LOCAL DECISION MAKING: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN

FEDERAL EDUCATIONAL LEGISLATION

AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

A DISSERTATION IN
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by
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Doctor of Philosophy Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this heuristic, social constructivist, phenomenological study was to understand the perceptions of teachers, school administrators and state legislators on the relationship between federal legislation, which is affecting educational experiences in Missouri public schools, and educational practices at the local level. This study was guided by each participant's active participation in answering questions and sharing their realities.

Six participants were interviewed for this study. Along with the interviews, questionnaires were elicited and documents were analyzed. The recurring themes of accountability, disconnect from federal legislation and active engagement were present in each story.

The findings of this study suggest that teachers and administrators feel they are actively involved in the development of curriculum at their district level. Interviewees described themselves as very involved in the process of curriculum development and rated themselves high on how much control they believe teachers have regarding pedagogical decisions and instructional practice. The legislators also responded that their level of involvement is high. When asked about key players in educational curriculum and standards the responses in this area did not always trickle down to the district level but remained at the federal and in some instances the state level. There did appear to be significant disconnect between federal legislation initiatives and state level initiatives and educator involvement. The opportunity for Participatory Action Research as a means for collaboration was explored.

Although federal mandates tied to high stakes testing seems to drive some of the curriculum, the teachers and administrators in this study provided dialogue that suggested a sense of independence from the mandates and the freedom to choose instructional methods and pedagogy to meet the needs of students. Though there was still the accountability factor and the fear that schools are not being held accountable by federal mandates in a fair manner.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies,

have examined a dissertation titled "Local Decision Making: The Relationship between

Federal Educational Legislation and Educational Practices," presented by Angela Marie

Rolofson, Candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree, and certify that in their opinion it

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GLOSSARY

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): The system of measurement within No Child Left Behind used by the U.S. Department of Education to determine schools' and districts' performance according to standardized testing.

Building School Improvement Plan (BSIP): A plan developed at the school building level to identify a set of goals and strategies to improve student learning and teacher effectiveness as well as a plan to evaluate and assess progress on the set goals.

Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP): A long range plan developed at the district level to identify a set of goals and strategies for district and student improvement which involves multiple stakeholders.

Differentiated Instruction (DI): Instructional strategy designed to meet the diverse needs of students in the classroom by taking into account students' ability, learning styles and interests.

English Language Arts (ELA): A testing strand within the Common Core Assessments.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): Originally enacted in 1975 to ensure children with disabilities receive a free and appropriate education (FAPE). It was reauthorized in 2004.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): The 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Participatory Action Research (PAR): A research method designed to represent the interest of stakeholders through empowerment, change and ownership through cooperative problem solving.

Professional Learning Communities (PLC): A learning community within schools to

    promote collaborative working groups among teachers.

Response to Intervention (RtI): A systematic intervention process designed to provide early

    interventions, progress monitoring and research based instruction to aid student

    progress.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

According to educational historian Spring (2008), "…public schools are used to
advance political and economic ideologies that do not improve the condition of human
beings" (p. 10). This statement is disturbing to me as an educator, a role I pursued after
experiencing the humanity of K-12 education from caring and genuine teachers. Now as I sit
at my desk typing reports and filling out paperwork I cannot help but feel some animosity
toward our federal political system and its continued tampering with an educational system
intended by the United States Constitution to be based on local control. Having experienced
education as a student in a traditional K-12 public school system and then as a student in a
college classroom I pursued education seeing it as honorable, important and able to make a
difference for future generations. After teaching special education for ten years and then
moving into the role of special education process coordinator I have seen the politics of
education so much more clearly. It is a pity that the mantra "Is it good for the children?" has
become just an expression.

However, political involvement, which reaches so deeply into the classroom leads to a
questioning of power and motives. Power can be defined broadly as providing a stable
economy and sustaining the United States as a global powerhouse or it can be defined more
narrowly to target the power of an individual or group. For the purpose of this study, power
is defined with a focus on teachers', school administrators' and state legislators' control,
influence, persuasiveness, and authority to act within the realm of their professions. The

political obligations that can easily make teachers and school administrators feel powerless are an imposition that must be tolerated or you risk having vital funding withheld. It is an endless circle of inconsistencies, mandates and promises that are never fulfilled and can not be good for the children.

One such obligation for schools is the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act commonly referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This Act is a prime example of the federal government setting standards for everyone but not following through on the necessary funds/resources needed to even breach the criteria that have been established. This Act is defined by the U.S Department of Education on their website ED.gov as an Act to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind.

Valli, Croninger, Chambliss, Graeber and Buese (2008) initially began a 4 year study of reading and mathematics in 2001 with fourth and fifth grade classes, just prior to NCLB. Three years into NCLB and the 4th year of their study in depth case studies were conducted at three elementary schools which served diverse and low income populations. As they documented the schools attempts to successfully implement NCLB, Valli et al. (2008), stated, "The 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), greatly expanded the federal role in education…" (p. vii). This intrusion on the part of the federal government in education is not new and can be traced back to earlier acts such as the Education of Mentally Retarded Children in 1958, the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which provided federal funding to address inequality, primarily due to socioeconomic status, The Education of the Handicapped Act in 1970 and in

1975 The Education for All Handicapped Children's Act. These earlier bills however; did

not have as far reaching implications in the classroom as more current and reauthorized

versions. Maybe the scare tactic of *A Nation at Risk,* a report to the nation and the Secretary

of Education by The National Commission on Excellence in Education in April 1983, which

claimed that the educational foundations of United States society were being eroded by a

rising tide of mediocrity (U.S Department of Education, 2008a. Retrieved from

http://www.Ed.gov) has contributed to this major growth in federal regulations in education.

Either way the enactment of bills forcing teachers to teach specific curriculum in an exacting

manner feels as though our voice, the teacher's voice, is powerless and not heard.

 As a teacher, I taught the curriculum handed down to me from the administrators

always assuming the curriculum committees made up of my colleagues were the driving

force. Not until I had been an educator for 14 years did I have any understanding of what

appeared to be the minor role local stakeholders (teachers, school administrators and state

legislators) were playing in the development and implementation of curriculum.   Not only is

the planned curriculum, the subject matter, under strict control but there appears to be a

decline in the teaching of personal and social development as it is being pushed aside by

federal regulation. This phenomenon is represented well in the following quote, Apple (2003)

states, "Schooling is controlled by the government--the entire process of schooling (how it is

paid for, goals, textbooks, who does well and who doesn't, who has the right to ask and

answer these questions) is then political" (p. 1).   This study explored the question of who is

controlling schools in Missouri and how much influence teachers, school administrators, and

legislators perceive they have in federal legislative decisions which affect schools.

Problem Statement

Educational bills over the last decade, which are significantly impacting schools, are being enacted by federal legislatures with minimal input from teachers, administrators and state legislatures. Levin (2008) writes, "Educators may believe that education policy should be based on their knowledge and experience. From a political perspective, however, evidence and experience are not enough to drive decisions, and they may be among the less important factors" (p. 13). Education groups such as the National Education Association (NEA) pride themselves on bringing educational reforms to the table because they feel teachers and school staff know what children need (Smith & Coffin, 2004, p. 71). Yet, federal politicians/legislators over the last decade have taken over the role of curriculum writers through enacting education related bills, which are not based on educational research but on agendas driven by big business (i.e. textbook companies) which as a result is shifting control away from local decision making (Kohn, 2002).

Schlechty's (2008) statement, "…understanding and commitment can only be gained when parents, teachers, and community leaders are involved --and feel they are involved-- in the development of standards and in the enforcement of standards" (p. 554) is a depiction of local control and its impact. Dutro, Fisk, Koch, Roop and Wixson (2002) also recognize the importance of looking locally, "Districts are not blank slates, but rather places with particular histories and competing forces that shape the implementation of any new policy" (p. 21). Dutro et al. (2002) further reports, "Our stance regarded individuals and teams not as "servants" of the standards, not as technicians implementing externally developed policies, but instead as partners in the construction of policy and research-based practice" (p. 20-21).

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These researchers recognize there is no one size fits all approach to education and that local decision makers should be embraced when developing policies impacting their districts.

When teachers, administrators and state legislatures are not a part of the decision making process policy implementation becomes labored and sometimes nonexistent. The pendulum swing of reforms that plague education result in an attitude of indifference, waiting for this to pass and the new "fad" to be introduced, which will likely come and go as quickly as the one before. "Standards must make sense to committed, strong practitioners or they may never become practice" (Dutro et al., p. 20). The lack of ownership in these policies results in a mode of doing what is needed until this, too, passes. This "fad" type of reform is not only impacting educators, administrators and state legislators but more importantly it is creating negative educational experiences for students.

When education is viewed as constantly in crisis, the learning environment becomes stressed for educators, administrators and students. The pressure of accountability and high stakes testing overshadows the growth of students in other areas (such as the arts) and through other assessments (such as portfolios). Student centered pedagogies are replaced by teacher directed, scripted lessons with no room for cultural, community and individual differences (Kumashiro, 2006, p.169). Teachable moments are dismissed as teaching to the test becomes the norm. Valli et al. (2008) studied three schools using a longitudinal study. There were 50 key school personnel as a part of the research. Of those personnel seven special education and academic support teachers were included. Valli et al. (2008) uses the experiences of a special education teacher to illustrate the stress this approach has on both teachers and students:

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We glaze over things. Kids aren't given the opportunity for repeated practice and to

get in depth, and to apply the skills, which is what they need to really retain the

information and learn it, because, we prep the heck out of them for [the state test]. But

if you ask those kids half that stuff now, they wouldn't know it…because it was

[snapping fingers] quick and dirty. (p. 134)

These stressors impact teacher attitude and motivation as well as demoralize the teacher as a

professional. These reforms also make an impact on students.   Gillborn and Youdell (2000)

make the following observation, "...the process of selection and monitoring that have been

adopted with the aim of heightening attainment are so frequently experienced as

disempowering and demotivating by the student" (p. 195).

Despite legislators at the federal level making policies for state/local agencies,

enforced with funding promises, the real impact is not in Washington but in each state, each

district, each building and each classroom. Valli et al. (2008) reports these findings,

"…policies associated with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) distorted the official curriculum,

undermined instruction, and created a test-driven culture that transformed school life in

troubling ways" (p. 157). Relationships between the community and school districts are

strained as many districts are not meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and the media has

exposed this phenomenon as the fault of teachers, administrators and school districts.

Tedesco (1997) reports on teachers and student demotivation citing deterioration in the

working conditions of teachers, demoralization, abandonment of the profession and

absenteeism all of which have a negative impact on the quality of education offered to

students. The implications of this statement can cause a ripple effect starting from one classroom and moving into other classrooms, the building, the district and the state.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perceptions of teachers, school administrators and state legislators on the relationship between federal legislation, which is affecting educational experiences in Missouri public schools, and educational practices at the local level. This study was guided by each participant's active participation in answering questions and sharing their realities. A phenomenological study as defined by Creswell (2007), "describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p. 57). The phenomenological approach in this study allowed for the telling of an individual's experiences and perception while studying how each individual's experience was shared with others in the study. This "telling of an individual's story" was the basis for a qualitative approach to the study of the perceived relationship between federal educational legislation and local educational practices.

Qualitative research is utilized to "describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008. p. 4). The advantage of using qualitative research is that in talking with individuals a different perspective may be reflected, different viewpoints expressed and another dimension of the problem may be exhumed with each participant. McKie (2002) explains the potential for qualitative research, "to address critically issues around power and participation in evaluation" (p. 261). Power and participation were key factors as the exploration of teacher voice and perception of influence on policies were examined.   These ideas led to the incorporation of social constructivist and

heuristic traditions to guide the participants' participation in answering questions and sharing their realities.   Social constructivism, an assumption of knowledge and learning created through interactions that have created meaning and ultimately a reality for the participants, created a basis for this examination. The reality each participant brings facilitates a framework for communicating and collaborating. It generates an opportunity for an evolution, a reshaping, of meaning and knowledge not only for the participants but for me as the researcher. The interpretive influence of understanding reality challenges the social construct of our own ideas and situates the problem in a broader arena. Personal understanding or tacit theory was challenged as heuristic research influenced the design and methodology of this study.

A heuristic study as defined by Patton (2002) requires that the researcher has a personal experience and interest in the topic as well as the participants in the study (p. 107). Moustakas (1990) delves deeper defining heuristic as "a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis" (p. 9). Influential works in this area of research are identified in Maslow's research on self-actualizing persons and Jourard's on self-disclosure (Moustakas, 1990). It is a search to fully understand one's self and to make meaning.   Its intensity and ability to gain in depth understanding of phenomenon guided this study and provided the opportunity for teachers, school administrators and state legislators to develop a sense of shared responsibility for the educational experiences of students in Missouri public schools and may provide a shifting of power back to the local level.

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study was: What are the perceptions of teachers, school administrators and state legislators on the relationship between federal educational legislation and educational practices at the local level? This study answers three sub-questions: (a) How do teachers and school administrators perceive their roles in local decisions about curriculum development? (b) What do teachers perceive are their levels of autonomy regarding pedagogical decisions and instructional practices? (c) What do state legislators perceive is their level of involvement and the level of involvement by teachers and school administrators in creating educational policies?

Theoretical Framework

According to Maxwell (2005) the framework is the "model of what is out there that you plan to study, and of what is going on with these things and why" (p. 33). It is the "actual ideas and beliefs that you hold about the phenomena studies, whether these are written or not" (p. 33). Miles and Huberman (1994) define a conceptual framework as a visual or written product, one that "explains, neither graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied--the key factors, concepts, or variables--and the presumed relationship among them" (p. 18). As federal politicians continue to take over the role of curriculum writers, the feelings of isolation and the inability to have control over educational practices may be evident in the experiences of teachers, administrators and state legislatures. These perceptions are the focus of the three main topics of the theoretical framework for this study.

The first is the politics of education. Communicating the history of educational politics from local control to federal mandates with an emphasis on two pieces of legislation affecting

schools right now, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB), help answer the question of who currently holds the power mandating education and how voices at local levels can influence legislature.

Curriculum is another topic of discussion. The controversy between policy and practice has risen out of a lack of ownership from educators and school administrators in relation to curriculum. Looking for answers from local stakeholders to the following questions: what do we value, what is the official knowledge, and how does this translate in the classroom opens the lines of communication between federal policy makers and local education stakeholders and creates a discourse on curriculum and teaching.

The last topic is teacher retention and the deskilling of teachers (Apple, 1988). Exploring the systematic deskilling of teachers is likely to lead to a better understanding of the perceptions held by teachers and school administrators in this age of accountability and high stakes testing. It also has implications for the development of a plan for retaining teachers and combating the teacher shortage.

The increase in educational legislation penned and enacted by federal legislatures over the last decade, with little emphasis on educational research or input from educators, administrators or state legislatures, demands an outlet for sharing of ideas. These conversations can result in systematic changes in the field of education and create a milieu where local stakeholders regain a sense of ownership.

Politics of Education

Levin (2008) states, "Politics is the primary process through which public policy decisions are made" (p. 8). Although in the past I rarely thought of education as a part of

politics or public policy it is a societal benefit and a part of local government. Lasswell's

(1958) exploration of the questions, who gets what, when, and how is itself political and

educationally relevant. The constant changes and pendulum swing of educational theories are

directly linked to policy changes driven by power. But has the government gone too far?

McColl (2005) questions the constitutionality of the No child Left Behind Act as well as the

unprecedented role of the federal government in educational policy which has been a function

of states. Goertz (2001) explores a shift in education policies which changed its focus from

input related to providing schools with resources to address inequalities to output and

accountability through testing which has not shown to improve student learning. You do not

have to look far for examples of the relationship between politics and education and its far

reach into the classroom. The enactment of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and the

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are significant pieces of legislation for

education.

Although these acts are not presented as curriculum they are driving what is taught as

well as how students are taught. As an educator, these influences feel as though they are

being handed down with little thought to those at the local level. Webb (2006) berates states

and school districts for excluding teachers--who may know more about student needs then

policy makers and are the ones being held accountable--and calls for districts and

governments to be accountable to "teachers and their power" (p. 16).

So, why is education such a hot bed for politicians? "Schools are widely seen as

playing a central role in the socialization of children and young people" (Levin, 2008, p.16).

Smith and Coffin (2004) list the following in the top ten reasons to support public education:

"(a) an educated population is the cornerstone of democracy (b) education reduces costs to taxpayers… and (c) public education is a worthy investment for public funds…" (p. 13-14). These reasons are political in nature and reiterate the use of education to further our current political system. It does not emphasize the importance of ownership for educating our children and building our future society at the local level.

According to Apple (2008), "Educational institutions provide one of the major mechanisms through which power is maintained and challenged" (p. 25). Welner and Oakes (2008) refer to a study by Armor and Jencks et al., 1972, which states that students' academic achievement is highly correlated with their parents' education and wealth thus continuing and maintaining those currently in power.   These ideas about education can be in sharp contrast to the debates regarding the nature of education and about essential life values (Levin, 2008, p. 13) which continues the cycle of inequality within our society. This is a cycle that can be influenced by politicians and by teachers. Freire (1985) believes that education is always political and warns teachers to look at the politics in their classrooms and to question the kind of politics they are presenting or representing. The far reach of politics behind education may be a contributing factor to the number of teachers who are leaving the field of education.

Curriculum

Current legislation with high stakes testing initiatives can be directly linked to what and how teachers are teaching. NCLB has created an environment in that "a student's worth--especially to the school system--is reduced to her or his test scores" (Valenzuela, 2005, p. 4). W.E.B. DuBois words are brought back to life by Foner (1970) as DuBois powerfully states his belief in the fundamental right of all students to learn:

Of all the civic rights for which the world has struggled and fought for 5,000 years, the

right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental…The freedom to learn…has been

bought by bitter sacrifice. And whatever we may think of the curtailment of other

civil rights, we should fight to the last ditch to keep open the right to learn, the right to

have examined in our schools not only what we believe, but what we do not believe;

not only what our leaders say, but what the leaders of other groups and nations, and

the leaders of other centuries have said. We must insist upon this to give our children

the fairness of a start which will equip them with such an array of facts and such an

attitude toward truth that they can have a real chance to judge what the world is and

what its greater minds have thought it might be. (p. 230-231)

So, how are teachers reacting to this change in educating students where questioning,

discovery and problem solving that is so eloquently addressed by DuBois is tossed aside and

replaced by standardized testing?

Teachers are being forced to teach to the test and emphasize the material that students

will be evaluated on using standardized assessments, even though many teachers know this is

not the way to "teach" students. Nicky Turner, an experienced special education teacher that

participated in the longitudinal study (Valli et al., 2008), says, "…I spent years, …studying

all…the research about what's best practice and how do kids learn…And then you get in the

schools, and it's like…throw that out the window you've gotta do test prep…" (p.137). Deng

and Luke (2008, p. 69) reference good teaching practice from as far back as 1916 with

Dewey's statement, "Knowledge and ideas emerge only from situations in which the learners

had to draw them out of experiences that had meaning and importance to them". Studying

and memorizing items to successfully complete a standardized test that has little meaning to students is not creating a meaningful experience and does not promote good teaching practice. Costigan and Crocco (2004) define the 'good teacher' as:

> one who embodies the dimensions of caring and competence, who bring knowledge and expertise to teaching, including both disciplinary knowledge and professional understanding; who is resilient and flexible in the face of professional demands; who is disposed to being a lifelong learner; and who maintains an ethical stance toward this work. (p. 12)

Teachers need the opportunity to go back to their classrooms and look at what their students need both academically and mentally and be allowed to make choices about what to teach and how to teach. Eisner (2002) looks at student as an individual, "Each child needed [needs] to be known individually….each situation….was [is] unique" (p. 381). At what point are we going to allow teachers to teach their students as individuals with needs and interests of their own? Valli et al. (2008) implore policy makers to make clear their intent of accountability if it is not meant to drive teaching to the test, restrict curriculum, or reduce learning to fill-in-the-bubble and short-answer practice (p. 173). These approaches are not providing an education for all students or creating positive educational experiences for students or teachers.

Teacher Retention and the Deskilling of Teachers

According to Feiman-Nemser, Schwille, Carver, and Yusko (1999) the United States is losing roughly 200,000 teachers yearly. Depending on the assumptions made, projections for the number of newly hired public school teachers needed by 2009 range from 1.7 million

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to 2.7 million (Nieto, 2003, p. 133). Costigan and Crocco (2004) report, "Overall, schools of education graduate annually more then enough teachers to meet the demands associated with teacher retirement…" (p. 31). Ingersoll (2002) found that there is not necessarily a shortage of teachers but retaining teachers in the field of education is difficult. He states that after five years of teaching, thirty-nine percent of teachers leave their teaching career (p. 23). Valli et al (2008) give us the image of a discouraged special education teacher:

> …I spent six years between undergrad and grad school getting my degree in education, and it frustrates me to be given eight binders at the beginning of the year, and this is what you're gonna teach and this is exact, the lesson is planned out for you…. (p. 137)

There seems to be the assumption that teachers cannot teach but need a prescribed set of lessons. Costigan and Crocco (2004) state that scripted lessons and lock step instruction are "…another form of teacher-proofing the curriculum, one more in the long line of cheap fixes…" (p. 39). No wonder so many people believe that anyone can teach. Yet, not everyone has forgotten about the expansive and influential role of the classroom teacher. According to Nieto (2003) a headline published in the *New York Daily News* in the summer of 2001 read, "Teachers are Key to Success" and she backs that stating, "A teacher can be the single most influential figure in a child's academic life" (p. 1). Costigan and Crocco believe (2004), as do many teachers, that "Teaching is knowledge work and people work" (p. 43). So why are so many leaving such a rewarding field?

Educational legislation has created a punitive system based on high stakes testing and accountability. The school climate, including teacher professionalism and voice, has been

placed on the chopping block in favor of what Nieto (2003) calls "winner-take-all high-stakes tests" (p. 5). Current educational legislation is believed to have more than doubled the amount of testing required in schools (Valli et al., 2008, p. 2). This approach is not only creating a shortage of teachers as many leave the field but is also resulting in a deskilling of those who have chosen to stay.

Valli et al. (2008) found that good teachers practicing learner-centered strategies are being pressured to teach to the test as raising test scores become the focus of education. The effect of this focus can be seen in how teachers teach and students learn (p. 160). "Good teaching reflects disciplinary standards and is motivating, age appropriate, moral, and aimed at enhancing the learner's competence with the disciplinary content. Good teaching is learner sensitive" (Valli et al., p.126). This is in direct opposition to what policy-based research views as successful teaching, "direct instruction, time on task and providing lots [the provision] of academic-learning time" (Valli et al., p. 127). The later approach relies heavily on the banking method which Freire in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) adamantly rejects. Grant and Hill (2006) have studied teacher stress and state that "powerlessness to implement pedagogy that extends beyond mandated curriculum standards and a lack of autonomy could contribute as a stressor for teachers, impacting teachers' self-efficacies" (p. 20).

Teaching practices which focus on teaching to the test narrow students' education and in many cases, prevents higher level thinking and less dialogue in the classroom. "Whatever the ultimate utility or detriment these reforms bring with them, it is clear that many new teachers find a curriculum of high-stakes testing to be devastating as an introduction to

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teaching" (Costigan & Crocco, 2004, p. 133).   This approach is not about good teaching

practices but about government stepping in to decide what is taught and how it is taught in

public schools without the input from the teachers and administrators.

Ellis (2007) states that, "…NCLB is the further stratification of society rather than the

narrowing of the socioeconomic gaps" (p. 227). The National Center for Education Statistics

Nations Report Card in Reading, Writing and Mathematics for 2002 (Smith & Coffin, 2004,

p. 21) reported that although scores are up in all areas, inequalities continue to exist.

According to Smith and Coffin (2004) seventy-five percent of schools are inadequate to meet

students' needs due to outdated facilities or overcrowding. Houston (2007) reports that those

closest to meeting annual yearly progress (AYP) goals are the ones getting the most attention,

not those needing the most assistance (p. 746). Findings from a study conducted by Nichols,

Glass and Berliner (2005) report that high stakes testing disproportionately affects students of

color, increases dropouts and that the pressure of high stakes testing also results in larger

numbers of students being held back. The bottom line is that federal legislation is not

narrowing the gap. Low socioeconomic students seem to be falling further behind.

Virginia Edwards, editor of *Education Week,* reports the following findings in the

Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) bulletin, "Studies show that when it comes

to student achievement, effective teachers are more important than any other school

ingredient" (MSDE Bulletin, 2003, p. 1). Yet, where is their input? How can a teacher be

effective in helping students attain success when they themselves feel so helpless and

powerless? Who is better adept at determining and influencing individual student

achievement than educators? Yet decision making and the ability to impact educational

reform has been taken out of their hands.

