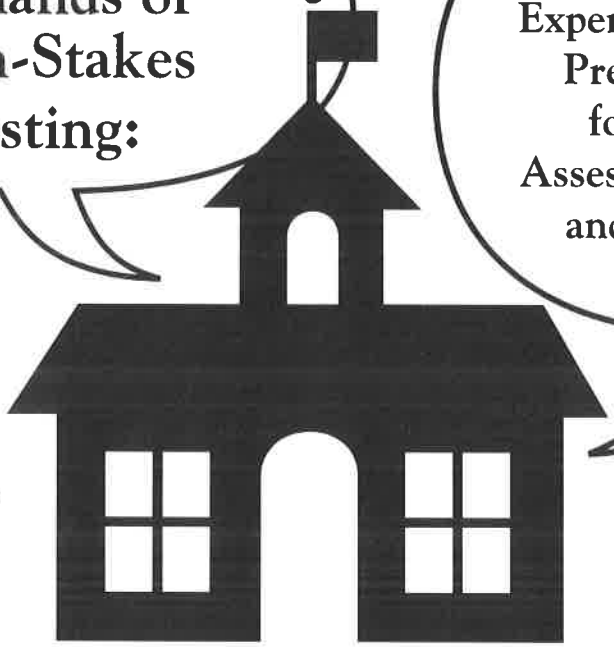
Negotiating the Demands of High-Stakes Testing:

Graduate Students' Experiences as Teachers Preparing Students for Standardized Assessments in Reading and Language Arts



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This qualitative interview study examined the experiences of four language and literacy education Ph.D. students, as classroom teachers, preparing students for high-stakes testing in public schools. Two of the participants taught in a western U.S. state while the other two currently teach in a southeastern state. The findings revealed that the participants supported progressive education practices. However, the teachers in the western state indicated that their state's lower-stakes testing program coincided with their beliefs about teaching and furthered their teaching goals while the teachers in the southeastern state felt that their state's higher-stakes testing program conflicted with their beliefs and hindered their teaching. Participants' approaches for negotiating the demands of testing with their pedagogical beliefs are described.

As a high school ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teacher, Nick is responsible for ensuring that his students, most of whom are immigrants, pass a high-stakes graduation exam to receive their high school diplomas. The writing portion of the high school graduation exam is given at the end of September, leaving Nick just two months to prepare his students. With such a short preparation time, Nick feels he has no choice but to formulaically teach the five paragraph essay that is assessed on the test. Yet, he is not happy about the situation. As Nick negotiates the pressures of high-stakes testing with his beliefs about teaching, he feels trapped between what he is expected to do and what he feels his students most desperately need.

Purpose

This research project was designed to explore the experiences of graduate students who have prepared kindergarten through twelfth-grade students for reading and language arts high-stakes tests in public schools. The graduate students in this study included former and practicing teachers who were Ph.D. students in a language and literacy education department at a major research university in the southeastern United States.

Literature Review

For the past 100 years, standardized testing has played a significant role in public education in the United States (Giordano, 2005). From the widespread intelligence testing during World War I to the proliferation of standardized testing in schools and employment venues, American society has become test-saturated. Following the SAT (originally the Scholastic Aptitude Test) test score decline during the 1960s and 1970s, many states initiated minimum-competency testing programs. For the first time, standardized tests were used for purposes of accountability and not just assessment (Haney, 1984). Standardized testing was further encouraged through the National Commission on Excellence in Education's (1983) report, A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) which called for increased testing to curb "a rising tide of mediocrity" in U.S. public education (p. 5).

Although education researchers such as Berliner and Biddle (1995) have argued that the SAT score decline

was due largely to an increase in ethnic minority students attending college and that the alleged public education crisis has largely been manufactured, the perception that American schools are performing poorly has continued to grow. Most recently, the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has echoed these concerns and called for increased accountability of student progress through standardized testing (Duffy, Giordano, Farrell, Paneque, & Crump, 2008).

