strong teachers with struggling students (Tertiary Interview, 7/9/2010).

Next, I call attention to Florida’s incongruent literacy messages as well as the dynamics of distance and resistance, all the result of a heavy emphasis on standardized summative tests, and which may be producing unintended consequences for marginalized

learners. In the following section, I provide recommendations for the macro- and micro-levels of Florida's adolescent literacy policy reform.

Macro-level recommendations. The goal of this research is not to suggest the state abandon its use of standardized tests. This idea would be implausible for several reasons, the least of which is due to the test-driven federal ecology in which all states are situated (Heise, 2006; Manna, 2006; Weaver-Hightower, 2008). Also, at the present, summative assessment data provides a rudimentary measure of unengaged and/or struggling adolescents' abilities to perform under contrived reading situations, which can then be used to draw conclusions about a given schools' efforts toward that end. And, undoubtedly, the ability to read and understand content-area texts in a testing condition is indicative of the existence of certain skills that indicate transfer from more authentic reading skills.

Instead, the overall recommendation stemming from this research is that *state-level policy actors should recognize and act upon the overemphasis the state has placed on summative assessment as a measure of quality teaching and learning*. Within this overarching advice, two shifts need to occur which will move Florida's adolescent literacy policy toward less constraining and more enabling conditions necessary for bottom-up emergence: (1) Florida should move away from a test-driven definition of literacy and toward one that is compatible with the curriculum standards it has designated for adolescents; and (2) Florida should move toward capacity-building and learning instruments and lessen the emphasis on authority tools. In general this means more emphasis on People-Based/Learning Tool solutions and a reduction in emphasis on

Systems-Based/Central Authority solutions. In order to facilitate each of these moves, the following suggestions should be considered:

1. Literacy-specific policy recommendations: The state should consider that by advocating multiple versions of literacy, it is likely sending mixed messages to agents and policy recipients.

- A state-level emphasis on expressive forms of literacy such as those delineated in the *Next Generation Sunshine State Standards* would promote better gains (Langer, 2004; Mahar, 2001) because this more comprehensive approach to literacy makes room for students' identity, agency, and self-direction (Behrman, 2003; Ivey, 1999; Moore & Cunningham, 2006).
- The state should embed literacy standards within content standards (Southern Regional Education Board, 2009a) to help facilitate the idea that literacy practices are a cross-curricular endeavor.
- Literacy-related terms should be used with fidelity to their established meaning. If policy documents advocate "FCAT Reading" or "Academic Reading for Adolescents" and not "Adolescent Literacy," the latter term should not be used as a moniker for policy initiatives.
- The state should develop and enact other indicators of quality teaching and learning. For example, site visits, where educator teams evaluate the daily activities of a given school across several days (Dorn, 2008), or the use of performance assessment portfolios which reveal a more comprehensive picture of a student's abilities (McCormick, 2007). These could be evaluated by teacher teams from other districts.

2. Policy-design recommendations. Florida should make room in policy designs for capacity-building and learning tools that depend on and honor local knowledge (Preskill & Catsambus, 2006; Schneider & Ingram, 1990; Stevens, 2006), and recognize that these mechanisms enable the enactment of highly situated problem-solving relevant to given localities. In particular, the state should promote, through funding, guidance and technical support, the use of *learning tools*. These mechanisms are highly appropriate policy tools for enabling emergence because they rely on local problem solving instead of centralized control (Schneider & Ingram, 1997). This shift would address the gap in knowledge across the policy-practice configuration (Cohen, Moffit, and Goldin, 2007). Additionally, it would “transform interpretation of a policy from an exercise in obedience and/or resistance to one that is more participatory and holds potential for generating more relevant and inventive teaching” (Stevens, 2006, p. 307). In particular, these changes will involve a greater emphasis on *formative assessment* and *short-range relationships* as well as a *redistribution of traditional uses of time*.

- Florida policy actors should recognize the potential of the principles of classroom formative assessment for enabling bottom-up emergence. Classroom based formative assessment is people-dependent, process-based and tightly woven throughout instruction and short-range relationships, with an emphasis on positive feedback, collaboration, student engagement, and mutual learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Langer, 2004; Torgesen & Miller, 2009). (For example, collaborative development of rubrics, and peer/teacher evaluation with these class-developed rubrics). Assessment of this nature provides much more useful information to the local level than that offered by annual summative tests. The

state should shift its fiscal investment of public funds to providing resources and capacity building towards this end, rather than in authoritative summative measures that do not inform teaching and learning at the local level (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Additionally, the state should recognize its propensity to over-reach into the classroom with its extensive data collection and data warehousing system (Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009). Frequent requirements to administer externally-derived benchmark assessment tools aimed at predicting students' performance on the FCAT can "preclude support for effective classroom-based assessment" (Torgesen & Miller, 2009, p. 62).

- Because struggling adolescent readers often face the daunting challenge of making more than a year's worth of progress in reading while simultaneously staying caught up with subject area requirements, Florida policy actors should increase efforts to help districts support struggling readers beyond FCAT Reading. This means helping students of all ages build the content knowledge that is so critical for success in academic reading. Here, policy support should be provided to help teachers bring students' out of school literacies into the classroom (Faulkner, 2005; Langer, 2004; Moje, et al., 2004) and bridge curriculum and instruction to situated and relevant learning opportunities (Behrman, 2003).
- People, at the local level, through short-range relationships with students, can make the delicate adjustments necessary for assisting marginalized students with literacy practices. Enabling these relationships through temporal and conceptual reconfigurations of the school day (e.g., creative scheduling and cross-disciplinary

teaching teams and thematic units) should be supported by the state's provision of research-based approaches or models from other states.

- Legislation and regulation cannot continue adding to micro-level requirements without taking others away. Time must be preserved for instructional staff to engage in collaboration, reflection and adjustment (e.g., professional learning communities). The state should provide research and guidance to districts toward breaking traditional conceptions of school scheduling in order to facilitate collaborative decision making and integrated learning opportunities for students.
- State policy actors should encourage university-school partnerships to leverage the literacy-specific knowledge of teacher educators and literacy experts.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is underpinned by the knowledge and influence inequities built into the policy-practice relationship. In many ways, it offers distinct contributions that overlap the boundaries of theory, policy and practice. This research was an external evaluation/analysis conducted from an organizational perspective, meaning I examined the policy in terms of the organization's overall purpose of improving the teaching and learning in Florida's secondary classrooms. A major benefit of this study is that it bends the light of accountability back toward the state level structures from whence literacy policy comes (Stevens, 2006).

As it currently exists, this study's contribution to theory, practice and policy is perhaps critical in nature, in that it repositions the oft-missing voices and identities of students toward the forefront of teaching and learning policy design. However, with time and additional research activity, the findings of this study have the potential to shift to

more of a system-sanctioned conversation about how complexity thinking can enhance the policy-target relationship. As well, this study will add to our emerging understanding of how complexity thinking can be used to guide and interpret both policy and teaching practice (Stevens, 2008).

This study also has the potential to build bridges across the research community. Because it addresses the discrepancy in knowledge across education domains, it is an answer to the call for interdisciplinary partnerships that forge various perspectives to strengthen the community of ideas about adolescent literacy. Similarly, it is also a response to the need for research that links the micro and macro levels of policy implementation research.

Finally, this research is also important to the practice of policy and teaching. Both within and across state boundaries, the “first formulation of a solution will to some degree structure subsequent attempts” (Peters, 2007, p. 73), and the overall response to the adolescent literacy “crisis” will most likely remain for an extended period (Cohen-Vogel, & McLendon, 2009). For these reasons, it is imperative that early policy responses are carefully considered and studied for their underlying theories and messages (Stevens, 2006). A fine-grained analysis of policy messages also has the potential to avoid missing the opportunity to help students (International Reading Association, 2004), and this study provided a close reading of policy language, acts and objects to that end. Finally, by providing disciplinary insight and an alternative reading to state level policy, this study has the potential to strengthen system structures through a reconceptualization of the traditional top-down, Systems-Based hierarchy inherent in Florida’s state education organization

Conclusion

I opened this report with the statement that policy and practice are interdependent constructs: Policy influences practice and practice influences policy (McDonnell, 2009; Cohen, Mofit & Goldin, 2007; Coburn, 2001). This reciprocity is the same ecological interdependency found amongst members and groups in complex systems (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Weaver-Hightower, 2008). Yet for decades, educational researchers have documented a resistance between these two constructs, which results in limited effectiveness of public education policy (Cohen, Mofit & Goldin, 2007; McLaughlin, 1987; Valencia & Wixon, 2004). The results of this study indicate the root of the education policy-practice resistance may be more a matter of policy-target resistance. In this case, the policy targets are adolescents who do not fit within system-defined levels of success.

As for teachers, Florida policy actors should consider the possibility that they are sending mixed messages about what they value: test scores or fully literate students. Like the teacher in Hinchman and Zalewski's (1996) study, teachers are juggling conflicting demands that interfere with the enactment of complexity principles. The result obstructs the establishment of a productive community of learners. Policy actors' preoccupation with test scores and in raising the state's status across the nation is such that increased test scores are the primary message schools, teachers and students may be hearing. Policy designs that rely on mandates as a primary mechanism are ineffective (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). Along with its deficit based approach to targeting poor performing districts, schools and teachers, state level policy actors must consider the fact that they are, as members of the state education institution, co-participating in the marginalization

of certain students through its line in-the-sand definition of success. This approach deems a large portion of Florida's students as less than successful by virtue of the principles of central tendency (Allington & Dennis 2007).

Adolescent literacy is an emerging field in a climate of high stakes testing. This might be seen as unfortunate timing; or it could be seen as coming just in time. According to Schneider and Ingram (1997), authority tools are often used to bring outliers "into compliance (p. 96). Now that a testing system is in place and schools and teachers have a clear baseline from which to build, state policy actors should recognize that coercive approaches may well be constraining bottom-up emergence, especially as it relates to marginalized adolescents. Learning theory suggests it is time to move beyond a performance orientation based on external rewards and toward a mastery-orientation that encourages a genuine embrace of learning for the sake of learning (Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 2006; Jetton & Alexander, 2004). In the future, perhaps we will look back on this phase of public education as a transitional period of "grade-grubbing," as we progressed toward more authentic methods of measuring quality teaching and learning. Perhaps McLaughlin stated it best: "policy at best can enable outcomes but in the final analysis it cannot mandate what matters" (1987 p. 173).

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Appendices

Appendix A: Initial Interview Request

Project: Dissertation Research: Florida's Adolescent Literacy Policy (University of South Florida, IRB # 00000131)

Investigator: Diane C. Kroeger, Doctoral Candidate, University of South Florida

Date: March 30, 2010

Dear -----,

With the enactment of the Middle Grades Reform Act in 2004, along with agency initiatives both pre- and post-dating this legislation, the state of Florida has emerged as a national front-runner in addressing the literacy needs of secondary students. As a doctoral candidate in Reading/Language Arts, I am interested in current and future policy responses designed to impact the literacy development of Florida's adolescents.

The purpose of this letter is to request your participation in a university-approved dissertation study of Florida's state adolescent literacy policy. Specifically, I would like to know your thoughts about current literacy policy and possible future solutions for meeting secondary school literacy challenges. To help assemble a clear understanding of Florida's current adolescent literacy reform structure, I will be interviewing approximately 25 individuals from three sources of state leadership: (a) Executive, (b) Legislative and (c) Tertiary, or non-governmental organizations who work directly with government policy makers.

Should you decide to participate in this study, the interview will take approximately 30 minutes. Your identity will be held confidential. Other than the three categories above, no identifying information will be released. However, you will be given the option to have your name or position associated with your statements. The interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed. Transcripts will be sent to you for review, modification and confirmation before they will be used in the study. Also, in compliance with USF Institutional Review Board guidelines, you will be free to withdraw from the study at any time during or after the interview.

A benefit to participation in this study is the inclusion of your unique perspective in the analysis of and recommendations for Florida's approach to reform. Indeed, your ideas are crucial to the success of this research. I am hopeful that you will join me in this effort to understand and impact the design of Florida's literacy policy for the future adolescent students in our 67 counties.

I will contact you soon by email to determine your interest in participating. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Diane C. Kroeger, Doctoral Candidate
University of South Florida, College of Education
dkroeger@coedu.usf.edu
(813)-997-1920

Appendix B: Interview Request Email Follow-Up

Project: Dissertation Research: Florida's Adolescent Literacy Policy (University of South Florida, IRB # 00000131)

Investigator: Diane C. Kroeger, Doctoral Candidate, University of South Florida

Date: April 13, 2010

Dear -----,

Greetings. By now, you should have received a letter requesting your participation in my dissertation study of Florida's adolescent literacy policy (approved by the University of South Florida). I have attached the letter here for your immediate reference.

The purpose of my study is to clarify Florida's response to the literacy challenges at the secondary level of schooling and propose recommendations based on my study findings, existing theory and research. I am very interested in your thoughts and perceptions of current and future policy responses designed to impact the literacy development of Florida's adolescents.

Will you please respond to this email indicating your interest in participating in a confidential interview during the period of April 19 through July30, 2010?

Thank you for your service to Florida's educators and students.

Sincerely,

Diane C. Kroeger
Doctoral Candidate
College of Education,
University of South Florida
dkroeger@coedu.usf.edu
(813)-997-1920

Appendix C: Preferred Level of Participant Identification

Project: Dissertation Research: Florida’s Adolescent Literacy Policy (University of South Florida, IRB # 00000131)
Investigator: Diane C. Kroeger, Doctoral Candidate, University of South Florida
Date: _____

Level I: I hereby agree that my statements recorded today concerning Florida’s adolescent literacy policy may be associated with my name and/or position within my organization.

Signature _____ Date _____

Level II: Other than the category of _____,
I prefer that my statements recorded today are de-identified for this study of Florida’s adolescent literacy policy. Further, I prefer that my statements are held confidential in all aspects related to this study.

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Group/ID Code _____
 Name, if applicable _____
 Date _____
 Interview Mode _____

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of South Florida.

Our discussion will last approximately 30 minutes and your responses will be audio-recorded. Shortly, you will be given the opportunity to designate your preferred level of identification for the recorded statements you provide (i.e., whether or not you wish to have your comments held confidential). The audio recording will be transcribed within a month's time and sent to you for review, modification and confirmation. At this time, you will also have the opportunity to change your preference with regards to your level of identification. Please remember that because this interview is voluntary, you are free to withdraw from participation at any time.

I will be asking you nine questions that will help me assemble an understanding of the major ideas driving Florida's secondary school literacy policy. Also, I am interested in your thoughts and perceptions about future possibilities for strengthening secondary literacy reform.

First, I want to confirm your willingness to participate in this study. Would you like to proceed?

Next, I want to determine your wishes about the use of your identity in this study. (Present the "Preferred Level of Participant Identification" form, explain, and have the participant sign). Thank you.

Now we will begin. These questions focus on literacy teaching and learning at the secondary level. I use the terms secondary students and adolescents interchangeably.

1. According to many literacy researchers, professional and private organizations, we face major challenges in helping adolescents meet the demands of 21st century literacy. What do you believe are the possible causes to the challenges we face?
2. Policy typically provides supports and constraints (or tools) to guide teaching and learning at the local level. What supports and constraints are currently in place to help Florida meet the challenges of adolescents' literacy acquisition?

3. With what key supports and constraints (or tools) have you worked most directly in your role as an (Executive, Legislative, Nongovernmental policy actor) that strengthen Florida's adolescent literacy reform?
4. What key supports and constraints (or tools) are not in place that you believe would be helpful to the challenges Florida faces with regards to secondary school literacy reform?
5. What suggestions do you have for struggling secondary students to become more successful as literacy learners?
6. What suggestions do you have for Florida's secondary teachers to help them become more effective as they work with adolescents who are developing literate practices?
7. What suggestions do you have for Florida's secondary principals to strengthen literacy learning at their schools?
8. Can you suggest an individual whose input you believe would be helpful to this study?
9. Are there any upcoming open meetings related to education policy that you believe would be helpful for me to attend?

Thank you for your time and thoughts! You will receive a transcript of your statements in one month. Please review and return them as soon as possible.

Appendix E: Supplemental Tables and Figures

Group _____
Name, if applicable _____
Date _____
Interview Mode _____

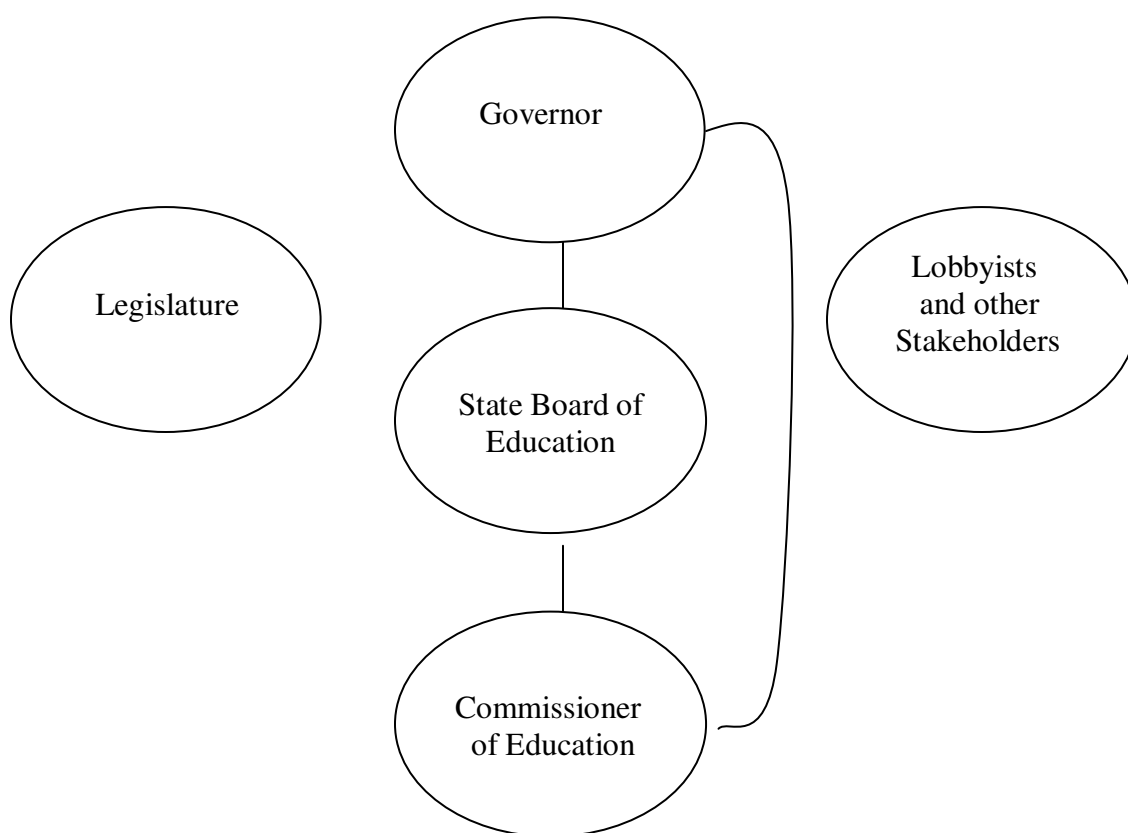


Figure 11. Interview discussion template for chain sampling.

Table 5

Interview Participant List

Group	Position and Name
Legislative (n = 11)	Members of the Senate Committee on Pre-K-12 Education
	Senator Nancy Detert
	Senator Ronda Storms
	Senator Stephen Wise
	Members of the House Pre-K-12 Committee
	Representative Dwight Bullard
	Representative Rachel Burgin
	Representative Marti Coley
	Representative John Legg
	Representative Anitere Flores
	Representative Erik Fresen
Representative Kelli Stargel	
	Member of the House Education Policy Council
	Representative Marlene O'Toole
Executive/ Agency (n = 3)	Florida Department of Education
	Frances Haithcock, K-12 Public Schools Chancellor
	Kevin Smith, High School Reading Specialist
	Laurie Lee, Middle School Reading Specialist
Tertiary (n = 6)	Individuals from three different organizations who requested anonymity
Total: 20	

Table 6

Meetings Analyzed

Group	Meeting and Dates
Legislative (n = 13)	Senate Committee on Pre-K-12 Education
	1-12-2010*
	2-16-2010
	3-2-2010
	3-10-2010*
	4-6-2010
	4-20-2010
	House Pre-K-12 Committee
	1-13-2010*
	1-20-2010
	2-17-2010
	3-3-2010
	3-10-2010*
	3-17-2010
3-25-2010*	
Executive/Agency (n = 2)	Florida Board of Education
	3-26-2010*
	5-18-2010*
Total: 15	

* *Attended these meetings in person.*

Table 7

Documents Analyzed

Source	Document
Center on Instruction	<i>Adolescent Literacy Walk Through for Principals</i> <i>Academic Literacy Instruction for Adolescents</i> <i>Assessments to Guide Adolescent Literacy Instruction</i> <i>Effective Instruction for Adolescent Struggling Readers</i>
Senate Committee on Education Pre-K-12	<i>Senate Interim Report 2010-111: Review of for Reading Intervention in Middle and High Schools</i>
SREB	<i>Making Adolescent Literacy a Priority</i>
Florida Department of Education	<i>Content Area Reading Professional Development Rule</i> <i>K-12 Reading Intervention Rule</i> <i>K-12 Reading Plan Rule</i> <i>Revised Reading Endorsement Competencies (Draft)</i> <i>Reading/Language Arts Standards, Grade 6 and 9-10</i> <i>Reading FCAT 2.0 Specifications Draft, Grades 6 and 9</i>
Florida Statutes	<i>Enforcing School Improvement</i> <i>School-District Grading System</i> <i>Implementation of School Improvement & Accountability</i> <i>Secondary School Redesign Act</i>
Total: 16	