The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the beliefs and practices of

successful teachers in a high poverty school. Specifically, this study examined the role of

teacher beliefs and how these beliefs were enacted in the classroom. This multiple case

study of three teachers took place in one middle school during a unit of study for each

teacher and examined teacher experiences and instruction throughout the unit of study.

Data collection included classroom observations, audio recorded interviews, teacher

assignments and information from school, district and state websites. Data were analyzed

using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Through this analysis,

three major themes surrounding teacher beliefs and practices emerged from the

observation and interview data: (a) teacher beliefs enacted – this theme showed a

connection between what participants said and what they did in their classrooms,

particularly related to high expectations, student interests and needs, autonomy, social

experiences, and cultural connections, (b) agency through resistance – teachers discussed

in this study how they didn't feel they could be successful unless they pushed back

against the standard curriculum by developing their own approach to teaching, which

usually focused on culturally responsive teaching and building a community of learners

and (c) support from colleagues and administration that impacted instructional decisions.

These findings suggested that successful teachers in high poverty schools held

and enacted beliefs that were centered on high expectations, social learning experiences

and meeting the interests of students. As teachers acted on their beliefs, they also enacted

agency in order to "push back" against the contextual constraints, primarily in regard to curriculum demands and assessment mandates, discussed in this study as "non-negotiables." In order to meet these demands, while still enacting their beliefs, the successful teachers in this study had to consider what was indeed negotiable within the context of local, state, and national mandates. In determining how they could navigate these negotiables, these teachers were able to find a balance that allowed them to develop instruction to meet the unique needs of their students.

EXAMINING THE BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF SUCCESSFUL TEACHERS

IN A HIGH POVERTY SCHOOL

by

Christy Maranda Howard

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro
2014

Approved by

_____
Committee Chair

To Jeremy and Maya
To Mom and Dad
For your constant support, sacrifice, and prayers

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation, written by Christy Maranda Howard, has been approved by the
following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North
Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____

Committee Members _____

_____

_____

_____
Date of Acceptance by Committee

_____
Date of Final Oral Examination

iii

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Never before has there been such a critical demand for quality teachers and instruction to meet and overcome the barriers and challenges of teaching in our nation's urban high-poverty schools (McKinney, Haberman, Stafford-Johnson, & Robinson, 2008, p. 69)

Reform advocates link the goal of improving literacy achievement in high poverty

schools to finding enough teachers who are able to successfully meet the challenges of

teaching in such settings. Coleman (1968) first pointed to this problem when he claimed

that students, who come from families with limited economic resources, would be

differentially impacted by whether or not they have a successful teacher. Researchers

offer continued support for the need to increase the number of teachers, who are able to

meet the challenges of teaching in such settings, because they are able to have a

significant effect on students' achievement (Delpit, 2006b; Hanushek, 2008; Ravitch,

2010; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Tough, 2012). The feasibility of increasing the number of

such teachers as a strategy for reform, however, is limited by our lack of understanding

regarding what successful teachers do on a daily basis to promote student achievement in

high poverty schools. If we had this knowledge, perhaps we could stem the high number

of teachers, estimated to be over 50%, who leave such settings in their first five years

(Gimbert, Desai, & Kerka, 2010) and increase literacy achievement in high poverty

schools.

We have general descriptions of successful teachers, which are widely supported, (Haberman, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995), but how those descriptions translate into daily instruction is where the research becomes less helpful because the number of recommendations far outweigh empirical evidence for their confirmation. To add to our understanding of successful teachers in such settings, this study focused on three middle school teachers, who had risen to the challenges of teaching literacy in a high poverty school and were viewed as successful by their school administration. Using a sociocultural theoretical framework, this study examined the factors related to successful literacy instruction and the practices teachers enacted in their classrooms. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which successful teachers strive to meet the literacy needs of students in a high poverty school by examining their beliefs and practices. Therefore, this study examined the following research question: *How do successful teachers in a high poverty school adapt their beliefs and practices to meet their students' academic needs?*

Review of the Literature

Assessment and Accountability History

While this study focuses on the instruction of successful teachers in high poverty schools, it is important to understand the larger context in which teachers teach, the context of school reform efforts, specifically as it relates to assessment and accountability. Understanding this background and the progression of reform efforts can lend an understanding to the challenges teachers have faced in meeting the needs of students. Specifically, this context is important because with changing reform models, the

expectations for teachers have evolved to a system that went from little accountability to constantly monitoring test scores as part of the teacher evaluation processes, thus, impacting their instructional practices by increasing pressures on them to narrow the curriculum by focusing mainly on test-defined content (Baker et al., 2010; Misco, 2008; Sleeter, 2007).

Reform efforts in the United States historically have aimed at creating a better education for an increasing number of students, particularly those from diverse populations who attend high poverty schools (Sleeter, 2007). Beginning with *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, an 18-month study of the nation's education structures, the deficiencies in the our education system were highlighted as this report called for reform in educational expectations across the country by directing the nation's attention to higher standards for teachers and students (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983). This report was a cause of many national conversations and strategies for improving education across the nation, including a summit with the nation's Governors called by President G. H. Bush in 1989 to focus on school improvement. From the summit, came *Goals 2000: The Educate America Act*. During this time, the reauthorization of ESEA was also taking place. In 1994 this reauthorization was titled, Improving America's Schools Act (IASA; U.S. Department of Education, 1997) and was embraced simultaneously with the *Goals 2000 Act*. These two efforts addressed many of the earlier concerns, including the focus of creating challenging standards for students (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). However, with the Improving America's Schools Act, the conversation focused on assessments *as well*

as standards. A major focus of this reform centered on increasing achievement for all students with an urgent concern with the achievement gaps between minority and majority students and between the highest and lowest achievers in our schools (U.S. Department of Education, 1997).

The goals of the Improving America's Schools Act focused its efforts on improving achievement and the idea that in order for improved achievement to be evident, state standards must be tied to student performance on state mandated assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). Furthermore, if states expected to see improved achievement, there must also be a focus on specific groups of students who historically scored lower on assessments, including but not limited to students in high poverty schools, students with disabilities, and Limited English Proficiency students (U.S. Department of Education, 1997).

Even with some states showing improvements throughout the years of the Improving America's Schools Act, after a few years with this reauthorization in place, President Bush noted little improvement across most states and called for new reforms (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Lawmakers believed a great deal of money had been spent and many reform programs had been put into place with minimal effects on literacy and math scores and the achievement gap (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). As a result, in 2001, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was enacted. This reform sought to address the aforementioned issues by building on and strengthening the individual states' accountability (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). While previously a large focus of

reform efforts had been placed on standards, with NCLB the focus shifted further toward testing and accountability measures (Center on Education Policy, 2012).

No Child Left Behind was different in that it brought data reporting systems and tied state funding to accountability (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). In order to monitor achievement, data systems were put into place to focus on the size of the achievement gap and the learning gains of minority students, special education students, students of poverty, and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). The purpose of No Child Left Behind was to ensure that all students had a fair and equal opportunity to meet the academic standards and assessments with proficiency (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). High standards had been a major part of the conversation since *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983) had discussed the lack of rigor and expectations in many state standards across the nation; now, in addition to the call for higher standards, assessment and accountability would be brought to the forefront in an effort to hold individual states to a higher standard for closing the achievement gap and educating all students (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). With this legislation, lawmakers thought that they found a way to hold schools and states accountable for student growth (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Additionally, rewards and sanctions were put into place for schools across the nation. Sanctions included making school rankings public and shutting down low-performing schools whereas rewards included financial incentives and public acknowledgement of school success (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Most recently, Race to the Top, one of the major education initiatives to improve education has focused on rewarding states in exchange

for adopting new standards and tying student test data to teacher evaluations (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

In sum, this overview of assessment and accountability reform shows the transitions of education measures over the past few decades. These reform efforts have continued to shape the context of the nation's schools by focusing accountability systems on individual teachers; therefore rewards and sanctions have shifted from the school level to the teacher level. Within these transitions, policy makers have focused on increasing student achievement and more focus has been placed on the role of teachers, increasing pressures they face in the context of high stakes testing reform.

Teaching in the Context of High-Stakes Accountability Reforms

While these reform efforts have held promise for improved achievement and school accountability, particularly with low achievers in schools where the majority of students come from families with minimal economic resources, they have not attained the goal of improved performance for all students. For example, the average score in 8th grade reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress was one point higher in 2011 than in 2009 with the majority of students below the 25th percentile being low income (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Additionally, students who were eligible for free or reduced lunch scored an average of 25 points lower than students who were not eligible for free or reduced lunch (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Thus, despite repeated reform efforts, students from low-income homes consistently scored mainly at the basic level of achievement on national assessment

measures and their gains have not been significant (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

Teachers adoption of a particular set of instructional strategies might be one possible reason why test scores have not increased for low-income learners, particularly when they attend schools where most students come from families with minimal economic resources (Delpit, 2013; Ravitch, 2010; Tough, 2012). Au (2007) analyzed 49 studies related to how teachers responded to high-stakes accountability pressures: the majority of teachers responded by (a) narrowing their content to focus on test-defined content, (b) fragmenting the structure of the knowledge presented, and (c) by increasing the use of teacher centered practices. Critics of this dominant pedagogy have voiced concerns because its practices only measure a certain type of low-level knowledge and fail to promote critical thinking (Au, 2011; Baker et al., 2010; Kelley & Protsik, 1997: Misco, 2008; Resnick, 2010). As a result, Ravitch's (2010) believes such practices have not raised standards; instead, have had a "dumbing-down" effect on schools. Her criticisms as well as those voiced by others (Delpit, 2013; Sleeter, 2007) are consistent with the previously mentioned achievement score trends.

Other studies have shown additional negative effects of these instructional practices on teachers' and students' attitudes. For example, teachers report frustration with having to abandon more authentic student-centered practices in favor of more time for teacher directed test preparation, often through teaching isolated skills (Abrams, Pedulla & Madaus, 2003; Costigan, 2002; Massey, 2006). Such frustrations have caused some teachers in high poverty schools to adopt a deficit view of learning where they

believe low income students need repetitive basic skills instruction because they are unable to learn at higher levels (Delpit, 2006a, 2006b, Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 2007). Delpit (2006a) and others (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Sleeter, 2007) links such deficit thinking to low expectations whereby teachers stop questioning their use of the dominant pedagogy and ultimately blame students for their low performances.

In summary, while there is not a proven causal relationship between the emphasis on basic skills instruction and trends in the test scores, student scores have not improved despite all the money spent on assessment and various reform interventions. Therefore, particularly within high poverty schools with the increasing pressures to increase test scores, researchers have started to question how they might help teachers to develop a different set of instructional practices. This questioning focuses on how successful teachers are finding a balance between what is expected of them by school districts and what they expect from themselves as professionals.

Researchers, who study how teachers can navigate the unintended consequences of high stakes testing, have started to focus on how these new accountability pressures have presented teachers with new challenges and decisions about teaching (Abrams et al., 2003; Au, 2011; Brimijoin, 2011; Zoch, 2013). Certain aspects of the new accountability systems are viewed as non-negotiable: teachers must attend to these new realities if they want to be successful. These non-negotiables include the need to (1) improve students' test scores, (2) administer mandated assessments from state and local agencies, and (3) follow required curriculum standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Critics and supporters of present day accountability systems agree with the need for teachers to

attend to increase student achievement, but in the context of high stakes testing, these new realities have posed new pressures and mandates to which teachers must contend.

While many accept these new realities, some researchers have started to focus on where teachers are able to negotiate how they deal with these realities to have a positive impact on students' learning (Au, 2007; Cuban, 2009, Zoch, 2013). Cuban (2009) evaluated how successful teachers, whom he described as "hugging the middle," were able to find a balance between districts' accountability expectations and personal teaching philosophies by melding student-center practices with explicit teacher directed instruction. Cuban's (2009) work speaks to the struggle teachers often face in the context of reform, as they seek to find a balance in meeting the needs of their students in the face of accountability mandates. Cuban's work (2009) spans across three school districts in both high and low poverty schools. Based on his findings, he suggests teachers find this balance in a more general sense, by balancing their approach to instruction, specifically teacher centered versus student-centered instruction. While all teachers in his study were not able to find this balance, Cuban asserts that the ones who did, were successful and flourished. His findings showed that in order to meet the non-negotiables of testing and curriculum requirements, these successful teachers found room for direct instruction in the classroom but also balanced this with giving students the opportunity to take ownership of their learning.

Additionally, Zoch (2013) examined how teachers were able to meet curriculum and reform mandates, by balancing what they believed to be best for their students and resisting the dominant pedagogy discussed in Au's work by enacting agency to address

the non-negotiables of assessment and accountability reform. Teachers in this study used the expectations of the test to drive their instruction in a meaningful way for students, integrating authentic literature to support reading and writing strategies. They found success by balancing units and lessons that met the expectations of the curriculum and testing expectations while also focusing on the interests of the students. These studies suggest a balance for teachers between the mandates of the new reality and the development of instructional strategies to address these mandates while connecting with students' needs and interests.

Studies of successful teachers in high poverty schools show how teachers are able to navigate challenges by finding a balance between accountability expectations and by coming to understand how they can provide instruction based on students' needs and interests (Haberman, 1995a; Hall, 2005; McLaughlin, 1993; Sleeter & Stillman, 2007; Zoch, 2013). Their instructional actions comply with the non-negotiables of assessments and required curricula topics while allowing teachers to negotiate how they address these mandates through their instructional actions. In addition, successful teachers have beliefs about instruction that best meet the needs of students and they are able to practice these beliefs in the classroom through enacting agency that pushes against the common norms and values of the high stakes testing context. This following section explores the beliefs and instructional practices of those teachers who have been able to find success in high-poverty schools.

Beliefs and Instructional Behaviors of Successful Teachers

> Regardless of the comings and goings of trends, fads, or false prophets, good teachers-guided by a set of articulated beliefs and informed by skill and knowledge of their craft-will, in their individual ways, rise to meet all educational challenges. (Starnes, 2001, p. 114)

What We Know About Teacher Beliefs

The beliefs that teachers hold when it comes to instructional factors are often enacted in their classrooms (Haberman, 1995b; Hall, 2005; McLaughlin, 1993). The literature on teacher beliefs shows that many educators' instructional beliefs focus on (a) high expectations, (c) creating a social learning climate, and (c) meeting the interests and needs of students. It is important to examine the beliefs of successful teachers in high poverty schools because often these beliefs are related to instruction.

Beliefs about high expectations. As previously mentioned, in the face of high stakes accountability, particularly in high poverty schools, teachers often "dumb down" (Ravitch, 2010, p. 13) the curriculum and fail to challenge students because they do not believe the students are capable of completing the work- conforming to ideas of deficit thinking (Delpit, 2006a) or because they feel this is how they can meet the expectations of testing mandates (Tatum, 2000). However, in examining the beliefs of successful teachers, research shows, this is not the case.

Successful teachers often discuss how standards based reform and high stakes testing conflict with their beliefs and their purpose for teaching (Lasky, 2005; Sleeter & Stillman, 2007; Valli & Buese, 2007). Specifically teachers often discuss how they must negotiate their beliefs of high expectations for students with what is expected of them in

preparing students for high stakes testing (Lasky, 2005). While teacher beliefs about high expectations may conflict with high stakes testing models, successful teachers hold to their beliefs and continue to challenge their students through high challenge tasks. An example of this is seen in Lazar's (2006) study of five successful literacy teachers in urban schools, conducted using interviews, observations and site documents, Lazar (2006) showed that in addition to giving students responsibility, these successful teachers held beliefs about high expectations for their students' success in literacy. The participants in the study also shared their expectations with their students and provided learning opportunities that were in sync with these expectations such as responses to texts through reading and writing tasks that required higher order thinking.

Delpit (2006a) asserts having positive beliefs about high expectations and implementing this belief are critical to the achievement of students as educators work to prepare them for the real world. Students learn more when teachers have high, yet reasonable expectations for their achievement (Blair, Rupley, & Nichols, 2007). Students must come to expect that teachers have high standards and expectations for them and will continue to push them to higher levels (Delpit, 2006a). Teachers, who hold to their beliefs about implementing high expectations, work to prepare students to achieve at the highest level and not to be satisfied with simply acquiring the basics (Sleeter & Stillman, 2007).

Understanding how "teaching down" to students and demanding little of them does not increase their achievement levels (Delpit, 2006b; Tatum, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) are important to the role of successful teachers, particularly with students

from poverty. As previously mentioned, students from poverty are already at a disadvantage coming into school at lower achievement levels, therefore teachers of these students must have high expectations in order to help them catch up. Delpit (2006a) suggests that teaching students using "test-oriented workbook pages" (p. 222) and "multiple-choice responses" (p.222) may serve them to do better on a high stakes assessment, but it will not "give them the opportunity to become doctors, astronomers, or writers." Instead, having high expectations and providing students the opportunity to engage in relevant, challenging texts and writing will better serve them (Delpit, 2006a; Tatum; 2000; Turner, 2005). While often teachers have these beliefs about high expectations and instruction, it is not always easy to enact them, yet successful teachers are committed to doing so. Beliefs about high expectations can make the difference in how teachers engage with students and how students view themselves, In Delpit's (2006a) work with teachers, she discussed the importance of demanding critical thinking from all students, and helping them to see their own "brilliance" (p. 221). This mindset can serve not only to engage, but to motivate students as well.

Beliefs about building social environments. Engaging students in the learning process through social learning has been discussed as a belief of successful teachers. Providing students opportunities to work collaboratively provides an avenue for learning from others within the social context of the classroom (Lasky, 2005; Thomas & Barksdale-Ladd, 1995). As teachers understand this, they can provide more opportunities for social engagement, which in essence provide more avenues for learning.

Research shows that successful teachers provide learning opportunities for students such as learning centers, cooperative learning projects, and small group instruction (Lasky, 2005; Sleeter & Stillman, 2007). Successful teachers' beliefs about social learning goes further than simply putting students in groups, but instead focuses on making learning authentic for students and allowing students to share their knowledge and questions with their peers, creating an environment for all students to learn from each other. When students learn to work together effectively, a safe community is created where students feel comfortable taking academic risks, sharing goals and providing feedback to each other (Jensen, 2013).

Many successful teachers work on building social and academic development with their students because they know that students will be more invested in their learning opportunities if they have a positive social environment where it is clear that teachers not only care about their academic success, but help students to learn and work together as well (Lasky, 2005; Sleeter & Stillman, 2007).

Beliefs about engaging students in instructional activities. Successful teachers believe it is their responsibility to interest and engage students in wanting to learn. They not only accept responsibility for teaching but also for creating a learning context that are relevant to students' lives and interests (Haberman, 1995a). This context is created, in part, by the instructional activities teachers implement in their classroom. These activities are often related to teacher beliefs. For example, in Thomas and Barksdale-Ladd's (1995) study of effective literacy classrooms and successful teachers, (as identified by their principal and literacy specialist), they posited that teacher beliefs about

reading and writing impacted how they taught literacy in the classroom. Findings showed teachers in effective literacy classrooms believed in order to improve reading and writing, students had to be given numerous and varied opportunities to engage in these acts, including giving students choice and ownership in their learning and providing texts that would reflect the student's lives and interests.

Often in classrooms where successful teachers hold beliefs about engaging students through such instructional activities, teachers developed engaging projects that were relevant to students, such as creating models, writing mythical stories (Delpit, 2006a), investigating how different cultural groups make sense of the solar system, having literacy scavenger hunts for books on a particular topic by authors from various cultures, and by incorporating cultural dances into lessons (Sleeter & Stillman, 2007). In some cases teachers enacted their beliefs by finding authentic literature to meet and navigate curriculum demands (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Zoch, 2013) and to increase levels of student engagement (Allington, Johnston, & Day, 2002). In Zoch's (2013) study, teachers used authentic texts to build units of study that were based on the interests of students while still meeting the expectations of testing. These examples of teacher beliefs about instructional practices are quite different from the "teach to the test" practices previously discussed. Teachers, who enacted their beliefs about literacy instruction, strongly believed it was their job to engage students and build on their interests while still remaining in line with the expectations of their local and state mandates. This balance of beliefs and instruction are not easily accomplished, but as teachers work within the

context of high stakes testing, "making and remaking" themselves as educators to meet the needs of their students, they are able to push against the constraints of reform.

Teacher Agency

Often in discussions centered on high stakes testing contexts, teachers are described as passively conforming to accountability policies and requirements (Sloan, 2006). As previously discussed this conforming takes the shape of narrowed instruction that fails to focus on critical thinking. However, as evidenced in Zoch's (2013) study, in some cases this conformity does not take place as teachers work to push against the contextual constraints brought on by accountability pressures by enacting agency.

For the purpose of this review of literature, I draw on Lewis, Encisco, and Moje's (2007) definition of agency as "the strategic making and remaking of selves within structures of power" (p. 4). Within these structures of power, Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain (1998) view agency as a tool to resist contextual constraints and create self-authored actions. Within the context of education, these contextual constraints often come from mandates and testing pressures. The self-authored actions come from teachers in the form of adjusting instruction and "pushing back" against these constraints in efforts to meet the needs and interests of students. Additionally Holland et al. (1998) discuss the idea of agency as produced by cultural structures of power and accompanied with actions that individuals take when exposed to cultural structures. In this case, the cultural structures of power include the curriculum expectations and high stakes testing context in which teachers must contend and the actions they take are the instructional decisions they make based on their beliefs. In examining teacher agency, it is possible to

understand how teachers responded to the contextual constraints in which they faced in a high poverty, high stakes context.

In considering the research on the challenges teachers face in navigating the non-negotiables of testing in high poverty schools, a major part of this ability to meet challenges and find success comes from these actions and teacher agency. This agency empowers teachers to be able to resist the curriculum constraints and create literacy experiences that align with their beliefs. In response to the structures of power teachers must contend with in schools often created by national and state mandates, they must make and remake themselves as educators and promoters of student achievement in order to navigate the contextual constraints. Successful teachers must adjust within the requirements that fail to fit their ideals of effective instruction. As teachers learn to balance these requirements and ideals, they become more agentive.

Haberman's (1995a) study of "star" teachers discussed how at times teachers had to "redefine and broaden the boundaries in which they work" (p. 779). In the example he gives, there is a teacher who has engaged her students in an assignment that might be noisy or messy or require unusual materials and the principal has required she discontinue the project and follow the regular lessons using the texts provided. In this case the teacher has the interest and engagement of her students, but has been told she must change her approach to teaching. Haberman (1995a) suggests a star teacher would work to negotiate with authority in order to protect the learning process. This "push back" in response to the contextual requirements of the school is an example of teacher agency. This study would suggest that in order for teachers to be successful, they must not simply

comply to mandates, but instead, they should push back and defend the choices they make in the best interest of their students. This agency helps teachers to balance the constraints of school requirements with what they believe is best for student learning.

Similarly, participants in Zoch's study (2013) found this balance because they "acted in agentive ways when their beliefs about literacy teaching were threatened by test preparation" (p. 63). Zoch suggested the participants in her study were a model of how to balance test preparation and beliefs through enacting agency. She asserts,

> It is important to situate teaching within the social, historical, and political contexts created by high stakes testing, and to consider the ways in which teachers are not only acted upon, but also act upon their situation in agentive ways. (p. 54)

In this study, findings showed that while teachers disagreed with high stakes testing, in order for them to successfully meet the needs of students, they had to work to create units that redefined the boundaries provided by their context and be agentive in their efforts to implement effective instruction. The teachers based their units and lessons on the interests of the students "the practices these teachers crafted took into consideration their own beliefs about quality literacy teaching and their students' interests and backgrounds" (p. 63). The students were engaged in learning through this expanded approach and teachers found enjoyment in teaching. These teachers were able to "balance test preparation with one's own beliefs about literacy teaching" (p. 63). Specifically Zoch discussed how teachers used their beliefs about instruction to craft quality instruction that aligned with testing goals, but allowed for alternate instruction that was aligned to their beliefs. Zoch (2013) discussed how teachers in her study "developed their own set of

answers about teaching that reflected their beliefs about quality literacy teaching" (p. 57).

As teachers searched to find a balance between their beliefs and expected practices, agency allowed them to "push back" creating self-authored actions and "respond strategically" (p. 63). From this, Zoch suggests that what the teaching profession needs are "agentive, decision makers who are able to navigate the demands of working in a high stakes testing culture while still promoting quality literacy instruction" (p. 63). As teachers become these "agentive, decision makers" they will be armed to enact their beliefs and adapt instructional behaviors that will meet the needs of their students.

What We Know About Effective Instructional Behaviors

The following sections form the basis for how instructional behaviors of successful teachers are described by researchers and theorists. While each is presented separately, in reality, the practices overlap considerably, allowing teachers to connect with and build upon students' diverse interests and backgrounds.

The instruction students receive in high poverty schools is highlighted in the research on both high stakes testing and culturally responsive teaching. Researchers suggest that successful teachers provide autonomy, rigorous curriculum, culturally responsive teaching and opportunities for students to make connections to learning. In order for teachers to provide these components, they must get to know their students by building relationships that help to drive their instructional decisions.

Relationships. It is important that teachers get to know their students in order to honor their "intellectual legacies" and to match their instruction to their cultural frameworks (Delpit, 2013).

Researchers suggest that relationships are a factor in increasing student engagement and achievement (Delpit, 2006a; Irvine, 2010; Lasky, 2005). Delpit (2006a) asserts that teachers must know their students outside of the realm of the assignments they give and understand their experiences outside of their classrooms in order to truly know their strengths. She suggests that if teachers do not build relationships with their students and get to know their student's strengths they create deficit assumptions and teach down to them, which will lead to teaching with lower expectations instead of expectations that will prepare students for the real world.

It is not only important to get to know students, but it is also important to become familiar with the communities students come from in an effort to understand the experiences they bring to the classroom (Banks et al., 2005; Delpit, 2006b, Moll, 1992; Villegas & Lucas, 2007). Building true, caring relationships with students includes gaining knowledge of what interests them, which is often based on their experiences outside of the classroom, and building content in which students can relate in order to best meet student needs (Irvine, 2010). Additionally, Villegas and Lucas (2007) suggest that in building these relationships and getting to know students, this process takes place in an authentic way, not simply getting to know information about general cultural groups, which can lead to stereotypes, but truly getting to know their specific students. This relationship building can be implemented by getting to know and understand the lives of students outside of school, getting to know parents and the community, and giving students an opportunity to share their experiences and aspirations within the classroom (Villegas & Lucas, 2007).

In Moje's (1996) 2-year study of teacher-student relationships, she analyzes literacy practices in content area classrooms as well as how teachers make instructional decisions. Moje (1996) suggested that a great deal of research has been conducted on teacher student relationships, but she wanted to examine how these relationships shaped the instructional decisions of teachers. For two years she followed the same teacher with different students. The participant in her study felt strongly that in order to meet the needs of her students she had to build relationships with them. Throughout the year, she worked hard to get to know each of her students individually. By building relationships with her students she felt she could better teach them in that her relationships impacted how she decided to teach. In response, the students were more engaged and willing to participate because they recognized the teacher's efforts to plan her lessons based on the knowledge of her students. In essence, her literacy practices were supported by the relationships she built with students. Building relationships is one means of engaging and meeting the needs of students. Giving students ownership and choice in their learning can also stem from the relationship building processes in the classroom.

Autonomy. In considering effective instruction, it is important to consider the needs of students. Many researchers suggest autonomy is a necessity for students (Anderman & Mueller, 2010; Brophy, 2004; Pomerantz & Moorman, 2010; Eccles & Roeser, 2010). Autonomy is seen as an important aspect of the learning process and to the academic experience for students (Anderman & Mueller, 2010; Brophy, 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2009; Pomerantz & Moorman, 2010; Eccles & Roeser, 2010). Although research supports providing opportunities for student autonomy, teachers of adolescents

often want to be more in control of classroom activities because of their fears of behavior issues (Anderman & Mueller, 2010) and assessment and accountability measures (Amrein & Berliner, 2013). At this stage, teachers often trust students less and believe in controlling them more (Anderman & Mueller, 2010). However, Brophy (2010) discussed the importance of creating social settings in the classroom that promote "autonomous motivation" (p. 158). He suggested that in these settings students should feel connected to others and feel a sense of competence. Some suggestions Brophy gives for responding to these students needs include teachers taking the time to listen to students, encouraging students, and being responsive to their inquiries. If teachers do not support these needs in school settings, opposed to feeling "autonomously motivated," students will feel "controlled and pressured" (p. 158).

Because of the importance of autonomy, Anderman and Mueller (2010) and Ryan and Deci (2009) encourage school environments to allow students more opportunities for autonomy and decision-making throughout the day as effective instructional practices. Students have a need for independence, responsibility and control. In order to create autonomy supportive environments teachers must create a climate where students feel supported and encouraged in their quest to take greater responsibility for their learning (Ryan & Deci, 2009).

Providing rigorous curriculum. As previously mentioned, research supports the idea that successful teachers have strong beliefs about high expectations for students. In addition, research also shows that effective instruction means implementing rigorous, challenging content for students in order to meet those high expectations. Anderman and

Mueller (2010) suggest students should be provided with "increasingly challenging, yet interesting, academic tasks" (p. 204). Stimulating curriculum affects how students learn and causes them to meet the high expectations that schools and teachers have for them (Kumar & Maehr, 2010) This can be a difficult road for teachers to navigate, because quite often, instead of being driven by a rigorous curriculum, they are driven by the fears of accountability measures that are often met through test preparation, multiple choice resources.

In Miller's (2003) study of high challenge tasks, teachers stepped outside of their fears to better meet the needs of their students through high challenge tasks that promoted critical thinking skills. With the implementation of these tasks, findings showed that students that were more exposed to challenging tasks were more engaged in high challenge tasks than the low challenge academic tasks. Students were engaged when the task expectations were higher and their focus shifted from extrinsic motivation of grades to being motivated by feelings of "competence and creativity" (p.44). Miller suggests that high challenge academic tasks that require extensive writing, collaboration, and extended time are a promoter of learning and motivation, whereas low challenge tasks such as filling in the blanks or working independently served to negatively impact motivation (Miller, 2003). Throughout Miller's (2003) two-year study with teachers implementing high challenge tasks, none of the teachers' reading scores dropped and four teachers showed an increase in scores. The school also saw a drop in student retention and special education referrals decreased by 50%. This research suggests that teachers can find success through challenging students opposed to through "skill and drill."

Instead, they could follow Miller's (2003) formula for high challenge tasks of giving students writing assignments where they are required to write extensively, collaborate, and work over extended periods of time. This could include research prompts, response to texts in the form of literature circle roles, or journaling and reflecting on experiences with texts.

In addition to providing overall high challenging tasks, rigorous instruction can be implemented by integrating higher-level questions. Specifically, in Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, and Rodriguez (2003) a study conducted on literacy instruction in high poverty classrooms, findings showed that higher-level questioning increased student understanding and increased student growth. And the more "routine, practice-oriented approaches to teaching important comprehension processes were observed, the lower the growth in reading comprehension (p. 23). The findings of this study not only showed higher growth in students in classrooms where teachers' instruction promoted active involvement for students, but also found that teachers that asked higher level questions understood the importance of challenging their students about their interactions with texts. These teachers that implemented higher level thinking questions also focused on thematic elements, making connections to texts, interpretation and student led discussions.

These examples of challenging tasks and question are consistent with the expectations seen in new national standards. With the implementation of Common Core Standards and suggestions for performance tasks, within the appendix document (CCSSI, 2010) there are challenging tasks that do hold high expectations for students. With these tasks, students are given extended writing opportunities in order to showcase authentic

knowledge opposed to "choose the best answer." These literacy standards are beneficial in helping students to evaluate, synthesize and gain knowledge from challenging texts (CCSSI, 2010). Using these standards as a guide to creating tasks will presumably serve to challenge students to be college and career ready, while neglecting the practices that drive deficit thinking.

Challenging tasks do not always have to take the shape of paper and pencil activities. Including media technology in education as a way of providing tasks that cause students to think critically by engaging digital text and uncovering hidden meanings is a way to challenge students as well (Dezuanni, 2010). Challenging students to go beyond simple decoding of text, to extending their thinking to underlying purposes and biases in multimedia and nontraditional texts promotes higher-level thinking and serves to engage students (Gutierrez & Beavis, 2010). If we are to create an environment that causes our students to engage in higher order thinking, exposing them to media and technology can help our students to address the demands of 21st century learning by exposing them to tasks that encourage using technology as a tool for connecting to new knowledge. Challenging tasks support the expectations of preparing students to be critical thinkers and ready for college and careers, which becomes even more critical as we examine the expectations of Common Core State Standards.

Building background knowledge and making connections. In examining what we know about effective literacy instruction, it is important to recognize the role of helping students make personal and real world connections to texts (Burke, 2008; McGregor, 2007). Snow, Griffin, and Burns (2005) suggest that students in effective

high poverty schools know how to make connections to their learning and are able to

recognize how tasks build on previous work and how assignments lay a "foundation for

future work" (p. 158). One way to help students make connections is by helping them to

build background knowledge and linking new material to their prior knowledge (Fiene &

McMahon, 2007; Haberman, 1995a, Ladson-Billings, 1994; Villegas & Lucas, 2007).

Building background knowledge and helping students make connections to texts can be

one way to meet the literacy needs of students by improving learning and engagement

(Burke, 2008; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007; McGregor, 2007). Teachers can foster this

knowledge through providing demonstrations, showing video clips, having visual

displays and asking students thought-provoking questions (Fisher & Frey, 2012). In

addition, class discussions and KWL charts (Ogle, 1986) which give students an

opportunity to consider what knowledge they already hold about a topic, what they would

like to know, and what they have learned can be beneficial. As a whole class activity,

this strategy not only helps to build background knowledge but also gives students

ownership of their learning in making decisions about what they would like to know.

Asking students to build and connect to their background knowledge in order to

access a text, and extend this knowledge to connections can be helpful as well.

Specifically asking students to make text to text, text to self, and text to world

connections helps students to connect their personal experiences to other texts or real

world happenings in order to deepen their understanding of a particular text (Burke,

2008; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007; McGregor, 2007). Helping

students connect to themselves and their lived experiences through analogies from their

lives is meaningful to this process as well (Villegas & Lucas, 2007). In Burke's (2008)

work of effective literacy instruction, he suggested that as teachers planned lessons they

should think about the connections they want students to make and bring in materials that

invite these connections. Encouraging students to make personal connections to texts as

well as connecting texts to other texts or the experiences of others can serve to engage

students in learning. These connections can come in the form of asking students to

connect to the world around them or to other texts. Giving students opportunities to

connect learning to themselves and their culture is important in that it build on student

strengths and helps them to consider the perspectives of others (Perez, 1998). At a time

when teachers in high poverty schools are often teaching more to the test than

implementing learning activities that engage students, (Rowley, Kurtz-Costes, & Cooper,

2010) tapping into the experiences of students and helping them connect to their learning

can serve as a tool to help students connect to texts in meaningful ways. Providing

learning activities that help students personally and culturally make connections to their

learning can be a tool in creating learning that is focused on the specific, diverse, needs of

students (McCombs & Whisler, 1997).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Helping students connect to texts through their experiences is a reflection of

culturally responsive teaching. Irvine (2010) asserts that learning is related to students'

cultural experiences and

> If new information is not relevant to those frameworks of culture and cognition,
> people will never remember it. If the information is relevant, they will never
> forget it. (p. 59)

This concept is important in considering the idea that teachers should value the cultural and historical learning students bring to the classroom and celebrate this culture by integrating content that will be relevant to these experiences while building a community of learners. As schools become more diverse, it is imperative that teachers meet the needs of all students and embrace differences in the classroom (Eccles & Roeser, 2010; Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2010; Talbert-Johnson, 2004). This can be accomplished by encouraging students to make connections and share these connections with their peers.

When instruction is presented to students in ways that help students connect to their own cultures and experiences, their academic achievement will improve (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Because of this, teachers should work to engage students with curriculum that helps students make these connections. Gay (2002) calls this approach to instruction culturally responsive teaching and defines it as

> using the cultural characteristics, experiences and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal and are learned more easily and thoroughly. (p. 106)

Culturally Responsive Teaching supports the aspects of successful teachers and teaching that have been discussed throughout this literature review. Knowing students and valuing their experiences while providing engaging learning opportunities helps students to connect their learning to their experiences, making learning more relevant and lasting for students. Villegas and Lucas (2007) suggest that within the context of helping students

connect to meaningful issues teachers challenge them to question, interpret, and analyze.

As discussed in Gay's (2002) definition, as students are given the opportunity to connect

knowledge with their lived experiences, learning becomes more meaningful.

      Cultural connections. It is important to build on the cultural experiences of the

lives of all students (Villegas & Lucas, 2007). Often in classrooms, if these connections

are not made, students feel left out of the learning process (Milner, 2010). These

connections can come from the integration of culturally relevant literature in the

classroom (Tatum, 2000; Turner, 2000). With culturally relevant texts, teachers can help

students make cultural connections to reading by having them use texts to examine their

own lives and make connections between historical and current events. These tasks can

serve to further engage students (Tatum, 2000; Turner, 2005). As students can make

connections to the texts they read and see themselves present in the classroom through

culturally relevant texts, characters, and experiences, they become more engaged and find

more meaning in the classroom world that they can call their own (Lazar, 2006; Turner,

2005; Tatum, 2000). In cases where teachers do not provide opportunities for culturally

meaning content and texts, and instead provide unfamiliar materials or increased use of

worksheets, researchers suggest this causes adverse effects in students (Delpit, 2006a,

2013; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

      Helping students find meaning in these texts can help students to bring new

knowledge to other texts they read that might not be considered "culturally relevant." It

is not enough to only implement the use of culturally relevant texts, and provide

opportunities for students to share experiences, but it is also necessary to help students

transfer their knowledge to a range of texts (Tatum, 2000; Turner, 2005). Helping students make connections can meet this goal (Turner, 2005). Once students are taught through scaffolding how to make cultural connections to texts, they will be able to transfer this knowledge to more challenging texts or texts they may not have originally thought they could make connections with (Tatum, 2000).

Specifically, teachers can work to help students to compare and contrast new learning with learning they have already mastered in order to build a greater understanding, to construct meaning from their previous experiences and share these experiences with others (Irvine, 2010). Irvine (2010) suggests these experiences help "students' voices emerge and knowledge and meaning are constructed from the students' perspective" (p. 60).

While it is important to focus on the student perspective and value the knowledge, experiences and languages students bring from their culture, it is also important to teach students how to connect to the power languages and codes in our society that are important for them to learn in order to be successful. Teachers cannot ask students to abandon their language and experiences, but they must teach them how to be successful and make connections to the various contexts they will face in the world (Delpit, 1988). Helping students make connections between their culture and their language and the culture and languages of others, is one way to address this concern. One way to embrace student differences and make connections is to provide opportunities for students from all backgrounds to share and incorporate their experiences in the classroom (Gay, 2000).

These opportunities for sharing, help students to learn about and value the cultural experiences of their peers and to be able to broaden their connections.

As teachers continue to work with culturally diverse populations of students, it is important that they value and support the voices and experiences of all students. Challenging students through a curriculum that allows them to make connections to their lived experiences and share these experiences, contributes to the research on effective teacher instruction, which is in contrast with the dominant pedagogy of Au (2007). As teachers work to meet the needs of their students, they have to consistently work toward a balance that values effective instruction, opposed to the dominant pedagogy. Finding this balance and enacting instructional practices that focuses on the needs of their students is often shaped by teacher beliefs about learning instruction and creating a context that shapes these beliefs. Determining specifically what this balance looks like in terms of context, beliefs and factors that are related to instruction was the focal point of this study.

Gaps in the Literature

As previously mentioned, there are general descriptions of successful teachers that have been widely accepted (Haberman, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995). However, there is a gap in the literature that speaks to how these factors are enacted in daily instruction, particularly in the context of high stakes testing in high poverty schools. In addition, studies that amplify the voices of successful teachers and their beliefs enacted in the classroom are outweighed by these general descriptions, which far outweigh empirical evidence for confirmation. This study adds empirical evidence to the literature. Specifically, this study contributes to the literature in that it does indeed amplify the

voices of teachers and their beliefs and showing these beliefs and practices enacted in the classroom. Teachers not only speak about their beliefs about teaching and learning through interviews, but they enact these beliefs within a sociocultural context that meets the needs and interests of students. This study shows the importance of the created context in teacher practices and how this context allows teachers take unique paths to enact agency in ways that push against curriculum resources that fail to meet the academic needs of students.

Theoretical Framework

This section focuses on the theoretical framework used to guide this study. In order to examine teachers' beliefs and practices in a high poverty school and how teacher beliefs were enacted in the classroom, this study draws on the sociocultural perspective. This section builds on references in the section where I described various practices of successful teachers: each of these practices is supported by a sociocultural perspective. While often this theory is used to examine student learning (Griffin, 2002; Matthews & Kesner, 2003; Silva, Verhoeven, & Leeuwe, 2011, in my study it was used to examine the *opportunities* for student learning provided by teachers based on teacher beliefs. The opportunities teachers provided served to shape the context of the classroom and were represented by the instructional decisions made by teachers. This lens helped me to examine the participants and their "sociocultural approach to instruction" (Eun, 2010, p. 401). The instructional decisions of teachers throughout this study were related to their beliefs about social learning and bringing the lived experiences and cultures of students into the classroom.

The sociocultural perspective is influenced by the work of Vygotsky, who viewed learning as a socially constructed process in which language helped learners to better understand and become members of social communities and cultures (Vygotsky, 1978, Wertsch, 1993). Vygotsky (1978) argued knowledge is constructed through social interactions, with students learning first through social interactions with peers and adults and eventually extending and internalizing knowledge to act independently. The sociocultural theory posits that values and experiences held by participants are shared within the learning context and serve to shape knowledge through social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). Forman and Cazden (1986) assert that two related ideas in Vygotsky's work are (a) the social foundations of learning, and (b) the importance of instruction. The sociocultural framework helps to examine both of these factors in the opportunities teachers provide for social learning and the beliefs related to their instruction. Viewing these components through a sociocultural lens served to examine how teachers serve as architects in designing learning environments they believe will increase the literacy knowledge of students.

In Moll's (1992) early work, he asserts there was little research applying Vygotsky's theory to instruction, examining classroom teaching. Since this time, more research has emerged to show this theory with implications for not only learning, but for instruction as well (Eun, 2010; Moll, 1994). The role of teachers in the sociocultural approach to instruction is important, in that, they "guide activities that involve students as thoughtful learning in socially and academically meaningful tasks" (p. 21). In order for teachers to guide this process, they must have implicit beliefs about social learning and

how to best meet the needs of their students (Au, 1992; Villegas & Lucas, 2007). In examining how teachers' implicit beliefs are related to their instruction and creation of a sociocultural approach to learning, I am guided by the work of Clark and Peterson (1984) who suggest that teacher's implicit theories of teaching are evidenced in their beliefs and instruction and should be examined as such as they work to create an environment of learning for students.

Au (1992) suggests this approach helps to apply Vygotsky's work by studying how teacher actions are guided by their beliefs to "arrive at an explicit description of these implicitly held beliefs" (p. 271). Au (1992) further discusses the requirement that researchers' interpretations of the teachers' beliefs do indeed remain faithful to the teachers' beliefs. In this study, through interviews, the implicit beliefs of teachers showed they valued the social, historical, and cultural experiences students brought to the classroom. These beliefs were made explicit in reviewing the interview and observation data through researcher notes and memos. Additionally, I ensured these beliefs stayed faithful to the teachers' views of their own beliefs by conducting intensive member checking. The implicit theories about learning as a social activity that valued the histories and cultures of students were revealed in my study as teachers discussed their beliefs about teaching and what they felt students needed to be successful.

Eun (2010) cites institutional factors such as standards and assessment mandates that can hinder teacher theories from being enacted. However, several studies show how teachers are able to enact their implicit theories as evidenced through their beliefs because of their agency by pushing back on mandates by embracing their implicit

theories of teaching and learning (Howard & Miller, 2013; Zoch, 2013). Within this context, sociocultural theory benefits this study by allowing me to look at how teachers deal with the challenges of such mandates as they negotiate their expectations and beliefs regarding the need for their instructional activities to align with students' values, interests, and expectations. As a result, the researcher is able to view the subtleties of teaching and learning by studying the interaction between instructional beliefs and their implementation via classroom activities (Au, 1992) given the need to attend to required mandates. This benefit is particularly helpful because teachers are not assumed to negotiate these obstacles in a one-size-fits all manner: instead, teachers' negotiations are tailored to the context of their individual classroom based on their instructional goals and students' needs and interests (Eun, 2010).

Gee (2000) suggests that contexts are "actively created, sustained, negotiated, resisted, and transformed moment by moment through ongoing work" (p. 190). Throughout this study, the actions and work of the teachers showcased how social contexts were created, sustained, negotiated and transformed in order for learning opportunities to occur for students. Specifically, as teachers enacted their beliefs about social learning, they were able to transform the classroom into a context that provided opportunities for students to work and share their knowledge together. In order for teachers to enact this belief, they had to resist the contextual constraints, similar to those mentioned in Eun's (2010) work, which favored curriculum models that did not represent this learning process. Throughout the study, teachers transformed their classrooms into opportunities for teacher-student learning and social learning between students, and

ultimately transformed them into learning opportunities that independently assessed students as they were able to showcase their independent knowledge.

In creating space for learning, the sociocultural approach focuses on the importance of the context. As previously mentioned, learning can look different with this approach in different contexts. The interactions between readers and texts are specific to the context in which they occur (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). As teachers foster learning, a context that supports cultural, historical and social learning serves to shape the experiences students bring to the table. With that said, the social contexts of teachers in this study were different in every classroom. These differences were based on the needs of students, teacher beliefs and the ways in which teachers found a balance in creating their context.

More specifically, within the context of social learning, the activities in which students participate help them to learn from and bring together the ideas of their peers as new learning occurs and from this collaboration, new strategies and knowledge emerge (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). The participants in this study worked towards helping students create new knowledge through the opportunities they created for social engagement, particularly providing opportunities for connecting students' experiences to learning.

In their review of Vygotsky's work, Scrimsher and Tudge (2003) discuss how the social context is a facilitator of learning. Within this context, learning is impacted by the social, historical, and cultural aspects of the learners (Scrimsher & Tudge, 2003). In order for teachers to provide successful literacy instruction, they must understand these

aspects. Teachers must understand the historical background of students and provide the social and cultural experiences for learning in the classroom.

In Moll's (1994) research on sociocultural theory and marginalized students, he asserts that often these contexts that focus on student's social, historical and cultural experiences are not created for students and because of this opportunities for them to share their sources of knowledge are minimal. Moll suggests an effect of this is that minority students are often viewed as having learning deficits. In particular, Tracey and Morrow (2012) argue that if students' background knowledge is not valued and showcased, especially students from marginalized backgrounds, it can lead to deficit thinking on the part of teachers, feeling that students' language or knowledge is limited simply because of historical or cultural factors. Instead, those factors should be celebrated so that all students can learn from each other and teachers should recognize knowledge and experiences students bring with them to the classroom creating a context that embraces the social and cultural aspects of learning (Moll, 1994).

This theoretical lens will help me to evaluate the extent to which teachers in my study recognize the experiences and knowledge students brought to the classroom and offer a context where these experiences were valued. Fairbanks (1998) also supported the idea of social interactions in learning and the importance of "nourishing conversations" (p. 203). In this essay, Fairbanks discusses the importance of providing an environment where students are able to work together and learn from each other. She discusses the importance of using literacy for social as well as reflective purposes. Providing a thought-provoking community in the literacy classroom environment gives

students the opportunity to share their personal experiences as these experiences relate to the text and new knowledge they are forming. Through these formats students are able to share their experiences through meaningful conversations, they are given an opportunity to question their experiences, and "articulate their stories" (Fairbanks, 1998).

Research supports the idea that stories students share and the texts they explore are enhanced by their cultural experiences. Gay (2000) suggests that culture plays a major role in how we think and therefore impacts how we teach and learn. As students engage in literacy learning experiences, this learning is shaped by their cultural experiences. It is also shaped by the context in which they learn, the text being read, the activity associated with the text, and the identity the reader brings to the text (Hammerberg, 2004). In fostering sociocultural contexts for learners, teachers will have to be open to what they consider to be "text" or what they consider to be "reading" and "writing." Literacies of students (especially in the 21st century) extend beyond traditional texts. Students are consumers and creators of varied mediums of texts and it is important that these literacy experiences be valued. Because of these elements of sociocultural experiences, it will be beneficial to examine the types of texts as well as the assignments provided to students by teachers in their quest for providing meaningful learning experiences for students as well as increasing student achievement.

Perez (1998) suggests that literacy is an interactive process of learning and that discussion helps students to negotiate meanings of texts as readers and writers. Research supports the idea that collaboration between students gives them the opportunity to learn from each other as Schunk (2012) asserts that when peers are given the opportunity to

work collaboratively, the social interactions among the students can serve as a method of instruction. Dyson's (2003) work with five African-American first graders shows the impact that students' cultural experiences have on the learning process as the students work, learn and teach each other along the way. These students bring in songs, sports, church and home experiences into the context of their classroom and into their processes of reading and writing. Helping students to understand the diverse experiences of their peers, and help to build a community of learners that value and learn from each other as we work towards one of the Common Core goals of helping students to "seek to understand other perspectives and cultures" (CCSSI, 2010, p. 7). Because knowledge is gained when students are socially engaged in discussions and collaborative learning activities, these experiences should be prevalent in literacy instruction.

In summary, situating this study in the sociocultural framework, particularly examining the opportunities teachers provided for students based on their beliefs, will allow me to understand the beliefs and practices related to literacy instruction across the classroom. In particular, in creating this context, I will be able to study the extent to which teacher beliefs are enacted in the classroom and these beliefs served to foster this environment as teachers believed in creating a social learning environment that supported and valued the culture and experiences of students. The extent to which teachers foster this context will allow me to study teachers' agency as they seek to achieve a balance between what is expected of them through state and district mandates and their ability to negotiate these challenges by enacting a curriculum based on students' interests and values.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

> The case study approach is not simply a data collection tool, but indeed an "all-encompassing method" that covers design, data collection and data analysis. (Yin, 2009)

Research Design

In an effort to examine teacher beliefs and practices as they navigate the challenges present in high poverty schools, the case study methodology has been used in this study. The case study approach is not simply a data collection tool, but indeed an "all-encompassing method" that covers design, data collection and data analysis (Yin, 2009). "In fact, the case study is a separate research study that has its own research design" (p. 26). I will explore each of these aspects of the method in relation to my study.

Case Study Methodology

Yin (2009) defines case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life context" (p. 18). Considering this definition, I will conduct an intrinsic explanatory case study focusing on the beliefs and practices of teachers in high poverty schools as they navigate the challenges present in their work.

According to Yin (2009), an intrinsic case study is used when the researcher has an intrinsic interest in the topic of study. I have an intrinsic interest in this study because four years ago I was an English Language Arts teacher in this high poverty middle school

and I am interested in the factors that are related to the instructional decisions of the successful teachers working in this school as literacy scores continue to meet expected or high growth each year. As a classroom teacher, I saw the collaborative efforts of teachers in my school and participated in professional development that helped to shape my practices and beliefs. I also experienced the challenges often faced in teaching in a high poverty school, including understanding the implications of out-of-school factors students faced regularly, understanding the role of diversity in instruction, understanding curriculum requirements, and navigating the need to help students pass the end of grade assessments while striving to make learning a meaningful and engaging process. After leaving the school, based on my experiences, I became curious as to the beliefs and practices of other teachers in the context of this school that continued to show academic growth. I was curious about how other teachers were able to find a balance between their beliefs and what was expected of them within the context of their school and their instructional practices.

The "explanatory" aspect of this study follows Yin's (2009) definition as a case study that seeks to explain the "hows and "whys" of a situation. This research study aims to explain the "hows" and whys" of literacy instruction as teachers navigate the demands and expectations of teaching in a high poverty school, particularly in the context of their classroom. More specifically, "how" successful teachers in a high poverty school adapt their beliefs and practices to meet the academic needs of their students and "why" teachers choose the instructional methods they choose in order to meet the expectations placed on them.

The first step in studying this topic was to develop a comprehensive literature review (Yin, 2009) about successful teachers, instruction and challenges in high poverty schools because I believe these factors play a major role in teacher's instructional decisions and the context in which they teach. Following this review of literature, I followed Yin's (2009) model of conducting a case study, and designed the study, deciding the time frame, and data sources I would need in order to answer the research questions. Next, I prepared (Yin, 2009) for the data collection process by seeking access to the site and individuals (Creswell, 2007). In gaining access to the site, I sought Institutional Review Board approval and then contacted the principal of the school. Once I gained access to the school, I asked the principal for recommendations of three teachers with successful literacy practices. I then contacted the three teachers, established their schedules and prepared a final plan for collecting data. From there I collected and analyzed data (Yin, 2009). This methodology proved to be beneficial in examining this topic in that it gave me the opportunity to amplify the voices of teachers. So often research in high poverty schools focuses on numbers and proficiency levels. That was not the purpose of this study. Using the case study approach I sought to provide a rich, thick description of the context of each teacher's classroom and the experiences they provided for students. This dissertation is my forum for sharing this case study research (Yin, 2009).

The case study approach helped me to carefully examine how teachers navigated the context of high poverty schools as they attempted to meet the academic needs of their students and meet the expectations set forth for them. This approach also helped me to

examine how teacher beliefs were related to their decisions for instruction in high poverty schools by interviewing teachers and observing them within the context of their classroom. Through examining specific classroom literacy activities as they took place, I was able to gain insight into teacher beliefs about instruction and how those beliefs were enacted. Valli and Chambliss (2007) suggest that classroom activities help to reveal the culture of a classroom as they provide a window into how students engage with each other and how cultures are produced. Throughout interviews and observations, I examined the classroom activities teachers provided for students and analyzed how these activities represented the beliefs of the participants as described in their interviews and enacted in their observations. Examining these activities in the classroom also helped me to understand the norms and values teachers wished to promote in the context of their classrooms.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which experienced teachers met the literacy needs of students in a high poverty school and how teacher beliefs were related to their instructional decisions. Specifically this study examined the following research question: ***How do successful teachers in a high poverty school adapt their beliefs and practices to meet their students' academic needs?***

Research Site and Participants

Dyson and Genishi (2005) assert that researchers use the case study approach because they are interested in participants and how the participants experience the world around them. This statement taken with Yin's (2009) suggestion of examining each case

within their real world context, guided my decision to conduct classroom observations of each teacher. With this model, it is important to provide a clear description of the context of the school as well as each participant and each participant's classroom.

Each participant in the study represented an individual case, making this study a multiple case study (Yin, 2009). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest a multiple case study is more compelling in that it helps to build a stronger understanding of a topic and adds confidence to findings as they are examined over multiple cases. In this instance, each participant represents a case and is described as so. At the conclusion of all case descriptions, a cross-case analysis has been completed (Yin, 2009).

School Context

> I guess with this being a high needs school and a magnet school, you have kids in here who want to be here . . . and then you have a population of kids who go to this school because this may be their district or neighborhood school. How those personalities mesh is always fun for me-and how people tend to find friends in people that they wouldn't ordinarily find a friend in. (Julia, interview 1)

Walking into the school, the walls are painted with mystical characters, and numerous signs ask you to please sign in at the office. The television tells you the principal is being acknowledged by the district for an outstanding middle school principal award. The office staff greets you and goes through all of the security procedures including calling the teacher you are visiting to alert them of your presence and walking you to her classroom. For the purpose of this study, a pseudonym has been used to identify the name of the school.

Grove middle school is a unique school in that it began as a middle school serving students in grades 6-8 and transitioned into a magnet school in 2002. In 2006, the school added a high school program making the school a 6-12 school. At the time of the study the middle school and high school were in separate buildings and served by two different groups of faculty members. Like all magnet schools in the district, parents had to complete an application for their child to attend the middle school. The middle school application is quite different from the application to enter the high school. At the middle school level, parents fill out an application and students are chosen through a random lottery selection process, like the other magnet schools across the district. However, at the high school level, students complete an application, have an interview, and audition for the arts programs. It is important to note these differences, as the population of high school students is very different from the population of middle school students. In this study, I focused only on the middle school.

Grove Middle School was a magnet school serving students in grades 6-8. While some students apply to the school as part of the district's lottery system other students at the school come from the neighborhood surrounding the school. The school is located in the downtown area of the city and is in the middle of low-income housing developments. At Grove Middle School, 73% of the students are minority (53% African-American) and 22% of the students in the school are European American. Grove Middle School data for free and reduced lunch is combined with the Grove High School's data, therefore Grove Middle School is no longer considered Title I. However, even with the combined numbers, the sixth-12th grade data based on district reports shows the school's free and

reduced lunch percentage as 56.65%, which based on federal guidelines, the school

combined is high needs. Additionally, looking at the data for the middle school

separately, the state reports 300 of the 442 (67.8%) students are economically

disadvantaged (receiving free and reduced lunch benefits), making the middle school, if it

were considered a standalone school, eligible for Title I funding. The fact that the school

no longer receives Title I funding has impacted the teachers. Because they do not have

the Title I status, this also means they do not receive funding that once helped to support

their curriculum needs as one of the participants discussed in her second interview when

describing one of the major challenges of working in this school.

> The resources—the lack of resources that we have available to us, it's—because we're not necessarily—we're not Title I, but we're still a high needs school, so we don't have a lot of the funds that other schools have." (Julia, interview 2)

She further asserted,

> Each year it feels—it seems like our homeless population grows. And that just—that hurts me to my heart just to know there are kids out there who just don't have the basics. (Julia, interview 1)

The demographics of the school are not the only factor that makes the school

unique. I chose this school as the context of this study, because while the nation

continues to see stagnant literacy scores as discussed in the review of literature, Grove

Middle school has seen consistent growth in literacy scores each year, meeting high or

expected growth for the last 6 years based on the state's "report card" data. During the

2012-2013 school year with new standards and assessments, even though scores declined

across the state, performance composite scores at Grove Middle ranked above the state

and district averages for the students in the school and state targets in reading were met

for all subgroups in the school.

Participants

In determining participants for this study, I chose to focus on successful teachers.

In Haberman's (1995a) work with successful teachers, he categorizes them as "star"

teachers. Haberman asserts "stars are those teachers who are identified by principals,

supervisors, other teachers, parents, and themselves as outstanding" (p. 778). In seeking

participants for this study, I conferred with the principal of the school, asking her for

permission to observe and interview three successful teachers. Choosing three teachers

gave me the opportunity to spend extended time with each of them throughout their units

of study in order to gain an in depth perspective of their literacy instruction and the

context of their classroom. These three teachers were chosen based on purposeful

sampling, due to their teaching in a high poverty school and deemed successful by their

principals. These teachers showed evidence of being teacher leaders within their school,

had been nominated by their peers and students for outstanding teaching awards, and had

reputations for positive relationships with their students. In addition, by their accounts,

these teachers showcased student growth and achievement on End of Grade exams. I was

not able to view test scores or value added data due to confidentiality constraints.

Examining successful teachers in this study allowed me to see (a) the factors that shaped

successful teachers' literacy instruction; (b) how successful teachers adapt their beliefs

and practices. For the purpose of this study, pseudonyms have been used throughout the study to represent the teachers.

Julia

Julia, an African American female, was a sixth-grade English Language Arts teacher who had been teaching at Grove Middle School for five years. At the time of the study, Julia daily taught three 90-minute classes of English Language Arts. When asked what brought Julia to the school, she shared how she had completed her student teaching here: after graduation, she was hired for a year as a part-time tutor, when a full time teaching position came up, she was offered the position. "And I've been here ever since" she concluded. While Julia wanted to teach at the school, Language Arts was not her first choice,

> I did not want to teach Language Arts before I became a teacher. I wanted to teach Social Studies. I loved history and that—I just figured I can teach history and make other kids love history, but there was a higher demand for Language Arts and my university required us to focus on two concentrations, and most teachers who taught—who teach Social Studies stay in that position for a long time. So I ended up teaching language arts and fell in love with it.

This love for language arts was evident in Julia's interview and observations. During the month of October, when I began my observations of Julia, she was the school's "Teacher of the Month." Her picture was in the hallway as soon as you entered the building of the school and the school's website showed this accomplishment as well. Each month, students voted for the teacher of the month for the school. By the conclusion of my study, Julia had won "Teacher of the Year" for her school and was going on to compete at the district level.

In the school, Julia was a teacher leader, evidenced by the leadership roles she had been given, including grade level team leader, student government association faculty leader, serving on the School Improvement Team and CHAMPS (classroom management) leader. Additionally the previous two years Julia had served as a district teacher leader in helping implement the Common Core State Standards in her school. In these roles she was a leader for both students and a resource for fellow teachers. In our first interview, Julia shared that these leadership roles helped her to "work towards the betterment of the school for the kids so that when they are here they are learning, and that's where the focus is." Throughout the study, Julia showed the importance of keeping the focus on student learning in her classroom.

Pamela

Pamela, an African American female, was a sixth-grade Social Studies teacher who had been at the school six years. At the time of the study, Pamela daily taught four 70-minute classes of social studies. Pamela had previously been a teacher assistant at an elementary school for 11 years. Six years ago, nominated by her peers, Pamela was the school's "Rookie Teacher of the Year." While Pamela was a social studies teacher, she believed strongly in implementing literacy practices in her classroom every day. She realized that in order for students to be successful in her course and on required assessments, students would need to know how to effectively read and write.

When asked what brought her to the school, Pamela discussed how she had applied to several schools in the district and while she knew the school was in a challenging neighborhood, it didn't impact her decision to come to Grove Middle School.

"I heard people say it was a bad school in a bad neighborhood-but it didn't matter to me what kind of children I taught," she shared. Throughout Pamela's interview and observations she celebrated the diversity of the students she served. "I like working with all kinds of children, all different races of children. I don't care about their ability levels—they are teachable to me," she asserted during her first interview. As will be later discussed, this was confirmed by the actions and experiences provided to students in Pamela's classroom.

Pamela was more than a teacher at Grove Middle School. She served on the academic intervention team for students; she was the social studies department chair and had previously been the grade level chair until she relinquished her duties due to having a lot of other responsibilities. Pamela also directed the gospel choir at the school. She saw this as an opportunity to work with and mentor students outside of the classroom. Pamela's passion for building student relationships was evident in the context of her classroom as well.

Jessica

Jessica, a European American female, was an eighth-grade English Language Arts teacher. Each day Jessica taught three 90-minute classes of English Language Arts and had been teaching at the school for five years. Previously, she taught for a little less than a year at a school with similar demographics. Jessica had also been a substitute teacher at Grove Middle School for over a year before going to teach at the other school. Of her year away, she says, "I taught elsewhere for a year or part of a year, and in that time the only place that I wanted to come back to was here." After being a substitute and teaching

at another school for a year, a position opened at Grove Middle School and she was hired as a full time teacher. Jessica discussed walking into the school for the very first time, "It just felt like home. . . . I just felt like it was a good fit."

Jessica also felt at home as a leader in the school. She was the eighth-grade team leader, facilitating grade level meetings, relaying information from the administrative team to her grade level and making decisions about scheduling when necessary. Like Julia, Jessica served on the School Improvement Team working to create the school improvement plan. In additions, Jessica served as the language arts lead teacher. In this leadership role, Jessica created curriculum maps for the units provided by the district and shared these maps with her teammates. Her knowledge of the curriculum was clear in her instructional decisions in the classroom.

Data Collection Techniques and Sources

Yin (2009) describes the strength of the case study method as having the ability to deal with a variety of evidence such as documents, interviews, observations and artifacts. In order to build on these strengths of the case study approach and provide a rich, in-depth study, I will include these different modes of data collection in the study design.

In this section, I describe my data collection sources and techniques for collecting data, including observations, field notes, and audio recorded formal interviews, transcripts of interviews, handwritten informal interviews and artifacts. Table 1 details the data collection procedures. Appendix A is an excerpt from my field notes with a description of what is observed on one side and observation comments on the other

(Dyson & Genishi, 2005). All data sources that were not electronic were kept in a

research binder.

Table 1

Data Collection

	When and How?	**Format**
Audio recorded formal Interviews	Interviews were conducted before the first observation of the unit and at the end of the unit	During interviews, I audio recorded the conversation using the Evernote Application recording feature and took hand-written notes in case there were any technical difficulties.
Observations	Observations occurred daily throughout a unit of study during one class period.	During observations I typed field notes into the observation protocol
Informal conversations	When questions arose from me or the participant wanted to share, reflect or expand on the unit.	I typed notes from these conversations/interviews in my field notes document or wrote them in my researcher memos.
Field notes	During observations, I typed field notes daily throughout the unit of study	Field notes were typed into the observation protocol.
Documents & Artifacts	Throughout the study I collected data artifacts from the state online database. I also collected artifacts teachers voluntarily shared with me regarding their lessons.	The format of these documents were websites that housed state assessment data, assignments written on the board, newsletters, blog assignments, etc.

Formal and Informal Interviews

In determining the tools for interview data collection, it was important to develop a tool that would allow teachers to expand on their beliefs and experiences teaching in a high poverty school. The interview questions were based on literature about teacher challenges, beliefs, and instruction. My academic peers and advisors reviewed these questions, some of which were also used in my pilot study (Howard & Miller, 2013). These questions were designed to amplify the voices and experiences of teachers in high poverty schools. During the interviews, handwritten notes were taken as well as audio recordings for accuracy.

I formally interviewed each teacher two times during the study. Each teacher was interviewed at the beginning of the unit and at the end of the unit (see Appendix B for interview questions). Each interview was audio recorded and later transcribed and coded. In the first interview participants were asked open-ended questions about how they came to work in the school, their leadership roles, their beliefs about teaching and to describe the unit they were going to be teaching. The second interview focused on questions revolving around the teachers' reflection of the unit, their beliefs and the context of the school. Throughout the study, informal interviews were conducted based on questions raised in the daily lessons or input teachers wanted to contribute. These informal interviews included clarifying questions and hand-written and typed notes documented these interviews. There were a total of 6 informal interviews, representing two with each participant.

Observations

In order to observe particular behaviors and environmental factors, Yin (2009) suggests case study research should take place in the setting of the "case" (p. 109). In this instance the case's setting was the classroom. An observation protocol (See Appendix C) was developed based on the literature surrounding effective instruction and teacher beliefs. The protocol also was based on the interview questions, in that, I wanted to see how teacher responses to the interview questions were enacted in the classroom through observations. The observation protocol allowed me to assess and reflect on the strategies and activities teachers used in literacy instruction. I informed teachers that I would be conducting observations in order to determine how their beliefs they discussed in their interview were enacted in their literacy instruction. During the observation, I sat in the back of the classroom, where I could easily see and hear the teacher. I took notes during each observation using the observation protocol. After each observation, I personally reflected on my visits and wrote researcher memos (Creswell, 2007). At the end of each observation cycle, during the final interview, I reviewed the observation data with teachers as a form of member checking and allowed them to provide any feedback. On two occasions with Pamela and Jessica, at the conclusion of a lesson, the teachers asked me to share a summary of my observations with them and I did during our informal conversation. Observations afforded me the opportunity to see firsthand how teachers navigated the challenges they faced and found a balance between their beliefs about literacy instruction and the expectations of their school/district.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest persistent observation during a study. Following this recommendation, each participant's class was observed every day during the course of a unit of study, which lasted from three to four weeks per teacher. I conducted fourteen observations of Julia's class, sixteen observations of Pamela's class and seventeen observations of Jessica's class. I chose to observe during a unit of study in order to allow me to see, without gaps in observations, the sequence of teacher's instructional decisions and how teachers executed a unit. For each teacher, observations took place during the same class period. I observed Julia's second core class, Pamela's third core class and Jessica's third core class.

Field Notes

As a method of data collection, during each observation, I took detailed notes focusing on the teacher, particularly her instruction, the context of the room such as instructional resources she provided or information on the boards, how she spoke to students and the literacy activities she provided for students. Field notes were typed on my computer in a word document that housed the observation protocol. During each observation, I first noted the description of the room and curriculum notes including the daily agenda and essential questions. After each observation was complete, I read through the field notes and wrote comments, thoughts and reactions to what I had observed. See Appendix A for excerpts from my field notes.

Documents and Artifacts

Throughout the study, I collected artifacts the teachers volunteered to share such as teacher assignments and surveys. I also reviewed reading test data from the district

and state data sites about the school in order to understand the academic context. While I did not focus on student reading *achievement* in terms of test scores, I think this data was beneficial in understanding the context of the school.

<div align="center">**Data Analysis**</div>

Maxwell (2005) suggests analyzing data as soon as it has been collected and writing memos about the data. After each interview was conducted, I wrote memos regarding my initial thoughts and responses to the data. After each observation, I reviewed the raw data and wrote initial thoughts and responses to the observation data as well. The school report card for the previous four years as well as reading scores from the newest state assessment the previous year were analyzed and included in memo data in order to provide an extensive understanding of the academic literacy achievement of the school. This data was used to understand the literacy success in the school during the years these teachers were employed there. After each interview was transcribed, and initial coding was complete, I participated in peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and analyzed the data using the constant comparative method.

Constant Comparative Method

In an effort to recognize emerging themes and arising issues, data from the first interviews and first week of observations for all three participants were analyzed. I began using open coding by reading and rereading interview and observation data to develop initial categories. Constant comparisons between interview and observations as well as participants were made to analyze data and develop themes. I created coding charts to organize the coding and analysis process. The charts organized the data by

examining each of the developing codes in interviews, observations, and informal conversations for each participant. An excerpt of this chart for one participant can be found in Appendix D.

The initial interview and observation data were analyzed in depth, producing 14 initial codes including, beliefs about teaching, mandates, school climate, expectations, leadership, teacher identity, engaging activities, collaborative activities, community building, relationships, instructional decisions, reflection, student choice, and assessment. These codes were put into the coding chart with supporting evidence from the data collection methods. After discussing these codes, with my peer debriefer, Dr. Miller, I reexamined the originally coded data in order to develop and revise interpretations using constant comparison analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990. In this process, I made comparisons of initial data to reduce, display, and draw conclusions about potential emerging themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). At this point I used the color-coding features of Microsoft Word to organize the data. Following this analysis and discussion with my advisor, the initial 14 codes were collapsed into 8 themes including differentiation, resistance, balance, agency, beliefs, community building, accountability, and tasks. Comparisons were made within each single case as well as across cases for a cross case synthesis (Yin, 2009). The analysis of interview data focused on identifying common statements until the major themes emerged and were placed in developing descriptive categories. From here, after all interviews were reviewed, coded, and analyzed, and after discussion with my peer debriefer, I analyzed the remainder of the observations using the constant comparative method. Focusing on

data that continued to surface and showed up frequently across the case studies and would answer the research questions and represent the voices and experiences of the participants developed final themes. The three final themes that emerged were (a) Teacher beliefs, (b) Teacher agency, and (c) Support systems.

As data was coded into categories and themes, this provided an opportunity to analyze the participant responses and to better understand the participants' responses and actions individually as well as collectively. The observations were compared to each other as well as to the data from the interviews in order to determine the correlation between participants' interview responses and what was observed in the classroom. The final report is organized by each case and commonalities and differences have been synthesized through cross case synthesis (Yin, 2009).

Validity and Credibility

In considering validity and credibility issues in my study, I implemented the steps described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for ensuring neutrality by establishing that the findings from my study were determined by the participants and not my own biases or interests. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested addressing these concerns by using a confirmability audit that focused on how raw data was treated and what techniques were used for data production and synthesizing. These processes are critical so that the biases or preconceptions of the researcher do not impact the collection or analysis of data. Therefore, in addition to these steps proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a validity measure, in my study, I clearly discuss my past experiences and biases as a former teacher and instructional coach in high need schools that may have shaped my research

approach (Creswell, 2007). Because I have had such extensive experiences in high need

schools, it was imperative that I revealed these experiences in addition to the credibility

measures discussed below.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest three activities for producing credible findings

in a study. These three activities include prolonged engagement, persistent observation,

and triangulation. They also suggest an activity that will provide an external check of the

inquiry process (peer debriefing) as well as an activity that tests findings from the source

(member checking). I employed these activities in order to increase credibility in my

study. An explanation of each along with a table can be found below.

Prolonged Engagement

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest prolonged engagement in a research

environment in order to "detect and take account of distortions that might creep into the

data" (p. 302) such as participants trying to please the researcher. As researchers spend

prolonged time in the research environment, they will be able to perceive these

distortions and take them into account. Prolonged engagement is also suggested as a

means of building trust with participants. In order for participants to be honest, they have

to trust that information they share with the researcher will not be used against them.

In the context of my study, I visited with participants every day during a unit of

study for an entire class period during each visit. Through the interview process I worked

to maintain trust with participants and ensured that they understood my role as a

researcher and not an evaluator. Because I previously worked in the school with the

participants and there was a mutual respect for each other as educators, trust was not an

issue. Over the course of the unit, in sharing my interpretations, questions and interview data, I feel I was able to maintain trust with participants in a way that increased the credibility of the study.

Persistent Observation

In regard to the process of observation during data collection, Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss the importance of ensuring that sufficient information has been collected and that premature conclusions are not drawn. The purpose of this careful, persistent observation is to be able to understand and distinguish between the irrelevant data and the important data. More specifically, the purpose is to identify relevant characteristics in the environment and "focus on them in detail" (p. 304). Throughout the study, this strategy helped to recognize what those relevant characteristics were, and not become sidetracked by distractors that were not relevant to the study. The observation protocol was a resource in ensuring this.

In the context of my study, in order to ensure that relevant, sufficient information was collected persistent observations were conducted using an observation protocol that allowed me to focus on the topic at hand while ensuring that I focused on what was truly meaningful. In addition, following each interview, my researcher memos helped me to ensure that I was monitoring and premature conclusions and that a focus was on the components of the protocol itself. Being in the classroom every day for the entire class period for a unit of study, opposed to sporadically throughout the semester, helped me to gain a clear sequenced, consistent picture of the context and the beliefs enacted within the

context. Throughout this persistent observation process I collected 202 pages of observation data using the observation protocol.

Triangulation

Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss the importance of using multiple sources of data in their discussion of triangulation as a method of increasing credibility. They discuss the idea that triangulation provides the researcher with the opportunity to look at the same topic from different perspectives through different sources.

One of Yin's (2009) principles of data collection is also to use multiple sources of evidence, including observations and interview data. Yin (2009) suggests "the case study inquiry relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result" (p. 18) Yin considers this a major strength of data analysis. He further asserts that these sources of data should not be analyzed only in isolation, but should be used collaboratively and for the purpose of corroboration of facts and phenomena. Yin (2009) suggests that when you have truly triangulated data, you have multiple sources to support events, facts, and findings.

In the context of my study I used interviews, observations and artifacts as tools of triangulation. For example, I observed the practices teachers discussed in their interviews before the unit and at the end of the unit and correlated and triangulated information gathered from observations with this data in order to view the topic from multiple perspectives.

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing is also beneficial in the effort to see the research from different perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The experienced peer should serve as the devil's advocate, questioning the steps in the design, the hypothesis, and ensuring the researcher is using good judgment in the research process. This helps the researcher to evaluate next steps as well as their perceptions and feelings regarding the research task.

In the context of my study, through weekly communication, my advisor, Dr. Miller served as the "devil's advocate" questioning the steps of my design, data collection tools, methods, and analysis and holding me accountable for using good judgment in the research process. We met 16 times face-to-face during data collection, analysis and writing of the study and consistently communicated through Google documents and email.

Member Checking

Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that member checking is the most crucial means of establishing credibility as it gives participants an opportunity to react to the representations of them in the study and also allows them to summarize and confirm information. In my study, member checking was used in an effort to ensure validity and credibility. Member checking took place in two phases. In the first phase, after interview data had been transcribed and observation data had been collected, participants were given the opportunity to review the transcripts in order to check for factual errors, add information or summarize information as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). In the next phase, once the study was completed, participants had the opportunity to review the

completed data to ensure analytic interpretations were accurate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

At this stage, participants were again given the opportunity to check for factual errors.

Researcher Role

These validity and reliability measures are especially important because of my

role as a researcher. Four years prior to conducting this study, I was a teacher in this

particular school. I worked on the same grade level with Pamela and Jessica at the time I

was at the school. Julia at the time, taught in another grade level. Once I left the school,

I conducted a research study in this school focusing on Pay for Performance incentives.

None of the participants in this study were participants in the study I previously

conducted in this school.

Coming into the study, while I had previously worked with the teachers, I had

never observed any of the teachers teaching. I did know from being in the school

previously and from their accolades (Rookie Teacher of the Year, district teacher leaders)

and district responsibilities that they were respected teachers. If my previous relationship

impacted the study at all, I think the participants felt more comfortable to be themselves

with me in their classrooms and we already had a relationship of trust from our previous

work together.

In considering the importance of disclosing my biases as a researcher, It is

important to note that I a see myself as a strong advocate for students, particularly

students that are at a disadvantage because of race or socioeconomic status. I believe this

need to advocate for these students come partially from my experiences as a minority and

partially from my experiences working in high poverty schools. This desire to help

traditionally disadvantaged students was one of the driving forces for me wanting to conduct this study. I have strong views about the importance of closing the achievement gap and I believe it is an injustice to students that as a system we continue to fail them. I believe all students deserve the best education our country has to offer. Because of these views, I believe it was easy for me to be an impartial researcher being that my focus is on effective teaching and instruction in order to better serve students. Because I am an advocate for students, I have no problem noting when what I would consider ineffective instruction or practices are in place. My goal in this study was to give voice to the teachers that are influencing education in positive ways through successful instruction. I believe I was able to effectively, impartially do this. However, as previously mentioned, the validity and reliability measures helped to ensure this.

The case study approach provided a lens into the lived experiences of teachers. As teacher voices are often silenced in the conversations surrounding high stakes testing and numbers speak out, this approach served to amplify the voices of teachers as it helped me to examine their beliefs and practices. Through interviews and observations I was able to see how teachers enacted their beliefs and how they pushed back against a curriculum they could not fully buy into. The prolonged observations helped me to consistently see these beliefs in action as teachers worked to meet the needs of their students.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

As teachers in high poverty schools work to increase literacy achievement, they are faced with local and state requirements and expectations. In this particular study, these requirements came in the form of mandated standards and assessments. Like teachers in most schools around the country, the teachers in this study were required to teach the Common Core State Standards to their students. Curriculum guides and pacing guides were provided for them, with the expectation that the standards in the pacing guide would be taught at a particular time in order for students to be prepared for district wide assessments. In addition, in this school, teachers were required to give common assessments to students every three weeks and to give district created benchmarks. Then, teachers were required to attend weekly content area meetings where they discussed the data from their assessments and ways to increase student scores.

In examining these expectations, three of the four requirements allowed a level of teacher input in terms of how teachers chose to approach them. Teachers had no input on the district mandated benchmark assessments. However, while they were required to teach the standards, use pacing guides and give common assessments, participants in this study found a way to implement their beliefs about student learning into these requirements and create a space for authoring their actions. Teachers followed the curriculum guides in assuring they were on pace with standards, but they did not follow

the curriculum guides as prescribed, neither did they always follow expectations for assessment practices. These examples of "push back" will be discussed in the following cases. This finding is important because it shows that within this framework of non-negotiables, successful teachers managed to find a balance between mandates and their beliefs about good teaching. In order to find success, and do what was best for their students in the classroom, these teachers had to find a way to meet the expectations while also meeting the diverse needs of their students. In considering how teachers were able to meet these expectations, it was important to examine how teachers navigated these requirements and how their beliefs and practices were related to their ability to do so.

In order to examine these factors, interview and classroom observation data were used and the following themes emerged across all three teachers related to those beliefs and practices showcased in their classrooms: (a) teacher beliefs enacted—these beliefs focused on high expectations for students, creating social learning structures and engaging students in learning by meeting their needs, (b) agency through resistance—teachers were able to push back against some of the norms and values of their school system in order to meet the academic needs of their students. This was enacted in the types of tasks teachers provided and their adjustments to curriculum guides, and (c) support systems—in each case, participants discussed the support systems they found within the context of the school. The following case studies reveal each of the themes exhibited in each teacher.

Case Study—Julia

The door of Julia's classroom showed how she valued the knowledge her students brought with them. It read, "When you enter the room you are 'writers, readers, respected, special, amazing thinkers, important.'" Throughout my observations I came to realize these were more than just words on the door. They were representative of Julia's beliefs and the expectations she had for her diverse group of students. Julia's class included 28 students, four boys, two were African American, one was European American and one was Hispanic. The class had 24 girls. Twelve of the girls were African American, nine of the girls were European American, and there were two Asian females and one Hispanic female. The students sat in desks arranged in groups of four around the classroom.

Upon entering Julia's classroom, it was immediately clear that she had created a student-centered, literacy rich environment. The bulletin boards held student work where students had created foldables, pictures, and alternate endings for the short story, "All Summer in a Day." Throughout the study, Julia's boards would change to represent the most current student work. She showed she valued their work by displaying it around the room. The day after students finished vocabulary posters she hung them in the front of the room. Once "The Bracelet" projects were complete she showcased those as well. Posters and bulletin boards around the room also showcased what "good readers do" and "important things to remember" about theme and characters.

The whiteboard on the wall outside of Julia's classroom always held a message for students. Sometimes this message was as simple as "Happy Monday" or "Smile."

Sometimes it was more specific and indicative of her expectations such as "Be ready to learn and work hard. Show what you know." These contextual features of Julia's classroom showcased many of Julia's beliefs when it came to student learning.

Beliefs That Drive Instruction

> What teachers believe regarding how children learn literacy constitutes the blueprint for literacy instruction in their classroom. (Thomas & Barksdale-Ladd, 1995)

Beliefs about High Expectations

Throughout interviews and observations with Julia, it quickly became clear that she held high expectations for her students. Teaching in a high poverty school did not turn her thoughts to deficit thinking, but instead made her think more clearly about how to challenge her students and make sure their needs were met. In my final interview with Julia, when I asked her about why she made the instructional decisions she made for her students, she discussed her ideas about high expectations for student learning.

> I believe that every student can learn any topic. I just believe it's the way you present the information. So I chose—I did what I did based on the fact that I know every kid can do it, it's just how you present it. (Interview 2)

This belief was evidenced in the different ways Julia presented information. She used PowerPoint presentations, video clips, whole group instruction, and allowed students to work in small groups. Julia integrated technology in her lessons and offered students access to texts in multiple ways, including read alouds, independent reading and students sharing texts with each other. Julia believed in the ability of her students, neglecting the

deficit thinking often cited in high poverty schools (Delpit, 2006a). She further discussed

these beliefs about her students' ability and her expectations in the second interview.

> I think you have to believe in the kids and know that regardless of their
> circumstances, situations, that they're still children and that they want to learn.
> My kids know that I believe that they can learn and that I teach as much as I can
> and give them as much as I can without blowing their minds in one given day.
> (Interview 2)

These beliefs weren't only shared in interviews, but they were enacted in Julia's

classroom discussions with students and her actions during observations. On the first day

of working on "The Bracelet" assignment, Julia told a student who complained about the

amount of work, "You don't have anything else to do in life except be a kid and a student,

so work hard to do that well." To another student claiming to be finished as she walked

around Julia said, "You need to add more to your section on the Venn-Diagram, that's

not all of the information. Sit down and get to work." To another group Julia observed,

she asked, "if you were reading this as me, would you say this covers everything you

need to cover? No? Then keep working." Julia's constant monitoring of student work

meant that when students weren't meeting the expectations, she was able to give them

immediate feedback. It was also important to Julia that she could monitor student

learning through formative assessments. On some occasions Julia required that each

student answer a question about the day's lesson or vocabulary before they were

dismissed for the day.

In addition to Julia's monitoring of schoolwork as part of student expectations,

Julia also required that students keep data notebooks where they could take ownership

and track their own learning. For each assessment, they tracked their score for each

standard assessed and recorded it as red, yellow, or green. On one occasion, Julia

returned a test to the class, letting them know she had higher expectations. "Today you

will get your test back, I was expecting a little better, but we will talk about it later," she

asserted. Julia let her students know that she expected students to do well, and when and

if they didn't, they should evaluate themselves and she would evaluate her practices as

well.

> If you begin to see a lot of red on your graph, I will step back and look at my
> teaching, and you should step back and make sure that you are doing your part as
> well. Yellow means we need to work together in tutoring. Green means you're
> good to go. Thumbs up if you understand this. This is going to help you to take
> ownership of your learning. When we do conferences and review, I will use these
> data folders to see where you are. (Observation)

Julia's "matter of fact" attitude when it came to school assignments showed a no-

nonsense approach to learning. However, she also made it clear that she would support

the students when they needed it. After an assessment, she offered the following

feedback to students,

> A lot of you struggled with direct and indirect characterization on your test and
> that's okay. We are going to keep working on it. We will work on it in
> homework and warm ups, so you will get it.

This feedback showed that while Julia did expect the students to work their hardest, as a

teacher, it was her job to support them along the way. Julia told me this was a process to

get all students to understand she was there for support. Another tool for supporting high

expectations was the use of rubrics for assignments. Julia provided rubrics for students

when she gave them assignments and held them to the high standards. "When it comes to your book project, I am not going to give you any leeway, your rubric has been given to you, read it very carefully." In Julia's rubric she made clear the expectations for book projects and as students presented them, she used the rubrics to evaluate their presentations. In addition to her high expectations, she challenged students to have high expectations for themselves as well. After students received their report cards, Julia discussed the importance of making sure their grades represented their ability.

> So you have your grades now, if you're not happy with it, then think about how you can make that different next quarter. For some of you, I put that your grade doesn't reflect your ability. Some of you are not giving your best ability. Even if you got a B, that doesn't mean you are giving your best ability, so think about that. I always want you striving to be better. Today is a beginning of a new quarter so today everyone has a 100% so you should try to keep that 100, but you're going to have to work hard for it.

In order to build this community of high academic expectations, Julia also knew she had to create an environment of high behavioral expectations. Classroom management and high expectations were evident throughout the study and students embraced and owned these expectations.

Students had created posters outside of Julia's door about behavior expectations. The posters displayed expectations for assemblies, the cafeteria, lockers and restrooms. Julia discussed her beliefs about classroom management and positive student behaviors as important to the learning environment of her classroom. This belief was evident throughout the study, particularly how classroom and time management contributed to student learning and expectations.

> I feel like classroom management is key to having a successful learning environment for your kids because they need to be able to feel like they're in a structured environment whether they know they need that or not, so that has really helped me as far as structuring my environment for learning. (Interview 1)

Structure was a major part of Julia's daily classroom routine. Students came in daily and a "warm up" assignment was posted on the board. There were clear expectations for student behavior including incentives and consequences. Time management was very important to her as well. She used digital timers to keep the pace going and constantly reminded students how much time they had to complete tasks. While structure was important, Julia also recognized her students' need to be active. She would often give them "brain breaks" to get their wiggles out or just to chat for 60 seconds with a friend before resuming their work.

Julia's expectations were evident in her interview and enacted in her classroom practices. She made it clear to students that they were at school to work hard and to learn. She created an environment that supported these beliefs through constant monitoring, constant conversations about reinforcement and holding herself to the same high standards she expected from her students. Julia's expectations reflected one of her goals she discussed with me in our first interview, "I want kids to be able to walk out of my door to apply what they learn, not just take a test and forget it the next school year." The methods of learning Julia provided were sure to help her achieve this goal. Julia also wanted students to be able to transfer knowledge. In order to make these high expectations meaningful for students, Julia knew she had to focus on getting to know her

students and allow them opportunities to get to know each other. Therefore, she enacted

her beliefs about building social learning environments for her students.

Beliefs about Building Social Learning Environments and Relationships

In my first interview with Julia, she made it clear that her classroom belonged to

both her and her students. She was building a community of learners.

> I'm not a teacher that feels like I'm the teacher, I'm in charge, I know everything,
> this is my room. I think, this is our classroom and we're learning together.
> (Interview 1)

This ideal was present each day in Julia's classroom. She worked hard to get to

know her students and provide an environment where the students felt ownership in their

learning and in classroom decisions. In interviews Julia discussed how in building this

learning community, she had to get to know her students both academically and

personally in order to meet their needs. In doing this, she referenced her use of interest

surveys.

> I do interest surveys, and a part of the interest surveys—it's like a mini-reading
> and writing survey just based on do they like it, if they do, what types of things do
> they like to do within the two. I also do a lot of getting to know you activities in
> order to help me make connections with my students and their families so I can
> pull those into the various reading and writing activities that we do. (Interview 1)

Interest surveys were just one factor in Julia's quest to build relationships and

a community within her classroom. An important aspect to her in building this

community was that her students understood that she cared about their success. This was

not only evident through the observation process, but also through Julia's interviews.

I let them know that I care. I think that's the biggest thing, you have to let the kids know, when you can tell them and they know that you care about them even if they can't do something they'll try. (Interview 2)

I have conversations with my kids outside the classroom about their personal lives. I show interest, and I ask questions so that they know that I really do care. And I think that makes the most—that impacts what I can do in the classroom the most because the kids know that you care about them, you truly care about them, will work for you. I believe that to be true just because some kids that most teachers in the school can't stand are some of my favorites, and they give me results that they don't give other teachers. (Interview 1)

Julia showcased that she cared about her students and their success by consistently checking in on them as they worked. In her consistent monitoring, she walked around checking student work and asking questions such as, "do you understand? Are you confused? Does anyone need more time? Julia also made it a routine to ask for student input on assignments and behavior incentives. She also asked for student feedback with an end of quarter evaluation. At the end of the quarter, Julia gave each student a survey to complete that was reflective of their work and effort, but also a reflection of what they had enjoyed about the class and what they didn't enjoy. She asked questions such as, "My goals for the next quarter are . . ." and "What is one academic thing that you liked this quarter? Explain." In an informal conversation, Julia told me this evaluation was important for her as well as her students.

I want to see how I'm doing with them and I also want them to think about where they can improve. Are they doing their best? What do they plan to do to work on their goals for the next quarter?"

This mindset and her actions helped Julia to build a community in her classroom. She shared that this community building began from day one with her. She let the

students know that they needed to be focused and they would work on learning together. Not only did Julia work hard to build relationships with her students, she also worked hard to help students build relationships with each other, and to build a classroom community. Julia's classroom management plan was evidence of this. Each week the students worked to earn behavior points, and as a class, they would choose a weekly incentive.

> We need to talk about what you want to do for your incentive this week, let's hear your ideas, it's up to you.

As students shared their ideas, Julia let them know that while their incentive was their choice, they had to value class time. Some of the choices the community discussed and agreed on throughout the weeks including being able to sit where they would like to sit in class, extra credit points on an assignment of their choice and assignment coupons. Julia showed that she valued the voices of her students and their contributions to community decisions.

In building relationships and community, Julia also encouraged students to support and celebrate each other. In an observation, Julia asked a student a question and when the student was reluctant to answer she asked the class to encourage the students. "Jane, you can do it, let's everybody give Jane a hand clap and tell her she can do it." The class responded by encouraging Jane and she did indeed answer the question correctly. On several occasions as students were absent, Julia would ask for a volunteer to take notes for the absent student. Each time she asked for a volunteer, almost every hand in the classroom shot up. In addition, Julia celebrated student relationships. During

one observation, she had given the students an opportunity to work in groups and choose their partners. An unlikely pair formed and as they were working, Julia approached the girls, "I can't believe ya'll are working together. Usually ya'll are always arguing. I'm glad you're working together on this," she gushed. The community Julia built helped students learn to work together effectively and feel they were a part of the decision making process when it came to building the community of her classroom. On one occasion, I walked into the classroom and the door had been redecorated with the school mascot. "We soar with Pride," the door read and around this message, each student's name was listed on wings. Julia's actions showed that community was important and she wanted each student to feel valued.

Julia implemented a great deal of group work in her classroom, which showcased her beliefs about social learning. In an informal interview, she discussed with me the importance of giving students choices on who to work with and how to work toward their strengths together as a team by creating plans of action and assigning teammates roles and responsibilities in order to work and learn from each other. During one observation, Julia allowed the students to work in partners on an assessment. At the end of reading "The Bracelet," students were to choose a partner and create a plot diagram tracing and describing all settings and what happened there. In partners, the students were instructed to determine the theme, and point and view using textual evidence. They were also instructed to use their notes to create a Venn diagram in partners that compared and contrasted the story to the background information they had researched about the war against Japan. Julia encouraged the partners to focus on how they wanted the assignment

to come together. "You decide how you want this to work. You get to decide what your

poster looks like and how you want to show this information" she encouraged. Julia

monitored student behavior in groups, making sure the student interactions were

meaningful. At one group she stopped, "You two need to talk to each other like you have

respect for each other, that's very important," she told them. Julia enacted her beliefs

about social learning and made these beliefs explicit for students. In an informal

conversation, Julia discussed how she felt working with partners would give students the

opportunity to view the stories from different perspectives-the perspectives of their peers.

As students asked for Julia's input, she reminded them, "The best part of working in

partners is that you get to help each other, so why don't ya'll discuss that together?"

These perspectives could also be seen on the homework blogs Julia created for students

to post and read each other's responses to the text they read in class.

Julia used social learning opportunities to enforce many of her curriculum goals.

For example, Julia believed vocabulary instruction was important, but she also believed

students could learn together to increase their knowledge of important vocabulary.

In the first interview, Julia discussed why she believed it was important to focus on

vocabulary.

> Kids really struggle with just that application of vocabulary, so I'm taking on the
> belief that if we build their vocabulary and give them a bigger bank then they can
> do a little more with it. (Interview 1)

This belief was enacted as Julia had weekly vocabulary terms she assigned the

students, relevant to what they were studying in class. On one occasion she had the

students work in groups to create a vocabulary poster based on a word from their text. Each group was assigned a different word. Students were instructed to use the dictionary and thesaurus as a group in order to include the word, definition, part of speech, synonym, original sentence, and syllables on their poster. These opportunities for vocabulary integration supported Julia's belief in building the "bank" of knowledge for her students and allowing them to work together. Julia showed students she valued active participation in groups by awarding the class points towards their weekly incentive for working productively in their groups.

On days where students were working together, you could find them all over the room where they had found comfortable places to gather. Sometimes they would work in groups in the hallways, on the counters, on the floor, at the back table or gathered together at their desks. It was clear that the students saw this as their space where they could gather together and learn from each other.

Beliefs about Engaging Students

Autonomy. While often teachers of adolescents want to control classroom activities and students (Anderman & Mueller, 2010), Julia worked diligently to create an autonomous environment for her students. This belief was evident in my first interview with Julia and enacted throughout her lessons.

> I give kids more choice as to how they want to show me master of skills or whatever I'm teaching. . . . I think I've learned the most as far as how to present the information to students and how to allow them to have the freedom to show me what they know. (Interview 1)

This approach was intertwined with Julia's desire to build a community of learners and sharers of knowledge. To start, Julia allowed students to read a fiction book of their choice and create a "book in a bag" where students decorated a bag based on their chosen book. On the inside of the bag, students chose objects that represented the major parts of the book. On "sharing day" students presented a book talk, showing ownership of their work and their book while their classmates kept a running list of the titles they heard that they might consider for future reading. At the conclusion of each book talk, Julia asked the students question about the text. "Who do you think would like to read your book? What type of person? What's your favorite part? Why?" The students were also given the opportunity to ask their peers questions about the text as well. This activity allowed students the opportunity to choose a text that interested them, to share that text with their peers and to hear from their peers about texts they had read, making a "future reading list." This activity gave students an opportunity to showcase their choices and to share why they had been drawn to particular texts.

In the partner and group projects students were also given freedom in choosing classmates to work with and how they would address a task. Julia showed confidence in their independences and decision-making processes. "Remember you're showing me if we're able to handle this or not. If you can't handle this, we won't do it," she told the students during a group assignment where students were able to choose partners and where they would work. Julia wanted students to learn to make decisions on their own and she worked to teach them and give them opportunities to do so.

Building on students' interests and needs. Research on successful teachers and practices state that teachers build on students' needs and interests (Sleeter & Stillman, 2007). Julia discussed this approach in her interviews and showcased it throughout her lessons. In regard to student interests, she shared,

> I try to incorporate as much of the arts as I can without losing them in the actual content. Just with the unit that you observed they did more of the actual art, drawing, and display of colorful things but in the past and in the future we'll do, you know, where they create poems and songs and dances. (Interview 2)

Julia knew these activities would engage her students, as they were part of the arts magnet program. This was further showcased in Julia's classroom as the informational texts she shared with students focused on World War II, but it included the arts, music, poetry and writings from the time period as well. "I want them to see that nonfiction, informational text can be interesting," she shared with me in an informal interview as I perused the books she had on a cart in her room from the media center.. In addition to videos, Julia also shared pictures from the Internet that represented the lives of people in internment camps. She worked diligently to provide the information to students using different mediums that would meet the interests of various students, often integrating technology and pop culture.

In addition, Julia had a strong focus on student learning styles. In her first interview, Julia described how she believed students learn best. "I think it's based on the individual student" she shared. Julia showcased this by focusing a great deal on multiple intelligences and learning styles in her classroom, allowing students the choice, based on their learning style to display their knowledge. She recognized and taught students that

they learn differently and as a class, they celebrated these differences. Around the

classroom students had created posters that represented their learning styles to celebrate

and showcase their differences.

> The students made those posters on multiple intelligences based on how they learn best. We put them up around the room so they can always see them. They can choose how to do some assignments based on their learning styles. (informal interview)

These practices promoted learning that focused on the interests of students, while at the

same time, Julia used various means of assessment to address the needs of students.

> One thing I noticed as I was grading papers this weekend and thinking about how to prepare you for this unit assessment was that ya'll need help with textual evidence. I still have several of you that are not correctly citing evidence. I have this poster and I want you to make this poster for yourself in your notebook. In *Jerry Maguire,* Tom Cruise always says "show me the money," so I created this poster that says, "show me the evidence" because I want you to show me the evidence you found, don't just give me a quote as your evidence. If you use a quote, tell me why the quote is evidence. So I am giving you sentence starters to help you. "Okay, ya'll copy this down, because I want you to practice with it. I want you to practice together as groups." (Observation)

On several occasions Julia worked with students based on their needs after a class

discussion or formative assessment. She tried to make this learning relevant, and

engaging for students by addressing it in less traditional ways. Her goal was to engage

her students and meet their needs at the same time.

Making Cultural Connections

In conjunction with Julia's beliefs about engaging students, providing

opportunities for students to connect their experiences to their learning was an intricate

part of Julia's classroom environment. Many of the instructional decisions she made were based on her desire to help students make connections. In the first interview, she discussed why she had chosen the text she had chosen for her unit as well as the activities she planned for the students in working together to understand the story. Julia described why it was important for students to read this particular text and share their experiences with their peers.

> I think the interpretation of stories is based on experiences, cultural background, so I think it's more about letting a child experience that story, talk to other people, talk with the teacher, have group discussions and things like that. (Interview 1)

This belief was enacted as Julia gave students an opportunity to share their connections, experiences and thoughts about texts through class discussion. In sharing video clips and reading texts, Julia made time for students to talk in their groups and share their knowledge with the whole class, welcoming the perspectives of all students through culturally responsive teaching.

Julia recognized that making learning relevant for students meant building their background knowledge and providing opportunities for students to connect to texts.

> I think the more the kids can see the real life application of the things that we're talking about and not just be a fictional story the more they can relate to it, the more connections they can make to it so that they can truly understand it. I would like for them to see . . . most of the time the kids come in with a myth that the only social injustice that took place in our society, was the civil rights movement is, separate but equal and slavery and they group all of those things together. So I like to just broaden their horizons so that they know that you know there was more going on, that's just what's most popular and most talked about. So also to be able to see those connections in the world today, how their world would be different if these things didn't take place, allow them to put themselves in the shoes of those people who had to go through it. And I think that will allow them

to kind of make—how—it would be some interesting writing there, discussions, critical thinking that really pushes that because it allows them to think outside the box and do a lot of what if situations and how would I react. It allows them to discover a little bit more about themselves, so although that one isn't necessarily mea—can be necessarily measured on a test, more of that real world out of the classroom type of thing with that topic. (Interview 1)

Julia certainly enacted these beliefs as she asked her students to watch video clips about the time period surrounding the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the Japanese internment camps. Julia provided background knowledge on the war and then asked students to watch the video and create a foldable that represented Pearl Harbor on one side and the internment camps on the other. As students watched the video and discussed their responses as a class, Julia shared her perspectives as well, and noted and celebrated the different perspectives of the students. She asked them to take careful notes of the responses they heard because they would use these responses on their homework assignment. The first video was the Franklin Delano Roosevelt speech about the war, next the students watched a video about the conditions of the concentration camp. After the video in response to a student Julia said,

Great question. I'm not going to answer that question about if the United States hurt the Japanese. It depends on your definition of hurt. I will let you decide for yourself about that one. (Observation)

Next, Julia showed a video about Executive Order, 9066. She asked students to share their notes and questions with each other in groups and then together as a whole class. With passion, Julia shared her perspective. She showed the class a part of the classroom that represented the amount of space each family was given. Then she showed another

video of first person accounts of the camps and people's experiences there. Again, she gave students an opportunity to share their thoughts.

> As we see here, they were discriminated against because of the way they looked, just like when we studied the Civil Rights movement. (Observation)

Julia helped students make connections to these texts by referencing texts from the previous unit. She helped them see that they could indeed make connections to internment camps, previous presidents and war. While these may seem like unlikely connections, she helped them connect their "known" to the "unknown" to gain an understanding of challenging concepts and texts. She responded to students' comments and questions about the videos, valuing their insights and voices during this shared time. For homework Julia asked students to respond to the prompt on the class blog after thinking about class discussions and videos. The prompt was as follows:

> What is your personal response to the treatment of the Japanese Americans after the attack on Pearl Harbor? Respond in at least 8-10 sentences. Be sure to check your spelling and grammar. Do not use any slang. Read and proofread it. Use textual evidence, use your notes. (Assignment Artifact)

Julia also asked students to review their peers' responses as well. These activities gave students opportunities to connect to the text, to put themselves in the place of others as Julia hoped. The following day when students read the corresponding fiction story, they took notes and created visual images as they read. Julia encouraged the students to connect to their background knowledge, connect to the characters, and to consider how they might respond under these circumstances. For the next homework assignment

students were required to write a letter from the perspective of the main character in the internment camp and post the letter on the blog. These activities were aligned with Julia's plans for engaging students in the text.

> Honestly I chose—a lot of the stories I chose were based on the student reactions I had in previous years. —the more you give students to connect to it the better, or the more they enjoy it. (Interview 2)

Throughout this unit, Julia gave her students many opportunities to make connections in an effort to engage them. At the conclusion of the unit, she felt this approach had been successful.

> All the kids seemed to really enjoy the story and the informational connections, I think that helped them to understand it better. (Interview 2)

Julia understood that in order to engage her students and help them to access the texts they were provided, she had to build their background knowledge and help them make connections.

Agency through Resistance

As previously discussed in the review of literature, individuals enacting agency resist contextual constraints and create self-authored actions (Holland et al., 1998). Julia's sense of agency is first revealed in the interview stage of this study. Many of the instructional decisions that Julia made were based on the knowledge she had of her students and her beliefs about teaching and learning. At times this differed from what was presented to her in district curriculum and pacing guides, but her knowledge of her

students and passion for teaching helped her to enact a sense of agency that drove her

instructional choices.

Julia discussed several contextual constraints including curriculum guides, testing

mandates and new standards. These constraints caused Julia to evaluate herself and her

practices and from there create actions as a teacher that she felt would best meet the

needs of her students. When initially asked about how the new standards and curriculum

impacted her practices, Julia shared her learning process.

> I felt like I really wasn't being me, I wasn't who I believe a teacher should be last
> year because every time I turned around I was jumping through a state-mandated
> hoop. This year I think I have more of a handle on it as far as that balance
> between what I have to do and what I really feel is best for the kids. So I don't—I
> guess I would have to say I'm still figuring it out. (Interview 1)

> Instead of—I guess to be honest, instead of whining and complaining about the
> changes, I've embraced them, and I'm like okay, it's not going to change. I have
> to accept this. And I've also—I've done more research. I realize that our school,
> or our district, I'm not sure which, doesn't have the money for a lot of
> professional development and I honestly can't afford to pay for my own stuff to
> go and to do it with the places that are out there and available. So I've just been
> doing a lot of reading, purchasing books, online reading, brain-based research,
> practices that work, working with a lot of like teacher communities and things like
> that to get ideas. I've made myself more familiar just through my own research
> and reading. So I've put more of an effort this year into trying to make this work
> and fit into who I am as a teacher to make it work for my students to make myself
> a better teacher for them. (Interview 1)

Julia realized as she worked to be a successful teacher, she would have to seek

knowledge outside of her environment and reshape her thinking and actions in a way that

would meet the requirements, yet help her stay true to herself as an educator. In her

efforts to become better for her students, she realized she had to become more

knowledgeable about instructional practices in order to be able to navigate the demands

she faced in a changing system of curriculum and standards. With this knowledge she

could balance the non-negotiable requirements of curriculum and assessment goals with

the needs of her students. With this knowledge, Julia was able to take the unit plans

provided to her by the district and make the additions and deletions necessary for her

students.

> This unit is focusing on reading and writing informational text. The way it was
> written from the county it's supposed to focus on three major standards citing
> textual evidence and making inferences, determining the central ideas and writing
> summaries—unbiased summaries and then integrating information and presenting
> it in different formats. I'm going to add to into that text structure, author's
> purpose and comparing and contrasting different works. (Interview 1)

In making these instructional decisions, Julia had to push against some of the district

resources because she did not feel she had the materials she would need and she did not

feel the curriculum expectations would meet the needs and interests of her students.

Instead, she focused on the standards she was required to teach in order to ensure she was

meeting the needs of her students.

> I chose—I mean I focused on the actual standards. I didn't use anything that the
> district prepared just because I didn't think that the resources that we have
> available to us in the school would really lend to a successful outcome. It was
> dealing with music piracy, and I think that the kids wouldn't have bought into it
> anyway. (Interview 2)

This enacted agency was a tool for Julia to resist the contextual constraints of curriculum

guides and create "self-authored" actions that would serve to meet the needs of her

students. This agency was clear in observations as Julia focused on texts and topics that

were relevant to students. Instead of following the recommended lesson plans, she

created her own lessons that still focused on the required standards, but that included

relevant topics for students giving them the opportunity to compare videos and texts and

learn from each other in meaningful social learning experiences.

      In order to make these agentive decisions, Julia had to have knowledge of the

curriculum as well as knowledge of her students' interests and what they may or may not

"buy into." She also had to understand the boundaries of the flexibility she was given by

her principal. Again, there were requirements and expectations, but she was able to

navigate those expectations in a way that stayed true to her instructional beliefs.

> The pressure is there, either through the state or through your school or through
> the county. So I had to adjust my teaching methods. I don't let that take over
> what I do in my classroom or take away from projects or the hands on activities,
> it's not all let's answer the question, analyze the text, and highlight and underline,
> we still do more hands on projects and application of the skill. I still don't feel
> like I'm a teacher that teaches to the test. (Interview 1)

This is evidenced not only in Julia's interview, but her position on assessment is also seen

in observations. As previously mentioned, Julia gave an assessment where students were

to create a poster on "The Bracelet" in partners. However, she balanced this with a

second part to the assessment where students had to answer 25 multiple choice and open-

ended questions about the text. In our initial interview Julia told me that she realized she

had to find a balance in her instructional methods and provide students access to testing

vocabulary and some "EOG style reading passages" (Interview 1) in order to help

students become familiar with how they will be assessed. In observations, I also heard

Julia tell students they needed to remember certain topics or concepts because they may

be helpful on a benchmark or End of Grade test. With assessment pressures continuing to

be the context of the education system as a whole, Julia had to consider where she stood in this context. The instructional decisions made by Julia, revealed her agency enacted. She was a "data focused" teacher because she wanted students to find success and celebrate this success. However, she found multiple ways to assess students in ways that were meaningful to them. In addition, Julia found a way to give students ownership of their learning by having them create their own data spreadsheets.

Julia discussed the fact that she had to give common assessments every three to four weeks based on the district standards she should have taught. She accepted this as a mandate and discussed how she made sure the students were prepared for it by giving them exposure to similar questions. However, she also discussed how in between those assessments, she did what she believed was best for meeting the needs of students which included ensuring that students show growth.

> My ultimate goal in any situation is just to see a child grow. I don't operate on the fact that I need to get them to grade level. I operate on the fact that I want to see them learn, I want to see them grow. (Interview 1)

This goal was heavily evidenced in the growth charts Julia has her students creating and the discussions she promoted in class.

Support Systems

Support through collaboration. In each case study, participants discussed some form of collaboration with colleagues, but it looked quite different across cases. While Julia was involved in content area meetings, she discussed that she did not really have a content partner this year.

> I really don't have a content partner. So it's [in content meetings] just me talking about what I'm doing [with the curriculum facilitator]. I would love to have somebody to bounce ideas off of, and really work with as a true partner, but I just haven't had that privilege. (Interview 1)

In spite of Julia's lack of a content partner however, she did seek out collaboration with one of her grade level teammates. Julia's discussion of this collaboration began in our first interview when she discussed seeking the opportunity to work with the science teacher. "Something that I'm trying new this year would be the interdisciplinary connection with science" she shared. This interdisciplinary connection was seen in the class observations as well.

Julia shared these collaborative goals with her students, when they began their study of text features, she discussed with them the importance of understanding text features across the content area and because of this, she explained she would be working with their science teacher to teach them text features. Throughout the unit, not only did Julia work with the science teacher on teaching text features, she also works with her to teach students about cause and effect relationships and inferences. During one observation the "ticket-out-the door" was to complete a cause/effect activity based on a video they watched in Science class that day. Julia told the students she wanted them to be able to transfer this knowledge across content areas. On one occasion Julia also had the students using their science book in her class to discuss text features.

Not only did Julia discuss and participate in collaboration with her science teammate, she also enlisted the help of the school's media specialist. In our second interview Julia told me she enjoyed this collaboration. "I work with her because she's

really intelligent when it comes to pulling resources together that are standards-based."

In addition, I saw this collaboration first hand throughout my observations. During one library visit, based on Julia's request, the media specialist conducted book talks for the students about Pearl Harbor, the Japanese Internment Camps, and World War II as this was the topic students were studying in class. In addition, these books were checked out to Julia so students would have access to these books in her classroom for their assignments and projects. Later in the unit, when the students had completed their projects, the media specialist made a visit to the classroom. Julia talked to her and gave her a tour of the classroom projects. The media specialist took some of the projects with her in order to display them in the library.

This type of collaboration displayed by Julia not only benefitted her, but it also benefitted her students. Julia clearly acknowledged this benefit in her first interview expressing how collaboration helped her to gain new ideas and often gave her a renewed energy. At the same time, students benefitted in this specific case by learning interdisciplinary approaches to concepts and by having a resource outside of the classroom (media specialist) to share texts and ideas. In addition, the media specialist helped to showcase the student's work, giving them ownership and pride as others saw their work on display.

Supportive administration. In addition to the support systems Julia found in her colleagues, she also found her administration to be supportive. She discussed how her principal made sure they were meeting the district mandates.

> Our principal always has on that district mandate hat, so there are certain demands that I have to conform to under her leadership. So we have to give assessments every three to four weeks—common assessments every three to four weeks based on data standards and all of those district things. Every three weeks we're going to do this, so I need to make sure my kids have gotten the standards. (Interview 1)

At the same time, in speaking of her principal she shared,

> I think until she sees that the kids aren't doing well we have the freedom to do what we want to do, what we think is going to be best for our kids in the classroom. (Interview 1)

This juxtaposition shows a line or balance Julia had to navigate. She was given her non-negotiables, and had "to conform under her leadership" but she was also given space to enact her agency to do what she believed was best for students. Within the constraints of district demands, Julia studied to reinvent herself as an educator, to find her place within these constraints and do what was "best for our kids in the classroom."

Conclusion

While this case study represents the major factors that impact Julia's instruction and how her beliefs about instruction were enacted, Julia also shared why she remained at a high poverty school.

> It's comfortable here although there's lots of surprises and very few surprises, if that makes sense. I'm comfortable with the fact that I know there's always going to be something new around the corner that changes, but that's expected. Being in a high needs school is all I've ever known—I don't want to go somewhere and be bored, I guess. I think it's engaging and fun to have kids that are a little rough around the edges. (Interview 2)

This approach has kept Julia at the school, but her ultimate goal here is to help students

find success.

> At the end of their day I want to feel like I'm making a difference in the kid's lives that when they move to other grade levels they can say, oh, I do know this, that they have a confidence that they can be successful. And also I want to be successful. (Interview 2)

Case Study—Pamela

Walking into Pamela's classroom, I could see it was a place of structure and

organization. Seats were arranged so that students were seated in pairs. Later in the unit,

Pamela would move some students into four person groups. The class was made up of 25

students, 13 girls, seven of whom were African American, four were Hispanic and two

were European American. There were 12 boys, six of whom were African American,

four were Hispanic, and two were European American. As students entered the

classroom, the class agenda was on the board, as I would see every day throughout the

study. Her Essential Questions for students read, "What is culture? What do we know

about culture?" Words on the word wall were from a previous unit on geography.

Throughout the unit, Pamela would add words about culture and constantly refer to those

terms throughout the unit. Bulletin boards around the room let you know right away that

you were in a social studies classroom. They were decorated with pictures of different

places from around the world and student made maps. The back wall had pictures of

people from different countries dressed up to represent their cultures. The "warm up"

assignments for the entire week were listed on the board and they reflected the reading

and writing components Pamela discussed with me in her interview. Examples of warm

up assignments for the first week included asking students to write a paragraph (6-8 sentences) about a culture trait they do with their family and reading an introduction to cultures in their workbook and creating a vocabulary list. The structure didn't end with the organization Pamela had created, but the students also came into class in an organized fashion. Each day students entered the classroom, sat down and awaited Pamela's instructions or began the warm up assignment on the board. Class never began without Pamela checking in on students. "Is everyone doing alright? Is everyone having a good day today?" she asked. Her nurturing personality was evident from the moment students walked in the door.

Unlike the other two participants in this study, more class time was spent on teacher led practices than on student led practices in Pamela's classroom, but it quickly became clear the evidence of relationships, student engagement and community were still heavily present.

Beliefs That Drive Instruction

Beliefs about high expectations. As Pamela discussed in our interviews, she had a diverse group of students including a large population of Exceptional Children and English Language Learners. While some teachers may have seen this as a challenge or an opportunity to teach "down" to students, Pamela held high expectations for her students each day. In describing her students, she shared,

> This is a good group. I would loop up with these kids and loop again. I don't think any of them are below average. Maybe on paper they are, but in my opinion and what I've seen, they are all above average to me. (Interview 2)

This mentality was evident in Pamela's classroom with her higher level questioning and her expectations for daily assignments. While Pamela did discuss and implement a slower pace for this particular class, she held true to the expectations of the required standards. She worked to challenge and prepare this class just as she did with her other classes.

With the shift to conceptual thinking with the new social studies standards, Pamela's goal was to help her students shift to this conceptual thinking. Opposed to asking students basic recall questions, she focused on asking them to dig deeper. "Why does it matter how many people live somewhere?" she asked.

> Why is population important to transportation? What happens to the population when one group moves to another area? How is the new area affected? What do you think popular culture has to do with globalization? I'm asking you to think critically here. (Observation)

Pamela wanted to get her students thinking deeply and understanding important terms, but also being able to apply those terms to curricula concepts and topics. Vocabulary was also personally very important to Pamela as discussed in her interview, but she did not simply ask recall questions about vocabulary, she asked questions that would require students to understand and apply this knowledge. Pamela also asked students to compare history to the present, making connections to their worlds. "How has the population of the world changed over time? Why do you think in the past people had more children than they have now? What has changed? Why have death rates changed?" While a great deal of class time was spent on discussion, it was thoughtful, engaging, challenging discussion for students. Often she asked students to use their textbooks, class discussions

or videos to support their answers. On one particular "warm up" assignment, Pamela asked them to "write a paragraph about the benefits of living in a culturally diverse country and discuss the drawbacks." She asked them to use their sources of learning from the week, including their textbooks, notes, and organizers, using information from a variety of sources to respond to a question. After students had time to write their paragraphs, they were given the opportunity to share with the class and receive feedback from both their peers and Pamela. Like Julia, it was important to Pamela that students had learned something at the end of the day. "Any questions? I don't want you going out those doors not knowing what you need to know about population," she explained. The day before the unit test, Pamela reviewed with the students, helping them find ways to remember certain concepts and asking students to help each other find ways to remember concepts. At the end of the class she asserted, "Ya'll have done good, so ya'll better pass this test!"

In my final interview, I learned the students did indeed pass the unit test. Pamela told me that none of the students in her class failed the test. While she had given them the option for an "open book" test, she was excited that most students did not need it because they had learned the information and felt confident in their knowledge.

Beliefs about building social learning environments and relationships. While students rarely worked in small groups, Pamela provided many opportunities for students to learn together in a whole class format. She invited all students to be a part of discussions, to share their ideas and their learning. In both interviews, she discussed with me how she believed it was important to give students the opportunity to discuss their

learning to promote retention of knowledge. This was enacted as Pamela asked students to volunteer to read aloud in class, discuss what knowledge they gained from the text or ask questions and share their ideas with the class. In addition, at the beginning of each class, Pamela asked students to share their learning from the previous day. During one observation, she randomly called on students based on what color they were wearing. "If you're wearing blue, stand up and tell me something about your culture" she said one day. In some class discussions as she recognized some students might not have shared in a while, she would ask them to contribute, leaving no student quiet. "I should see everyone's hand up" she would prompt. "I haven't heard from you yet," she would say to students who had not contributed to class discussions. On other occasions, Pamela asked student to share their completed work with the class. "Can someone raise their hand and share with the class some notes you have on your graphic organizer?" Pamela created a safe place for learning, a place for students to feel comfortable sharing their knowledge with peers. "Thank you for working so hard," she told one student. "That's good, that wasn't even in the book," she said responding to another answer. Pamela celebrated the work of all students and built an environment of social learning and comfort. This comfort not only came in the form of social learning and relationships with peers, but Pamela also felt it was important for her to build a relationship with her students and to let them know how much she cared about them.

In the first interview with Pamela she made it clear how she felt about her students,

> You will know right off the bat that I love my students, even the ones that drive me bananas, that I have great rapport with my kids. I love my kids, and I think they pretty much like me too. . . . Good teachers love their students, they care about their students, and they will teach their students at any cost. (Interview 1)

This was evident each day in Pamela's class as she nurtured the needs of her students, almost in a "motherly" way.

> I think my kids know that I care about them and love them, and I feel like because I do build relationships with them that that helps. (Interview 2)

At the end of class, many students would run up to hug Pamela before they went off to their busses. These relationships were also built through humor. In Pamela's first interview she told me that she believed it was important to bring humor into the classroom. Despite her stern, structured approach to teaching, the humor Pamela brought to the room was genuine and easily embraced.

Pamela also worked to help students build relationships with each other in her class. "You don't talk to people that way," she reprimanded one student. She, like Julia had high behavior expectations, primarily centered on how students should respectfully interact with each other. There was zero tolerance for disrespect of anyone in the classroom. Pamela built a safe, nurturing environment for social learning experiences to take place.

Additionally in her interview, Pamela told me that she believed students learned best with encouragement from teachers. This was a constant occurrence in Pamela's class. She spent a great deal of time building students up. "You guys have great questions! I am blown away with your knowledge of culture. I am very impressed."

Pamela encouraged her students even when they answered questions incorrectly.

"You're warm, oh, you're hot!" she encouraged, striving to value student responses.

Through this encouragement she hoped to make her students feel comfortable and

continue to engage in the lesson.

Beliefs about Engaging Students

       Autonomy. While Pamela's class was teacher directed, she did give students

some freedoms in assignments. On one particular assignment, she gave students the

opportunity to showcase what they learned about a particular topic from the chapter and

create an organizer that would showcase their knowledge. "Do whichever one you want.

Your organizer might be different from your neighbor and that's fine." Students were

able to choose from the topics of cultural diversity, how cultures change, different ways

of life, development of culture and culture traits. In an informal conversation Pamela told

me that she hoped this activity would help her assess what students had learned up to this

point. Opposed to a multiple choice or fill in the blank quiz, Pamela gave students a

chance to choose a topic they felt comfortable with and showcase this knowledge in an

organizer of their choice.

       In addition, students were given choices and a sense of independence as they

spent several days creating their culture books. There were topics the students had to

include, but they were given the freedom to choose how they wanted to represent

themselves through this book they would share with their teacher and peers.

       Building on students' interests and needs. The needs of her students seemed to

be top priority to Pamela as she was working with a large population of Exceptional

Children and English Language Learners. In our final interview she discussed her beliefs about meeting student's needs.

> You need a teacher that's understanding of their needs. I mean they're not going to be successful if they have a teacher that really doesn't understand their needs. (Interview 2)

This belief was showcased every day in Pamela's class. Her patience and guidance with her students was immeasurable. Recognizing the needs of her students, she worked hard to ensure these needs were met. Pamela discussed how many of her practices were a reflection of the needs students had based on personal education plans, including read alouds and pacing.

> I just have to pace a little different than my higher level students because I want them to get it. It's important to me that they get it, so I have to slow the pace with them. I have to read aloud a lot with them. I am constantly moving with them, with my lower kids. I have to make sure I'm visible at all times when they are working so that I'm there if they—you know, if they have a question. (Interview 1)

Pamela discussed how she taught the same standards and concepts across all of her classes, but with this particular class she presented the information differently, often through repetition, read aloud or CDs that read the text aloud to the students. These practices were enacted daily in Pamela's classroom as she focused on the needs of students and let them know she was there to support them, constantly walking around, monitoring students making sure they were on task and up to speed. "Is everybody ready? Let's make sure we are all on the same page," she coaxed. Often Pamela would start off by modeling activities for students, and gradually release responsibility to them.

Scaffolding was a major part of her instructional climate. Pamela also used "chunking the text" as a strategy, where she asked students to read small amounts of the text, take notes, discuss their information with a partner and/or the class and then return to the text with a clear understanding of what they had already read. She practiced this strategy with texts the students read independently as well as texts students listened to on CD. During one visit students were listening to a CD that read the text aloud to them. As students listened, Pamela walked around the room to ensure that everyone was following along. Periodically she would stop the CD. "Okay, what are some things we learned from that section?" she would ask to begin engaging students and to get them thinking about their learning.

Pamela put a heavy emphasis on vocabulary, using her word wall and making sure students knew the terms related to the unit. She recognized they would be responsible for these terms on both class and district assessments. Each class began with a review of important terms and concepts from the day before and ended with a review as well. As she mentioned in her interview, providing repetition of concepts and consistent practice was how she met the needs of students. Pamela provided high support for students. She consistently monitored student work and asked students questions about their assignments as they worked on completing them. "Okay, how do you want to set up your graphic organizer?" she asked one student. "What's important from that section that you want to add to your organizer?"

In addition to reinforcement of concepts, Pamela provided several examples and opportunities for students to apply their knowledge throughout the lessons. While

repetition was a major focus of her lessons, it was not simply repetition of basic skills, but repetition of examples and application of major concepts such as globalization and the impact of population on cultures. "I believe students learn by repetition," Pamela told me in her first interview. Pamela said as a learner herself, she had to read and hear things several times to make them click, and because of this, that is why she took her time with her students and gave them the repeated practices and listening opportunities she felt they needed.

In addition to meeting the academic needs of students, Pamela also wanted to engage students by appealing to their interests. She began the unit with her own excitement for learning about cultures. She let the students know they were sure to enjoy the unit: "I think you're going to enjoy the activities I have for you in this unit. This is one of my favorite chapters," she shared with the students on the first day of the unit.

In our follow up interview Pamela told me she chose to teach this unit this way because in the past her students loved learning about different cultures and governments and she wanted to engage these students the way her previous students had been engaged. She also discussed the importance of integrating literacy into not only this unit, but all of her units. "I use literacy every day," she told me. "I can't really teach social studies without reading and writing. I can't." This description of writing was evidenced in her classroom through warm up assignments, giving students opportunities to write about what they learned, write in response to reading, and the writing projects she gave students such as the culture books. Writing was not only a way to interest students, but also a tool for meeting their instructional needs.

In Pamela's first interview she told me she believed in meeting the interests of her students by providing hands on learning opportunities for them. This was evident in the graphic organizers and foldable activities she implemented daily as well as the opportunities for students to represent their learning by creating visuals and the culture books students created to represent their personal cultures. Pamela also gave students opportunities to share what made them different from other cultures or ethnic groups.

A few times, Pamela showed videos as a means of answering questions and integrating vocabulary throughout the unit. In preparation for one video she asked the students, "How many people do you think live in our world today?" She engaged the students in guesses, tracking their predictions and then showed them a four-minute video that showed how many people are in the world. "Did that information surprise you all? Why? What does it say about our population living longer? What are the reasons?" Pamela asked these questions to pique the interest of students and to make learning relevant to them, to help them make connections. She recognized the topic of culture was an engaging one and she wanted to engage students in learning and discussing. In the first interview, Pamela told me the students always have so many thoughts and so much to say; she wanted to provide a space in her classroom for them to discuss these thoughts and ideas.

Like the other participants, Pamela used different mediums for teaching. Not only did students read traditional text, she also worked to engage them by asking them to read texts in reader's theater form in magazines, traditional texts from magazines, listen to texts and read diagrams, and maps. Again, Pamela used these texts to engage students

but also to challenge them, asking them to analyze these materials. Many of her warm up activities included having the students read articles in their Scholastic magazine and compare and contrast information from the articles. "Based on this picture, what do you think is happening at this level? Let's think and talk about chickens going through each of these levels," she posed. It was important to Pamela that students understood at a level of not simply being able to regurgitate information, but being able to apply and analyze information.

Pamela also felt discussions were a major part of helping her students. "I think having discussions helped with the vocabulary" she told me in the final interview. "I think they understood and were able to apply it when it came to taking the test." Initially, with her focus on repetition, I was expecting rote instruction that asked students to memorize facts. Instead, I found a literacy rich learning environment created by Pamela that engaged students in higher level thinking in an effort to meet the needs and interests of her students while engaging students in making connections.

Making Cultural Connections

Part of helping students make connections includes the opportunity for students to share their experiences and make connections to their learning and the context of the classroom. Pamela's unit leant itself to these practices by focusing on cultures of the world and inviting students to share their personal experiences and cultures.

> At the end I hope that they will know that everybody is different. We have to respect different people's culture, that we are blessed and honored to live in a democracy, because we'll talk about different types of government and how some people don't have the same rights that we have. (Interview 1)

As Pamela discussed her goal was to understand that everyone was different, this was enacted in Pamela's lessons as she shared her cultural experiences and background and provided a forum for her students to do so as well. "We are going to do a culture project and that way you can share your cultures and we can learn more about you and your culture," she said, introducing culture book projects to her students.

In this culture book Pamela asked students to include information about the languages, music, foods, special occasions, traditions, family, etc. She asked students to present this information in paragraph form and to include illustrations. Students were invited to add other information that was important to them, and as Pamela reviewed each of these categories, she shared examples of her own life. Students were given several days in class to work on the project with support from Pamela.

Like the other teachers in this study, one aspect of Pamela's beliefs that showed up in the context of the classroom was helping students connect their learning to their experiences. Pamela did this with her discussion of ethnicities and diversity. In one observation, she discussed with the class how diversity could sometimes cause conflict.

> We have a lot of ethnicities, values, and cultures in this country. The book says varieties of diversity can cause conflict. Why do you all think that is?

Pamela sought to make learning relevant for students by giving them an opportunity to share their stories and relate their stories to the videos and texts they read in the classroom. As students shared their responses and their experiences, Pamela also shared experiences she had personally had with conflicts and how those conflicts were similar to the conflicts discussed in texts. She focused a great deal with discussions such as this on

helping students bridge their knowledge and experiences with the information they were required to learn in social studies.

Walking into Pamela's classroom one day, I could feel her energy before she even greeted me. She had such intense excitement about the lesson. Once students were seated, she began. "Okay everyone on your paper, write music/culture. Everyone's going to love this activity, this is one of my favorite activities!" The activity involved the students listening to musical selections from other countries. "Pay attention to the instruments you hear" she told them.

> With this assignment I want to raise your awareness about different types of music in different countries. I'm going to share some different music with you. Write about the instruments you hear, your personal response to the song, I like this song because . . . I don't like this song because . . . how does the song make you feel and what country do you think this song came from? I'm giving you the choice to write your answers in paragraph form or notes form. (Observation)

Using the knowledge students had gained about cultures the students had to determine which country each song represented. Pamela played the music, trying to tone down the excitement as Bob Marley blared through the speakers. After each song she asked students to discuss their responses. By the time the bell rang Pamela was making promises of letting the students hear more songs the following day. The music was a source of connection for students. Later when the students worked on their culture books she asked them to write about the role of music in their culture and think back to this assignment. Each day was a connection to the next and a connection to the lives of students.

Agency through Resistance

Pamela told me there were curriculum guides she was to follow from the district.

She told me often she had to change these lessons because of time constraints or because

the lesson failed to meet the needs of her students. In some cases, Pamela was not always

in line with the pacing guide particularly with the class I observed because she believed

in slowing the pace down for them, but still meeting all of the required standards.

Pamela's main goal was to have an understanding of the standards and meet the needs

and interests of her students. When the lessons provided by the district failed to do that,

she described what she decided to do.

> Last year was rough because that was the first year [of the new standards] that I
> had to totally change everything. I researched all summer to make sure I was on
> target. (Interview 1)

Pamela discussed how she felt her success was viewed in terms of her student's grades

and she wanted her students to continue to make high scores, but she also wanted

learning to be meaningful for them. On the social studies state assessment the previous

year, she discussed how all of her students passed, and she had over 100 students. She

discussed how she tried to prepare them for the test

> I try to make sure I have covered all the material for the standards so the students
> will be familiar when they see it on the assessment. (Interview 1)

While teaching the standards was a priority because they were a requirement, a non-

negotiable, Pamela also prioritized finding new and engaging ways to teach her students.

"I'm still researching new ways that I can teach differently." (Interview 1) She discussed that she wanted her students to pass their test but she also made her instructional decisions based on what she believed worked and what she believed would engage the students and meet the needs of each student in her class.

The previous year, Pamela also found her expectations for herself were not being met as she was pulled in different directions within the school. She pushed back against these constraints and demands and decided to focus on her students. In discussing all of the roles she had been asked to participate in the previous year, she said she had to stand up and shift her focus. She discussed how she pushed against the roles that took her away from her students. She reinvented herself as a teacher and leader within her classroom opposed to in the politics of the school. "I'm not here to put out fires, I'm here to educate students so I had to change my focus." (Interview 1) she shared. Because of this, Pamela gave up some of her leadership roles that she felt took her away from serving students. One of the leadership positions she continued was serving on the school's Instructional Support Team (IST) a team of teachers and support staff that work to focus on supporting at risk students and ensuring they have the resources they need to be successful in school.

Support Systems

Support through collaboration. While Pamela believed in supporting students, she also had a support system of her own that helped her in making and supporting her instructional decisions. When asked about her support systems she mentioned the school's math coach and guidance counselor. Both of these resources supported Pamela

with personal and student concerns. In addition, Pamela was able to get instructional

support from the district's monthly professional development meeting for social studies

teachers. In these meetings Pamela received ideas for teaching the new standards.

Pamela also discussed meetings she had with her curriculum facilitator who

served as a resource in analyzing data and helping to grow the students that were

struggling academically.

Supportive administration. In addition to collaborative colleagues, like all three

participants in the study, Pamela found her principal to be especially supportive.

> It's been helpful to have support from the principal here. I've never had an issue
> with her. Anything that I've asked of her she's done it. So that's a nice support
> system. . . . There has not been a time when I to her that she didn't support me
> whether it be a parent issue or a student issue or whatever. (Interview 1)

The role of the administrator helped Pamela to feel comfortable in knowing that if she did

need her principal, she was there as a support system.

Conclusion

Even though Pamela's teaching methods were different from the other two

participants, her beliefs about how children learn were clearly implemented and her

beliefs about literacy instruction in a social studies classroom were clearly discussed in

her interview and enacted throughout the classroom observations. Pamela's beliefs about

the needs of students and her willingness to meet these needs were evident. Helping

students connect to learning showcased Pamela's understanding about meeting the needs

of her students. Pamela's beliefs helped her to find a balance and enact agency in order

to be the teacher she felt she needed to be. While her support systems were not

specifically geared toward literacy, these support systems did give her a sense of support in her classroom. Ultimately these factors impacted Pamela's decision-making processes. She was able to teach in a way she believed in and because of this, her passion for teaching was clear. At the conclusion of our final interview she told me she wished I could be there for the next unit. "It's one of my favorite units!" she exclaimed. "You told me this was one of your favorite units," I reminded her. She laughed and told me she guessed she enjoyed them all. In response to how she felt his unit went, she stated, "I feel like they learned a lot and that it was a success. While Pamela did see grades and student scores as a measure of success, she also felt successful because she felt she made a difference in the lives of her students.

> Wanting to make a difference is important to me. I'm going to make a difference in a child's life today. . . . I want to make sure that I'm loyal to teaching them what they need to know about social studies. (Interview 1)

Case Study—Jessica

Jessica's room was representative of a literacy rich environment. Seven bookcases lined the back of the room, filled with books. In front of the bookcases there was a couch and a big fluffy chair for reading. A sign told inhabitants of the book section this was a "Quiet Zone." Colorful display boards told students to "Reach for the Stars" and reminded them there should be "No Slacking Anytime."

A wall showcasing cultural diversity showed pictures highlighting Hispanic scientists, athletes, entertainers, authors, journalists, and leaders. A word wall was partially filled with words and throughout the unit, Jessica would regularly update it, at

times clustering vocabulary terms together to help students see the connections. An anchor chart showed students the parts of a plot diagram for reference throughout the unit. Information on the two front boards presented instructions for students, as they would every day. On the first day there were "warm up" sentences and the students were instructed to write the sentences and determine the subject of each. Throughout the unit, warm ups would change to represent vocabulary or word parts. When I asked Jessica how she determined what she would ask students to complete for warm up assignments, she said she used the language standards that were paired with the unit to guide her warm ups. In her instruction of warm up assignments involving grammar and vocabulary Jessica shared with the students how these skills would be helpful to them, not only in language arts, but in other content areas as well.

The other front white board had a list for students to complete as they came in. "Copy homework in your planner, take out presentation procedures and expectations, label three pieces of paper with the following information." As students entered the classroom, the expectations were structured for students to begin their tasks.

Desks were arranged in six groups of six desks. Each group had three to six students. Jessica's students filled the seats with a total of eight boys, five of which were African American, one Hispanic and two European-Americans. Fourteen girls also made up the class, seven African American girls, one Hispanic girl, one Asian American girl, and four European American girls. Jessica informed me that the students were in assigned seats, but she would be shifting them to work in new groups for their literature circles. In our first interview she told me I would see her moving around in these groups

quite frequently. Often as she moved through the groups she was "high-fiving" students for a job well done or encouraging them to work harder. "I try to see every student at least once," she told me. "You'll see the relationships I have with them. . . . And I really think relationships make you successful."

This was a goal Jessica worked toward every day as evidenced in her daily meetings with each literature group. Talking with each student every day also helped Jessica to get to know her students, which was evident in her ability to make book recommendations as students finished reading books of their choice. The literacy rich, social learning context Jessica provided will be discussed in the following case study.

Beliefs That Drive Instruction

> I push the kids to think, and I challenge them, and I think that brings a lot of success because when they think they can't, I show them that they can. (Interview 1)

Beliefs about High Expectations

From my first interview with Jessica, it was clear that she held high expectations for her students. "Every child has potential and no matter the ability, they should all be held to a high standard," she shared in the first interview. Jessica enacted this belief each day in her classroom from the beginning of the period until the students were dismissed. An example of this was showcased when she introduced the concept of literature circles, Jessica told her students,

> I know these are high expectations, but you will meet them. I need you to have all of the opportunities to have success in my class and to learn. This will help

you be successful throughout the unit. It's going to take time, and that's okay. I'm pushing you to push your thinking. You have to think.

Her "no nonsense" approach to expectations created a context where high expectations were the norm. In our initial interview when we discussed teaching the new standards, Jessica told me she not only wanted to teach her students the basics of the standards, but she wanted to ensure that her students were,

> applying them[standards] at that higher level, not just saying here's a worksheet, this is on nouns. It's more of taking the standard and starting with the basics and then expanding upon it so they get to that higher level of thinking where they're critically thinking themselves. (Interview 1)

Jessica consistently pushed her students to be critical thinkers. This was evidenced in Jessica's class as she asked students to identify themes in the text and make interpretations. She made it clear that anytime she asked students to identify elements such as theme, she was also expecting them to support their findings with textual evidence. Jessica assured the students that while they would be reading the popular text *Hunger Games*, even if they had read the text before, they would see it in a new light as she was now asking them to "read it deeply" and focus on the literary elements and author's decisions.

Jessica was clear about her expectations with her students throughout the study. As they worked in literature groups on independent tasks or group tasks, she reminded the students,

> you can ask me questions as you work, but I will not tell you what to write, you must figure that out. I need you to have some confidence in your work. Who's

paper is it? Yes, it's yours, so trust yourself. Stretch yourselves, you are capable.
Use your nugget and your book.

Throughout the unit, these conversations were frequent with students. Jessica

encouraged her students to push themselves in every task. Jessica consistently modeled

what she wanted her students to do. While she had high expectations for her students,

she also guided their work and helped to prepare them. Before their test, she had a

review time with the students, showing them how to push their thinking further, how to

make adequate inferences and analyze the text. "This is good," she told a student. "But

you're being really literal, push it a little, add your interpretation."

On my last day of observations the students were taking their test. Jessica later

discussed with me that a student told her the test was hard. "That's good, that's what I

want to hear them say," she told me. "It means they have to push themselves." When a

student tried to turn in a test without the open-ended questions answered, Jessica refused

to take it. "I'm not taking it, I'm not letting you out of doing it, you need to get used to

answering these types of questions," she told him. Jessica believed in challenging

students and held them accountable for reaching academic success.

At the same time, Jessica also believed in shared success. One of her goals with

this unit was to implement literature circles, an opportunity for students to build

relationships and learn together.

Beliefs about Building Social Learning Environments and Relationships

In this unit, Jessica was implementing literature circles for the first time, which

easily led to social learning for students. She began by introducing the novel using a

PowerPoint presentation with background information about the author and the text.

From there she explained to the students they would be working in literature groups.

> I assigned the groups based on how you work together and who I thought you would be successful with.

While students were regularly seated in groups in Jessica's classroom, they had not yet had the opportunity to work in literature groups so this would be a new experience for all of them. Jessica began by reviewing and modeling the roles and allowing students the opportunity to practice the role as a whole class with the first few chapters to give them a sense of comfort with the roles they would later take on independently. The roles students were assigned were (a) discussion director, (b) conflict connector, (c) literary luminary, (d) summarizer, and (e) plot master. The expectations for the group were also provided beforehand. Jessica expected each group member to be prepared, having assignments read and completed, focused on discussions, contributing to discussions and participating as active listeners in the group. In describing these roles and expectations, Jessica's excitement was clearly present. "What do you have to provide with this role? Yes! Evidence! Yes! Look at those words! Archetypes! Themes! Yeah!" Jessica wanted students to have the same excitement she did when it came to literature circles. She felt giving them roles would give them ownership and responsibility of their learning. At the beginning of the unit Jessica called a meeting with the discussion directors. In this meeting she reviewed their roles with them again and asked them as she read aloud the first chapter, to create questions that would guide their group's discussion. Jessica

wanted each person to feel comfortable and valued in his or her role. When students were absent, she still expected their roles to be discussed within the group.

> Okay, we have some people that are absent, so can those of you with absent people pull together to make sure that all roles are covered? Thank you, I appreciate you doing that.

Jessica had created an environment where students did pull together and work toward the success of their group.

It was clear that Jessica enjoyed implementing the literature circles, as she was a part of the process as well. Each day she met with every group, offering herself as a resource to students and giving them feedback on their progress. A major part of Jessica's approach to literature groups was her belief in constant monitoring. She walked around the room reminding students of expectations. To one group she reminded them they should be having authentic conversations, not simply reading their role sheets.

> Remember you should not be going through each role, but you are having a conversation. It becomes meaningless if you are just going through the motions and reading your paper. This should be an opportunity for you to discuss and learn from each other. Does anyone have any questions about that?

In Jessica's rounds, she also prompted students in their thinking process.

> What would be a good questions to start off with? What questions is going to get everyone talking and giving input? Okay, this is good conversation, yes, this is the conversation I want to hear.

While Jessica was excited about the conversations, she could not spend the entire class period on literature circles. Usually students were given 30-45 minutes of the 90-minute

class to work in their groups. Jessica often had to force students to stop talking about the text or reading the text when it was time to move on to something else because of the interest and engagement in the social process of sharing knowledge and interpretations of the text that the students were so engrossed in. Jessica promoted this social process of learning and the opportunity for students to learn from each other. In our first interview she discussed the importance of students being both learners and teachers.

> If one student gets it and they are next to each other I'm more than willing to let them explain because sometimes they can explain it differently.

This belief was evident in Jessica's classroom as she gave students space to learn from and question each other as readers, interpreters and experts of the text. The roles she provided nurtured social learning and opened the doors for students to be both learners and sharers of knowledge. With the roles, Jessica explained to students that they would at some point have every role. "Everyone will find his or her voice and lead so everyone will have to be the leader at some point," she encouraged. Jessica promoted leadership in these groups and provided an opportunity for every student to lead.

In my final interview with Jessica she discussed how she felt the literature circles had been a success in one aspect because students had gotten the opportunity to work with their peers they may not normally have chosen to work with, and that was important to her. "I expect that from them," she said as she discussed how in the real world this skill of working and learning from others would be important.

In an informal interview, discussing the progress of the literature groups, Jessica mentioned to me that she was excited about how the groups were going.

> This is the way the classroom should be, it's a happy classroom, the kids aren't competing with each other, they are working together with the same goal, they're engaged, they're learning. I was nervous about this, but I like it.

Beliefs about Engaging Students

> I think each student learns differently. I think students learn in a multitude of ways. I think students learn best in an environment they feel safe, and they don't feel like they are being judged. I also think that they learn best when they are challenged even if they think they don't want to be. (Interview 1)

Autonomy. In addition to providing students with opportunities for social learning, Jessica also felt it was important to give students ownership and freedom in some aspects of their learning. On the first day of observations, Jessica's class was completing an assessment from the previous unit on research writing. In this unit students had chosen a topic, spent several weeks researching the topic, written a paper and on this particular day, students were sharing their papers with their classmates. Jessica put up a poster with expectations for the student presentations. "You already know the expectations, you created them, so you need to make sure you follow them." In preparation for the day's presentations, Jessica had given students ownership of the event by asking them what they thought the expectations should be for presentation day. The poster of expectations showcased that expectations such as asking the speaker to speak loudly, clearly, and facing the audience while the audience was quiet, respectful and asked topic related questions at the end of the presentation. During presentations, Jessica was a facilitator, asking students to come up as their names were called, but students led the discussion around presentations.

As an observer, this was an introduction to the autonomy Jessica would offer her students. In Jessica's initial interview she told me she was excited to try literature circles because it would give her students the "freedom to think and process." In literature circles, Jessica gave her students many freedoms, some of them as simple as making choices about assignments and logistics. Jessica asked groups to choose a character they would like to follow throughout the text and track that character's relationships and changes. Students were also given roles to choose from, in their literature circles with the understanding they would all have the opportunity at some point to rotate through them in their literature circles. While Jessica assigned discussion leaders, she gave students the opportunity in their groups to choose the remaining roles giving students ownership and "buy in" in their tasks.

As previously mentioned, Jessica monitored groups closely. Quite often they wanted input from her, but she wanted to teach them independence and how to make their own decisions concerning their work.

> No, I'm not going to tell you if you can write that or not, you have to make that decision. Think about it, can you write that? Should you write that? You decide. What if I weren't here and you couldn't ask me? What would you decide?

Jessica wanted to empower students that could learn as a team, but could also take control of their learning, scaffolding them to greater independence. By the end of the unit, Jessica spent a lot less time telling students they had freedom and independence. She had shown them enough that the context of the class was shifted, where the students knew

what to do, how to do it and how to lean on each other for knowledge and support before reaching out to Jessica.

Building on Students' Interests and Needs

Jessica began the school year by trying to learn about her students' interests and needs through a questionnaire she distributed at the beginning of the year. In addition, she discussed how she used a variety of strategies to engage students. Jessica liked to get kids up and moving and talking and providing them with opportunities for learning that would help them make connections to previous learning.

> I differentiate and I modify whether it be grading or assignments, rubrics, or the lesson in general. If I see that they are not necessarily grasping it, I'll reflect on it and change it for the next year or the next day or the next time that a standard comes up. (Interview 1)

Jessica's differentiation was evident in her classroom as she chose the initial discussion leaders for literature groups based on who she saw as student leaders. Jessica also spent more "one on one" time with some students than with others and she gave students choices in their assignments. Jessica offered different strategies for students as they read the text such as the option for a "read aloud" the use of post-it notes to document their thoughts, and graphic organizers. Jessica provided a lot of visual representations to accompany her lessons so that students would both hear and view the topic or concept. In our conversations Jessica discussed how her thoughts and reflections of her lesson caused her to think about how she might better meet the needs of her students in the future.

In order to meet students' needs Jessica also offered a lot of modeling. She never gave an assignment without modeling how the task should be completed and giving students time to work and ask questions. One example of this was during an observation after Jessica finished modeling how to complete word webs, she gave them an opportunity to try it on their own.

> Okay, now I'm going to give you ten minutes to work on your word web so you can have to opportunity to ask me questions now.

This process of scaffolding was common in Jessica's class, as when she released them to work on their own or in their groups she had given them the guidance they needed beforehand. When Jessica introduced a new role about characters, she modeled the role for the entire class, after that she asked students to review the role for themselves and write down any questions they had. Jessica addressed each student's questions one by one.

Jessica believed her choice in the text, *The Hunger Games*, led to high interest for students. She felt that choosing a popular adolescent novel, even one that some students had read, would provide high interest, particularly with the promise of viewing the film at the completion of the text and comparing and contrasting the text to the film using the Common Core State Standard Reading for Literature 7 as a basis for analyzing the choices made by the director and actors in the film and how the film stayed true to or departed from the text version (CCSSI, 2010). In the final interview she discussed how she and her Language Arts teammate chose this text with the hopes of giving students a text in which they could relate.

> We determined that *The Hunger Games* would be an excellent text, it's something modern that the kids would relate with and be interested in. It's also something a lot of the students have read, which would then allow us to push them more, because obviously if you read something more than once you understand it better, you can break it down more, you can really delve into it, so they had background knowledge, a lot of them, not all of them, but a lot of them. (Interview 2)

Jessica hoped and worked towards keeping the students interested through continuing to challenge them and telling them this time, they would understand the text more deeply, they would get more out of it than they did before and if they hadn't read it previously then they had the opportunity to embrace it both for pleasure and literary analysis.

Making Cultural Connections

Throughout the study, Jessica worked hard to make sure students were able to connect their learning to their real world experiences. Even in assignments not related to literature circles, she wanted to help students feel personally connected to their assignments, often offering opportunities for them to bring their cultural experiences into the classroom. In one assignment before the Thanksgiving Break, Jessica asked students to complete a Quickwrite activity about their holiday plans.

> What are your plans over Thanksgiving Break? In 1-2 paragraphs, write in detail what you plan to do over your Thanksgiving break. Be specific-travel? Dinner? Shopping? Family? Friends? What do you want to eat? Where are you going to eat? Be specific, stretch yourself. Be creative, be descriptive. (Assignment Artifact)

Students were given the opportunity to share their Quickwrites with the class. On another occasion, Jessica asked students to use a Quickwrite to share their experiences on a field trip to the Civil Rights Museum the day before.

What is at least one thing you learned at the civil rights museum? What made an impact on you or made you have an emotional response? Why? What do you plan to do to make sure history doesn't' repeat itself? (Assignment Artifact)

While these Quickwrites were not tied directly to the novel or literature groups, Jessica

did use them to give students an opportunity to bring their cultural connections into the

classroom.

Jessica also provided an opportunity for students to make connections to novels of

their choice. Each week the students were required to read a book of their choice for 120

minutes at home and complete a reading log. In addition to writing summaries about

what they read, Jessica asked students to make personal connections to the text with

prompts such as "This connects to my life, I relate most to the character ____ because

____ and This passage makes me feel . . ."

In regard to helping students make connections to the novel, Jessica began the

unit by using a Quickwrite to ask students to activate their prior knowledge about *The*

Hunger Games. The first assignment was as follows:

Directions: Please respond to the following questions in complete sentences; please write the number next to each of your answers you do not need to write the question.
o   Write do you already know about the Hunger Games, the book?
o   What do you already know about the Hunger Games the movie?
o   What do you already know about the author of the hunger games, Suzanne Collins?
Please include whether or not you read the book and or seen the movie. If you read the book and or saw the movie, please include what you remember and your favorite parts. (Assignment Artifact)

In addition to tapping into students interest by activating their prior knowledge through a Quickwrite, Jessica also asked students to put themselves in a similar situation by asking them if they would be willing to play a game for prizes, and if they would still be willing to play that game if they knew there was a chance they could be killed. She then asks them how they would feel to learn they didn't have a choice in playing the game and connected this scenario to the text.

Throughout the study, Jessica asked students to make connections to the text as well. "What real world connections can you make?" she asked one day as students worked in their literature groups.

> Sharon said she could connect to the tongue being cut out when a crime is committed and some people being executed when they commit crimes. That was a good real world connection. Like think about when 9/11 happened, what was the response of the President? What was the response of everyone? How does that relate to this? That's another great one! This is similar to when you turn 18, you can be drafted in the war. That's a great real world connection.

Jessica pushed students to see how the text connected to their lived experiences and the world around them. She constantly asked them to consider how the main characters could be compared to kids in our society and how they themselves might respond in the main characters' shoes. Jessica wanted them to see that she had chosen this text because it was a text in which they could make connections and challenge their thinking.

Agency through Resistance

In Jessica's first interview, she did not hide her discontent of the contextual constraints she faced such as curriculum guidelines and assessment guidelines. She

discussed her beliefs about assessment in terms of not feeling like multiple choice tests met the needs of students, but that was the expectation she was to follow.

> I think that we over assess our kids in a paper and pencil manner. I like to use tasks like a project that's based on the standards to really see how the students are grasping it because that puts it at that higher level of thinking. However I was recently told I need to paper and pencil assess more, which I really don't agree with.

Within these constraints and with these directives, Jessica had to find a balance if she wanted to meet the needs of her students. When I asked her how she was able to balance her beliefs with these expectations, she told me she pushed back.

> I buck it as much as I can, but I do it. I try to limit the amount of paper and pencil assessments because I really think if you can do it by actually doing it rather than answering it, if you can show me then I think that makes a stronger impact and it lasts longer and when they get the paper and pencil test it's easier to apply. I'm still fighting that battle. So I'm bucking it by holding off as long as I can . . .

Jessica felt strongly about these assessment practices and it was evident in the presentations from the previous unit that served as an assessment as well as the literature circles which she used as an assessment tool and the assessment she gave that required students to push their thinking beyond multiple choice questions.

In response to the new standards and curriculum guides, Jessica also expressed her beliefs about being true who you are as a teacher.

> You shouldn't completely alter the way you teach because it's the way *you* teach, especially if it proves to be successful but you alter maybe the manner in which you break down the content to make sure it fits the standard better.

This was evident in Jessica's struggle to determine exactly how she would teach this unit. She discussed how she planned by creating a curriculum map. In this planning she would "break down" each standard in order to figure out how to teach it. Jessica discussed how this process was sometimes challenging for her because she would constantly ask herself, "How am I going to engage students using the guideline the county provides?" (Interview 1). In the end, she did not always use the curriculum guides by the county. She expressed how they did not always work to meet the needs of her students. "What's written on paper doesn't always work in the classroom."

This was evident in the changes Jessica made to the proposed curriculum. She did not feel it fit the standards it claimed to represent, therefore she changed the texts and the assignments, while staying true to the standards themselves. The text Jessica chose to teach, *The Hunger Games*, was not available in Jessica's school. Therefore, she had to ask another school if she could borrow the text to use with her students. She did not let these contextual constraints hold her back from how she wanted to meet the needs of her students, instead she found a way to make it happen. In addition, she chose not to focus only on a multiple choice pencil paper test or "teach to the test."

> I really try hard not to teach to the test but teach to the children and teach the standards to the children and relate it back to life because that's how they buy into it.

Jessica realized she had to reshape her thinking within the context and additionally she had to meet the requirements of teaching the standards and giving the mandated district tests, but when it came to how she chose to teach and assess in her classroom, what she

could control, she focused on the needs of students. She did find a balance, but she also stood firm and on her beliefs not to have a "paper pencil" driven classroom. She has chosen to push back and continues to fight the battle.

Support Systems

Support through collaboration. Like Pamela and Julia, Jessica found a support system in her colleagues. In our first interview she discussed the support she received from her colleagues at the school through professional development put on by the teachers. Teachers that considered themselves "experts" signed up to deliver professional development to the staff at the school Jessica said this was helpful to her in that she had learned a lot about how other teachers use data in their classrooms to guide instruction.

In addition, Jessica discussed her collaboration with a colleague in another grade level. "She and I are constantly back and forth with questions, information, everything." Jessica discussed how the supported each other by sharing ideas and even though they were on different grade levels, because they taught the same content, it was extremely beneficial and helped to shape her instructional practices. Jessica also worked closely with her grade level teammate. She discussed how they met more frequently than was required, often talking on the phone, email and via text because they tried to stay on the same page with what they were teaching so they could support each other.

Supportive administration. Not only did Jessica feel like she had a support system with her colleagues, like the other participants, she felt strong support from her administration. In our final interview she discussed the expectations and the support from the principal.

> It's a high needs school with expectations that are set very high. I think our administrator really pushes for us to really teach and push our students and it's not so much as getting them on grade level which is where we ultimately want them, but it's more a matter of just showing growth and with that we can you know, if somebody's in the third-grade reading level and we move them up to a fifth or sixth-grade level, that's a ton of growth. (Interview 2)

This support is in line with Jessica's beliefs about growing her students. Her principal held the same high expectations, while at the same time supporting the idea that teachers were there to help the students grow. Jessica also discussed how even when she and her principal were not on the same page, she knew she still had a support system there.

> I have support in one way or another. I know there are people I can vent to, whether it be a problem with a student or a problem with an administrator, even if it is *the* administrator, I have that relationship where I can go and I can say, hey, I don't agree with it, and it's not me being insubordinate, it's me saying hey, I don't agree with this and here's why, and to listen, so there's a respect. (Interview 2)

This support system helped Jessica feel comfortable in her space in the school and feel that she could integrate her beliefs into teaching, even if it meant she had to push back at times.

> I know what to expect here at this point, I know what organized chaos I'm going to face, even if sometimes it seems overwhelming I know I have support in one way or another. (Interview 2)

The collegial and administrative support provided to Jessica impacted how she instructed students in her classroom. While she was given the opportunity to collaborate with her colleagues and get ideas from them, she also felt she could turn to the administrator with

concerns. In spite of her roles being overwhelming, she felt she had a support system to embrace her along the way.

Conclusion

In conjunction with this support, Jessica also had held beliefs about how students learned best in within the context of her classroom. These beliefs were based on the social, cultural and historical experiences of her students and impacted her agency, which allowed her to find a balance within what she called "organized chaos." Within this context she was able to find success and implement literacy strategies that met the district requirements and aligned with her beliefs about serving her students.

<div align="center">

Cross Case Synthesis

</div>

In Ladson-Billings's (1994) work with teachers in high poverty schools, the participants showed that there were multiple ways to be successful in the classroom. There is no cookie cutter teacher solution. Instead, the participants in her study showed different approaches to teaching, with the same goal in mind and a focus on relationships, community, and meeting the needs of diverse learners.

Quite similarly, the teachers in this study met the needs of their students, but this looked quite differently at times. This synthesis will provide a discussion of these similarities and differences. In conducting a case study consisting of at least two cases Yin (2009) suggests that a cross case synthesis be applied to examine the results across cases. This synthesis will address the similarities and differences among the three participants in this study.

Beliefs

Throughout the interview process, the participants shared similar beliefs about what it meant to be a good teacher and meet the needs of students. All of the participants had beliefs that were coded in the areas of high expectations, supporting social learning, and meeting the interests and needs of students, however at times these beliefs looked quite different across the participants and classrooms.

High Expectations

Successful teachers believe all students are capable of learning (Haberman, 1995b; Thomas & Barksdale-Ladd, 1995). All three teachers held this belief for students. Their "no-nonsense" approach to learning expectations was clear. The participants made higher order thinking a part of the context of the room. Consistently pushing students to think more critically and dig deeper. In addition, on several occasions they told students that their purpose was to push them to think higher and explained the expectations were high. Most importantly the participants let the students know that while the expectations were high, as teachers, they would be there to support them.

Not only did all three participants have high expectations for their students, they all held high expectations for themselves to be knowledgeable of the new curriculum and how to effectively engage their students. Successful teachers have a love of learning and want to be better teachers for their students (Haberman, 1995b; Thomas & Barksdale-Ladd, 1995) this approach is consistent with all three of the teachers I studied. Pamela and Julia discussed working to be better, researching over the summer, seeking new ways to teach and engage students, while Jessica discussed studying the standards as she

created curriculum maps throughout the year and learning them to ensure she was accurately teaching them to her students. These expectations for themselves impacted the knowledge these teachers brought to the classroom as they implemented strategies from their learning process.

Social Learning

Julia, Jessica and Pamela believed that students learned best through sharing their experiences and knowledge with others. However, this belief was enacted differently in the classroom. When it came to social learning, Julia and Jessica believed in students working together in groups while Pamela saw this social learning as taking place as a whole class experience. She ensured the students shared their knowledge and learned from each other, but she led the discussions. Jessica and Julia gave group assignments that would require students to work together as leaders and learners among themselves in a child-centered social setting. Regardless of how this social setting looked in each classroom, all three participants created a safe, comfortable environment for students to participate, share, and learn together, valuing the experiences of all students and giving voice to these experiences.

Meeting the Interests and Needs of Students

All teachers focused on constant encouragement of students and showing passion for the learning of students. They met the needs of their students through constant monitoring and support. This support looked different across the classrooms as Pamela's support was related to specific education plan needs of Exceptional Children and English Language Learners. Pamela met the needs of students by slowing down the pace in her

classroom and focusing on repetition. Pamela as the "nurturer" was very hands on and guided her students in a way quite different than Jessica and Julia, ensuring each and every one of her students was along the ride with her. As facilitators, Jessica and Julia gave the students the reigns and let them lead the way. The end result however, was the same. The teachers enacted their beliefs about learning and worked to meet the needs of their students.

Autonomy

As previously discussed, research surrounding teachers of adolescents shows at a time when students need independence and freedom, teachers want to control them. This was not the case with participants in this study. Across all three teachers, students were given a sense of independence and freedom in their classrooms. Students were provided choices in topics to learn or review, choices in texts to read, roles to empower, and how to showcase their learning. While this sense of autonomy was seen more frequently in Julia and Jessica's classroom, Pamela also allowed students to make choices in their learning that gave them independence and ownership of their work.

Making Cultural Connections

Children need literature that reflects their lives (Thomas & Barksdale-Ladd, 1995). All three teachers worked to help students make connections to their content and bring their own experiences through these connections into the classroom. In order to help students make these cultural connections, teachers had to consider how they could meet the required standards through texts that the students could connect to. As researchers (Tatum, 2000; Turner, 2005) suggest this is not only accomplished through bringing in

popular culture as a means of engaging and connecting students, instead educators must teach students how to transfer these easy connections to more complex work. This was exhibited in all of the classes, particularly in Julia's case, a topic to which sixth-grade students may not initially be able to relate (Pearl Harbor and the Japanese internment camps) was made accessible by asking students to connect to previous examples of injustice such as the civil rights movement which they had previously studied, enjoyed and easily connected to. In addition, Jessica helped students to make real world connections with *The Hunger Games,* connecting "the reaping" to being drafted to the war at age 18. She also asked students to make political connections, connection the text to September 11, 2001 and the reactions of the politicians. Pamela helped her students make connections to her unit by asking students to consider how their cultures and lived experiences were related not only to their classmates, but also to students and cultures around the world. While all of these cultural connections look different across the classroom, in each scenario described in the cases, the teachers are valuing the experiences and knowledge students bring to the topic and helping them to extend this knowledge through making connections and learning from their peers.

Agency

The successful teachers in this study, also known as teacher leaders worked diligently to meet the needs of their students. In all three cases, this meant pushing against some of the contextual constraints they faced in the classroom in terms of assessment and curriculum expectations.

All teachers taught the standards, but they taught and assessed in ways they believed in. All of the participants did incorporate a few multiple choice questions, as an aspect of their tests because they wanted students to be familiar with those types of questions, but they in no way outweighed the engaging, open ended projects that occurred throughout the unit. These teachers enacted agency in a way that pushed against the norms and expectations set by the district and the contextual constraints of curriculum guides and assessments and found a balance between their beliefs and these constraints. These teachers were able to navigate the non-negotioables and enact their beliefs about teaching and learning that would shape the literacy lives of students.

Support Systems

All three participants discussed collaborating with their colleagues as a form of support in the school. Jessica collaborated with content teachers on her grade level as well as content teachers on other grade levels. Julia collaborated with the science teacher and the media specialist and Pamela collaborated with other district social studies teachers. While these support systems were different, all teachers felt they benefited from the opportunity to work with and learn from others and these support systems helped to impact their instructional decisions.

Additionally, the three participants all felt supported by their administration. Julia saw her as an enforcer of district requirements, but also felt supported by being given a sense of autonomy as long as the district mandates were met. Both Jessica and Pamela saw the principal as a resource, if they needed anything she was there to support them,

even if it was not curriculum related. These support systems provided a sense of comfort for teachers in their classrooms.

Conclusions

Julia, Pamela, and Jessica all had strong beliefs about what it meant to be educators in a high poverty school. Each teacher recognized that in order to be meet the needs of their students, they would have to find a balance between the expectations and mandates that were presented to them and their beliefs about teaching and learning. These teachers were able to find this balance by being armed with knowledge and the ability to use their knowledge and beliefs to "push back." For these teachers this knowledge of the new standards and how to ideas for implementation, came primarily from their own research, all of these teachers showed they valued personal learning and growth in order to meet the needs of their students in that they all sought out research to guide their work.

These participants had ideals about what it meant to be a good teacher, and while these ideals were discussed differently, their end goal was the same. Julia suggested that good teachers recognize they are much more than teachers, that they must take on the role of "mother, father, coach, leader, motivator, and educator" (Interview 1). Pamela suggested that good teachers simply love their students and Jessica suggested that good teachers were reflective in their teaching. "You always worry am I doing enough? Am I pushing hard enough. Am I pushing too hard?" (Interview 2). While all teachers discussed different ideas about being a good teacher, they all embodied each of the descriptors. And most importantly, they all believed that good teachers focused on

helping students to grow academically. "My ultimate goal in any situation is just to see a child grow" (Julia, Interview 1). This was a common goal across all participants. They realized it was their responsibility to help students learn and grow. This realization was evident each day in the instruction teachers provided for students, instruction that valued the voices and experiences of all learners while still focusing on challenging and growing students.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

High stakes testing is often discussed in the context of numbers and proficiency status with labels attached to schools and scale scores attached to students. The purpose of this study was not to add to the existing literature on those aspects of the high stakes conversation; instead, it was to amplify the voices of successful teachers in the context of high stakes testing reform in high poverty schools. The purpose was to open the doors of classrooms that housed teachers deemed successful by their school administrator and look into the realities of those classrooms, focusing on the ways in which teachers instructed and engaged students in the literacy learning process.

As previously mentioned, research shows the different ways in which many teachers across the nation have responded to high stakes testing, quite often at the expense of engaging, rigorous instruction. Researchers have also provided checklists for successful teachers, however, rarely do they examine the voices and experiences of these teachers and ask them face-to-face about the beliefs they have and why they remain in the school or profession while comparing this data to observations. Often research focuses on reform mandates but rarely do teachers get to tell their stories in relation to the non-negotiables placed upon them. The purpose of this study was to allow interview, observation and artifact data to tell the stories of these teachers.

While case study data is not considered to be generalizable, it is useful in considering the implications for larger scale studies and for digging deeply into the crevices of stories teachers have to tell, beliefs that impact their instruction and the experiences they provide for their students. Throughout this study I examined these stories and through these stories I hope to have created a larger view of teacher beliefs and practices and how these beliefs are enacted in classroom literacy instruction.

The Role of Instruction

In the context of high stakes testing, and increased teacher turnover in high poverty schools, the review of literature has shown the progression of accountability measures that led many teachers across the nation to adopt practices to meet the requirements of multiple choice tests that assessed basic skills. The outcome of these practices meant putting children in poverty at a greater disadvantage because it would be unlikely they would receive supplemental instruction or comparable experiences outside of the classroom like many of their middle class peers (Berliner, 2009; Coleman, 1968). As a result, the achievement gap in reading remains between high and low poverty students (Haberman, 2005; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011) and the minimal growth that is seen is seen in the area of basic skills. For this reason, the quote that began this study becomes more relevant in that it states the need for both quality teachers and quality instruction in high poverty schools.

> Never before has there been such a critical demand for quality teachers and instruction to meet and overcome the barriers and challenges of teaching in our nation's urban high-poverty schools (McKinney et al., 2008, p. 69)

As a researcher I agree with this assertion and this study supports it. In a time where there is such a critical demand for quality teachers and instruction this study is helpful in examining both successful teachers and their instruction. The need for these two components has been the driving force of this study.

The findings of this study showed that the instructional practices of teachers were specifically focused on the social, historical and cultural needs of students. These practices embraced the sociocultural framework and were based on the beliefs teachers had on how students learn best. Teachers focused on helping students make connections to their lived experiences and to share those experiences with their peers, becoming both teachers and learners within the context of their classroom.

The Role of Successful Teachers

The need for quality teachers in high poverty schools is key in that Delpit (2013) argued high poverty students fail to achieve at the same academic levels as their high performing peers because teachers fail to provide adequate instruction. She states,

> In many schools where children are not performing, a larger number of teachers are not really teaching (although there are almost always exceptional teachers to be found in any school setting). The children are completing worksheets, answering written questions, doing seatwork. The teachers are at their own desks, apparently also doing seatwork. There is little interaction except for discipline. Few questions are asked, and those that are asked demand little thought. Children who choose not to be involved are ignored. (p. 9)

Quite simply, research supports the idea that what students in high poverty schools need in order to increase achievement are successful teachers that challenge students beyond the basic levels of learning. As Delpit states, there are successful teachers in these

settings and this study focused on those successful teachers that resisted the status quo. In an effort to better understand these teachers and their stories, this study sought to examine successful teachers and their beliefs and practices enacted in their classrooms.

The participants in this study were successful teachers and academic leaders in their school and districts. The school was seen as successful in terms of reading test data showing consistent growth in literacy scores during the years the participants worked at the school. While it is impossible without confidential individual teacher test data to conclude that these teachers are the primary reason for the successful test scores, it does stand to reason that these teachers were in fact instrumental in the success of the school. This is supported by teacher accolades and the fact that all teachers discussed their success with student growth and noted that they felt supported by the principal in their practices because they had been successful with helping students show academic growth. In addition, these teachers had been named as teacher leaders in many areas by their principal and from my experiences working in the school, these academic leadership positions were awarded to teachers who consistently showed academic growth in terms of district and state tests. Finally, the data gathered from this study supports the literature reviewed and the research found about the characteristics of successful teachers (Haberman, 1995b; Hall, 2005; McLaughlin, 1993; Sleeter & Stillman, 2007).

Not a One Size Fits All Approach

In Ladson-Billings's (1994) groundbreaking work, *Dreamkeepers*, she presents the practices of two teachers with similar goals, yet different means of getting there. In this study, Ladson-Billings (1994) examined the practices of two literacy teachers in high

poverty schools. She discussed how these two teachers "made literacy a communal activity" (p. 104). In her description of one teacher's classroom, Ladson-Billings discusses the community of learners and the high expectations in place for all students. This classroom gave students an opportunity to practice challenging tasks such as comparing and contrasting information from texts, creating character-attribute webs and incorporating relevant art activities. The teacher practiced constant, meaningful praise of her students while daily working to build a safe community of learning.

The second teacher in this study was quite different from the first in that she was very structured, focusing on direct instruction. However, she too built relationships with her students, had clear high expectations, and provided social learning opportunities. While Ladson-Billings (1994) discussed the differences between these two teachers, she reinforced the idea that they both held high expectations and were able to make learning relevant to all of their students using various instructional strategies. These teachers, working to increase the achievement level of all of their students focused on high expectations, culturally relevant teaching and building a community of learners in order to find success.

In light of this study, Ladson-Billings (1994) suggests that there is no prescriptive way to teach students from poverty and opposed to providing a list of best practices, we should instead allow educators to hear the stories found in research and use these findings to make sense of their own practices and how they can work to better serve students. This study sought to do just that, provide stories of the literacy practices successful teachers used in their classroom and how their beliefs were related to those practices, so

that other teachers might make sense of the practices they enacted in order to navigate the mandates of teaching in a context of high stakes reform.

The stories of Julia, Pamela and Jessica showed, much like Ladson-Billings's (1994) work, that there is not one road to reaching students. There are multiple avenues for promoting engaging, social, higher level learning for students. While the teachers held similar beliefs and were able to balance these beliefs with the mandates imposed on them, these beliefs at times, were enacted in the classroom in very different ways.

Beliefs and Practices

This study examined teacher practices and the beliefs that drove instructional decisions. From interview and observation data the themes that emerged to answer these questions were the (a) types of beliefs teachers had and how they enacted these beliefs, (b) agency through resistance—agency teachers enacted to push back against contextual constraints, and (c) the support teachers had from colleagues and their principal.

Beliefs Enacted

In discussion of these factors, it is important to first examine not only the fact that teacher beliefs played a role in instructional decisions but to examine the particular beliefs these teachers had that were related to their instruction. In other words, these teachers had beliefs that were relevant to the rich learning experiences of students.

These teachers not only believed in what some might consider "best practices" they believed in having high academic and behavior expectations for students as the foundation of their work. In addition, not only did they believe that all students could learn, they believed that all students could share knowledge as well and become both

learners and distributors of knowledge in social environments. Finally, participants

believed in the importance of teaching in ways that met the needs and interests of

students and making connections between required curriculum and standards and the

lives of students. It was not enough for these teachers to have these beliefs; they also had

to enact these beliefs. As discussed in the review of literature, researchers have long

posited that these are the beliefs of successful teachers. There is little room for debate

that holding these beliefs are an aspect of what makes teachers successful. Many schools

of education teach pre-service teachers the importance of these components, but rarely

does anyone teach strategies for *how* to enact these beliefs. It's one thing to say "I

believe this" and another thing to make these beliefs part of the culture of the classroom.

It may seem to be common knowledge that teachers enact their beliefs through

their instructional practices, but in reality, this is not always the case. In early studies of

teacher beliefs there is a discussion of the obstacles that sometimes kept teachers from

enacting their beliefs. These obstacles involved teacher knowledge, teacher preparation

and conflicts between beliefs and programs (Konopak & Wilson, 1995; Richardson,

Anders, Tidwell, & Lloyd, 1991). While these obstacles were present in the early

discussions of teachers enacting their beliefs, these obstacles are still relevant today.

Agency through Resistance

This study shows that teacher's ability to enact their beliefs came from their

ability to find a balance between the non-negotiables of curriculum and assessment

presented to them and their beliefs about how students learn best. In finding this balance,

teachers had to enact agency in order to resist the contextual constraints of high stakes

testing. Participants in this study had accepted that testing mandates were not going away, in fact they had increased over the years, now tying student scores to teacher evaluations. Therefore, within this context, teachers had to consider how to be agentive in their decisions when it came to teaching their students. The participants found their beliefs did not always align with what was expected of them in terms of curriculum and assessment and they had to figure out how to navigate that misalignment. In order to do that, they had to reshape who they were as teachers, by researching and learning how to effectively "push back" while still meeting the expectations of local, state and national mandates. Similar to participants in Zoch's (2013) study, agency allowed teachers to enact their beliefs through curriculum tailored to meet the needs of their students. This agency produced student led book talks, student created culture books and literature circles that gave voice to the experiences of students.

Support Systems

Researchers suggest that administrative support is important to the success of teachers and schools (Horn, 2009; Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2011). In this case, this support served to impact teacher instruction as teachers felt they were held accountable for student achievement by the expectation of student growth. While the principal made a supporter of mandates, participants felt she also worked to ensure that she was a supporter of her teachers.

In addition, participants felt support from their colleagues in their ability to share ideas and strategies. Johnston, Kraft, and Papay (2011) suggest that if expert teachers fail to share and collaborate with their peers, the knowledge they have does not reach beyond

their classrooms or students. In addition, they suggest this support from colleagues can strongly impact the improvement of the school by not only helping the teachers to feel successful, but by expanding the experiences of students as well.

Balance

While the results of this study showed that teacher beliefs, agency, and support systems were related to the literacy practices of teachers, the underlying foundation that pulled all of these pieces together was the ability of these teachers to find a balance. In Julia's words, in discussing curriculum and assessment requirements she spoke to the essence of finding the space between mandates and beliefs.

> This year I think I have more of a handle on it as far as that balance between what I have to do and what I really feel is best for the kids.

In order to enact their beliefs, all teachers in this study had to find this balance, figuring out how they could do what they had to do in terms of mandates, yet do what was best for kids. Much of this balance came from researching and learning how to use the standards to engage children and being able to enact agency in order to push back against the demands they were faced with. Participants realized without this "push back" and modification of the instructional materials and guides they were given, they would not have been able to meet the needs of students. By resisting the constraints placed upon them, they were able to make instructional decisions that they believed best met the needs of their students. They were able to do this by finding a balance between their beliefs and the mandates provided to them. Without this balance it is quite possible teachers would have leaned more towards curriculum mandates and less toward students' needs or vice

versa. This balance helped them to "redefine and broaden the boundaries" (Haberman, 1995a) of their teaching. In doing so, these teachers redefined what it meant to meet required standards by broadening the scope of learning beyond multiple choice tests and textbooks.

Sitting at the 2014 Emerging Issues Forum listening to Diane Ravitch discuss education in our country, she spoke of the need for students of poverty to have a "full and rich curriculum" and the need for schools to have larger goals than test scores. In nodding my head to these words throughout her speech I thought of this study and these teachers embodying these recommendations for education. I thought of the full and rich curriculum these participants provided for students through integrating technology, the use of magazines, film, firsthand accounts, and numerous visual representations to help students make connections to their lived experiences and share those lived experiences while at the same time meeting the "standards." I thought of the beliefs of teachers enacted in their instructional decisions and in the lives of students as their primary goal, was to "help students grow." This reflection reiterated Delpit's (2013) stance that there are good teachers in every school and in the midst of teaching that robs students of a "full and rich curriculum" we must continue to research what these good teachers do.

Sociocultural Instruction

One of the major components that showed up in classrooms of participants in this study was social learning. This was a major part of teacher beliefs and instructional practices. In discussion of the sociocultural approach, Schunk (2012) discussed Vygotsky's idea of the importance of the social environment in the process of learning

and how "social interactions transformed learning experiences" (p. 242). Teachers in this study used social interactions in their attempt to transform learning experiences for students. The opportunities they gave students to work together, sharing knowledge and experiences they gained from a text which may have been different from their peers, and at times assigning students different roles to take different perspectives in their reading-in sharing this knowledge, participants hoped students would work together, learn together and bring new knowledge to their literacy experiences.

In the context of high stakes testing, beliefs, agency, social learning and support systems came together for these teachers in a way that related to how they taught children. These factors were intricately blended with a balance that allowed teachers to know what boundaries to push and know how to redefine themselves for their students within the contextual constraints of standards and assessment mandates.

Limitations

In discussing the limitations of this study, I will begin with obstacles I faced in being able to collect data. Due to research constraints, I was not able to have the principal as a participant in the study. Getting her perspective about the support she provided to teachers would have been helpful as well as getting a more in depth perspective of her views on specific teacher practices as well as her insights as to how she felt she supported teachers. This perspective could have strengthened the study. In addition, this study may have benefitted from being able to interview other teachers in the school who worked closely with the participants to see how others perceived their success and collaboration.

Implications and Future Research

Implications for Practice

The implications of this study suggest there is not a "one size fits all" approach to the instructional decisions made by successful teachers. Instead, teachers must provide instruction that meets the specific needs of their students, not scripted programs and curriculum guides that assume all students learn the same way at the same time. This study also suggests instructional practices of teachers can be related to the beliefs they hold and enact and when these beliefs are aligned with what researchers consider to be effective practices, they are able to engage students in literacy activities that are meaningful and promote learning. Therefore, presenting coursework that allows students to understand their beliefs in conjunction with the context of high stakes testing may work to better prepare students to have confidence to enact their beliefs once they enter the classroom.

This study also holds implications for teacher education programs and new teacher support programs to consider how they might help to nurture educational beliefs that will best serve students. These programs might help to benefit teachers by providing resources and opportunities for preservice and novice teachers to consider the tools that would be necessary to enact their beliefs and to be critical consumers of research in order to be armed with the knowledge to support their beliefs and enact agency based on the knowledge they have about how to best serve students.

In addition, programs that train school administrators might also consider how to help principals foster these beliefs and ideas of teachers and support teachers through

understanding the standards, understanding the variety of assessments and holding teachers accountable while helping them address the needs and interests of students. Each teacher discussed the support of the administration. It could be argued that the support of the administration played a role in how and why teachers felt confident in enacting agency in their classrooms. Because of this, programs that prepare school administrators may benefit from helping principals to foster school contexts that help teachers to meet the academic needs of students in spite of mandates by state and district reform efforts. All of these teachers were proven leaders within their school as indicated by their roles and rewards. Therefore, it could also be argued that school leaders should provide more opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles.

In addition to strategy and diversity courses and professional development offerings, schools of education and school districts may benefit by including a specific course that focuses on helping teachers feel comfortable with creating a culture of social learning by integrating activities that involve collaborative learning.

Implications for Policy

In considering the lack of opportunities for professional development as discussed by the participants, I reflect on my pilot study that sought to examine the role of pay for performance incentives on instructional practices. The pilot study showed one of the major influences on instructional practices was the professional development required for teachers. However, in this study, with the requirement for professional development being taken away, there was little mention of professional development as impacting instructional practices. Notably, the teachers in the study did want effective professional

development, but because it was not made available to them, they sought out knowledge on their own in an attempt to improve their instruction. These findings show that policy makers should provide resources and funding for professional development. When it is relevant to the instructional practices of teachers, they value it. When they do not have it as a resource, they are forced to find alternative means for gaining knowledge to meet the needs of their students. While successful teachers may seek out this knowledge, for other teachers, a lack of meaningful professional development may cause teachers to feel less capable of making instructional decisions.

In considering implications for policy, the characteristics and beliefs of these teachers could be used as a dimension of a teacher evaluation model. Specifically, teachers could be evaluated on the opportunities they give students to engage in meaningful social learning, autonomy, and culturally relevant learning. Teacher beliefs enacted could be used as a measure of evaluation as teachers focus on high expectations for students in their quest to increase student learning and growth. These characteristics are related to the practices of successful teachers in this study and may serve as a tool for evaluating other teachers as well.

Teachers ability to have voice in instructional decisions has been cited as one of the reasons teachers stay in the profession (Ingersoll, 2011). While the intent of this study was not to assess why and how successful teachers remain in high poverty schools, it was important to examine this question in considering the needs of students in high poverty schools and the high turnover rate of teachers in these schools. Ingersoll's (2011) analysis of the Schools and Staffing survey showed that teachers, who felt a sense

of autonomy and were given a voice in decisions within the school, including curriculum

decisions, were less likely to leave. These components seem to be true in this case as

well, however there seemed to be other driving factors as well.

As this study sought to look at the "hows and whys" of beliefs and instruction in

the classrooms of successful teachers, it was also important to consider how to keep these

successful teachers in the profession so these exemplary practices can continue to

happen. One of the major concerns of teachers that needs to be addressed are testing

policies and the expectations in place to prepare students for testing. When these

particular teachers were asked why they stay, the support of the principal played a role

and their ability to make a difference in the lives of students played a role.

> I love kids, so . . . And I feel like it's a gift that God's given me, and so I just push
> through. (Pamela, Interview 2)

> I know what to expect here at this point, I know what organized chaos I'm going
> to face, even if sometimes it seems overwhelming, and I know I have support in
> one way or another. (Jessica, Interview 2)

> At the end of their day I want to feel like I'm making a difference in the kid's
> lives that when they move to other grade levels they can say, oh, I do know this,
> that they have a confidence that they can be successful. And also I want to be
> successful, I want to be a teacher that is known—that's well-known because she
> teaches her classes, because she cares about the kids. So it's just success all
> around, either for me or for my students. (Julia, Interview 2)

Further implications of this study show that in addition to autonomy, teachers may stay in

high poverty schools when they feel they are supported and have the opportunity to make

a difference in the lives of students. In addition, teachers may stay because they enjoy

the success they find in these schools and they want the success to continue for both them and their students.

Future Research

As always, a lesson research teaches us is that there is so much more to learn in the field of education. As I interviewed and observed these teachers I couldn't help but to think about how they came to have these beliefs and the ability to enact them. It is one thing to learn about beliefs teachers *should* have, but to be able to enact these beliefs and be seen as successful in the process is quite different. Therefore future research should include a longitudinal study of teachers coming into the profession and follow them for the first five years of teaching in order to examine how their teacher beliefs are formed and the differences in teacher beliefs of teachers viewed as successful versus those that are viewed as unsuccessful.

Additionally, throughout the study I thought of the views of students and wondered how they viewed the success of their teacher and their instructional decisions. As an observer, I assumed they were engaged in the tasks and found them challenging. However, in future studies I think it would be important to interview students as well in the context of a successful teachers' classrooms in order to examine their responses to instructional literacy practices of their teachers.

As our nation continues to address the concerns of the achievement gap, instruction that focuses on building strong, competent citizens that embrace their cultural experiences and provide nurturing environments and relationships with students is imperative. While these practices may not look the same in every classroom, they should

involve culturally responsive teaching that caters to the diverse students and needs in their classrooms if they are to be effective providing relevant learning environments. In addition, as researchers, we must continue to examine successful teachers and their instructional decisions in order to learn from their stories and take what fits our own experiences in an effort to be better educators in this time of reform and mandates because

> Never before has there been such a critical demand for **quality teachers and instruction** to meet and overcome the barriers and challenges of teaching in our nation's urban high-poverty schools. (McKinney et al., 2008, p. 69)

REFERENCES

Abrams, L. M., Pedulla, J. J., Madaus, G. F. (2003). Views from the classroom:
Teachers' opinions of statewide testing programs. *Theory into Practice, 42*(1),
18–29.

Amrein, A. L., & Berliner, D. C. (2003). The effects of high-stakes testing on student
motivation and learning. *Educational Leadership, 60*(5), 32–38.

Allington, R. L., Johnston, P. H., & Day, J. P. (2002). Exemplary fourth-grade teachers.
Language Arts, 79(6), 462–466.

Anderman, E. M., & Mueller, C. E. (2010). Middle school transitions and adolescent
development. In J. Meece & J. S. Eccles (Eds.), *Handbook of research on schools,
schooling, and human development* (pp. 198–215). New York, NY: Routledge.

Au, K. H. (1992). Changes in a teachers's views of interactive comprehension instruction.
In L. C. Moll, (Ed.), *Vygotsky and education: Instructional implications and
applications of sociohistorical psychology.* New York, NY: Cambridge University
Press.

Au, W. (2007). High-Stakes testing and curricular control: A qualitative metasynthesis.
Educational Researcher, 36(5), 258–267.

Au, W. (2011). Teaching under the new Taylorism: High-stakes testing and the
standardization of the 21st century curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies,
43*(1), 25–45.

Baker, E., Baron, P., Darling-Hammond, L., Haertel, E., Ladd, H., Linn, R., & Shepard, L. (2010). Problems with the use of student test scores to evaluate teachers (pp. 1–22). Washington.

Banks, J., Cochran-Smith, M., Moll, L., Richert, A., Zeichner, K., Lepage, P., . . . McDonald, M. (2005). Teaching diverse learners. In L. Darling-Hammond & J. Bransford (Eds.), *Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do* (pp. 232 – 274). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Barksdale-Ladd, M. A., & Thomas, K. F. (2000). What's at stake in high-stakes testing: teachers and parents speak out. *Journal of Teacher Education, 51,* 384–397.

Berliner, D. C. (2009). Poverty and potential: Out-of-school factors and school success. *Boulder and Tempe: Education and the Public Interest Center and Education Policy Research Unit.* Retrieved from http://epicpolicy.org/publication/ poverty-and-potential

Blair, T. R., Rupley, W. H., & Nichols, W. D. (2007). The effective teacher of reading: Considering the "what" and "how" of instruction. *The Reading Teacher, 60*(5), 432–438.

Brimijoin, K. (2011). Differentiation and high stakes testing: An Oxymoron? *Theory into Practice, 44*(3), 37–41.

Brophy, J. E. (2004). Self-Determination theory of intrinsic motivation: Meeting students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. *Motivating students to learn* (pp. 152-183). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Brophy, J. E. (2010). *Motivating students to learn*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Burke, J. (2008). *The teacher's essential guide: Effective Instruction*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Center on Education Policy. (2012). *Reflections on a half-century of school reform: Why have we fallen short and where do we go from here?* Washington, DC: Jennings.

Clark, C. M., & Peterson, P. L. (1984). *Teachers' thought processes.* Occasional paper no. 72. East Lansing, MI: Institute for Research on Teaching College Education.

Coleman, J. S. (1968). Equality of educational opportunity. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 6*(5), 19–28.

Common Core State Standards Initiative. (2010). *Common Core Standards for ELA and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects.* NGA/CCSSO.

Cooper, H., Nye, B., Charlton, K., Lindsay, J., & Greathouse, S. (1996). Summer learning loss: The problem and some solutions. *Review of Educational Research, 66*(3), 227–68.

Costigan, A. (2002). Teaching the culture of high stakes testing: Listening to new teachers. *Action in Teacher Education, 23*(4), 28–34.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cuban, L. (2009). *Hugging the middle: How teachers teach in an era of testing and accountability.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2007). Third annual brown lecture in education research—The flat earth and education: How America's commitment to equity will determine our future. *Educational Researcher, 36*(6), 318.

Darling-Hammond, L., & Sykes, G. (2003). Wanted: A national teacher supply policy for education: The right way to meet the "highly qualified teacher" challenge. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 11*(33), 1–57.

Delpit, L. D. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard Education Review, 58*(3), 280–298.

Delpit, L. D. (2006a). Lessons from teachers. *Journal of Teacher Education, 57*(3), 220–231.

Delpit, L. D. (2006b). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom.* New York, NY: The New Press.

Delpit, L. (2013). *Multiplication is for white people: Raising expectations for other people's children.* New York, NY: The New Press.

Dezuanni, M. (2010). Digital media literacy: Connecting young people's identities, creative production and learning about video games. In D. E. Alvermann (Ed.), *Adolescents' online literacies: Connecting classrooms, digital media, and popular culture* (pp. 125–144). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

Dyson, A. H. (2003). *The brothers and sisters learn to write: Popular literacies in childhood and school cultures*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Dyson, A. H., & Genishi, C. (2005). *On the case: Approaches to language and literacy research.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Eccles, J. S., & Roeser, R. W. (2010). An ecological view of schools and development. In J. Meece & J. S. Eccles (Eds.), *Handbook of research on schools, schooling and human development* (pp. 6–21). New York, NY: Routledge.

Entwisle, D. R., Alexander, K. L., & Olson, L. S. (2010). Socioeconomic status. In J. L. Meece & J. S. Eccles (Eds.), *Handbook of research on schools, schooling, and human development*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Eun, B. (2010). Form learning to development: A sociocultural approach to instruction. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 40*(4), 401-418.

Fairbanks, C. (1998). Nourishing conversations: Urban adolescents, literacy and democratic society. *Journal of Literacy Research, 30*(2), 187–203.

Fiene, J., & McMahon, S. (2007). Assessing comprehension: A classroom-based process. *Reading Teacher, 60*(5), 406-417.

Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2012). *Improving adolescent literacy: Content area strategies at work* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Forman, E. A., & Cazden, C. B. (1986). Exploring Vygotskian perspectives in education: The cognitive value of peer interaction. In J. V. Wertsch (Ed.), *Culture, communication, and cognition: Vygotskian perspectives*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education, 53*(2), 106–116.

Gee, J. P. (2000). The new literacy studies: From 'socially situated' to the work of the social. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton, & R. Ivanič (Eds.), *Situated literacies* (pp. 180–196). London: Routledge.

Gimbert, B., Desai, S., & Kerka, S. (2010). The big picture: Focusing urban teacher education on the community. *Phi Delta Kappan, 92*(2), 36–39.

Griffin, M. L. (2002). Why don't you use your finger? Paired reading in first grade. *Reading Teacher, 55*(8), 766–774.

Gutierrez, A., & Beavis, C. (2010). 'Experts on the field': Redefining literacy boundaries. In D. E. Alvermann (Ed.), *Adolescents' online literacies: Connecting classrooms, digital media, and popular culture* (pp. 145–162). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Haberman, M. (1995a). Selecting "star" teachers for children and youth in urban poverty. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76*(10), 777–781.

Haberman, M. (1995b). *Star teachers of children in poverty.* Indianapolis, IN: Kappa Delta Pi.

Haberman, M. (2005). *Star teachers: The ideology and best practice of effective teachers of diverse children an youth in poverty.* Houston, TX: Haberman Educational Foundation.

Hall, L. A. (2005). Teachers and content area reading: Attitudes, beliefs and change. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 21,* 403–414.

Hammerberg, D. D. (2004). Comprehension instruction for socioculturally diverse classroom: A review of what we know. *The Reading Teacher, 57*(7), 648–657.

Hanushek, E. (2008). Teacher deselection. In D. Goldhaber & J. Hannaway (Eds.), *Creating a new teacher profession* (pp. 165–180). Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.

Harvey, S., & Goudvis, A., (2007). *Strategies that work: Teaching comprehension for understanding and engagement*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Holland, D., Skinner, D., Lachicotte, Jr., W., & Cain, C. (1998). *Identity and agency in cultural worlds.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Howard, C. M., & Miller, S. D. (2013). *Pay for performance accountability programs: It's more than the money.* Paper presented at the Literacy Research Association 63rd Annual Conference.

Ingersoll, R. M. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis. *American Educational Research Journal, 38*(3), 499–534.

Irvine, J. J. (2010). Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *Education Digest, 75*(8), 57–61.

Jensen, E. (2013). *Engaging students with poverty in mind: Practical strategies for raising achievement.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Johnson, S. M., Kraft, M. A., & Papay, J. P. (2011). How context matters in high-need schools: The effects of teachers' working conditions on their professional satisfaction and their students' achievement. *Teachers College Record, 114,* 1–39.

John-Steiner, V., & Mahn, H. (1996). Sociocultural approaches to learning and development: A Vygotskian framework. *Educational Psychologist, 31*(3/4), 191–206.

Keene, E. O., & Zimmerman, S. (2007). *Mosaic of thought.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Kelley, C., & Protsik, J. (1997). Risk and reward: Perspectives on the implementation of Kentucky's school-based performance award program. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 33*(4), 474–505.

Konopak, B., & Wilson, E. K. (1995). Formal and practical knowledge in reading education: Examining preservice, inservice, and university teachers' perspective on classroom instruction. In K. A. Hinchman, D. J. Leu, & C. K. Kinzer (Eds.), *Perspectives on literacy research and practice* (pp. 400–416). Chicago, IL: National Reading Conference.

Kumar, R., & Maehr, M. (2010). Schooling, cultural diversity, and student motivation. In J. Meece & J. S. Eccles (Eds.), *Handbook of research on schools, schooling, and human development* (pp. 308–324). New York, NY: Routledge.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The Dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children.* San Franscisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into Practice, 34*(3), 159–165.

Lasky, S. (2005). A sociocultural approach to understanding teacher identity, agency and professional vulnerability in a context of secondary school reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 21,* 899–916.

Lazar, A. (2006). Literacy teachers making a difference in urban schools: A context-specific look at effective literacy teaching. *Journal of Reading Education, 32*(1), 13–21.

Lewis, C., Encisco, P., & Moje, E. B. (2007). *Reframing sociocultural research on literacy.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalist inquiry.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Massey, D. D. (2006). "You teach for me; I've had it!" A first-year teacher's cry for help. *Action in Teacher Education, 28*(3), 73–85.

Matthews, M. W., & Kesner, J. (2003). Children learning with peers: The confluence of peer status and literacy competence within small-group literacy events. *Reading Research Quarterly, 38*(2) 208–234.

Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

McCombs, B. L., & Whisler, J. S. (1997). *The learner-centered classroom and school: Strategies for increasing student motivation and achievement.* CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.

McGregor, T. (2007). *Comprehension connections: Bridges to strategic reading.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

McKinney, S. E., Haberman, M., Stafford-Johnson, D., & Robinson, J. (2008). Developing teachers for high-poverty schools: The role of the internship experience. *Urban Education, 42*(1), 68–82.

McLaughlin, M. W. (1993). What matters most in teachers' workplace context? In J. W.

    Little & M. W. McLaughlin (Eds.), *Teachers' work: Individuals, colleagues, and*

    contexts (pp. 79 – 103). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Meece, J. L., & Schaefer, V. A. (2010). Schools as a context of human development. In J.

    Meece & J. S. Eccles (Eds.), *Handbook of research on schools, schooling, and*

    human development (pp. 3–5). New York, NY: Routledge.

Miles, M., & Huberman, A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new*

    methods. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Miller, S. D. (2003). How high and low-challenge tasks affect motivation and learning:

    Implications for struggling learners. *Reading & Writing Quarterly, 19,* 39–57.

Milner, H. R. (2010). What does teacher education have to do with teaching?

    Implications for diversity studies. *Journal of Teacher Education, 61,* 118–131.

Misco, T. (2008). Was that a result of my teaching? A brief exploration of value-added

    assessment. *The Clearing House, 82*(1), 11–14.

Moje, E. (1996). "I teach students, not subjects": Teacher-student relationships as

    contexts for secondary literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *31,* 172–195.

Moll, L. C. (1992). Bilingual classroom studies and community analysis: Some recent

    trends. *Educational Researcher, 21*(2), 20–24.

Moll, L. C. (1994). Literacy research in community and classrooms: A sociocultural

    approach. In R. B. Ruddell, M. R. Rudell, & H. Singer (Eds.), *Theoretical models*

    and processes of reading (4th ed., pp. 179–207). Newark, DE: International

    Reading Association.

National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey. (2007-2008). Retrieved July 1, 2013) from http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/ sass0708_2009324_t1s_02.asp.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2011). *The Nations Report Card: Reading 2011*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences.

National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform. *The Elementary School Journal, 84*(2), 112-130.

Ogle, D. M. (1986). K-W-L: A teaching model that develops active reading of expository text. *The Reading Teacher, 39,* 564–570.

Olson, J.K. (1981). Teacher influence in the classroom. *Instructional Science, 10,* 259–275.

Peterson, B. (2003). One teacher's journey. In L. Christensen & S. Karp (Eds.), *Rethinking school reform: Views from the classroom* (pp. 60–75). Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking schools.

Perez, B. (1998). *Sociocultural contexts of language and literacy*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Pomerantz, E. M., & Moorman, E. A. (2010). Parents' involvement in children's schooling: A context for children's development. In J. L. Meece & J. S. Eccles (Eds.), *Handbook of research on schools, schooling and human development* (pp. 398–416). New York, NY: Routledge.

Ravitch, D. (2010). *The death and life of the great American school system: How testing and choice are undermining education.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Resnick, L. B. (2010). Nested learning systems for the thinking curriculum. *Educational Researcher, 39*(3), 183–197.

Richardson, V., Anders, P., Tidwell, D., & Lloyd, C. (1991). The relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices in reading comprehension instruction. *American Educational Research Journal, 28*(3), 559–586.

Rowley, S. J., Kurtz-Costes, B., & Cooper, S. M. (2010). The schooling of African-American children. In J. Meece & J. S. Eccles (Eds.), *Handbook of research on schools, schooling, and human development* (pp. 275–292). New York, NY: Routledge.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2009). Promoting self-determined school engagement: Motivation, learning and well-being. In K. Wentzel (Ed.), *Handbook of motivation at school* (pp. 171–195). New York, NY: Routledge.

Sanders, W. L., & Rivers, C. R. (1996). *Cumulative and residual effects of teachers on future student academic achievement.* University of Tennessee Value Added Assessment Center. Research Report. Retrieved August 28, 2013 from http://mccluelearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Cumulative-and-Residual-Effects-of-Teachers.pdf

Schunk, D. H. (2012). *Learning theories: An educational perspective* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Scrimsher, S., & Tudge, J. (2003). The teaching/learning relationship in the first years of school: Some revolutionary implications of Vygotska's theory. *Early Education and Development, 14*(3), 293–312.

Silva, S. M, Verhoeven, L., & Leeuwe, J. (2011). Socio-cultural variation in reading comprehension development among fifth graders in Peru. *Reading and Writing, 24,* 951–969.

Sleeter, C. (2007). Democracy, equity, and accountability. In C. Sleeter (Ed.), *Facing accountability in education: Democracy & equity at risk* (pp. 1–12). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Sleeter, C., & Stillman, J. (2007). Navigating accountability pressures. In C. Sleeter (Ed.), Facing accountability in education: Democracy & equity at risk (pp. 13–29). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Snow, C. E., Burns, S. M., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children.* Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Snow, C.E., Griffin, P., & Burns, M. S. (2005). *Knowledge to support the teaching of reading: Preparing teachers for a changing world.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques.* London: Sage.

Talbert-Johnson, C. (2004). Structural inequities and the achievement gap in urban schools. *Education and Urban Society, 37*(1), 22–36.

Tatum, A. W. (2000). Breaking down barriers that disenfranchise African-American adolescent readers in low-level tracks. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 44*(1), 52–64.

Taylor, B. M., Pearson, P. D., Peterson, D. S., & Rodriguez, M. C. (2003). Reading growth in high poverty classrooms: The influence of teacher practices that encourage cognitive engagement in literacy learning. *The Elementary School Journal, 104*(1), 3–28.

Thomas, K. F., & Barksdale-Ladd, M. A. (1995). Effective literacy classrooms: Teachers and students exploring literacy together. In K. A. Hinchman, D. J. Leu, & C. Kinzer (Eds.), *Perspectives on literacy research and practice* (pp. 169–179). Chicago, IL: National Reading Conference.

Tough, P. (2012). *How children succeed: Grit, curiosity, and the hidden power of character.* New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.

Tracey, D. H., & Morrow, L. M. (2012). *Lenses on reading: An introduction to theories and models.* New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Turner, J. D. (2005). Orchestrating success for African-American readers: The case of an effective third-grade teacher. *Reading Research and Instruction, 44*(4), 27–48.

U.S. Department of Education. (1997). *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (IASA) guidance.* Retrieved November 21, 2010, from http://www2.ed.gov/pubs/Final/index.html

U.S. Department of Education. (2002). *Overview: Key policy letters signed by the Education Secretary or Deputy Secretary.* Retrieved March 14, 2013, from http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/020724.html

U.S. Department of Education. (2004). *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.* Retrieved November 21, 2010 from http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html

U.S. Department of Education. (2005). *Overview—Introduction: No Child Left Behind.* Retrieved November 1, 2011, from http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/index.html

U.S. Department of Education. (2009). *Race to the Top Executive Summary.* Retrieved November 21, 2010, from http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf

Valli, L., & Buese, D. (2007). The changing roles of teachers in an era of high-stakes accountability. *American Educational Research Journal, 44*(3), 519–558.

Valli, L., & Chambliss, M. (2007). Creating classroom cultures: One teacher, two lessons, and a high-stakes test. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 38*(1), 57–75.

Villegas, A. M., & Lucas, T. (2002). Preparing culturally responsive teachers: Rethinking the curriculum. *Journal of Teacher Education, 53*(1), 20–32.

Villegas, A. M., & Lucas, T. (2007). The culturally responsive teacher. *Educational Leadership, 64*(6), 28–33.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wertsch, J. V. (1993). *Voices of the mind: A sociocultural approach to mediated action.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research design and methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Zoch, M. (2013). *Crafting theoretically defensible literacy teaching practices while supporting students with test preparation.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the LRA 62nd Annual Conference, Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina, San Diego, CA. Retrieved from http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p578989_index.html

EXCERPTS FROM OBSERVATION FIELD NOTES IN JULIA'S CLASS (OCTOBER 9, 2013)

	Field Notes	**Initial Thoughts/Comments**
Classroom Organization/ Structure/ Guides • Instructional tools around the room • EQs • I cans • Bulletin Boards	• Room is decorated with anchor charts for Theme, setting, characterization, plot, conflicts, point of view • Student work is around the room, book projects, brochures, posters, etc. • There are posters around the room that have been created by students about the different levels of multiple intelligences. • There is a character trait poster on the wall and a bully proof poster. • "Where does this go in your binder? Yes, handouts." • There is a board dedicated to "I can statements, Agenda, and homework" • A "While you were out" board so students can get their missing assignments. • Back wall is books and supplies such as glue, highlighters, markers, etc. • "I can read a text and make inferences" "I can identify text features" • Agenda: Warm up (Inference), Vocab review, text features notes. • Homework is organized by color. • "Make two stacks on your desk for your work today."	• Students work is evident showing students their work is valued. The student created posters of MI show that she has taught the students this and that they have taken ownership of it and their learning, as they use these posters to make decisions about their learning. ****Informal Conversation • J tells me students use these MI posters to determine based on their learning style how they should study or what choices they should make in their learning. Organized room, easy for students to maneuver (student friendly) • Student made character posters speak to the community in the classroom. • Binders are used to help students with organization • The agenda on the board lets students know what to expect for the day and shows the organized nature of the teacher. • The "I can" statements are an instructional tool for students to track their learning.

(Cont.)

	Field Notes	Initial Thoughts/Comments
Instructional practices ex: Types of **tasks,** examples of opportunities for **higher order thinking**, opportunities for **collaboration engagement, support**, **technology integration** etc.	I arrive as second period is leaving. She is asking them spelling words as they leave. Each student must spell a word and line up quietly to leave. • Students come in quietly. She reminds them that they should be trying to earn a point. • "Thank you for your behavior yesterday while I was out, I am giving you a point for that and I am giving you a point for how you came in today." • Inference warm up on the board that students write in the warm up section of their journal. After the short passage, it says "prior knowledge, details, inference" • "Raise your hand if you can relate to this passage? Have you ever broken anything? I haven't but let me tell you about my nephew…" • "Karen and Ellen, tell me what you wrote down. Tell me your connections and prior knowledge." • "It's not written in the text, we have to read between the lines to know these answers. So what are our inferences? • "We make inferences every day, we just don't realize we're doing it." Students discuss their responses. She also tells them that they will have an inference task for	• Formative assessment as students leave, they have the opportunity to showcase their knowledge. • Point system in place for behavior. • Respects and rewards student behavior in her absence. • Students keep journal (WRITING) • Values students making personal connections. • She shares her personal connections-more connections • Challenging the students to think critically. • Making real world connections to the skill

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How did you come to work at this school? (Background) What expectations did the school convey to you when you came here?

2. How would you describe the students in your school?

3. What were your beliefs/attitudes toward teaching English Language Arts (ELA) before you became a teacher? Have these beliefs changed? If so, how?

4. How would you describe your identity as a teacher? How has your identity been shaped by your experiences as an educator in a high poverty school?

5. What are your beliefs about how students learn best in ELA classes?

6. What is the role of professional development in your teaching practices? (What types of professional development are you provided/required?)

7. Take me through a typical Language Arts content meeting/PLC/PD. What are the discussions you have about data, planning, student achievement, etc. What do you learn/take away from these sessions that impacts your teaching?

8. Give me a brief overview of the unit you plan to teach and tell me about how you made your instructional decisions. What are your goals for your students by the end of this unit?

9. As I conduct my observations of your classroom, what will I notice about your instructional practices? How do you think these practices reflect your identity/how you see yourself as a teacher.

10. Tell me about how high stakes testing impact your instructional practices? How do you balance your instructional beliefs with the demands of high stakes testing?

11. Tell me about the instructional practices use to support the diverse reading needs of students in your classroom?

12. What are your beliefs regarding instructional practices when it comes to preparing students for end of grade assessments?

13. Tell me about the instructional practices you use to support critical thinking and reading comprehension?

14. Tell me about how the new standards impacted your instructional practices?

15. Tell me about the factors that make you a successful teacher in a high poverty school?

16. Tell me about your experiences working in a high poverty school. What do you enjoy most about working in a high poverty school?

17. What is the biggest challenge(s) of working in a high poverty school? How do you navigate these challenges? What about you as a teacher helps you meet these challenges?

18. Complete this sentence.

19. Good teachers . . .

APPENDIX C

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

	Field Notes	**Initial Thoughts/Comments**
Day/Time: Location:		
Physical Setting (chart/description)		
Instructional practices ex: Types of **tasks,** examples of opportunities for **higher order thinking**, opportunities for **collaboration**, **engagement, support**, **technology integration** etc.		
Student/teacher interactions • Greetings • Conversations • How interactions represent the culture of the classroom		
Addressing Diversity in terms of • Academic diversity • Cultural diversity • Student interests/strengths		

Observation Protocol (Cont.)

	Field Notes	Initial Thoughts/Comments
Teacher beliefs in action (if applicable)		
Classroom Organization/Structure/ Guides • Instructional tools around the room • EQs • I cans • Bulletin Boards		

APPENDIX D

EXCERPTS FROM JESSICA'S CODING TABLE

Jessica	Interview #1	Observation	Interview #2	Informal Interviews
High Expectations	• Every child has potential and no matter the ability they should all be held to a high standard. • I still have the same beliefs is to hold them all to high expectations and push them to think. Which drives them crazy. • I push the kids to think, and I challenge them, and I think that brings a lot of success because when they think they can't, I show them that they can.	• "I need you to have all of the opportunities to have success in my class and to learn. This will help you be successful throughout the unit. It's going to take time, and that's okay. I'm pushing you to push your thinking. You have to think." • "I know these are high expectations, but you will meet them." • "You can ask me questions as you work, but I will not tell you what to write, you must figure that out."	• "I think it's a high needs school with expectations that are set very high. I think our administrator really pushes for us to really teach and push our students, and it's not so much as getting them on grade level which is where we ultimately want them, but it's more a matter of just showing growth and with that we can you know, if somebody's in the third-grade reading level and we move them up to a fifth or sixth-grade level, that's a ton of growth, and those are types that—more of the expectations of just to grow the kids from where they are."	• In discussing a student saying this is hard, she tells me, "That's good, that's what I want to hear them say, it means they have to push themselves." • Discusses with me her processes for making the test and how she wants their test to challenge their thinking and push them-giving them a chance to and showcase their critical thinking

BALANCE DIAGRAM

NON-NEGOTIABLES
- INCREASED PROFICIENCY SCORES
- PACING GUIDES
- MANDATED TESTING
- REQUIRED STANDARDS

INSTRUCTIONAL DECISIONS

NEGOTIABLE
- TEACHER BELIEFS
- RESISTANCE THROUGH AGENCY
- TAILORED CURRICULUM

BALANCE

Successful Teachers