However, as the use of standardized testing has increased, so have its critics (Haney, 1981). Progressive educators going back to John Dewey have often been at odds with the testing movement. Dewey (1922) argued that such scientific testing limits teachers' abilities to explore and experiment within their own classrooms. Similarly, Costigan (2008) and Costigan, Crocco, and Zumwalt (2004) described beginning teachers who found the test-centered environments in which they taught at odds with the student-centered pedagogies they experienced in teacher education courses.

Other researchers have documented the ways in which high-stakes tests are influencing teachers and their instruction. Hillocks (2002) examined the writing standards and assessments used in Texas, Illinois, New York, Oregon, and Kentucky. He found that the standardized writing assessments used in these states largely determined what standards teachers taught and how they taught them. In many cases these assessments narrowed the writing curriculum, reducing it to simplistic forms of writing such as the five-paragraph essay. Nichols and Berliner (2007) documented through newspaper stories nationwide numerous instances of cheating by teachers, administrators, and even state boards of education on high-stakes tests. They argued that this evidence supports Campbell's law—that indicators to which high stakes are attached will become corrupted. Koretz (2008) provided evidence that high-stakes testing policies such as those used in Texas have resulted in excessive score inflation. This score inflation occurred in two ways: blatant cheating and teaching to the test. Although some test preparation has been shown to actually increase test-score validity, types that narrow the curriculum to tested objectives and focus on numerous practice passages obscure test validity and inflate scores. Although such policies have resulted in increased scores on state tests, scores on more trusted measures such as NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) have remained relatively stable.

Despite a significant number of studies that have shown the negative, often unintended, consequences of high-stakes testing, a few studies have suggested that some teachers are able to provide challenging, student-centered instruction in spite of the test. For example, Gradwell (2006) provided a case study of an eighth-grade history teacher in New York State in her third year at a diverse school. Rather than narrowing her instruction to test preparation, she provided a rich and challenging curriculum for her students and, in turn, they scored well on the state test. Similarly, Williamson, Bondy, Langley, and Mayne (2005) reported on two urban teachers who were able to practice differentiated instruction and earn high test scores. They too found that teachers did not have to become test-centered to prepare students for tests.

High-stakes testing is a political and controversial topic that has been vigorously defended and critiqued throughout its 100-year history. However, little research has been conducted that examines the ways in which teachers negotiate the pressures of testing with their beliefs about teaching, especially teachers who advocate principles of progressive education. Graduate students who have taught under NCLB and are currently preparing to become researchers and teacher educators could provide important insights into these issues.

In order to understand how these graduate students/teachers negotiated the demands of testing with their pedagogical beliefs, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What did high-stakes testing for reading and language arts look like in their states?
2. How did their experiences with testing coincide and/or conflict with their beliefs about teaching?
3. How did they prepare students for testing and fulfill their other teaching goals?

Participants

Although there were six participants in this study, this paper focuses on only four of them: Nick, Jane, Wendy, and Katie (pseudonyms). These four were selected for this paper because they all had recent teaching experience in public schools under NCLB mandates. The other two participants consisted of a reading coach and a college professor. Neither of them had taught in public-school classrooms in recent years. Coincidentally, both Nick and Jane were practicing teachers in the same southeastern state, and Jane and Wendy were former teachers in the same western state.

Nick had completed his sixth year of teaching at the time of the interview and was pursuing his Ph.D. part-time. During his first two years of teaching, he taught middle school Spanish, and the last four years he had been teaching high-school ESOL. His teaching experiences were at schools with large Latino and immigrant populations in a southeastern state.

Jane had also completed her sixth year of teaching and was pursuing her Ph.D. part-time. All of her teaching experience was at the first-grade level in the same southeastern state as Nick. Her first three years she taught in an inner-city school with a large number of ethnic minority and impoverished students. Her fourth year she moved to a different district with a similar student population. Her fifth and sixth years she taught at a more diverse school with a variety of student ethnicities and income levels.