Overview of the Methodology

The purpose of this heuristic, social constructivist, phenomenological study was to

interpret the perceptions of teachers, school administrators, and state legislators regarding the

relationship between federal educational legislation and educational practices at local schools.

The unit of analysis, defined by Patton (2002) as the focus for data analysis and framing of

my conclusions and findings (p. 228), was the perception of the relationship between federal

legislation and local decision making. This study provided an opportunity to delve deeper

into how educators, school administrators and state legislators view the making of policies

which impact schools and their ability to affect those policies and the educational experiences

of students within their local educational system.

Patton (2002) quotes Albert Einstein as saying, "Not everything that can be counted

counts and not everything that counts can be counted" (p. 12). This view point emphasizes

the importance of a qualitative study for the problem statement of this research. Qualitative

studies involve "authentic conversations" with those directly involved to "provide a rich way

of making meaning" (Costigan & Crocco, 2004, p. 13). Qualitative data tends to "…lead to

new integrations…get beyond initial conceptions and to generate or revise conceptual

frameworks". "Words…have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often proves more

convincing…" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 1). Understanding the impact of educational

legislation goes beyond test scores and AYP data; extending into the humanistic side of

education. Teachers and students should feel valued for what they bring to the classroom.

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Allowing teachers and administrators to tell their stories gives them voice. Being viewed as experts may then shape what is being taught and how it is being taught in individual classrooms. A better understanding is needed to change the lens through which educational legislation and reform is viewed. Torrance (2008) affirms that there needs to be a new perspective,

> Governments and some within the scholarly community itself seem to be seeking to turn educational research into a technology that can be applied to solving short-term educational problems, rather than a system of inquiry that might help practitioners and policy makers think more productively about the nature of the problem and how it might [be] addressed. (p. 73)

 Torrance (2008) goes on to implore qualitative researchers to manage relationships with policymakers emphasizing interaction as opposed to guidelines and standards (p. 74). As a qualitative researcher, the approach is one of exploration and understanding. How each participant uses their tacit understanding of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity may help enlist contributions toward shared participation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 29).

This study encompasses educational stakeholders within the state of Missouri. The following people are participants in this study: teachers and administrators within two suburban Midwestern school districts, and state legislators elected in Missouri. These participants were invited to give consent (Appendix A) to complete an online questionnaire (see Appendix C and D) regarding their understanding and involvement with education and the legislative process. After completing the questionnaire, six participants were selected for an open ended interview (see Appendix E) based on their in depth and rich information about

the issues central to the study, as is the definition of purposeful sampling by Patton (2002, p. 46).

According to Patton (2002), qualitative findings first require data collection. The data sources for this study include (1) an online questionnaire, (2) in-depth, open ended interviews conducted in a one-on-one setting, and (3) document analysis of district curriculum and state level standards. Interviews allow for a conversation not just verbal but other gestures which convey meaning. "The open ended interview offers the opportunity for an authentic gaze into the soul of another, or even for a politically correct dialogue where researcher and researched offer mutual understanding and support" (Atkinson and Silverman, 2001, p. 34).

The collected data sources were an aid in the development of an understanding regarding the relationship between federal legislation and local educational practices. Data was segmented and categorized to create links within the sources. As key words or phrases continued to appear within the research they became themes that had not been pre-assigned. Analysis was completed on these data sources using enumerative and thematic coding techniques as well as completing a phenomenological analysis.

Significance of the Study

The 2011 Phi Delta Kappa survey reported that more than 70% of Americans have trust and confidence in those who are teaching, however; there appears to be less confidence in educational leaders and education policy makers (Walker, 2011). The public's message seems clear yet policy makers at the federal level don't seem to be getting the message. In today's classroom high stakes testing and accountability have taken precedent to sound pedagogical practices and the teaching of the whole child. Bureaucracy and politics have

taken local control away from schools and placed it in the hands of federal politicians with no formal background in the field of education. Teachers, school administrators and state legislators must develop an understanding of the implications of this shift in power and begin to examine their role in this phenomenon. An assessment of federal educational legislation, its impact on curriculum, teacher retention and the deskilling of teachers and the perceived relationship between the federal and local levels are significant to the profession. The analysis of the data in this study answers the research questions posed as well as provides a forum for educators and community members to assess their role in educational reform.

Chapter One reviews the framework, poses the research questions and provides an overview of the methodology for this qualitative study. A historical and political discussion surrounding education and politics, a look at who controls the knowledge or curriculum of schools and teacher retention are discussed in Chapter Two. The major traditions of this study are outlined in Chapter Three to explore the overarching question regarding the perceptions of teachers, school administrators and state legislators on the relationship between federal educational legislation and educational practices at the local level. Chapter Four contains the findings from this study. The final chapter, Chapter Five, provides a discussion of the conclusions garnered from this study, implications and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The current research, presented in the literature reviews, emphasizes a qualitative approach, as most research in this area has been documented through discussions and interviews with educators. The emphasis has been on how current legislative mandates /acts have come alive moving from idea to practice. Current research has focused primarily on the effects and attitudes produced by mandates such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and No Child Left Behind, successfully creating an atmosphere of us /them or victim/victimizer failing to bring about positive changes. The focus has been on the effect of mandates on achievement and school climate but not on the process of how and truly why these mandates exist. In my initial data searches I focused on several topics starting with No Child Left Behind, IDEA and educational politics. In this search I used EBSCO and ERIC databases producing over 2,000 hits. Most articles discussed key terms such as alignment, state standards, accountability, testing, academic achievement, achievement gaps and mandates, a focus on the effects after the mandates have been issued. I found one article whose primary goal was to warn of federal intrusion, one article addressing pedagogy and six referring to teacher retention. In further searches of these databases I input key words such as curriculum, over 64,000 sources, teacher retention just under 1,500, site based management and professional learning communities, just under 6,000 sources but less than 1/3 holding relevance to schools. Deskilling of teachers, there was barely a handful. This data search

was beneficial as it allowed me to give background on the topics of policies, politics, curriculum and teacher retention as a foundation for viewing our current operating mode but the lack of research in other areas gave rise to the questions that are asked in this study. Perceptions, decision making roles, implementation and practice became viable topics to explore the relationship between federal legislation affecting educational experiences for students in Missouri and educational practices at the local level.

The literature review presented here is intended to provide foundational and historical knowledge. Educational politics, curriculum, and teacher retention have been researched and examined extensively however their connection to the deskilling of teachers and to each other in relation to educators' and state legislators' perception and the relationship between federal legislation and local educational practices is largely absent. This disconnect is seen in the approach the federal government takes in its choice of dialoguing with business leaders, test and textbook makers instead of teachers and administrators about how to improve education for all students (Kohn, 2002). Revealing the perceptions and realities of educators and state legislators, previously ignored, leads to increased ownership and the building of a more collaborative attitude which in turn impacts the students of Missouri. This research is deliberate in its offer of hope through a vision of collaboration in education, a milieu that is becoming fiercely competitive and largely undemocratic.

Politics of Education

Ronald Reagan addressed the issue of politics and education in a statement made June 6, 1983, "There's too much federal involvement in education…We set out and promised that we would eliminate the federal department. I think we should remove federal influence from

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education" (p. 79). This statement was made more than twenty-five years ago but instead of

seeing a decrease in the federal government's involvement with education there has been a

significant increase.   This has not gone unnoticed. Spring (2010) has been a driving source

for updated information in education and teaching. His continual updates and revisions to his

popular books have made him an authority in the field of education. Spring refreshes his

book *American Education* with new information about NCLB and his political perspectives.

Spring (2010), states that legislatures are driving the curriculum and teaching practices of

classrooms across the nation. Communities are forced into the educational debate by the

media and politicians who think "education is a good campaign issue" (Preface XV). It

appears that educators are being controlled by federal mandates. This shift in control may

have an influence on perceptions about federal legislation and educational practices.

Historical Contexts of Politics Related to Education

Looking as far back as the United States Constitution there is no policy giving the

federal government rights over schools or education. Our Constitution clearly states that any

power not specifically given to the federal government is left to the states and education falls

into this category. Aside from the legality involved, there have also been philosophical

differences between political parties, making federal involvement in education a hot topic of

debate.   Kevin Kosar (2005) provides a perspective that is not wholly educationally based.

He has researched the political actions behind educational policies and defines two conflicting

parties as Antistatists and Liberals (2005). In Kosar's words, Antistatists "usually oppose

bills that seek to increase the federal role in education". They distrust the federal

government's involvement in education and "hold that schools are the responsibility of the

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states and localities and that the federal government should not meddle in them" (2005, p. 3).

On the other hand you have liberals who "believe that states and localities cannot be trusted to provide good schooling to all children. Moreover, liberalism holds that the federal government is more trustworthy than state and local governments" (Kosar, 2005, p. 3). These conflicting views have historically caused bills to stall out. For every bill passed by one party another was passed by the opposition in an effort to balance the power. This back and forth movement did not make for significant changes within educational politics until the Supreme Court decision in 1954 which ordered desegregation in the landmark case *Brown vs. Board of Education*. The courts ordered separate was not equal and mandated that black children and white children were to be allowed to attend school together. This case, along with the fear created by Sputnik, seems to have opened the door for political involvement that truly altered education.

The National Defense Education Act of 1958 sought to define educational programming which would be beneficial to our national defense. In 1965 President Lyndon Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Other acts followed such as PL 91-230 in 1968 to assist students with limited English proficiency, PL 90-247 in 1973 to ensure the education of handicapped children and The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975 commonly known as P.L. 94-142. Subsequently, in 1979, the Department of Education was reorganized becoming a cabinet level agency. *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* was released in 1983 claiming a national crisis of mediocrity, failure and decline. President Reagan responded to this downward spiral at a conference on April 26, 1983, "I was interested to see…the almost uninterrupted decline in

student achievement scores during the past two decades, decades in which the Federal presence in education grew and grew". Despite Reagan's own desire to abolish the Department of Education, the role of federal government in education continued to grow as curriculum became a major topic.

In 1989 President George Bush introduced the Educational Excellence Act.   The goals of this legislation were to promote excellence by rewarding schools, teachers, and students for their achievements; enhancing the option of parental choice and placing a greater emphasis on areas such as Science, Mathematics, and Engineering. In 1990 President Bush announced six national education goals which were to be measured using the National Report Card. These goals were to be achieved by 2000. On April 18, 1991 the secretary of education unveiled these goals as America 2000 which was to establish national standards that would be a model for states to follow apart from the federal government. Unlike many of the previous acts America 2000 focused on the education of all children.   However, with the change in administration from President Bush to President Clinton educational legislation again came to the forefront under a different name, Goals 2000. Goals 2000 was a standards based reform that met with little resistance. Goals 2000 promoted the same concepts that had been a part of past legislative acts and continue to be a part of new mandates; equitable educational opportunities and high levels of achievement for all students, but Goals 2000 also aimed to look at reauthorization of all Federal education programs and sought to develop and adopt a voluntary national system of skill standards and certifications. Its goal of all students meeting national standards was not met in the year 2000 and eventually made its way to the sidelines.

President George W. Bush took office in January 2001 on the campaign promise of increasing federal spending for education. He immediately began work on the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 which was signed into law in January 2002. This Act expanded the role of testing and accountability while also carrying prohibitions on federal control. Subpart 2, Section 9526 of NCLB identifies the following prohibitions on federal control in regard to local control: nothing in this section shall be construed to (a) authorize an officer or employee of the Federal Government to mandate, direct, review, or control a State, local educational agency, or school's instructional content, curriculum, and related activities; or (b) create any legally enforceable right. Subpart 2, Section 9527 of NCLB identifies the following prohibitions on federal government and the use of federal funds: nothing in this Act shall be construed to (a) authorize an officer or employee of the Federal Government to mandate, direct, or control a State, local educational agency, or school's curriculum, program of instruction; or (b) mandate a State or any subdivision thereof to spend any funds or incur any costs not paid for under this Act.

Although these provisions are in place, Kosar (2005) believes that NCLB did increase the federal government's power over education but does seem to hold that local control is still in place. He states that, "…it left the heart of education, curricula, where it always has been: in the hands of localities and states" (p. 195). Since the creation of the Department of Education in 1867 there have been many more Acts toward educational reform not mentioned here and I believe there will be many more (Figure 1).

| Brown v. Board of Education | Training of Professional Personnel Act | | The Education of the Handicapped Act | | The Education for All Handicapped Children's Act | | The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act | The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act |

↑　　　↑　　　　　↑　　　　　　↑　　　　　　　↑　　　　↑

1954__1958_1959___1965__1970__1973_1975____1986__1990____2002__2004___

↓　　　　　　↓　　　　↓　　　　　　↓　　　　　↓

| | Education of Mentally Retarded Children Act | The Elementary and Secondary Education Act | Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act | The Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities Act & The Handicapped Children's Protection Act | The No Child Left Behind Act |

Figure 1. *A timeline of important legislation that has impacted education from 1954-2004*

As legislatures, lobbyist, parents and advocates continue to have an agenda; pieces of legislation will continue to grow in the area of education. Kerr's (1976) analysis is "…the underlying purpose of any policy is to make systematic some enterprise" (p. 57). Kosar (2005) states, "…the health of the United States system of representative democracy is contingent, in part, on the education levels of the citizenry" (p. 42). As long as education is seen as the primary means to social and economic advancement, politicians will continue to play the game of politics inciting more policies about how to regulate and control schooling.

Politics

Levin (2008) offers this definition of politics; "Politics is about power", while other educational theorists define politics as a focus on formal processes of government (elections, political parties, division of power). Others see politics as "extending beyond formal processes to include a wide range of informal influences and larger social processes" (p. 8).

Apple (1998) defines the politics of schooling based on who controls the knowledge that is being taught in classrooms. After three decades of working with educators and various governments Apple (1998) believes politics is people driven and heavily influenced by many with hidden agendas which have contributed to the power struggle between federal control and local control.

Educational politics have increasingly become a power struggle between the federal government, states, and local educational agencies. According to the United States Constitution education is the responsibility of the states. Yet, with the current pressure of politics on education, it is as though the federal government is implying that states have not been responsive to educational needs. Student achievement and the gap between learners of different socioeconomic backgrounds, race, and ability have become the issues driving educational debates. Local educational agencies and states are feeling the depletion of their power as mandates such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and No Child Left Behind are handed down while the federal government maintains control of the purse strings, providing funding that is only obtainable if the mandates are implemented.

With, reportedly, only 96 of 558 school districts or 17% meeting the 2011 proficiency targets for adequate yearly progress (AYP), districts do not see a light at the end of the tunnel (dese.mo.gov). As AYP targets become more difficult, schools are faced with a sinking feeling of unworthiness. Business CEOs, on the other hand, are being empowered by the current politics in education.

For example, Metcalf (2002) reveals that when President George W. Bush "invited a group of 'education leaders' to join him for his first day in the White house, the guest list was

dominated by Fortune 500 CEOs" (p. 50). The politics of education seem to have become the

politics of finance. McGraw-Hill, Houghton Mifflin, Harcourt General and other CEOs,

considered by President Bush to be education leaders, have a financially vested interest in the

high stakes testing and "scientifically based research" programs being pushed by politicians,

primarily the executive branch of the federal government. McGraw-Hills phonics program,

Houghton Mifflin's textbooks, and the many companies that generate and score standardized

assessments have made big money from schools. "Over the past five years alone, state testing

expenditures have almost tripled, from $141 million to $390 million" (Metcalf, p. 51).

National educational politics are often about profit which leads to power. This political power

then drives policies at the state and local levels.

Policy

"Public policy is about the rules and procedures governing public sector activity"

(Levin, 2008, p. 8). In education, policy includes specific legislation, regulations and

guidance provided to schools from policy makers. Currently, the Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act (IDEA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) are the primary sources governing

school actions.

Senator Harrison Williams authored the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in

1974 stating,

We must recognize our responsibility to provide education for all children [with

disabilities] which meets their unique needs. The denial of the right to education and to

equal opportunity within this nation for handicapped children-whether it be outright

exclusion from school, the failure to provide an education which meets the needs of the

single handicapped child, or the refusal to recognize the handicapped child's right to grow-is a travesty of justice and a denial of equal protection under the law. (Yell, 2006, p. 83)

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975 commonly known as P.L. 94-142 was implemented to provide for the educational needs of students with disabilities. It was an amendment to the Education of the Handicapped Act and became what special education knows as Part B. When President Gerald Ford signed EAHCA it became another example of a significant increase in the federal government's role in education.

EAHCA provided federal funds to states to support the implementation of programs that would educate students with disabilities however there was governmental bureaucracy. States were required to submit a state plan describing their policies and procedures for educating disabled students in compliance with the EAHCA. If the plan was approved the state was then obligated to provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) to students with disabilities in exchange for the federal funding. FAPE was to be available for students ages 3-18 by September 1, 1978, and for students up to age 21 by September 1, 1980. This funding was significant for schools which previously did not have the resources to educate students with disabilities resulting in numerous children with disabilities being excluded from public schools, attending schools but not receiving an appropriate education or children not being diagnosed thus not meeting with success (Yell, 2006, p. 87).

In 1990 EAHCA was amended changing the name to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) P.L. 101-476. IDEA itself was amended in 1997 (IDEA 1997) and again in 2004. IDEA mandates that children with disabilities are provided a free and

appropriate education (FAPE). It entitles students to receive special education, defined in

IDEA, 20 U.S.C S 1404 (a) (16) as "specially designed instruction, at no charge to the parents

or guardians, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability" and related services

defined in IDEA, 20 U.S.C S 1404 (a) (17) as "any developmental, corrective, or supportive

services that students need to benefit from special education" (ED.gov., U.S Department of

Education, 2008b). These services must be provided through an Individual Education Plan

(IEP) and services must be made available in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). LRE

is part of the mandate of IDEA that requires students with disabilities to be educated with

non-disabled peers to the maximum extent possible.   Other key points of IDEA are:

nondiscriminatory testing, evaluation and placement procedures, procedural due process-

including parent involvement, meets individual needs, and prepares them for further

education, employment, and independent living.

These mandates apply to students who meet at least one of the thirteen (school age)

categorical disability areas: 1)Autism; 2) Deaf-Blind; 3) Deafness; 4) Hearing Impairment; 5)

Mental Retardation now called Intellectually Deficient; 6) Multiple Disabilities; 7)

Orthopedic Impairments; 8) Other Health Impaired; 9) Emotional Disturbance (MO excludes

Socially Maladjusted); 10) Specific Learning Disability; 11) Speech or Language Impairment;

12) Traumatic Brain Injury; and 13) Visual Impairment, including blindness. Part C of

IDEA-The Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities Act provides services to children birth to

age 2 transitioning them to Part B at 3 years of age if they meet eligibility criteria. Part C

eligibility requires that a student demonstrate developmental delays in one or more of the

following areas: Cognitive, Physical, Communication, Psychosocial Development-Social/Emotional or Self Help Skills-Adaptive.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act contains four parts. Part A contains the justification, definitions and goals. Part B contains substantial requirements for local education agencies. These include a Zero Reject which states that all students eligible for services under IDEA are entitled to FAPE, a Child Find requirement which includes students who are attending private schools, Specific guidelines for the identification and evaluation of students, a Continuum of services requirement and Procedural Safeguards notification. Most interestingly the amended IDEA in 2004, known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, was designed to align NCLB and IDEA. This alignment resulted in additional provisions for educating students with disabilities. No Child Left Behind had a considerable impact on IDEA in 2004.

No Child Left Behind is the amended and reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 which was created as a Title I federal aid program meant to reduce achievement gaps between students of different socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity. No Child Left Behind directs its efforts on areas such as

- academic achievement,
- preparing, training and recruiting highly qualified teachers and principals,
- limited English proficient and immigrant students,
- bringing schools into the 21st century,
- parent choice, and
- flexibility and accountability.

The reauthorization of NCLB occurred in 2001, but was not signed until January 2002. This bill is specifically tied to federal dollars based on performance standards. Standardized testing is increased as is accountability for schools through an Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) measurement. Progress is documented for students based on groups and subgroups such as economic background, race or ethnicity, English language proficiency and disability. Pinckney (2008) describes NCLB in this way,

> NCLB is principally a regulatory policy employing mostly mandates and system change as its instruments of choice. Such policies generally take the form of laws or rules that explicitly require and/or prohibit certain behaviors and assessing penalties for failure to comply. (p. 166)

Politicians argue that although the federal government established the policy, states have latitude in implementing that policy. In essence states are not required to comply as long as they do not want the federal dollars attached. However, a district's failure to comply with the set regulations, results in a loss of funding and a loss of respect.

Standardized test scores for each school district are made available on the internet and in newspapers. Proficiency levels of subgroups as well as whether the school has met the stringent requirement of Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) is advertised. Inability to meet this goal results in a failure rating for schools and districts which affects the property values and the economics of the surrounding area. These penalties are harsh in light of the lofty requirements and strict timeline for compliance. NCLB has been a controversial law since its enactment. Many stakeholders demonstrate strong feelings either for or against it. Yet, standards based reform movements are not new in education.

In 1999 many states adopted statewide standards for core subjects. However, NCLB promotes a national set of standards based on high stakes testing. Apple (2006) continues to look at schools as a larger part of our political and social environments. He contends that No Child Left Behind is creating,

> a situation where the tail of a high-stakes test 'wags the dog' of the teacher, pressuring schools to constantly show increased achievement scores on such standardized tests no matter what the level of support or the impoverished conditions in schools and local communities, to publicly display such results in a process of what might be realistically called shaming, and to threaten schools that do not show 'improvement' on these tests with severe sanctions or loss of control. (p. 76)

Due to their affiliation with the National Education Association, Smith and Coffin (2004) may be viewed as biased toward educators. In their book they answer questions frequently asked of educators, however; they make the following statement which is a reflection on the association, and leads to the assumption that members may also hold the same analysis,

> The people who drafted the bill were politicians and bureaucrats who knew very little about the day to day realities of educating children. Those same politicians refused to listen to the advice of educational professionals during the development of the bill. (p. 33)

For many, this high stakes accountability system is based on negative consequences for students, teachers and classroom environments. Granger (2008) views the accountability of NCLB as destructive to the educational system. He considers NCLB to be mythical and unrealistic in its belief that passing standardized tests will create equality. He sees NCLB as

punitive and creating an environment of fear regarding the quality of public schools and their teachers while not addressing the real problems of poverty, segregation and school funding (2008, p. 220).

Some stakeholders believe NCLB has become institutionalized and then morphed into a promotion of privatization and vouchers cloaked as school choice with a covert desire to see public schools fail. According to a Gallup Poll conducted by Phi Delta Kappa regarding the public's attitude toward the public schools in September 2008, it is reported that one in four Americans believe NCLB is helping schools, while three of four believe NCLB is hurting, believe it is making no difference, or are unsure if it is making a difference. Houston (2007) is not opposed to testing. In fact he touts testing as an important part of the educational process but believes testing must be kept in perspective. He asserts that, "Teachers need to know what kids know and how they are progressing, and the public has a right to have a snapshot of how well benchmarks are being met" (p. 745). Another viewpoint states that when used wisely, formative assessment can be an important and fundamental component to effective, quality teaching (Black & William, 1998a, 1998b & Shepard, 2001). Black et al. (2001) completed an extensive survey of previous research compiling data from over 250 sources. Their conclusion simply states that improving formative assessment raises standards, there is room for improvement and there is evidence about how to improve formative assessment. The National Center for Fair and Open Testing seems to question how wisely testing is being used. They posted an article in January 2008 declaring that "NCLB's test-and-punish approach to school reform relies heavily on limited, one-size-fits-all tools that reduce education to little more than test prep" (p. 1). There are many key concerns regarding NCLB

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identified by the National Center for Fair and Open Testing yet, while many have stated that standardized tests do not require higher level thinking skills and dumb down instruction, The Educational Research Newsletter reported April 29, 2009 that assessment driven reforms will make American students more competitive in the global market. There is also the argument that teachers need to be more reflective and critical of their instruction. With the accountability system in place, Educational Research (2009) claims a strong positive relation between high stakes consequences and performance. Within NCLB there is also the belief that regardless of socioeconomic status, race or disability, the expectations set forth challenge students to acquire content and skills past the minimum requirements established within an educational system.

There are many viewpoints regarding NCLB. However, Ohanian and Kovacs (2007) believe that, "The number of people calling on Congress to repeal-not patch up-the legislation grows daily, increasing the chance that NCLB will be replaced with educator-led reform" (p. 271). However, this call for change has been in the works for many years. The controversy behind NCLB may be one reason there has not be a reauthorization, which was due to occur in 2007. President Obama released a revision proposal March 13, 2010 which seems to have stalled in the current climate. He uses key words to gain support from the educational community such as: teachers as professionals, broadening curriculum and empowering teachers and schools (Ed.gov). Yet is it truly a reform led by educators as opposed to federal politicians? In fact, who is in control of educational reform?

State Level Politics

The United States Constitution gives educational control to state governments. Prior to the early twentieth century, most laws focused on creating school districts, general academic requirements and mandating school attendance. In the early twentieth century states began licensing teachers and creating certification requirements. When federal programs began to develop in the 1960s, states began stepping in and taking more control over districts. "With centralization, the control of state educational policy is primarily a product of interaction between leading politicians and educational politicians, and between educational associations and business groups" (Spring, 1998, p. 116). Although the federal act, No Child Left Behind, has garnered a great deal of attention due to its high stakes testing and mandated requirements that all students be proficient by the year 2014, state senators and representatives continue to impact the educational community on a large scale as well. Spring (1998) reports that, "State politicians are increasingly involved in educational issues, and some members of state legislatures have become expert in educational policies" (p. 111). On April 30, 2009 the Missouri Council of School Administrators (MCSA) Bill Status Report listed over 300 education bills currently being discussed in the Missouri House, many introduced by the same member(s). Each of the bills impact local school districts and many have financial strings attached.   Yet how do changes occur when politics are involved?

Spring (1998) identifies three major sources of political change at the state level: (a) a grass-roots movement which involves phone calls, mailings, contact with state legislatures all by constituents; (b) political strategies of elected politicians and educational politicians establish links with businesses and school groups with compromises made to further each

entities agenda; and (c) general policy concerns focus on what is wrong with education and uses the negative to further the agenda (p. 122). Personal agendas also affect legislative action. This can be seen at the district level as politics seep into the election of local Board of Education members. James Cibulka (1996) writes, "As school boards have become battle grounds for many special interests, it is less credible for them to argue that they speak for the community as a whole" (p. 13). Special interest groups with their own plans have become a major influence. This includes teachers, administrators, religious groups, people of color or simply political groups. With increasing state and federal control, the power of local school boards has decreased primarily in the area of curriculum, but the power to hire teachers and administrators allows for site based management. With so many political actors influencing education, the question becomes, who has the power?

Who has the Power

There is always the debate regarding who has the power, who is in control and who decides how resources are allocated. Although it seems that this is a new debate the increasing role of politicians in education is not. As Kosar (2005) states some are of the opinion that, "…using federal power to raise education standards is a good idea" (p. 2). This viewpoint is shared by Brademas (1987), "…Congress can play-has played-a powerful and creative role…in the field of education, in particular, has been a source of innovation and a forum for oversight" (p. 52). However as a former member of the committee of the House with principal responsibilities for education legislation, Brademas (1987) does acknowledge that personal, political and institutional factors influence educational reform. There is also the constraint to reach decisions with uneven information which results in, settling for

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compromised solutions to the problems faced (p. 58). Almost in contradiction to his previous

statement Brademas (1987) says, "The American system of education…is more decentralized

than that of most other Western democracies. This decentralization allows a broad measure of

local influence and freedom of decision making. This is as it should be" (p. 74). Although

these sound opposing, Brademas does see states and local governments as having

responsibility for education. He also sees a place for federal government involvement. Goertz

(2001) used data from the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) to look at the

roles of government at different levels and how intergovernmental relationships influenced

education reform policies and practices (p. 63). Goertz (2001) maintains that,

> The roles of federal, state and local governments in designing and implementing
>
> education reforms were expected to change as well. States would establish
>
> challenging content and performance standards for all students and provide support to
>
> schools, which would have more flexibility to design appropriate curriculum and
>
> instructional programs. The federal government and the states would align their
>
> educational policies both vertically (federal to state) and horizontally (across programs
>
> within the U.S. Department of Education and across policies within states) to provide
>
> coherent policy guidance and instructional support. (p. 62-63)

This approach looks at federal and state level officials forming a collaborative

partnership. However, later in the same article Goertz (2001) addresses local entities and

states, "… the success of the Title I program depends on the willingness of states and

localities to enact policies that reflect federal objectives" (p. 64). This stance again places the

federal government into the position of correctness and the states into the position of

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following federal government initiatives that have been developed by politicians not educators. Her concluding thoughts were simply that standard based reforms may be embraced but the variations of their implementation may hinder progress (Goertz, 2001, p. 64).

This fact does not escape American Association of School Administrators Executive Director Paul Houston (2007), who points out that the federal government is leaving out the experts, teachers. "Those at the federal level do not-and cannot-know better how to educate a child than those working at the child's level" (p. 748). Educators are not the only ones who feel they are being left out of the reform movement. According to Bushaw and Gallup (2008, September), "Americans believe the next president should turn to education leaders-not political or business leaders-in developing policies for public schools" (p. 10). In this poll 77% felt that education policy should not be in the hands of business and political leaders and it is further reported that, "If national education standards are developed, Americans feel strongly that they should be created by state-level leaders working together as opposed to a federally appointed panel or employees working at the U.S. Department of Education" (p. 13). Phi Delta Kappan (2007, Dec.) published a petition calling for the dismantling of NCLB. In this petition it states reasons why the law should not be salvaged and instead calls for "…formal, state-level dialogue led by working educators rather than by politicians, ideology-bound 'think tank' members, or leaders of business and industry who have little or no direct experience in the field of education" (p. 273).

Conclusion

The "Educational field has its own rules, practices, and social relations that are not necessarily reducible to the status of 'dependent variable' "(Apple, 2003, p. 105). It is not a subordinate system relying on support from other agencies. "The educational system creates the economic goals and values, the visions of both the family and race, gender and class relations, the politics of culture, difference and identity and the role of the state" (Apple, 1996, p.18). Apples' writings promote active participation in politics, economy and culture and the creation of a more equal society which starts in the school. Granger does not hold as optimistic view. "The world-to-itself of spectacle is, after all, staged, theatrical, and there can only be one outcome--that which maintains the current balance (or imbalance) of powers" (Granger, 2008, p. 220). Many parties are pushing for educators to take control of educational reform but the Missouri School board Association (MSBA) goes a step further.

In the 2008-2009 Legislative Platform for the Missouri School Boards Association the second platform identified is Family and Community Involvement. In this section MSBA contends that they believe, "…families and the community must work as partners with the public schools in order to provide a quality education for each child" (p. 1). They go on to say that the ultimate decision regarding curriculum must be made at the local level and oppose "…any legislation, regulation, rule or judicial decision which would diminish local control" (p. 2). This opinion does not mean that MSBA is shirking a district's responsibility toward accountability. MSBA accepts that boards, families and communities are responsible for academic achievement. Assessment systems to hold students accountable, performance based

evaluations for administrators and teachers, high standards and narrowing the achievement gap are all ideas supported by MSBA.

Their last platform addresses federal issues and is written, "While public education is primarily a state and local responsibility, there are roles for the federal government. Local boards of education must be aware of federal issues impacting their districts and take appropriate positions" (p. 3). MSBA supports common sense reform and greater local flexibility.

Kerr's (1976) words offer a summary of the debate over educational policies but are almost contradictory to Granger's idea of a predetermined balance, "…whatever else policies are, they are things that we choose and we could always decide otherwise" (p. 4). The question for this study is can we; teachers, school administrators and state legislatures, not business leaders, federal politicians or textbook companies impact things such as the curriculum? Additionally, are we willing to be actively involved in curriculum development?

Curriculum

Schools are an integral part of a society and thus prone to political involvement and policy initiatives. In the past, states have governed schools allowing for some autonomy within districts and within classrooms. Over the last decade the presence of state legislatures has been somewhat under-represented in educational reform. The federal government has crowded into the educational arena with high stakes testing, accountability, and a call for equality for schools and students, not before experienced. The movement brings educational politics to the forefront as well as policy initiatives which are impacting public schools but it does not promote collaboration between educators and politicians.

Corporations and the Big Business of Education

With high stakes testing comes a furious debate regarding curriculum. Core subjects such as reading and math are taking center stage while fine arts and untested areas such as science and social studies are pushed aside. As this dispute regarding the content of schooling becomes more prominent, textbook publishers are scrambling to get in on the action. Together, with the standardized tests created by politicians, textbook publishers are determining what students need to know. School districts accept these presumptions about what is of value. However, textbook publishers are trying to make a profit, not necessarily educate youth. The corporations behind them are driven by finances and politics (Kohn 2002).

Spring (1998) uses the term Neutral Knowledge to refer to the standardized knowledge for different subject areas. This knowledge is defined by professional educators, government officials, the publishing industry and testing corporations (p. 162). He further states that the idea of a neutral knowledge is perpetuated in the reporting of standardized test scores as opposed to revealing what students have actually learned.

> What does it mean to read at grade level? Since a grade level is an artificial construct, the idea that all students should master a given body of knowledge by a particular grade level is also artificial. But in order for educators and officials to gain professional acceptance, and in order for the public to accept the use of standardized tests, everyone concerned must act as though there really was such a uniform body of knowledge. (Spring, 1998, p. 162)

The uniform body of knowledge apparent in many textbooks carries with it an agenda wrought by political influence as well as a direct authority determining classroom content. Textbook developers tend to write conservatively and try to ensure that their textbooks do not create controversy. State politicians influence publishers and pass on political bias and conservative viewpoints. Yet textbook companies are not the only ones influencing curriculum and benefiting from the increased accountability and testing milieu. The testing industry is also making a profit.

In *The 500-Pound Gorilla* Kohn (2002) describes the many financial connections that may well be driving the testing craze. Standard and Poors, a financial rating service, offers to evaluate and publish test scores to compare districts within a state. This comparison demonstrates the usefulness of test scores to determine school quality. Standard and Poors is owned by McGraw-Hill one of the largest manufactures of standardized tests. Now if your district is performing below neighboring districts, programs designed to raise test scores are available from McGraw-Hill. Other connections such as the vice president of McGraw-Hill sitting on the Board of Regents for the state of New York or the relationship between Mr. McGraw and George W. Bush or support for testing accountability in *Business Week*, which is owned by McGraw-Hill.

National tests have been debated and rejected by a number of groups, the new mandates establish national testing as a necessary tool to ensure rigorous and challenging curriculum. Tests such as the National Teachers' Examination (NTE), the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), American College Testing Program (ACT) and even the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) have a substantial impact on student learning. These tests drive

what is viewed as knowledge and how this knowledge is taught. Publishing companies are

reveling in the new laws as many are producing textbooks and tests in this era of testing.

Beside publishing companies other businesses are getting into the business of writing

curriculum.

Two hundred and fifty executives from large companies came together as The

Committee for Economic Development. This group demanded that, "school curricula be

linked more closely to employers' skill requirements and calls for 'performance-driven

education', incentives, and a traditional 'core disciplinary knowledge' version of instruction"

(Kohn, 2002, p. 6). Their concern is the preparation of students for future employment. The

result of NCLB has been a movement toward standards-based reforms and an emphasis on

reading, math and computer technology, all invaluable tools to an employee, and a significant

part of the curriculum.

Defining Curriculum

Arthur Ellis (2004), attempts to bring together theory and practice in *Exemplars of*

Curriculum Theory. He presents eight exemplars of curriculum theory and identifies two

goals of schooling (a) raising academic achievement and (b) deepening the social/moral

fabric. These goals, he ascertains, can be met through a careful examination of curriculum,

which he claims "comes to life in the hands of teachers and students" (p. XIV). Federal

politicians are currently driving what is taught in schools through standardized assessments

and standards-based programs which rely heavily on scripted lessons and other preset

programs to achieve the first goal, raising academic achievement. The curriculum focus of

federal legislation is a prescriptive one.

Ellis (2004) defines a prescriptive curriculum as one that focuses on what ought to happen. There is a set plan obtained through expert opinion about what needs to take place in the course of study. This type of curriculum is pre-existent and is just waiting to be implemented (Ellis, 2004, p. 4). In contrast, descriptive curriculum explores how things are and what happens when the planned curriculum is engaged. The focus here is on the curriculum in action (Ellis, p. 5).

Differing views of curriculum are not new. Curriculum has been and continues to be a highly contested area in the realm of schooling. Current federal legislation is knowledge centered and promotes the themes of the Western canon. "Knowledge is both product (knowing what) and process (knowing how), but learning must be measured or tested in some way" (Ellis, 2004, p. 105). The federally implemented plan relies heavily on standardized tests and textbooks. "The Bush revolution in education is the culmination of a decade of educational reform spearheaded by conservatives and business leaders" (Metcalf, 2002, p. 49) many of whom are profiting from the new reforms. Apple (2000) affirms this belief, "There are areas in the United States where it has been mandated that teachers must teach only that material which is in the approved textbook" (p. 114).

Since schools socialize students and prepare them for the world, business organizations hold an interest in curriculum development. There is the belief that controlling schools, teachers and curricula to focus on business, technology, traditional values and workplace norms will result in the disappearance of the crisis of achievement, unemployment, global competiveness, and other social ailments (Apple, 2000, p. 114). It is true that "curriculum decisions… are shaped in large measure by other considerations—ideology,

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personal values, issues in the public domain, and interests…. [and] are often part of a much larger public debate … beyond education to larger questions of public goods" (Levin, 2008, p. 22).   But the promotion and continuation of a democratic society cannot be obtained if schooling itself is not democratic.

Levin (2008) defines the official school curriculum as, "curriculum developed by governments or other sanctioned authorities for standard use in schools across a state, province, or country" (p. 7). More pointedly he defines curriculum "as an official statement of what students are expected to know and be able to do" (p. 8).   At a basic level, curriculum requires a scope and sequence embedded with goals and objectives. These goals are a strategy outlining broadly what is to be achieved. The objectives are the means to achieve the goals.   In many schools, teachers form curriculum writing groups and discuss/decide what will be taught, what will not be taught and at what point the material is presented. Debates arise around additional subjects which may be requested. Social/moral discussions within the curriculum can also arise which can complicate the building of a curriculum. By and large teachers are developing content level curriculum for their schools based on a given set of framework and skills.

But a trend is moving quickly through the nation. "Increasingly, teaching methods, texts, tests, and outcomes are being taken out of the hands of the people who must put them into practice" (Apple, 2000, 118). This planned, standardized and centralized curriculum places the focus on standardized tests and alienates teachers who must execute the knowledge. The curriculum style is generally less critical and controversial and focuses on basic knowledge and skills as opposed to higher order thinking and reasoning. Current legislation

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promotes a concept much like Hirsch's Core Knowledge Sequence as defined by Ellis (2004, p. 124).

Hirsch defines four aspects or attributes of knowledge:

1. Shared Knowledge refers to the population having a common knowledge resulting in a common culture.

2. Solid Knowledge is important core knowledge about science, math etc.. but is also about the traditions and stories shared within the culture.

3. Sequenced Knowledge requires that the learner build new knowledge based on previous information.

4. Specific knowledge is dates, history, names and events that help the learner understand their world.

The lessons being implemented based on the standards reform and high stakes testing are commonly scripted and packaged requiring little thought or skill by the teachers or the students. The federal legislative acts also emphasize "scientifically based research" in the development and implementation of professional development activities and curriculum decisions.

NCLB makes it mandatory for school leaders who receive federal funds to select and use only those programs whose effectiveness has been demonstrated by scientific research. Therefore, for a school or district to use federal monies to purchase textbooks or to pay for teachers' professional development, they must first certify that scientific research proves that these books or professional development opportunities will boost student achievement. (Sloan, 2007, p. 26)

The above provision of the act has caused considerable controversy. Identifying programs that meet the scientifically based criteria eliminates many successful instructional materials and practices and narrows the choices within the field which shrinks the knowledge selection. It significantly impacts the curriculum students receive in the classroom on a day to day basis. Through case studies and a review of history up to present day Sloan looks at the accountability behind current legislation and its impact on teachers. Sloan (2007) reports a teacher's response to the way federal mandates have impacted curriculum and instruction in her school, "State and local accountability policies forced teachers to deliver simplistic, skill-and-drill instruction using low quality workbooks" (p. 63). Higher level skills are pushed back as memorization, rote learning and teaching to the test moves forward. Apple (2000) fears that "the skills that teachers have built up over decades of hard work—setting relevant curriculum goals, establishing content, designing lessons and instructional strategies…--are lost" (p. 117-118).

This approach to learning is not isolated to the policies being implemented or even to the United States. Apple describes Global Models of Curriculum and Instruction. He identifies four World Model systems: Human Capital, Progressive Education, Religious Education, and Indigenous Education. The World Model system, which is comprised of eight goals, is most widely utilized. These goals are: (a) national standardization of the curriculum; (b) standardized testing for promotion, entrance, and exiting from different levels of schooling; (c) performance evaluation of teaching based on standardized testing of students; (d) mandated textbooks; (e) scripted lessons; (f) teaching of world languages, particularly English; (g) defining the goal of education as educating workers to compete in the global

economy; and (h) measuring the value of education by economic growth and development. As Apple points out these are very similar to the No Child Left Behind Act (p. 242). "Curriculum is produced out of the cultural, political, and economic conflicts, tensions and compromises that organize and disorganize a people" (Apple, 1996, p.22). Curriculum in this sense should not be static but change through discourse and the critique of the education system and the culture of the school environment. How and what we are teaching students through either overt or hidden messages is one of the most important factors in curriculum.

This questioning of politics in education is a major theme in Michael Apple's work. Apple has contributed extensively to critical theory discussions and thoughts surrounding the idea of politics in educational arenas. Politics have impacted curriculum discussions and reform movements across the nation but Bartell (2001) warns that, "We [educators] 'study' policy rather than seek to influence its direction and practice" (p. 189). Bartell (2001) warns that to ignore the influence of policy and the vital role it takes in shaping the world of practice is at our own peril and may render ourselves irrelevant and obsolete (p. 189). Apple's discussions rooted in Critical Theory, a critique to examine social theory related to promoting social change within the education system and the culture of the school environment itself, is an examination of society and school cultures, and requires active participation in making changes as Bartell also encourages. Apple's writings more specifically have three resounding themes: (a) schools connection to politics, economy and culture; (b) the creation of inequality in schools and society; and (c) the idea of transformation to a more democratic method of schooling.

Apple believes that schools are a part of the larger picture of the state. Due to this connection, schools are, in essence, a political, economic and cultural agency. Apple (1998) asks, "Whose knowledge is of most worth"? From this standpoint he believes that, politically speaking, the question is, "Who controls the selection and distribution of knowledge "(p.5)? Which political group is most at work in the creation of curriculum and the function of a school? Who is making the determination about what becomes the "official knowledge"?

> What we teach our children embodies what we most value in our society. The curriculum, in all its complexity, *is* the culture. Embedded in it are our values, our beliefs about human nature, our visions of the good life, and our hopes for the future. It represents the truths that we have identified as valued and worth passing on. (Henderson and Kesson, 2004, p. 206–207)

This is important not only for schools but for society in general because the knowledge passed on to schools is also the knowledge of society.

Secondly, Apple (1998) refers to the coupling of schools to economy. He defines this in these terms, "How is the control of knowledge linked to the existing and unequal distribution of power, goods and services in society?" (p.5). The concern is that schools are essentially contributing to the stratification of society whether overtly or inadvertently. Apple connects the idea of power to a relationship between class, race, gender, ability and sexual orientation. The society as a whole, not just the educational system, but the government, the economy, the working class, people of color and women, the overall structure of society and how it is reproduced are Apple's concerns. The idea that schools benefit those who already have the advantages of birth and social class as well as being the

dominant culture in society continues the current economic status of who has what and who controls the power. Adler (2010), contrary to Apple's concerns, believes that giving all students the same kind of schooling, general and liberal, will actually level the playing field and eliminate the different tracks and provide each student with the same opportunities (p. 18-19).

Apple's third theme of school connectedness is the understanding of school and culture. Apple (1998) states, "…culture is emergent, contested and consequently always in the process of being constructed and reconstructed as a historical production" (p.1). He defines culture (1998) as ethical (treating others responsibly), aesthetic (linking knowledge to the biography and personal meanings of the student), technical (making it accessible) and ideological (whose knowledge and what knowledge is of most worth) (p.5)? Apple (1982) challenges us to ask questions such as,

> Why and how are particular aspects of a collective culture represented in schools as objective factual knowledge? How concretely, may official knowledge represent the ideological configurations of the dominant interests in a society? How do schools legitimate these limited and partial standards of knowing as unquestioned truths? (p.19)

Collective culture is the lived experiences of each individual. To validate people we must have a better understanding of their lives and allow them to share their experiences. If that is practiced in school, it may be reflected in society and the idea of hegemony at work may be disbanded as truth.

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Hegemony is the idea that one group, a dominant group, is suppressing/dominating another more subordinate group. It is the creation of inequality within the schools and society. Apple believes that these hegemonic relationships create the culture. He states (2003) that, "Hegemony is a process not a thing" and that "Hegemonic power is constantly having to be built and rebuilt, it is contested and negotiated" (p.6). Hegemony is in our day to day practices, so embedded that we may not realize we are creating inequalities. The idea of a national curriculum for instance, is not creating fair accountability but emphasizing differences and creating segregation (Apple, 1996, p. 32). Apple (1995) looks at the hidden curriculum as lessons about justice, power, dignity and self-worth (p. 13). This hidden curriculum teaches norms and values that can be identified as a process to reproduce class relations in our society furthering inequality (Apple, 1982, p. 20-21). We have reduced education to the input of the dominant cultures' knowledge and the reproduction of the stratification of society. Apple writes about the struggles of women, people of color, religious groups, and social classes and how their history and knowledge is not included in the curriculum. He refers often to the textbooks and the construction of themes that correlate with the dominant culture while neglecting other groups and their roles in our history. The teaching of the curriculum of the western canon takes away the creativity of the teacher. Apple does not give up hope. His writing examines what is actually taught in schools and how teachers transform text in the classrooms. He refers to pedagogy as the art, craft and act of teaching. Critical educators emphasize the importance of not predetermining the learning act through a rigid focus on the curriculum and instructional techniques (Apple, 1998, p.24). He looks to critical educators to guide, facilitate and dialogue with students to help them

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construct their identity.   These practices can lead to a transformation of schooling to a more democratic approach.

Offering students a wide range of information and allowing for their opinions to be heard creates discourse and a dynamic curriculum embedded in democracy. Apple (1998) refers to the idea of praxis:

> thought and action combined and enlivened by a sense of power and politics; involves both conscious understanding of and action in schools on solving our daily problems; also requires critically reflective practices that alter the material and ideological conditions that cause the problems we are facing as educators. (p.4)

It is a social change within the system and school environment, a "transformation of educational policies and practices-or the defense of democratic gains in our schools and communities…" (Apple, 2003, p.193). Clabaugh (2011) looks at the idea of democratic classrooms and takes the role of devil's advocate. He states quite frankly that policies are set by elected school board members so in essence schools' undemocratic condition was decided through a democratic process (p. 100). Clabaugh (2011) sees the conditions of our schools as a direct correlation to our society and the factory or business approach to schooling. He does not believe that Americans are up for the challenge of teaching about diverse values and others' needs and rights (p. 96-100). However, Apple (2003) holds onto the hope that our institutions could be different (p. 17). Schools should not be seen as an avenue or media to carry messages, ideas, practices to the minds and lives of students but as an institution that can affect the course of the state which in turn will influence social movements and identity (Apple, 2003).

Teacher Control of Curriculum

Current policies and political actors do not need to discourage and frighten teachers out of the field of education. Although teacher autonomy has decreased with the new accountability factors, the philosophy the teacher brings to the classroom may have the biggest impact on the outcomes of the students and the enacted curriculum. Teachers are given the planned or official curriculum which outlines what and possibly when topics are to be taught. However, the individual classroom teacher ultimately determines how it will be taught and managed.

Teachers are trained to enact the curriculum using effective classroom strategies not specifically outlined in the official curriculum. In *The Art and Science of Teaching* Marzano (2007) offers ten instructional design questions to assist teachers in effective classroom pedagogy which allows them to take control of the curriculum and positively impact educational reform movements from the classroom level working outward. Marzano developed these questions after extensive research on the characteristics of effective teaching. In his book Marzano presents classroom scenarios, defines or describes the strategies and then presents his research results for each strategy, making a comparison with previous studies. Marzano's approach allows for the reader to immediately see the research supporting the strategies introduced and the impact teachers can have on their classrooms.

The emergence of Response to Intervention (RtI) coupled with differentiated instruction has also given teachers more control of how and when to present topics within the curriculum (Allan & Goddard, 2010). RtI is based on data driven decision making that focuses on individual student success. Through progress monitoring students are assessed

regularly to determine where they are in their learning compared to peers. Those requiring additional support or re-teaching of concepts are then provided with scientifically based instruction moving from making changes within the classroom to more intense, small group environments. This approach recognizes that not all students learn the same way or at the same rate and allows for differentiation so that all students may learn. Differentiation is not a new strategy but, "an umbrella concept that incorporates many effective traditional methods and strategies as well as merging many aspects of critical thinking, brain research, interdisciplinary instruction, and constructivism" (Allan, n.d.). Differentiated instruction builds on concepts such as flexible grouping, which groups students based on their readiness levels, learning styles and/or interests which may change depending on what is being taught; collaborative teaching, whole classroom and individual teaching (Allan & Goddard, 2010). This approach requires monitoring and adjustment by the teacher based on student needs and allows the teacher to control the material, pace and overall implementation of the curriculum.

"The state may legislate changes in curriculum, evaluation, or policy (which is itself produced through conflict, compromise, and political maneuvering), but policy writers and curriculum writers may be unable to control the meanings and implementations of their texts" (Apple, 2006, p. 71). Until textbook companies and politicians examine the "relationship between the formal curriculum and real teaching and learning practices in schools" (Levin, 2008, p. 17) educators must turn teaching into a promotion of democracy and a valuing of individuals. "Working practices of teachers are shaped primarily by day to day realities of their workplace, their habits, and their views about what is practical" (Levin, 2008, p. 20).

Using Marzano's principles of participation, cooperation, and the relationship of curriculum to the experiences of students are still possible under the regime of standardization and centralization. It is the basic recognition that students are individuals and may require instruction presented at different times and using different strategies that allows teachers to continue to take control of the curriculum. Sharing knowledge as a facilitator while providing guidance designed "to improve academic knowledge and skills…make them better citizens, people who are more aware of others and the need to practice self control in life" (Ellis, 2004, p. 12) is still the responsibility of each classroom teacher. Taking an active and participatory role in the reform movements, seeking understanding of "scientifically based research" and becoming a researcher to seek knowledge about the best ways to teach require a commitment by the teacher to students and self. "If educators are seeking to identify best practice and make data driven decisions, it is paramount that they recognize research that is valid and accurate" (Gates, 2008, p. 33). To do this educators "must be able to take a hard look at the research, determine its quality, and develop strategies appropriate to its findings" (Gates, p. 34).

Participating in discourse with school administrators, district level administrators, local boards of education, local elected officials and community members may help bridge the gap and allow all stakeholders' voices to be heard. Removing, even momentarily, the biases and assumptions about policymakers, policies and the politics of education may facilitate a sharing of power and a systematic approach to shifting control back toward the local level. Participating in policy research and processes may provide an avenue for broadening a teacher's perspective and providing more information on how to best serve students.

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Conclusion

"For politicians, what people believe to be true is much more important than what may actually be true. Beliefs drive political action and voting intentions much more than do facts" (Levin, 2008, p. 13). Perception is reality for most stakeholders. Each individual's reality is constructed of his or her own experiences. The idea of closing the achievement gap, holding schools accountable and having all students proficient by the year 2014 has garnered support from democrats, republicans, teachers, teacher organizations, administrators, parents, businesses and other community members. However, stakeholders also see the reality of the acts' mandates and the troubling lack of funding from the federal government for the mandated educational reforms. Parents, businesses, community members and politicians believe in the ideal of NCLB but their experiences and focus on educational experiences may result in a new reality.

Making decisions with teachers regarding textbooks, specific programs and teaching styles requires a look into the school's culture, communities, individuals and families being served. This approach may bring about a transformative change motivating stakeholders to become involved. Taking control of the classroom resides within the teacher's philosophy and attitude toward teaching and students and their willingness to become participating members in politics. The ability to impact curriculum, the fabric of the classroom, may lead to professionalizing teachers, a step toward teacher retention and putting a stop to the deskilling of teachers.

Teacher Retention and the Deskilling of Teachers

Teacher retention is not a new problem for the field of public education. According to the Office of the State Auditor of Missouri in a report dated August 22, 2002, "Only 18 percent of those individuals receiving an initial certificate in fiscal year 1995 taught for all seven years from school year 1995 to 2001 and 28 percent never entered a Missouri public school district as a teacher" (p. 1). Additionally, 15 percent of new Missouri public education teachers in 1990-2000 left public teaching in the state after only one year (Office of the State Auditor of Missouri Claire McCaskill, 2002, p. 2).

The No Child Left Behind Act has brought the discussion of teacher retention and teacher recruitment back to the forefront. Under Title II, Part A and C of the act programs are outlined to recruit members of the armed forces, highly qualified mid-career professionals and recent higher education graduates into the field of education. However, the act itself may be a contributing factor to teachers leaving education. The standards based and scientifically based research reform agendas may arguably be resulting in the deskilling of teachers which may lead to overall job dissatisfaction.

The issue of teacher turnover is imperative to understand as this study examines the perceptions educators have of their influence on educational legislation. The satisfaction of study participants and degree of input at the building and/or district level may impact the perception of their involvement at the state and federal level. An analysis of conflicts within the field of education related to teacher retention and program reforms may provide insight into the ideas of ownership, participation, professionalism and the attainment of satisfied teachers providing high quality learning opportunities for all students.

The No Child Left Behind Act - High Quality Teachers and Principals

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 was designed with the purpose of closing the achievement gap between diverse groups primarily through accountability and parent choice. It is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 which focused federal aid on reducing the gap between students of different socioeconomic status and races. There are ten primary components of the No Child Left Behind Act:

1. Title I looks at improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged or low socioeconomic students.

2. Title II focuses on preparing, training, and recruiting high quality teachers and principals.

3. Title III looks to improve language instruction for limited English proficient and immigrant students.

4. Title IV supports bringing schools into the 21st century.

5. Title V promotes informed parental choice and innovative programs.

6. Title VI looks at flexibility and accountability.

7. Title VII draws attention to the needs of Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native education.

8. Title VIII explains impact aid.

9. Title IX consists of the general provisions.

10. Title X repeals, re-designates, and amends other statutes.

The focal point here will be on Title II-Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High Quality Teachers and Principals.

Title II consists of four parts of which most contain multiple subparts. Part A focuses on the Teacher and Principal Training and Recruiting Fund and consists of five subparts; Grants to States, Subgrants to Local Educational Agencies, Subgrants to Eligible Partnerships, Accountability and National Activities. Part B examines and defines Mathematics and Science Partnerships. Part C: Innovation for Teacher Quality contains five subparts as well: Transitions to Teaching, National Writing Project, Civic Education, Teaching of Traditional American History and Teacher Liability Protection.   Enhancing Education Through Technology is the topic of Part D. Its subgroups include: State and Local Technology Grants, National Technology Activities, Ready-to-Learn Television, and Limitation on Availability of Certain Funds for Schools.   For the purpose of this study only those areas related to high quality teachers, their retention and recruitment and reform movements will be analyzed.

Part A: Funding

The intent of Part A is to provide funds through federal grants to state and local educational agencies to increase student academic achievement. Improving teacher and principal quality, increasing the number of highly qualified teachers and principals, and holding schools and educational agencies accountable are identified as a means to improving student outcomes. The allocations of funds for this program are determined through an application process which must consist of several key components. "Changes in the financing of public education—from a reliance primarily upon local property taxes to increasing aid from the state and local levels—has eroded the power of lay boards of education and local school officials" (Noll, 1980, p. 138). This new reliance requires compliance by school

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districts to gain much needed funding despite the controversies plaguing many of these requirements.

The first key component of the Part A application is a description of how the activities are to be carried out using scientifically based research and documentation; as well as, a description of how the activities are expected to improve student academic achievement. Foorman, Kalinowski and Sexton have done substantial research in the area of reading and providing early intervention based on proven research based practices. Foorman et al. (2007) praise NCLB for its efforts to provide instruction supported by data. The selection of materials based on validity, reliability and alignment with state standards and tests targets students' needs through improved classroom instruction (p. 35). The mandate of this requirement may encourage research and field studies to be conducted to aid teachers in affecting student learning outcomes. Gates (2008) also believes that research based actions may be effective but cautions that research in education frequently identifies a problem but does not offer a solution for improving student achievement. Others are less accepting of this component.

"Education is a profession prone to fads: there is always a reform practice du jour that will be superseded by tomorrow's trend, and woe betide the educator who implements yesterday's craze today" (Danielson, 2002, p. 120). The pendulum swing of education may be seen as a deterrent to the acceptance of scientifically based research. Kumashiro (2006) adamantly rejects the idea of dictating what and how teachers teach through learning standards, scripted lessons, high stakes tests and instructional methods that are "scientifically proven" (p. 169). These "reforms are financially profitable" and "privileges only certain

knowledge, skills, and perspectives…of only certain groups in society" (Kumashiro, p.169). Although this controversy exists, funding cannot be obtained without (a) identifying the researched activities to be used and (b) defining how they will improve student learning.

Another component is the assurance that activities are aligned with challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards, state assessments, and state and local curricula. Curriculum is a topic of controversy from what is to be taught, who should dictate what is taught and whether curriculum should be aligned with high stakes tests. Fadiman (1980) simply argues for a basic education—a set of skills and knowledge which provide a foundation (p. 32-34). Goodman (1980) on the other hand promotes independent thought and expression without conformity. Individualization, flexibility and a curriculum that relates to student interests (p.26-29).

Apple (2000) believes that curriculum is political and should be decentralized. "Whose knowledge is taught and what the power relations over choosing it and teaching it are…" is pertinent (Apple, p. 38). Apple is constantly striving for democracy. Even before the enactment of NCLB Apple (2000) noted that "current plans for the centralization of authority over teaching and curriculum, often cleverly disguised as 'democratic' reforms, are hardly off the drawing board before new management proposals or privatization initiatives are introduced" (p. 44-45).   Although some believe that set standards and curriculum promote consistency and high standards, the fact that curriculum varies with changes in the political, economic and social climate makes consistency difficult to manage (Spring, 2010, p. 239). Regardless, teacher's classroom lives are becoming more controlled. Administrative logistics are tightening the reins on the processes of teaching and curriculum instead of moving toward

increased autonomy (Apple, 2000, p. 114). This trend that moves in the direction of state and even federal standards makes Apple's (2000) question, "Who is doing the teaching?" more puzzling (p. 117).

A third component is a description of how funds will be used to improve the quality of the state's teachers and principals. Professional development activities are at the center of a number of the application requirements. The coordination of professional development activities required under NCLB and other Federal, State and local programs is to be documented. Professional development must be intensive, cost effective, and easily accessible and use proven, innovative strategies (technology, peer networks, and distance learning). As with any initiative, in this case accountability and high standards for school personnel, pros and cons exist.

Professional development is designed to increase teachers' professional knowledge. Collaborative efforts such as Professional Learning Communities are bringing teachers together. According to Sloan (2007) activities which bring teachers together increase professional satisfaction (p. 63). In turn, these positive effects on teachers result in improved instruction and higher expectations for all students (Sloan, p. 63). Kelleher (2000), reports that teacher quality is the leading factor in determining student achievement. Aligning professional development activities with standards and test results produces more highly qualified teachers. This viewpoint is not shared by all.

The limitation of "scientifically based research" applies to the area of professional development. "Districts or schools cannot use any federal funds to pay for or support teacher workshops or teacher trainings in instructional strategies that have not been shown by

scientifically based research to boost students' academic achievement on standardized tests" (Sloan, 2007, p. 37). Critics feel that the definition of the terms science, research and academic achievement are narrow and eliminate successful programs from receiving funding. They also contend that schools and classrooms are complex environments impacted by many influences which cannot be adequately measured in scientific terms (Sloan, p. 37). Policymakers' demand for teachers' time and lack of teacher control on what and how to teach is demoralizing and stressful to many educators. Although the professional development component requires collaboration and participation based on the input of teachers, principals, parents, administrators, paraprofessionals, and other school personnel, accountability and "proven scientifically based research" methods drive these sessions. Accountability is not just impacting current teachers but also those in teacher education programs.

Teacher professional standards, certification, and licensing are also under the requirements of NCLB. An assurance that the state activities are carried out in conjunction with the entity responsible for licensing and certification is a provision. Annual measurable goals are required of each agency along with a description of how funds will be used to meet the teacher and paraprofessional "highly qualified" requirements. These requirements entail full State certification or that the teacher has passed the State teacher licensing examination and hold a license that has not been waived on a temporary, emergency or provisional basis. Additional criteria must be met for new teachers such as holding a bachelors degree and subject knowledge and teaching skills which have been assessed by a State test.

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The plan is required to ensure that all teachers instructing in core academic subjects (English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography) within the state are highly qualified not later than the end of the 2005-2006 school year. The annual measurable objectives for each local educational agency and school must include an annual increase in the percentage of highly qualified teachers at each local educational agency and school to meet the highly qualified provision for the 2005-2006 school year.

An annual increase in the percentage of teachers who are receiving high-quality professional development in order to enable such teachers to become highly qualified and successful classroom teachers is also a part of the plan. A reformation of the teacher and principal certification process is called for to ensure an alignment with challenging state academic content standards. The emphasis for teachers is that they have the necessary matter knowledge and teaching skills in the academic subjects that they teach including technology literacy. Principals must have the instructional leadership skills to help teachers teach and students learn. The premise of this provision is hard to argue. Teachers who are well informed about their content areas and teaching practices produce high achieving students. However, a number of concerns have arisen out of this requirement.

The first concern is that states are responsible for developing teaching standards for the purpose of licensure and certification. According to NCLB, to be considered highly qualified, a teacher must demonstrate teaching and content knowledge. For many states certification involves completing and passing a single test (Sloan, 2007, p. 35). With the

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threat of teacher shortages across the nation, states have no incentive to raise standards or make it more difficult to gain teacher certification.

Secondly, there is a ripple effect for low income, low performing schools and small, rural communities.   These districts and schools have a difficult time recruiting and retaining highly qualified personnel. "New teachers as well as veteran teachers, will be more likely to look for work in wealthier white communities where students' tests scores usually are higher and the threat of NCLB consequences is lower" (Sloan, 2007, p. 36). In smaller communities teachers tend to teach multiple subjects and multiple grades; meeting NCLB standards proves to be difficult. This tension is not lost on policymakers. Berry (2006) states,

> …in times of shortages policymakers typically lower standards to ensure a 'teacher' is in every classroom. In doing so, policymakers—who are the ones in control of the teaching profession—end up not having to make the deeper investments in both teacher education and in competitive salaries necessary to ensure highly qualified teachers for all students. (p. 81)

Also, retaining teachers in the field can prove to be complicated. According to a study by the American Federation of Teachers in 2007, 6.6 % of teachers left the profession completely and turnover in high poverty schools (21.1 %) was substantially higher than for low-poverty (14.2 %) schools (Spring, 2010, p. 209). The retention and turnover woes of education prompted additional requirements under this plan.

Support for teachers and principals new to their profession, such as programs that - provide teacher mentoring, team teaching, reduced class schedules, and intensive professional development - are required. According to Starr (2009) one-third of beginning teachers leave

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the field within five years. She further states a study of teacher supply and demand in North Carolina found that almost two-thirds of teachers who quit teaching said that a lack of administrative support was a determining factor. NCLB strives to develop and implement mechanisms to assist local educational agencies and schools in effectively recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers, including specialists in core academic subjects, principals, and pupil services personnel. Feiman-Nemser (2003) recognizes an "emerging consensus among U.S. educators and policymakers that the retention of new teachers depends on effective mentors and induction programs" (p. 1). Still she believes "most policy mandates lack an understanding of the learning needs of beginning teachers and of the resources required to create effective programs" (p. 1). Feiman-Nemser challenges her readers to take teaching seriously and to work toward producing effective teachers thus increasing student achievement.

Despite the mandate for highly qualified teachers and stricter certification processes, NCLB has established programs that expand, or improve alternative routes for state certification of teachers and principals, especially in the areas of mathematics and science. Highly qualified individuals with a baccalaureate or master's degree, including mid-career professionals from other occupations, paraprofessionals, former military personnel, and recent college or university graduates with records of academic distinction who demonstrate the potential to become highly effective teachers or principals are now eligible for teaching assignments. The National Education Association takes a firm stand against this component.

"Although it is extremely valuable to be an expert in your subject matter, merely knowing a subject does not mean that you can teach it" (Smith & Coffin, 2004, p. 77).

Teaching skills, managing classrooms, knowledge of research in the field of education are non-negotiable tools gained through teacher preparation programs. Given the research, there is no dispute that there are enough teachers graduating with teacher certifications. Retaining qualified personnel in the field of education is the most difficult issue. NCLB has provided extensive funding for the initiatives outlined in Part C while wholly ignoring the systematic changes that need to occur within schools to retain the qualified teachers already within the population.

Part C: Teacher Shortage

Part C intends to address the teacher shortage through innovative programs. The purpose of this section is to authorize funding and administration of programs such as the Troops-to-Teachers Program as well as initiatives to recruit mid-career professionals into the field of teaching. Under NCLB provisions are in place to assist Armed Forces personnel in obtaining teaching licenses as well as assist professionals who have worked in other professions make a career change to education through alternative certification routes. This shortcut method to teacher certification is a growing trend. According to the National Center for Education Information's annual survey of states 59,000 individuals were issued certificates to teach through alternate routes (National Center for Alternative Certification, 2007). As the numbers continue to grow, research will be necessary to determine these individual's effectiveness in the classroom and rates of retention.

Accountability

NCLB is about accountability. The above components of the application process will be evaluated by state educational agencies. The extent to which local educational agencies

meet the goals related to teacher recruitment and retention must be established. Adequate

yearly progress (AYP) must be addressed.   "A school or district achieves AYP when each

group of students meets or exceeds the statewide annual objective. Further, for each group, 95

percent of students enrolled must participate in the assessments on which AYP is based"

(Spring, 2010, p. 158). Schools who do not meet AYP requirements are targeted for school

improvement.

       NCLB states that after the second year of the plan, if a local educational agency has

been determined by the state to have failed to make progress toward meeting the annual

measurable objectives for two consecutive years, such local educational agency shall develop

an improvement plan. The improvement plan is to be developed to enable the agency to meet

such annual measurable objectives and to specifically address issues that prevent the agency

from meeting such annual measurable objectives. After the third year of the plan, if the State

educational agency determines that the local educational agency has failed to make progress

toward meeting the annual measurable objectives and has failed to make adequate yearly

progress for 3 consecutive years, the State educational agency shall enter into an agreement

with the local educational agency on the use of that agency's funds under this part. The State

educational agency, in conjunction with the LEA, teachers, and principals, will build

professional development strategies and activities, based on a proposed sequence of action

developed through scientifically based research. The local educational agency will use this to

meet the annual measurable objectives.   The local educational agency is required to utilize

such strategies and activities.

There are many options within No Child Left Behind to try to correct a local educational agency that is determined to have failed. School choice, tutoring programs by outside agencies and technical assistance are part of the remedies deemed helpful by the federal government. These choices are outlined in Title I and Title V of NCLB.

Conclusion

No Child Left Behind has ignited a wave of documents either for or against it, but there is no doubting the importance of the problems outlined within the act. When schools experience difficulty staffing their classrooms with highly qualified teachers, students' educational performances suffer. The intention of NCLB's highly qualified teachers' provision is assumedly noble. Connecting accountability to student achievement, as measured by standardized tests, to determine teacher quality is not accepted by teaching professionals.

Understanding that teachers are generally not opposed to high standards and accountability for themselves and their peers is important. The allure of higher salaries, greater respect and a status of professionalism for teachers is enticing and may be obtainable through more accountability. However, many disagree with the means promoted by NCLB. "Under this legislation, the federal government is directly involved in determining the training and certification of teacher" (Spring, 2010, p. 203). "Teacher development, cooperation and 'empowerment' may be the talk, but centralization, standardization, and rationalization may be the strongest tendencies…" (Apple, 2000, p. 114). Directing instruction at a narrow skill base that can be assessed only through standardized testing results in the deskilling of teachers and "undermines teachers' professional status" (Sloan, 2007, 65).

Apple (2000) equates teaching to the labor process where management has two primary objectives for gaining control. The first is separation of conception. In this process complicated jobs are broken down so that workers lose sight of the whole process therefore losing control to someone on the outside. This is followed by deskilling. As control is lost skills atrophy making it easier for management to take over the planning and control (p. 116). As NCLB turns districts to scripted lessons and narrow curriculum separation of conception is evident. The loss of planning lessons, researching new approaches to teaching and managing curriculum become someone outside of the classrooms responsibility. As the skills are not used atrophy sets in and teachers experience the deskilling already evident in many classrooms.

It is as though the government is trying to "convince a significant portion of the population that what is private is now good and what is public is bad inside and outside of education" (Apple, 2000, p. 9). Powerful groups such as the federal government, textbook companies and testing centers are working toward making their knowledge legitimate and increasing their influence within society (Apple, p. 9). Apple (2000) states, "Those in dominance almost always have more power to define what counts as a need or a problem and what an appropriate response to it should be" (p. 10). There is a push of reforms such as national curricula and assessment, parent choice, marketization and privatization (the threat of a voucher system) defining school classrooms. Teachers are losing control of the curriculum. Quantity versus quality approaches are resulting in teachers leaving education while time constraints make it difficult to address all the new areas being added to the curriculum.

The fact remain, regardless of certain gains in general teacher power, that a

professional life characterized by deadly routine, the following of orders and

directives, and exclusion from participation in policy-formation and other

serious matters has a debilitating effect on teachers. There is a similar effect

upon students who work under like conditions. (Noll, 1980, p. 185)

No Child Left Behind has defined problems within the educational system and offers

one set of solutions but it has created a national controversy in its path. If nothing NCLB has

created discussions and explorations into teacher recruitment and retention. As Noll (2011)

explains, "Controversy is the basis of change, and hopefully, improvement. Controversy

prompts re-examination and, perhaps, renewal" (Preface V). It is my hope that through

controversy educational stakeholders will find a voice, demand the right to be heard and leap

into action promoting participation, collaboration and systematic change.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Legislatures are enacting bills with minimal input from those at the local level. Politicians/legislatures have taken over the role of curriculum writers and driven education into the world of big business. Districts are forced into a one size fits all approach to teaching where accountability through standardized assessment is the expectation.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has been critically analyzed by Ellis (2007) to explore "…the societal impact of the act in the areas of funding, equity, social stratification, and overall success in achieving the act's stated goals" (p. 221). Ellis's (2007) findings suggest that NCLB has taken "…real curriculum decisions out of the hands of the teachers and school administrators and put them in the hands of corporations that develop texts and curricula to match the state mandated standards" (p. 231) and that overall "…NCLB is a severely flawed law both in design and in implementation" (p. 232).

Mandated federal laws are also creating a strain between schools and the communities they serve as media outlets report on failure to meet AYP and other required measurements as a teacher and/or school district failure. Berliner (2005) argues that the simplistic curriculum driven by the mandated tests are demeaning to educators. The negative attitudes toward education and educational personnel are resulting in deskilling and a nationwide shortage of teachers.

Good teaching practices are being tossed aside to make room for the curriculum that will teach to the test in hopes of high scores and meeting standards imposed by politicians.

Stratification, an underlying factor in educational settings and the community, is perpetuated. This phenomenon is occurring throughout the nation's schools and creates crisis for children and stakeholders.

The purpose of this heuristic, social constructivist, phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of the stakeholders' perceived role in influencing national legislation impacting educational experiences in Missouri's public schools. The ability to gain insight into how each participant views his/her role in educational reform and curriculum decisions is told through the individual stories of each contributor. Providing an opportunity for stakeholders to explore and give voice to their experiences may promote autonomy and a participatory role in the development of educational reform.

The goal of this study was to answer three questions: (a) How do teachers and school administrators perceive their roles in local decisions about curriculum development? (b) What do teachers perceive are their levels of autonomy regarding pedagogical decisions and instructional practices? (c) What do state legislatures perceive is their level of involvement and the level of involvement by teachers and school administrators in creating educational policies? These questions were explored through a journey of the telling of individual stories but also through the discovery of my own personal beliefs and biases as an educator.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

A critical lens is employed with this qualitative research as it advances the viewing of a topic or phenomenon to be studied. Important characteristics as described by Janesick (2003) include: (a) looking at relationships; (b) forming personal, face-to-face and immediate connections; (c) requiring that the researcher also becomes the research instrument; and (d)

requiring the construction of an authentic and compelling narrative of what occurred through the stories of the research participants (p. 57-58). Qualitative research produces words, descriptions and vivid images of the participants' thoughts and feelings allowing for a connection with the research data that cannot be compared to a set of numbers, chart, or table. The researcher captures the perceptions of the reality of participants' tacit understandings through empathy and reflection of their lives. Qualitative research is, "situating and re-contextualizing the research project within the shared experience of the researcher and the participants" (Janesick, 2003, p. 48). This type of data is important because it focuses "…on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that we have a strong handle on what 'real life' is like" (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 10). Miles and Huberman (1994) go on to define four recurring features of this naturalistic approach:

1. Qualitative research is conducted through contact with a typical field or life situation that is reflective of the everyday life of individuals, groups, societies, and organizations.
2. The researcher's role is to gain a "holistic" view of the participants' perspective under study: the logic, arrangements and explicit and implicit rules.
3. The researcher is trying to capture the perception of the participants through attentiveness, empathetic understanding and suspension or "bracketing" of preconceptions related to the study.
4. The researcher may isolate themes and expressions that can be reviewed with the participants but maintained in their original format throughout the study. (p. 6)

In this study, real life is based on the perception educators and community stakeholders have of their roles in influencing educational legislation. Teaching others about this truth may lead to their active participation in developing legislation. The stakeholders' realities were constructed as a summation of the original stories. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) state, "Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationships between the researcher and what is studied and the situational constraints that shape inquiry" (p. 4). The major traditions of this qualitative study were heuristics, social constructivism and phenomenology.

Phenomenology

Moustakas (1994) states that, "The very appearance of something makes it a phenomenon" (p. 49). More pointed is the definition provided by Creswell (2007), "…a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (p. 57-58). This definition brings us back to Moustakas as he goes on to frame perception in the arena of phenomenon maintaining it as a source that cannot be doubted. Moustakas (1994) writes that perception is created through multiple meanings that create an overall view or interpretation of the experience. "Phenomenologically-produced understanding of the way individuals construe their world and their place in it is one way in which inter-subjective knowledge leads us to new dimensions of seeing social experience" (Kincheloe, 1991, p. 148).

Two people who appear to have shared the same event may perceive it quite differently because they are building meaning based on their own previous knowledge.

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Without the dialogue, the participants may not even be aware of their perception of an event as they may be so engrossed in their daily routine that deep thought about their actions may not have occurred. The mere act of answering interview questions and reviewing transcripts may open a new mind set and create an "ah ha" moment for participants. For this research the perception of influence is key. As Kincheloe (1991) states, "the most influential and important reality is human perception" (p. 149).

A phenomenologist also requires the ability not to presuppose judgment. It is an attempt to rid as many presuppositions as possible to unmask hidden assumptions about the nature of reality (Kincheloe, 1991, p. 147). The phenomenon approach explores,

> …how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning. This requires methodologically, carefully and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon--how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it and talk about it with others (Patton, 2002, p. 104).

This study was not a fact finding mission to establish how many times participants contacted their legislator regarding educational bills on the floor or how many times they voted for a legislator with a strong pro educational standing. The interest was in their perceptions of their reality, worldview, and how they, as stakeholders, perceive their role in impacting educational reform. Through careful examination of interview transcripts and reading and re-reading data sources the participants' account of what is occurring within their life situation became transparent. Phenomenology allowed me to understand not only the participants' experiences and interpretations, but it also allowed for an exploration and defining of my own experiences

without passing judgment or projecting my own reality onto the participants.   Which is why, for this study, heuristic inquiry was nested inside the major tradition of phenomenology.

Heuristic Inquiry

As an educator, I have my own experiences and interest in legislative topics. This leads me to identify my study as heuristic. Moustakas (1990) refers to heuristic inquiry as a

> …process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge (p. 9).

Patton (2002) further defines a heuristic study as one which focuses on human experiences which are intense for the participants and the researcher (p. 107). "I may come into touch with new regions of myself, and discover revealing connections with others" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 11).

A heuristic study provides a method of research that is systematic and structured for data collection. More importantly, it leads to findings which will answer the research questions through the participants' experiences and the personal reflections of both the participants and the researcher. Heuristic inquiry gives the researcher the ability to dialogue about a topic that is impacting the participants quite possibly on a personal and professional level. This may provide new insight into previously suppressed areas.

Moustakas (1990) describes six basic phases in the heuristic process:

1. Initial Engagement, a discovery of an intense interest, a passionate concern, holds important social meanings and personal, compelling implications, an inner search.

2. Immersion is defined in the following term, "requires my full presence, to savor, appreciate, smell, touch, taste, feel, know without concrete goal or purpose".

3. Moustakas states, "One must permit the glimmerings and awakenings to form, allow the birth of understanding to take place in its own readiness and completeness" as the third phase, Incubation.

4. Illumination is the appearance of themes and patterns to create new discoveries as awareness, meaning and knowing grows.

5. Explication is focusing, self-dialogue, reflection creating new connections and relationships.

6. Creative Synthesis pulls together all the data revealing the total experience, patterns and relationships. (p. 27-32)

Due to my own experiences as an educator, my hope was that the topic of educational legislation would help open the door for awareness and the building of working relationships between educators and legislators; expanding opportunities for personalization not available through other research methods. This type of study emphasizes my tacit knowledge upon which I so heavily rely in my own work. It also provides insight and understanding that contributes to the research. This interpretive framework was also guided by social constructivism.

Social Constructivism

The tradition of constructivism is intertwined with phenomenology and heuristics as it involves both the participant and the researcher. The authenticity of this study is based on individuals' realities and their perceptions of the phenomenon being studied. Crotty (1998) defines social constructivism as, "…focusing on the meaning-making activity of the individual mind" (p. 58). Social constructivism involves individuals creating an understanding of their worlds. It is subjective and relies heavily on the participants' views and perceptions of the events that have occurred. These views are created through interactions and experiences with other people, the social aspect.

Meaning in social constructivism is constructed based on previous experiences of both the participants and researcher. It is then interpreted. Guba and Lincoln (1990) believe that the human world is different from the natural, physical world. Humans have evolved and are capable of constructing their own realities. It is as if our world is not real, but was conceived by each individual's mind and is played out based on the constructs developed. Multiple individual realities create perceptions that make for the study of human beings.

Understanding the perceptions of the participants is critical to this qualitative approach. It leads to seeing…

> from new perspectives what schools and the contexts in which they operate are like and why they have come to be that way, qualitative research teaches action researchers to heighten their consciousnesses of themselves as players on the educational stage, to take themselves less for granted, and to view themselves as objects of study. (Kincheloe, 1991, p. 146)

Constructivism seeks change for all participants and "a critical constructivist perspective on the purposes of qualitative inquiry values teacher empowerment, [and] believes in human agency (i.e., the capacity of individuals to change their own lives)…" (Kincheloe,1991, p. 146).

Grbich (2007) advises using phenomenology when "…the essence of people's experiences of a phenomenon is to be explored, described, communicated and possibly interpreted" (p. 84). This heuristic, constructivist, phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of educators, school administrators and state legislators as a means to study their perception of the relationship between federal legislation and local practices. It questioned the experience and social constructs of each individual as well as the researcher. As a heuristic study there is a component of subjectivity as my own thoughts, emotions and experiences are also researched (Grbich, 2007, p. 22). This did play a role in the research process. "Heuristic research involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery; the research question and the methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning and inspiration" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 11).

The interpretive framework was also guided by social constructivism which allowed for a complexity of views from the participants and how they have shaped their understanding of educational legislation and incidentally their role in its development and implementation in the classroom. These views varied based on the individual's past experiences and how they relate this phenomenon to their current reality. As the study was conducted the development of the phenomenon in a shift of power from local to national levels was explored.

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Sampling Techniques

Research Sites

The settings for this study were suburban communities located in the Northwest region of Missouri. The participants were selected from research sites located within two school districts: Selfton School District and Hyaldale School District as well as representatives from the Missouri State Legislature. The names of the districts have been changed to protect the identity of the study participants.

Selfton is located north of downtown Kansas City encompassing 105 square miles. Selfton has two buildings in the south end of the district, an elementary building housing Kindergarten through second grade and an elementary/middle school housing third through eighth grade. The District Education Center is located in the north end of town and houses an early childhood program. The campus located on the north end of the district consists of an elementary, first through third, an elementary fourth and fifth grade, a middle school sixth through eighth, a high school ninth through twelfth and a career center. Off campus is the kindergarten building. Selfton School District is a growing community with over 3,500 students and almost 300 certified teachers (Selfton School District, 2011).

The Hyaldale School District is also located north of downtown Kansas City. The enrollment is just under 19,000 students with 1,350 certified teachers. Hyaldale boasts twenty one Kindergarten through fifth grade elementary buildings, five sixth through eighth grade middle schools, four high schools and other programs such as alternative schools and preschools. The district's buildings fall within an 82 square mile radius (Hyaldale School District, 2011).

To begin the research process, each district's Central Office received a letter identifying myself as the researcher, a statement regarding the topic and purpose of the study and participant characteristics (see Appendix F). A follow up call was made within a week after the letter had been sent to the district's central office (see Appendix G). Upon receiving permission from the districts, the initial letter was then sent to the principals of the buildings targeted for participation. In the Hyaldale School District their protocol did not allow for direct contact however the introductory letter was sent through their central office research office. For the legislators, an introductory letter was sent via email, again identifying myself as the researcher along with a statement regarding the topic and purpose of the study (see Appendix B). This letter was also used as an introduction for the study participants.

Participants

This study was designed to elicit reflective responses from fourth and fifth grade teachers, school administrators and state legislators as each discussed his/her perception on the relationship between federal educational legislation and educational practices at the local level. Fourth and fifth grade teachers were chosen based on their exposure and participation in state wide mandated assessments and likely would be able to provide a more in depth discussion related to the phenomena of local decision making. Numerous initial requests for participation (83) were sent out with the knowledge that the study was voluntary and many may choose to not participate. Participant demographics such as race, ethnicity and gender are not available for the district as a whole. Participant demographics are not reported to protect anonymity. The introductory letter, consent form and questionnaire (see Appendix B, A, C or D) were distributed to 58 teachers, 11 administrators and 14 state legislators. Thirteen

consented and completed the questionnaire, agreeing to participate in the study. When calculating the rate of return, fourth and fifth grader teachers returned the consent form and questionnaire at 12%, administrators at 36%, and legislators at 14%. The participants (those completing and returning the questionnaire) in this study include seven elementary teachers at the fourth or fifth grade level, four school administrators and two Missouri state legislature members. The questionnaire was utilized to draw out a more specific sample group for the one on one interview session and also served as a significant data source for this study. Of the 13 participants six were chosen to participate in an interview session.

After collecting the questionnaires and reviewing the answers six participants were selected for individual interviews conducted for approximately one hour. These participants were contacted based on their questionnaire responses and each acknowledged their participation in the study and continued consent. The questionnaires specifically aided in identifying participants that have some level of involvement with curriculum, an understanding of or awareness of educational legislation and the willingness to discuss issues related to education. There was no criterion established for number of years within the field as long as there was evidence that the participant was actively involved at their level. To ensure that this in depth and meaningful data was obtained from the participants' purposeful sampling was utilized.

Purposeful Sampling is defined by Maxwell (2005) as "…a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (p. 88). He further goes on to say, "Selecting those times, settings, and individuals that can provide you with the information that you need

in order to answer your research questions is the most important consideration in qualitative selection decisions" (p. 88). Maxwell (2005) identified four possible goals for purposeful selection:

1. Achieving a representativeness or typicality of the settings, individuals, or activities selected;

2. Adequately capture the heterogeneity in the population;

3. Deliberately examine cases that are critical for the theories that you began the study with, or that you have subsequently developed; and

4. Establish particular comparisons to illuminate the reasons for differences between settings or individuals.

This technique guided the study and helped identify participants that would likely provide insight into the perceptions of teachers, school administrators and state legislators on the relationship between federal educational legislation and educational practices at the local level.

Data Collection

Data was collected from October 2012 through March 2013. Data collection began with the gathering of documents, then the distribution of questionnaires. After reviewing the questionnaires six participants were chosen to complete a one on one interview.

Documents

"Records, documents, artifacts, and archives…constitute a particularly rich source of information about many organizations and programs" (Patton, 2002, p. 293). Documents can be a valuable resource to corroborate what has been said. It can also lead to further inquiry to

aid in a deeper understanding of the participants' perspective. Miller (1997) states, "Texts are one aspect of the sense-making activities through which we reconstruct, sustain, contest and change our sense of social reality. They are socially constructed realities that warrant study in their own right" (p. 77). Patton (2002) identifies five challenges associated with document analysis (p. 499):

1. Access to documents;

2. Understanding how and why the documents were produced;

3. Determining the accuracy of the documents;

4. Linking documents with other sources, including interviews and observations; and

5. Deconstructing and demystifying institutional text.

Allport (2001) claims that in the personal document, "can be found the needed touchstone of reality" (p. 193). "Knowledge of the history and context surrounding a specific setting comes, in part, from reviewing documents" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 107). The documents that were chosen for this study had a direct correlation with my research questions and guided decisions that were made in forming the questionnaires and interview questions. Additionally, documents were selected from the participating organizations to assist in understanding the perspectives provided by the participants. Curriculum maps, agendas and notes from curriculum meetings, Board of Education meeting minutes, district level Comprehensive School Improvement Plan, state level produced pamphlets and newsletters were analyzed and provided useful information for triangulation. "If the language of personal documents can be shown to enhance understanding, to confer powers of prediction and

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control, then the use of these documents must be admitted as valid scientific method"

(Allport, 2001, p. 197).

Questionnaires

The questionnaires (see Appendix C and D) were designed to elicit information from

participants regarding their experiences in the field of education and for legislators,

educational politics. Its purpose was to gauge the participants' interest in and knowledge of

curriculum, educational legislation and their current role in these areas. To gain this

information the questionnaire asked each to identify specific experiences in their field, trends

they believe have impacted education in the last decade, their perception of the relationship

between federal educational legislation and educational practices, their role in decision

making, to rate their level of control and how informed they perceive they are and actions

they have taken to participate. The questionnaire provided the opportunity to narrow down

the choices to those who provided rich, thick descriptions and the greatest, most, relevant

information to the topic under study. Based on the 13 completed questionnaires six

participants were selected for a one on one interview session to garner more information

about their perceptions.

Interviews

Looking at interviews as a means of collecting data Maxwell (2005) states,

"…interviewing is often an efficient and valid way of understanding someone's

perspective…" (p. 94). Understanding that qualitative research is based on the telling of

stories and is deeply embedded in individual perception, interviewing plays a key role in data

collection. "Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of

others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (Patton, 2002, p. 341).

Interviewing is a tool for understanding experiences and reconstructing events when the researcher was not a part of the experience (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 1).

The most important piece of interviewing is that the interviewer establishes the milieu of an interview session which begins with a good rapport and maintains an open mind and genuine interest in what is being said. An interview session allows for interaction, probing of responses and an observation of the participants' body language and vocal inflections. Interviewing, "explores social, political, and economic changes" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 4) through the lens of each participant but only for those who are listening.

Patton (2002) identifies three basic approaches to collecting qualitative data through open-ended interviews, which are generally used in qualitative studies to gain the most information (p. 342):

1. The informal conversational interview consists of spontaneously generated questions which occur in the natural flow of the conversation.

2. The general interview guide approach begins with an outline of issues, a checklist, of what is to be discussed.

3. The standardized open ended interview initiates the conversation based on a pre-established set of questions which is arranged to take each participant through the same questions.

For the purpose of this study, open ended interviews were used as a means of data collection. Questions centered around educational legislation, who each perceived as key players in curriculum and standards development, their role in local decisions, implications relevant to

educational legislation in the school and actions they have taken to participate. Although

some set questions were established prior to the interview (see Appendix E) flexibility in

querying and the ability to spontaneously generate questions as the interview proceeded

allowed for probing inquiry but continued to keep the interview moving smoothly and

collecting the needed data to help answer the research questions posed. The interview settings

were in an agreed on location established by the researcher and participants. The interview

participants include two state legislators, two administrators and two teachers. Although

participants were not queried on their race and ethnicity all participants were Caucasian. The

interviews were audio recorded, with permission, and transcribed after the sessions.

Due to the phenomenological nature of this study, interviewing was a key component

(Creswell, 2007). "The purpose of qualitative interviewing is to capture how those being

interviewed view their world, to learn their terminology and judgments, and to capture the

complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 348). "It is a

way of finding out what others feel and think about their world" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 1).

To explore the participants' culture or interpretation of the world by developing a shared

understanding (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 20). Interviewing in qualitative research fits with the

purpose of this study: to understand how the participants perceive the relationship between

federal educational legislation and educational practices at the local level. These data sources

were analyzed through coding and phenomenological analysis was used to make meaning of

the in-depth interviews.

Data Analysis

The first type of analysis includes Miles and Huberman's (1994) method of coding which is used to analyze, dissect and define themes found within the documents. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe coding as analysis, specifically, "To review a set of field notes, transcribed or synthesized, and to dissect them meaningfully, while keeping the relations between the parts intact…" (p. 56). They go on to describe codes as tags or labels connected to words, phrases, sentences or whole paragraphs that create meaning of the data. These tags or labels are developed after thoroughly reading the material and bracketing key words, thoughts or ideas. The data is then examined and given various themes so that the sources may be seen from varying views. In Miles and Huberman's (2004) model codes are used for retrieval and organization to make the research easily accessible. These codes are further identified as descriptive or inferential, but no matter the label the purpose is to pull the data together to enable an analysis (p. 58). A code book was developed to look at each piece of the data and then cross referenced to look for similar patterns and themes. Ongoing coding provided assistance to look at the next event using a different perspective or be more aware of some piece that seemed less important on previous data collections. Aside from the obvious benefit from ongoing coding the practical implication is in time and the goal of not becoming overwhelmed with too much data.

The interviews, on the other hand, were analyzed using Moustakas's (1994) modified version of Van Kaam's method of phenomenological analysis. "Phenomenological analysis seeks to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or a group of people" (Patton, 2002, p. 482). This process must

begin with seeing things as they truly appear free of judgment and preconceptions which

Moustakas (1994, p. 90) defines as Epoche. Moustakas (1994) offers additional steps to

phenomenological analysis through his extensive writing on phenomenology:

1. Listing and Preliminary Grouping--in this step list every expression relevant to the
   experience (known as horizonalization).

2. Reduction and Elimination--test each expression for two requirements.

   a. Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and
      sufficient constituent for understanding it?

   b. Is it possible to abstract and label it? If yes to these questions it is a horizon
      of the experience and becomes the invariant constituents of the experience.
      If it does not meet these criteria, overlap, repeat or are vague expressions
      they are eliminated or presented in more exact descriptive forms.

3. Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents--cluster the invariant
   constituents of the experience that are related into thematic labels which are
   converted into the core themes of the experience.

4. Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes by Application--
   check the invariant constituents and themes against the complete record of the
   research participant to achieve validation. Ask:

   a. Are they expressed explicitly in the complete transcription?

   b. Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed? If they are not explicit or
      compatible they are not relevant and should be deleted.

5. Using the relevant, validated invariant constituents and themes, construct for each participant an Individual Textural Description (the what) of the experience including verbatim examples from the transcribed interview.

6. Construct an Individual Structural Description (the how) of the experience based on the Individual Textural Description and Imaginative Variation.

7. Construct a Textural--Structural Description of the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes.

Finally a Composite Description is developed from the Textural-Structural Description to summarize the meanings and essence of the experiences of the group as a whole (p. 120-121). This step is a way of understanding how the group experiences what they experience. It involves Imaginative Variation which requires that the phenomenon is approached from various perspectives, positions, roles or functions; a variation in the frame of reference (Moustakas, 1994, p.97-98).

In completing the data analysis I, the researcher, ensured that I did not leave myself out of the examination. As discussed earlier, this study involves a Heuristic design which brings the researcher even further into the study. Moustakas (1990) reminds us that dialogue with one's self as well as with the participant is typical data collection in a heuristic study (p. 46). While the steps for phenomenology are closely related to Moustakas six phases of the heuristic process, as highlighted earlier in this chapter, searching for meaning in the data sources and developing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon must also bring an awareness of my own growth and knowledge of self. The awareness of my own constructed reality and the reality of the participants assist with developing themes during the analysis phase. Bringing

my own experiences, reflections and insights to the data analysis further connects me to the participants and to the research. This personalization reiterates my role as the primary tool in this inquiry and also leads to some limitations.

Limitations, Validity, Reliability and Ethical Considerations

My sampling is based within one region of the state of Missouri. This may create difficulty when trying to replicate this study as it cannot be assumed that other regions will have similar issues. Additionally, all participants are Caucasian so there was not a diverse representation of voices. I used purposeful sampling to identify participants that would likely provide insight into my study and to identify educational stakeholders who are interested in impacting educational legislation. This method of sampling may create a bias within my research analysis as I am choosing participants based on specific criteria. It is also important to understand that each individual has created his/her own reality based on experience or lack of experience in the area of educational legislation. The perception of the role he/she plays will impact his/her own understanding as well as the interpretation of the topic's meaning and questions posed during the interview process.

Inevitably, each study has its own set of limitations and generally those limitations are in the form of researcher biases. As an educator I am aware that I hold a bias toward politicians and the impact politics play on the field of education. Being in special education, I deal with legislative acts and bills on a daily basis which drive my decisions and practices. As a resource for classroom teachers, I am aware of the stress that is incurred by teachers due to legislative acts such as No Child Left Behind and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. I am also aware that l feel I have made little or no impact on the legislation

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which drives my day to day experiences and those of the students with whom I come into contact, my viewpoint may be a potential bias.   However, I feel these biases took a back seat to the data received from participants in the study and were held in check during the interview process ensuring that I did not lead the interviewee to see my viewpoint or to taint their opinion by sharing my own beliefs or attitudes. At the same time, I was able to mentally reflect as they shared their experiences and make connections with their views.   Ultimately, it was my responsibility to develop a sense of each participant's reality and their role and interactions within it whether I agreed or disagreed with their stated position. In qualitative studies researcher bias is expected and in a heuristic study my own experiences and interpretations are valued along with those of the participants. To bracket my own thoughts and feelings, to ensure they did not interfere with the participants' voice, I re-read the interview transcripts and annotated my reactions along the side. This provided me with an opportunity to illuminate my feelings without imposing on the constructed meanings of the participants.

To try to reduce the effect of my bias, I used open ended interview questions with wording that was objectively stated and did not reveal my own personal opinions or realities. "Researchers put together the information they find from qualitative interviews to form explanations and theories that are grounded in the details, evidence and examples of the interview" (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p. 4). Neutral and nonjudgmental facial expressions, body language and other interactions with the participants were employed while still remaining interested and engaged in the experiences that were being shared.

The same limitations hold true for analyzing document sources. Clarifying the intent of document sources and their meaning will also reduce bias. Ethically I have and will continue to remain confidential with the findings and viewpoints expressed by the participants and with the data collected through the study. Participant names are not revealed to allow for discussion with a colleague and critical reflection to be built into the process. This study contains checks and balances in the form of validity and reliability.

Validity and Reliability

"Validity in qualitative research has to do with description and explanation and whether or not the explanation fits the description" (Janesick, 2003, p.69). Rubin and Rubin (1995) simply identify validity as a reflection of the world being explored (p. 85). However they recognize that qualitative research does not fit the general research mold. Instead they look at credible work based on the following criteria:

1. Transparency, meaning the reader is able to see the basic processes of data collection. Quotes from interviews support conclusions, evidence of what was done, seen and felt is readily available. For this study interviews will be recorded, transcribed and analyzed placing data sources according to participants.

2. Consistency which examine themes in interviews for coherence with other participants, researching and understanding inconsistencies that may occur through probing deeper.

In a qualitative study replication may prove difficult. Interviews consisted of a few set questions allowing for the participant to take the lead in the interview driving each interview in a somewhat different direction. However, through analysis, common themes or patterns

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became evident between participants. The same proved true when comparing different data sources for the same participant. Identifying themes and patterns aided in consistency, however Miles and Huberman (1994) caution that the context should be carefully considered as meaning is derived from each event (p. 102).

3. Communicability, participants should see themselves in the descriptions; other researchers should understand your text and accept your descriptions because they complement what they and others have seen.

Research that is designed to garner lots of evidence: that is vivid, detailed, and transparent; that is careful and well documented; and that is coherent and consistent is likely to be convincing. These are the standards through which qualitative interviewing studies gain credibility (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 91).   Lather (1991) identified four types of validation that are more traditional, three of which are relevant to this study:

1. Triangulation involves multiple data sources, methods, and theoretical schemes. Questionnaires, interviews and documents are used as data sources for this study creating multiple perspectives viewed through multiple theoretical lenses.

2. Construct validation recognizes the constructs that exist rather than imposing theories/constructs on informants or the context. This form of validation requires a removal of biases and assumptions looking for codes and meanings within the data.

3. Face validation is another form of validity as the researcher is able to observe, document and analyze as the event is occurring.

Incorporating these methods of validation strengthens the voices of the participants and gives deeper meaning to the realities of each partner in the research study.

Along with establishing validity, reliability will be a key element. Is "the process of the study…consistent, reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods" is the question asked by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 278). For this study, reliability is recognized in the recordings of the interviews, transcription of the interviews and coding of data collection. Code books are used to document the themes and definitions to maintain consistency and allow for examination of data. The researcher's constant review of data sources and comparison of participant responses were used to develop the concept of reliability.   Giving readers the opportunity to see the evidence presented in the research study as well as the logic that leads to the findings are goals of this qualitative study and may promote sustainable change.

Ethical Considerations

The questionnaires and interview questions designed for this study meet the federal definition of research as they were developed to gain a better understanding of teachers, administrators and state legislatures. The participants for this study are adults, over the age of 18, and their written consent was required for participation (see Appendix A). Participants were provided with a written explanation of the procedures and purpose of the study (see Appendix B). Personal information was not shared and anonymity was maintained throughout the findings. The questionnaires originally contained identifiable information as did the audiotaped recorded interviews however, unidentifiable markers were assigned to the data and identifying information was removed to maintain confidentiality. During the course of the study all documents were kept in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher. Letters of consent, questionnaires, interview notes and documents will be maintained in a

locked cabinet in the Principal Investigators office, which is only accessible to the researcher,

located on the UMKC campus for 7 years from the completion of the project. Only the

researcher will have access to participant information and responses ensuring confidentiality.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The questioning of the perceptions of seven elementary teachers at the fourth or fifth grade level, four school administrators and two Missouri state legislature members on the relationship between federal educational legislation and educational practices at the local level involved a study of curriculum development, pedagogical decision making, instructional practices and educator and legislator involvement in educational policies.   The research is present on the effect of mandates such as NCLB and IDEA on achievement and school climate but not on the process of how and why these mandates exist. Looking at perceptions, decision making roles, local implementation and daily practice became viable topics when answering the question; What are the perceptions of teachers, school administrators and state legislators on the relationship between federal educational legislation and educational practices at the local level?

This heuristic, social constructivist, phenomenological study explored the perceived realities of fourth and fifth grade teachers and administrators in two suburban communities located in the Northwest region of Missouri as well as representatives from the Missouri State Legislature. This study answers three sub-questions: (a) How do teachers and school administrators perceive their roles in local decisions about curriculum development? (b) What do teachers perceive are their levels of autonomy regarding pedagogical decisions and instructional practices? (c) What do state legislators perceive is their level of involvement and

the level of involvement by teachers and school administrators in creating educational policies?

The participants interviewed for this study offered a wide array of experiences. A State Legislator with teaching experience prior to election and experience sitting on educational committees, another legislator with experience sitting on educational committees at the state level, a central office administrator with experience as a teacher and building administrator, a building principal and two elementary teachers. Each participant willingly volunteered to be a participant in the study and to be interviewed. The study participants spoke openly and without hesitation during the session. Although the interviews are the primary source of data, documents provided for additional analysis.

Documents provided a third view of the perceptions of the study participants. They were used to triangulate the findings from the interviews and provided a more holistic view. This third perspective provided for a phenomenological analysis as described by Moustakas (1994). It aided in the development of three individual reports of the participants' perceptions that then established their individual stories. In using heuristic inquiry I was then allowed to use my own experiences to connect to the participants' stories.

Miles and Huberman's (1994) process of assigning descriptive and interpretive codes or tags through analysis with the result of the formation of themes and Moustakas (1990) six stages of heuristic research design: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and culmination were utilized throughout the analysis of data and proved most beneficial to my ability to bridge a relationship between my own experiences and the experiences of my participants. The ability to return to each participant's story, recognizing

the themes and experiences they shared, helped me make sense of their meaning and their ability to communicate their lived experiences relevant to the study. Though my time with each participant was limited, their willingness to share of themselves and their experiences created a bond, a sense of knowing, about each one in a personal way.

Findings of the Study: Questionnaires, Interviews and Document Analysis

In this section I report the findings of the questionnaire, interviews and document analysis. The questionnaires (see Appendix C and D) were designed as an introductory tool to the participants. It provided me with general information such as number of years in their field, current and previous experiences, as well as their involvement with curriculum and legislation. It also provided the participants with a glimpse into the study and an opportunity to begin thinking about and constructing their thoughts around curriculum and legislation as well as federal control and local control. Words and phrases that expressed, described and created meaning were bracketed and then labeled or coded according to Miles and Huberman (1994) and those deemed relevant were then validated against the other document sources for the individual. These codes were then identified as descriptive or interpretive to assist with analysis (Miles and Huberman (2004).

One open ended interview with each of six participants was also conducted as a part of this study. A group of set questions were established prior to the interview (see Appendix E) however there was flexibility in querying. The ability to spontaneously generate questions as the interview proceeded allowed for probing inquiry and the ability to collect the needed data to help answer the research questions posed.

The interviews are the main data source and were transcribed from the audio recordings. After transcription the analysis began with reading and re-reading for the essence of the experience portrayed. The interviews were then studied using Moustakas (1994) phenomenological analysis. According to phenomenological analysis every expression relevant to the experience was taken through the process of horizonalization, listing and preliminary grouping. Each expression was then evaluated for two requirements: (1) Does the expression contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it? (2) Is it possible to abstract and label it? If I was able to answer yes to these questions it became a horizon creating an unchanging ingredient that became a part of the participants' overall experience. If it did not meet these criteria the expressions were eliminated or presented in more exact descriptive forms.

Continuing with phenomenological analysis, Moustakas (1994), describes clustering and thematizing of the constituents with labels which are then converted into core themes of the experience. Through this process I was able to drill down to finalize the invariant constituents and themes to achieve validation. It was at this point I used a process of labeling constituents as descriptive and interpretive codes that helped to thematize the data. Using these relevant, validated invariant constituents and themes, I constructed for each participant an individual textural description (the what) of the experience, an individual structural description (the how) of the experience and a textural--structural description through verbatim examples from the transcribed interviews. Finally a composite description was developed from the textural-structural description to summarize the meanings and essence of the experiences of the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994, p. 120-121). This step provides for a

variation in the frame of reference as the phenomenon studied is approached from various perspectives, positions, roles or functions (Moustakas, 1994, p.97-98).

To demonstrate the process of constructing each description described above two participants were chosen for each step: (a) individual textural description (participant 8 and participant 3), (b) individual structural description (participant 5 and participant 4), and (c) individual textural-structural description (participant 2 and participant 1). Additionally, the final composite description was used to analyze what the phenomenon means for the group by combining the textural and structural descriptions. Developing the individual textural descriptions resulted in descriptions ranging from three to seven pages. While the individual structural descriptions ranged from three to four pages. Structural descriptions required the use of analysis referred to imaginative variation to express the lived experiences of the participants. This involved reading, re-reading, self- examination and reflection of the in depth interviews, questionnaires and documents to construct each descriptive report which constitutes their stories. The textural and structural composite reports focused on the "what" and "how" for the group and provided the depth required for the composite textural structural description. These descriptions were developed and reported through the words of the participants. Qualitative research relies on the voices of the participants and the sharing of what they all have in common with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). For the telling of these stories fictitious names are assigned to each participant to protect their identity and some information is purposefully vague to preserve confidentiality.

Individual Textural Descriptions

Participant 8-Joey

  Joey has over ten years of experience as a state level politician and had previously served his local school district as a member of the School Board of Education for just under ten years. Joey has served on education committees focused on K-12 and higher education. Joey views the trends that have impacted education over the last decade as those focusing on budget issues, primarily not funding the foundation formula fully; unaccredited or provisionally accredited schools and the general emphasis on education reform that is sweeping the country. He sees himself as very involved in educational legislation, "My role is to decide which bill to hear and not hear, which to support and oppose." But when asked about the relationship between federal educational legislation and educational practices he did not feel he had as much experience, "NCLB, Race to the Top were not made in legislature, state and DESE make decisions then after the fact existentially involved but not much." He does not view the understanding of federal education policies as his main emphasis but when probed about federal legislation such as NCLB he commented, "I have heard nothing but negative about it. Improvement is hard to show especially annual progress at a high level, it's good we requested the waiver for NCLB."

  Joey further discussed the idea of local control when responding to NCLB legislation, "…closer government is to the people the better, local is better than the next level." Joey reported that on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being complete control be given to the local level regarding curricular decisions and instructional practices that philosophically it should be a 4 or 5.

It should be a mixed bag, everyone wants accountability and to know how we are stacking up, comparing with other states, other countries, but if only local then we have no way to have a comparison. Society wants local control and on the other hand accountability, sometimes it doesn't mix. The best is buy in from local support, local control.

Joey has taken a participatory role in educational decisions and has an open mind to working with others,

…engage as much as possible, listen to the views of others and share my own. All of us care deeply about kids but have different ways and thoughts about doing it. We need to work together to craft education policy, be involved, visit, listen to teachers and superintendents."

In summarizing Joey's experiences as a state legislator the idea of a divided government emerged as an interpretive code. Joey's experience at the state level is represented as distanced from what the federal government is imposing. His lack of knowledge or involvement when asked about NCLB represents this division as well as his emphasis on local control.

Participant 3-Sandy

Sandy is a second year fourth grade teacher. She is an active member of the School Leadership Committee and participates on the Academic Committee during Professional Learning Communities (PLC) days. Sandy participates in shared decision making at the building level, collaborates with team mates and vertically with other grade levels, attends PTA meetings and school board meetings so that she can "be aware". Sandy describes herself

as active at the school level and local level and realizes there are lots of stakeholders and multiple avenues/outlets to voice an opinion about educational decisions. Although Sandy realizes that she has minimal experience in the field she has already noticed more push toward data driven decision making and tracking. "In recent years, students have been expected to be more accountable for their own data note-booking. Also more pressure is put on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) test and the test scores that are received." She relates these changes to educational legislation such as Individual Education Plans (IEPs), 504s, the Senate Bill requiring students to be reading at a certain level before being allowed to progress and NCLB. In discussing educational legislation she feels, "the intention is good but not the right people making the decisions."

The interpretive codes of elected officials and educational legislation not knowing what's best and the idea of fair accountability is evident in Sandy's data. Sandy feels that elected officials should not be making educational decisions,

> I feel that elected officials do not have sufficient backgrounds in education to be able to make choices and legislation regarding this field. More pressure is given and expectations are set higher, but we can't make a miracle without funds or resources. The legislation is not supportive of teachers and at times is framed completely opposing our needs and our realistic goals. I feel like little is done to seek our insight or input. It seems that we are the bad guys, yet are expected to be super heroes all at once. I think we need more teacher involvement and for legislators to have to have a background in education to be on an education committee. Without these things in place it will be a struggle to fairly hold educators accountable.

Despite this gap between teachers and elected officials Sandy does report that in her district teachers have a lot of say regarding instruction and curriculum development.

Each grade level team has teachers representing them to go and figure out how to map it and what things are going to fit. It is all based off the Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) which are provided by DESE but within our district we are able to take that and see how it looks for us and what our expectations are. Since we are elementary we are standards based so we will look to see what's a 1, 2, 3, and 4. What desired outcomes are going to be? How much will they need to articulate it? We look at what we are given based on GLEs and state standards and now Common Core and see, now what is that going to look like within our standards based? It is guiding our curriculum.

This process and participation Sandy describes is evident in the district's Curriculum Maps, agendas and notes from curriculum meetings, and the district level Comprehensive School Improvement Plan.

Sandy stated, "…with the added pressure and the unattainable goals it is very disheartening." Yet she maintains a desire to teach and be with the kids. Her ability to actively participate and guide instruction in her district makes her feel like a key player in educational curriculum and standards.

<center>**Individual Structural Descriptions**</center>

Participant 5-Jim

Jim is currently serving as an elementary principal, a role he has held for 7 years.

Prior to becoming a principal he spent 6 years as a teacher and two years as an assistant

principal. Jim's responses reflect the interpretive code of collaboration. When asked about

trends impacting education his responses included numerous collaborative approaches along

with other key words in education, "shared leadership, Professional Learning Communities

(PLC), collaboration, improved instructional practices, continuous learning, accountability is

higher and quality-Baldrige." He backs this statement up with identifying his role in

curriculum development as, "Supporting teachers and district personnel in aligning and

creating curriculum." Speck (1999) reports that, "the principal's actions speak to the overall

beliefs and expectations held for the school" (p. 38). When Jim identified the use of PLC and

collaboration time as an avenue for teachers to meet in teams, based on grade level and/or

content, as a way to review data accrued through acuity testing and other assessments to

adjust curriculum and learning in their classrooms he is holding teachers accountable for their

curriculum.

Jim's utilization of the PLC approach promotes empowerment, accountability and

shared leadership within his building (Stoehr, Banks, & Allen, 2011). In a PLC, "Members of

the community work together to create a shared vision, define their beliefs and values,

establish teaching and learning goals, and determine objectives to reach these goals" (Stoehr,

et al., 2011, p. 11). These same ideals are shared at the district level of Jim's school as

evidenced through their Comprehensive School Improvement Plan and their Strategic Plan

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which outlines a vision, mission, values, focus areas and goals which each building level administrator is responsible for memorizing and implementing in their day to day activities.

Jim believes teachers have complete control over pedagogical decisions/instructional practices, "Processes are up to teachers. What and how they use instructional practices are flexible." This level of teacher control over what and how curriculum is taught is another interpretive code within Jim's story. As an elementary building administrator his teachers are subjected to high stakes accountability. Yet Jim understands, "The individual teacher needs the freedom to recognize children as individuals and to use this recognition to help each child reach his maximum potential" (LaCoe, 2008, p. 1).

Jim recognizes that teachers help write the curriculum at the local levels and also created the Common Core Standards. He believes that Building School Improvement Plans drive everything and that involving stakeholders in shared decision making is essential. Those stakeholders, according to Jim, do not appear to include federal legislators. "Most federal legislators don't know what is best for kids." He does hold firm that increased accountability is good.

Participant 4-Ashley

Ashley has spent 17 years in education with experiences ranging from teaching multiple elementary grades, to assistant principal to her current role as a fifth grade teacher. Ashley is involved with decisions at her building level and participates in the Leadership Committee, Curriculum Committee and is a member of the National Education Association (NEA). Ashley seems most concerned about testing pressures.

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There is much more pressure to teach to the end of the year test. There is talk about

making our pay based on how kids do on the test. This will only make the problems

of teaching to the test worse.

She blames NCLB for the testing emphasis which has resulted in the loss of focus on kids'

small gains. Ashley presents a valid concern and one that has been echoed by educators since

the enactment of NCLB. However, Rex and Nelson (2004) found that teachers taught their

students based on what they felt was best for their students' learning and what they felt would

benefit them the most in the future. Rex and Nelson's (2004) data indicated that teachers,

"did not compromise their beliefs and change their usual practices due to pressures and

conflicts" (p. 1299) related to high stakes testing.   Ashley's statement that she tries not to

worry about the government but takes care of the needs of her students confirms that although

there is pressure she has continued to look out for her students' needs as well.

Ashley's responses represent a seemingly divided view of her role and control of

pedagogical decisions/instructional practices as well as a frustration with federal educational

legislation.   The interpretive code of a lack of control over curriculum is present in Ashley's

story but is divided, almost like a tug of war between what she believes and what she sees

happening in education. When asked about her role in local decisions about education she

responded, "I am on the ELA steering committee so I am involved directly in establishing

curriculum, distributing information in the classroom and how the curriculum is

implemented." When asked about her role in decisions regarding curriculum development she

again responded, "I have a direct role in curriculum development. As a committee member I

have a hand in what is being taught in the classroom." The seemingly conflicting views are apparent when asked about curriculum and practices in the broader realm of education.

When asked to rate the level of control teachers have to impact curricular decision she rated it a 3 with 1 being no control and 5 being complete control. She stated, "We don't have much control over what we have to teach but we do get control on how we teach it." But when asked to rate the level of control teachers have regarding pedagogical decisions/instructional practices (the how of teaching) she gave it a 2 on the same scale, responding, "Many of the teaching decisions are handed down to us as proven best practices." Although Ashley views herself as a teacher with autonomy, "…autonomy gives teachers the freedom to prioritize curriculum requirements according to their own beliefs about their students' abilities and need" (LaCoe, 2008, p. 13) she does not appear to hold that view of all teachers within the profession.

Ashley remarked on the educational swing of out with the old, in with the new, political candidates promising to make changes to NCLB but never changing it, AYPs unrealistic goals and the influence of textbook makers on educational curriculum and standards all as frustrations. Her simple answer, "I would like to see the blame stop. Instead of constantly wanting to blame we need to find the deficits and fix it."

<div align="center">

Individual Textural/Structural Descriptions

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Participant 2-Craig

Craig is a central office administrator with eighteen years of experience prior to becoming a district level administrator. His academic experiences have been at the high school and middle school levels. Craig is in his second year with his current school district

and reports that he has previously been in several other districts. Craig spoke about his experience with educational legislation and curriculum from an administrator's perspective reflecting on current practices. Three areas emerged as interpretive codes: accountability measures for schools and individuals, continued improvement, and facilitating curriculum.

Accountability for Schools and Individuals

The interpretive code of accountability measures for schools and individuals illustrates the theme of accountability. The theme of accountability is generally defined through state mandated high stakes testing but more importantly it is defined by teachers influencing student growth. "A teacher's beliefs about students' chances of success in school influence the teacher's actions with students, which in turn influence student achievement (Marzano, 2007, p. 162). This level of accountability is found in the responses from Craig. "Our educational practices need to support increased accountability measures, but also consider best practices in creating an organization where these accountability measures are embedded in our work naturally."   Nesin (2005) holds that high levels of accountability translate into high levels of engagement, "To be engaged in the learning environment, students must, in collaboration with teachers, build the classroom environment around clear and common expectations for their learning" (p. 53).

Craig does not focus on the criteria behind NCLB but the spirit by which it was created. "Because I think it increases accountability of schools, which I am all for increasing accountability for school and the individuals within that school." He believes that there were teachers who individually wanted to get better but that without NCLB a collective responsibility and accountability would not have taken place.

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Continued Improvement

The interpretive code of continued improvement illustrates the theme of data driven decision making. Data driven decision making is defined through the use of growth as progress. Craig is excited about the promise of MSIP 5 as a growth model opposed to our current approach,

> I don't know how much you know about MSIP 5 but I am loving that as well. Because although it's complicated in the formulas and things like that, what I love most about it is it's about growth. Because you want to move kids and get credit for moving kids from below basic to basic whereas before if you didn't have any advanced or proficient you got nothing.

Using data such as MSIP 5 helps determine growth and drives decision making. "Schools that analyze and utilize data are better able to make decisions about sustaining powerful practices, making midcourse corrections, and discontinuing ineffective practices (dese.gov.mo)." According to Craig it is important "to see a kid where they are at and move them forward." This may be through the use of tests but he believes we should use the data for improvement not the end all be all. Ellis (2004) ties assessment to terms such as application, reflection and growth, as a core piece of the curriculum (p. 72). These tenets are pervasive throughout the more rigorous curriculum and assessment standards of today.

In addition to MSIP 5 and standardized tests Craig touches on Response to Intervention (RtI) as a data tool to measure growth. He reports that his district is still trying different things and different buildings are doing different things. He attributes this looseness in implementation as a way to not stifle creativity. Although there should be a common

scope, sequence and assessment Craig feels that teachers can still be creative and in the end compare data to see what is working or not. In the end everybody will still need to answer the question, "What are we doing for kids that aren't getting it?" This can only be accomplished through data analysis. "The basis of RtI, progress monitoring and data based decision making."

Facilitator of Curriculum

Craig defines his role, "to facilitate the development of a common scope, sequence and assessment of the curriculum that is aligned throughout the school district." When asked about changes in curriculum Craig believes that curriculum is now more systematic and is being created as a team as opposed to being developed and executed in isolation. Craig questions why we wouldn't all have the same standards of essential things that children need to know so we can see how we are doing and make adjustments accordingly. However, he states that,

> At the end of the day I am less concerned about the curriculum it is what it is whether
>
> we create the curriculum or its common core or whatever it is. At the end of the day it
>
> comes back to what do we want kids to know? How do we know they know it? And to
>
> me the two most important questions that we have to answer no matter what the
>
> curriculum is, What are we going to do about those kids that have been identified that
>
> didn't get it? What are we going to do with the kids that did get it?

Craig discusses the process he takes in relation to curriculum development as facilitator.

> What I try to get our curriculum coordinator to do is less about telling teachers what
>
> the curriculum is and writing it but more hey what are you seeing out there? What's

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good with what we have? What's bad? Why do you think it's bad? What does the data

suggest? How do you think we can be better?

Craig acknowledges that he is not an expert in kindergarten teaching or other areas so he turns

to the experts, the people doing it, and then he helps pull it all together to create the system.

Craig's approach can be likened to Capacity building, "the process of assisting an individual

or group to identify and address issues and to gain the insights, knowledge and experience

needed to solve problems and implement change" (United Nations Educational, Scientific and

Cultural Organization [UNESCO], n.d.). This approach fosters empowerment through

information exchange, research, and training (UNESCO, n.d.). Craig accepts that the

Common Core is taking the place of our current Grade Level Expectations and Course Level

Expectations but does not see his role or the experts within his district's role diminishing. "At

the end of the day we just need to work with kids that need our help."

Participant 1-Darren

Darren has an extensive background in education as a high school teacher and a coach.

His current role is as a Missouri state legislator. Darren has served on a number of

committees including those focused on K-12 and higher education. With Darren's

background it is no surprise that he is actively involved with the schools within his

constituency. "I make a real effort to visit my school districts. I visit as many school board

meetings as I can and I have several hundred educators on an email database that I contact

weekly."

With so much involvement on Darren's part it was surprising to hear him discuss so

much division between state and federal and federal educational legislation and educational

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practices. This division was identified as an interpretive code within the text. Additionally, he discussed the importance of middle management in evaluation and ultimately accountability.

Division between Entities and Implementation

Darren believes in the concept of every child can learn that is behind NCLB but also understands that "the devil is in the details." He likens education to a big ocean with no U turns. "NCLB is a tugboat that may be moving it just a little bit and I think it's moving it in the right directions." In furthering our discussion regarding NCLB I asked whether reauthorization was in the near future. "I don't know about that that is federal. I don't know what the hell the federal government is doing." Continuing our conversation he offered good insight into Common Core which he refers to as a national issue. But again he illustrated this divide between state and federal entities,

> We have a bunch of people who don't know a frickin thing about education trying to destroy it [Common Core]. It's the right wing wackos. Here we call it the black helicopter people or the guys with the aluminum hats on. They want to keep the federal government out of everything. When you see the black helicopter you know the federal government is here. That's what they see in the Common Core.

When asked about the relationship between federal legislation and educational practices Darren views that relationship as a disconnect. "One size does not fit all." Though he feels there are few mandates as to what is taught and when he sees that, "the standardized tests shape the curriculum quite effectively by what is tested and the local districts seem to change courses, grades and content to match the tests." This change in the curriculum is often seen as a narrowing of the curriculum, "State and local accountability policies forced teachers

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to deliver simplistic, skill-and-drill instruction using low quality workbooks" (Sloan, 2007, p. 63). In 2008 the Republican and Democratic platforms also recognized this struggle over the extent and nature of federal power over local schools (Spring, 2010, p. 193-195).

But Darren does not view the federal government as the key player influencing educational curriculum. Instead Darren views the state board as having a great deal of influence. "I work closely with the State School Board, DESE, the Administrator organizations, the teacher unions (or professional groups depending on the day or issue)." He shared that he communicates almost daily with key personnel at the state school board, that the day following our interview the state board was going to testify on Darren's proposed bill and he utilizes their expertise to assist with wording of education related bills. He provided several documents produced by MSTA and DESE that he references regularly and utilizes to stay informed about current issues. This relationship is the key to the organization of state systems of education. "Laws passed by the state legislator provide the more-detailed and specific responsibilities of the state educational agencies (Spring, 1985, p. 168). Spring (1985) further clarifies this relationship, "The sources of most of the responsibilities and power of state boards of education, departments of education, and superintendents are the state constitution and the state legislature" (p. 168). Darren works hard to maintain his connection with the classroom, teachers and boards of education as well as the state level agencies he serves.

Middle Management

Looking beyond NCLB and political deals, Darren believes that the total fix of education is to fix middle management. He shares his mantra, "I have never seen a good

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school with a bad principal or a bad school with a good principal." Darren sees evaluation as the function that will improve everything.

Darren does not believe that tenure should be the focus of reform but evaluation. If a principal is doing their job you have everything you need to say whether a teacher is effective. "There has to be a principal or evaluator who has courage enough to do it and do it right and the time." Darren added to his mantra, "I have never seen a teacher go into a classroom wanting to be a bad teacher." But Darren says he has seen many left to flounder because no one says this works or this doesn't, I want you to do this and if you don't there will be a job target.

Donaldson (2011) conducted a study looking at constraints and opportunities around teacher evaluations. The Principals in their sample identified two main purposes for evaluation: first, to improve instruction and, second, to identify poorly performing teachers for intervention, and, potentially, dismissal yet many felt that evaluation did not regularly achieve either (Donaldson, 2011, p.17). Mielke and Frontier (2012) propose a framework of evaluation that empowers teachers to assess their own practice and self-diagnose areas of growth (p. 10). This approach focuses more on the first main principle identified in teacher evaluations in the Donaldson (2011) research, improvement. Ideally teachers use data to reflect, improve and grow through feedback and authentic conversations with peers and administrators. This approach may help with the issue of the time constraints Darren identified that principals endure when trying to evaluate teachers in their buildings but more importantly could be a positive reform movement in teacher evaluation.

Composite Textural/Structural Description: The Essence of the Perceptions

By following the steps of phenomenological analysis defined by Moustakas, I was able to draw out three reoccurring themes identified in each of the six experiences. These themes represent the stories of the participants and their perceptions of their own reality. The themes of accountability, disconnect from federal legislation and active engagement are explored.

Accountability

Since the early 1900's Americans have struggled for equal rights, the opportunity to gain advantages and equal treatment under the law (Spring 1985). Education has been at the forefront of this struggle whether for women, for people of color or for the disabled. Early federal legislation attempted to create accessibility and equality. With the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2002 (known as No Child Left Behind) accountability for subgroups such as English Language Learners, different racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities and low socioeconomic students was brought to the front lines as a means of creating equality. Equality and thus accountability was being measured through the use of high stakes tests. Darren and Sandy specifically identified the intentions of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), that all children can learn, as good. Accountability in isolation was never mentioned by the study participants as a bad idea. Joey understands that we (the public) have the desire to compare ourselves with other states and countries. But the idea of fair accountability surfaced throughout this study along with the fear that current methods for assessing students and ultimately teachers is antiquated and does not meet the needs of students. According to Mielke and Frontier (2012) "three days of testing does not

improve student learning" (p. 13). Sandy expressed concern that, "more pressure is put on the MAP test and the test scores that are received." Ashley fears that teachers are teaching to the test and eliminating other important subjects such as spelling and grammar. Craig views this method of evaluation where you only get credit for students in the advanced and proficient range as hurting the school and districts moral.

Jim sees some hope with Common Core as a way of leveling the playing field and recognizes that teachers have played a part in developing these standards. The movement toward MSIP 5 and a state based growth model is also getting nods of improvement. Craig explains MSIP 5 as a, "3 year rolling average which speaks to the growth in progress of a school or school district and that's where I think we are going to get the most bang for our buck." Missouri has been approved for a waiver from achieving 100% proficiency to the attainable goal of Top 10 by 2020, which will be measured based on a growth model. For Craig the bottom line is, "we have kids who are struggling, what are we going to do for those kids and we have kids that got it and need enrichment and need to advance and we aren't really doing much for them either."

Disconnect from Federal Legislation

With the increased role of federal involvement in education more educational stakeholders are expressing a displeasure and general distrust of their intentions. Craig's attitude toward politics and politicians is not uncommon when talking with educators. He states, "I know there are politics everywhere. I know there are politicians and lobbyist that want to crush public education pumping a lot of money in there to do everything they can to really bring it down." Sandy felt strongly that legislation does not support teachers and is in

opposition to teachers' needs. She feels left out of the process and does not see elected

officials seeking insight and input from teachers. Darren, a current state legislator commented

that he does not know what the federal government is doing. This disconnect though is not

isolated to only educational policy makers.

Page and Bouton (2006) discuss the disconnect between policy makers and the public

in relation to foreign policy however their insight is easily transferred to the disconnect in

educational policy making. They discuss the need for policy makers and the public to come

into substantial agreement through either policy makers responding to citizens' wants or by

persuading citizens to agree with their judgments (p. 201). They further dispel the notion that

meager knowledge by average citizens prevent public opinion from being generally stable and

consistent and reflect the best available information (p. 202). Instead, Page and Bouton (2006)

hold that

> ….the findings of stable, consistent, and coherent collective public opinion point
>
> toward a relatively populistic brand of democratic theory that calls upon elected
>
> government officials (and those they appoint) to respond to the policy preferences of
>
> the citizenry. To allow officials simply to ignore what the public wants would risk
>
> ignoring values that their constituents hold dear.   To assume that officials always
>
> know best….would be more dangerous than listening to the public. And it would be
>
> undemocratic " (p. 203).

Page and Bouton (2006) attribute this lack of democratic responsiveness to the ability of

decision makers to get away without fear of electoral retribution and that competing

influences (organized interest groups, party activist, campaign contributors) often push them

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away from doing what the public wants (p. 220-221).   Joey sees a common thread that could

work to bring policy makers and local stakeholders closer together, "All of us care deeply

about kids, we have different ways and thoughts about doing it. We need to work together to

craft an education policy."

Active Engagement

Joey's remark, "I do not have a lot of patience for people who complain but do

nothing" does not envelope the participants from this study. The teachers and administrators

interviewed participate as members of leadership committees, curriculum committees and

PLCs. They frequently attend PTA meetings and school board meetings. The legislators sit

on educational committees, visit constituents in their schools, attend school board meetings in

their districts, and keep constituents informed with newsletters/emails.

Craig comes to work everyday asking how can we do things differently? How can we

improve? This active engagement is not only visible in the participants' voice but also within

their districts. Citizen advisory groups, task force development, community meet and greets

are evident within one research site.   The need for not only teachers to participate but parents,

business leaders and community members is now a focus to garner input and support for

schools. This new focus is a form of participatory action research (PAR).

Participatory approaches to policy formulation requires a shift in thinking, a change of

attitude…" (Holland, 1998, p. 2). Although there are many approaches to participatory

research a core conviction is "that local people have the knowledge and ability to be the

subjects of their own development" (Holland, 1998, p. 4). PAR "involves practitioners in the

research process from the initial design of the project through data gathering and analysis to

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final conclusions and actions arising out of the research" (Whyte, 1991, p. 7). Participatory action research methodology may promote a sense of empowerment and ownership in impacting legislative actions among all stakeholders. The emphasis on local voice being "translated" by the researcher for the benefit of the policymakers aims to bridge the gap, bringing policymaker and local stakeholders together directly (Holland, 1998).

Questionnaires

Each participant completed a questionnaire containing open end questions (qualitative) and rating scales (quantitative) as a part of this study. These questionnaires provided a starting point for obtaining a glimpse into the perceptions of the participants. The questionnaires were read and re-read for recurring phrases and key words that were then bracketed and analyzed. Interpretive codes were assigned to provide more depth and a better understanding of the realities presented. From these codes themes were identified. In looking at all of the participants' questionnaires the three themes identified above also resonated throughout the questionnaires: accountability, disconnect from federal legislation and active engagement in decision making.

The theme of accountability was evident in 8 of 13 questionnaires. Participant 11, a teacher, states that, "It [NCLB] is good at holding individuals and districts accountable however focus can go towards testing." This however shows the hesitance of focusing on just testing instead of self-improvement or group improvement which Ellis (2004) reports as the central purpose of assessment (p. 36). Participant six, an administrator also looks at NCLB, "NCLB has dominated structural changes in public education. It has influenced state accreditation, teacher certification, accountability efforts and reflective emphasis on

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addressing students in various subgroups who struggle academically." Neither participant views the premise of NCLB as a negative or the idea of accountability in and of its self. Participant 7, an administrator holds a more negative view of the accountability process tied to NCLB, "NCLB has over-emphasized sub-group achievement and made high stakes testing detrimental to positive risk taking and creative thinking by teachers and administrators." Participant 10, a teacher, responds that, "Buildings tend to spend more time teaching to the test instead of the expectations needed at that grade level." These split views are evident not just within the research sites but across the field of education and may be contributing to the feeling of disconnect.

Disconnect between educators and legislators was unmistakable in nine questionnaires when asked about the relationship between federal educational legislation and educational practices. An administrator identified as participant six states, "This is becoming a strained relationship due to multiple unfunded mandates." Participant 13, also an administrator, sees that, "Teachers struggle to meet the expectations set by the federal government." A teacher, participant 12, agrees, "Districts are under pressure to meet federal guidelines. Teachers feel this pressure as well." Cohen and Spillane (1993) point out that "the decentralized organization of American education rendered the connections between policy and instruction inconsequential for most of our history (p. 37), however this connection can no longer be ignored. Bartell (2001) reminds us that, "We have to become advocates for our own field of endeavor at home and in the broader political arena" (p. 196).

The idea of being advocates starts with the last theme that was evident in eight questionnaires, active engagement or involvement. Participant 9 and 11, both teachers, report,

being members of different BSIP committees that participate in making or changing building policies, being asked input through surveys, and sitting on team and grade level meetings to discuss curriculum. This shared decision making process is not new to education and promotes an environment of collaboration and active involvement. "This [Shared Decision Making] is based on the premise that those closest to the children and "where the action is" will make the best decisions about the children's education" (Myers, 2009).

> A strong commitment to the goal must be present on all sides. For administrators, they must be willing and committed to give up some managerial powers traditionally entrusted to them. Teachers must be willing to sacrifice more time and energy into working on issues and topics not within the realm of their usual everyday travails. (Myers, 2009)

According to the answers provided by the teachers on the questionnaire these teachers are willing to work on issues in a collaborative manner.

Documents

Through identifying key words and recurring phrases, bracketing and coding, I analyzed the following documents: Curriculum maps, agendas and notes from curriculum meetings, Board of Education meeting minutes, district level Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP), Building School Improvement Plans (BSIP), state level produced pamphlets and newsletters were analyzed. These documents were chosen to provide further insight into the districts' curriculum development, instruction and decision making processes. They also provide information about the current priorities for the school districts. The

pamphlets and newsletters were chosen to give a current view on educational legislation and priorities within the state legislature related to education.

The interpretive codes identified in the documents were shared decision making, a focus on creating a shared mission and value and a desire to pull away from federal legislative involvement in education. These codes match the theme of active engagement and touches on the disconnect theme found in the interviews and questionnaires but the codes did not mirror the overarching themes previously identified. For the documents separate themes of shared decision making and local decision making were utilized.

Shared decision making and local decision making were evident in the educational documents. The curriculum meetings, board meetings, CSIP and BSIPs provided a structure for decision making and a culture focused on improvement. This is evident in one districts mission and goals posted throughout their district (2013): "Mission, to prepare individual learners for success in life the Selfton School District provides meaningful experiences in a safe and caring environment". Their goals are, Student Focused, Collaboration, High Expectations, Integrity, Visionary Leadership, Innovation and Results Oriented.

Curriculum meeting notes indicated that grade level and content specific representatives were involved in at least two meetings over the last six months. Those present were documented as sharing in the decisions and having input into the conversations surrounding the implementation of Common Core, textbook adoptions and changes in assessment schedules at the district level. The curriculum meeting minutes documented conversations teachers had regarding the implementation of Common Core and textbooks and resources needed for implementation. The question of realignment and current textbooks

appeared to be discussed at length and teachers reportedly asked for more information about Common Core and when and how it would be implemented for their subjects and grade levels.

The CSIP for one district documents a CSIP committee of 82 stakeholders which included teachers, support staff, administration, students, parents and business owners with a goal of increasing opportunities for learning and higher levels of achievement. Professional learning communities and improved participation from all stakeholders are identified goals. Under the goal of increased academic performance, "Develop and deploy a consistent Professional Learning Community Teaming Model" is one of six strategies identified in the CSIP. PLC's are grounded in the belief of teacher leadership and teacher involvement in improvement efforts (Stoehr, Banks, & Allen, 2011). The Building School Improvement Plans for this district are aligned with the CSIP and set measurable goals for students. "Data on the goals is analyzed throughout the year during collaboration time. Teachers work together to determine how to help one another increase the achievement of all students."

The Board of Education goals are also aligned with the comprehensive plan. The goal of enhancing programs to improve student achievement and improving parent and community involvement are also evident in the CSIP. In a recent board meeting the minutes reflected that three teachers presented on their findings of a recent review of data on student performance through the use of acuity data focusing on how PLCs were functioning in their building and the positive effects they believe were due to PLCs and teacher involvement. All of these documents and the efforts of both research sites point to a desire for local control of student achievement and decisions affecting that goal.

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The pamphlets and newsletters provided by the legislator contained factual information regarding proposed changes to teacher retirement, funding of Common Core as well as proposed teacher evaluation procedures and reiterate the theme focusing on local control. In the March 28, 2013 MSTA Newsletter the "anti-teacher bill" HB631 reportedly "eliminates local control over teacher evaluations" and "The local district loses control over how student growth will be measured." The March 8, 2013 MSTA Newsletter focuses on the debate lawmakers are having regarding Common Core. "There was also concern raised about the amount of student-level data being collected by the smarter balanced consortium that could then be shared with the federal departments of education and labor," a glimpse into the concern of federal involvement. While proponents report local control, "The standards spell out what is expected of students, but don't dictate curriculum or teaching practices, both of which are developed at the school district level." The documents analyzed correlated with the responses provided by the participants and provided another layer of validation for the information provided by participants.

My Reflections

As I listened to the participants' stories I reflected on my biases and realized that my perspective may be completely different than my participants. As I transcribed the interviews I had the same thoughts and decided that after transcribing the interviews I would go back and read them and then re-read them taking the time to annotate in the columns of the transcription. I found myself pleasantly surprised yet almost disappointed to know that those I talked to felt more like stars then the later described by Culbert (2011),

The way to make stars out of teachers is to let teachers be stars, to let them be as innovative as they can be, to let them find the path that works best for them and their students. If they are allowed to search for the best answers, they'll find them. Instead, we're doing the opposite: we're telling them that if they want to keep their jobs, they have to do what people who know so much less than they do about education tell them to do.

The amount of autonomy teacher's expressed in their classrooms, the involvement teachers and school administrators felt in curriculum development, the collaboration felt through PLCs and shared learning came as an almost disparaging concept after so many assumptions.

In re-reading Sandy's interview I could still feel her excitement as a new teacher yet her knowledge about a broken system of mandates gave me pause. As I reflected on her scoring of control over curriculum and instructional practices the middle of the road rating made me respond, "at least she is realistic". The active role the legislators take in their districts from an educational standpoint and the true concern for students was also overwhelming. I found myself marking the concerns the legislators have regarding the education budget with the statement, "really, they are aware". When hearing the state legislators express frustration with federal legislation I wrote, "why are we not working together more?" When I heard Darren's mantra I wrote it down but until I read it and re-read it the power of his words did not hit home and all I could write was, "remember these words, this is good."

Summary of Findings

Guiding this study is the overarching research question: What are the perceptions of teachers, school administrators and state legislators on the relationship between federal educational legislation and educational practices at the local level? This study answers three sub-questions: (a) How do teachers and school administrators perceive their roles in local decisions about curriculum development? (b) What do teachers perceive are their levels of autonomy regarding pedagogical decisions and instructional practices? (c) What do state legislators perceive is their level of involvement and the level of involvement by teachers and school administrators in creating educational policies?

The findings answer the questions: How do teachers and school administrators perceive their roles in local decisions about curriculum development? Teachers and administrators felt that they were actively involved in the development of curriculum at the district level. They articulated opportunities to participate in curriculum committees, BSIP committees and leadership committees at the building and district level. One administrator described his role as a facilitator and looks to the experts (those teaching) for guidance on curricular decisions. The CSIP and BSIP documents were also evidence of involving multiple stakeholders (teachers and administrators included) in the goal of improving student achievement. The questionnaire provided teachers and administrators an opportunity to list their involvement on committees and in organizations that promote their active involvement. Each of the 11 school personnel documented at least two committees or groups they participated. This process of shared decision making appeared to be a systematic approach allowing for stakeholders to participate in this critical role.

What do teachers perceive are their levels of autonomy regarding pedagogical decisions and instructional practices? Interviewees described themselves as very involved in the process of curriculum development which was also evident in the curriculum meeting notes, CSIP and BSIP plans. On the questionnaires most participants rated themselves at a 4 or above on how much control they believe teachers have regarding pedagogical decisions and instructional practice. One teacher commented, in the interview, on being overwhelmed with having to make all of the decisions regarding textbooks, resources, curricular guides and that her group wished for more guidance. Rigor and application of skills were discussed but all within the context of teachers making the decision on how that would look. Despite those positive comments one teacher reported in the questionnaire and interview that there is less importance on subjects not tested as there is pressure to teach to the test, due to accountability through NCLB.

Question three asks, What do state legislators perceive is their level of involvement and the level of involvement by teachers and school administrators in creating educational policies? One legislator I interviewed has a background in education and serves on several education committees. He reported visiting his constituent schools, attending board meetings and communicating regularly through newsletters. Both legislators interviewed are involved with funding for K-12 and Higher Education and when we met Darren was presenting a bill regarding intervening in failing schools. The legislators' level of involvement is high. When asked about key players in educational curriculum and standards Darren answered the State Board (DESE). His responses in this area centered on state organizations and did not trickle down to the district level. The documents he referenced reiterated his concern for decisions

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being made regarding teacher retirement, evaluation and the Common Core outside of the state and at times outside of the local school district.

These questions help to answer the overarching question, What are the perceptions of teachers, school administrators and state legislators on the relationship between federal educational legislation and educational practices at the local level? Based on the participants in this study a culture of collaboration and shared decision making is predominant in making decisions related to curriculum despite the federal legislation of NCLB and IDEA. Although these Acts seem to drive some of the curriculum the teachers and administrators in this study gave me a sense of independence from the mandates and a freedom of choosing their instructional methods and pedagogy. There were some comments related to NCLBs accountability and high stakes testing dictating what is taught but overall there did not seem to be sense of powerlessness to make curricular decisions. There did appear to be a disconnect between federal legislation initiatives and state level initiatives and educator involvement. The legislators in this study seemed to have a better grasp about the battles ensuing around educational issues impacting teachers and students but had less input on the actual practices taking place in the classroom.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This heuristic, social constructivist, phenomenological study explored the perceived realities of teachers and administrators in two suburban communities located in the Northwest region of Missouri as well as Representatives from the Missouri State Legislature. Eighty-three invitations to participate were distributed, 58 were fourth and fifth grade teachers, 11 administrators and 14 state legislators.   Seven or 12% of the teachers, four, 36% of the administrators and two, 14%, of the legislators returned the consent form and questionnaire. Of this group six were chosen to participate in an interview session. Questionnaires were completed, documents were analyzed and six participants were interviewed as a part of this study.

In the literature reviewed for this study I found a gap in connecting administrators at the district level to state legislators. I also found that previous research had explored the ramifications of legislation such as NCLB and IDEA but had not followed its path to drill down why and how it became law. Nor had the research studied classrooms to determine how the perceptions impacted students.

This dissertation has taken me from a cynical approach of believing that teachers feel left out and ignored to a more positive attitude of knowing that teachers are working to have their voices heard and continue to maintain autonomy to teach the best way for their students. The revelation that administrators see and appreciate that teachers are experts is encouraging. My experience with the legislators that participated in the interview sessions may not be

typical. The fact that one legislator had teaching experience may have skewed his perception as he was able to easily relate his own teaching experiences with accountability and high stakes testing, giving him a perception of what teachers are currently undertaking in their classrooms on a daily basis.

Implications

The implication that I believe come from this study is the need for those teacher leaders to mentor and guide other teachers in their buildings to create an environment where everyone feels they are contributing and that they have the power and ability to make instructional and pedagogical decisions despite the mandates that seem to be prescribing the curriculum. Administrators can contribute to that goal by encouraging teachers to join committees that are making decisions about curriculum at the building or district level. And lastly, there needs to be more involvement with federal and state legislative actions to promote a true democracy where elected officials are tied to the educational practices happening in community schools. Portis and Garcia (2007) encourage you to "…articulate your vision, set realistic expectations, involve the union, think systematically, focus on instruction, use data and shift the reality" (p. 18).

Recommendations

Based on this study there is a small group of teachers and administrators who are satisfied with their involvement in curriculum matters and their freedom to implement curriculum in the way they deem is most appropriate for their students. However, I would recommend that these two districts delve deeper and target a larger pool of teachers and administrators to gain their perceptions in curriculum development and implementation as

well as their involvement with educational legislation. After identifying the perceptions of those employed within the district a broader approach to involve community stakeholders may provide an additional forum for understanding educational legislation and its impact on the experiences of students. This approach may lead to a method of shared decision making that extends to all stakeholders and promotes collaboration and participation as a community.

The idea of promoting shared decision making that extends outside the school walls through action research allows for the building of a relationship infused with trust and open and honest communication. These extended groups can then form grass root movements to impact legislative decisions at the state and federal level and be sure that our voices are heard. "For a profession in which external mandates, external solutions, and external research dominate, action research provides a welcome relief to instructional leaders who believe that educators, parents, and students at their schools have the intelligence, context knowledge and resources to examine situational issues and respond to them through in-depth inquiry, evaluation and action" (Ross, 2008, p. 135).

Developing an action research project involves gathering and analyzing preliminary data, identifying a focus area, collecting quantitative and qualitative target data, developing an action plan with identified objectives (The members will..), monitoring progress through data collection, revision as necessary and continued implementation (Ross, 2008). This study could prove as a starting point for conversations around an action research project that involves not just the typical stakeholders identified by school districts (teachers, administrators, community members and business leaders) but involving state legislators as a

part of shared decision making. Participatory Action Research, as discussed earlier, may be one avenue for attaining a shared voice for the participants.

Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research (PAR) is founded on the premise of representing the interests of stakeholders. It embodies the ideals of empowerment, change and ownership through cooperative problem solving. This research technique goes hand in hand with the qualitative approach.

"PAR is a way of learning how to explain a particular social world by working with the people who live in it to construct, test, and improve theories about it so they can better control it" (Eldon & Levin, 1991, p. 131). For this study the education environment, involving stakeholders such as teachers, administrators, parents, politicians etc…, is the social world to be studied.   Through PAR the goal is to "…help people learn how to better control the circumstances of their lives" (Eldon & Levin, 1991, p. 131). This requires a balancing of the power.

Current legislation is based on the assumption that, "…order can be re-established, if educational leaders can just lay out what teachers should do and teachers just do it, schools may return to their previous glory" (Kincheloe, 1991, p. vii). However, Kincheloe (1991) warns that, "Such a socio-educational vision is naïve and dangerous…" (p. vii). "Teachers possess vital knowledge about students-and because of this knowledge they can provide much needed leadership for the changes needed to improve public education" (Berry, 2006, p. 84). Involving stakeholders in the decision making process invites a partnership, this in turn results

in ownership of the ideas and empowerment. When these components are present it is more likely that the decisions will result in sustainable change.

Phillips (2006) is a proponent of involving stakeholders not only to promote democracy but because of the advantage those at the local level have in knowing their populations and their specific needs,

> The more decisions are made remotely from above, however, the less schools are able to adapt practices to meet the needs of their own special contexts, clients, and circumstances. In order to preserve both the democratic traditions of local control and to enhance client responsiveness, significant control over decisions must remain at the local level. (p. 214)

Phillips (2006) demonstrates this tension (see Figure 2) between doing what is right for all students and doing what is right for each student (p. 220). He does not call for complete control at the local level but a balanced system, "…some degree of external accountability must be in place to assure that inequalities are not permitted to exist without being challenged" (p. 214). This balance is already a vital part of our political system however in education the scales seem to be tipping toward the federal government.

As states are asked to implement federal policies at the local level their distinct needs are being ignored.   Stakeholders are being alienated and frustration and a feeling of cynicism are rising out of the bureaucracy. Local groups are feeling that despite their efforts they are not making an impact. This current system puts the federal government at the top of educational leadership.

PAR seeks to balance the power and reinstate what Phillips (2006) refers to as key levels of educational hierarchy founded on schools, districts and state educational agencies. Involvement at multiple levels of the organization is required to develop a complete picture. Whyte (1991) reports, "Effective participatory systems depend upon commitment rather than coercion….systems that must fully utilize the information and ideas of the members cannot be preprogrammed or tightly controlled" (p. 240).   PAR has its challenges but it also has its benefits.

Kane (1998) believes, "PAR can be the most effective strategy for producing valid, timely information and appropriate, sustainable action" (p. 31). However he does identify some challenges that are relevant to educational policy and to this study:

1. How to generate information for policymakers while simultaneously leaving something useful behind for the community.

2. Deciding how to relate findings to policymakers and planners who are more comfortable with quantitative studies

3. Determining how to aggregate data across communities, using a more participatory approach to help individual communities develop action plans which are unique to their circumstances.

4. How to leave behind a trained body of people

The challenges presented in one and two will require changing the norm of educational politics. Phillips (2006) states that we need to "…re-examine the intergovernmental power relationships that have resulted in the loss of control and innovation, and construct a new accountability paradigm for policy development and local action" (p. 214). This shift can be

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empowering to those at the local level and can contribute to a systematic change in politics.

Challenge three requires that a community develop a deeper understanding of action research.

Action research is reflective and systematic and requires that the participants identify a

problem and have a desire to change it.

Kurt Lewin (1958) identifies seven steps of action research.

1. Identify a focus for your research. As a group identify the issue of concern and develop a research question that will be the focal point for gathering information.

2. Next develop a Plan of Action. Decide what data will need to be collected, who will collect the data and at what point the data will be collected.

3. Collect multiple types of data utilizing formal and informal assessments such as observations, questionnaires, documents, etc…

4. Organize the data to ensure confidentiality and to make the data more accessible.

5. Analyze the data and draw a conclusion based on qualitative and/or quantitative interpretations.

6. Disseminate the findings to others. Share the results with other stakeholders at the local, state and federal levels.

7. Lastly, develop a new plan of action based on your research.

Not just developing a plan with local communities but teaching them how to formulate an

action plan can help alleviate the challenge described in three and four and promote

empowerment and sustainability. Moser (1998) asserts that "…even the best strategies will

achieve only modest results unless local communities, community based groups, and the

people as individuals play increasingly assertive roles in defining, managing, implementing

and monitoring the development efforts that affect their lives" (p. 39). Turnbull, Friesen, and Ramirez (1998) regarded PAR as, "one means of addressing the gap between researchers and the intended beneficiaries of research" (p. 178). Turnbull et al. (1998) identified five advantages to using PAR:

1. An increased relevance of the research. Turnbull et al. (1998) believe that when the stakeholders are "involved in identifying potential research priorities and specific topics, the research is more likely to be relevant in solving the problems that they face" (p. 179).

2. Increased rigor of research resulting in "increased feasibility and acceptability of research procedures, better questionnaire or interview protocol design, more accurate data, and greater longitudinal involvement with the study" (p.179).

3. Increased benefit to researchers in minimizing logistical problems such as identifying and recruiting families for the study and higher completion rates.

4. Increased research utilization resulting from participants having access to "information on topics that are of especially high priority to them, then they will be more likely to utilize the findings" (p. 179).

5. Enhanced empowerment was identified in their research "including family members taking action to get what they want and need, families having increased opportunities for contribution and input, researchers having a significant learning opportunity about the reality of family life and the nature of family support, and researchers and families expanding their sense of collective power through their collaboration with each other" (p. 180).

Another advantage of PAR is the ability for PAR to build a community.

Participatory Action Research calls on communities to come to together to impact change. This requires that the group has established a sense of community and that each individual truly feels like a contributing member. This concept of community is recognized by McMillan and Chavis (1986) in their study which identifies four key elements to developing a sense of community.

Membership is the first element and consists of five attributes. The first is labeled, boundaries which takes into consideration things such as language, dress, and ritual, indicating who belongs and who does not. Second is the attribute of emotional safety which McMillan and Chavis define as a willingness to reveal how one really feels. Third is a sense of belonging and identification which is an acceptance into the community. Next is personal investment which would take into account the impact of decisions on each individual stakeholder. Lastly, a common symbol system is needed.

The second element in developing a sense of community is influence. Members of the group must feel empowered to make decisions and influence their communities. Each member must open themselves up to others opinions and values so that there is shared decision making. McMillan (1996) states, "This process [of bidirectional influence] occurs all at the same time because order, authority, and justice create the atmosphere for the exchange of power" (p. 319).

Integration and fulfillment of needs is the third element. In this step the groups' needs are being met on an individual level as well as part of a group. This fulfillment comes from being an integral part of a group that is active in making sustained changes.

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The fourth element is shared emotional connection. According to McMillan and Chavis this element consists of seven important features however the elements appear to be interrelated thus one seems to lead into another. For the purpose of this argument I will discuss them as intertwined not separate ideas. Emotional connectedness is built on the premise that the quality of the group's interactions will determine the extent of connectedness. A group that is ambiguous in its interactions and does not make definitive decisions is less likely to be cohesive. Whereas a group that is not afraid to share personal interactions and not turn away from each other during a crisis is more likely to have a tighter bond and be more effective. When the group has shared experiences they develop a bond and their willingness to put more time and energy in the group increases, making the group a rewarding experience.

Schools have taken these of elements community and developed staff development exercises to promote collaboration and accountability. The most common of these is known as Professional Learning Communities (PLC). PLCs combine individuals with an interest in education (the commonality of the group which brings about belonging and identification) such as individual teachers, departments, school leaders, district leaders, boards of education-state department of education, professional organizations and legislatures have frequently been left out but are essential to the decision making process impacting schools and should become more of an integral part of learning communities. These groups share an interest in educational reform and decision making while holding a personal and societal interest as discussions center on, how this will impact each child, each student, each classroom, each business, each constituent, each career, each neighborhood, each town, each school, each school district and each state.

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Professional Learning Communities must also encompass the second element of influence that McMillan and Chavis (1986) share as bidirectional. PLCs "recognize that they must work together to achieve their collective purpose of learning for all. Therefore, they create structures to promote a collaborative culture" (Du Four, 2004, p. 9). All stakeholders must acknowledge the input and expertise of each individual and begin to question and seek solutions through shared leadership and power. When members come together and work as a team they experience the integration and fulfillment of purpose and share a deeper connection with each other. This connection and broader definition of community is what is currently missing when state officials, boards of education and community members are not included in the Professional Learning Communities. With the goal of PLCs being on student learning and doing what is best for all students the commitment and shared decision making at the local level can only be increased when all stakeholders are invited to participate in the community and share of connection which extends beyond the school building doors.

Conclusion

Participatory action research has been used in various research projects around the globe however it has not been a part of the mainstream research methodology. PAR aims to involve all stakeholders within a community to resolve their issues collaboratively and through the development of an organized plan of action. It challenges us to "…a rethinking and restructuring of relations so that the impact of the process can carry far into the future" (Whyte, Greenwood, & Lazes, 1991, p. 40). This restructuring needs to begin with an expansion of our definition of community to include not just school personnel in our PLCs but boards of education, parents and legislators. It asks us to create a balance of power

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allowing for bidirectional influence. PAR leads to "…data on the interaction and activities in the participation process that have given rise to those attitudes and perceptions" (Whyte et al., 1991, p. 45). Attitudes and perceptions that have long been ignored and given rise to discontent and feelings of isolation at the local level. With PAR perceptions and realities will be examined from all stakeholders and a new sense of empowerment and ownership in impacting legislative actions along with communities that involve all stakeholders from local to state levels will be encouraged. The emphasis on local voice being "translated" by the researcher for the benefit of the policymakers aims to bridge the gap, bringing policymaker and local stakeholders together directly (Holland, 1998). With a policy focused research, this study may be able to have a direct influence on policy decisions. It may also develop a sense of community where the focus is on what is best for all students. This in turn can lead to a balancing of power and a sense of collaboration and responsibility for directing sustainable change.

Future Research Needs

As stated earlier this study is based on a small sample of teachers, administrators and state legislators and future research could expand the sample size and participation in exploring perceptions. Research sites located within an urban setting and a more diverse participant group may provide different perspectives not explored in this study. Additionally a more in depth look into state legislators' perception of educators' roles may prove beneficial in encouraging more educators to take an active participatory role in legislation impacting their classrooms. The following could be considered: (a) Expand the sample group beyond the fourth and fifth grade levels to include K-12 teachers and administrators. (b) Include Board

of Education Members in the research participants. (c) Expand the legislative participants to include those primarily within your district. Although this list is not comprehensive it could provide a starting point to expand the findings of this study.

Summary and Conclusion

This heuristic, social constructivist, phenomenological study was to interpret the perceptions of teachers, school administrators, and state legislators regarding the relationship between federal educational legislation and educational practices at local schools. Thirteen participants completed the questionnaire with six being selected for one on one interviews. This study was conducted in two suburban communities located in the Northwest region of Missouri as well as Representatives from the Missouri State Legislature. This study took place from October 2012-March 2013. Questionnaires, interviews and documents were analyzed and coded drawing out themes connecting the research materials, participants and the researcher. The recurring themes of accountability, disconnect from federal legislation and active engagement were present in each story.

The findings of this study answer the research questions posed and provide insight into the overarching question, What are the perceptions of teachers, school administrators and state legislators on the relationship between federal educational legislation and educational practices at the local level? Based on this study, teachers and administrators feel they are actively involved in the development of curriculum. They articulated opportunities to participate at the building and district level.

Participants described themselves as very involved in the process of curriculum development and rated themselves high on how much control they believe teachers have

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regarding pedagogical decisions and instructional practice. Although federal mandates tied to high stakes testing seems to drive some of the curriculum, the teachers and administrators in this study provided dialogue that suggested a sense of independence from the mandates and the freedom to choose instructional methods and pedagogy to meet the needs of students. The legislators also responded that their level of involvement is high. When asked about key players in educational curriculum and standards the responses in this area did not always trickle down to the district level but remained at the federal and in some instances the state level. Though there was still the accountability factor and the fear that schools are not being held accountable by federal mandates in a fair manner. The opportunity for Participatory Action Research as a means for collaboration was also explored as a means of building a relationship between federal educational legislation and educational practices at the local level. An expanded definition of community which includes school personnel, boards of education, parents and legislators may help create a balance of power and bidirectional influence resulting in sustained, systematic change.

The findings of this research provide me with a profound sense of hope and I believe offers itself as a resource for future educators. An understanding of the influences driving curriculum and the politics surrounding the educational environment could prove to be beneficial for pre-service teachers and better prepare them for a career in education. The emphasis on empowerment and the idea of human agency is also evident in this study and promotes an environment where teachers are decision makers and curriculum planners. The idea of having influence over how curriculum is organized and what is effective to promote student learning is evident in the attitudes of the teacher participants and could provide a

discussion point for students in teacher training programs. Additionally, this research could be a part of preparing boards of education to embrace local control as they take part in educational policies. Legislators involved on educational committees, administrators and community members could benefit from an understanding of the perceptions of those in this study and this study could provide a foundation for exploring the perceptions of their own stakeholders. As a final thought, this study has made a deliberate attempt to talk about politics and how policies and decisions are made which impact education. Understanding this process can provide a forum for more voices to be heard.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH STUDY

Local Decision Making:
The Relationship between Federal Educational Legislation
and Educational Practices

Investigators:
Dr. Loyce Caruthers, Ph. D
Angela Rolofson, ED.S

Request to Participate:

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This study is being conducted at the Selfton School District, the Hyaldale School District and at the state level through a legislative participant. The researcher in charge of this study is Dr. Loyce Caruthers, Ph. D. while the study will be run by Angela Rolofson, ED. S. The study team is asking you to take part in this research study because you are a teacher, school administrator or past or present state legislator. Research studies only include people who choose to take part. This document is called a consent form. Please read this consent form carefully and take your time making your decision. The researcher or study staff will go over this consent form with you. Ask him/her to explain anything that you do not understand. Think about it and talk it over with your family and friends before you decide if you want to take part in this research study. This consent form explains what to expect: the risks, discomforts, and benefits, if any, if you consent to be in the study.

Background:

You are invited to participate in a research study to examine the perception of teachers at the fourth and fifth grade level, school administrators (principals of a fourth/fifth grade building as well as central office personnel) and Missouri state legislators on the relationship between federal legislation affecting educational experiences in Missouri public schools and educational practices at the local level. You will be one of about 35 subjects in the study which includes all locations. The research project is a qualitative study gleaming data through questionnaires, interviews and documents. Those questionnaires which provide rich, thick descriptions and the greatest, most, relevant information to the topic under study will be asked to participate in an interview session. This research project is part of a dissertation for the partial fulfillment of requirements for a doctoral degree.

The purpose of this study is to understand and ask about the perception of teachers, school administrators and state legislators on the relationship between federal legislation affecting educational experiences in Missouri public schools and educational practices at the local level. The research will seek to answer three sub-questions: (a) How do teachers and school administrators perceive their roles in local decisions about curriculum development? (b) What do teachers perceive are their levels of autonomy regarding pedagogical decisions and instructional practices? (c) What do state legislatures perceive is their level of involvement and the level of involvement by teachers and school administrators in creating educational policies? The significance of this study is seen in the classroom. In today's classroom high stakes testing and accountability have taken precedent to sound pedagogical practices and the teaching of the whole child. Bureaucracy and politics have taken local control away from schools and placed it in the hands of federal politicians with no formal background in the field of education. Teachers, school administrators and state legislators must develop an understanding of the implications of this shift in power and begin to examine their role in this phenomenon. An assessment of federal educational legislation, its impact on curriculum, teacher retention and the deskilling of teachers and the perceived relationship between the federal and local levels are significant to the profession. The analysis of the data in this study will answer the research questions posed as well as provide a forum for educators and community members to assess their role in educational reform.

Description of Procedures:

As a potential participant from an identified study site you are receiving this consent form via email so that you may be informed about the study and all of its components. With your authorization, which may be emailed with an electronic signature, you are agreeing to the following procedures. Participants will complete a written questionnaire sent via email, which will be reviewed by the investigator. The participant emails will be obtained from district websites after approval from the district's central office and building administrators have been obtained. Legislator emails will be obtained from public records via the internet. The questionnaires will be sent along with a letter to introduce myself and the study. Questionnaires are expected to take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Based on questionnaire results 5-7 participants, who have provided rich, thick descriptions and the greatest, most, relevant information to the topic under study will be chosen to complete at least one individual interview lasting approximately one hour. If necessary a follow up interview may be requested which would last no more than 30 minutes. Potential interview participants will be contacted via email. A mutually agreed on time will be established. The interview will take place on the school grounds or in the legislative office to allow for a familiar and public environment for the participant but to also allow for confidentiality. The interview will be tape recorded and then transcribed within a week of the interview. The tape recorded interview will then be erased and the transcribed information will contain no demographic information that would identify the participant to anyone except the researcher. It is expected that once the questionnaires are sent out the research will last no more than 6

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months. All documents/data obtained for the purpose of this study will be maintained for 7 years from the conclusion of the study.

Study Break Down:
- Obtain consent from district personnel
- Send Questionnaires to participants
- Analyze questionnaires and select participants for interviews within two weeks of sending out questionnaire
- Email and arrange a meeting to conduct interviews within two weeks of selection
- Identify follow up interviews needed and conduct these within two weeks of initial interview

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be involved in this study for a minimum of 30 minutes (completing the questionnaire) up to two hours (if chosen for interviews) over the next six weeks. When you are done taking part in this study, you will have access to the study results.

Risks and Inconveniences:

No physical or psychological/emotional risks are associated with this study. The questionnaires will originally contain identifiable information as will the tape recorded interviews. Unidentifiable markers will then be placed on the data to maintain confidentiality however there is the risk of identification resulting in the loss of confidentiality. This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks of taking part in this research study are not expected to be more than the risks in your daily life. There are no other known risks to you if you choose to take part in this study.

Benefits:

Benefits from this study for the participants may include gaining a better understanding of his/her role in educational legislation and in local decisions about curriculum development and implementation. This understanding may provide an opportunity for participation in systematic change which impacts schools and children.

Fees and Expenses:

There are no monetary costs to you.

Compensation:

You will not be compensated for participation in this study.

Alternatives to Study Participation:

The alternative is not to participate in this study.

Confidentiality:

While we will do our best to keep the information you share with us confidential, it cannot be absolutely guaranteed. Individuals from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies), Research Protections Program, and Federal regulatory agencies may look at records related to this study to make sure we are doing proper, safe research and protecting human subjects. The results of this research may be published or presented to others. You will not be named in any reports of the results.

Data collected will include written questionnaires, transcribed interviews and documents. The questionnaires will originally contain identifiable information as will the tape recorded interviews. Unidentifiable markers will then be placed on the data to maintain confidentiality however there is the risk of identification resulting in the loss of confidentiality.

In Case of Injury:

The University of Missouri-Kansas City appreciates people who help it gain knowledge by being in research studies. It is not the University's policy to pay for or provide medical treatment for persons who are in studies. If you think you have been harmed because you were in this study, please call Angela Rolofson, ED. S., the researcher at 816-223-8786.

Contacts for Questions about the Study:

You should contact the Office of UMKC's Social Sciences Institutional Review Board at 816-235-5927 if you have any questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research subject. You may call the researcher, Angela Rolofson ED.S. (816) 223-8786/ amrc55@umkc.edu if you have any questions about this study. You may also call Dr. Loyce Caruthers Ph.D (816) 235-1044/ caruthersl@umkc.edu / University of Missouri 00243 Ed 339 Kansas City, MO 64110 if any problems come up.

Voluntary Participation:

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. If you choose to be in the study, you are free to stop participating at any time and for any reason. If you choose not to be in the study or decide to stop participating, your decision will not affect any care or benefits you are entitled to. The researchers, doctors or sponsors may stop the study or take you out of the study at any time if they decide that it is in your best interest to do so. They may do this for medical or administrative reasons or if you no longer meet the study criteria. You will be told of any important findings developed during the course of this research.

You have read this Consent Form or it has been read to you. You have been told why this research is being done and what will happen if you take part in the study, including the risks and benefits. You have had the chance to ask questions, and you may ask questions at any time in the future by calling Angela Rolofson (816)223-8786 or Dr. Loyce Caruthers (816) 235-1044. By signing this consent form, you volunteer and consent to take part in this research study. Study staff will give you a copy of this consent form.

Authorization:

_____   _____
Signature (Volunteer Subject)   **Date**

_____
Printed Name (Volunteer Subject)

_____   _____
Signature (Authorized Consenting Party)   **Date**

_____
Printed Name (Authorized Consenting Party)

_____
**Relationship of Authorized Consenting
Party to Subject**

_____   _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   **Date**

_____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

APPENDIX B

INTRODUCTION TO STUDY LETTER

Dear Educator/Legislator:

As an educator or state legislator you are an essential element in defining and creating the educational experiences of students in Missouri public schools. It is my intention to learn about your perceptions in relation to federal legislation and its impact and implementation in the public school classroom.

If you would please help by completing the attached questionnaire and returning it via this email address or a personal email address it would be appreciated. As a part of this study I am asking teachers and administrators from the Hyaldale and Selfton School District as well as Missouri legislators to participate. To develop an accurate picture it is important that all participants complete and return the Questionnaire.

The questionnaire should take about 20 minutes to complete. Most questions are related to your experiences in your current job. The risks and benefits of completing the questionnaire are similar to responding to questions about a work related matter. Your participation is completely voluntary and all answers will be handled confidentially. All documents will be kept in a locked cabinet only accessible to the researcher.   Per federal regulations, the data will be kept for seven years stored in a secured area. No school or person will be identified individually in any verbal or written report. Only aggregate information will be discussed in reports and publications.

It is my hope that you take the time to complete the questionnaire as your feedback is very important. If you have any questions regarding the questionnaire or this study please contact me at the information below. In addition, if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Missouri-Kansas City Institutional Review Board by phone, 816-235-5927.

Thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Angela Rolofson, ED.S.
Ph: (816)223-8786
amrc55@umkc.edu

or Dr. Loyce Caruthers, Research Advisor
Ph: (816) 235-1044
caruthersl@umkc.edu
University of Missouri 00243 Ed 339 Kansas City, MO 64110

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE -SCHOOL PERSONNEL

1. How many years have you been in your current school district and what is your

    position or job title?

    _____

    _____

2. What are your experiences in the field of education?

    _____

    _____

3. What trends do you believe have impacted education the most over the last decade?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

4. What do you perceive is the relationship between federal educational legislation and

    educational practices?

    _____

    _____

    _____

5. How do you see your role in decisions regarding curriculum development?

   _____

   _____

6. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not informed at all to 5 being very informed, how
   informed do you see yourself in terms of understanding federal education policies?

   _____Comments:_____

   _____

7. What are some of your thoughts about how NCLB legislation has impacted schools?

   _____

   _____

8. What changes have you seen in the curriculum being adopted and taught in schools?

   _____

   _____

9. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being no control at all to 5 being complete control, how
   much control do you believe teachers have to impact curricular decisions?

   _____Comments:_____

   _____

10. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being no control at all to 5 being complete control, how
    much control do you believe teachers have regarding pedagogical
    decisions/instructional practices?

    _____Comments:_____

    _____

11. What action might you take and/or have you taken to participate in decisions affecting

 your school?

 _____

 _____

 _____

 _____

 Please use a separate sheet of paper if additional space is needed.

By completing and returning the questionnaire, you are volunteering to be a potential

participant in this study. Your name and the information you provide will be kept

confidential.

_____ _____

Participant Name   Position

_____ _____

Participant Signature   Date

_(_____)_____

Contact Number

_____

Email

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONNAIRE -LEGISLATORS

1. What positions have you held prior to your current position?

   _____

   _____

2. How many terms have you served as a legislator?

   _____

   _____

3. Upon which committees have you served?

   _____

   _____

4. What trends do you believe have impacted education the most over the last decade?

   _____

   _____

5. What do you perceive is the relationship between federal educational legislation and

   educational practices?

   _____

   _____

   _____

6. How do you see your role in decisions regarding educational legislation?

   _____

   _____

7. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not informed at all to 5 being very informed, how

   informed do you see yourself in terms of understanding federal education policies?

   _____Comments:_____

   _____

8. What are some of your thoughts about how NCLB legislation has impacted schools?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

9. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being no control at all to 5 being complete control, how

   much control do you believe is given to the local level regarding curricular decisions

   and instructional practices?

   _____Comments:_____

   _____

   _____

10. What action might you take and/or have you taken to participate in decisions affecting

    the schools in your constituency?

    _____

    _____

    _____

Please use a separate sheet of paper if additional space is needed.

By completing and returning the questionnaire, you are volunteering to be a potential

participant in this study. Your name and the information you provide will be kept

confidential.

_____ _____

Participant Name   Position

_____ _____

Participant Signature   Date

_(_____)_____

Contact Number

_____

Email

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do you feel about the educational legislation that is impacting schools?

2. Who, do you believe, are the key players influencing educational curriculum and standards?

3. What do you perceive to be your role in local decisions about education?

4. What are the ways that you monitor implications of state and federal educational legislation in the school setting?

5. What would you like to see happen in the field of education?

6. What might you do and/or have you done to take a participatory role in decisions affecting your classroom, school district, and/or state?

LETTER TO OBTAIN PERMISSION FOR STUDY SITES

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a graduate student at the University of Missouri, Kansas City in pursuit of my Interdisciplinary Ph.D. I would like to invite teachers and administrators in your district to participate in a research study to examine the perception of teachers, school administrators and state legislators on the relationship between federal legislation affecting educational experiences in Missouri public schools and educational practices at the local level. The research project is a qualitative study gleaming data through questionnaires, interviews and documents. This research project is part of a dissertation for the partial fulfillment of requirements for a doctoral degree.

The research will seek to answer three sub-questions: (a) How do teachers and school administrators perceive their roles in local decisions about curriculum development? (b) What do teachers perceive are their levels of autonomy regarding pedagogical decisions and instructional practices? (c) What do state legislatures perceive is their level of involvement and the level of involvement by teachers and school administrators in creating educational policies?

Participants will be asked to complete a written questionnaire, which will be reviewed by the investigator. Questionnaires are expected to take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Based on questionnaire results 5-7 participants will be chosen to complete at least one one on one interview lasting at minimum one hour.

Participation in this study is voluntary at all times. Participants may choose not to participate or to withdraw participation at any time. There are no monetary costs to you and no compensation will be provided for participation in this study.

Benefits from this study for the participants may include gaining a better understanding of his/her role in educational legislation and in local decisions about curriculum development and implementation. This understanding may provide an opportunity for participation in systematic change which impacts schools and children.

If you have any questions about the study please call Angela Rolofson, the investigator, at (816) 223-8786.

Thank you for your consideration,

Angela Rolofson

APPENDIX G

PHONE SCRIPT

The follow up call to Central Office and Building Administrators will contain the following information:

"Good Morning/Afternoon, my name is Angela Rolofson. I recently sent you a letter identifying a study I am conducting as a part of my dissertation. In that letter I have outlined my topic, the purpose of my study and the potential study participants I am looking to administer a questionnaire and possibly follow up interview. I was wondering if you have had the opportunity to review this information and if you have any questions I might be able to answer? I hope I have clarified any questions you have for me. Do I have your permission to conduct my study on your site? Thank you very much. I will be mailing the letter of consent for your signature along with a self addressed and stamped envelope for its return. Thank you for your time."

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VITA

Angela Marie Rolofson was born in Ft. Riley, Kansas in 1972 to John and Carol Worrel. She has an older sister, Kimberly and two younger siblings, Catherine and Christopher. Angela's father was in the military so the first few years the family moved from Kansas to Georgia to California back to Kansas and then to Missouri where they settled in Liberty. Angela's father moved to the Army Reserves at that time. In 1977 Angela, her older sister and her mother moved to Gladstone, Missouri where they resided for most of Angela's school years.

Angela attended school at Chapel Hill Elementary, Antioch Middle School, Liberty Junior High and Oak Park High School where she graduated in 1990. Upon graduation Angela attended Missouri Western State College in St, Joseph, Missouri. After completing her Bachelors in Education, Angela obtained a job in Lathrop, Missouri as a K-8 cross categorical special services teacher. After two years she transferred to Antioch Middle School in the North Kansas City School District to teach 6th grade cross categorical special education. She remained in North Kansas City for 8 years. