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Indiana's High-stakes Reading Assessment: Impact on Professionalism and Instructional Practices of Elementary Teachers

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ABSTRACT

INDIANA'S HIGH-STAKES READING ASSESSMENT: IMPACT ON
PROFESSIONALISM AND INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES
OF ELEMENTARY TEACHERS

by

Michelle A. Fish

Chair: Raymond J. Ostrander

ABSTRACT

Dissertation

Andrews University

School of Education

Title: INDIANA'S HIGH-STAKES READING ASSESSMENT: IMPACT ON PROFESSIONALISM AND INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES OF ELEMENTARY TEACHERS

Name of researcher: Michelle A. Fish

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Date completed: October 2015

Problem

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, political mandates have been the driving force behind educational decision-making. The execution of the federal Race to the Top Assessment Program in 2009 ushered in a new era of accountability measures for educators, resulting in a significant increase in the number of state assessments, including the implementation of the *Indiana Reading Evaluation and Determination* (IREAD-3) summative assessment in the spring of 2012. Within this model of top-down, political decision-making, the collective voice of educators has been minimized as instructional practice has been driven by student performance on standardized assessments. The purpose of this study, then, was to explore the impact of the IREAD-3

on the professionalism and instructional practices of elementary teachers in order to provide a voice for these important stakeholders.

Method

By incorporating a phenomenological methodological approach, this study examined the lived experiences of twelve early-primary educators from a school district located in Northern Indiana. In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format, which included the use of open-ended questions. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed. After the initial analysis, gaps regarding perceptions of professionalism, curricular rigor, and increased testing emerged; these required additional follow-up interviews.

Findings

A set of super-ordinate and supporting themes emerged which uncovered the common or shared experiences of twelve participants. This occurred through a detailed analysis of in-depth interviews and follow-up questionnaires. The following five super-ordinate themes emerged: imposed change, reactive instruction, the paradox of testing, teaching under pressure, and loss of autonomy. This led to an examination of the essence, understanding the essential features of the central experience of teaching after the implementation of the IREAD-3, which, when constructed, focused on the themes portraying both what was experienced and how the participants responded. The essence of these shared experiences emerged as teachers in bondage.

Conclusions

The implementation of the IREAD-3 has impacted both instructional practice and professional autonomy among the elementary teachers. Educators have been constrained by the bondage of ignorance, the bondage of culpability, and the bondage of professional oppression. With a renewed understanding of the impacts of high-stakes testing on educators, efforts to eliminate this bondage must follow. Therefore, this study provides necessary research to inform parents, administrators, and politicians regarding future decision-making and to bring about positive change.

Andrews University

School of Education

INDIANA'S HIGH-STAKES READING ASSESSMENT: IMPACT ON
PROFESSIONALISM AND INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES
OF ELEMENTARY TEACHERS

A Dissertation Proposal

Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Michelle A. Fish

October 2015

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Date approved

DEDICATION

To my father, William H. McPhail, for believing I was created for a special purpose. I know you would be so proud.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AYP	Annual Yearly Progress
IREAD-3	Indiana Reading Evaluation And Determination Summative Assessment
ISTEP+	Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress Plus
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act of 2001
NRP	National Reading Panel

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The key is to keep company only with people who uplift you, whose presence calls forth your best.

- Epictetus

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

During the early years of the twenty-first century, much discussion and writing focused on a new federal law, Public Law PL 107-110, which had the potential to greatly impact public education. With lofty goals of ensuring all children read at a level of proficiency by 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, December 6), what became commonly known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 was a historical act of bi-partisanship among politicians during the George W. Bush administration. The passing of time demonstrated the significant impact of NCLB, as this federal legislation ushered in an era of standards and accountability in public education. (Pinar, 2012; D. Ravitch, 2011). Time also demonstrated that NCLB has served as a precursor to an even greater emphasis on high-stakes assessments in the field of education. On the heels of the Obama administration's 2009 Race to the Top (U.S. Department of Education, 2013, May 28), the Indiana State House of Representatives passed Public Law 109 in 2010, which implemented the Indiana Reading Evaluation And Determination (IREAD-3) summative assessment to measure foundational reading standards for all third-grade students (Indiana Department of Education, 2015a). With the goal of ensuring "all students can read proficiently before moving on to grade four" (para. 1), students without a waiver who do not pass the IREAD-3 are retained in the third grade. The eruption of

tests and assessments since the 2009 implementation of Race to the Top (Goldstein, 2014) requires an examination of the implications of high-stakes assessments in order to determine if the benefits truly surpass the limitations.

Examining the implications of high-stakes assessments, there has been a deprofessionalization of the teaching profession which increased after the implementation of the 2001 NCLB and has dramatically heightened since the 2009 Race to the Top (Goldstein, 2014; Owens, 2013; Pinar, 2012; D. Ravitch, 2011, 2013). Studies have indicated that teachers have moved from decision-makers to mere implementers of instruction (Ainsworth, Ortlieb, Cheek, Pate, & Fetters, 2012; Newberg-Long, 2010). This has left teachers feeling powerless and overwhelmed, trapped by a system beyond their control (Dresser, 2012). Yet research has indicated that teachers are a vital component in effective instruction, and teachers need to be valued as contributing professionals for successful program implementation (Ciminelli, 2011; Fullan, 2008; Ohle, 2013; Rosenberger, 2012; A. M. Smith, 2011).

With the pressures of high-stakes decision-making based on state assessments, another implication results in tests becoming the driving force behind curriculum and instruction (Pinar, 2012; D. Ravitch, 2011, 2013). Studies have demonstrated an increased dependence on scripted reading programs (Ainsworth et al., 2012; Dresser, 2012). Additionally, the increase in high-stakes assessments has resulted in a greater instructional focus on covering tested materials, which has led to a more narrowed, rigid, and unbalanced curriculum (Au, 2009; Battley-Fabre, 2011; Berliner, 2011; Duke & Block, 2012; Pavia, 2012). Studies also indicate skills-based instructional practices as a consequence of a testing-driven curriculum (Rosenberger, 2012; A. M. Smith, 2011).

At the time of this research, a search of both EBSCOhost and The ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text for “IREAD-3” resulted in only one study addressing the impact of this newly implemented assessment. Stubbs (2013) conducted a quantitative study to specifically examine the impact of grade retention as a policy mandate. This research, however, did not examine the impact on the professionalism and instructional practices of teachers. Additional searches resulted in limited findings regarding the impact of a high-stakes reading assessment on the professionalism and instructional practices of teachers. No other results specifically addressed the impact of the IREAD-3. In light of the increased emphasis on high-stakes assessments in the last decade, it is significant to understand the implications of these policy mandates. The scarcity of research specifically available for understanding the impact of the IREAD-3 is concerning considering in 2014 this assessment directly impacted 84,257 third-grade students and their classroom teachers throughout the state of Indiana (Indiana Department of Education, 2014b).

This study attempts to contribute to the growing body of research and increase the knowledge base of the implications of a high-stakes reading assessment by specifically examining the impact of the IREAD-3 on the professionalism and instructional practices of elementary teachers. Through the process of one-on-one, personal in-depth interviews the lived-experiences of elementary teachers who have experienced teaching both prior to and after the implementation of the IREAD-3 will be examined. Consequently, through the use of phenomenological research methods their stories will provide a much needed voice to a group of stakeholders who have been marginalized as a result of high-stakes testing.

Statement of Problem

Although teachers were once considered experts in their field, over the past half-century educational decision-making has been driven by politics and governmental mandates (Kliebard, 2004; Marshall, Sears, Allen, Roberts, & Schubert, 2007; Pinar, 2012). This has led to the minimization of the voice of the teacher in education today. As the former Assistant Secretary of Education for the United States serving under President George H. W. Bush, D. Ravitch (2011) indicated the standards-based movement in education has led to the “reform” movement that focuses on testing and accountability. According to Pinar (2012), the governmental push for school reform has led to school “deform” and teachers “have been silenced in the public discussions” (p. 18), creating a greater need for research which brings validity to the voice of the teacher.

Examining educational trends since the turn of the century, greater emphasis has been placed on standardized assessments within the public schools. NCLB raised the level of accountability for schools, with the intention of ensuring all children would not just have access to education but would perform proficiently in reading and math by 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, December 6). A consequence of this mandate was the increase of high-stakes decision-making based on standardized assessments and increased mandates regarding how and what to teach in the classroom. Although under NCLB schools were held accountable, in 2009 the stakes became even higher with the Obama administration’s federal Race to the Top Assessment Program. Teachers are now personally held accountable for student performance as a result of Race to the Top, as federal funding is dispersed to states which evaluate teachers annually based on student

achievement, equating to students' test scores on state assessments (Goldstein, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2013, May 28).

In the spring of 2012, the Indiana Reading Evaluation And Determination summative assessment was implemented statewide. Employed as an additional assessment to the already existing Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress Plus (ISTEP+), the IREAD-3 was implemented to measure foundational reading standards for all third-grade students in the state of Indiana (Indiana Department of Education, 2015a). Additionally, students must pass the IREAD-3 in order to promote to the fourth grade. According to the Indiana Department of Education (2014a) 80,326 third-grade students were enrolled in public schools statewide in the Fall of 2013 and the following spring 77,295 third-grade public school students participated in the IREAD-3 examination process (Indiana Department of Education, 2014b). Based on the National Center for Educational Statistics (n.d.) the average pupil-to-teacher ratio for the state of Indiana is 16.7; consequently, one could conclude that approximately 4,600 third-grade teachers were impacted by the implementation of this assessment.

The increased prominence of standardized assessments has resulted in uses beyond a mere measure of student achievement when used as determinants for important decisions such as grade promotion for students and pay increases for teachers (Goldstein, 2014; Pinar, 2012; D. Ravitch, 2011, 2013). Although the impact of high-stakes testing has been explored in previous research, limited research is available regarding the impact of the IREAD-3. Furthermore, when exploring the impact on the professionalism and instructional practices of elementary teachers resulting from the implementation of the IREAD-3 there is an apparent gap in the existing research.

Understanding the consequences of political mandates is an important aspect in ensuring advances in education. Therefore, an examination of this research has the potential to benefit many stakeholders in the field of education. First, politicians need to be aware of the consequences of their educational mandates and how these decisions impact their constituents. Second, it is important for administrators to understand their employees in order to not only know how to best meet their needs, but to create a value-added, collaborative environment that leads to forward progress (Fullan, 2008). Finally, in an era of high-stakes testing where teachers have often been overlooked in the decision-making process, this research provides a needed voice in the field.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of the IREAD-3 on the professionalism and instructional practices of elementary reading teachers from a school district located in Northern Indiana. Through the inductive process of social constructivism, the reality of these teachers' experiences will be co-constructed with the researcher (Creswell, 2013). Using procedures established by Moustakas, this qualitative phenomenological study will seek to understand the shared experiences of the participants and discover common themes through in-depth one-on-one interviews (as cited in Creswell, 2013). Ultimately, the goal of this research is to describe the essence of the lived-experiences of elementary teachers resulting from the implementation of a state-mandated, high-stakes reading assessment and provide a necessary voice for these stakeholders.

The Research Questions

The following overarching questions will guide this research: How has the implementation of the IREAD-3 impacted the instructional practices of elementary teachers? How has the implementation of the IREAD-3 impacted the professionalism of elementary teachers?

Conceptual Framework

Research is an interpretive process guided by beliefs and feelings that may be stated, assumed, or even highly controversial, and used to provide understanding of the world around us (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). As a result, a conceptual framework is employed as a “guide and ballast for empirical research” providing specific strategies to explore the topic (S. M. Ravitch & Riggan, 2012, p. xiii). According to Maxwell (2012), it is the “system of concepts, assumptions, expectation, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs your research” (p. 39). Consequently, the interpretive framework of social constructivism along with the reflexive cycle of *carrere* will be employed in order to understand the impact of a state-mandated, high-stakes reading assessment on the professionalism and instructional practices of elementary reading teachers.

Social Constructivism

Maxwell (2012) indicated “using an established paradigm allows you to build on an accepted and well-developed approach to research” (p. 40). According to Creswell (2013), when using the interpretive framework of social constructivism in qualitative research “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (p.

24). Within both a historical and social context, the goal of this approach relies on the view of the participants to gain an understanding of the essence of the phenomenon.

Philosophical Assumptions

A social constructivist paradigm assumes relativist ontological beliefs that multiple realities are constructed through our lived experiences and personal interactions. This model includes subjectivist epistemological beliefs that reality is co-constructed among the researcher and the respondents. Axiological beliefs of social constructivism maintain that values among individuals are honored and expressed. Additionally, this paradigm includes naturalistic methodological beliefs where ideas of the world around us emerge through an inductive process (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Ontology

Ontological issues relate not only to how reality is known, but the characteristics of the nature of reality. Evidence of reality becomes known by examining multiple realities and “includes the use of multiple forms of evidence in themes using the actual words of different individuals and presenting different perspectives” (Creswell, 2013, p. 20). Evidence of this reality will be made known by including the individual voices of teachers who have experienced the phenomenon.

Epistemology

With an epistemological assumption the researchers use firsthand accounts and attempt to connect personally with the participants by spending time with them; conducting “studies in the ‘field,’ where the participants live and work” in order to demonstrate how reality is known (Creswell, 2013, p. 20). This will be demonstrated in

the research by conducting multiple comprehensive interviews with the participants and the inclusion of direct quotes throughout the narrative.

Axiology

Creswell (2013) indicates that qualitative research is characterized by axiological assumption because researchers in a qualitative study “make their values known” (p. 20). In this way, the researcher’s values or driving motivations are openly discussed and presented along with the information gathered both from literature reviews and the lived experiences of the participants in the field.

Methodology

According to Creswell (2013), researchers in a qualitative study follow an inducted path of reasoning in order to build the logic from the “ground up” (p. 22). To this end, the findings will emerge through an inductive process of examining the lived experiences in order to discover common themes among participants.

Currere

Using the interpretive framework of social constructivism, topics will be explored through the reflexive cycle of *currere*. A reflexive cycle refers to a conscious effort of thought turned back on itself; thus, a self-reflection through volition (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2008). Although the Latin infinitive form of “curriculum,” *currere* means “to run the course.” The concept of *currere* originated as an effort to understand curriculum as autobiographical and biographical text (Pinar & Grumet, 1976; Pinar et al., 2008, p. 518). Pinar (2012) stated the method of *currere* provides a strategy to study “the relations between academic knowledge and life history in the interests of self-

understanding and social reconstruction” (p. 44). There are four steps or moments in the method of *currere*: the regressive, the progressive, the analytical, and the synthetical (Pinar, 2012; Pinar et al., 2008). To understand the nature of this study, these steps or moments will be used as an organizational structure.

Regressive

The regressive step or moment is to re-experience the past in order to understand the present (Pinar, 2012; Pinar et al., 2008). Using this model, the historical context of high-stakes testing will be examined to understand the current phenomenon. With the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the United States entered into a new era of standards and accountability (Pinar, 2012; D. Ravitch, 2011). Although this resulted in a culture of high-stakes testing, accountability reached even higher levels with the federal Race to the Top Assessment Program in 2009 by promoting teacher accountability. It is within this historical context that the implementation of the IREAD-3 will be examined.

Progressive

In the second or progressive step, one looks to the future to understand the present. Pinar (2012) stated, “Like the past, the future inhabits the present” (p. 46). It follows then to examine the debate regarding evidence-based instructional practices for the teaching of reading as the results of these practices impacts future generations. Davis (2010) found, “The present climate of high-stakes accountability testing and races to the top make the demand for high-quality instruction even more critical” (p. 54). Nevertheless, high quality instruction is highly debated and not easily defined. For the purpose of this study, high quality instruction will refer to the level at which instruction is

considered to be most effective, promoting academic achievement while engaging students (Davis, 2010; Halladay, 2012). This will be explored in the context of evidence-based reading instruction, which are approaches considered to be reliable, trustworthy, and valid based on sound research and student success over time (International Reading Association, 2002).

Analytical

In the analytical stage of *currere* the past and present are both examined in order to understand how history has shaped the present circumstances (Pinar, 2012; Pinar et al., 2008). To this end, this study will examine how historical decisions regarding education led to a philosophy of essentialism which promotes skills-based instruction in schools today (Ainsworth et al., 2012; Costello, 2012; Dresser, 2012; Ohle, 2013; Pinar, 2012; D. Ravitch, 2011, 2013; A. M. Smith, 2011). Additionally, the study will explore the historical impact of governmental mandates on the deprofessionalization and demonization of educators (Owens, 2013; Pinar, 2012; D. Ravitch, 2011, 2013).

Synthetical

The final synthetical moment is a coming together of the past, present, and future to create meaning of the present (Pinar, 2012; Pinar et al., 2008). Through the lens of social constructivism and implementing the organizational structure of *currere*, this study intends to re-examine the past, gain an understanding of the present, in the hopes of finding the future (see Figure 1). Therefore, with this conceptual framework it is the act of making sense of the research with the hope of moving forward to bring about positive change.

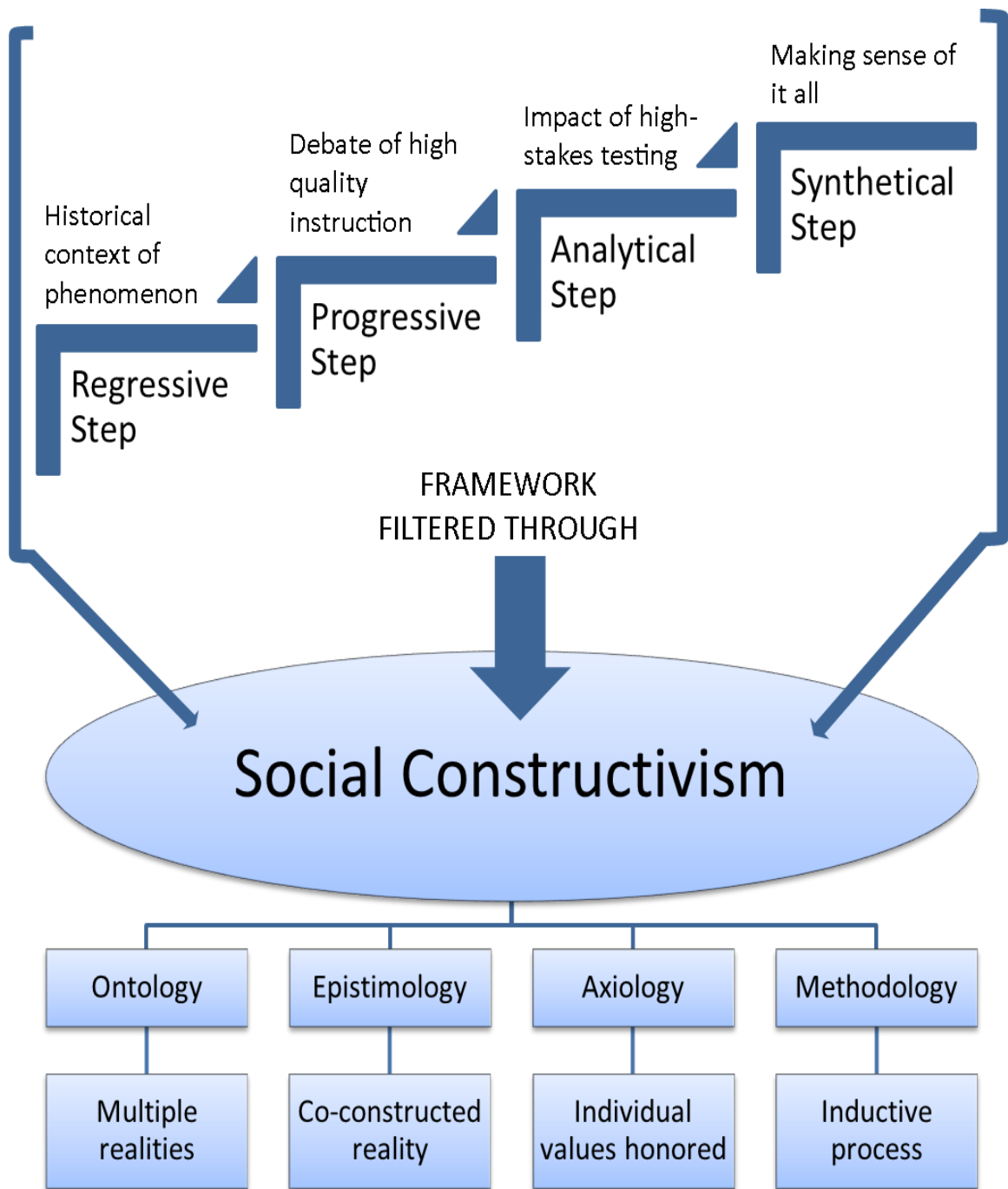


Figure 1. Concept map for conceptual framework.

Key Terms

Achievement gap: The gap which occurs between different groups in academic success is often referred to as the achievement gap. For example, disparities may exist among racial groups, gender, or socioeconomic status. The desire to close the achievement gap among minority and non-minority students was an initial driving force behind No Child Left Behind (D. Ravitch, 2013).

AYP: Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is the statewide accountability system mandated by the federal NCLB in 2002 requiring each state to ensure all schools and districts make yearly progress. In order to demonstrate AYP, schools, districts, and the state must either meet the annual target ensuring 100% of students will pass state tests in both English and Math by 2014 or reduce the percentage of students who do not pass by a minimum of 10% each year (Indiana Department of Education, 2013). It has become a common benchmark used to determine how well each public school performs on standardized tests each year (D. Ravitch, 2011).

Basal reading program: A basal reading program is a textbook series used for the purpose of teaching reading. A program consists of a teacher's manual, student readers with short stories, and often includes other supporting materials, such as student workbooks, assessments, and other supplementary reading books. The name "basal" refers to the concept of employing a "base" or "basic" approach to developing reading skills in a sequential process. The first basal reading program was developed by William A. McGuffey in the 1830s and commonly became known as the McGuffey Readers. This was the first known reading series that offered progressively more challenging textbooks as a student progressed through grade levels (Tompkins, 2010).

Currere: A Latin infinitive word form of “curriculum,” *currere* means “to run the course.” The concept of *currere* originated as an effort to understand curriculum as autobiographical and biographical text (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 518)

Differentiated instruction: Based on Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development, the concept of differentiated instruction refers to honoring the individual similarities and differences of child. The teacher differentiates or distinguishes the unique instructional needs of each student, as opposed to focusing on whole-group or one-size-fits-all instruction (Tompkins, 2010).

Early primary education: For the purpose of this study, early primary education refers to kindergarten through the 3rd grade. Primary education generally refers to elementary education (Kindergarten – 6th grades); whereas secondary education refers to the middle and high school years (7th – 12th grades). It is important to note that for some school systems, 6th grade would be considered part of the middle school program; thus, a part of the secondary education.

Evidence-based reading instruction: Evidence-based reading instruction refers to practices or programs considered to be reliable, trustworthy, and valid based on sound research and student success over time (International Reading Association, 2002).

Grade retention or promotion: Grade retention refers to a student who is not permitted to advance to the next grade level. On the contrary, grade promotion refers to a student who is promoted or advances to the next grade level in a school setting.

High-Stakes assessments: When standardized tests are employed for major decisions, such as student advancement or retention, the hiring and firing of teachers or

principals, and the closing of schools they are utilized for what are considered to be “high-stakes” purposes (D. Ravitch, 2011).

IREAD-3: The Indiana Reading Evaluation And Determination Summative Assessment (IREAD-3) was employed by the state of Indiana beginning in 2012 to measure foundational reading standards for all third-grade students (Indiana Department of Education, 2015a).

ISTEP+: The Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress Plus (ISTEP+) is administered each spring to all third through eighth grade students enrolled in public education in the state of Indiana. It is employed to measure student achievement for all grade levels in English/language arts and mathematics. Additionally, the testing occurs for science in fourth and sixth grades, and social studies during fifth and seventh grades (Indiana Department of Education, 2015b).

Merit pay: For the purpose of this research merit pay refers to the direct relationship between a teacher’s salary (pay increases or decreases) and student achievement on standardized assessments.

NCLB: The 2001 federal Public Law PL 107-110, which became known as The No Child Left Behind Act.

Node: When utilizing NVivo software for qualitative research analysis, the user codes sources, such as interviews, articles, or survey results. A node develops when a collection of references are made to a specific theme, place, person, or topic.

Professionalism: Merriam-Webster (2015) defines professionalism as “the conduct, aims, or qualities that characterize or mark a profession or a professional person” (Full Definition of Professionalism section). Beyond conduct, including moral

character, there are certain qualities that characterize what it means to be considered a professional. Pinar (2012) declares “professional self-governance” as a necessary “prerequisite for professionalism” (p. 69). Similarly, D. Ravitch (2011) states “the essence of professionalism is autonomy, the freedom to make decisions based on one’s knowledge and experience” (p. 259). For the purpose of this study, the concept of professionalism will focus on the quality of self-governance that characterizes teachers as autonomous decision-makers resulting from specialized education, training, and experience.

Reflexive: Used in the discussion of *currere* as a reflexive cycle, the concept refers to a conscious effort of thought turned back on itself or the use of self-reflection through volition (Pinar et al., 2008).

Scripted curriculum: A scripted curriculum not only includes the specific day-to-day lessons to be taught, but according to Milosovic (2007) requires teachers to read from a script while teaching the lesson to the class. It would be considered the most prescriptive form of standardization among curriculum forms.

Stakeholders: For the purpose of this research the term stakeholders refers to individuals who have a direct interest in or may be affected by the implementation or outcomes of the IREAD-3 (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Process of Selecting Resources

Literature Search Strategies

Research for this topic included utilizing the extensive online reference system EBSCOhost, available through Andrew University's James White Library, to simultaneously search Academic Search Complete and ERIC for scholarly articles. Advanced search queries within these databases included: "reading instruction" and "elementary education" and "teaching methods," "reading instruction" and "teaching methods" and "best practices," "reading instruction" and "grade retention," "reading instruction" and "guided reading," "reading instruction" and "scripted," "reading instruction" and "high-stakes testing," "high-stakes testing" and "curriculum," "high-stakes testing" and "reading," and "high-stakes testing" and "teaching."

The ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text, which offers full text graduate works from 1997 to present, was searched utilizing the following advanced search queries: "elementary education" and "curriculum narrowing," "elementary education" and "reading instruction" and "literacy" and ("testing" or "assessment"), "high-stakes testing" and "education" and "teacher perceptions" and "literacy" and "instruction," "IREAD-3" or "Indiana Reading Evaluation and Determination assessment."

Other search strategies involved exploration of current literature on the topic, and employing the use of ancestry searches, or to search within the reference list of relevant books and articles to reveal additional sources. Additionally, all articles published by *The Reading Teacher* since 2009 were reviewed in order to cull additional resources on the topic.

Criterion for Selection of Literature

Due to the 2009 implementation of Race to the Top, which placed an even greater emphasis on high-stakes assessments and teacher accountability, literature was primarily selected from articles and/or books published in the past five years to examine the impact on the most recent generation of high-stakes testing. Exceptions to this standard were allowed for sources relating to historical perspectives and reading instruction. Primary journal sources were acquired from scholarly or peer-reviewed journals, and books were selected from among authors employing detailed references and/or personal firsthand accounts.

Criteria for inclusion in the review of literature included sources relating to the topics of the historical development of high-stakes assessment, best practices in reading instruction, and the impact of high-stakes testing on curriculum, instruction, teachers, and student achievement. Based on the above criteria, any sources resulting from the advanced searches using both EBSCOhost and ProQuest that appeared to have any connection were initially selected by an examination of the title. Once selected, the sources were sent to a folder within the database to be held for further review. These selections were later evaluated again by reading the abstract. If the source still met the inclusion criteria, it was then saved electronically. Finally, the saved sources were read

in-depth and notated utilizing iAnnotate. Although advanced search results varied from as few as 4 articles to over 1,700 for an initial search, through the selection process less than forty percent of articles saved for a thorough reading were eventually selected for inclusion in the literature review.

Organization of Literature Review

Using the reflexive cycle of *currere*, this literature review will attempt to run the course through an examination of the complexities of a complicated conversation (Pinar, 2012). In order to understand the present condition, this review of literature will use a regressive step to examine the past in order to gain a historical perspective on the development of high-stakes testing. In the progressive step, one begins to understand the present by examining the future (Pinar, 2012; Pinar et al., 2008). Determining quality reading instruction defines future instructional practices. Without understanding best teaching practices, one will not be able to positively impact future student achievement. Therefore, in the progressive step quality reading instruction will be examined to provide a foundational understanding of effective literacy practices. The analytical step of *currere* is an examination of the past and present, in an attempt to determine how “the past inheres in the present and in our fantasies of the future” (Pinar, 2012, p. 48). In this step, existing research will subsequently be examined to develop an understanding of the present impact of high-stakes assessments on the professionalism and instructional practices of teachers. As we fantasize about future achievement, one must examine the impacts on student achievement. Ultimately, the final synthetical step results in a coming together of the past, present, and future to create meaning (Pinar, 2012; Pinar et al., 2008). Therefore, using the reflexive cycle of *currere*, a synthesis of the literature will

result in analyzing contradictions or inconsistencies, exploring recommendations, and examining future implications for further research.

The Regressive Step

Historical Perspectives on High-Stakes Testing

In 1983, the report *A Nation at Risk* was released by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) under the Reagan administration. According to D. Ravitch (2011), the report was written in understandable English, which made it reasonable to those outside the field of education. By using flamboyant and militant language, it warned of the foreboding economic and social crisis the United States would experience unless dramatic changes were put in place for the education of all children (Goldstein, 2014; D. Ravitch, 2011). Placing blame on the educational system for America's social, economic, and national security has been a historical recurrence (Kliebard, 2004; Marshall et al., 2007; Pinar, 2012; D. Ravitch, 2011). After the 1957 launch by the Soviet Union of the world's first satellite, *Sputnik*, responsibility for the United States' failure to win the space race was not placed on policy, funding, or even the military, but ultimately on educators for implementing a soft curriculum in American schools (Kliebard, 2004; Marshall et al., 2007). Reminiscent of what occurred in the late 1950s, *A Nation at Risk* placed the responsibility of national advancement on the shoulders of the educational system.

Considered by D. Ravitch (2011) as "the all-time blockbuster of educational reports" (p. 24), *A Nation at Risk* offered many recommendations focused on reforms at the high school level, such as increasing high school graduation requirements, administering more homework, addressing behavioral problems, and raising college

entrance requirements. It also recommended higher requirements for entry into the teaching profession to recruit additional high quality teachers, increased teachers' salaries to make the profession more competitive, and promoted differential pay for teachers where quality was determined by peer review (D. Ravitch, 2011). Also calling for a coherent curriculum, the report became the precursor to the standards movement in educational reform (Au, 2012; D. Ravitch, 2011). Subsequently, Goldstein (2014) referred to *A Nation at Risk* as "one of the most influential federal documents ever published" (p. 165).

Although *A Nation at Risk* was a report and "not a legal mandate" it paved the way for a new federal law (D. Ravitch, 2011, p. 29). The passing of time has demonstrated that Public Law PL 107-110, or what has become commonly known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, December 6), not only was a historical act of bi-partisanship among politicians during the George W. Bush administration, but ushered in an era of standards and accountability in public education (Pinar, 2012; D. Ravitch, 2011). A central goal of NCLB was that by 2014 every child would be reading at a level of proficiency, or more commonly interpreted as reading at grade level standards, by the end of third grade (Duke & Block, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2010, December 6).

Ushering in a New Era of High-Stakes Testing

Although NCLB was intended to require states to develop standards for curriculum, there were unintended consequences as the focus in education quickly shifted from standards to accountability to increased testing. With a desire to meet the demands of the Reading First initiative of NCLB, many schools adopted scripted curriculum

programs, such as Open Court, Success for All, and Direct Instruction to assure teachers were teaching the required standards (Goldstein, 2014; Milosovic, 2007). Yet, the testing mandates, requiring all fifty states to annually test all third through eighth grade students, became the driving force of NCLB (Goldstein, 2014). With testing as a national focus, the curriculum narrowed to focus instruction on reading and math, the primary subjects required by NCLB (Goldstein, 2014; D. Ravitch, 2011). D. Ravitch (2011), educational historian and former Assistant Secretary and counselor to Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander during the George H. W. Bush administration, initially supported NCLB. However, she ultimately withdrew support after observing a shift in focus when NCLB became “all sticks and no carrots” and “test-based accountability – not standards” became the educational policy of our nation (p. 21).

With goals of raising reading and math test scores nationwide, NCLB became the unintended catalyst for high-stakes testing. However, with the Race to the Top Assessment Program, authorized under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and backed by the Obama administration, the bar for test-based accountability was raised even higher (U.S. Department of Education, 2013, May 28). Whereas NCLB held schools accountable, Race to the Top provided an even greater emphasis on holding teachers accountable for low test scores, forging an era of merit pay where a teacher’s salary is directly tied to student performance on high-stakes, standardized assessments (D. Ravitch, 2013).

These federal mandates have served as an antecedent to additional state-mandated assessments in the field of education. In 2010, the Indiana State House of Representatives passed Public Law 109, which implemented the Indiana Reading

Evaluation And Determination (IREAD-3) summative assessment to measure foundational reading standards for all third-grade students (Indiana Department of Education, 2015a). With the goal of ensuring “all students can read proficiently before moving on to grade four,” students who do not pass the IREAD-3 without a waiver are retained in the third grade (para.1).

The Progressive Step

Evidence-Based Reading Instruction

In order to recognize how a high-stakes assessment has impacted instructional practices, one must first understand what is considered to be effective literacy instruction. In this era of high-stakes testing the demand for quality instruction is considered a critical necessity (Davis, 2010; Owens, 2013; D. Ravitch, 2011, 2013). There is also a general understanding that in order to have effective instruction, there must be effective teachers (Blair, Rupley, & Nichols, 2007). In fact, there is a shared belief among those in the current educational reform movement that poor children would reach the same level of academic achievement as affluent children if only taught by highly effective teachers (D. Ravitch, 2013). Consequently, one must examine what it means to be an effective teacher within the context of an effective literacy classroom.

Effective Teachers

Through a collaboration of educational scholarship, Sanden (2012) identified six instructional attributes of highly effective reading teachers: “excellent classroom management, balanced literacy instruction, implementation of instructional density and

higher order thinking activities, extensive use of scaffolding, encouragement of self-regulation of literacy skills and strategies, and high expectations for all students” (p. 224).

Effective teachers are knowledgeable about both their students and the curriculum they teach (Dresser, 2012). They expect self-regulation and encourage metacognitive thinking among their students (Ainsworth et al., 2012). They also blend formal and informal assessments to identify the individual needs of the students, all the while understanding that assessment alone is not a means to improve reading achievement, but a tool to select appropriate instructional strategies (Blair et al., 2007). According to Blair et al. (2007), “effective teachers of reading will not only enhance students’ reading development, but they will also lead learners to a lifelong love of literacy” (p. 437). Effective teachers take all of this knowledge and use their expertise to adapt the curriculum in order to meet the needs of all learners (Dresser, 2012).

Effective Instruction

For decades, best teaching practices for effective literacy instruction have been highly debated (Barrett-Mynes, 2013; Davis, 2010). The conflict has often been divided among a teacher-centered, explicit, or direct-instructional approach primarily focused on skills, such as phonemic awareness or phonics on one side of the debate and a student-centered, whole language approach to literacy instruction on the other. A teacher-centered approach typically results in whole-class instruction and a student-centered approach often includes collaborative or small-group elements (Davis, 2010). This major conflict in reading development and instructional approach, pitting phonics against whole language became widely known in previous decades as the “reading wars” (Barrett-Mynes, 2013; Underwood, 2010).

In 1997, the United States Congress commissioned a committee composed of 14 leading experts in reading research, reading educators, reading professors, school administrators, and parents in an attempt to determine effective reading instruction based on scientific, evidence-based research. This committee became known as the National Reading Panel (NRP). Primary goals outlined for the NRP included presenting conclusions regarding effectiveness of various programs of reading instruction and providing a strategy or national plan for “rapidly disseminating this information to facilitate effective reading instruction in the schools” (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 1.1). The NRP selected five areas of curriculum instruction as a primary focus: (a) alphabets (including phonemic awareness and phonics instruction), (b) fluency, (c) comprehension (including vocabulary instruction, text comprehension instruction, and teacher preparation and comprehension strategies instruction), (d) teacher education and reading instruction, and (e) computer technology and reading instruction (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Although there were many recommendations, the panel included a call for explicit instruction of phonemic awareness, the teaching of fluency through guided and repeated oral-reading, increased professional development regarding vocabulary instruction, and more teacher development connected to student assessments (Barrett-Mynes, 2013). With the subsequent rise of NCLB and the standards movement, this call for explicit and systematic instruction as an effective means of reading instruction paved a way for the proponents of a scripted curriculum as schools struggled to meet the demands explicit standards-based instruction (Milosovic, 2007). Finally, recommendations regarding the

use of technology in reading instruction were inconclusive due to limited experimental research available on the topic (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Although the development of the NRP, and their resulting report regarding scientific-based research on teaching children to read, was intended to help settle the debate regarding effective reading instruction, the report was not met without criticism. Due to methods of purposeful sampling, the number of studies included in the report was considerably low and resulted in a limited number of participants. Additionally, the findings were criticized for the inclusion of an inadequate number of minority representations (Barrett-Mynes, 2013). Consequently, the NRP's report included a minority view from the only panel member with a career experienced in elementary schools. After outlining the established requirements the panel was commissioned to address, Yatvin stated, "I believe the panel has not fulfilled that obligation" (National Reading Panel, 2000, Minority View, p. 1). According to Yatvin, congress made unrealistic demands of a small group of volunteers, with insufficient time and a lack of support personnel to cover the entire field. The resulting impact was out of necessity for the panel to make quick decisions, which resulted in a narrow examination of the field. One of such consequences was the nearly automatic exclusion of inquiry into the fields of language and literature. Made up primarily of university professors, Yatvin concluded the panel was not qualified to determine what practices can be of immediate use on a practical level and should have consulted with classroom teachers to determine practical implementation measures due to classroom realities. As a result, Yatvin determined that although the results could be used as a springboard for additional study, they provided

little use to teachers, administrators, and policy makers (National Reading Panel, 2000, Minority View).

Skills-Based vs. Student-Centered

Through a comparative study of skills-based and student-centered instruction, Davis (2010) explored the effects of these two approaches in a second-grade classroom to better understand student perspectives as it relates to reading instruction. The data revealed several important factors. Student attitudes were impacted by their ability to choose both the content and context of their reading, as most students valued self-selection. The researcher found that students were also more likely to read more than the required amount when the text was self-selected. Collaborative activities also resulted in higher levels of interest among students, as opposed to independent tasks, revealing collaboration as an important element to reading instruction. Additionally, differentiating instruction positively impacted student participation and provided opportunities for success regardless of reading levels. Davis also observed that, as a result of whole-class assignments, students became more discouraged and made comparisons with other students, even labeling classmates as good or bad readers. Finally, the research indicated the number of students concerned about peer-perceptions more than doubled as a result of skills-based instruction.

A Balanced Approach

In a multiple case study to examine high-performing third-grade reading programs in low-income schools in rural southern Illinois, Rosenberger (2012) found a balanced instructional approach to reading as a common theme. In one high-achieving school an

individual technology-based intervention program was used, while at another school in the study a small-group instructional model was employed. Although the two schools in the study utilized differing basal reading programs, the basal curriculum was used with fidelity and supplemented to meet the needs of the students. The basal was considered just one tool for teaching in both school environments.

Based on a synthesis of educational research, Allington and Gabriel (2012) identified six elements of effective reading instruction that every child should experience every day: engage in self-selected reading, participate in high-success reading in order to read with accuracy, read something he or she understands, write about something personally meaningful, talk with peers about reading and writing, and listen to a fluent adult read aloud.

Guided reading. Many of the components identified by Allington and Gabriel (2012) as effective instruction are incorporated into guided reading, developed by Fountas and Pinnell (1996), as essential elements of high-quality reading instruction. With this approach, children are engaged in proficient processing every day as they participate in small groups with leveled books in a guided reading lesson supported by the teacher. According to Duke and Block (2012), a What Works Clearinghouse panel identified small group, intensive and systematic instruction as an effective interventions approach to help struggling primary-grade readers. Additionally, guided reading groups are formed with the goal of being dynamic and flexible, rather than fixed, to allow for individualized growth and differentiation as students develop their reading powers (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Consequently, reading power moves beyond rote

memorization and learning basic reading skills to building a “network of strategic actions for processing texts” (p. 272).

Research has consistently demonstrated that differentiation in literacy instruction is important (Dombek & Connor, 2012; McCullough, 2012; Tompkins, 2010). In order to meet the needs of the diverse child, in guided reading the readers engage with texts that “are on the edge of their learning – not too easy and not too hard” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 269). Although Ohlhausen and Jepsen developed the Goldilocks Strategy, where children self-select books that are not “too easy” or “too hard,” but “just right” (as cited in Tompkins, 2010, p. 280), in guided reading, teachers use the standardized procedure of running records to select an A to Z text level gradient book in order to determine the appropriate text (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, 2012). However, teachers must keep in mind that levels are meant to be a guide for finding appropriate reading materials, and not a prescriptive category that traps children into a set label (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Furthermore, Halladay (2012) found that matching readers to an appropriate text is a complex task and assigning labels has limitations. Therefore, teachers need to use caution in labeling children and provide opportunities to engage with multiple texts in different contexts.

Aligned with the elements of effective reading outlined by Allington and Gabriel (2012), students participating in guided reading attend to the elements of proficient reading when reading with accuracy and are able to develop higher levels of decoding, comprehension, and fluency (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Furthermore, students utilize the classroom library to self-select books based on their personal interests for independent reading. Miller (2012) suggested that reading choice among students is a powerful

motivator and an important aspect in creating a classroom where readers flourish. As students engage with a self-selected text at the appropriate instructional level, they begin to build a network of strategies for processing the text. Afflerbach, Cho, Kim, Crassas, and Doyle (2013) found that successful readers are metacognitive. These readers are motivated and engaged in the reading as they monitor and evaluate their own reading practices. By thinking while reading the text, students use metacognition strategies in guided reading to monitor and self-correct, solve new words, summarize information, and build fluency in order to interpret the text (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012).

Just as Allington and Gabriel (2012) identified the importance of discussing reading and writing aloud with peers, Fountas and Pinnell (2012) emphasize oral language as an essential element of effective reading. With daily discussions as a component of guided reading, the teacher engages the students in rich conversations about their reading with a small group of peers. Therefore, the six elements of effective instruction outlined by Allington and Gabriel (2012) and the guided reading model proposed by Fountas and Pinnell (2012) include complimentary components of an effective literacy framework backed by research.

With little previous research on successful literacy approaches for deaf students, Schaffer and Schirmer (2010) investigated the effectiveness of the guided reading approach within a balanced approach for teaching literacy at the Michigan School for the Deaf. After analyzing the running records data from the first two years of implementation, they found that for each year of instruction, students made improvements of between a half-year and two years. Although they noted this would be considered a modest improvement in a traditional setting, the authors clarified that deaf

students typically only make annual gains of one-third of a grade equivalent. With a focus on students' individual strengths and weaknesses, Schaffer and Schirmer (2010) found guided reading provided the necessary differentiated instruction to meet specific needs and develop increasingly capable readers.

In another study to determine the effectiveness of guided reading on improving reading achievement for fourth and fifth grade students, Underwood (2010) conducted a mixed-methods study in a small urban school district in Illinois. In the study, guided reading was implemented to supplement the existing basal reading program in order to provide differentiated instruction for the students. Although reading scores did increase, the results did not demonstrate statistically significant improvements on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) after one year. However, after the second year of guided reading instruction, significant improvements in test scores were recorded. Therefore, this research supports the theory that improvement as a result of guided reading instruction developed over time.

Differentiated, small-group instruction. McCullough (2012) conducted a quantitative research study to determine the effects of differentiated instruction on the academic achievement of struggling second-grade readers. The research included 78 students from three 2nd grade classes in an urban Title I school in eastern Virginia. Students received differentiated instruction for 90 minutes four days per week over a period of 10 months. The differentiated instruction during the 90 minute reading block included a read-aloud strategy, small-flexible grouping, and tiered assignments similar to the guided reading instructional approach to reading. A read-aloud helped to build prior knowledge and increase vocabulary, while flexible small groups allowed students to be

grouped and regrouped based on individual needs. Tiered assignments met the needs of the individual student by matching an assignment to the interest and instructional level of the student. The researcher examined and compared pretest and posttest results from the Student Achievement in Reading (STAR) and Phonological Awareness and Literacy Screening (PALS) assessments. After an analysis of the data, it was concluded that differentiated reading instruction had a significant effect on both vocabulary and comprehension skills among the 2nd grade students. As a result McCullough (2012) concluded, “when struggling readers are provided with reading instruction that is motivating and engaging at their instructional level, they are able to grasp and apply the essential strategies and skills that are needed to become proficient readers” (p. 99).

Finally, in a study of three low-socioeconomic elementary schools in a North Carolina school district, Sabin (2012) found a significant correlation among the number of adults in the classroom and student engagement. Additionally, there was a significant correlation between student engagement and small-group instruction. As a result, his findings demonstrate the importance of small-group instruction and a lower adult-to-child ratio in the classroom.

Although reading approaches have been highly debated, a review of the literature demonstrated a balanced literacy approach which includes a small-group, differentiated student-centered method as an effective instructional strategy. Moreover, self-selected reading at an appropriate instructional level is also an important element of effective literacy instruction (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Duke & Block, 2012; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, 2012; McCullough, 2012; Schaffer & Schirmer, 2010; Underwood, 2010).

The Analytical Step

Impact of High-stakes Testing

As the pressures and implications of standardized testing increase, understanding the impact of state-mandated, high-stakes reading tests on both the professionalism and instructional practices of elementary teachers is important.

Impact on Teachers

For decades, if teachers did not agree with a movement in education, they could theoretically close their classroom doors to those ideas and continue to teach without consequence. Historically, the gap among theory and practice has often been evident and according to Moseley when teachers would choose not to participate in a new educational crusade the ideas would pour over the teachers “like the proverbial water on a duck’s back” (as cited in Kliebard, 2004, p. 167). As the professional gatekeepers of instructional practice, teachers used their specialized expertise to make educated decisions regarding instruction. However, with the current accountability movement the teacher as the educated and respected decision-maker has been diminished (Owens, 2013; Pinar, 2012; D. Ravitch, 2011, 2013).

Pinar (2012) refers to the bi-partisan political deprofessionalization of the field as the “demonization” of teachers (p. 18). Indicating that with the demands teachers are facing in the classroom as a result of accountability and high-stakes testing, teachers are held to a standard that no other occupation of professionals could adhere to, including economists, lawyers, physicians, or pastors. Pinar stated, “Teachers are demanded to perform miracles parents – even priests – cannot always pull off” (p. 28). Additionally, the current environment induced by high-stakes testing ignores the intellectual judgment

of educators, mandating them to “betray their professional calling to teach their subject as they deem appropriate” (p. 40).

Desiring to make a difference in a future generation, Owens (2013) left a profitable job to become a secondary English teacher in New York City. He experienced first-hand the unrealistic demands that are placed on teachers to perform daily miracles. He quickly learned that in a broken system “teachers have become scapegoats” (p. xx). Although the author entered teaching with high expectations to do some good, he instead found that “America is demanding too much from its teachers without giving them the proper support to educate students effectively” (p. 62). Additionally, throughout his book, *Confessions of a Bad Teacher: The Shocking Truth from the Front Lines of American Public Education*, Owens (2013) shared short reflections from teachers across the country who voiced their lived-experiences, often revealing the toll high-stakes testing has taken on both their professional reputations and classroom experiences.

Ainsworth et al. (2012) found lack of control in curriculum decision-making resulted in teachers moving from the role of educator to that of an implementer. According to Pinar (2012), this factory designed model of efficiency has “reduced teachers to automata and administrators to manager” (p. 37). Dresser (2012) indicated that although supporters have claimed scripted programs resulting from the impacts of high-stakes assessments are effective and user-friendly, through action-research he found the move to a scripted curriculum has led to teachers feeling powerless and overwhelmed, as they are relegated from professional educators to “mere transmitters of knowledge” (p. 72). In a qualitative phenomenological study, Newberg-Long (2010) found teachers, no longer feeling trusted as decision-makers, felt sadness as the curriculum shifted from the

teacher as the designer to one required to read a script. Additionally, research demonstrated the teachers felt conflicted between what was required, the word-for-word scripted curriculum, and what they deemed best for students, such as differentiated instruction. Furthermore, Dresser (2012) found teachers feel trapped in a test-driven curriculum, as both their professional judgment and the individual needs of the students are ignored. Due to merit pay and punitive consequences, teachers also become fearful of straying from the scripted curriculum, even when they know it is not best teaching practices, reducing both the quality and quantity of what is taught in schools (Au, 2012; Pinar, 2012).

In a qualitative study which included 12 elementary teachers, Ohle (2013) sought to determine teacher perceptions during the implementation of a mandated Targeted Reading Intervention (TRI) policy. The researcher found that in policy implementation teachers perceived a lack of control and held no voice in the policy decision-making. In contrast, the teachers viewed themselves as the ones who ultimately make a difference in the lives of their students. Ohle (2013) concluded that due to the fact that teachers are the central agents of change when it comes to the final step in implementation, there is a need to validate teachers because their influence on students is valuable.

Ciminelli (2011) examined the outcomes of a mandated curricular program in a rural elementary school and found school climate is an important aspect to implementation. Teachers need to feel secure in a risk-free, punitive-free environment where they can voice concerns and know their voices will be heard. Fullan (2008) indicated that in order to raise student achievement, school administrations need to invest in teachers and build their capacity “by creating the conditions for them to succeed” (p.

25). This includes respecting the teaching profession by building a creative, collaborative, and supportive working environment. Additionally, there needs to be a balance among freedom of choice and a need for guidance, such as training and curriculum support. Supportive of this research, Rosenberger (2012) found when examining high-performing third-grade classrooms in low-income schools, teachers were afforded the flexibility to exercise professional judgment to supplement the basal curriculum based on student needs. Teacher participation in the decision-making was also determined to be an important aspect to a successful reading program. Conversely, A. M. Smith (2011) indicated when teachers face a lack of support including public scrutiny and humiliation it not only adds to the deprofessionalization of the field, but results in the loss of effective classroom teachers.

Despite the deprofessionalization of the field by legislative mandates, in the 43rd annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the public's attitudes toward public schools, Bushaw and Lopez (2011) found "almost three out of four Americans have trust and confidence in public school teachers" (p. 10). Although this level of trust was higher among college graduates, those under 40, and parents who have children in public schools, 73% of respondents believed teachers should have the flexibility to use their expertise to make educational decisions as opposed to following a prescribed curriculum. However, even though the overwhelming majority of individuals have confidence in the ability of teachers, 68% of respondents indicated they generally hear more bad stories about teachers in the news media than positive ones and the same Gallup Poll indicated that media does play a role in negative perceptions regarding schools in general. These negative perceptions in the media may possibly have taken a toll, but one can only

speculate. In the 2014 46th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the public's attitudes toward public schools confidence in public school teachers slipped to 64% (Phi Delta Kappa International, October 2014).

Impact on Curriculum and Instruction

High-stakes testing over the years has had a significant impact on both the curriculum and instructional practices of teachers (Au, 2009). Among the many impacts, tests have now become the driving force behind curriculum, with a domination of curriculum as the guide for instructional practice. According to Pinar (2012), classroom effectiveness under the current environment is determined by test scores “not erudition of intellectual engagement” (p. 19). D. Ravitch (2011) stated, “Tests should follow the curriculum. They should be based on the curriculum. They should not replace it or proceed it” (p. 16). However, with the demand for higher test scores, the curriculum is now being tailored to meet the needs of the test. This has resulted in a narrowed, unbalanced curriculum, strongly reminiscent to the essentialism movement which occurred in the 1930s and maintained the ideals that only those things which were vitally important should be taught (Kliebard, 2004) and the minimum competency movement of the 1970s (Berliner, 2011).

Scripted Reading Programs

One consequence of this phenomenon has been the implementation of scripted reading programs across the country to ensure that tested materials will be covered during instruction (Ainsworth et al., 2012; Dresser, 2012). Milosovic (2007) indicated that reliance on a skills-based, scripted curriculum is buying into the myth that once students

master basic reading skills they are literate. Furthermore, it overwhelms the school day with whole-group instruction and provides little individualized instruction. Ainsworth et al. (2012) conducted a case study examining the impact of a state-mandated, semi-scripted language arts curriculum among four first-grade teachers from a large urban school district. They found that the mandated curriculum clearly impacted the teachers' instructional practices, citing the lack of flexibility in providing appropriate differentiated instruction for their students. Although they noted a prescriptive method of instruction could potentially result in greater stability for children moving from one school to the next, a common theme among teachers was the obvious lack of creativity, resulting in more robotic instructional practices. Additionally, they found that a semi-scripted language arts curriculum lacked the differentiation, the ability to meet the individual needs of the students.

Pavia (2012) employed the use of a case study to examine teachers' perceptions and explore the effects of high-stakes assessment on elementary curriculum and instruction at a school system in Pennsylvania. The findings revealed the use of high-stakes testing resulted in both positive and negative effects. A positive outcome that was noted was that some teachers found high-stakes testing resulted in creating clear expectations for the teachers. Conversely, teachers communicated that time-constraints in teaching with a scripted curriculum has resulted in a rigid, narrow, and unbalanced approach with limited small-group instruction, student-centered learning, creativity, and differentiated instruction.

Narrowed, Skills-Based Instruction

As a result of No Child Left Behind legislation teachers have abandoned content-area instruction in order to focus more time on skill-focused reading and math instruction (Berliner, 2011; Duke & Block, 2012). Consequently, this leads to unbalanced instructional practices focused on a skills-based approach. Au (2009) found a nationwide study conducted by the Center on Education Policy reported that 71% of the school districts surveyed indicated the number of curriculum offerings at the elementary school level had been decreased in order to allow more time for teaching of test-related subjects. In support of these findings, Berliner (2011) reported from a national survey of over 500 school districts that after the implementation of NCLB, schools increased instructional time for English and language arts 47% and math instruction increased 37%. These increases led to a decrease in science, social studies, physical education, music, art, recess, and even the time allotted for lunch. In another online survey of teachers, Griffith and Scharmann reported 59% of teachers had decreased science instruction since the enactment of NCLB. Additionally, more than half of the teachers surveyed reported spending less than one and a half hours per week on science instruction (as cited in Duke & Block, 2012). With a greater focus on skills-based teaching, they found a decrease in the teaching of science and social studies, which builds conceptual and content knowledge. Battley-Fabre (2011) also reported that non-tested subjects at the elementary level such as science and social studies were not taught until immediately after the testing occurred and then for only a limited amount of time.

In order to understand the effects of high-stakes testing on the teaching of literature at the secondary level, A. M. Smith (2011) surveyed 40 literature teachers from

across the United States. The teachers were very experienced with numerous professional learning involvements, including many with experience in curriculum development. As a result of the research, A. M. Smith (2011) found an overwhelming number (78%) of teachers felt high-stakes testing negatively impacted the overall quality of their instruction. Additionally, rather than a focus on the high-level thinking attributes of the literary or thematic aspects of a text, 33% of respondents felt their instruction now focused instruction almost exclusively on lower-level, skills-based instruction. Supporting this research, Rosenberger (2012) found even teachers in schools meeting AYP believed reading instruction was being short-changed in third-grade classrooms with pressures for more skills-based instruction.

Teaching to the Test

In a survey of 60 teachers in Louisiana, Battley-Fabre (2011) found that prior to testing in the second-half of the year, 90% of teachers regularly taught test-taking strategies, 85% regularly used state test-preparation materials for practice, and 66.6% of teachers regularly used worksheets for test preparation. Additionally, 80% of teachers surveyed felt tremendously high pressure from their administration to improve students' test scores, supporting the concept of a top-down pressure to succeed. Due to the rigid pacing of the mandated curriculum and the amount of time spent in test preparation, the survey also revealed teachers did not feel they were able to explore topics in-depth. Battley-Fabre (2011) concluded that with a focus on standards and basic skills, the richness and depth of the curriculum had been compromised due to preparation for state-mandated tests, as many teachers reported the inability to adequately teach concepts

through strategies that engaged or excited students, such as hands-on projects and enriched opportunities.

In a qualitative grounded theory study conducted in a suburb of one of the largest cities in the South Eastern region of the United States, Barrett-Mynes (2013) found that teachers, when implementing the English and Language Arts Common Core State Standards (ELA CCSS), had to be intentional regarding their instructional efforts not to teach to the test. In the transition to teaching with ELA CCSS, teachers spent a significant amount of time on developing and implementing formative assessments. Additionally, teachers found it more difficult to differentiate instruction and the amount of time spent on differentiation was greatly decreased during the implementation process.

After an examination of the literature, it is apparent that high-stakes testing does have an impact on instructional practices. As a result of high-stakes testing, the curriculum often becomes unbalanced and narrowed leading to a pointed instructional focus on what content will be on the test. Another consequence of this narrow focus results in a decreased focus on science, social studies, the arts, physical education, and even lunch. The increase in the implementation of scripted programs has also led to a lack of creativity and freedom in teaching practices. Consequently, with a whole-group scripted program small-group, student-centered learning and differentiation among students are diminished. Additionally, when faced with mandates and the needs to raise test scores, a skills-based focus of teaching to the test and intensified test-preparation becomes a greater priority, resulting in what Pinar (2012) refers to as “cram schools” (p. 238).

Impact on Student Achievement

Although the purpose of this literature review is to increase an understanding of the impact of a high-stakes reading assessment on the professionalism and instructional practices of elementary teachers, a critical component in understanding the effectiveness of these instructional practices is to examine them in the context of student achievement. With both national and state goals of raising student achievement through effective teachers and quality instructional practices, this aspect cannot be overlooked. Existing research has overwhelmingly led to the conclusion that a narrowing of the curriculum to test-based, skills-focused instructional practices does not result in higher test scores (Pinar, 2012; D. Ravitch, 2011, 2013). Additionally, rather than eliminating the achievement gap in the effort to leave no child behind, the high-stakes testing movement has continued to perpetuate a state of inequality among students (Au, 2009).

Fifteen years after the National Research Council released their report *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, which provided research-based recommendations regarding how kindergarten through third-grade students could be better prepared for success in fourth grade and beyond, Duke and Block (2012) examined the progress that has been made since that report was published. Despite an increased emphasis on standards, accountability, and an increase in high-stakes testing over the past fifteen years, the authors found little improvement in comprehension among students of low-socioeconomic status.

Reardon, Valentino, and Shores (2012) examined national and international literacy assessments to determine patterns of literacy among U.S. Students. They found that over the past forty years there has been little change in knowledge-based

competencies. In the past decade, small gains were recorded in reading skills among nine-year-olds, but they attributed this to a reduction in very low-achieving readers. The researchers acknowledged that during this time-frame a deliberate targeting of skills-based instruction occurred as a result of NCLB; however, they indicated several studies specifically evaluating NCLB reforms have found no significant difference in either average or low reading scores. As a result, they indicated the small gains cannot be attributed to NCLB legislation. Furthermore, although they found that almost all U.S. students have the ability to read by third grade, according to the standards of knowledge-based competencies only about one-third of middle school students in the U.S. possess a proficient competency to “read” in this sense.

Reardon et al. (2012) also conducted international comparisons among students in the United States and other developed countries based on two recent international studies. They found that U.S. students performed above the international average. Additionally, the rate of knowledge-based literacy competencies among middle school students in the United States was found to be typical of developed countries. Therefore, despite national efforts to raise test scores the overwhelming research indicates the implementation of high-stakes assessments has not contributed in higher academic achievement among our nation’s children.

When examining literacy achievement gaps, Reardon et al. (2012) found that while the reading skills black-white gap decreased, the income gap has increased among high- and low-income children over the past decades. Therefore, socioeconomic status appears to play a more important role in increased literacy gaps among those who have and those who have not. However, D. Ravitch (2011) pointed out the achievement gap

between black and white students actually decreased more prior to the enactment of NCLB than in the years following. Reardon et al. (2012) also noted that when controlling for socioeconomic status, literacy gaps among English language learners and native-English speaking students were not significant.

Research has found the narrowing of the curriculum has occurred more frequently with schools with higher minority enrollments (Au, 2009). When lower-achieving students receive a curriculum that is narrowed to reading and math, while higher-achieving students receive a richer and more diverse learning experience, an inequality in learning develops. Additionally, when statistics indicate the majority of lower-achieving students are poor or minority students, an inequality in educational experiences among those of differing race and socioeconomic status emerges.

Although high-stakes assessments, such as the IREAD-3, are used as a tool to determine grade promotion, research has demonstrated grade retention results in a negative cost-benefit ratio and any initial positive effects diminish over time. Furthermore, it is unlikely that retention will benefit the student and may actually hinder achievement (Dombek & Connor, 2012). Stubbs (2013) conducted research drawn from 1,719 third-grade students from the Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation in southwestern Indiana, who were assessed with the IREAD-3 during the 2011-2012 inaugural school year. The research indicated three groups of students in the study – low socio-economic students, non-White, and those with poor attendance – had significantly increased odds of not passing the IREAD-3. Stubbs (2013) indicated these findings were consistent with the statistics presented by the U.S. Department of Education, which indicate black males are two times more likely to be retained than White or Hispanic

males, and low socio-economic students are four times more likely to be retained than students not living in poverty. Au (2009) referred to this form of educational inequality as the zip code effect, where a student's success or failure on standardized assessments could be determined by the neighborhood which typically has "distinctly different racial and economic class demographics" (p. 2). Additional findings of the research conducted by Stubbs (2013) indicated that passing the IREAD-3 can be predicted by test performance on Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and Text Reading Comprehension (TRC) level. In fact, a logistic regression model demonstrated that below-grade performance on both reading assessments were predictive of later low-performance on the IREAD-3 in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade. These findings lead to questions regarding the need for implementing an additional high-stakes test when earlier tests predict the same outcomes.

The Synthetical Step

Discussion

Contradictions, Gaps, and Inconsistencies

After an examination of the literature, there is an apparent inconsistency between what is considered quality reading instruction and the teaching practices that are occurring as a result of the demands of high-stakes testing. Although it is apparent that small-group, differentiated instruction, and self-selected reading at an appropriate instructional level are important elements of effective literacy instruction (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Duke & Block, 2012; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, 2012; McCullough, 2012; Schaffer & Schirmer, 2010; Underwood, 2010), current research indicates a high-stakes testing environment has led to a scripted, rigid, and narrowed curriculum which does not

value small-group instruction or differentiation (Ainsworth et al., 2012; Dresser, 2012; Pavia, 2012; A. M. Smith, 2011).

There also exists an inconsistency between public perception of teachers (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011) and the impacts of high-stakes mandates on the professionalism of educators. Although the majority of the general public believes teachers should be professional decision-makers in regards to curriculum and instructional practices, the policies and legislation have paralyzed the educator as a decision-maker turning them into what some authors refer to as factory-workers (Pinar, 2012; D. Ravitch, 2013).

Through an examination of the impact on student achievement, it is also apparent that there exists a contradiction between the aims and goals of educational legislation and the actual outcomes. Although NCLB sought to close the achievement gap and to ensure all children could read by 2014, an examination of the research indicates no significant improvements have occurred over time (Duke & Block, 2012; Reardon et al., 2012) and what was intended to remove the achievement gap has helped to maintain it (Au, 2009). Referring to the promises of NCLB, D. Ravitch (2011) stated, “Its remedies did not work” (p. 110). Examining this in the context of the achievement gap, it appears the very children NCLB was attempting to *not* leave behind, have indeed been left behind.

Nonetheless, with the government’s continued race to the top, additional state laws have resulted in further implementation of high-stakes testing, such as the IREAD-3. Yet, within the IREAD-3 there also exists a contradiction between the use of grade retention as a means to raise student achievement and research indicating that retention is not an effective practice (Dombek & Connor, 2012). Additionally, based on Stubbs’ (2013) findings the validity of implementing an additional high-stakes test to measure

reading performance comes into question when pre-existing school assessments already provide predictive future performance.

An additional gap in the research is the limited number of studies that specifically examine the impacts of high-stakes testing as it relates exclusively to reading instruction at the elementary level. Much of the research regarding English and language arts relate more specifically to secondary instruction. Additionally, since the IREAD-3 high-stakes reading assessment was implemented in the spring of 2012, very limited research on the impact of this specific reading assessment is available.

Recommendations

Teach for effective learning, not to pass a test. In order to increase the effectiveness of reading instruction, Allington and Gabriel (2012) propose what some might consider to be radical alternatives in the face of curriculum mandates. The authors recommend the elimination of most worksheets and workbooks, suggesting instead that resources be used to increase classroom libraries. They also recommend banning all test-preparation materials and activities from the school day, citing that although it is an incredibly profitable business for testing companies, research does not demonstrate that time spent on test preparation improves test scores or reading proficiency. Additionally, by removing test preparation from the school day, more time and money can be spent on quality instructional practices.

Use assessments for benchmark data, not for high-stakes purposes. According to D. Ravitch (2013), “tests should be used sparingly to help students and teachers, not to allocate rewards and punishments and not to label children and adults by their scores” (p. 241). The educational historian also indicated tests have been given too much power;

standardized assessments should not be used as scientific instruments, such as one might use a thermometer to measure the temperature. They are instruments written by imperfect human beings, and therefore, must be interpreted and utilized in the context of a broader understanding, not as the final authority. In 1999, The Committee on Appropriate Test Use of the National Research Council released a report indicating the fallible nature of tests and provided a warning that a single test should not be used for educational decisions that would have a major impact on test takers (D. Ravitch, 2011). Yet, despite this clear warning, single scores on standardized assessments continue to be utilized for high-stakes decision-making.

Include teachers in the decision-making process. Teachers need to be able to communicate concerns and offer input in a secure risk-free, punitive-free environment. Ciminelli (2011) found that implementation of even mandated curriculum is more successful when teachers are valued and allowed academic freedoms in how a curriculum is implemented into the classroom. Scripted curriculum leads to feelings of demoralization and strips teachers of their professional expertise in decision-making (Dresser, 2012).

Increase awareness among parents and the general public regarding the impacts of high-stakes testing in order to perpetuate change. With an apparent gap between best practice and the outcomes of teaching to the test, and the divide among public perception of teachers and what is actually occurring in the field, it is important to ensure voters have an accurate perception of what is occurring. For those who desire to get involved in changing the current high-stakes climate, Owens (2013) recommends seeking out involvement in national organizations, such as Parents Across America and Save Our

Schools (SOS). However, local action – such as getting to know your local school administration, board members, and state legislators – is often the most effective place to start (Jacobs, 2010).

Implications for Future Research

Dombek and Connor (2012) found that differentiating literacy instruction to meet the needs of individual students could result in fewer grade retentions. As a result, an interesting topic for additional research would be to examine a move towards intervention, not retention. Although this research does not seek to explore this subject, in light of the mandates of the IREAD-3 and its impact on grade promotion, it would be a judicious topic to explore.

With the 2012 implementation of the IREAD-3, there is very limited practical research available to examine the impacts of this assessment. The review of literature demonstrates there is also limited research examining the impacts of high-stakes testing on the professionalism and instructional practices of elementary teachers as it relates specifically to the subject of reading. Consequently, additional research is needed in order to examine the impacts of a high-stakes reading assessment on both the professionalism and teaching practices of elementary teachers, as those specific factors in relationship to the IREAD-3 remain unknown.

Conclusion

Although written in 1901, Dewey's writing regarding educative interactions remains insightful over a century later:

No matter what is the accepted precept and theory, no matter what the legislation of the school board or the mandate of the school superintendent, the reality of

education is found in the personal and face-to-face contact of teacher and child.
(as cited in Au, 2012, p. 34)

Through an examination of the historical implications of high-stakes testing and the resulting impacts of these assessments, it has become apparent the realities of the lived-experiences of the teacher and child have been overshadowed by a preoccupation with legislation and governmental mandates. The research indicates effective reading instruction has been compromised for a narrowed curriculum led by a test-driven focus. As a result, there is a need to further explore the impacts of new high-stakes assessments on both professionalism and reading instruction.

In this new era of high-stakes testing, where student promotion and teacher pay is tied to the results of a single measure, research demonstrates it has led to the deprofessionalization of teachers and the oppression of the very children who have the greatest needs through marginalized teaching practices. Yet, through an examination of research there is a glimmer of hope. Hope for effective instructional practices. Hope that existing and future research will indeed make an impact on forthcoming decisions. Hope that additional research in the field will lead to a better future education for our children.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Since the turn of the century there has been an ever-increasing focus on standardized assessments. Used for high-stake purposes, such decisions regarding the promotion of students from one grade to another and teachers' salaries, the IREAD-3 was implemented in 2012 with the purpose of measuring foundational reading standards for all third-grade students in the state of Indiana. To explore the impact of the IREAD-3 on both the instructional practices and the professionalism of elementary teachers, this study examined the lived experiences of twelve early primary educators through the employment of in-depth interviews. This chapter describes the methodology that was used and how the study was conducted.

Qualitative Design

According to Creswell (2013), a phenomenological approach to research involves studying the “lived experiences” of either an individual or a group of individuals as they respond to a phenomenon (p. 76). It often employs a social constructivist framework as the researcher intentionally engages with the participants and interacts with them in real-life settings. Creswell (2013) also indicated phenomenology is most popular in the fields of social sciences, sociology, psychology, nursing, health sciences, and education.

Historical Development of Phenomenology

A phenomenological approach to research was initially based on the philosophical components and writings of German mathematician Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) (Creswell, 2013, p. 77). Influenced by Descartes, for Husserl phenomenology encompasses intentionally engaging in conscious activity. Individuals use reflexive practice to examine their own experiences of a phenomenon in order to fully grasp the subjective experience or the interaction between the self and the outside world (Moustakas, 1994; J. A. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). As a part of this transcendental phenomenological method one must bracket, or set aside, the familiar or “taken-for-granted” perceptions of the world (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p. 13). Through a subjective yet systematic examination of the first-person experience one can discover the essences of experiences and understand the world (Moustakas, 1994; J. A. Smith et al., 2009).

Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre expanded the work of Husserl, moving further away from a philosophical and transcendental approach to one that created the foundations for the use of phenomenology in the fields of social and health sciences (Creswell, 2013; J. A. Smith et al., 2009). A student of Husserl, Heidegger placed a greater emphasis on the person-in-context and intersubjectivity, which “refers to the shared, overlapping and relational nature of our engagement in the world” (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p. 17). Another divergence from Husserl’s thinking was Heidegger’s transition to the work of a hermeneutic phenomenologist which moved from an abstract focus of philosophical phenomenology to theory development of the methods and purposes of the interpretation (J. A. Smith et al., 2009).

Building on the hermeneutical foundations of Heidegger, Gadamer focused on the importance of the historical and literary text as it relates to interpretation between the past and the present (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). He believed preconceptions were not fully realized prior to the interpretation, as they may develop while engaging with the text. Consequently, one may not be aware of preconceived bias prior to engagement; therefore, “meaning will be strongly influenced by the moment at which the interpretation is made” (p. 27).

Currere as Phenomenological Method

Although at times phenomenological research has been criticized as messy, mystical, and superficial, proponents argue it is a complex and rigorous effort which focuses on human perception and experience (Pinar et al., 2008). Phenomenological research “produces knowledge to disclose what it means to be human” (p. 407). With a phenomenological perspective, *currere* is an autobiographical curriculum theory which “focuses on the educational experience of the individual, as reported by the individual” (p. 414). As a conscience experience, lived-experiences are examined in the social environment to create meaning while examining the context of the past, present, as well as the future. It is through this “aesthetic experience” that one takes a step back “from the everyday and the familiar” in order to see the phenomenon, or what is occurring, with a renewed perspective (p. 415).

The General Process of Phenomenology

Creswell (2013) attributed the contemporary procedures associated with phenomenology to Moustakas, which include: 1) Understanding a phenomenon through

the common or shared experiences of the participants; 2) Clearly identifying a specific phenomenon; 3) Recognizing any “broad philosophical assumptions of phenomenology;” 4) Collecting data based on in-depth interviews, as well as possibly conducting observations and including other sources of data, such as journals, art, poems, etc.; 5) Asking participants broad, open-ended questions; 6) Identify significant statements and organize the data to find themes; and 7) Use the themes to create a description of the experiences (p. 81-82).

Therefore, as a means for better understanding the lived experiences of teachers, a phenomenological approach was employed in this study. Doing so uncovered voiced teacher experiences through an exploration process. This revealed and lent understanding to teachers’ individual and collective involvements in the phenomenon central to this research.

Role of the Researcher

When writing for a qualitative audience it is important to position or bracket oneself in relationship to the research content and personal lived-experiences. According to Creswell (2013), “writings are constructions, representations of interactive processes between researchers and the researched” (p. 215). Therefore, one should make personal biases and interpretations known to the audience. This positioning of oneself comes as a result of reflection and an understanding of one’s interpretation based on past experiences in relationship to gender, class, personal politics, other cultural experiences, and much more. According to Richardson, implementing “reflexivity” in one’s writing is not just an opportunity, but “an ethical duty” (as cited in Luttrell, 2010, p. 450).

As a beginning teacher in a rural Midwestern public elementary school, I will always remember the excitement as I worked tirelessly setting up my classroom in anticipation of the first day of school. My dream had come true. In just a few short days I would welcome a class of first-grade students. I would be able to put into practice all that I had been learning and preparing for, but most of all it would be my opportunity to change the world. Teaching was much harder than I anticipated, but my passion and love for teaching did not dim. I soon discovered that facilitating the learning process to meet the individual needs of students as they learned to read was incredibly rewarding and my love for teaching reading only increased.

With this passion for teaching reading and language arts, I pursued a graduate reading minor during my master's studies in order to add a reading endorsement to my state teaching license. During those years of study, I witnessed an educational shift resulting from the passing of the NCLB at a federal level, as state standards became the focal-point of lesson-planning and high-stakes were attached to standardized assessments. As I was nearing the end of my master's program, I recall in the summer of 2005 a professor stating the high-stakes testing pendulum had swung so far it would surely begin to swing back in the near future. Unfortunately, time has proven his conjecture to be incorrect.

The high-stakes testing pendulum has swung higher since the 2009 implementation of Race to the Top than any educator could have anticipated during the early part of the twenty-first century. The increased use of standardized assessments for high-stakes purposes has left teachers feeling as though their voice has been minimized in the conversation (Owens, 2013; Pinar, 2012; D. Ravitch, 2011, 2013). I have witnessed

this impact on teachers first-hand. During the 2011-2012 school year when the IREAD-3 was implemented in the state of Indiana, I volunteered in my son's third-grade classroom which included weekly interactions with his third-grade teacher. Professionally supervising student-teachers in the field that same school year, five of my students completed placements in the third grade. My responsibilities included conferencing not just with the teacher candidates, but with the supervising classroom teachers employed in the schools. Witnessing the impact of the implementation of the IREAD-3 on teachers during that school year greatly influenced my decision to conduct this research.

Subsequently, a phenomenological approach was selected for this study to allow the lived-experiences of the participants to emerge. Through this research I intend to bring a voice to the teacher during an era of data, accountability, and high-stakes testing. Although I teach elementary education classes at the collegiate level and am participating in this project as the role of the researcher, a part of me will always be an elementary school teacher. I believe teachers are vital stakeholders in the educational process and their lived-experiences need to be understood.

Data Collection

Creswell (2013) described the data collection as a circle of “interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions” (p. 146). In a phenomenological study, in-depth interviews are the primary means of collecting information. According to Hatch (2002), interviews may also be the only source of data in a qualitative approach. In this study, the primary source of data was in-depth interviews with individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of teaching in the public classroom both prior to and after the implementation of the IREAD-3.

Participants

Number of Participants

The field of qualitative research continues to contend no direct relationship exists between the quality of the study and the number of participants (Hatch, 2002). Consequently, experts in the field are often reticent in making recommendations regarding the number of participants required for phenomenological research. Although Creswell (2014) acknowledged there is no specific quantity, a phenomenological study typically includes three to ten participants (p. 189). While J. A. Smith et al. (2009) find it difficult to assign a number for PhD studies, they consider ten or more participants to be a larger corpus when employing interpretative phenomenological analysis.

In order to explore the impact of the IREAD-3 on the instructional practices and professionalism of early primary teachers it was determined to include the experiences of first-, second-, and third-grade teachers. This allows for interpretation of the experiences at varied grade levels, both two years prior to the assessment as well as the grade level the exam is employed. Acknowledging experiences may differ from one elementary school to another, participants were included from four elementary schools. Thus, the goal of this study was to recruit twelve participants: one first-, second-, and third-grade teacher from four different elementary schools.

Purposive Sampling

The nature of qualitative research is to purposefully select participants “that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (Creswell, 2014, p. 189). Due to the nature of phenomenological research, an essential criteria requires the shared experience of a phenomenon among participants, which in the context

of this research is the implementation of the IREAD-3 (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Thus, the participants were selected through the use of purposeful sampling. Criteria for participation included teachers with a minimum of five years of teaching experience in order to make comparisons to both before and after the implementation of the IREAD-3. Additionally, since the IREAD-3 is conducted at the third grade level, this study specifically sought to represent and compare the experiences of first-, second-, and third-grade teachers. Consequently, the goal of this study included the recruitment of one first-, second-, and third-grade teacher from four separate elementary buildings since experiences may or may not differ among locations.

Recruitment

A letter was sent to the school administration seeking approval to conduct this study within a public school system in Northern Indiana (see Appendix A). Approval from district administration to conduct the study was provided with the condition that I meet with each of the elementary principals to explain the purpose and scope of the study. The administration also required that I work directly with each principal to obtain a list of potential participants.

After obtaining Institutional Review Board approval from Andrews University, meetings were scheduled with each of the participating elementary principals. As a result of these meetings, the elementary principals provided a list of all eligible first-, second-, and third-grade teachers who have taught at their specific grade level a minimum of five years. The number of eligible participants varied both by school and grade level (see Table 1).

Table 1
Percentage of eligible participants by school and grade level

School	Grade Level	%
Elementary #1	First	40
	Second	40
	Third	40
Elementary #2	First	50
	Second	50
	Third	20
Elementary #3	First	60
	Second	75
	Third	60
Elementary #4	First	33
	Second	40
	Third	33

From the lists of eligible participants, one teacher from each grade level was selected from four elementary schools within the same district. Initial contact was conducted via email and follow-up phone calls ensued for potential participants who did not initially respond. Each potential participant received a formal recruitment letter (see Appendix B) and a copy of the informed consent (see Appendix C) prior to scheduling the interviews. Eleven of the twelve initial contacts resulted in agreement to participate in the study. During the recruitment process many teachers were initially reluctant to participate, citing a lack of time for any additional responsibilities. However, with one exception all were willing to participate after discussing the topic and purpose of the study. For the twelfth potential participant who declined, another eligible participant from the same grade level and elementary school agreed to participate. Before any interviews were conducted, an initial participant withdrew, citing personal scheduling

conflicts. Another eligible teacher from the same grade and elementary school was contacted, and the individual agreed to participate in the study. After the recruitment process, the population consisted of twelve early primary teachers from four elementary schools in a public school district in Northern Indiana.

Description of Participants

Participants responded to a brief questionnaire regarding demographic information prior to the initial interview. Demographic questions included race, gender, current grade level teaching assignment, number of years teaching current grade, total number of years teaching experience, and highest level of education obtained. Although purposeful sampling ideally would have included teachers of a different gender and race, all teachers who met the criteria for this study were both white and female. All teachers were currently teaching within the district, with the exception of one who had recently retired. Table 2 provides descriptive statistics regarding teaching experience and Table 3 depicts the demographic characteristics of participants.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Teaching Experience of Participants

Currently Teaching	n	Years in Current Grade			Total Years Teaching		
		min	max	<i>M</i>	min	max	<i>M</i>
1st grade	4	5	9	7.00	8	12	9.50
2nd grade	4	8	12	10.50	16	30	23.25
3rd grade	4	9	21	12.25	13	40	27.25
All	12	5	21	9.92	8	40	20.00

Table 3
Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variables		N	%
Gender			
	Male	0	0.0
	Female	12	100.0
	Total	12	100.0
Race			
	Caucasian	12	100.0
	Total	12	100.0
Teach			
	1st grade	4	33.3
	2nd grade	4	33.3
	3rd grade	4	33.3
	Total	12	100.0
Degree			
	Bachelors	5	41.7
	Masters	7	58.3
	Total	12	100.0

Research Setting

The research was conducted within a school district in Northern Indiana. The Indiana Department of Education provides enrollment data based on ethnicity and free/reduced price meals. Generalizations in statistical reporting have been employed to maintain confidentiality of the district, yet provide an approximation for the reader. Although population demographics vary among the four participating elementary schools, at the time of this study, the student population for the district was approximately 50% white and 30% Hispanic, with the remaining percentage consisting of black, multiracial, and other minority students. Approximately 50% of students received free lunches (the statistic does not include those who received reduced lunches). In the

first three years after the implementation of the IREAD-3 the district averaged a passing rate of approximately 80 to 85%.

Confidentiality

All participant consent forms were scanned to create digital files and the original paper documents were destroyed. The digital consent forms were saved with a password protected access code. Additionally, participants selected a personal pseudonym to be used in place of real identities. These pseudonyms were used as personal identifiers for all documents relating to this research. All documents with personal identifiers were given a password protected access code. Finally, for the member-checking process, the participants' pseudonyms were employed in brackets after each quote in the draft document. Each participant received a copy with the given pseudonyms, but was asked to delete the document after the member-checking was complete.

Interviews

Initial Interviews

For phenomenological research, semi-structured one-on-one interviews with broad questions are a preferred method of data collection (Creswell, 2013; J. A. Smith et al., 2009). For a 45 to 90 minute interview, J. A. Smith et al. (2009) recommend an interview protocol with six to ten open-ended questions, as well as additional prompts.

One hour in-depth interviews were scheduled with each participant after school hours and took place over the course of four weeks. Seven of the participants chose to meet face-to-face in their classrooms at their given elementary schools. Three participants chose to meet face-to-face at an off-site location. The remaining two

participants were originally scheduled to meet face-to-face in their elementary classrooms, but due to scheduling conflicts the interviews were conducted via FaceTime. All interviews were recorded with an iPad using the free app Voice Record Pro by Dayana Networks Ltd.

The following questions were used to guide the interviews:

1. What changes have occurred in the reading curriculum over the past five years? Possible Prompts: Basal vs. whole-language? Student-centered vs. teacher-centered? Whole-group vs. small-group? Differentiation instruction, curricular-focused vs. test-taking strategies? Creativity, time spent on reading vs. other content areas?

2. [Ask only if any changes were mentioned] Do you associate any curriculum changes with the implementation of the IREAD-3? Possible prompts: In what ways? How do you feel about these changes?

3. Describe the instructional practices you use on a regular basis in your reading classroom. Are there any experiences in particular that stand out?

4. Have your instructional practices in the teaching of reading changed in the past five years? Possible prompts: In what ways? Do you feel they are better or worse? How do you feel about these changes? What do you think brought these changes about?

5. What has your teaching experience in reading been like since the implementation of the IREAD-3 compared to before the test was employed?

6. What do you think it means to be considered a respected professional in your field? Possible prompts: What about self-perception vs. public perception? Are teachers are more respected or less respected than when you entered the field of teaching? Why or what has impacted this?

7. Has the implementation of the IREAD-3 affected your professionalism as a teacher in any way? Possible prompts: In what ways? Do you feel it has been for the better or worse? How do you feel about this?

8. What would be a metaphor or saying that represents your experience in teaching reading over the past five years?

9. Is there anything else you think I should know that would help me understand your experience as a teacher who prepares students to take the IREAD-3?

Follow-up Interviews

After an analysis of the data from the initial in-depth interviews, gaps were identified and additional follow-up questions were created for themes where only half of the participants discussed the theme during the initial interview. A total of four follow-up questions were created, but questions were only employed for participants who did not address the topic in the initial interview. For example, some participants only needed to answer questions one, two, and four, while another only needed to answer questions one and four. Based on the initial analysis, each participant received at least one of the four questions while four participants received all four questions.

Participants were initially contacted via email for the follow-up questions with their specific questions in an attached document. Attempting to be sensitive to the particular timing of the school year and in anticipation of overwhelmed schedules, participants were provided the option of responding to the questions face-to-face, via technology such as FaceTime, over the phone, or with a written response. Ten participants selected to provide a written response to the questions. Two participants never responded to the follow-up questions, even after multiple contacts.

The follow-up questions were as follows:

1. Definition of professionalism (context of this study):

Merriam-Webster defines professionalism as the conduct, aims, or qualities that characterize or mark a profession or a professional person. Beyond conduct, such as good judgment and appropriate behaviors, there are certain qualities that characterize what it means to be considered a professional. In *What is Curriculum Theory?* William Pinar (2012) declares “professional self-governance” as a necessary “prerequisite for professionalism” (p. 69). In *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, Diane Ravitch (2011) states “the essence of professionalism is autonomy, the freedom to make decisions based on one’s knowledge and experience” (p. 259). Consequently, for the purpose of this study, professionalism also refers to the freedom of teachers as trained and experienced experts in their field who can make educational decisions based on intellectual and professional judgment.

With this definition in mind, has the implementation of the IREAD-3 impacted your freedom to make decisions based on your intellectual and professional judgment?
Possible prompts: In what ways? Has it been for the better? Has it been for the worse? If there has been a change, how do you feel about it?

2. How does the amount of required testing today compare to five years ago?

Possible prompts: Has it increased? Decreased? If there has been a change, how do you feel about it? Has this impacted your instructional practices in any way?

3. How have learning standards and expectations changed in the last five years?

Possible prompts: Have they increased? Decreased? If there have been changes, how do you feel about them? Have they impacted your instructional practices in any way?

4. Has the implementation of the IREAD-3 impacted the amount of time you spend on what you consider to be quality reading instruction? Possible prompts: In what ways? How has it improved? How has it diminished? If there have been changes, how do you feel about them?

Journals

Each participant was provided with a journal in order to record any additional thoughts or reflections that came to mind regarding the topic once the initial in-depth interview was complete. None of the participants utilized the journals to record additional thoughts on the topic.

Data Analysis Procedures

After conducting each interview, a memo was created to record initial thoughts and reactions from the interviews. Each in-depth interview was then transcribed into a written narrative. As each initial transcription was completed a quality control process was implemented. This process entailed listening to the entire interview once again while reading through the script to ensure the accuracy of the transcription. The twelve initial interview transcriptions totaled 123 single-spaced pages and 69,100 words.

The transcriptions were uploaded to NVivo 10, qualitative analysis software by QSR International created to organize and analyze unstructured information. A variation of “generic” coding methods, or a combination of basic coding methods promoted by Saldaña (2013) were employed. Each interview transcript was examined individually, applying the coding to one full narrative before advancing to the next (p. 64).

Attribute Coding was initially employed by creating node classifications to create connections between the interview transcriptions and demographic information in order to identify “essential participant information” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 70). Next, each narrative was examined using Holistic Coding, which entailed examining the interview transcript paragraph-by-paragraph in order to identify larger themes or a broader scope. This is in line with the concept of “lean coding” presented by Creswell (2013) to start with five or six broader categories before expanding the information to include more detailed categories of information (p. 184). Then, Initial Coding was employed by examining the narratives sentence-by-sentence. Codes were applied utilizing both descriptive words and phrases, and *in vivo* coding (direct quotes from the narrative) to develop significant statements. After the initial coding process was completed for the entire transcript, a recursive process developed as the narratives were returned to time and again to examine codes and explore developing themes.

When working with larger sample sizes in interpretative phenomenological research (10 or more participants), J. A. Smith et al. (2009) indicate a super-ordinate theme may emerge when it is prevalent in over half the responses. To begin determining super-ordinate themes, the NVivo software was utilized to create a report of each code including data on the number of sources and coding references. This report was analyzed and an Excel spreadsheet was created to determine codes common among a majority of the participants.

Based on an analysis of the data, gaps emerged in four areas where at least half of the participants discussed the topic. The follow-up questions were created based on these

gaps in order to identify if these areas represented the consensus of more than half of the participants, providing additional support for the development of super-ordinate themes.

The follow-up responses received from the participants were in written form; therefore, they could be directly uploaded to NVivo. Due to the nature of the written narratives, they were already categorized into broad categories found in the holistic coding process. Consequently, the written responses were coded utilizing the sentence-by-sentence Initial Coding process. Once the responses were coded another report was created and the new data was added to the Excel spreadsheet to determine commonalities among codes.

Although the NVivo software was incredibly beneficial in identifying common codes among participants based on significant statements, the manual clustering of these meaningful units created the super-ordinate themes. This included a recursive process that involved reading and re-reading the data, as well as grouping and re-grouping the common codes over a two month time period.

Finally, a composite of both the textural and structural description of the phenomenon was created. The composite, along with reflection and discussion of the themes with another colleague, helped to inform the development of the essence of the experience.

Strategies for Validating Findings

An important element of qualitative research is to have an accurate understanding of the account or phenomenon in the study. To demonstrate a deep understanding, there are many aspects that need to be examined in regards to validation, reliability, and evaluation criteria to ensure standards of quality. Validation strategies are better

considered as credibility, authenticity, or dependability in qualitative research methods. They may include, but are not limited to techniques such as prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer review, clarifying researcher bias, member checking, and rich, thick descriptions. Reliability addresses issues such as detailed, quality field notes, the use of reputable software, and intercoder agreement. Additionally, the quality of the study is determined by addressing standards or criteria in relationship to a specific qualitative research approach (Creswell, 2013).

Validation Strategies

Prolonged Engagement

Creswell (2013) identified “prolonged engagement” as a validation strategy in qualitative research (p. 250). Aspects may include attempting to build trust among participants, as well as to learn and understand the culture. An aspect of building trust was to ensure the participants’ identities would remain confidential. Initially, some participants would begin the interview reluctant to share, and others would lower their voices and whisper responses. When reminded of confidentiality, the participants would gain confidence and begin to open-up and talk more freely.

Another aspect of prolonged engagement was the amount of time spent listening to recordings and rereading transcripts. Although the initial interviews were approximately an hour long, many additional hours were spent pouring over the data. Prolonged engagement with both the interview recordings and transcripts enriched and deepened an understanding of the experiences.

Triangulation

According to Creswell (2013) in the use of triangulation “researchers make use of multiple and different sources, investigators, and theories ... to shed light on a theme or perspective” (p. 251). Providing evidence in current literature that supports the interview data is a way of corroborating findings. The use of journals was intended to be an additional source beyond the interviews; however, participants selected not to use the provided journals. Selecting teachers from different elementary buildings who had experienced the phenomenon was also an intentional source of creating triangulation. Essentially, utilizing a second round of follow-up interviews was an additional source of data to provide validity as well.

Clarifying Researcher Bias

By bracketing myself and clarifying my researcher bias, I have increased the validity of this study by assisting the reader in understanding assumptions which may impact the inquiry. According to Creswell (2013) this clarification exposes past experiences that could likely shape the interpretation of the study.

Member Checking

Member checking allows the participants to read through the findings and provide feedback on the interpretations (Creswell, 2013). This strategy was employed by offering the opportunity to participants to verify the accuracy and credibility of the accounts. All participants were provided a copy of the findings. The version presented to the participants included pseudonym identifiers in brackets following each quote. Since the participants selected their own pseudonyms, personal statements were easily

identifiable. Eight of the twelve participants elected to contribute to this process, including all four third-grade teachers. This process adds to the validity of this research as 100% of those who provided feedback believed they were quoted accurately. As one participant stated, “The quotes that you used from me are exactly as I intended.” Additionally, another validating factor was the reaction of participants to the quotes of others. One participant indicated, “I kept finding myself saying, ‘exactly’ or ‘I agree!’”

Rich, Detailed Descriptions

Finally, throughout the study I have employed the use of rich, detailed descriptions in my writing to communicate the context and setting, as well as utilize quotes from participants to bring an authentic voice to the research. All quotations used without a citation are direct quotes from the participants. The goal is that readers will be emotionally drawn into and will engage with the research through my narrative approach.

Reliability Perspectives

High Quality Data

Creswell (2013) indicated reliability is greater when detailed notes and a good-quality recording is obtained. After each interview memos were recorded to ensure the reliability of experiences were documented instead of relying on memory. Additionally, by using the app Voice Record Pro on the iPad, I was able to monitor the quality of the recording during the entire interview process by discretely monitoring the equalizer. The same app was also available on my iPhone, in the event that I experienced any issues. Ensuring the quality of the recording aided in creating reliable transcripts.

Additionally, a quality control process was implemented to ensure the accuracy of the interview transcripts. This involved reading through the completed narratives after they had been transcribed while simultaneously listening to the recording to ensure the transcription was correct.

Intercoder Agreement

Due to the highly interpretive nature of coding transcript narratives, according to Creswell (2013) intercoder agreement refers to the stability of coding passages among different researchers. Creswell and his colleagues pursued an 80% agreement on coding passages based on agreed upon definitions of codes in an established codebook (p. 254). To establish reliability in the coding methods, an experienced researcher and methodologist agreed to code an interview transcript from this study. In contrast to Creswell's example of using an established codebook, the external researcher used the same Initial Coding strategies as the primary researcher, but employed the use of the NVivo software without a prior knowledge of the existing codes assigned. Due to time constraints, the external researcher coded approximately two-thirds of one interview transcript. To compare intercoder agreement, the codes were compared, including a discussion of their meanings and the segments of the text that were coded. In the selected narrative, a combined total of 23 unique codes were utilized. Of those codes 19 were utilized by both coders, resulting in an intercoder agreement of nearly 83%.

Evaluation Criteria

To demonstrate the quality of this phenomenological study, the criteria established by Creswell (2013) to communicate the philosophical views of the

phenomenology will be employed. These standards will work to provide validation, indicating the research is “well grounded and well supported” (p. 259). These have been clearly presented in the conceptual framework and supported by literature and findings throughout the research. Additionally, the rich, detailed descriptions of both the experience and context, along with the use of quotes from participants will convey the overall essence of the experience of the participants. Finally, I have situated myself within study by demonstrating a reflexive writing process that not only presents my position, but allows the reader to make determinations regarding any personal bias.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure ethical research practices, an initial proposal was submitted to the Andrews University Institutional Review Board for approval. After obtaining that approval, initial contacts were made and initial interviews were scheduled. All updates and follow-up questions were also submitted for IRB approval during the research process.

Pseudonyms were created for each of the participants in order to maintain confidentiality and the names of the elementary schools were assigned random numbers. The name of the school district has not been revealed, nor the actual number of elementary schools that reside in the district. Statistical data was generalized in order to provide broad information for the reader, yet maintain the confidentiality of the district. Additionally, participants were provided the option of meeting in a neutral location in order to maintain confidentiality within the district.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

A set of super-ordinate and supporting themes emerged examining the common or shared experiences of twelve participants through a detailed analysis of in-depth interviews and follow-up questionnaires. The essence, understanding the essential features of the central experience of teaching after the implementation of the IREAD-3, was constructed focusing on the themes portraying both what was experienced and how the participants responded. The following five super-ordinate themes emerged: imposed change, reactive instruction, the paradox of testing, teaching under pressure, and loss of autonomy. Table 4 indicates the super-ordinate themes and supporting text codes, prevalent in over half the cases. All quotations utilized without a citation are direct quotes from the participant interviews.

Imposed Change

The Changing Curriculum

A theme of the changing curriculum, which was the common experience among participants regarding imposed change in the curriculum, emerged early in the research. In fact, all participants spoke about the changing curriculum (see Table 4). When asked, “What changes have occurred in your reading curriculum in the previous five years?” One participant laughed and responded, “How long do we have to talk about this?” Since

Table 4
Prevalence of themes among twelve participants

Super-Ordinate Themes	Supporting Codes	N	%
Imposed Change	Changing Curriculum	12	100
	Basal Adoption	11	92
	District Curriculum Map	8	67
	Increased Rigor	11	92
	IREAD-3 Behind Changes	11	92
Reactive Instruction	Changing Instructional Practices	12	100
	Test-Driven Instruction	10	83
	Increased Differentiation	7	58
	Shared Impact with ISTEP+	9	75
	Improved Instructional Practices	8	67
The Paradox of Testing	Increased Testing	12	100
	Test-Driven Instruction	10	83
	Diminished Instructional Time	8	67
	Teaching How to Take the Test	7	58
	Students Under Stress	10	83
	Narrowing of the Curriculum	7	58
Teaching Under Pressure	Pressure on Teachers	12	100
	Higher Demands	8	67
	Teacher Evaluations	10	83
	Many Factors Impact Student Achievement	12	100
	One Size Does Not Fit All	10	83
Loss of Autonomy	Diminished Professionalism	10	83
	The “Fun” in Teaching	10	83
	Negative Public Perception	8	67
	Political Responsibility	10	83
	Public Perception Worse Now	7	58
	Ignorance of Outsiders	10	83

the implementation of the IREAD-3, teachers have experienced numerous mandated curricular changes which have left teachers feeling as though the curriculum is “always changing.” The common experience of imposed change is undeniable (see Table 4):

We ride a roller coaster, so up-and-down. We change programs all the time. So just when you get used to teaching one way, you know, we are implementing one program, now we are switching to this program. Then, we are going to switch and do this program and each year it's like, “Are we going do the same thing?”

Referring to the perpetual change in the curriculum, one participant concluded the “language arts curriculum has just been, like crazy.”

The Imposed Curriculum

Prior to the implementation of the IREAD-3, the school system dedicated both time and money into developing a district-wide language arts curriculum. The district curriculum included a blend of balanced-literacy methodologies, including approaches such as Making Meaning and Guided Reading. Participants attributed the IREAD-3 as the driving force behind the curriculum changes (see Table 4). After the implementation of the IREAD-3, the scores were not meeting the district-wide benchmark which was set by the state; however, the district initially received “waivers” from the state to use their own “integrated language arts program” instead of a state-approved curriculum. When the state no longer provided the school district with a waiver, they adopted a state-approved scripted basal curriculum in order to maintain funding. A participant summed up the shift away from the district curriculum by stating, “Then we had to drop all that and follow this basal series that had been okayed by the state of Indiana and so that was very frustrating.”

One participant described the new curriculum as follows: “[The] textbook that we adopted was a whole language arts program; it included reading, and spelling, and

writing, and so the first year of implementation we stayed pretty true to the textbook program.” Some participants voiced negative feelings regarding the textbook adoption for being “more scripted” and “surfacy.” Although teachers were encouraged to stay true to the curriculum, one participant stated, “If we hadn't had the background in the comprehension strategies and the digging a little bit deeper for things - just following the basal, in my opinion, would not have been good.” Another participant indicated the curriculum was “disjointed” and did not “spiral” well; moving to the next concept too quickly, using the basal “never really felt like you were digging deep.”

While strong opposition to the basal adoption was voiced, there also existed apparent conflict of thought regarding the benefits and limitations of the curriculum series. A more experienced teacher criticized the overuse of worksheet pages and continual testing of benchmarks in the curriculum, yet she also stated “a lot of young teachers really need the script; you know, help with teaching certain things.” Although the design of the basal series attempted to meet the needs of diverse learners through the use of supplemental books at three different levels, participants also noted the curriculum fell short in meeting the individual needs of students. “It's not [at] everyone's level either” because there are more than three learning levels per classroom. Another participant voiced a conflicting opinion, indicating “having a basal was nice because it had a lot of resources, but it also felt binding. You know, you felt like you were kind of like, bound to it.”

Even though the school system was required to adopt a state-approved curriculum, participants stated that instead of improving test scores, the scores diminished. Referring to this a participant stated, “When the basal was first adopted we

were sticking to it pretty rigidly, and then realized that wasn't the best practice.” This led to changes in the curriculum yet again. While most were “happy” about the decision to move away from a scripted curriculum, the perpetual change left many teachers feeling disillusioned and frustrated. “They said, ‘No, you don't have to do that anymore.’ I mean ... It's just like you're always changing.” One participant summarized the experience as follows:

I know education is constantly changing. I think that's awesome, but I just feel like we don't stick with something long enough in order to make it work ... I just feel like everything is just, kind of like, just random. Random I guess.

Following a Curriculum Map

During the school year this study was conducted, the district in which this study’s participants taught moved away from a focus on the basal curriculum and allowed more freedom to use additional resources, as long as teachers followed the district curriculum map. The purpose of the curriculum map was to be a guide for addressing required state standards, and essentially laid out “the skills” to be taught in each unit and “the timeframe for each unit” so teachers would know “exactly” when they were “supposed to be teaching each segment of everything.” If teachers adhered to the curriculum map, then “by the end of the year” they should “have covered everything in [the] standards.”

Although the curriculum map was perceived as an advantage for providing “uniformity in the curriculum” among schools within the district for transfer students and assists in preventing “holes in the curriculum,” criticism of the map was focused on attempting to meet the demands of unrealistic, state-mandated standards. Another participant stated:

In order to insure that skills are covered before the test, the administration has developed a curriculum map to be followed. This map is helpful and effective for its purpose, but consequently, there is so much to be covered that I often feel like I must keep moving even though students need more time to practice and master skills.

The Issue of Rigor

In addition to criticisms voiced by some regarding coverage, a vast majority of participants addressed the issue that “learning standards and expectations have become more rigorous” (see Table 4). The participants concurred there have been “many more expectations and pressures put on students in the past decade.”

We use “rigorous” in this state like it is the best thing to hit education. We don’t look at all at the impact it is having on our children. We expect kindergartners to read a book and write sentences. Second graders are to be reading books that used to be read by third and fourth graders.

The focus on rigor and increasing “the amount of information a student is expected to know” has also made the experience of teaching “more intense.” State standards have become an underlying force “not focused so much on the student and what the student needs. It’s focused on what the state says they should be able to do.” As one participant concluded, “If you have a child that’s in elementary, they deserve a break when they get home. They do deserve a break, because I think there’s *a lot* [participant’s emphasis] expected.”

Reactive Instruction

Changing Instructional Practices

Without exception, each participant spoke of their changing instructional practices from autogenous to reactive instruction (see Table 4). When asked to describe the experience of teaching reading during the past five years, one participant responded, “It’s

kind of like the wind, always changing.” Undeniably, the experience of implementing an imposed and perpetually changing curriculum is intricately interwoven with instructional practice.

Changing instructional practices due to the implementation of the scripted basal curriculum were described as going “backwards” and “for the worse.” Teaching with the basal series’ spiraling curriculum, which moved swiftly from one topic to the next, left participants to feel as though they could not “really dig in and really fully explore a strategy or concept.” The perpetual change also made determining what instructional strategies might be best practice very difficult. A participant voiced concern regarding younger colleagues:

One thing that's hard, and I think it's hard for our school, and it's affected us; not just me, but probably everybody - we keep grasping at different things...I'm on the other, the back-end of teaching, but I think it gets confusing to people, young people, young teachers.

The focus of reactive instruction became: "What does the state say you need to know and how are you going to teach that, and how are they going to be ready?"

Test-Driven Instruction

The Driving Force

Overwhelmingly, participants discussed testing and the reactive impact on instructional practice (see Table 4). All third-grade teachers in this study addressed the influence of testing on instruction. According to one participant, “everything is test-driven.” Another participant indicated, “It seems that we use the testing window and then work backwards trying to make sure, from the first day of the year, that the skills and standards tested will be the ones that are taught.” Although one teacher indicated she would teach the required skills regardless of the test, she stated, “In third grade,

probably it was just more important that we cover certain skills earlier in the year, so that we are sure we have covered those before the IREAD test.”

Shared Impact with ISTEP+

In reference to test-driven instruction, participants also indicated a shared impact on instructional practices between preparing for the IREAD-3 and other tests (see Table 4). This included the ISTEP+, the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress Plus exam, which was already in place to measure student achievement prior to the implementation of the IREAD-3. Referring to her instructional approach, one participant indicated, “I don't know that IREAD has changed [my instructional approach] just because we always had ISTEP, and they're very similar.” In addressing the fact that she has to take time out of instruction to teach students how to take the test, another participant remarked the impact is “not only due to IREAD but also to ISTEP.” In a testing-focused teaching environment, one teacher stated, “I find myself teaching towards the test now. I always have the unit test in front of me when I'm planning.”

Impacts of Test-Driven Instruction

Impacting “Best Practices”

Participants provided examples of how best practice instruction has been impacted by a test-driven focus. One participant stated, “Using ‘best practices’ sometimes loses out to efficiency and pace.” Another voiced the concern that “instructional practices are impacted because we are most test-driven, and I think we are missing so much in creativity and digging into project learning.” While another participant communicated “the format and structure of the test dictates the structure of

some the activities I present to children in the classroom,” she shared her reactive instructional experience in the years following the implementation of the IREAD-3:

When IREAD was started, initially I spent a lot of time formatting activities to look like the test format. Over time I have spent less time with that and focused on more authentic teaching, because I think that if the children have a good grounding in these skills they will be able to manage the test. As I have grown more comfortable with the test I have started to shift back to more teaching practices which I believe to be good teaching. When IREAD first began I felt compelled to adapt my teaching to meet the demands of the test.

Increased Differentiation

Small group instruction. Although many struggled to implement Guided Reading or The Daily 5 under the constraints of the basal reading series, most participants referred to the current implementation of both small-group and differentiated instructional approaches. For some participants these approaches, particularly Guided Reading, have been in place longer than the onset of the IREAD-3. However, others have implemented these teaching approaches more recently due to requirements of the school district. Referring to more recent instructional changes, a participant stated, “Instead of whole group, now we do differentiated instruction - Daily 5, where the kids work ... they have stations.”

Targeted differentiation. Additionally, a third-grade teacher communicated how test-focused instructional practices have resulted in targeted differentiation:

We're trying this year to very closely target the kids who will not qualify for exemptions, because that's the other thing, we have certain services and things available for kids in our building, but you also have to look at where you can get the most bang for your buck. You know, if we have a reading remediation program and it only has ten seats, there are only spots for ten kids. It doesn't make sense to necessarily put your ten lowest kids in that program, because they may, they probably won't grow enough to pass the test anyway. So we want to target those kids who are close enough where we can make a difference.

A second-grade teacher indicated an increased focus on “the kids that you think aren't going to make it next year if they don't have some intensive evaluation, or intensive intervention.” Another participant shared how she has received instruction through staff training to meet the needs of those who are struggling “on the fly,” by checking for understanding and then pulling kids aside to form an “automatic group” for intervention.

Improved Instructional Practices

Participants shared that overall they believe their instructional practices have improved (see Table 4). Repeatedly, participants referred to experience gained over time as a key factor:

Just with experience you realize that time is everything and the more time spent with a group, the more rich those children's experiences are. So I think yes, my approach has changed and that I take more time and devote more time to each child. And when I first started it was kind of like, I'll get to a group - maybe two today. Then I'll just look and see if everybody is doing the right thing when they are doing their stations, and two groups today - I am good; but now I don't feel right if I don't meet with all of my kids every day.

As with any professional field, gaining experience takes time: “I feel like the more I teach the more I learn, and I've been doing this for quite a while now.” Another participant stated, “You just pick up so many things that you don't know when you first start, so [my instructional approach] has definitely gotten better.” One participant shared her intentional focus of improving instruction by having “the kids work in partners more, or in table groups, and it's not just sit and get; [it is] getting them up and moving, even just doing quick little activities.” A participant who is newer to the teaching profession reflected on the reasons behind her improved instructional practices:

Each year I become a better teacher, I gain experience with each year I teach. I feel like I'm becoming a better teacher because of my experiences, and because the corporation is doing a better job with professional development. I feel as if I'm always given new ideas or things to try in my classroom to enhance my

teaching or students' learning. Now do I think I'm a better teacher because of the test? I don't think so.

The Paradox of Testing

Increased Testing

Participants spoke of the increase in required testing, and although perspectives regarding the timeline of when the increase occurred varied slightly for two participants, the vast majority voiced testing has increased “tremendously” in the past five years (see Table 4). A participant who has taught for more than twenty years stated:

It's been such a shift because we've always taken standardized tests, but there was never as much emphasis put on it, at the beginning when I was first teaching, as what there is now. The emphasis has definitely changed ... within the last five, six years it's definitely gotten a lot worse.

To ensure readiness for the high-stakes exams, schools have implemented more and more tests to monitor progress and help prepare students for the once-a-year assessments.

Participants were not only in agreement regarding the increase in the amount of testing, there was a general consensus students are tested “too much.” In fact, participants believe “the testing has been a real pain.” Just days before her interview, one participant overheard a second-grade student say to her friend in the bathroom, “I hate Friday because we just take tests all day.”

High-stakes testing aside, participants see the value in classroom assessment:

I think it is good for us to know where the kids are. It depends on what kind of testing, like if it's just a quick, little assessment to kind of see where the kids are, where they need to be. But if it's a test like the IREAD test that's going to determine whether they move on to the next grade or not ... that's where I have some concerns.

A major issue is participants feel the pendulum has “swung too far.” As one participant stated, “There is a place, of course, for data, and it can be a useful tool, but I

think it should be one that's more informative in terms of your teaching.” Another participant acknowledged the value in collecting data, but indicated she did not “need a test” to tell her what is observable during small group instruction. Informal assessments are often more valuable for classroom teachers to make appropriate instructional adjustments. On the contrary, the participant noted, “A paper-pencil test doesn’t always tell me what a student knows.”

In this era of increased testing, there is an ongoing discussion among teachers regarding the purpose of an additional state-mandated reading test in third grade when students are already required to take a reading assessment during the ISTEP+ each spring. One participant questioned aloud the necessity: “Why do they have to take the IREAD-3 as well?” She continued, “The ISTEP test is already so long ... so why put another test on top of it for them? They're so young.” With the IREAD-3 perceived as an unnecessary assessment, one participant quoted the current Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction, Glenda Ritz, stating, “No child learned to read by taking a test.”

Teaching to the Test

Another contradiction became apparent with the topic of teaching to the test. As presented in the previous theme of *reactive instruction*, testing has undoubtedly become a driving-force behind instructional practice. Although some shared with lowered voices and reassurance from the researcher identities would remain confidential, participants communicated the ways in which instructional practice has been modified to better prepare students for success on the IREAD-3. “Teaching to the test” is the elephant in the room no one wants to acknowledge. As one participant expressed regarding the

IREAD-3, “I don't want to say we teach to the test, but we definitely know what's on it, and we make sure that we cover that material.”

One participant, who maintained a strong position of teaching for “growth” not to a test, expressed the “great pressure” and “great uncertainty” the first year the IREAD-3 was implemented because “we didn't really know for sure if what we were teaching was really what we needed to be teaching.” Although admitting the IREAD-3 was “very difficult” for the population of students at her school, she was relieved after administering the test to see the exam was a “very reasonable test” for an “average third-grader.” Although at times contradictions existed between the participants’ stance on teaching to the test versus teaching for growth, the participants teaching at the elementary with the highest poverty level in the school district spoke consistently to the topic of teaching for growth as a pedagogical approach.

Diminished Instructional Time

Test-Taking Takes Time

The era of hyper-testing has led to an additional incongruity, the loss of instructional time. Testing itself takes time. As one participant stated, “It seems like teachers are constantly testing and not teaching.” Another participant communicated, “I spend way too much time testing my students. I usually know how they will perform before they take a test because it is my job to know what they understand and what they still need to work on.” Participants believe there is a misplaced focus on testing instead of teaching: “If we used our resources for teaching the kids ... that would be a lot more beneficial than trying to test.”

The Genre of Test-Taking

In addition to the actual testing, instructional time is sacrificed in order to teach students how to take the test. This includes teaching students how to understand the testing “format,” such as providing students with “a passage with questions similar to the IREAD.” One participant referred to this instructional practice as “the genre of test-taking.” She indicated:

Much of my time is spent preparing to take tests rather than teaching my students to, how to learn ... I spend way too much time teaching the genre of test-taking. While I believe there is some value in teaching this genre, the amount of time spent on this is unreasonable ... and I'm not sure that really furthers kids' ability to grow as readers. I find it difficult to balance my guided reading time with teaching test-taking skills. I feel increased pressure to teach test-taking skills because the children need these skills to pass IREAD.

The genre of test-taking extends beyond third grade. A participant with less than ten years of teaching experience noted a difference from even the beginning of her career stating, “We are doing test-taking strategies in first grade now that we've never done before.” For instance, earlier in her career they did not practice how to “bubble in” responses or how to determine “which one is the silly answer,” but according to this participant “it is part of school now.” With a sense of exasperation, the participant shared how she now spends time teaching something she never anticipated; something that was never addressed in her teacher-training was how to take a test. She stated, “Here we are teaching them how to read *and* [participant’s emphasis] how to take an open-ended or a multiple-choice test.”

With the additional state requirements of computerized testing for the IREAD-3, the genre of test-taking also involves spending time teaching students “how to take the test on the computer,” including “how to use all the icons.” Even participants who teach first grade referred to spending time teaching their students how to use the computer for

testing. Additionally, in preparation for the IREAD-3 one participant spoke of spending “more time teaching kids to read on the computer because the test is computerized and there's a different process for reading on the screen than there is using pencil and paper.” One participant concluded, “If it were still paper-pencil we could focus more on the actual reading and not so much on the technology, but I know that's the day and age we are in, so I don't think there's any escaping it.”

Loss of Resources

The residual impact of the computerized testing is a loss of instructional resources. As a consequence of computerized testing for both the IREAD-3 and ISTEP+, one participant noted, “We will not be able to use the computers for research, taking Accelerated Reader tests, or anything related to the internet during the two weeks that testing is occurring because the system cannot handle it.” Another participant stated not just the loss of the computer lab during the testing weeks, but the loss of reading intervention support staff pulled away from her classroom to help with testing. She commented, “It just pulls all your resources - time and staff and scheduling.” Based on the participant’s calculations, her students lost two months of intense reading intervention due to the loss of support staff in preparation for and during the ISTEP+, IREAD-3, and ESL testing.

Managing Student Stress

Students are under stress; just ask the teachers (see Table 4). Under state requirements, students in the third grade must pass the IREAD-3 to advance to the fourth grade. Participants have observed first-hand the impact the stress is having on the

students and are greatly concerned. Teachers have “witnessed children in tears after learning they didn’t pass IREAD.” The impact is also felt by classmates, as a participant shared how one student expressed “how sad she was that her friends won’t get to go on.”

A participant who teaches third grade observed:

Initially when IREAD came out, the kids [were] unaware that there was this looming test, but most, I’d say half to three-quarters of third-graders, now come into third grade knowing that there is a test that they need to take this year - that they need to pass, and any mention of it by anyone brings some anxiety forward.

As one participant stated, “More and more students have anxiety disorders. I feel bad for our children.” Consequently, participants have been left to question if “the number that we arrive at, at the end, is necessarily a measure of how kids read, but rather how they endure the stress of the test.”

The stress is not limited to third-grade students. Participants who teach second grade also reported students feel anxiety regarding the looming IREAD-3 and are “scared to go on to third grade because they have to take ‘that test’.” Sheltering students has also become more difficult because “it’s on the news; it’s not something that they can just walk away from.”

Another implication of the IREAD test is that we now teach children how to relax and de-stress. We have seen a huge increase in the anxiety of children in response to testing ... and so really teaching, teaching them how to deal with that anxiety almost is part of teaching reading.”

In response to the stress, guidance counselors are now conducting sessions to help students learn how to handle if they “have a little panic attack” and how to get “refocused” and how to “take your brain to your little happy place” when dealing with test anxiety. Consequently, teaching stress management to cope with test-induced anxiety minimizes quality instructional time.

Narrowing of the Curriculum

An additional conflict which emerged regarding testing is the struggle to find balance in teaching content-area subjects. The implementation of the IREAD-3 has “narrowed curriculum boundaries in preparation for the test” (see Table 4). With an increased focus on reading instruction and assessment “over the last five years,” participants reported they “definitely spend more time on reading instruction.” As one participant indicated, “The IREAD-3 has certainly brought reading instruction to the forefront of awareness. Most of our individual and grade-level planning and collaboration time is focused around reading.” Additionally, teachers “have been more concerned about reading, thus there has not been time to incorporate those content areas.”

A participant expressed:

I have mixed feelings about it. It is great to work with the kids and have time for reading. I do miss teaching more social studies and science related curriculum, and feel like kids are missing out on a more rounded education.

The narrowing of the curriculum has been attributed to a shared impact between the IREAD-3 and the ISTEP+. “We were told not to worry so much about science and social studies. We had to worry about teaching math and language arts because those things were tested” on the ISTEP+. The implementation of the IREAD-3 contributed to the narrowing of the curriculum, as “science and social studies have become much less important because of the focus on reading in third grade.” Targeted differentiation has also increased focus on the subjects of reading and math for struggling students. In order to address this issue, teachers have been told by administrators “social studies and science are supposed to be taught during reading.” However, participants have found this approach challenging. Some have “tried to find trade books that were similar to the topic;” however, “at times, it is difficult, impossible to find texts on the correct reading

level that match up to [science and social studies] standards.” One participant also expressed feedback she was receiving from secondary teachers due to a narrowed approach to curricular instruction:

The high school people and the junior high people are screaming bloody murder because the kids come and don't have any background for those upper-level courses. I told [them] for a long time, I said, "They may be able to read and write, but they're going to be stupid."

Consequently, the implementation of high-stakes testing has narrowed the curricular focus by shifting the instructional concentration to a skills-based focus on tested subjects, diminishing instruction in the areas of science and social studies. This is especially true for lower achieving students who rarely have opportunity for enrichment activities in other content areas. The aforementioned combined with the push for greater privatized education, often a plausible option for higher-achieving and higher-socioeconomic students, led one participant to state: “There is a part of me that feels like we're going back to segregation almost, in some ways; so that the public schools are going to be left with the ones nobody else wants.”

Teaching Under Pressure

Feeling the Pressure

Participants overwhelmingly referred to the current environment of teaching under pressure (see Table 4). A word frequency query revealed participants utilized the word “pressure” on forty-nine occasions throughout the interviews in direct references to teachers. All references to pressure, including those relating to both students and teachers, were developed into a word tree to demonstrate the numerous ways in which the word was utilized in participants’ responses. By presenting the word “pressure” in a visual branching structure, the word tree provides a graphical representation of the word

used in context. Each reference to the word pressure is represented with the word or phrase employed prior to each use on the left, and the word or phrase that followed the use of the word on the right. Figure 2 provides a visual representation on a single page; whereas, an enlarged version is presented with the top half of the word tree in Figure 3 and the bottom half in Figure 4.

With participants overwhelmingly referring to this pressure, the foreboding burden of knowing students will be “retained if they don't pass” is felt as “looming pretty big all the time.” A participant stated, “I always worked hard, but now I feel like we put in *a lot* [participant’s emphasis] more time ... I come in earlier than what I used to come in, some days I stay later.” When asked to clarify “earlier,” the participant stated she now regularly arrives three hours prior to the start of each school day, which equates to a minimum of nine to ten hour workdays. Additionally, participants not only referred to working longer days, but to taking work home in the evenings and spending time either at home or coming back to the school on weekends.

There is also greater pressure to advance students to the next level. When a student struggles with growth:

There's a feeling of deflation ... now it feels like, "What am I doing wrong that I can't get this kid to move forward?" I think we personalize it a lot more and so there is a more, there's a sense of urgency. Like, [slight choking noise, attempted to catch her breath] you kind of go into a little panic.

Feeling the pressure of student achievement is not a new occurrence. As one participant stated, “I've always felt pressure to get them ready for the next grade level.” Participants acknowledged “it's always been our shoulders” but the pressure has increased; now “there's a lot more pressure on everybody.” Although all participants

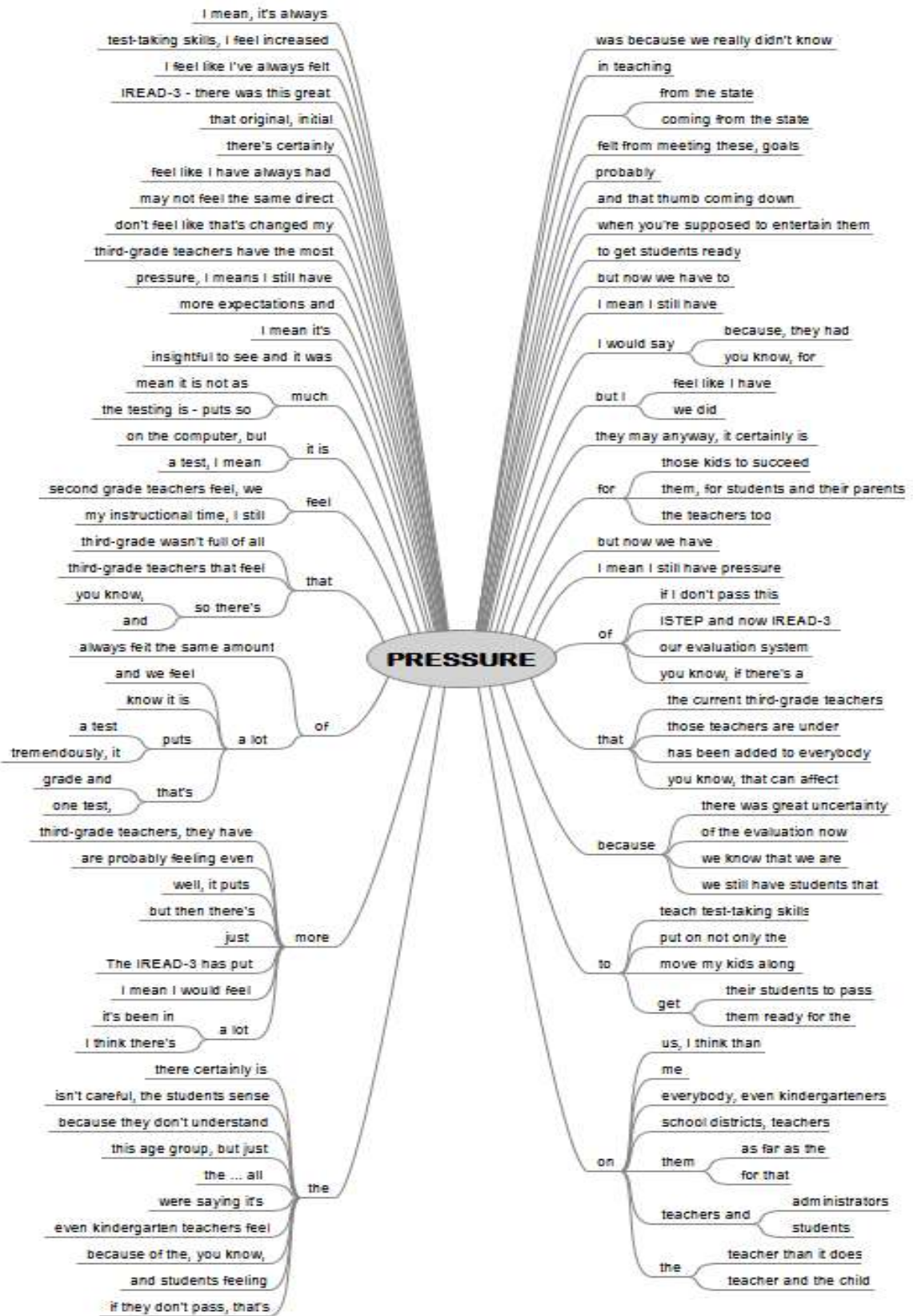


Figure 2. Word tree depicting the word pressure used in context.

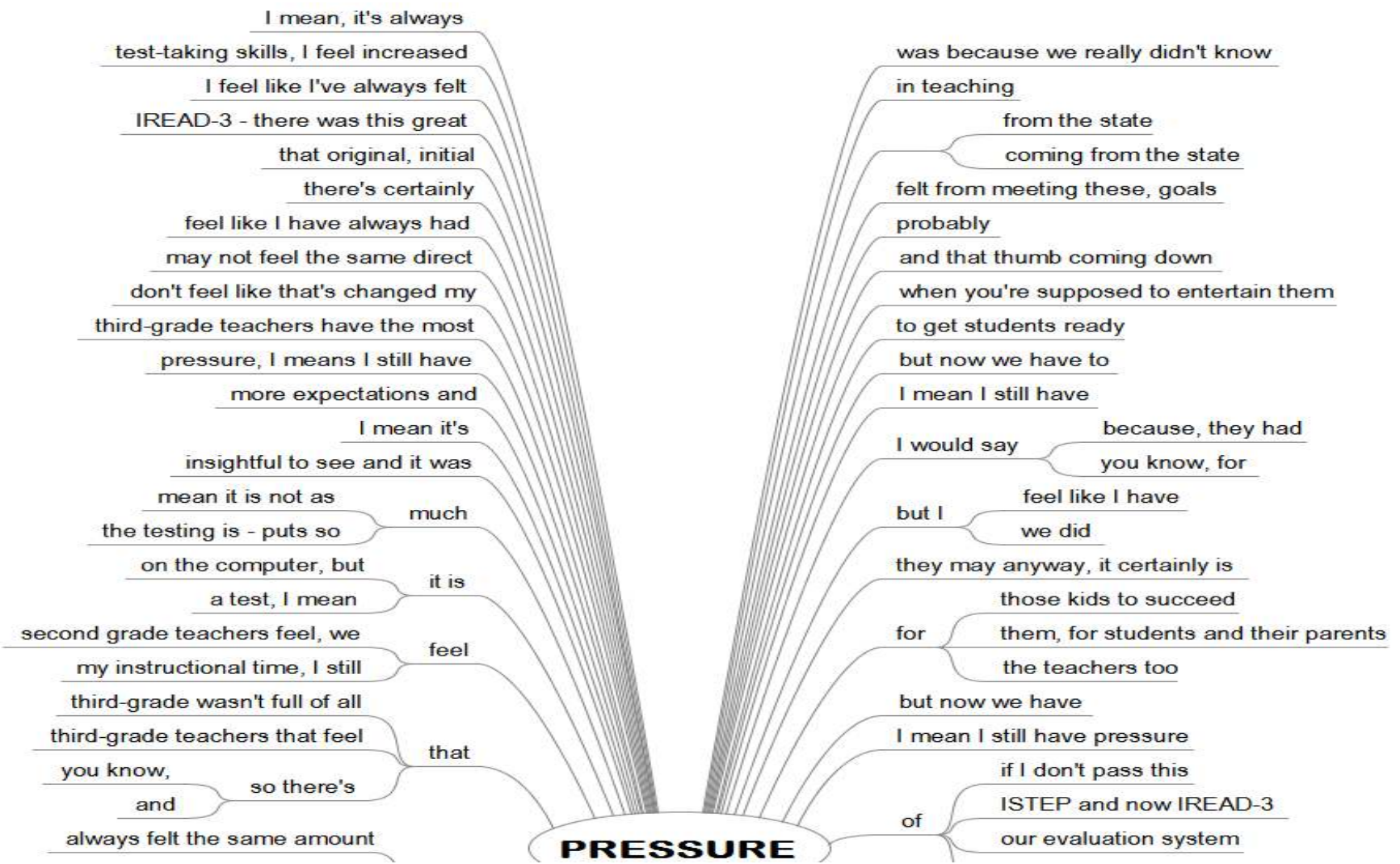


Figure 3. Top half of word tree depicting the word pressure used in context.

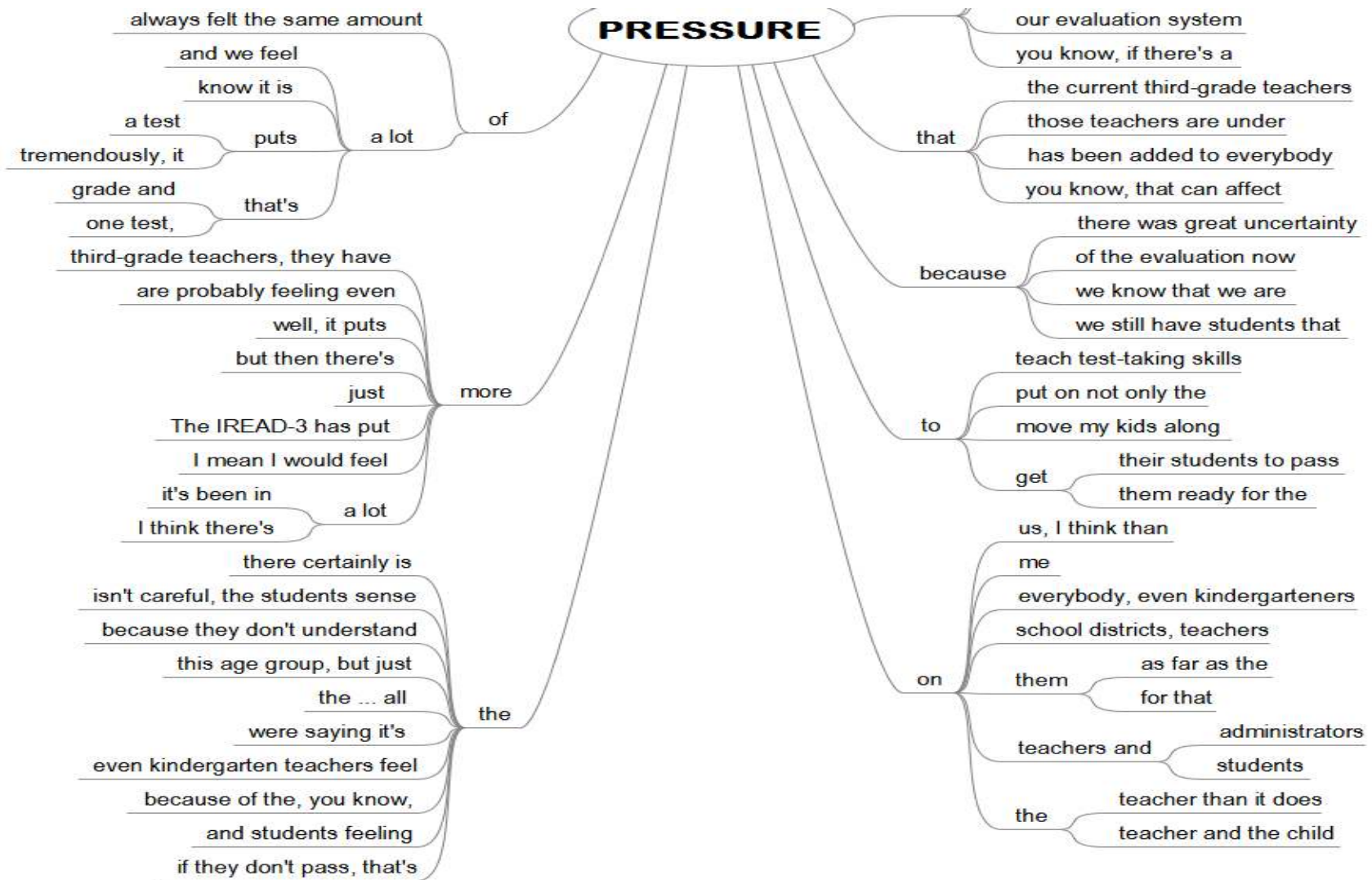


Figure 4. Bottom half of word tree depicting the word pressure used in context.

feel the pressure, some perceived this pressure differently than others. Participants teaching at the highest poverty school appeared to be the least personally impacted by the pressures of the IREAD-3, taking it more in stride and indicating they have already felt great pressure for years. In contrast, participants at the other schools expressed stronger emotions, taking the experience much more personally and feeling “like a failure” if students did not pass the test.

Although the IREAD-3 is administered in the third grade, “it’s not just third-grade teachers [who] feel that pressure for those kids to succeed.” Participants teaching in the years prior to third grade also have a vested interest. As one participant reflected, “We feel a lot of pressure because we know that we are the grade before they give the test and we want to make sure that our students do well.” Another participant explained the emotions of dealing with the stress:

I’ve always asked. I want to see my kids’ scores that I had in second grade, that are taking the IREAD in third grade, because I want to know how they did. There is just, there’s a lot of stress. And I think when we have stress, the teachers are stressed - I’ve been stressed today - the teachers are stressed, kids can always feel the stress. . . . I think that’s probably part of the problem too because I think that everybody is stressed and you don’t want the kids to be stressed. And we are not supposed act stressed, but here we are.

First-grade teachers “may not feel the same direct pressure that the current third-grade teachers have on them,” nor experience pressure in the same way as those teaching second grade, but neither are they exempt from the pressure. According to participants, “even kindergarten teachers feel the pressure.” The impact of student performance on the IREAD-3 has a “trickle down” effect on all the previous teachers. “I feel responsible for third-graders that were mine as first-graders, that aren’t passing it. . . . You feel kind of like a failure.” Hearing about the performance outcomes of former students is an emotional experience: “I feel like that’s a reflection on me because I was their first-grade teacher . . .

and if you hear that they didn't pass, your heart sinks because you feel like you've been a part of that failure.” This sense of responsibility is shared among teachers:

The third-grade teachers have the most pressure on them as far as the IREAD-3 is concerned, but as I said before, I feel the same amount of disappointment or frustration when a former student doesn't pass. I feel very responsible for that because I feel like what, what more could I have done? Um, it's, I think just one of those things that, you know, when your students come in that first day, they automatically become your kids.”

Even though the pressure is genuine, all participants currently teaching first grade spoke to the fact that third-grade teachers are under the greatest amount of pressure. One participant stated she “would feel very helpless” if she taught third-grade, adding: “I am thankful that I teach first grade.” Participants teaching in previous grade levels also spoke of a desire to teach third grade earlier in their careers; however, due to “the pressure of ISTEP and now IREAD-3” they have since lost the aspiration to teach third grade because of “that thumb coming down on you all the time.”

Teacher Evaluations

Another factor in *teaching under pressure* has been the employment in the past five years of a teacher evaluation system in the state of Indiana. The implementation of the “IREAD-3 and the evaluation system all came out around the same time” and for participants they are interconnected because the teacher evaluation system includes a causal relationship between a teacher’s salary and standardized test scores, equating to merit pay. For teachers this means “you get a raise or don't get a raise based on how the whole school does and how your kids do.” One participant explained:

The state implemented mandates a few years ago that every corporation had to have a new evaluation system for teachers and part of the teacher’s evaluation now is based on test scores, and so there's that pressure that can affect how much money a teacher earns.

Ultimately, the “pressure for the teachers” comes from being “graded on how many pass or don't pass.” For third-grade teachers, the “IREAD and ISTEP” scores factor into their performance results.

There was a window of opportunity, before the state-required evaluation system was implemented, for school districts to proactively develop and implement their own plan using specific guidelines. Participants spoke with respect and appreciation regarding how the district “chose to develop their own” evaluation system. To the benefit of the teachers:

It was developed by a group of teachers and administrators, and they were very careful to make sure they had a good representation of teachers, and teachers were informed throughout the entire process; and so at [our school district] only a very small part of the formula comes from students passing tests, comes from student achievement.

Within the evaluation system, the state required that “teachers are labeled highly effective, or effective, or ineffective ... or needs improvement.” One participant communicated, “The principles were told [from the state] that it would be expected that a certain number of teachers in the building would not be effective.” Despite the pressure from the state, a participant broke down emotionally as she shared how her building principal worked collaboratively with the teachers to “model” best practice and help them through the implementation process.

Not all teachers were so fortunate. One participant shared her firsthand experience observing the outcomes of a compatriot from another school district, which did not proactively develop a teacher evaluation system and consequently had to employ the state-mandated program. Her colleague teaches sixth grade high-ability students. According to the state requirements, this teacher’s students “were expected to grow six levels” in their reading ability, but most of her students “were already at level Z; there's

nowhere else to grow.” Other students “maybe grew from X to Z ... but she was penalized because that's only two levels.” With frustration in her voice regarding the unfair practice of labeling of teachers, she stated, “The ridiculousness of it all is just, I guess, that it’s just so infuriating.”

Regardless of an evaluation system which considers other factors beyond standardized assessments, participants experience pressure having their income connected to state-assessments. “It puts a lot of pressure on teachers and administrators.” Additionally, a sense of embitterment exists regarding the labels placed upon teachers as effective or ineffective. Another harmful outcome: “It can breed some sort of a competitive nature among teachers that's not collaborative.” As one participant noted, “It makes it difficult to hold all of those other things that I do see as professional in balance.” Another participant has observed, “With the whole teacher evaluation and teacher effectiveness rubric, it seems like there's been ... it's like, a lot more cutthroat.” Consequently, “everyone has stepped up their game.” There is increased pressure to perform “because the microscope’s on everybody” who taught the student through their early-primary school years. As a participant who teaches first grade indicated:

It just makes you more self-conscious of what kind of person you are. You know, if you need to improve on something - and I'm the kind of person where I know all the things I need to improve on. I mean, everyday I'm like, "Oh, I should've done this differently." You know, so I'm kind of already evaluating myself. ... When somebody comes in to watch me, I'm thinking, "Ok, I need to do *all* [participant’s emphasis] things; I need to show this, and this, and this." And so I have to do it while they are there, which might not be the best for the lesson, but I have to do it because someone is watching me.

In the current environment, participants shared this sense of disillusionment, a perceived shift from personal convictions regarding pedagogy and self-evaluation, regarding student growth, to feelings of comparative-driven, self-doubt, based on the

measure of a test. Thoughts regarding self-evaluation and what it means to be an “effective” teacher was stated directly: “I have started to evaluate myself in terms of getting kids to pass that test.” It was also communicated tentatively as one participant positioned her experience in relationship to a popular children’s book:

My reading teaching in the last five years [pause]...*Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* because I am always questioning myself. ...I feel like I'm very hard on myself. ...I just feel like I'm constantly down on myself or struggling with, "Am I doing the right thing?" ...Almost all of my students have always shown growth, ...but I just feel like I am constantly questioning or I'm constantly comparing myself to other people, that I feel like, "Oh, they're really good teachers I probably should be doing this instead."

In an era of testing, “the state’s teacher evaluation form has also created the need for more testing.” As a part of the requirements for the evaluation system, “the teacher has to set a performance goal and decide which assessment will measure the achievement of that goal. Consequently, small instructional goals are set, taught, and measured all-year long.” This is all in an attempt to “help the students pass the final assessment, which helps determine the teacher’s pay.” One participant shared, “It saddens me that the children are rigorously tested so that the state can evaluate teachers and/or schools.”

Many Factors Impact Student Achievement

With the pressure of increased accountability measures, without exception participants voiced there are many factors which impact student achievement (see Table 4). Even though teachers are held personally accountable for their students’ test scores on state assessments, much of it feels beyond their control. It feels “ridiculous.” Broadly, the impact of various factors beyond their control leaves participants feeling the odds are against them. Being a teacher is not just about teaching and meeting performance goals. Participants feel as though they are “expected to do everything” in

meeting the needs of all aspects of the child in a “six hour day,” without any consideration to the fact that there are many factors impacting performance well-beyond the scope of teaching. As one participant stated, “I think that if a kid doesn't pass a test it's not because the teachers didn't teach them what they were supposed to teach.” When considering the high-stakes attached to the IREAD-3, participants concurred “there are so many other variables to success in school that don't have much to do with the school itself, but other to factors in a child's life; so it feels really harsh, to evaluate both children and teachers” based on a single standardized test.

Computerized Testing

Participants indicated testing on the computer impacts student performance on the IREAD-3. Although teachers shared they have been attempting to teach students how to type at a younger age, typing is still more than difficult for most eight- and nine-year-olds. This becomes problematic when the test is not only computerized, it is timed. Additionally, reading on the computer screen takes a different skill set than reading from a book. For an already struggling reader that creates a new learning curve. This adds additional pressure to teachers when factors beyond their control impact student performance. In response to the computerized testing one participant stated, “I don't think it really tests what their testing ... It's bizarre that they're testing that way when we are not ready.”

Changing Population

With the exception of the participants from the school with highest poverty, participants from the remaining three elementary schools in this study spoke of the

changing student populations. Students are “coming in with less skills, no skills, no support from home.” Additionally, the number of students who are “emotionally needy” or those who come to school “with baggage” has increased, requiring much more attention and services. When addressing this topic an experienced teacher indicated, “When I first started [teaching] I could get through a whole curriculum; that doesn't happen anymore because it takes you longer to get thorough skills, to get the kids to master certain skills.” With student populations arriving with greater needs and performance demands at an all-time high, this adds immense pressure to participants.

Student Motivation and Behavior Issues

Dealing with increased student behavior issues and a lack of motivation has added to the pressure teachers are feeling. With increased rigor, participants have found there are students “who do not care if they even complete the test, let alone pass it.” Faced with expectations beyond their abilities becomes overwhelming for students:

I feel like we are expected to cram a lot of information in their brains and they are not emotionally capable of handling all of it. I had a little boy say today, “I do this, then I have to do something else...I just don't know if I can do it all.”

Participants have also observed an increase in negative behaviors among students, which are “often very disruptive and infringes on the learning of the other children.” As one participant speculated, “I think one of the factors in the children's misbehavior at school is related to the testing environment we have. They are too young to face this pressure.”

Impact of Home Support

Participants overwhelmingly believe the issues students face at home impact what occurs at school, noting “a direct correlation between students who don't pass [the

IREAD-3] and don't get much support at home." Although academic expectations have become more rigorous, some examples provided by participants demonstrating the factors impacting student achievement included: a lack of sleep, or not even having a bed to sleep in; a lack of food to eat; a parent in jail; parents fighting at home; a physical or learning diagnosis, but no medication; vision impairment, but no glasses; not reading at home, or lack of support in order to read outside of school; a television located in the bedroom; or those who "have experienced and seen things that kids shouldn't have to see." Participants pointed out, there is "so much more going on [with] a child than what's happening in a classroom."

Regardless of creating a safe and caring environment at school, what occurs at home impacts what occurs at school. For example, students come to school "mad because of whatever happened at home." Not only do these issues take class time, participants do not feel fully equipped to address all of the challenges they encounter on a regular basis. As one participant stated, "I've dealt with all kinds of issues just today ... so that's probably one of our problems with our scores because we deal with a lot of issues." These issues impact student achievement:

This week has been kind of an eye-opening week for me, for some of my kids, because I found out some things about my kids that just really makes me sad for them; because there's things going on at home that I'm just like, "No wonder they can't concentrate at school." You know, they don't care about a test. I don't even care about this test any more for them, because of things that are really going on in their life.

With many outside factors impacting performance, participants have been left to question: "Why is my evaluation based on their test scores when I feel like I'm working harder than they are, or the parents aren't doing their job?"

We Teach All Students

When considering the many factors that impact student test scores, the often ignored reality in our national public education system is teachers are diligently working to meet the educational needs of *all* students. Participants acknowledged the conflict that exists in creating an educational system based on a quantitative, outcomes-focused business model. Foremost, children themselves are not quantifiable; “we're talking about children ... not a product coming out of a factory where every product has to maintain a certain degree of quality control. They're children!” Additionally, in a business model “you can fire someone if they are not doing their job.” The employee, not the employer is the one who is most often held accountable. Yet, teachers would never tell their students, “Okay, don't come back tomorrow, you're not doing your job, you're out.” According to participants, the difference in public education is “we have to take all of the kids, so we don't have the option of just taking the cream of the crop.”

Quoting author and motivational speaker, Jamie Vollmer, a participant expressed this metaphorically as, “We take all the blueberries.” She retold Vollmer’s story, who was a once critic of public education and president of an ice cream company which claimed to “make the best ice cream in America.” Vollmer was convinced business principles could be applied to public education to turn things around (Vollmer, 2011). Here he was “talking to the teachers about education, but yet he owns an ice cream company.” According to the participant, at the end of one particular motivational speech he provided the opportunity for teachers to ask questions. An experienced teacher inquired of Vollmer regarding the quality of the blueberries the company accepted in their very “best ice cream.” In his response to the teacher, it quickly became apparent the

company used only the very best blueberries, rejecting those which did not meet high-quality standards. To which the experienced teacher responded, “We take all the blueberries.” From first-hand experience, the participant explained:

We take the one that didn't get breakfast at home, we take the one that was never read to, we take the child that comes from poverty, we take the child who doesn't speak English. We take *all* [participant's emphasis] the blueberries. So we have to have children measured by the same test, but they're not all starting the race at the same point.

So how does that affect the reading? Well, we just try to get them to achieve as much as they can and the test just has to happen. One child in my class ... came to me in August having only lived in the country for two weeks, and he didn't even know the names of letters in Spanish, and he doesn't read or write in any, either language, and this is what I can do. This is what I will work hard to do, but I have to take all the blueberries. I don't have any choice about who is in my class.

One Size Does Not Fit All

In teaching all students, an additional pressure participants encountered is the one-size-fits-all approach to educational decision-making. Participants are fully aware that “every group of students is different and a cookie cutter approach does not work” because “not every child progresses in same manner.” Additionally, participants noted “there isn't one path to this target that we're setting. There may be better and worse ways to get there, but there isn't one path.” Yet, “expecting every child to take the same exact test when they're not at the same exact level, in order to move to the next grade” assumes all students are the same and places unrealistic expectations on both the teacher and student.

The difference in reading abilities among students was explained metaphorically:

They're all different. Some of them catch on really quickly, and then it's like a funny car on a racetrack, they just take off and go; and some of them it's like an old clunker with some sugar in the gas tank.

Participants desire to see all students pass the IREAD-3, they “would all love for that to happen,” but the reality is the test does not take into consideration the abilities of

all third-grade students. Participants noted the students of color, low-socioeconomic status, and those learning English as a new language are most often those who struggle to pass the IREAD-3; “they're the ones that are struggling and I don't want them to feel like failures, because they didn't pass the test when they are working in many cases as hard as they can.”

Although third-grade students performing at an average or above grade-level are able to pass the test “unless there's some other factor in their lives,” the results of the IREAD-3 are “not always predictable” as a one-size-fits-all measurement. Since each student is unique, one does not always “know how a particular child will respond on that particular day.” Some struggling students have passed, leaving participants pleasantly surprised; while others fail who have been expected to pass, leaving participants to wonder, “What?!? That doesn't make sense. This child can read.”

Loss of Autonomy

Defining Professionalism

For the majority of participants defining what it means to be a professional in the field of education was challenging. Difficult to answer, the topic initially appeared to require more time for consideration. From the initial interviews, there was a great disparity in responses and not one descriptor to this open-ended question represented a majority response. The concept of “collaboration” was the only response that came closest to a majority, with five of twelve participants stating this as a professional characteristic desirable among teaching professionals. The varied responses were primarily related to conduct or behavior, such as: being a positive role model or setting a good example, caring for others, treating others with respect, and being respected by

others. Additional noted characteristics included being punctual, coachable, honest, hard-working, and able to follow directions. Very few responses addressed additional qualities, such as continued personal growth or learning within the profession, being knowledgeable and experienced in the field, or helping students to grow in their learning. However, after reading the findings one participant responded to the exclusion by stating, “I think we take those characteristics for granted because they are built into who we are and how schools work.” No participants described professionalism to include self-governance or autonomy, as in the freedom to make decisions based on professional knowledge or experience.

Diminished Professionalism

Based on the self-defined descriptions of what it means to be considered a professional, nearly half of participants felt their professionalism has increased since the implementation of the IREAD-3. Working harder than ever, despite the demands and consequences of the test, one participant summarized her work-ethic by stating, “I still put my heart into the job.” In direct contrast to these explicit statements of increased professionalism, self-described statements of lived-experiences consistently demonstrated diminished autonomy or a loss of control: “You have no control over the test. You have no control over how they come to school. You have no control over what's going to happen that day. You have zero control and here you are evaluated by it.” Additionally, with the pressure and demands of the IREAD-3, there is not enough time “to do things that we should be doing.” Participants have been left to feel, “Okay, just leave us alone. Just let us teach. Just let us be.” A participant stated with exasperation, “I just want to

teach, I didn't come into teaching for all these tests and to teach to tests; you know, I want to be able to teach.”

When later presented with a follow-up question describing professional self-governance or autonomy as a quality of what it means to be a professional in the field of education, all but two participants indicated the IREAD-3 has personally diminished their professional autonomy. Those participants who did not attribute reduced professional decision-making to the IREAD-3 also did not teach third-grade. For participants, professional autonomy has diminished due to “mandates from the top down” which have “limited instructional freedom and overall stifled teacher creativity.” Additionally, the IREAD-3 has specifically limited the ability of teachers to make decisions “in the best interest for a child” especially in the area of grade retention.

Looking for the “Fun” in Teaching

Participants overwhelmingly discussed a longing for more enjoyable teaching. Prior to this era of testing “you could really have fun with the kids, and do these really fun projects” but now participants have to follow a prescribed schedule; consequently, following the plan has become more important than making learning fun. One participant reflected on the impact of the IREAD-3 on autonomous decision-making: “Most prominent is the feeling that there is no time for enjoyable activities.”

Test-driven instruction minimizes fun-instruction. “It doesn't feel like as much fun as what it used to be because you've got all these test scores” which places an overemphasis on “individual outcomes and makes it more difficult to develop a passion for reading.” Whereas in the past there was “more leeway to do projects and fun and help the kids make more connections to what they were reading,” the current focus is “based a

lot around the test and not necessarily out of enjoyment.” Engaging instructional practices have been replaced with skills-practice. Another participant stated:

I feel like it is harder to find the joy in our lessons. I feel like I work so much harder than at any other time in my career but with much more frustration as an outcome. I think our school district is working to find a balance, but it is frustrating to see these decisions made by people who are not educators and are not seeing the results of their decisions.

This creates a professional paradox for participants as they attempt to balance mandates with what they consider best practice. In reading instruction, participants acknowledged “if it's so rigorous and not exciting, [students] are not going to like to read. If there's no excitement and no fun and no choice or no ‘read with a partner’ - anything fun, you're just making them hate reading.” From no longer having time for reading entire chapter books, to limited self-selected reading, to having an overemphasis on standards-based instruction, participants are conflicted with what they are witnessing in their own classrooms. As one participant voiced, “I just feel like, ‘Poor kids!’”

Willfully, participants also addressed the necessity to fight for best practice. Despite the mandates, “we are still trying to teach children to read and write, to think clearly, to solve problems, and to enjoy learning.” Participants are still attempting to figure out ways to allow students to “read out of enjoyment.” Possibly, just possibly, “if we taught them how to read and enjoy it” maybe they could figure out how to answer tough problems and pass the test anyway. Though, the continual pressure due to the realities of mandated testing leaves participants feeling “it certainly is hard to let teaching and learning be a joyful adventure.”

Negative Public Perception

Participants are disheartened by negative public perception, which is perceived as worse now than five years ago. Although most do not place the full responsibility on the IREAD-3, participants communicated there is a shared culpability among high-stake assessments related to test results and school grades, which has been widely reported by the news media. Participants believe “teachers are perceived as whiners” and “complainers” rather than experts in their field when speaking about “their opinions on the testing or what's happening at the state.” The teaching “profession as a whole is being vilified.” For those with no associations to the schools, there are misconceptions that teaching is an easy job, more the role of a “babysitter” or “anybody can do it.” Additionally, there is also the negative perpetuation that those who “are trained” for the profession of teaching are “just lazy.”

Multiple participants spoke to the issue of teaching being more than just a job, of their passion and love for teaching. With great emotion in her voice, one participant addressed the criticism:

I'm proud to be a teacher, I feel like it's my life calling. I feel like it is my Christian calling. I feel like this is where God led me, and I have a passion for kids that... [voice breaks] I mean, I don't sleep at night sometimes because I'm worried about my kids. I spend hours here ... I have put my heart and soul into this building, into these kids; and it just feels, it feels vicious when someone says those things. Even though they're not talking about me personally, they're talking about my job and my career, and it's hurtful.

Political Responsibility

Participants believe the negative public perception stems from the state legislature and governmental leaders. Fundamentally, “the core of the issue often feels like trust; there's just not a lot of trust in educators.” Participants have heard statements made by

state legislatures that teachers are “selfish” or they are “not interested in the kids” which “stings because that's not true.” The concept of distrust towards current teachers is also perpetuated through legislation, which does not require individuals to have a background in teaching or minimizes the requirements for those transferring from other professions.

Conversely, participants have “lost confidence” in the “Department of Education” and “state legislators” because of an inaccurate school grading system and using standardized tests, such as the IREAD-3, as an inappropriate measure of both teacher effectiveness and student promotion. Currently, individuals outside the field of education are driving the decisions regarding “what should be taught and in what grade. It changes the pace of instruction, the depth of instruction, and has modified the hope of mastery for all students.” Increasingly difficult for participants in recent years, one participant stated, “I feel like a lot of the things that have happened, have not been done to help kids; they have been done to catch teachers, and that's not what education is about ...our kids have been the pawns in the game.” Another participant voiced a similar sentiment, “That doesn't help education; that doesn't help kids!” Consequently, this becomes “very defeating” for participants “when the political people, who really don't understand education, are making decisions.”

Ignorance of Outsiders

Participants spoke to the continued perpetuation of negative perceptions regarding educators today as a consequence of ignorance, or the lack of knowledge, from those outside the field of education. In reality, “unless you're in the profession, it's hard to know exactly what goes on every day.” Participants readily admitted parents involved in the schools have often become their greatest proponents, and perceived many individuals

within the district as generally “very supportive.” In contrast, those parents who “talk negative about teachers” are those who do not “understand” or are disconnected from the schools.

There are “so many things that people don't see that teachers have to do” which leads to misconceptions regarding the field. The general public may only see “test scores” in the paper or on the news with no knowledge of additional factors. They have no reason to consider that schools are not the same; that making one comparison to another is “not apple to apples.” They do not realize the challenges teachers are facing, kids are not the same, and “teachers aren't bad.” While attempting to hold back tears, one participant communicated:

You hear a lot of negative things and then, you know that you are just working your tail off [voice breaks] and it's hard too, because the public, I don't think, understands that we have kids from all kinds of homes. We have kids that need medical care, we have kids that have experienced and seen things that kids shouldn't have to see, and then they come to school.

Not only are many unaware that educators are working harder than ever, they also do not realize how deeply teachers care about their students. Being a teacher is “not just coming to work and being prepared for a lesson.” As a teacher “you're a mom ... you're a substitute mom or dad, you're a nurse, you're a counselor ... you're everything. It is not just teaching.” Participants often referred to their students as “my kids.” As one participant communicated, “I have my own biological kids, but these are my kids that I lose sleep over, because I know the struggles they go through at home.” Another stated,

When your students come in that first day, they automatically become your kids. They're just a part of you. I'm always saying, “My kids, my kids.” You know, it doesn't take away from my own children, but I mean it's just they become mine. And I feel like I'm very good about developing relationships with my students. And I just feel responsible for them when they move on.

Consequently, for participants “watching these kids stress out over IREAD ... is painful.”

In combating negative perceptions, participants welcomed the concept of having other individuals experience first-hand the changes they have endured, their teaching environments, the pressures they have faced, and the consequences of high-stakes testing they have lived through. In fact, one participant stated, “The governor and the legislature, they think we just sit around and eat bonbons all day. So I've said, ‘Come and do my job for a month and then we'll talk.’” Participants are confident that if others lived their experiences they would not be perceived as complainers, as professionals without a voice, but others too would “know the testing, all the testing, is not the answer.”

Essence: Teachers in Bondage

Bondage is a state of being bound by compulsion, the act of being forced or pressured to do something. A “subjugation to a controlling person or force” (“Bondage,” 2015; “Compulsion,” 2015). Since the implementation of the IREAD-3, teachers have experienced “constant up-and-down change” associated with curriculum mandates resulting from student test scores. They have been forced to comply, not through the use of whips and chains, but through teacher evaluations, merit pay, student retentions, and school grades.

Deemed unfit decision-makers ultimately by individuals “who really don’t understand education,” the profession as a whole has been “vilified.” Participants have experienced first-hand “limited instructional freedom”: The loss of freedom as an expert decision-maker; The loss of freedom regarding what should be taught; The loss of freedom regarding the pace with which to teach; The loss of freedom concerning best instructional approach; The loss of freedom relating to how students should be assessed;

The loss of freedom regarding how often students should be assessed. In fact, participants no longer think to include autonomous decision-making as a characteristic of their own profession. They have been reduced to blue-collar workers, rewarded for following instructions.

There is a “great pressure.” Not only are teachers forced to “jump through hoops” like trained dogs at the circus, they have been bound regarding what pains them most: the toll testing is taking on the children. Teachers have observed students struggling to find a “passion for reading” and who “hate Friday” because of the end of week testing intended to help them prepare for “that test.” They have witnessed “stress on little bodies,” students who have “stomachaches” and are plagued by constant “anxiety” regarding “that test” because they may be forced to remain in third grade for another year. Yet despite the “real pain,” participants feel bound in their ability to have their voices heard because they have been labeled “whiners” and “complainers,” as “lazy” teachers desiring to take the easy route. Viewed as another mandate “from the top down,” the IREAD-3 has “hampered” participants “professional judgment.” Expertise has been “undermined.” Scores matter more than professional judgment. Students look to their teachers to fix the problem, but teachers are in bondage.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

A phenomenological qualitative research study was conducted to explore the impact of the IREAD-3 on both the instructional practices and professionalism of elementary school teachers. The study included in-depth interviews among twelve participants from four elementary schools in a Northern Indiana school district. An examination of the lived-experiences among the participants revealed five super-ordinate themes: imposed change, reactive instruction, the paradox of testing, teaching under pressure, and loss of autonomy. The essence of these shared experiences emerged as teachers in bondage. The following discussion is an analysis of the findings in the context of evidence-based research and current literature relating to the topic.

Discussion of Findings

Although much research has been conducted in examining the impacts of high-stakes testing, the problem which framed this study was the introduction of the IREAD-3, an additional mandated assessment implemented in an already highly-tested educational environment. With student promotion and teachers' salaries tied to student outcomes on the IREAD-3, higher stakes were attached to this exam than the already existing standardized assessments. Due to the lack of research on the impacts of the IREAD-3, an examination of the lived experiences of educators teaching before, during, and after the

implementation of this exam followed. Because recent literature has indicated the voice of the teacher has been minimized in the field of education, a phenomenological approach was selected to allow the experiences of these teachers to be more broadly explored (Owens, 2013; Pinar, 2012; D. Ravitch, 2011, 2013). In the process of examining the lived experiences of the participants, findings consistent with previous research and unexpected discoveries emerged.

Imposed Change

I'm not running this district by consensus or by committee. We're not running this school district through the democratic process.

- Michelle Rhee (as cited in Mellow, 2015, para. 120)

Imposing an alleged uniform method upon everybody breeds mediocrity in all but the very exceptional.

- John Dewey (1916, p. 173)

Consistent with past research, participants in this study experienced imposed change with the implementation of a scripted curriculum. The implementation of a scripted reading series assisted in ensuring tested content would be taught during classroom instruction (Ainsworth et al., 2012; Dresser, 2012). With the IREAD-3 attributed by participants as the driving force behind the curriculum change, the concept that curriculum is being tailored to meet the needs of the test instead of assessments designed to follow the curriculum was supported (D. Ravitch, 2011). Although the lived-experience of an imposed scripted curriculum may have been new to the participants in this study, this experience is not new in a historical context. As the literature supports, in the hope of raising test scores after the implementation of NCLB, many schools adopted scripted reading programs to ensure teachers were teaching the required standards and

meeting the demands of state and federal mandates (Ainsworth et al., 2012; Ciminelli, 2011; Dresser, 2012; Goldstein, 2014; Milosovic, 2007). Thus, supported by the findings of this research, history has repeated itself.

The fact that student test scores dropped on the IREAD-3 after the implementation of a scripted curriculum seemed like a silver lining for the participants. This resulted in the unexpected finding that participants were allowed more freedoms in curricular decision-making during the school year this research was conducted. Although still required to follow a district curriculum map based on state standards, participants were relieved to experience more freedom of choice. It was described by one participant metaphorically:

I was on a cruise ship, and we were sailing in beautiful water and all of the sudden a storm hit us. And we rocked everywhere, and we had to throw out all the good things that we had done because somebody said we had to. And slowly the ship turned around, and we are finding our treasures again.

While the impact on test scores is not yet known, greater flexibility and increased autonomy among teachers to exercise professional judgment results in higher professional creativity and a more balanced instructional approach focused on meeting the needs of students (Ciminelli, 2011; Fullan, 2008; Rosenberger, 2012).

Reactive Instruction

If that's what test prep is about, teaching people to read and understand paragraphs, that's what I think education is about.

- Joel I. Klein (as cited in Pinar, 2012, p. 22)

Testing controls what teachers teach and what students learn.

- William F. Pinar (2012, p.64)

Research has also supported the participants' experiences of teaching to the test as a reactive consequence in instructional method when faced with the pressures of high-stakes testing (Barrett-Mynes, 2013; Battley-Fabre, 2011; Gallagher & Allington, 2009; Kamenetz, 2015; Pinar, 2012). However, a surprising outcome of this study was the discussion among participants of increased differentiation in instructional practices. This finding was in opposition to the research, which indicated a decrease in differentiated instruction as an impact of high-stakes testing (Ainsworth et al., 2012; Dresser, 2012; Pavia, 2012; A. M. Smith, 2011). Despite a state-mandated curriculum adoption, the participants collectively discussed a focused effort to increase differentiation. This was driven by a district initiative to incorporate a small-group instructional approach. With the recent move from the scripted curriculum, participants were encouraged further to implement an even greater differentiated approach, such as with Guided Reading. This approach is supported by research as an evidence-based instructional practice (Ciminelli, 2011; Dombek & Connor, 2012; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; McCullough, 2012; Tompkins, 2010).

Another unexpected finding was the indication among participants of self-described better instructional practices. Although feeling as though they were taking a step "backward" when teaching with the scripted curriculum, participants believe with time they have become better teachers through intentional practice and self-reflection on instructional pedagogy. Participants clearly indicated improvements in teaching practices could not be attributed to the IREAD-3; any betterment occurred despite the exam. Similar to the findings of Barrett-Mynes (2013) participants are aware of the instructional efforts necessary not to teach to the test, yet as with the findings of Battley-Fabre (2011)

there was a sense that in skills-based preparation for state-mandated exams concepts are not able to be taught with as much depth. This leads to an apparent contradiction among what participants have reported regarding better instructional practices, compared to the description of compromising richness, depth, creativity, and “fun” in teaching for the sake of preparing students for the IREAD-3.

Although there has been an admitted sacrifice in quality teaching for test preparation, participants pointed out experience equates to better teaching practices. Thus, if experience results in better teaching practices, the notion of a professional from a field outside of education flying in as a superhero to save the day creates a contradiction. Therefore, this study provides research to support the personal lived-experience of author Owens (2013), who discovered first-hand “new blood” does not equate to the “miracles” and “instant results” school-reform advocates promote; educational success is about “developing individuals” over time (p. 214-5). Despite the restrictive nature of the testing era and the impacts on instructional practice, participants believe experience in the field allows for better teaching when compared to those enduring the same circumstances with less experience.

The Paradox of Testing

One thing I never want to see happen is schools that are just teaching to the test. Because then you're not learning about the world; you're not learning about different cultures, you're not learning about science, you're not learning about math. All you're learning about is how to fill out a little bubble on an exam and the little tricks that you need to do in order to take a test. And that's not going to make education interesting to you. And young people do well in stuff that they're interested in. They're not going to do as well if it's boring.

- Barack Obama (as cited in D. Ravitch, 2013, p. 29)

Teaching to the test ... produces an atmosphere of student passivity and teacher routinization. The creativity and individuality that mark the best humanistic teaching and learning has a hard time finding room to unfold.

- Martha Nussbaum (as cited in Pinar, 2012, p. 57)

While the intentions of Race to the Top were initially laudable, the reality is the efforts have contributed to the paradox of high-stakes testing; between the hope of teaching students to read, and the unintended consequences and negative outcomes resulting from high-stakes testing. The findings of this research provide credence to the literature citing an even greater emphasis has been placed on testing and accountability among teachers since Race to the Top was implemented by the Obama administration in 2009 (Goldstein, 2014; Kamenetz, 2015; D. Ravitch, 2013). With the increase in high-stakes testing, schools have responded with more tests to measure if students will be ready for the once-a-year high-stakes assessments. This response of additional testing to raise student achievement could be compared to stepping on the scale more often in order to lose weight.

This study also supports past research regarding the narrowing of the curriculum with an overemphasis on the tested subjects (Au, 2009; Battley-Fabre, 2011; Berliner, 2011; Duke & Block, 2012; Gallagher & Allington, 2009; Kamenetz, 2015). Participants have witnessed an increased focus on reading instruction since the implementation of the IREAD-3 and voiced concerns regarding the virtual elimination of teaching science and social studies at the elementary level. Additionally, the narrowing of the curriculum perpetuates what Au (2009) considered to be inequality by design. An unbalanced overemphasis on a skills-based reading model hinders a well-rounded educational experience, making learning less fun. Participants also noted an increased focus on skills-based instruction for the lower achieving students. This model leaves less time for

enrichment and attention on other subjects, widening the gap even wider between children who have and have not. As one participant noted, in the current environment wealthier families have the option of pulling students out of public education for a more enriched learning environment, perpetuating a segregated educational system for those who remain.

An aspect of these findings that add significance to the body of research regarding the impact of high-stakes testing on instructional practice is the paradox of testing resulting in diminished instructional time. Participants in this study emphasized many ways in which quality instruction of reading has been diminished with the implementation of the IREAD-3. For example, requiring computerized testing results in the need for teaching eight and nine year olds how to use a computer. According to participants, many students do not have access to a computer outside of school, yet they need the skills to not only navigate, but type responses on a timed test. Additionally, this study raises the awareness of how students are facing great anxiety and stress over the implementation of the IREAD-3 and how classroom instruction is diminished now due to including lessons on stress management. The creation of stress on students resulting from the test is difficult for teachers because they fully believe students should be able to enjoy school, not hate it because they are always being tested.

Teaching Under Pressure

We also want to embed into the law competitive grant programs like Race to the Top that are proving so effective in driving reform at the state and local level. This \$4.3 billion program -- representing less than one percent of education spending nationally -- has prompted states and districts across America to change laws, remove obstacles to reform, and encourage stakeholders to work together in ways that they haven't for decades. More than 30 states have changed laws around the issue of public charter schools, and teacher evaluation. As of today, 37 states have

agreed to adopt higher common, college and career ready standards and others are still considering them.

- Arne Duncan (U. S. Department of Education, 2010, para. 39)

Everyone is smart in different ways. But if you judge a fish on its ability to climb a tree, it will spend its whole life thinking that it's stupid.

- Mr. Daniels in *Fish in a Tree* (Hunt, 2015, p. 159)

Supportive of Owen's (2013) statement "America is demanding too much from its teachers," this study demonstrates that educators today are teaching under pressure. Without exception, participants addressed the pressure they are facing on a daily basis. The findings also support the research of Dresser (2012) indicating teachers are feeling powerless and overwhelmed, trapped in a test-taking culture motivated by testing that ignores student needs and individuality. Teachers know a one-size-fits-all approach does not work (Ciminelli, 2011). Student achievement is not predictable. Teachers are working with humans, not a product on a factory assembly-line. Consequently, the principles of an outcomes-based business model which utilizes a system of quality controls cannot be applied to children in an education system which prides itself on accepting and educating all students, regardless of abilities or the skill-sets in place when they arrived.

Loss of Autonomy

Education is about to go through that decoupling. K-12 is partly about babysitting kids so parents can do other things. I don't think that will change.

- Bill Gates (as cited in Hardy, 2010, Education section, para. 6)

Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help them become what they are capable of becoming.

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (as cited in Price-Mitchell, 2013, para. 20)

Supportive of existing research, as a result of the implementation of the IREAD-3 participants experienced a loss of control and the flexibility to exercise professional judgment resulting from the adoption of a mandated state-approved reading curriculum (Ainsworth et al., 2012; Dresser, 2012; Newberg-Long, 2010; Ohle, 2013; Pinar, 2012). The top-down decision-making model has limited instructional freedom, creativity, and the ability to meet the needs of the child as teachers deem best. This includes professional input regarding student promotion to the next grade level. Not only have these actions removed the option for third-grade teachers to practice professional decision-making, additional pressure has been placed on the teachers in lower elementary grades as they struggle to consider what may or may not occur in the future academic path of a struggling student. According to Kamenetz (2015), deprofessionalizing teachers by giving the “final say” to outside authorities is “making teachers hate teaching” (p. 20).

An overwhelming issue addressed by participants was the longing for “fun” or “enjoyable” teaching. They desire to make learning fun in order to increase student engagement and motivation. The concept of diminished creativity and fun in learning supports the writing of Pinar (2012), referring to reduced quality of instruction resulting in skills-based “cram” schools. The current environment has left teachers to feel little control over their ability to create deeper projects or even spend time reading entire chapter books. Even though participants have experienced more freedoms to include curriculum beyond the basal reader, they must still follow a curriculum map to meet the required state standards. Therefore, both what is taught and the pace at which it is taught is still prescribed.

Regarding public perception, participants voiced feeling support from within the community, especially from parents connected with the schools. This is supported by the findings of a Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll which indicated the highest level of confidence in teachers among Americans included parents who have children in public schools (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011). Participants also spoke of an overall increase in negative public perception. Comparing Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll results from 2011 to 2014, confidence in public school teachers at a national level slipped from nearly 75% to 64% (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011; Phi Delta Kappa International, October 2014). Although 64% still represents a majority, the decline in public confidence may be explained by additional findings of the 2011 poll, which also indicated respondents heard more bad stories about teachers in the media than positive ones (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011). Participants in this research also addressed the overall negative publicity promoted by the media, although noted a recent shift among some local newspapers that have printed articles in support of teachers. Although participants believe the media reflects a general consensus when depicting negative portrayals of teachers, in reality the media is not reporting the views of the general public, but of the minority.

Essence: Teachers in Bondage

We need an entirely new teaching workforce ... there are some great teachers out there, but they've been mixed among a bad element for too long.

- Dave Levin (as cited in Goldstein, 2014, p. 196)

My father and mother ... wanted me to be a brain surgeon. I exceeded their expectations. I became a teacher and a scholar.

- Harry K. Wong (2009, p. ii)

With current literature regarding the deprofessionalization of teachers, as professionals with diminished self-governance and autonomous decision-making, an anticipated finding was that participants would communicate how their professionalism in the field of education has been diminished in recent years (Goldstein, 2014; Kamenetz, 2015; Owens, 2013; Pinar, 2012; D. Ravitch, 2011, 2013). When participants shared their lived-experiences they included descriptions of diminished autonomy and limited decision-making capabilities. Yet, when asked to define what it means to be considered a professional in the field of education, the characteristic of being considered a professional based on expertise as an autonomous decision-maker was not a part of the discussion. Not one participant made mention of this factor. The topic had been discussed indirectly, but in terms of defining professionalism, the characteristics of autonomy were excluded. In fact, some participants actually mentioned the opposite, including being able to “accept mandates,” “do what you’re told,” and as one who “follows procedures” as characteristics of being considered a professional. Therefore, an unexpected finding was not only what was included in the description of professionalism, but what was excluded.

Participants have been teaching under the pressure of imposed change for years. Mandated change is the antithesis of autonomy. Synonyms of autonomy include “free will” and “choice.” In contrast, antonyms of autonomy include “subjection” and “unfreedom;” and near antonyms include “coercion,” “constraint,” “force,” and “pressure” (“Autonomy,” 2015). Living under the mandates of imposed change has impacted self-perceptions of what it means to be a professional among teachers. Although literature may indicate the deprofessionalization of teachers is occurring, this

research supports the concept that the minimization of teachers as autonomous decision-makers has already occurred.

As noted in the findings, bondage is a state of being bound by compulsion, the act of being forced or pressured to do something; a “subjugation to a controlling person or force” (“Bondage,” 2015; “Complusion,” 2015). By ignoring the intellectual judgment and expertise of educators, teachers are in bondage. Teachers are bound by accountability, used as scapegoats for any other form of responsibility or factor that might impact student achievement (Owens, 2013). Educators, not politicians or parents, are held responsible for decisions and factors beyond their control through increased testing, student retentions, teacher evaluations, merit pay, and school grades. Teachers are bound by high-expectations, held to a higher standard than any other profession (Pinar, 2012). Imagine if oncologists were held to the same standards for saving the lives of their cancer patients as teachers are with their students. Tethering the income of oncologists to the survival rates of their patients would seem ludicrous, especially considering lung cancer which, as the leading cancer killer in the nation, has less than an 18% five-year survival rate (American Lung Association, 2015). There are too many factors beyond doctors’ control to hold them personally accountable. They are compensated for their education, training, and expertise. Yet, both oncologists and teachers work with dynamic subjects, facing unpredictable odds.

Finally, teachers are bound by instructional constraints, with limited decision-making regarding the needs of the children they teach (Ainsworth et al., 2012; Dresser, 2012; Newberg-Long, 2010). Perceived as curriculum implementers, they are held accountable, yet unable to utilize their acquired expertise in curricular decisions. After

years of policy-driven limitations, they celebrate when restraints are partially lifted, providing a false sense of freedom. Yet, there remains a bondage to jumping through hoops, to overwhelming expectations, and to meeting the demands of a looming test.

Limitations and Future Research

The limitations of this study include demographic considerations. All participants were white females, and although this was representative of the majority of early primary teachers within the school district, one could question if representation of male or minority participants might have impacted the findings. Furthermore, utilizing a phenomenological approach limited the number of participants, including those currently teaching third-grade.

These limitations open up possibilities for future research. Thus, further study including both male and minority participants would be recommended. Additionally, a quantitative follow-up study utilizing a survey approach among participants from different geographic locations throughout the state of Indiana would allow an examination of a larger sample and could provide a broader scope regarding the impacts of the IREAD-3 on a statewide level.

As presented in the findings, test scores on the IREAD-3 did not improve after implementing the state-approved scripted curriculum; thus, additional freedoms were afforded to participants in curriculum decision-making in the current school year. Consequently, a follow-up study examining the impact on test scores when teachers are allowed more freedom in both curricular and instructional decision-making is recommended.

Implications

When examining the impacts of the IREAD-3 on the instructional practices and professionalism of elementary teachers, the essence of the findings revealed teachers in bondage. Consequently, the following recommendations are presented with the objective of releasing teachers from such bondage.

Breaking the Bondage of Ignorance

In order to break the bondage of ignorance there needs to be heightened awareness as to the current testing environment occurring in schools and the impacts it is having on both students and teachers. A limited number of participants in this study noted the changing tide regarding the growing awareness concerning the amount of testing and how it is impacting teachers, indicating “some parents” and “some people are noticing more.” A few even spoke with hopeful tones of the growing number of concerned parents disturbed by the implications of the IREAD-3, including student retention and the impact on teacher evaluations.

The reality is the American public trusts teachers and schools more than politicians or the media, which is why awareness of this issue needs broader exposure. Although confidence in public school teachers has diminished at a national level from nearly 75% in 2011 to 65% in 2014, the majority of American’s still have faith in teachers (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011; Phi Delta Kappa International, October 2014). In comparison, 28% of American’s have confidence in the legislative branch, composed of our elected U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, and only 40% have confidence in the accuracy of news reported by mass media (Gallup, 2015).

This current research adds credence to the collective voice of the teacher when communicating the current state of public education to the community. Knowing the majority of American's have confidence in teachers, educators must speak out without fear of being labeled a "complainer." Rather than fearing an additional label, educators need to rediscover the aspects of being autonomous decision-makers and let their voices be heard. The winds of change will not occur without some form of resistance. Additionally, with higher levels of confidence among parents, educators need to ensure parents are aware of the impacts of high-stakes testing in order to partner together in creating change.

Because parents can be a powerful advocate for teachers, they need to understand their power for advocacy regarding both their children and teachers. There is power in numbers. Together parents and teachers are able to make a difference. When parents get concerned enough the media and politicians take notice. An example of this was the outrage voiced in Indiana regarding the number of hours planned for the spring ISTEP+ exams, which were scheduled to double from approximately six hours of testing from the previous year to twelve hours in 2015 (Wang, LoBianco, Ryckaert, & Turner, 2015). Within a week of when the testing hours were released to the public, a twitter media storm and an "outcry from educators and parents" resulted in the governor signing an executive order to reduce the amount of testing (McInerny, 2015a, para. 2).

Breaking the Bondage of Culpability

Accountability and evaluation, when implemented without high-stakes consequences attached, are not evil. Professional occupations outside the field of education adhere to review processes or evaluations to ensure individuals are maintaining

quality work and growth. In fact, participants acknowledged both the need and benefits of a suitable process. The failure of accountability and evaluation exists in the inappropriate application. According to participants, politicians have voiced an expectation that a certain number of teachers should fail. Evaluating teachers on student test scores guarantees it.

The concept of value-added measures and merit pay have been driven both by federal and private funds, making the profession of teaching a quantifiable business model, designed by individuals who are not experts in education (Goldstein, 2014; D. Ravitch, 2013). By tying teacher salaries to student test scores, the “cardinal rule of psychometrics” has been broken, which is “a test should be used only for the purpose for which it was designed” (D. Ravitch, 2013, p. 111). Standardized tests were designed to inform educators and parents regarding student progress. They are given once a year as a snapshot of achievement and should be examined with numerous other measures to provide a visual scrapbook of how the child is progressing. Once-a-year tests were not designed to provide comprehensive information to be used to reward or punish (D. Ravitch, 2013). Additionally, a single measure should not be used to label students or teachers. Placing income rewards and punishments on educators for standardized assessments, such as the IREAD-3, holds them culpable for measures greatly beyond their control.

Yet in 2014 when more teachers than expected were rated effective in Indiana, some politicians found it “hard to believe” and thought there had been “too much local control” in the development of the evaluations (Elliott, 2014). This led to a vote in Indiana State Board of Education to move forward with changes in the teacher evaluation

system, including greater accountability to objective measures, with recommendations that ISTEP+ be required to weigh more than any other objective measure (McInerny, 2015b). In direct contrast, 61% of Americans are opposed to using test results to evaluate teachers and 56% believe decisions regarding what should be taught in public schools should be governed by the local school board, compared to only 28% who believe decision-making should occur at a the state level (Phi Delta Kappa International, October 2014, September 2014). Consequently, based on the findings of this research, the use of student standardized test scores should be removed from teacher evaluations.

Additionally, the Department of Education, State Board of Education, and state legislature in Indiana should examine the models set forth by school systems utilizing teacher evaluations not based on test scores, but factors that lead to empowering teachers, such as rewarding educators for pursuing professional development and growth as implemented by school systems in Portland, Maine and Helena, Montana (Fullan, 2008; Rosales, 2015). The State of Indiana has an opportunity to become a national leader by legislating educational policy change which values teachers instead of demoralizing and demonizing them.

Breaking the Bondage of Professional Oppression

When the bondage of ignorance and culpability are broken, the opportunities to lift educators beyond oppression become more realistic. Thus, the next steps in breaking the bondage include valuing educators for their training and expertise. Acknowledging this expertise includes recognizing teachers as qualified to identify the individual needs of the students and as highly-qualified to make professional decisions regarding educational pedagogy. The final threads of bondage will be released not only when the

unfair practices of high-stake attachments are removed, but when unnecessary testing is eliminated.

As with other highly trained professionals, educators need to be valued for their expertise and training. Value is attributed to teachers when they are able to make decisions based on professional expertise, not when standardized achievement test scores are the benchmark. These teachers not only have the educational training and experience to teach, they also know their students. Teaching is also about personal connections. Participants in this study acknowledged they become a surrogate parent; “a substitute mom or dad” to their students. From an outside perspective, students have become quantifiable, a mere statistic; from the inside perspective of a teacher, they become “my kids.” The student-centered teaching and learning resulting from this mindset focuses on growth, not statistics. A growth mindset celebrates individual achievements and opens the door to make learning and instruction enjoyable again. Because of their intimate knowledge regarding reading behaviors, teacher input is important (Speece et al., 2010; Speece et al., 2011). Knowing their students, teachers need to be trusted to work at a local level to create an educational plan that demonstrates growth. Challenging students with rigorous content is not bad when it is within a student’s zone of proximal development. Through their expertise, teachers become aware of each student’s sweet spot for learning. In making broad, general policies regarding student learning goals and objectives, policy-makers have demonstrated they do not have an awareness regarding how to meet the needs of the individual child. Consequently, politicians must rely on the expertise of educators when it comes to policy decisions regarding student growth and achievement.

In this era of top-down decision-making, where test scores, not teachers, are used to make decisions, teachers are in professional bondage to standardized assessments. Their professional decision-making has been demoralized. A profession lacking value and respect results not only in diminished success, but in a decline of those desiring to be employed in the field (Fullan, 2008). An indication of this impact is the attrition rate in the teaching profession, with large numbers of teachers retiring or leaving the field (Kamenetz, 2015; Owens, 2013). Kamenetz (2015) reported the attrition rate among teachers in big cities averages 50 percent, but has been as high as 70 percent in some cities, such as Washington D.C. Additionally, a 2012 MetLife Survey reported teachers who were “very satisfied” has declined “to 39 percent, its lowest point since 1987” (p. 22). Furthermore, the number of individuals entering the field of education has declined. For example, in recent years the number of new teaching licenses issued by the State of Indiana has declined 63 percent (Associated Press, July 12, 2015).

Yet despite the existing professional oppression, there is opportunity for positive change. When the Indiana state legislators, the State Board of Education, and the Department of Education create united policies with a strong commitment to respecting the teaching profession, focusing on professional growth, not public shaming or practices of teacher demoralization, then the bondage of professional oppression will begin to release. In fact, the practice of respecting and valuing teachers as educational experts is one of the secrets to positive change (Fullan, 2008). Respect is valuing the voice of the educator. Respect is demonstrated by relying on educators, not individuals outside the field, to drive educational policy and decision-making. Respect is removing high-stakes from standardized assessments, which have been used to punish and shame.

Finally, the validity of continuing to administer the IREAD-3 needs to be questioned. With a comprehensive standardized reading assessment already included with ISTEP+, research has demonstrated that the IREAD-3 is an unnecessary exam (Stubbs, 2013). Although implemented to ensure all students could read proficiently prior to entering fourth grade, rather than improving instruction and making school a place where students desire to learn and grow, the IREAD-3 has compounded problems that exist in an already over-tested environment. The implementation of this assessment has led to a “roller-coaster” of changes for teachers, resulting in increased test-taking skills and diminished quality reading instruction. The addition of this exam has led to unhealthy stress in children and countless additional pressures on teachers. The IREAD-3, combined with teacher evaluations, has demoralized teachers, leaving them in bondage for so long they are unsure of how to break free.

The image of professional bondage is not an attractive representation of educators. The chains of culpability and professional oppression are ugly and will only be removed when the high-stakes attached to standardized assessments are eliminated. To those ignorant of the impacts of high-stakes testing, the description may seem absurd. Bondage may even be an extreme representation of the impact, but for participants in this study it is real. As participants confirmed the experiences as accurate, they too came to the realization the findings represented “what we are all feeling.” As one participant admitted, the reality of these collective experiences is “sad.” However, that which is sad becomes tragic when the removal of ignorance is followed by inaction. Acknowledging these experiences challenges us anew to restore teachers to their rightful position as respected professionals. And with a renewed understanding of the impacts of high-stakes

testing on educators, there is a moral obligation to strive for positive change in order to eliminate the bondage of ignorance, culpability, and professional oppression.

Test-based accountability is a motor built of mistrust and anxiety that creates more mistrust and anxiety in its wake. If we trusted our teachers and school leaders to do the right thing, we wouldn't agree to subject students to these tests. And as long as we don't trust them, nothing will get better (Kamenetz, 2015, p. 214).

APPENDIX A

School District Participation Letter

Dear _____,

As a doctoral student pursuing a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction at Andrews University, I am embarking on the research portion of my experience. For my dissertation research I will be conducting a qualitative study entitled the *Impact of a High-Stakes Reading Assessment on the Professionalism and Instructional Practices of Elementary Teachers*. I am requesting your permission to interview up to 12 teachers currently teaching in first, second, or third grade at *XYZ School District* during the 2014-15 school year. The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of the IREAD-3 on the professionalism and instructional practices of elementary teachers.

As a potential benefit for the participants, this study provides the opportunity for teachers to share their experiences regarding high-stakes testing, providing a necessary voice of important stakeholders in an era of top-down, governmental mandates. The results of this study will be made available per your request. As an administrator, this may be beneficial to gain important insights into teacher experiences that under differing circumstances may not be fully expressed. Consequently, this study may be used not only to understand the lived-experiences of your staff, but to guide future curricular decision making.

Participants will be selected through a purposeful sampling process in order to meet the criterion of the study, which will be a minimum of five years teaching experience in the primary grades. Using the snowball method, I will make one or two initial contacts and ask the participants to make recommendations for other teachers who currently meet the criterion. Teacher participation in this study will be completely voluntary and may be discontinued at any time without penalty. Assuming there are willing participants, I would desire to interview three teachers from each of the four elementary schools. The interview process will include an initial 50-60 minute recorded interview conducted before or after school is in session, with the potential for an additional follow-up interview. Participants will also be provided a journal to record any thoughts on the topic that may come to mind outside of the interviews.

The name of both the school district and participants will remain completely confidential. Pseudonyms for the participants, elementary schools, and school district will be assigned to protect the privacy of those involved in the study. Participants will only be aware of their given pseudonym in order to participate in fact-checking, ensuring data accuracy.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns about this research study.
Thank you in advance for your consideration.

With regards,

Michelle Fish, M.A.
Andrews University
[Email here]
[Phone number here]

APPENDIX B

Participant Recruitment Letter

Date

Re: A Research Study You May Be Interested In

Dear Mr/Ms Name:

As a doctoral student at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, I am conducting a study to explore the impacts of a high-stakes reading assessment on the professionalism and instructional practices of elementary teachers. With the 2012 implementation of the IREAD-3 in the state of Indiana, I am specifically examining the impacts of this reading assessment. The study will seek to develop an understanding of the unique experiences of the teachers who have experienced teaching in the early primary grades both before and after the implementation of this assessment. As a potential benefit, this study provides the opportunity for you to share your personal experiences regarding high-stakes testing, providing a necessary voice for important stakeholders in an era of top-down, governmental mandates.

If you meet the following criteria I would like to invite you to participate. Criteria for participation in the study include (1) a minimum of five years teaching experience in the early primary grades (2) currently teaching in first, second, or first grade. Ideally, I would like to recruit one first-, second-, and third-grade teacher from each of the four elementary schools within the school district for a total of 12 participants.

Initial participation will involve a recorded, 50-60 minute interview. This interview will be conducted face-to-face either before or after school hours. As a participant, you will also receive a journal to record any additional thoughts or experiences that might not have been covered during the interview. Short follow-up interview requests might arise after our initial conversation as approved by our Institutional Review Boards at Andrews University. However, these follow-up interviews will be approved before they are conducted.

Your participation in this study will be strictly confidential. Your interview file and transcript will be labeled with a pseudonym. Any quotations from your interviews which are used in reports or articles will also be presented with a pseudonym. Additionally, the name of your school and school district will not be included in the final report to protect your privacy.

As a participant, you will have the right to review any materials related to this study and comment on my interpretation of the data. You will be able to read my transcriptions to check for accuracy and correct interpretations of your interview. This process should take 15 minutes for each review of the data. If any changes are necessary, you will have the opportunity to read the new data.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me:

Michelle Fish

[Email here]

[Phone number here]

If you have questions about your rights in the study, contact:

Ray Ostrander, Ph.D.

Professor, Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum

Andrews University

[Email here]

[Phone number here]

I believe your input regarding this topic is of great value and could provide important information to help stakeholders such as administrators and politicians improve future decision-making processes. Most importantly, your participation in this study will help add to the body of research available regarding the impact of a relatively new high-stakes reading assessment in the state of Indiana.

Sincerely,

Michelle A. Fish

Andrews University

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: Impact of A High-Stakes Reading Assessment on the Professionalism and Instructional Practices of Elementary Teachers

Principal Investigator: Michelle Fish, M.A., Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI

E-mail:

Phone:

Through this research project I intend to better understand the impact of a high-stakes reading assessment on the professionalism and instructional practices of elementary teachers. As a potential benefit, this study provides the opportunity for you to share your personal experiences regarding high-stakes testing, providing a necessary voice for important stakeholders in an era of top-down, governmental mandates. Results from this research may be presented at a conference and published, but most importantly will add to the existing body of research on this topic.

You should be aware that your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to stop the interview or withdraw from this study at any time. I will audio-record and then transcribe your responses and reflections gathered in this interview. All research data will be kept in password-protected, locked electronic files. I promise to keep your personal information secure and your participation in this study strictly confidential. A pseudonym will be used in place of your name for this study and any quotes from your interview included in articles or research reports will be associated with that pseudonym. Additionally, the names of your elementary school and school district will also be assigned pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

If you have any questions after the interview or if you would like a copy of one of the papers or articles that will eventually result from this research, feel free to contact the Principal Investigator in this research study:

Michelle A. Fish, MA
Principal Investigator
Andrews University
Berrien Springs, MI 49104-0101

By replying to this email (or signing this physical form) I indicate my willingness to participate in this interview and consent to the interview being audio recorded.

Printed name of participant

Signature of participant

Date

Printed name of researcher

Signature of researcher

Date

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EDUCATION

Ph.D., Curriculum and Instruction, Doctoral Candidate

Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, anticipated degree conferral December 2015

M.S., Elementary Education, Graduate Reading Minor

Indiana University, South Bend, IN, 2006

B.A., Elementary Education

Bethel College, Mishawaka, IN, 1994

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Assistant Professor

Bethel College, Mishawaka, IN, August 2015 to Present

Adjunct Professor

Bethel College, Mishawaka, IN, January 2011 to May 2015

Adjunct Student Teaching Supervisor

University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA, Fall 2011

Children's Ministries Director

River Oaks Community Church, Goshen, IN, August 2006 to June 2010

Reading Teacher Internship

Orchard View Elementary, Middlebury, IN, Jan./Feb. 2006

First Grade Teacher

Orchard View Elementary, Middlebury, IN, Fall 1995 to Spring 1998

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Dynacom, Mishawaka, IN, Fall 1994 to Spring 1995