Wendy was a fulltime doctoral student, completing her third year in the Ph.D. program. She had taught for four years in a western state. Her first year she taught high school English at a school that was 99% Caucasian in one of the most affluent communities in the state. After teaching there one year she then taught middle school English at a school with middle-to-lower income students and a larger Latino population.

Katie was also a fulltime doctoral student, completing her first year in the program. Coincidentally, she taught in the same western state as Wendy, though in a different community and school district. Katie had taught high school English for four years at a high school with moderate ethnic diversity and student-income levels.

High-Stakes Testing in a Southeastern and Western States

The first focus of the study was to determine what high-stakes testing for reading and language arts looked like in the states in which the participants taught. From the perspectives of these teachers, various similarities and differences existed among the two testing programs. For example, both states did require high-stakes tests in reading and language arts. These tests consisted only of multiple choice questions. The language arts tests in both states focused primarily on grammar, punctuation, and concepts about writing but did not require any composition. Both states did administer a writing test at the high-school level in which the students actually wrote essays. Nick, Wendy, and Katie also prepared their students to pass a graduation test to receive their high school diplomas. This use of graduation tests was another similarity between the southeastern and western states in which they taught. Jane, who taught first grade in the southeastern state, gave her students a reading and language arts test. The tests Jane administered were not tied to promotion until the third grade when students then had to pass the reading test to be promoted. In the western state in which Wendy and Katie taught, standardized tests were not tied to promotion at any grade.

Another difference between the tests in the southeastern and western states involved how they were created. Those in the southeastern state, used by Nick and Jane, were created by a professional publishing company, whereas those used in the western state, by Wendy and Katie, were actually created by committees of teachers. The tests were still official and formal, and the questions underwent a pilot process, but the questions were created by teachers rather than an outside company. Wendy explained that this process was probably used to save money. Both Wendy and Katie mentioned that their state spent fewer dollars in education per pupil than most other U.S. states. Nonetheless, Wendy noted that she really liked this process because it acknowledged the professional status of the teachers and gave them an active role in assessing students through standardized tests.

Beliefs about Teaching and Testing

The second focus of this study was to learn about how these graduate students' experiences with testing coincided and/or conflicted with their beliefs about teaching. All four graduate students seemed to advocate some form of progressive education practices (Dewey, 1900/1943; 1938/1963). None of them relied heavily on worksheets, textbooks, or test-preparation workbooks. Both Wendy and Jane described themselves as identifying with constructivist theories of learning. Wendy believed in integrating the language arts, teaching thematically, and carefully aligning her teaching objectives with her instruction. Grammar and punctuation are important writing components, she argued, but are best taught in the context of actual writing. She developed a passion for working with economically disadvantaged students and expressed that learning was much more important to her than grades.

Similarly, Jane also described her love for teaching economically disadvantaged children. As a current classroom teacher, she strongly values diversity and honors children's dialects in her classroom. She believes in the importance of establishing relationships and community with her children. Also, she teaches a love for reading and a need for critical literacy. Jane teaches reading through guided reading groups and giving students choices of high-quality literature in their reading selections.

Katie did not use the word constructivist in her description of her beliefs about teaching but instead used the phrase "student-centered instruction." Katie believed in differentiating and individualizing instruction for struggling readers and capitalizing on students' strengths. She also stressed the importance of believing that every child can learn and making instruction relevant. At the high school where she taught, she participated in an experiential

education program that integrated English, science, social studies, and physical education in an outdoor alternative learning environment. The students took several field trips and often went hiking and mountain biking. Students participated in outdoor learning activities such as conducting science experiments in streams and reading Emerson and Thoreau in the wilderness when studying transcendentalism. Katie felt this program offered numerous opportunities to teach across the curriculum and access students' multiple intelligences.

Nick also discussed the importance of getting to know his students and aligning his teaching with their interests. As a current teacher, he uses young adult literature to hook his ESOL students' interests with stories about issues of authority and identity. Once he captures their imaginations through these books he is able to assess and strengthen their language use. Nick also stressed the importance of understanding the immigrant story. Like many of his students, Nick also immigrated to the United States. Having this shared experience with his students, Nick believes he can better understand their needs and struggles. Young adult literature provides a resource for discussing the issues his students face in a new country.

All four participants felt that their beliefs about teaching both coincided and conflicted with high-stakes testing at some level. For example, Nick felt that the tests give a fairly accurate account of what his students know but are limited because they cannot explain why a child is not performing. Standardized tests, he argued, do not reveal the issues of inequity behind the scores themselves. Wendy, on the other hand, liked the tests in her state overall and felt they matched her philosophy of teaching because they included higher-level thinking questions on the reading tests. She appreciated the writing tests as well because grammar and punctuation were only a part of the assessments and were evaluated in the context of writing passages. Katie also approved of many attributes in her state's standardized reading test noting how it promoted content area literacy and included authentic informational texts. She also said it assessed higher-level thinking but was limited by its total reliance on multiple-choice questions. Katie felt that her state's standardized tests were a decent indicator of student performance but discriminated against students with limited experiences and students with learning disabilities.

Of all the participants, Jane, who taught in the southeast, most strongly critiqued standardized tests. Although she acknowledged the importance of accountability and the usefulness of standardized tests, she still maintained that they were entirely inappropriate for six-year-olds. Certain questions that required students to match numbered definitions with corresponding multiple-choice letter options were much too confusing for first graders. Moreover, first graders use pictures, word walls, teachers, friends and other books to help them decode words in their everyday reading but are prohibited from using these on the test. She even criticized the reliability and validity of these tests by citing examples of students failing for non-academic reasons such as illnesses and test anxiety.

Despite the fact that all four participants discussed the pros and cons of their states' testing policies, Wendy and Katie were much more supportive of their states' testing program than were Nick and Jane. Figures 1 and 2 show webs of the categories that emerged from each participant's description of his or her state's standardized tests and corresponding district and school policies. Wendy and Katie both mentioned that they perceived their state as being much less test-

FIGURE 1 *Wendy and Katie's beliefs coinciding with their state testing program.*

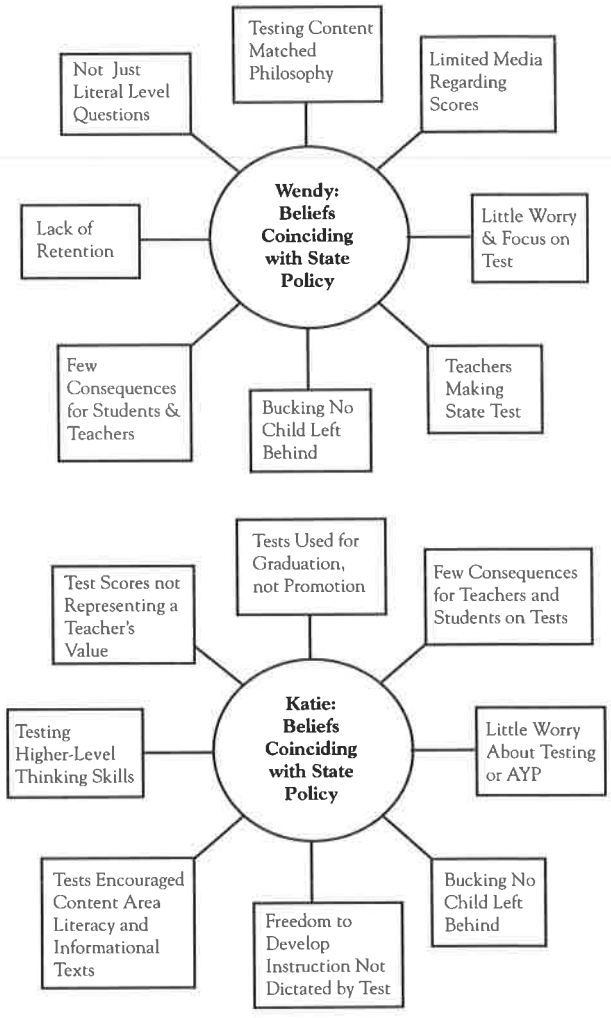
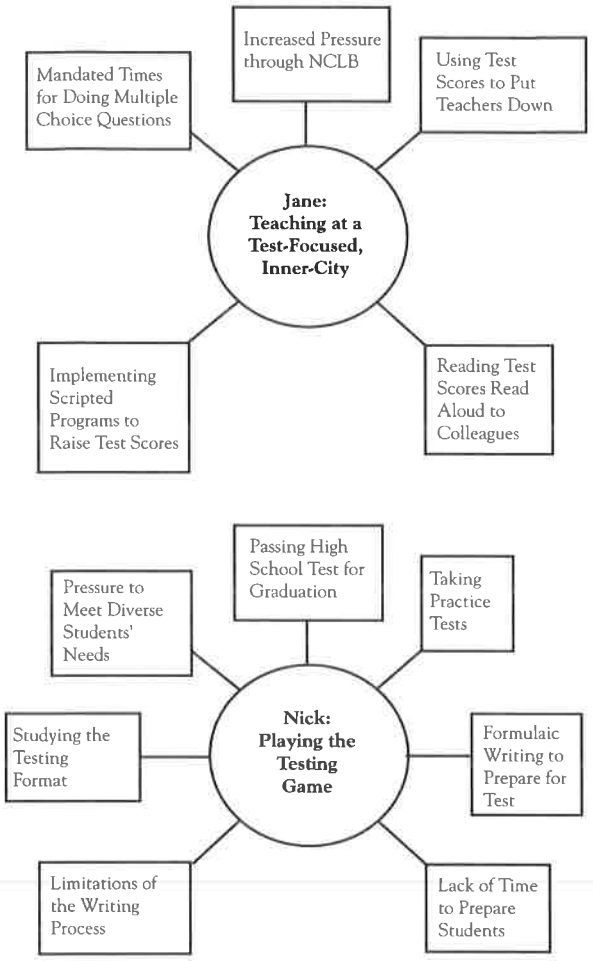


FIGURE 2 *Jane and Nick's beliefs conflicting with their state testing program.*



focused than other states. One reason they both gave for this was that before accepting NCLB funding, their state legislature passed a symbolic bill bucking NCLB. Essentially their state said they would accept the money but only follow NCLB mandates when they did not conflict with their own state education goals. Both Wendy and Katie were quite proud of this defiance. Another example they gave of their state's lesser focus on testing was the fact that as teachers they never received individual student score reports. They received reports showing how their classes performed overall but never were told which individual students passed or failed. Wendy explained that this may have been a cost saving policy by the state. Both Wendy and Katie mentioned that media outlets seemed less concerned about testing than in other states, normally just running stories about which schools did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Also, both expressed that testing was not the main focus at their schools, and teachers were still given considerable latitude in designing instruction.

Although Nick and Jane's experiences differed at the various places they taught, they both expressed stronger critiques of testing than Wendy and Katie and both perceived their state's policies as being highly test-driven. These policies were often implemented in their schools in ways that conflicted with their beliefs about teaching, and they used various strategies to negotiate these pressures. Although it is likely that different stories and perceptions of testing would have been obtained had different teachers in different contexts from these two states been interviewed, it is worthwhile to note how similarly Wendy and Katie and Nick and Jane each perceived their own state's testing policies. Moreover, it is noteworthy how different the perceptions of the two states' testing programs were from one another.

Negotiating the Demands of Testing

Learning about these graduate students' experiences preparing students for high-stakes testing and how their beliefs about teaching coincided and/or conflicted with the testing policies where they taught, enabled greater understanding in how they negotiated preparing students for testing while fulfilling their other teaching goals. At Nick's first teaching job, middle school Spanish, there were no testing demands for him because Spanish was not a tested subject. However, when he became a high school ESOL teacher, things changed dramatically. The high number of failing ESOL students had prevented the school from making AYP. Consequently, the administration revamped the ESOL program and hired new teachers, one of them being Nick. This change caused Nick to realize that his success as a teacher is dependent on if his students pass the graduation test. Because the reading test is not given until March, Nick has time to seamlessly integrate the tested reading standards into the young adult novels he reads with his students. Also, his administrators created a test preparation class for ESOL students as well. All his ESOL students return to him for a second time each day to focus specifically on reading comprehension questions and the tested standards. Nick likes this extra class because it frees him to focus on other standards in a more holistic way during his regular class time.

Since the writing test is given at the end of September, Nick feels he has little choice in writing instruction during the first two months of school. He understands that students are expected to write a traditional five-paragraph essay, what he calls "the scientific approach." Consequently, he has developed a formula he teaches to his students to ensure they will produce the type of writing assessed on the test. He believes this is unhelpful in developing his students' writing skills; its only value is helping them pass the test.

> . . . I'm a reflective teacher, because I've thought about it, I've worked out my formula, whatever it is, good or bad, I do what I have to do, and then once that's done I move on to do what I need to do you know. So, you just have to do what you got to do, I mean you just do what you got to do.

According to Nick, once the writing test is over, the real writing instruction begins. Students have an opportunity to write in journals about the characters and issues they read about in their novels. This process of actually becoming a writer, Nick argued, is long and methodical.

The ways in which Jane negotiates the demands of testing have varied greatly in the different settings in which she has taught. In an attempt to raise test scores, the inner-city school where she first taught implemented a scripted reading program that teachers were forced to use. Also, they mandated a block of time each day in which teachers were required to give their students multiple-choice practice passages. Jane felt that test scores at this school were used not only to judge teachers but also to shame those not performing well. She recalled a team meeting with her principal in which she and the other first-grade teachers were forced to read aloud their tests results to each other. Jane's students had done very well while the other teachers' students performed poorly. Jane felt the principal was not interested in why her students did well but used the meeting as a way to emphasize how badly the other teachers had done. All of these experiences greatly conflicted with Jane's philosophy of teaching, and after three years she left that district. She felt she could no longer be good for her students under such constraints.

Jane moved to a school with a similar student population but not nearly such regimented policies. The students there took the same tests with the same high-stakes attached, but the school was much more open to letting teachers prepare students in their own unique ways. Still distraught from the experiences at her previous school, Jane decided to not explicitly provide any test instruction the entire year. Interestingly, her students performed very well on the state tests. Although she was not completely sure how this happened, she felt that it had more to do with the abilities of that particular group that year than her approach. She only stayed at that school one year before moving to her current position. Jane continues to teach in an environment that strongly stresses test performance but feels she has matured in the ways in which she integrates tested objectives with her larger teaching goals:

> We had a good time that year, but I think that the way I'm looking at it now is a much healthier way, so it wasn't like this year it took us over either, or last year. It kind of found its way in a little bit more organically in to what we were doing.

Jane used the phrase "teaching testing as a genre" to describe her approach to testing instruction. She believes that explaining to children that testing is a contrived genre is important. She lets them know that they may have to read something they do not enjoy, and they will not be able to ask questions and discuss the test with friends. By teaching her students the specific expectations of the test and the language it uses, she addresses testing without letting it consume her teaching.

Katie did not feel pressure to teach to the test or excessively worry about her students' performances on them. Although her school was held accountable for making AYP, there was little pressure placed on teachers and students concerning testing. She remembered that one year her school did not make AYP but did not remember it being mentioned after that. She went about with her regular instruction throughout the year and believed that the skills and strategies students learned through regular instruction would serve them well on the tests. About a month before testing they would spend about ten minutes of class each day discussing passages and questions from old tests, often turning it into a game. She also initiated critical discussions with her students about testing and its pros and cons:

> I would always tell them this score is not going to be a measure of your worth as a person you know because I don't think it measures their worth as a person, but at the same time I know there's [there are] hoops I've had to jump through to get . . . the education that I wanted, and so . . . I tried to make that a transparent thing[,] you know?

Like Katie, Wendy felt little pressure to worry about her students' test scores.

While teaching at an affluent high school her first year, her principal reminded the teachers that he hired only the best and that their students would do well on the tests. Wendy taught with little concern about testing and her students did do well. When she moved to the middle school position, the message from administrators changed but testing continued to be rarely addressed. The middle school had a much stricter teacher evaluation process with several administrator observations that favored direct instruction. This concerned Wendy, but she continued

with her normal, progressive-style of teaching. Also, the other English teachers wanted her to spend the first ten minutes of class having students edit a sentence with mistakes. This strongly contradicted her teaching philosophy. She believed that students should spend more time reading conventional writing, not errors, and that grammar and punctuation are best taught in the context of the writing process. Wendy refused to use the sentences and was ultimately reported to her principal. She held her ground and continued teaching as she saw best:

> . . . wherever the pressure comes from, if it's testing, if it's your department, if it's your district, I think teaching is first and foremost, it's an ethical thing. Like . . . your primary concern is the well-being of your students, and that you give your students the absolute best education that you can based upon what you know. It is first and foremost a moral imperative . . . because you are working with young lives. And so wherever the pressure comes from, I think you should still be true to yourself and your teaching philosophy, and let the chips fall out like they will.

Wendy took this same approach to testing. She provided students with her normal instruction and spent only a small amount of time prior to the tests discussing what she also called the "genre of testing." By acting on her beliefs about teaching her students performed well.

Discussion

In summary, there are several key findings that can be drawn from this study. First, all four participants had recent teaching experience during NCLB. In fact, they all started teaching around the time NCLB came into effect. All the participants were required to administer standardized tests in reading and language arts that consisted of multiple-choice questions. Although both states followed NCLB mandates and enacted test-based graduation policies, Wendy and Katie experienced a lower-stakes form of testing in their western state than did Nick and Jane in their southeastern state. This was made evident in the fact that Wendy and Katie's state placed its own interests above NCLB mandates and did not enact test-based promotion policies. Wendy and Katie described little pressure to focus on test scores from their administrators and communities.

In terms of their beliefs about teaching and testing, all four participants appeared to advocate progressive forms of teaching, although what this looked like in practice varied somewhat from teacher to teacher. Both Wendy and Katie felt their state's tests matched their philosophies of teaching in several ways. For example, they acknowledged the focus on higher-level thinking, grammar tested in context, the incorporation of content area literacy, and the use of authentic informational texts. They both appreciated the limited focus given towards testing and the latitude they were given in making instructional decisions. Wendy praised the role teachers have in creating the standardized tests her state uses. Nick and Jane clearly felt more pressure to prepare students for testing than Wendy and Katie and struggled to negotiate these demands with their beliefs about teaching.

All four actively negotiated preparing students for testing and meeting their other progressive education goals. Although they differed somewhat in how they did this, they all incorporated some version of teaching testing as a genre. Teaching testing as a genre provided a means by which the participants addressed the various pressures of testing while still preserving the majority of class time for their authentic reading and writing activities. Wendy and Katie, feeling little pressure to get high test scores, allotted a small portion of class time for test instruction a few days prior to the test. Jane and Nick, however, encountered greater challenges. After being forced to spend large amounts of time in daily test preparation, Jane rebelled, and for one year refused to acknowledge testing at all. She has now adopted a more balanced approach in which she more seamlessly incorporates tested standards throughout the year. Nick is also able to integrate tested reading standards into his daily reading instruction through his use of novels. However, because of the short time-frame to prepare for the writing test, he feels forced to teach a formulaic writing style that contradicts his beliefs about writing instruction.

One of the important findings in this study is that Jane and Nick struggled a great deal to negotiate the demands of testing in their state, whereas Wendy and Katie struggled little at all. This finding is supported by numerous studies that have documented the negative effects that occur when high-stakes are applied to standardized tests. These include emotional stress (Smith & Rottenberg, 1991), negative coaching (Herman & Golan, 1993; Stecher, 2002), and adapting teaching styles to test formats (Smith, 1991). Moreover, Au (2007) found that high-stakes testing can result in content, formal, and pedagogic control. When this occurs instruction becomes focused solely on tested subjects and standards. Knowledge is taught as isolated, testable objectives, and instruction becomes teacher-centered rather than student-centered. Jane and Nick found themselves engaged in such teaching-to-the-test activities at various times in their teaching but also sought-out ways, sometimes successfully and other times not, to achieve their broader, progressive education goals.

Limitations

Like all research projects, this study has its limitations. First, it only reports on four participants. Obviously this prevents generalizing about what experiences other teachers in these states are having. However, my purpose was not to generalize broadly. Rather, my goal was to describe the experiences and perceptions of these four graduate students and compare them with each other. A second limitation is that all of the participants were Ph.D. students at the time of the study. Given the culture of critique in doctoral programs, especially toward high-stakes testing (e.g., Costigan, 2008), it is possible that teachers not in graduate programs experience less conflict with such testing. However, because doctoral students will be highly influential as teacher educators, the ways in which they negotiate the demands of testing is a worthwhile area of study. Finally, the findings of this study are limited by the diverse characteristics of the participants. Each of the participants taught in different schools and different grades in different towns and states. For example, Jane taught first grade while the other participants taught at the secondary level. Moreover, Nick was an ESOL teacher while the rest of the participants taught general education students. Such diverse characteristics do not allow for exact comparisons. However, direct comparisons were not necessary to address my research questions. Rather, my primary focus was to learn about my participants' experiences preparing students for high-stakes testing and specifically how they negotiated these demands with their other teaching goals. All of the participants shared experiences in these areas, allowing some comparisons to be made while also acknowledging the differences.

Implications for Research and Classroom Practice

Although there is a significant amount of research documenting the negative consequences of high-stakes testing and teaching to the test, few studies have addressed how teachers negotiate these pressures. This study helps add to that limited knowledge base. Much more research is needed, however, to better understand the ways in which teachers negotiate the demands of high-stakes testing with their pedagogical beliefs. Specifically, what are the conditions that enable some teachers to provide challenging, student-centered instruction without narrowing the curriculum to tested standards and multiple-choice questioning? Additionally, more research is needed to determine what types of testing programs best encourage content expansion, knowledge integration, and student-centered teaching (Au, 2007). How is it that the attached stakes and test designs influence instruction? To what extent do the high- or low-stakes of testing programs encourage or discourage progressive, student-centered teaching practices?

The benefits of this study include a greater understanding of the high-stakes testing demands on classroom teachers, specifically those participating in Ph.D. programs. This information can help teacher educators more effectively prepare teachers to be successful incorporating student-centered pedagogy and preparing students to pass standardized exams. Likewise, teachers can learn ways in which other teachers, especially in test-saturated states like Georgia, have negotiated these demands.

Finally, this study provides implications for policy makers. Although the two states in this study both met NLCB requirements, they differed greatly in the high-stakes that were applied to testing. This study challenges policy makers in states like Georgia to consider alternative, lower-stakes approaches to testing that could support, rather than constrain student-centered approaches to teaching and learning. Accountability through the use of standardized testing affects every aspect of our society. Policy makers are eager to improve accountability programs to strengthen public education nationwide. Learning how to better assess and monitor student progress in ways that encourage more effective teaching practices helps meet these goals.

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