

How Teachers' Professional Identities Position High-Stakes Test Preparation in Their Classrooms

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In this article, we present profiles of two high school English teachers and their classrooms as the teachers responded to mandated high-stakes test accountability. Both teachers accepted targeted professional development, strong accountability measures, vigilant specialist support, and school site leadership; both believed tests were permanent and measured important skills; and both were committed to being team players and to teaching to the test to support their low-achieving students in performing well. We describe how both teachers unwittingly stymied their own test preparation objectives, and we represent the complicated reasons for these acts as expressions of their own personal accountability. Their purposefulness in their teaching competed with and mostly took precedence over the accountability goals of their departments, schools, and districts. We represent their powerful personal commitment as an expression of their professional identities. These we represent through pastiches of the teachers' own descriptions of their teaching. Through our descriptive narratives of their classroom practices, we illustrate relationships between their beliefs and practices, illustrating how they render test preparation to a subordinate position. The cases illustrate three interrelated dimensions for understanding why this occurs: professional accommodation, personal integration, and delegation of testing to secondary status. At the conclusion of the paper, we discuss the implications for policy and professional development.

In this paper we focus on two teachers with strong professional commitments to their low-achieving students. Using ethnographic methods, we construct case studies to represent how these teachers, under the pressure of test score accountability, describe their practices and perform them in their classrooms. It is the first formal study to emerge from a larger,

ongoing research project investigating how accountability pressures impact what is taught and learned in a district's two high school English departments. With this study we deepen understandings of teachers' responses to the threats and mandates of high-stakes testing. Our aim is to better understand why teachers, even when they want to prepare their students for the tests and are supported by professional development, translate policy into classroom practice in ways that do not achieve their goals.

By describing the local, situated complexities (Sumara, 2000) of teaching and learning, we plan to complement current studies, which have reported conflicting outcomes of accountability. Some report increased test scores and student learning, and others report declining teacher confidence and instructional quality. With this study, we provide a view of classroom performance that reflects the dominance of teachers' personal measures of accountability over external accountability pressures.

As far back as 1986, Erickson noted in U.S. schooling an increase in accountability systems, such as management by objectives, continual achievement testing, and more pressure for uniformity of curriculum and aims. McNeil's (2000) more recent study of Houston schools' responses to high-stakes TAAS testing illustrates how powerful accountability pressures were exerted on teachers. In the 1st year of our project, we found this also to be the case in the district we studied. Comprehensive, powerful pressures to be accountable were being brought to bear on its teachers. Teachers were asked to provide evidence they had successfully revised their curriculums to closely mimic the language, procedures, and skills required by the state's high-stakes test. These findings led us to ask the question guiding the 2nd year of our study. We wanted to know how teachers interpreted these mandates and responded to these pressures by observing what went on in the day-to-day practices in their classrooms. Specifically, we were interested in seeing what constituted the subject matter and how the teachers taught it. But we wanted to go to the next step and learn from the way teachers talked about their teaching why they made the moves they did.

What we learned from the two teachers in our study suggests an important direction for follow-up studies and new ways of thinking about policy and professional development. We learned that what and how teachers teach, even within powerful accountability cultures, is dominated by their own ethical senses of what they should do for their students and who they need to be as a teacher. Even when they believed they were teaching to the test, they relegated competing pressures of subject matter standards and test preparation to a secondary position when confronted by the ethical and professional challenges of doing what they thought was best for their students. As another teacher lamented publicly at a 2-day district workshop to show them how to "teach to the test,"

We're all, especially this year, experiencing constant frustration because we all want to teach the things outside of, you know, how these kids prepare for the test. And that's an ongoing issue that you battle with personally . . . it's always a battle trying to figure out how you prepare them and teach them the skills [for taking the test] and also teach them the other things they're there to learn.

Throughout the rest of the paper we present the two cases from our study as illustrative profiles of how two teachers with classrooms of low-achieving students regarded and enacted the same district mandates for improving students' test scores. We represent their professional identities as pastiches and their classroom practices in descriptive narratives. We analyze relationships between the teachers' values, beliefs, and dispositions about their teaching and their classroom practices. We show how teachers' professional identities took precedence over other accountability pressures. At the conclusion of the paper, we discuss the implications for policy and professional development of teachers' stymieing of their own test preparation objectives.

THEORETICAL APPROACH

COMBINED APPROACH

To describe how accountability pressures played out in classrooms in a way that richly represented what teachers did, what sort of language arts education students were getting, and how and why, the study applied a combined ethnographic (Geertz, 1973; Hymes, 1996) and discourse analytic (Gee, 1996, 1999) lens. This lens made it possible to understand and describe what was going on in specific places and situations within larger contexts. The main assumption underlying our work is that social practices—like teaching and learning—are constructed through and visible in discourse or the ways that people communicate. Put another way, discourses, or language in use in speech and writing, are forms of social action with their own social meanings. On the one hand, discourses occur in macro-contexts, in organizations and institutions (like English departments and schools), and, on the other, they occur in micro-contexts at a particular time, in a particular place, with particular participants (like a classroom discussion and a conversation between a teacher and student before class). To understand the meaning of a particular conversation, it must be viewed in relation to various social and political contextual conditions, and to describe how classroom, school and department policies are constructed, sustained, or changed we need to observe teacher conversations in their

classrooms and lunchrooms (Gee, 1999). Through this lens, we can view the relationships between moment-to-moment occurrences in individual classrooms and political and social conditions in the English departments, high schools, and district venues. This view provides much broader and more practical answers to the question of why teachers teach as they do than conventional perspectives, which report only individual intentions and knowledge. By seeing their teaching as a reflection of conditions in social and political worlds teachers inhabit, we can offer contextualized and compatible recommendations for improvement to teachers, administrators and district personnel that will be more far-reaching and have greater staying power.

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

We learned from the pilot study that over years of teaching many of the English teachers had developed a sense of their own professional identity dedicated to the well-being of their students that was uniquely personal to them. As one of the teachers said, "At the end of the day, I need to know I'm doing the right thing for my students." These and other statements by teachers about their practice told us what for them being a professional educator meant. Their definitions of professionalism did not answer to any national or institutional standard. They were a unique blend of personal values, beliefs, learnings, and dispositions, part of what Bourdieu (1977) terms a "habitus." The judgments teachers make about who their students are and what they need, as well as decisions about what and how to teach, are mediated by and expressions of their habitus, which continues to evolve and to accommodate new experiences such as the demands of high-stakes test accountability. In this study we describe how the accommodation plays out in teachers' self-reports of their practice and in our observations of their classrooms.

THE STUDY OF CLASSROOMS

Within this theoretical framework, classrooms are unique cultures within other cultures of schooling whose meaningful practices and values as they accrue become ordinary and invisible to their members. This assumption, though it respects participants' voiced views of their experience, has misgivings about the value of findings when teacher and student self-reports are the sole description of their practices. This study, therefore, combines both teacher reports about their practice and researchers' observations. It employs systematic, triangulated observation of what teachers and students are observed to say and do in their day-to-day

practices over an 8-week course of study, to continuously monitor how, over time, commonly held understandings of what counts as literate thinking, literate actions, literate products, and being literate are visible as patterned relationships (Rex, 2001; Rex & McEachen, 1999; Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, 1992).

RESEARCH ON HIGH-STAKES TESTS AND INSTRUCTION

In his study of New York teachers' perceptions of changes in their state's testing program, S.G. Grant (2000) reviewed the literature on the relationship between high-stakes test scores, professional development, and classroom instruction. Grant found that few empirical studies represent the relationship between teachers and the tests they administer. Those that do present a mixed picture. In this section, we borrow heavily from Grant's analysis to show why we decided to pursue this study as we have.

Grant asserts that advocates of testing make positive claims couched as general assertions of the inevitability that good tests will drive good instruction (e.g., Feltovovich, Spiro, & Coulson, 1993; Shanker, 1995); that good test results equal good education (e.g., Popham, Cruse, Rankin, Sandifer, & Williams (1985); that tests are part of an overall strategy for fundamental school change (e.g., Fuhrman, 1993; Smith & O'Day, 1991); and that because tests are entrenched they should be used as a fundamental part of curriculum planning. He points out that in none of these studies is there evidence that good instruction occurs, other than standardized test score improvements. What constitutes good instruction is, by default, whatever raises test scores. Nor is empirical evidence provided to warrant the claim that when students' test scores rise they are receiving a good education. Similarly, the argument for testing as fundamental to systemic school reform does not illustrate empirically how such effects were achieved nor how, by making high-stakes testing integral to curriculum planning, teaching and students' educations will be improved.

Grant notes that critics of high-stakes tests are more specific in their assessment of the impact of testing on teaching. Smith (1991) reports eight responses teachers take toward pressures to prepare students for the test, including ordinary curriculum with no special preparation. However, LeMahieu (1984), Koretz (1995), and Madaus (1988) assert that teachers tailor their content to the test and that whomever controls the test controls the curriculum. One of the most damning claims comes from Corbett and Wilson (1991), who assert that under the influence of testing accountability, especially minimum competency testing, teachers turn their attentions to test scores and away from their students and their sense of educational purposes. They claim that accountability pressure inevitably lead to

teachers' changing their classroom activity and that such changes are not reforms of the type test advocates envision.

Research also exists, Grant tells us, referring to studies done before high-stakes accountability that determined a weak relationship between testing and classroom practices. Freeman et al. (1980), Kellaghan, Madaus, and Airasian (1982), and Salmon-Cox (1981) found little impact on teachers' daily instruction of mandated testing pressures. Of particular interest to the claims of this study are the findings of Firestone, Mayrowetz, and Fairman (1998) that tests influence what teachers teach—in other words, what they include as subject matter—and have no influence on how teachers teach—that is, on the ways they plan and deliver instruction. Grant's (2001) own study of state-level testing in New York on social studies teachers found little direct influence on either content or pedagogical decision making.

This mixed bag of claims does little to inform our understanding of how testing accountability pressure influences relationships between what teachers think they should be doing and what they do in their classrooms. All these studies allow us to say is that testing does seem to influence teachers and that the influence transfers to a greater or lesser extent to classroom practices. What we need are field-based, thick descriptions of how teachers incorporate test pressures into their thinking and into their daily classroom practices and the relationship, if any, between those two incorporations.

A field-based study by Linda McNeil (1985, 1988, 2000) richly describes the sweeping effects of centralized controls on Houston's public magnet schools' classrooms due to TAAS accountability. She presents a troubled and troubling picture of the legacy of restrictive accountability language and resulting mandates. Her central claim is that "educational standardization harms teaching and learning and, over the long term, restratifies by race and class" (McNeil, 2000, p. xxvii). She first describes classrooms in which teachers were teaching successfully to meet the needs of particularly needy students, and then she returns to the same classrooms to describe how standardization had caused a "watering down of what was taught" (p. xxvii). McNeil lists a litany of what is excised from classroom practices, including discussions, role playing, research papers, and multimedia activities. She also describes negative changes in the cultures of the schools and the cultural practices of the teachers, as they reacted to blaming and threats of dismissal.

McNeil's study provides the impetus for the microfocus of this study. Her large-scale study focuses on change, on the influences of mandates for particular kinds of change, and on what looked different. McNeil's descriptions are broadly drawn in order to foreground positive trends before testing and negative developments afterward across a number of

classrooms. Such representations lead us to ask why individual teachers made the decisions they did. By understanding how teachers interpret what they have to do as they grapple with threats and mandates, we can better understand why teachers, even when supported by professional development, translate policy into classroom practice as they do. Looking at what is “meaningful” to the players and at how they act on those meanings would help us understand the local instantiations of policies and the part teachers’ interpretations of mandates play. They could provide insights into why mandates and ensuing local professional development are so often unsuccessful in accomplishing their intended aims (Miller & Fredericks, 2000).

METHOD

EVOLUTION OF THE STUDY QUESTION

Five years ago in Michigan we began using ethnographic methods to explore relationships between a school district, its community, and its high school English classrooms’ teaching practices. At that time, accountability, as measured by the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP), dominated conversation. In the local newspapers, we read the mayor’s harsh criticism of the schools and teachers for low student MEAP scores. We heard the superintendent hold the principals’ feet to the fire at a school board meeting. Principals wanted to tell us how they were making their teachers accountable, and English teachers volunteered how they were bearing up under accountability pressures.

Our 2-year presence allowed us to develop relationships with district administrators, curriculum and instruction supervisors, English language arts specialists, department chairs, and classroom teachers. By the time our study focused on the practices in specific classrooms, we had established a knowledge base and relationships with key informants that meaningfully enriched what we observed and were told. We observed that the English departments in each of the two high schools were developing standardized policies, guidelines, and procedures for teachers to follow, and teachers were following them. They attended the meetings, created practice tests, wrote new curriculum, and engaged in collegial dialogues about how to enact them. We also were developing a long list of questions. We wondered if teachers meant what they said publicly, whether they would follow through on the protocols, and if they did, what that would look like, and how students would perform.

At that point, we took up residence for 8 weeks in the classrooms of two teacher volunteers to see what they believed was their competent

integration of MEAP into their teaching. We collected daily field notes, video tape recordings with two cameras of classroom practices (30 hours per classroom), and informal interviews with both teachers and selected students. We also formally interviewed both teachers four times, each time for an hour.

Stan and Marita were in their 2nd year of teaching at their respective schools, though they had prior teaching experience and extensive educations (see teacher profiles in Appendix A). Both had confidence in their curriculum, though they were open to information that might help them improve their practice. We intentionally chose classrooms in different schools with comparable low-achieving student populations (see profiles of students in Appendix B). The questions guiding the collection and analysis of classroom data asked the following: What counts as literate knowledge in this classroom? How is literate knowledge constructed? How does the teacher plan/replan and enact curriculum? How do students take up the curriculum? What does the curriculum become and how does it evolve? How does the teacher conduct instruction? How do students respond to instructional approaches? What are the classroom norms for being literate and performing literately? What counts as literate language arts achievement? What is important and expected for students' literate performance?

THE DISTRICT'S ACCOUNTABILITY CULTURE

The accountability cultures in both Stan's and Marita's English departments originated in the community's, mayor's, superintendent's, and principals' mandates to increase students' MEAP scores. During the school year previous to the one recounted in this study, English teachers were mandated to provide students with MEAP-test-like assessments that combined the format of questions that the students would see on the actual test with the subject matter that the teachers were covering in the class. Eleventh grade English teachers at both schools were funded to spend 2 days with district language arts specialists to develop these assessments. Other half-day professional development occasions were set aside. After the 1st year of implementation, student test scores improved.

At Marita's school, reading specialists led teachers in classroom exercises that would help students learn how to think critically, a skill that many in the district believe is essential for high performance on the MEAP. They served as test coordinators for the English department, tracked student performance on the language arts portion of the test, and provided support for individual students and teachers in preparing for the test. The year of the study, in the months leading up to the test, the chair of Marita's English department organized meetings to discuss how to write MEAP-like assessments. The 11th-grade teachers were required to submit to their

principal their MEAP-like assessments, the students' practice scores, and their earlier scores on the actual MEAP test.

English teachers at Stan's school were subject to the same district-imposed accountability measures as those at Marita's school; however, their implementation was more tightly structured and regulated. The school principal conferred directly with the specialists in the design and scheduling of practice assessments and sat in on teacher meetings. The result was the implementation of a test preparation system at Stan's school, which required teachers to administer three aligned MEAP-like practice tests at specific times over the course of the year, culminating in the official test in May. To assist with test preparation, the school purchased MEAP practice workbooks for all English teachers, although most declined to use them. In addition, teachers were responsible for evaluating their students' performance on the practice tests and detailing how they would improve student performance based on their results. Teachers met in biweekly department meetings to discuss the practice tests and results, test results were posted publicly by the administration, and teachers whose students performed well were praised. The year of the study, teachers continued meeting to improve preparation of curriculum that taught skills needed for the test, and the principal required four practice tests. Stan conducted a workshop for his fellow teachers on how to prepare students for the extended writing portion of the test.

METHOD OF INTERVIEWING

During the 8 weeks of observation, at the end of daily class sessions, each teacher engaged with one of us in informal, video recorded, conversation lasting 5 to 30 minutes. The teachers initiated a topic and controlled the direction of the conversation, which ranged widely. Most often they discussed the actions of specific students and parts of lessons, requested strategies or advice, and shared concerns that were initiated by the previous class. The questions we asked on these occasions emerged from teachers' interests and encouraged elaboration (Spradley, 1979). We also formally interviewed Stan and Marita four times: the 1st week, at the end of observation, and twice thereafter, until we believed the topic areas had been substantively explored. Using a topic guide (see Appendix D) we conducted open-ended, unstructured interviews (Weiss, 1994), saying as little as possible while encouraging teachers to reflect on what was important about how and why they taught. It is important to keep in mind that Stan and Marita's responses to our questions about their histories, teaching philosophies, curriculum, and students reflected their belief that what they were teaching—that is, their own curriculum with MEAP-like practice—was basically sound.

METHOD OF INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

After conducting the interviews and classroom observations, we became aware, through seeing how they related to their students and what they asked students to learn, of the centrality of Stan and Marita's focus on their students. We wanted to understand how they conceptualized their responsibility to their students, where that view originated, and how it linked to their teaching. First we replayed the formal interviews to look for patterns that emerged in response to the questions: How do teachers make decisions they consider professionally responsible? And, how are their judgments to best serve their students an expression of their professional and personal knowledge and experience? Using this open coding approach similar to the grounded theory method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) we evolved conceptual categories for how each teacher talked about what they considered important in their teaching. For Stan we induced the categories (a) simple and easy to complex and difficult; (b) structure; (c) confidence; (d) "real writing," and (e) MEAP testing. For Marita's we evolved (a) relating subject matter to students' experience, (b) motivating and accommodating students, (c) free expression, and (d) fitting in MEAP preparation. These represented areas the teachers had spoken in depth about or weighted heavily in talking about their practice. The tapes were then revisited to find occasions when the teacher had spoken in direct and extended ways within each category. These segments were transcribed verbatim to represent the teacher's professional position in his or her own voice, and linked together to produce coherent texts that were later condensed into representative pastiches.

We agree with Patai (1988) that all representations of persons are incomplete and for a purpose and that the genre of representation should be selected with the purpose in mind. In this case, to retain the teachers' voices, we selected and connected slices of transcript from each category of what Stan and Marita said was most important. The resulting pastiches create a readable and purposeful representation that is consistent with our analysis and considered authentic by both teachers.

METHOD OF FIELD NOTE AND VIDEO ANALYSIS

We read through the 8 weeks of field notes for each classroom, looking for confirming or disconfirming evidence of each conceptual category from the interviews (Erickson, 1986). The teaching practices in Stan and Marita's classrooms were mostly consistent with what was important to them, with some noteworthy exceptions. We selected actions and events to construct descriptive narrative summaries for each. The logic of each narrative emerged from the interrelationships we observed among daily field notes

(complemented by video replay), our interview analyses, and the work students produced. We asked Stan and Marita to read and respond to our categories and narratives, and we reshaped them to accommodate their views. Similar to the pastiches, these narratives are incomplete constructions meant to illustrate through selected observational data the features of the teachers' practices that fit within their self identified categories of importance.

METHOD OF COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

As we constructed Stan and Marita's interview texts and the summaries of their classroom practices, we became aware of commonalities in their talk about and demonstration of what they thought was important. Consequently, we performed a within text analysis and a cross-text analysis, which surfaced five categories of importance: (1) responsibility to students, (2) purpose for teaching and being a teacher, (3) what schooling is about, (4) perspective on subject matter, and (5) how much they could and should do.

We observed only Stan and Marita's general English classes, but we formally interviewed them about their teaching of all their students, including the honors classes they taught. Although they often generalized across their classes, they also responded in informal interviews to issues that arose in the classes we were observing. We believe this may have influenced the emphasis the two placed on what was most important. The emphasis on students' survival and growth outside of school may have dominated their answers because they believed that many of their 11th-grade students had difficult lives that compromised their school performance. However, our interviews of another teacher with an honors class indicates that these same elements of importance pertained with students perceived as less personally needy and higher achieving. Although the constraints of this paper do not allow us to make a full comparison, analyses show that this teacher believed the same five issues to be important. However, she gave greater emphasis to the importance of students demonstrating academic conventions for making personal meaning through their reading and writing.

RESULTS

In this section we first present pastiches of the teachers' words to illustrate how they located standardized testing and the MEAP within their own coherent conceptual frames to give them purpose and direction. Next we present composite narratives of classroom practices to highlight how each

teacher “integrated” the MEAP into their regular curriculum. Taken together, these representations illustrate that Stan and Marita did not compromise their beliefs and change their usual practices due to pressures and conflicts. Their approaches, methods, and styles and the dispositions that informed them remained uniquely and consistently focused—except when they practiced for the MEAP.

We complete the section with an analysis of each case before providing a cross case analysis to forward an understanding of the role of professional identity in teachers’ work and in relation to testing.

STAN

In Stan’s interviews he positioned testing in general and MEAP preparation in particular within broader, more demanding teaching and learning goals related to personal growth and authentic reading and writing. School subject matter and testing are secondary to students’ knowing how to learn and being determined to succeed. He wants them to become problem solvers in improving their reading and writing so as to be more prepared for life after school.

STAN’S VIEWS OF HIS PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

[Teachers] must go beyond content material . . . to me that’s the essence of teaching. I try to treat everybody with respect in the classroom. This is what teachers do, to try and inspire kids like this to read and write.

I think it’s more important to get students to become more confident people, and more independent learners, and to maybe get some students to really like learning, or even to love it. At least what I try to do is teach students how to become better people. I use whatever class I happen to be teaching as a vehicle to do that. Now the school says, and rightly so probably, we expect your students to have a certain proficiency in writing or in understanding what they’re reading, and that’s great, that’s part of it, and I think that’s important. I don’t think the school really understands though . . . they really don’t go beyond that and teach to the whole student, the heart of the student. The school is very interested in teaching to the mind of the student. Sometimes I think they’re more interested in MEAP scores, than a kid leaving a school with a love of learning or a love of Hemingway or a love of writing, or having more patience, or being more determined to succeed. These are skills that these students are going to need for the rest of their lives. And I think in one way the school misses the boat on that. My job is sort of to improve the MEAP

scores, but in a way that is true to what I believe a teacher should do and that's to get beyond the grades and the scores to some of these other more important things I've been talking about. To learn how to learn. I don't think a lot of these students know how to learn, and I think that's one of the charges that I have as a teacher in this class.

I think one thing I'm trying to do is to get students to be problem solvers. Not to worry about making mistakes. They can rewrite their papers. Most of their mistakes here in this class, they can correct in some way. I'm trying to get them . . . to be problem solvers [in their reading], to interact with the text; to have the text interact with who they are—their thoughts, their feelings. I want them to write a piece of writing, and look at it—and this goes back to MEAP, which is nice. To be able to evaluate what they wrote, I know that's one of the goals of the MEAP test. But it seems like the MEAP evaluation is so stilted. I want students here to really be able to look at something and say, “Yeah, I was wasting words here, I could have said this another way, or this punctuation mark would be better here than here. Or maybe I shouldn't use it. Or why did I use that word. Or maybe this argument would have been better. Or maybe I should have said it this way because I'm writing for this audience. . . . to be a problem solver with their writing, I hope, would translate into being a problem solver with their life.

A lot of these students need structure . . . I think for all students, writing is sometimes so diffuse, that it's good sometimes to have something to hold onto . . . [like the semicolon]. These little mini lessons will work. For these students it's [the semicolon] important because sometimes their writing is all over the place. This is something they can handle.

I've seen a passion in their writing—that's something I can really work with. Some of their [test practice] writings made me happy because they were really revealing. They were telling me things that they wouldn't if they didn't trust me. I'd like to do less talking and have more student interaction among themselves. I have to move slowly. The only objective I had is for them to read as much as they can . . . and I'll be happy. If they can read with that book [*A Farewell to Arms*], they can do it with anything. I purposefully start off slowly with reading and writing. They aren't separate. The reading supports the writing, the writing supports the reading. I'm trying to have students tie in reading and writing as much as possible, so they can see the connection.

Today for instance in class, I'm trying to get students to think of themselves as real writers, [and not to] write in a way that is sort of this artificial situation that the MEAP gives them. For me there's sort of this theoretical problem. I'm trying to get students to think of themselves as real writers, but they're taking this test and having their writing evaluated and scored because it's a test. I have a problem with that. That's not what real writers do. The tests pretty much are reliable, but I don't think they're valid. I don't know of anybody who sits down and does that kind of writing if they're a real writer, a journalist. They're certainly not tested on it, not in that way anyway. If we wanted to be fair about it, students' prewriting would be looked at, they would be given more time to write what they're doing, and probably write on something that they're really interested in.

There's so much controversy over the test itself, whether it's useful. And to have so much emphasis placed on this high-stakes test is not good as far as I'm concerned. The time we spend on the MEAP could be well served doing something else. We could be reading literature, talking about something that they find important to themselves. Doing some other kind of writing. It's not that the goals of the MEAP are so bad. They're not. They're laudable. Every student should develop some kind of voice in their writing, be grammatical, and be convincing in an argument. But it's sort of what we're doing to get to those goals. We have all these things that writers should be doing, but we say we have to do them through the MEAP practice. If you're doing a good job teaching writing, students should be ready to take the MEAP.

Other than that, I don't say much about it. I think that if I present the MEAP in a challenging way, if I'm enthusiastic about it, that'll help. Even though I have some problems with the test, I consider myself a team player. I accepted the assignment of coming up with a prep for the extended writing portion of the test, which I gave to the other English teachers. When the test scores go up, I'm happy.

This is a black school. I went to a mixed elementary school and had a great time there. I grew up with black kids; we got along. But I've come across some problems here. There was a fight in the hall last week, between two black kids, and one kid, I guess, said the ultimate insult to another kid. He called him a "white boy," and that precipitated the fight. And that really bothered me . . . I know that some students see me as white. They don't see me as Mr. Stevens, they see me as a white teacher, Mr. Stevens. I try to treat everybody with respect in the classroom. I'm used to the students here, and I'm glad I have [them].

STAN'S CLASSROOM TEACHING PRACTICES

Stan's beliefs about students scoring well on the MEAP and similar tests is consistent with test makers' and policy makers' common contentions. If he does a good job of teaching writing, then students will perform well when they write for the test. He has carefully planned a curriculum intended to build student engagement, confidence, and problem solving, which he believes will also accommodate insertions of MEAP and MEAP-like practice tests. The following narrative, highlighting a chronological logic of instructional practices, illuminates a difference between the conceptual logic with which Stan has planned and conducted his curriculum and the strategic reading and writing knowledge required for the MEAP. In these first 8 weeks, students do not read for comprehension by determining main themes, nor do they write arguments that apply evidence from multiple, thematically linked texts. When students took the MEAP practice tests, Stan was indirect and noncommittal and returned quickly to the regular curriculum.

SIMPLE AND EASY TO COMPLEX AND DIFFICULT

Stan believed in starting off slowly and simply and building complexity and difficult. He checked early on with students to be sure they thought the lessons were "easy," and so did we. For example, on the 3d day, Cindy reported to me she thought it was easy so far compared to other classes where she would be writing papers by now. But she expected it to get harder.

At first, most of class instructional time was taken up with learning vocabulary words using mnemonics and sentence writing exercises that had students beginning and ending with strong words, adding a color, a name, and references to the senses. The 2nd day, the students performed an active listening exercise and Stan read aloud examples of good descriptive writing. Student writing was limited to paragraphs, like a short fairy tale that included five vocabulary words.

When students began reading *A Farewell to Arms*, Stan read aloud and talked them through the first two pages, and they were assigned no more than five pages for homework reading at a time. Students drew their interpretations of the novel's setting and wrote journal entries explaining what didn't make sense, what they noticed, and what in the story related to them.

By the 3rd week, students were expected to write a description of a piece of scenery in the style of Hemingway, using a semicolon, two senses, and three colors. They were also being directed to respond to each other's writing in pairs and groups, whereas before only Stan had commented

during whole class shares. They were also writing predictions of what would happen next in the novel, which inspired lively discussions.

By the 5th week, students were free writing in their journals about their impressions of characters' actions in the novel. One day, Stan asked them whether they fantasize like the characters do. On another he had them share their personal experiences with the St. Anthony figure in the novel. They highlighted colors, action verbs, and proper nouns in another descriptive text, and Steve pointed out that all the stories they were reading were good because they were detailed.

Vocabulary had taken large chunks of class time in the first weeks of class as Stan taught students how to apply mnemonics to their vocabulary words. It commanded 37 minutes on Day 3 and 39 minutes on Day 4. But by the 16th day, vocabulary review was down to 8 minutes and remained low (e.g., at 4 minutes on 17th day) as he shifted his expectations to students making up their own mnemonics outside of class.

By the 7th week, Candy's prediction had come true. The students were writing two papers: a personal narrative about something that affected them so much it changed their life in some way, and an extended journal entry in response to a particular character's actions in *A Farewell to Arms*.

STRUCTURE

Stan had designed his classroom activity to follow a purposeful structural logic. In addition to going from easy to complex, the assignments also moved from discrete to integrated. At first, vocabulary, sentence writing, journal writing, and reading stood alone. Gradually he combined what students were doing for each so that students wrote about what they were reading in their journals using their vocabulary words and designated sentence elements.

From the beginning, Stan adhered consistently to routines for classroom procedures regarding behavior and instruction. He presented class rules and processes for rule infringement on the 2nd day. Eating candy and telling someone to shut up were out; drinking water and doing make up work were in. At first, classroom rule breakers were warned, then asked to wait in the hall for a talk; then parents were phoned. Nearly all instructional activity was orchestrated through him. Sitting or standing in the center of the semicircular desk arrangement, he asked questions and called for volunteers; someone always raised a hand, usually more than one student. Volunteers answered, read, or shared their work for the class and received points, which he tallied in a notebook he always carried. Participation structures turned into recognizable routines for practicing vocabulary, writing, reading, responding to journal entries, and reading aloud. He would ask students what they thought something meant or was, call on

volunteers, record points, and affirm or correct what students said, finishing by telling what he had thought or had written.

CONFIDENCE

In his interviews, Stan had said he wanted students to have something to hold onto, something they could get a grasp of and succeed in learning amid the diffuse demands of reading and writing well. By doing so, he thought they would gain confidence in their abilities to learn and do the work. Starting easy and structuring were two of his ways of operationalizing that goal. Another was starting with what students already knew. He began the reading of a novel set during World War I by asking students to write about what they know about war. When practicing sentence-writing techniques, he asked them to write about personal experiences. When memorizing vocabulary words, they created mnemonics that related to their experience, like the McDonald's golden arches sign for "harbinger." And, when reading the novel, they wrote about how it related to their lives.

Stan's approach for learning and building confidence about learning was to combine and complicate already understandable and achievable knowledge. As time progressed, assignments became more complicated as Stan combined discrete elements from prior activities. Single assignments called for the presence of vocabulary words, sentence elements, descriptive and revelatory writing techniques, issues from the novel, and the content of students' lives. Most students kept up with the increased complexity and reported they still did not think the work was that hard.

"REAL WRITING"

The focus of the curriculum was the teaching of "real writing." Hemingway was held up as a role model of a real writer, and his descriptive narrative as real writing. Stan asked students to produce writing that conveyed a sense of veracity and honesty, like Hemingway's. He wrote along with students in class, read his drafts aloud, and encouraged students to volunteer theirs. He praised those pieces that sounded honest and real, and that used semicolons and dashes to add "sophistication" and "maturity." He urged them to be free in writing about their thoughts and impressions, to write what they really believed, and not to assume that writing had hard and fast rules as they had come to accept.

By having students share their writing with the class, by sharing his, and by having them write about personal subjects he aimed to develop trust and respect. From the first day he led activities designed to build trust and a "team" for writing and learning. In addition to personalized topics for reporting their reading of the novel and for practicing sentence elements

and vocabulary, everyone shared with the class an experience they would like to relive. Later in the course, they related stories of past physical injuries and detailed the chronology of their morning routine.

Also from the first day, he demanded respect by quietly but consistently enforcing his rules for class participation. Then, throughout, he encouraged applause for students who read their work, willingly discussed decisions students thought were unfair, and accepted student language and interpretations that were self expressive and not disrespectful of anyone in the class. He accepted a boy's declaration that the first time he "pimped" was an occasion he would like to relive. However, he told a girl her response was inappropriate when she laughed at a classmate's desire to relive the day her father left the family.

MEAP TESTING

Stan added the MEAP practice tests to his curriculum at the appropriate moments as he had been directed by the principal. Students took the reading and writing practice portions. He gave students sufficient class time to complete the tests and played a CD of Celtic guitar music while they wrote. However, his presentation of the test was not as enthusiastic as he had intended. He explained to the class that their delay in reading the novel was due to test practice. He said they would "HAVE to take the tests," and when students moaned, he responded that he would try to make it "fun," though he had not followed through on his promise by the time we discontinued our observations. The day Stan attended a test preparation workshop, a substitute teacher had the task of talking students through the unfamiliar practice test instructions. The day Stan gave the next phase of the test, his explanations of the test prompt and procedures were brief and perfunctory, and lacked his usual interactive style. Typically he returned student work punctually within a few days after they turned it in. However, when students asked if they could have their tests back a week after taking them, he said he had not yet read them. When he did return the graded tests, he said only that they were helpful to him. Stan didn't take up opportunities to personalize the tests, as he could have for the test section in which students reflect on the effectiveness of two pieces of writing in their portfolios. And he did not attempt to make links between how the information being tested related to "real writing" or to reading knowledge that supported it. Stan did give points to students if they took the test, and he offered extra credit if they scored well, for example, if they got 23 out of 29 on the reading practice. He counted the test points as a category for grading at the end of the first marking period along with points for participation, vocabulary, and journals.

In keeping with Stan's view, the practice tests in his classroom were an add on. Though physically integrated into the curriculum, there is a clear contrast between the quality of connection, interrelatedness, and emphasis placed on the elements in the rest of the curriculum.

OUR READING OF STAN'S PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Stan's logic about his responsibilities for teaching the content of his subject matter—reading and writing—in relation to teaching his students to do well on the test is complicated and sometimes conflicted. However, he takes a position amidst this complexity that allows him to move forward in his teaching. He agrees with the goals of instruction measured by the test, calling them laudable. And he believes he should be teaching that knowledge and teaching students how to perform well on the test to demonstrate it. He states that if students practice “real writing,” they should be prepared for the test. Yet he has taken on the responsibility passed onto him by his administration to teach more directly to the test, and to change “real writing” practices. He is giving students practice tests and reshaping his regular reading and writing assignments to match test formats.

These beliefs tug in different directions. On the one hand, he says that he is teaching content to prepare for the test that he would have taught anyway. For example, his students practice problem solving, writing with details, and developing a written voice. On the other, he acknowledges what he calls a theoretical conflict between teaching writing as a test situation and the writing process experienced by “real writers.” He mediates or integrates these competing perspectives by taking the position that relegating writing to test practice formats sends the wrong messages about the process of writing, even as it teaches other writing knowledge, and uses up time better spent on more worthwhile activities. This position allows him to continue preparing his students for the test, remain a believer in the content he is teaching, and feel justified in criticizing this mandated practice. He believes what he is doing is worthwhile, but he could do more if it were not for the test. If he did not have to use time on the preparation, students could learn more about the processes, as well as the skills and forms, of real writing.

Stan makes very clear that he is driven by motives beyond teaching subject matter content. He wants to reach students' hearts, improve their attitudes about themselves and toward learning, and teach them how to be better people. To him, the practices of schooling and the subject matter curriculum are vehicles to accomplish that. He believes the complications he experiences in achieving this goal have to do with the motivations and self-awareness of his students. They are not currently problem solvers in school or in life; they need to learn how to learn; and they need to learn more

about what they can and can't do and make changes in their lives to accomplish more. He believes most of the students in this class are dispirited and apathetic, driven by a sense that they are unable to act on their own behalf. His ways of changing that are to have them read and write about topics that are meaningful for them and learn things they can hold onto that will build their confidence. He believes things like how to add detail, use a semicolon, a dash, and an active rather than passive verb, give them a sense of control as they grapple with large diffuse bodies of knowledge, like how to write.

Stan's goals are complicated not only by test preparation and student apathy. He finds problematic the issue of his whiteness in a black-dominant school culture. To have students express their personally meaningful readings and writings, Stan believes they need to trust him, and his color makes that challenging. He takes personally White slurs hurled between Black student adversaries; and, he feels shut out when students tell him he can't possibly understand them because he is the wrong color. Stan does think he understands them as adolescents who are in need of building confidence in their own abilities to engage with the world. And, from a sufficient number of students to be troubling, he receives the message that they resist his reasons for why they act in school as they do.

Stan teaches in the same racial demographic area in which he spent positive formative years. He has fond memories of attending a mixed-race elementary school. He sought a challenge when he came to this high school. He wanted to grow as a teacher and feels he has done that. Amid competing tensions, he is buoyed by students who are reading beyond class assignments, and who demonstrate their trust through self-revealing, passionate writing, as well as by his principal and colleagues who support preparation for the MEAP test. He is finding sufficient evidence of the efficacy of his professional identity in his classroom and school to reinforce his view that this is a good way to be even in a place that is socially challenging at a time in education that is accountability conscious.

MARITA

Marita's interviews reveal her concern with lessening students' test anxiety and preparing them for the world. Her strategy was to downplay the academic and assessment aspects of her curriculum, while emphasizing attainability and meaningfulness.

MARIA'S VIEWS OF HER PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

I try to approach [the test] in a way where it's not like a drill for them.
I try to approach it in a way where these are just some skills they are

going to need. I do refer to the test, but ultimately I just want to show them skills they should have at this point as young adults about to go out into the world. They should be able to read, and they should be able to think and figure out what they read and what it means to them. They should be able to write in standard formal formats and these are the things that I am really trying to help them understand, as well as they should be able to write and clearly express their ideas about what they read. Their ideas are those that they form on their own about what they read. . . . A lot of times they just really don't like to focus on what they are doing. They want an easy, quick "I did the work; I get the points" and that's it. So I want them to understand that the work that they are doing requires them to think, so there's not going to be a one sentence answer, that they have to actually use their brains and think about it. Now they are at the point where they have questions, but they won't find the answers in a line or two [of the text], they have to think about it, make conclusions based on what they read, their understandings of what they read.

I try to pick material and have activities that I know will interest them like the *Go Ask Alice* book, which I thought they would find interesting, which they did. [In] some of the writing assignments, I try to outline or underline all the test skills for them so they will be aware of what they are doing, that it will be required on the test. I still try to make it something where they don't feel a sense of stress about it because it's like when you say "test" or when you say "quiz," or you say "We have to read literature," sometimes just those words alone "test," "write," "literature" they just clam up. So I try to present things in a way where this is just something real basic, don't worry about it, this is something you have to do and this is how you do it. So they go through the steps and they see this is how you do it and they find that "Gosh, that wasn't so hard. It just really wasn't that hard." It takes some of the anxiety out of approaching literature and writing.

I can teach here. Number one, here I am expected to do my job, that means a lot. That means they actually expect a finished, final product when I'm done in this class. Which is for students to have learned something that they will be able to apply out side of this classroom. And having that expected holds me to it. It's like "Am I going to sink or swim, am I a mouse, or am I a woman, am I really a teacher or what?" So it's good, because what I've been wanting to see, I get a chance to see of myself as well as a professional. If you go so many years and you have these ideas about what you can do and what you want to do, and you never see them come to fruition, it can kind of make you second-guess yourself a little bit, even though you may have

circumstances that prevented you from really doing it. You don't always want to say, "it's the circumstances' fault," but it really was.

I try to make sure that the things we do are connected in some kind of way. So the last part of the semester is still important, that you still do what you were supposed to do. As difficult as it is I try to hold steadfast to certain policies and procedures that I've put in place. It has a tendency to work but sometimes they just don't seem to have the motivation to do what they are supposed to do in the first place. They are the same kids who do the same things over and over again. I have one student, and he sticks out in my mind, I guess because he is one of the ones who never does anything. But today he worked on a piece and that made me, like, pleased. I'm like "Thank you." I even had to tell him "That's true spirit. That's a true diehard spirit. Never say die until the day you die. You know, don't throw in the towel because it ain't over 'til it's over. So you keep trying and you can't help but succeed. Don't stop."

My students this year are doing more work than I would think any of my students have done in the previous years. And when I say more, I don't just mean quantitatively, because definitely quantitatively, but qualitatively they're just turning out much better work. It's much more meaningful to them and you can see it . . . I can see that their reading is having an impact on them too, their reading and their writing.

The main objective is for them to develop their own style of writing. . . . We've used their writing to develop some of the more standard requirements in writing, in terms of sentence structure, paragraph structure, things like that, so they kind of employ all of that in their writing. We've used sensory detail, things like that. So, the students have basically taken what feels good to them and what works for them most. They've peer conferenced with each other to see what's effective and what's not. . . . As you can see, when they begin to try to express themselves, they come up with some of the most profound things. They surprise me, they do.

I try not to throw my hands up with them, but sometimes I feel like that's what I want to do. Just like, forget it, if you don't want to be bothered, you know what I mean, but then it's kind of frustrating because they are missing out. Sometimes I feel that I am like their mother. And why are they missing out? For no good reason, to me. But you know I don't know if it's a personal issue or a professional issue that I have. There's only so much you can do to make people do, to uplift and motivate. If a person has decided they are not ready to

progress or elevate, it's not going to happen. That's what I have learned, at least personally. And I'm just not sure professionally that applies because that's part of my job description, really, is to motivate.

The [department] view seems to be that you have to set goals and you have to set guidelines and parameters and you have to hold steadfast to that. And that's something I think I've probably done more this year than ever, where [before] I've been more lenient and taken late work and things like that. And it's turned out to be a total stress thing for me and it doesn't teach the kids a sense of responsibility. Now, on the other hand, I'm getting better results and response and output, but there's still that level, the sense of responsibility doesn't seem to be higher to me. There's still too many kids that don't seem to take their education seriously. And they just don't follow through. I'm not happy with my progress with students who just don't seem to pay attention. I don't know if I just need to develop a higher tolerance or patience for those two or three who always come up to me and ask, "What do I do with this?"

I had a life of "hard knocks" growing up, and that probably plays a role in how I relate to the students. Because I left home at a very early age, I was fifteen when I left home. . . . When you don't know where you're going to be sleeping, or where your next meal is coming from, or when you're going to take another bath, it's like, you can't be thinking about "work this," or "what theorem", it's just not it.

When I got into high school, that's when I started to think about at least going to college. . . . [One of my teachers] held me accountable to do the work in her class, so I busted my butt to do the work in her class, and that also kept me coming to school. I decided to stay [here in the city], and I wanted to finish school at [the local college], that was important to me. Because I knew that [the college] was recognized nationally, and there would be the opportunity for me to go to different schools nationally.

MARITA'S CLASSROOM TEACHING PRACTICES

Similar to Stan's practice in its consistency, Marita's teaching also matched her purposes for teaching and her goals for her students, except for test preparation activities, when she dramatically changed her approach. Marita put her class through step-by-step direct instruction. In these ways, the intellectual and applied reading and writing skills found on the test were positioned as something different from, and as less important than, the other tasks to be undertaken. Test practices were not woven into the fabric

of student culture or made a part of larger life issues. Test preparation was not as interesting or as fun as regular curriculum.

REALTING SUBJECT MATTER TO STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

Marita's approach of trying to mesh subject matter with students' experiences was visible in her curriculum and her classroom procedures. Over the course of a marking period, students independently read five novels of their own choosing and read one together as a class. Each week, they were to turn in a report on what was happening in their own book and their assessment of it. Marita dedicated most of each Monday's class time and portions of class on other days for sustained silent reading and the writing of these reports, some of it in the computer lab. In addition, students were to write daily journal entries in response to prompts related to the day's activity or as an open free write.

Other reading and writing activities were interspersed in the remaining time. These emerged from what Marita concluded would be interesting to students and useful for them to learn at that point. For example, after reading the lyrics to the Stevie Wonder song, "Pastime Paradise," and noticing how engaged students became, Marita assigned a real-world research project that students were to present in a round table discussion. Students were assigned three words from the lyrics to define and illustrate using real world applications. She explained to them that taking time to explore concepts changes the way they read and hear things. Students used television, movies, books, interviews, and the Internet for their information sources. For the term "isolation," students referred to Wright's *Black Boy* and to a segment from the Sally Jesse Raphael television show about a girl who was kept in a closet. Marita added an illustration of the concentration camp fate of German Jews, making it a good reason to stay involved politically and vote. "Race" produced descriptions of the "stolen children" episode in Australian Aboriginal history. "Stimulation" evoked an illustration of illegal drug use resulting in athlete Johnson's forfeiture of the gold medal at the Sydney Olympics. An animated discussion, equal parts curiosity, disgust, and fascination erupted when the examples for "mutilation" were the brutal rape of a young girl, female circumcision, male castration, and sex change operations.

Marita focused the book the class read together, a 1970s novel about a teenage girl's descent into drug addiction, on what she called the identity issues of the main character that contributed to her low self-esteem and decline. In an animated debate in response to Marita's question, "What influenced Alice to avoid her problems?" students called on references to the text to blame either Alice's mother or father. Through such discussions, directed journal prompts (such as "What do you wish your parents

knew?”), and an essay Marita directed students to compare the character’s issues to their own. She slipped subject matter about paragraph structure into this trajectory of reading and writing. For example, after introducing a graphic organizer for paragraph writing (e.g., topic sentence, three to five support sentences, concluding sentence), she asked students to write several structured paragraphs about how the effects of drugs on Alice relate to their effects on them, their family, friends and community.

MOTIVATING AND ACCOMMODATING STUDENTS

Marita called students up to her desk daily to talk about their grades, their assignments, or to give personal advice. She did the same as she walked around the classroom, during blocks of 20-, 30-, and 40-minute individual reading and writing time, directing individuals to get on task. The commonly talkative class required continual reminders to be quiet and get to work. Most students worked a little and engaged in extensive social talk. This “laid back” approach with students was an important part of Marita’s method of maintaining her relationships with students and of keeping the pressure off. She was seeking a balance between pushing for performance and maintaining an environment that fostered personal engagement and individual initiative. Sometimes Marita threatened to phone home. She followed through on her threats and talked with parents to get their support in getting work completed and turned in.

Marita stayed on top of the performance of individual students, talking to them whenever she felt they needed it, and giving advice to fit their situation. Her advice about how to improve academic performance was always shaped by her knowledge of her students’ life experiences, which she acquired from them directly or from home. For example, Joseph had not been keeping up with his journal entries. When Marita questioned him, he explained that the topics made him too emotional because they tapped too readily into his mother’s recent death. Marita commiserated and told him to see the journal writing as an opportunity to “just purge.” She said that writing was a way of cleaning out emotional issues so they don’t fester.

When students got in to trouble at school or at home, she used the event as an opportunity to teach a life lesson while trying to keep the student engaged in the work of the class. Richard’s ten-day suspension for a repeat offense occasioned a phone call from Marita. She directed him to get himself to the library, do some research about repeat offenders, and write her a report. Richard appeared ten days later with a six-page report in hand and Marita called home to report the news to his mother. This was Richard’s mother’s first positive call about her son from a teacher.

Marita adapted her class time and assignments to fit the performance and interests of the whole class. Sometimes she stretched assignment

deadlines she announced at the start and the end of class sessions. She did so to accommodate her belief that students needed more time or to insert something into the schedule that took advantage of students' interest in something they were discussing or doing. She built on students' appreciation of Stevie Wonder's impassioned lyrics by having them present their own poetry to the class. They wrote about the definition of love, a teen killed by a drunk driver, and being kicked out of the house. Mondays' sustained silent reading time was an opportunity for students who were not reading at home to keep up and for students to complete homework not done over the weekend. On the occasions when students' behavior jeopardized their school attendance, to keep them coming to class and working, Marita molded class assignments to suit their specific situations. When Kyle was suspended for smoking marijuana and returned to class with a written report on a self-help book he was reading about the affects of drugs, she accepted it in place of the weekly novel book report.

FREE EXPRESSION

In keeping with her aim for students to be authentically expressive within the confines and purposes for instruction, Marita complained when students' talking kept her and them from reading or writing in their journals, but never criticized what they talked about or how they spoke. She reminded them when they needed to assume an academic style of language. During the practice of structured paragraph writing, she told a girl to "Use Standard English for this assignment, sweetheart."

Students freely voiced their feelings and opinions both verbally and in writing about their class reading and writing assignments. Marita's replies to students' complaints indicated complaints were permissible but would not change her mind. They still had to do the assignments. For example, Marita's response to a boy's declaration "I hate English" when she assigned the revision of a piece of writing was "That's OK" and then an explanation of how to go about the revision. On another occasion, when Jolene kept putting her head on her desk during a discussion, Marita asked her to sit up, softening her insistence that she participate by saying, "We love you and want you to be happy today."

Sometimes boys would briefly break into a rap cadence during a class discussion, as though to punctuate the meaning of a topic. Marita didn't rap, but occasionally she slid into song. During a discussion of the class novel, Marita sang a few lines of the song the class recognized as fitting the theme they were discussing. And, while modeling how to provide peer response for each other's poems, she sang some of the lines of her own poetry to demonstrate that it could be the lyrics to a song.

Students, mostly boys, interspersed profanities and African American English laden with street slang as they discussed classroom topics and read their poetry. For coffee-house presentations of their poems, the girls wrote mostly about love and relationships such as “What You Mean to Me,” “Daddy’s Little Girl,” and “Someone Special to Me.” The boys’ poems were mostly complaints entitled “Homeless Nation,” “A Normal School Day,” “Pain,” and “Time Never Waits.” When a boy used vulgar epithets in his poem to describe a promiscuous girl, Marita told him he didn’t need to be that vulgar, that his message was powerful but his language wasn’t appropriate for the classroom.

Marita maintained an easygoing, conversational, yet maternal register with her students that validated social talk and personal disclosure, while reminding them of what they needed to accomplish.

FITTING IN MEAP PREPARATION

When only three students turned in the structured paragraph writing assignment, and those three were incorrect, Marita changed to a radically different approach. Reversing her own pronouncement against direct invoking of or teaching to the MEAP test, she did both. She told students they needed to attend to paragraph structure because it was on the test and would affect how they were scored. She retaught the graphic organizer, and for the first time during our observation she walked around the class, checking each students’ performance at each stage of filling in the template and critiquing performance. She prepared the students for their first test, an assessment of their reading of the class book. The test was in the MEAP format, one page of five multiple choice and short answer essay questions, which was to be written using the five-sentence paragraph structure. She talked the students through the information they would need later on the test, and practiced filling in the template with the information for the essay question. Most of the students took the practice test with uncharacteristically quiet attention to the task. After they were graded, the class read over the answers to the multiple choice questions, and Marita explained why some of their right answers did not count. She said that test takers make mistakes by not following directions, and some students had not circled answers.

This close attention to structure and to particular elements of student performance was a dramatic contrast to the procedures Marita usually followed.

OUR READING OF MARITA’S PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND TESTING

Marita is protective of her students and strategic in how she incorporates MEAP preparation. She believes her students are already anxious, will be

less likely to learn by directly teaching to the test, and will not be served by increasing their anxiety about testing and schooling. She is not required to have her students take actual MEAP practice tests, and she prefers not to. She points out to students that the skills they are learning will also be handy for the test but prefers to play down the evaluative and accountability aspects of the assignments. She believes that by representing what students are learning as basic and not too difficult to learn, they will be less anxious and more willing and able to learn it, and this will show up in their test scores. Her assumption is that students believe school and life are a sufficiently difficult burden. If they believe she is adding to it, they will disengage from her assignments and perhaps school, which Marita tries to avoid. However, these beliefs did not prevent her from teaching directly against them during her paragraph writing assignment.

The basics that Marita wants her students to learn are the skills they need out in the world as young adults. These include reading skills that require thinking. She views her role as getting students to move beyond being satisfied with quick, brief answers to work for deeper understanding. These positions set up a teaching challenge. Although Marita wants students to adopt a view of reading that requires thinking to recognize and represent nuances and complexities, she wants to present a sophisticated process as basic.

Marita takes on this challenge by trying to mesh subject matter knowledge and skills as closely as possible to student experience, by emphasizing the importance of thinking through and communicating one's own views and slipping in the subject matter as a way to do it. Reading and writing become vehicles for students to express, develop, and substantiate their feelings and ideas. She chooses texts to read, like *Go Ask Alice*, she knows students can relate to. Though the novel is about 1970s teen drug culture, she believes her students still find the subject and issues topical and asks for their responses to characters' actions and the issues they raise. Writing becomes a medium for not only expressing their ideas, but for developing their personal style, and conventional knowledge about paragraph development and sentence structure is introduced as tools.

For Marita, for whom schooling was central in making a life for herself, high school is about teaching skills students will need out the world and getting them to understand what skills will serve them. Life is about survival and getting ahead, and she is committed to teaching what will help them. She is frustrated when students do not seem motivated to learn what she thinks they will need. And she is conflicted about her professional responsibility and ability to motivate her students. Like a mother, she feels deeply connected to her students, committed to their welfare, and concerned for their growth and survival, yet she has come to accept that some students are not able to see the value of their schooling, which worries

her. She is not sure what she should do about that, or if how she continues to teach is best. She knows that emotionally she cannot let any student go, but she has not figured out how to engage them all in learning. She worries that the lesson she learned in her personal life—that some people are not ready to progress—may compromise her responsibility as a professional educator to motivate the students who most need what she is teaching.

Marita's ambivalence about being a taskmaster and holding her students accountable as a way of producing results, is mirrored by her thinking about how her school and department pushes her to test herself and measures her effectiveness. In this school her efficacy as a teacher is evaluated by how well her students perform as measured by grades and standardized test scores. Reminiscent of her performance with her teacher in high school, Marita thrives on the challenge of proving that she is capable of producing. She followed the guidelines and parameters set by her English department, even though she had to change previous teaching patterns, which was stressful for her. But the changes resulted in overall more and better quality student work. However, Marita measures her success in terms of the work students produce for her and not their test or grade performance. Since her students' scores and grades have not been improving, she is caught in the difficult position of respecting and adopting accountability measures while doubting their ability to motivate or to measure what is important.

TOWARD UNDERSTANDING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN RELATION TO TESTING

In summary, Stan and Marita's cases bring to light three noteworthy dimensions of the relationship between their professional identities and test score accountability: Professional accommodation, personal integration, and delegation of test preparation to secondary status. The teachers took stances within each of these dimensions in order to teach with commitment. They accepted the accommodations they were making to their schools' MEAP preparations. They integrated their personal beliefs and values to act on these accommodations. To do so, they positioned test preparation outside their primary purposeful frames for teaching.

Additionally, within each of these dimensions the teachers existed in an often uneasy, unresolved state of conflict. Though appreciative of their schools, they did not fully agree with all the policies they were asked to act upon or their rationales. While they remained passionate about their commitment to teaching, they were often ambivalent about their own or their students' actions. They accepted the place and purpose of the MEAP, but also resented it. Nevertheless, they believed they were making their own decisions, taking initiative, and acting as they thought best in their own

classrooms. They believed they were being treated as professionals and acting as professionals.

When Marita and Stan talked about acting professionally, the same categories of importance emerged:

- A sense of responsibility to students
- A sense of purpose for teaching and being a teacher
- A view of what schooling is about
- A perspective on their subject matter
- An assessment of their agency in terms of how much they could and should do

A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY TO STUDENTS

For both teachers, their commitment to their students as whole people and to the trajectory of students' lives beyond schooling came through strongly. Test performance and subject matter were not primary. Student welfare as survivors and achievers in the "real" world was foremost. They would shape curriculum, test preparation, and pedagogy to serve that important end. Though team players, with appreciation for and commitment to their colleagues and their administration, both teachers believed they needed to act in their classrooms to protect and serve their students in ways not fully understood or appreciated by those outside the direct experience.

A SENSE OF PURPOSE FOR TEACHING AND BEING A TEACHER

Tied closely to their commitment to their students was a sense of purpose. For both, teaching was not a job but a professional identity deeply related to personal satisfaction. To be of value, to be doing important work, to be growing and evolving in that work, was essential to their feeling personally satisfied and remaining in the profession. Neither teacher equated test scores with accomplishment of their purposes. They looked for indications that they were helping their students grow as people; that they had given direction, provided support, taught them how to learn, to think, and become more responsible for themselves.

They had chosen to teach at their schools because they believed their teaching would be supported and challenged there. They believed their schools' MEAP preparation and testing demands were a reasonable extension of their teaching, and accommodated specific requests in order to be responsible team players. At her previous high schools, Marita had begun to doubt her herself within what, in retrospect, she regarded as

arbitrary, confounding administrative policies. Within a more stable and supportive administrative and collegial environment, she looked at her teaching, even with MEAP accountability pressures, as an edifying challenge. Stan had found help during his first “nightmare” year, made changes, and grown. He had purposefully sought to transform his college teaching into high school pedagogy.

A VIEW OF WHAT SCHOOLING IS ABOUT

The teachers expected schools to support them as professionals in doing difficult work. They believed schools were buffeted by political demands and educational trends and should assist teachers in negotiating these pressures as they faced tough teaching challenges. Schools should be places where they could do what they were prepared for and deeply committed to doing—preparing young people for doing well in the world. Both teachers believed that, given the unavoidable political climate and the demands for testing, their schools’ MEAP accountability measures did not compromise their personal views of what schooling was about.

A PERSPECTIVE ON THEIR SUBJECT MATTER

For Stan and Marita, MEAP performance was always subordinate to learning what would personally serve students in current school activity and later in life. However, because they believed the reading and writing skills being asked for on the test reflected real-world applications, then teaching those skills was appropriate. A conflict arose when testing preparation became a subject matter, an end product, rather than a mode and a means for teaching their students. When MEAP preparation was not taught as a way for Stan to help his students become “real writers” or for Marita’s students to express themselves, it became secondary, obligatory subject matter, which “caused anxiety” or “wasted time.” Both teachers gave primacy to subject matter that taught students to be problem solvers and thinkers, and they did not construct test preparation activities to do that. Their regular language learning curricula was ultimately for personal expression and growth. The belief that when students learned how to read and write for that purpose test scores would follow may have obscured from view the necessity of transforming the intellectual and literacy demands of the MEAP into personally meaningful reading and writing activities for students.

ASSESSMENTS OF THEIR AGENCY IN TERMS OF HOW MUCH THEY COULD AND SHOULD DO

In the rhetorical structures they used in their interview responses, the two teachers expressed a strong sense of their own agency in the way they

thought about teaching their subject matter to their students. Through one particular repeated phrase, they also exhibited a specific way of exerting that agency. They continually said they were “trying” to do what was important. “I try to treat everybody with respect . . . I’m trying to get students to think of themselves as real writers . . . I’m trying . . . to get students to be problem solvers,” said Stan. Likewise, Marita said, “I’m trying to approach the MEAP where it’s not like a drill for them . . . I try to pick material and have activities I know will interest them . . . I try to present things in a way where this is just something real basic . . . I try to make sure things are connected in some kind of way . . . I try not to throw my hands up.”

In communicating agency, Stan and Marita qualify the power of that agency. By viewing this linguistic marker in relation to the preceding evidence, we can interpret it as a marker of their irresolution about what they are able to accomplish. Because of the conflicted state of their beliefs about what they should be doing, they also wavered about what they could do. There is no doubt in their minds that they should be doing certain kinds of things, as represented by these five foci. But they are less sure about exactly what can be accomplished and when.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

We do not advocate generalizing from two cases, preferring readers take from Stan and Marita’s profiles elements that resonate with their own local situations. Nevertheless, Stan and Marita are two very different teachers who share common professional priorities, and neither were aware that they subordinated rather than integrated test preparation. How and why they did so offers us the opportunity to reflect on the implications for test preparation accountability practices. Their cases urge us to consider that test preparation requires taking into account the nature of teachers’ professional identities because of the invisible and comprehensive power they exert over instruction.

Through this study we do not mean to validate the position that it is the responsibility of teachers to raise their students’ test scores, nor do we want to give force to the assumption that achievement tests exert a positive influence on pedagogy and curriculum. We take the position that standardized state and national achievement testing is a political and practical occupational reality for teachers, particularly at this time in American history, which is unlikely to abate in the near future, and that studies of how teachers are managing these realities are urgently needed.

The accountability pressures on Stan and Marita were not dire. At the time of this study, they were not in danger of losing their jobs nor were their

schools threatened by closure if test scores did not rise, as has become the case in so many districts. In those situations, teachers have changed their instruction to be more test driven and report that all they do is prepare students for the test (e.g., Graue, 1993; Lieberman, 1992; Shepard, 2000). Nevertheless, Stan and Marita's cases bring into view a previously unexamined aspect of accountability reasoning. Because theirs were not extremely high-stakes situations, we were able to observe what two professionally committed teachers do with accountability demands and to consider why.

Stan and Marita's cases help us begin to understand, from a teachers' point of view, why we should not underestimate the ever-present role of personal history in establishing and maintaining professional competence. Years ago Nespore (1987) and Pajares (1992) summarized scholars' assertions that, though difficult to accomplish, understanding teacher beliefs was fundamental to improving teaching practices. Committed teachers, Stan and Marita show us how sustaining the integrity of their professionalism and their personal beliefs drives their pedagogical actions. That integrity is informed in large part by what they have gone through as students and teachers. Both have spent all their lives in schools and associate their success as independent and accomplished people with their schooling. Both pursued higher education and continued to develop their knowledge as educators through advanced study. It follows that the ways Stan and Marita interpret the effects of schooling on their lives strongly influences who they think they should be as teachers for their students. It also follows that their success has led them to powerfully and confidently believe in the efficacy of their views and to act on them.

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu developed an extensive theory of individual action in relation to social (Bourdieu, 1965) and educational practices (Bourdieu, 1977). He posited that behavior is strategic rather than rule or norm conforming. His theory provides a way of understanding why teachers who are committed to preparing students for achievement tests also have difficulty doing so. Teachers, like all people, in their everyday practices attempt to move through a maze of constraints and opportunities that they grasp imperfectly. While they move strategically, being strategic does not mean all their choices are conscious, rational, or consistent calculations. Rather, Bourdieu says, when faced with conflict and ambiguity teachers act pedagogically according to a personal sense of honor about what seems appropriate or possible in constrained situations. Teachers' choices about how and what to teach in preparation for a test emerge not from following, disobeying, or transcending rules. Rather, teachers act practically in the moment, over time, and in different but related contexts based upon what they are able to discern as honorable and necessary amidst conflict and ambiguity.

Who teachers are as professionals is so intricately tied to who they are as people that to think of teaching as a job that can be performed separately from what one believes to be important is to dehumanize the role of teacher. Stan and Marita's teaching illustrated how their personal views influenced what and how their students learn. Their cases also illuminated how at the local level of classroom practices tests are positioned by those beliefs. Inevitably, the way teachers position test preparation will shape students' beliefs about and preparation for those tests, which will play a big role in students' test performance. This observation suggests that understanding how classroom instruction and subject matter reflect teachers' deeply held beliefs is critical in developing more efficacious discussions among administrators, policymakers, professional developers, and teachers about testing and curricula integration. The question central to those discussions becomes How does our understanding of the role of teachers' professional identity in test-related instruction inform professional development and policy? We will attempt some answers to this question by considering what Stan and Marita's cases tell us about what has and has not worked.

Stan and Marita did not lack accountability. Test preparation remained unintegrated because they held themselves accountable and exerted a pressure on themselves that competed with and mostly took precedence over the accountability goals of their departments, schools, and districts. These circumstances suggest that increasing external accountability measures on teachers is counterproductive when they compete with internal accountability.

Stan and Marita taught us that teachers who do not want to teach to the test will make the attempt if they experience their school culture as supportive and if they believe a test measures worthwhile knowledge. As we have seen, teachers can feel urgency, accept changes in policy, and follow established guidelines for classroom implementation and evaluation.

Stan and Marita also showed us that current approaches to test preparation are insufficient. Even when districts provide targeted professional development, strong accountability, vigilant specialist support, and school site leadership, classroom teaching to the test can undermine what it seeks to achieve. Stan and Marita were preparing their students for a reading and writing exam they thought was a fair and reasonable high school exit test. They appreciated that the test asked students to read extended portions of original texts, to write extensive responses, and that all the readings and the writing were thematically linked and related to student experience. For example, the theme of the test sample they used in class was making an important choice. Students read texts that illuminated the theme and wrote a personal narrative about a time they had made an important choice. On the face of it, the test seemed reasonable and consistent with what the teachers valued. What, then, was the source of

conflict or ambiguity that led Stan and Marita to strategically default in their actions to their respective “honorable” positions in preparing for the test? Several possibilities suggest themselves. One is the resentment teachers feel over outside accountability impinging on their pedagogical territory. In Stan and Marita’s case, they professed they weighed student’s test success and being a good team player as more important than the resentments they felt.

Another possibility is that neither Stan nor Marita viewed the English language arts demands made by the test as important. The test made complex intellectual and literacy demands, such as reading thematically across four texts and constructing a focused argument using evidence from each of them. Those practices did not appear in their curriculum. Stan and Marita may have had only a superficial understanding of what the test was calling students to demonstrate, which led them to dismiss the test as superficial. Without a clear sense of the demands of the test, and a conscious and rational comparison to their own objectives, their beliefs prevailed. It may be the case that when teachers do not consider the intellectual and production skills required for successful test performance as consistent or at least overlapping with what they already know and believe to be important, they will treat testing as an add on.

If test preparation remains out of alignment with classroom instruction, classrooms will remain sites of confounded learning where the goals of the curriculum and of test preparation conflict. Classrooms remaining in this conflicted limbo are wearing on teachers and students, who are unlikely to resolve such massively complex and unarticulated dilemmas on their own and generate good test performances. We suggest three ways of thinking about dealing with this dilemma: changing the tests to more closely conform to curriculum as valued and taught; changing the schools to provide alternatives for preparing students for the tests; and changing professional development so that teachers inquire into and develop their classroom practices.

Changing standardized tests to more closely resemble what students are taught and learn in schools is warranted and has been argued for more powerfully elsewhere (e.g., Linn, 2000). We will not make that argument here because the reading and writing achievement test in this study had many progressive features proposed by advocates of authentic performance assessment. It provided lengthy excerpts from a variety of real world as well as school-based texts, it asked for developed pieces of writing on topics relevant to students, and the writing was scored holistically. Though tests can always be improved (e.g., give more time for students to write, and provide open ended rather than multiple choice comprehension questions), we agree with the teachers that when compared to other large-scale, standardized tests this one had many redeeming qualities.

A more compelling option is the second category—changing schools to provide alternatives to regular classrooms for achievement test preparation. This option acknowledges that standardized tests can never accurately measure the depth and breadth of school curricula and recognizes them as institutionally constructed entities deserving of their own curriculum and pedagogy. An example already exists. Currently, high school seniors take a yearlong course to prepare them for their advanced placement examinations. Teachers of those courses have often taken extensive training in the kinds of knowledge, literacy skills, and test-taking strategies called for by the test. They receive updates on the forms of the test and curriculum guides with samples to analyze. This approach leads to developing a cadre of school site teachers whose job it is to be test specialists. Such a cadre of test-year teachers was developing by default at Stan and Marita's schools, where the same teachers were often assigned to teach the 11th-grade course each year. If test prep is viewed as the goal of the course, teachers might be less conflicted in teaching it. The distinction is a fine but important one. When a teacher views the purpose of a course as the preparation of students for being literate in the world and views the test as an inadequate measure of that learning, then the test will take a second class seat. However, if teachers take up the goal of preparing students to do well on a particular test, then that conflict abates.

The third, and we think the most compelling, option for change brings teachers into conversations about test preparation and makes professional identity issues and classroom practices a topic of those conversations. Because we know that teachers are often unaware of their teaching actions and of their reasons for them, professional development could lead teachers to become reflective inquirers into their own classroom practices. Policies are necessary to support this kind of teacher thinking and the application of subsequent understandings to improve classroom instruction. Teachers need to be engaged in noting what they actually do in their practice and how that reflects their individual beliefs about what is good for students, yet they cannot work alone at this undertaking. Policies and infrastructures that sustain a culture of inquiry and reflexivity and long respected practices in teacher preparation and educational research are necessary to support such practices and their applications to school change. Most important, policies that encourage teacher self-inquiry must also support and legitimize teachers in applying that information. Within their departments, teachers need to be able to operationalize inquiry and reflexivity in accomplishing their own and their departments' and districts' common goals. Given the current climate of external accountability and distrust of teacher professionalism, any move in this direction will not be easy.

Nevertheless, trends toward making teacher beliefs a part of teacher and school change efforts are already underway. In a review of the literature on

teacher change, Richardson and Placier (2001), applying terms from Chin and Benne (1969), found that researchers are shifting from an “empirical-rational” perspective, in which expert models are implemented, to a “normative-reeducative” model, in which teachers examine their own beliefs and practices. In addition, the teacher as researcher movement has established itself as a substantive route for professional development. Teacher-researchers provide an encouraging model for how description of, and reflection on, one’s teaching practice can be achieved. However, teacher research is typically a personal enterprise, engaged in by individual teachers interested in growing professionally according to a personal research agenda.

It has been argued that to extend such self-study to a whole department or school requires a systemic transformation to bring about full-scale changes in the school culture (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), requiring new kinds of leaders (Fullan, 1993; Murphy & Louis, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1991) who shape and elevate teachers’ motives and goals (Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995). Fullan (1993) has conceptualized such change efforts as “recultur-ing” or changing the norms, values, incentives, skills, and relationships in a school to foster a different way that members work together (Fullan, 1998). Affecting classroom practices by transforming school culture involves mobilizing social processes. Socially safe, validated opportunities need to be created for teachers to do deep, sustained reflection on their own and colleagues’ teaching beliefs and practices. These social opportunities must allow teachers to pursue common as well as individual purposes. These are to be occasions for negotiating a shared vision to guide self-directed efforts (Wheatly, 1999) and to build procedures for planning, experimenting, and evaluating them (Little, 1993). In that way, teachers could explore the language they use, which would lead each to explain what was meant by what was said and uncover the assumptions that shaped their practice (Senge, 1990).

Where might such teacher inquiry and reflection lead in today’s testing culture? Such engagement might push against trends to deprofessionalize teaching and reinstate teachers’ voices in the debates over testing and its role in schooling. Reopening a dialogue could defuse what we have observed are escalating teacher outrage, diminishing moral, and the exiting of committed teachers like Stan and Marita from teaching. It would reinstate the principle of teaching that calls for individual practitioners to study and learn from their own practice, to learn along with their students, and to be responsible for acknowledging, applying, and sharing what they learn. Giving teachers the time and tools for studying their own classrooms in ways that frame the integration of teaching and testing could reverse the damage done by professional development approaches to test preparation that are reductive and generic. It could reinforce what well-informed,

experienced teachers already know, acknowledge as yet unrecognized teaching challenges, and target specific school-site problems. Reculturing to institutionalize teacher inquiry, reflection, and voice could give new teachers, who are only beginning to develop a sense of what it means to be a teacher, a chance to grow in ways that are personally as well as professionally meaningful. For teachers who had to give up the fight and let their practice be driven by test taking, or who never saw the problems with such practice, it could be an opportunity to be persuaded by a new rubric of professionalism.

Stan and Marita, by having the courage to volunteer their classrooms and themselves for this study, should have the final word. They want us to know that to accomplish reculturing through social mobilization teachers need to believe they will not be socially or politically jeopardized by making public the beliefs informing their professional identities. They need to trust that their beliefs and the actions they take because of them will be respected by others as rich, diverse sources of positive pedagogy as well as sites for worthwhile reflection and change.

APPENDIX A

THE TEACHERS: STAN AND MARITA

Stan is European American and in his 3rd year in the district and at his school. He received his undergraduate degree in English from a large state university. Stan then began working in a psychiatric hospital where he taught teenagers for two years. This experience led him back to the university where he obtained his teaching certificate. Unable to find a job he liked in the public schools, he continued his education, teaching composition for eight years at two different universities while working on his Masters degree in teaching and his Ed.D. After receiving his degrees, Stan taught alternative education in a suburban school district for one year, until decreased funding led him to his current position.

Marita is African American and also in her 3rd year in the district and at her school. At age 15, when her mother became unable to support her, she moved out on her own and became legally independent. In spite of the difficulty of her circumstances, Marita finished high school and went to college, a path that Marita says she took because of the prodding of one of her high school teachers. While she planned to become an entertainer, Marita determined that she needed the security provided by a college degree, and she earned her undergraduate degree in mass communications from a medium-sized state university in the urban area. She also received Masters degrees in teaching and instructional technology. While working on

her degrees, Marita began substitute teaching, an experience that led to her career choice. After finishing her degrees, Marita taught at a large public high school in her home school district. This experience was both “challenging” and “frustrating” for Marita because of the variety of teaching opportunities and the lack of funding associated with her responsibilities. Marita was reassigned to different schools for three years before “getting out” and moving to her current position.

Both Stan and Marita completed an intensive summer institute on the teaching of writing conducted by their local affiliate of the National Writing Project the summer prior to this study.

APPENDIX B

STAN AND MARITA'S STUDENTS

Stan's class is composed of 18 African American students and 4 students of Chaldean descent. Overall, and with few exceptions, the students in the class have consistently performed below average throughout their school career in both yearly achievement tests and grades. The students' grades in their high school English classes ranged from F to B+, with most students receiving grades of C or C-. These grades are consistent with the students' performance in their elementary and intermediate school years as well. The students' achievement scores were also consistently below average. All students for whom achievement test records were found scored below the 50th percentile in reading and language arts on the achievement tests they took during their elementary school years. In addition, the writing and language arts state test scores for the students in Stan's class were designated, with the exception of one student, as “not proficient.” Three of Stan's students live in homes in which a language other than English is the main language.

The pattern of below average performance on standardized achievement tests and school grades seen in Stan's class is also evident for Marita's students. Approximately one third of Marita's class received an F in 1 of their first 2 years in high school, and another third received an A or B. The remainder of the students scored in the C range. Student scores on achievement tests ranged from the 1st to the 80th percentile, with the majority of students clustered around the 50th percentile. Also evident in the achievement tests scores are consistently declining results. Nearly all students performed best in their early elementary school years and steadily declined. State reading and writing test scores for Marita's students were divided evenly between “low” and “proficient” scores throughout their school careers. Additionally, seven of Marita's students were newcomers to

the district, having enrolled within the last three years. All of these students had moved to the area after leaving the nearby large urban city.

APPENDIX C

THE RESEARCHERS

Lesley is a European American female who taught high school English, college composition, and English teacher education for a total of 27 years before becoming an educational researcher. She is currently a member of the educational studies faculty of a research university. Her main interests are inclusive classroom practices that forward the literacy learning of traditionally underachieving students. She worked in various capacities with teachers and administrators in the school district under study for more than 3 years before becoming the principal investigator on this project.

Matthew is a European American male and a graduate student in a doctoral program in English and education at a large state university. He is interested in the preparation of graduate student assistants in teaching entry-level university composition classes. He became involved in the project as a research assistant early on and has shared data collection and analysis responsibilities. Matthew has had experience teaching composition at the university and has also taught high school.

APPENDIX D

Areas to probe during formal interviews with teachers:

1. Educational background including degrees and certification

What schooling experiences have prepared you to teach English?

What other educational experiences have prepared you to teach English?

2. Teaching history

Where and how long have you taught?

What have you taught?

Describe your teaching experiences at this school and/or in this district.

3. Teaching philosophy

What guides how and what you teach?

What do you think is most important for teachers to understand about the students they teach?

What particular approach do you take when you teach and why?

Which approach are you taking with this particular class and why?

Describe a particularly successful classroom occasion when you knew teaching and learning was going well.

What do you never do/always try to do in your classroom?

4. *Description of class curriculum*

What is the source of your curriculum for this class?

What kinds of written records/plans do you make and keep of your curriculum?

How would you describe your curriculum?

5. *Description of class as a group*

What is teaching this class like? As compared to your other classes?

What do you like the most/least about teaching them?

6. *Description of at-risk students*

Which students are you most concerned about?

Which students do you think will have a difficult time performing satisfactorily in the class?

7. *Stance on standardized achievement testing*

What do think about the state achievement test as a test of students' reading and writing achievement?

What do think about these kinds of tests in general?

How do you deal with these tests in your classroom?

How do you think your curriculum and teaching prepares them for these tests?

What challenges do you think you will have in preparing these students for the test?

8. *Stance on English Language Arts Standards*

Do you follow your state and/or NCTE or other subject matter standards for your curriculum? In what ways?

9. *Why volunteer for this study*

Why did you volunteer for this study?

What do you want/hope to learn from participating?

What do you want to result from this study?

10. *Concerns at this point*

Do you have any questions about the study that we haven't addressed?

Are you concerned about anything to do with the study?

What advise would you give me about this project?

11. *Things s/he thinks we should know that we haven't asked*

What haven't I asked you about that you think I should know?

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High school exit exams (sometimes called high-stakes tests) pose risks for students with learning disabilities. Find out how to address them in your school district. One important reason for this is their lack of access to the curriculum on which the tests are based. Failing a high-stakes test, such as a test required for graduation with a standard diploma, can increase the likelihood that low achievers will drop out of school. We already know that nearly 30 percent of students with learning disabilities drop out of school (compared to 11% of the general student population), and we know that dropping out of school is associated with poor life outcomes in regard to postsecondary education and employment. A high-stakes test is a test with important consequences for the test taker. Passing has important benefits, such as a high school diploma, a scholarship, or a license to practice a profession. Failing has important disadvantages, such as being forced to take remedial classes until the test can be passed, not being allowed to drive a car, or difficulty finding employment.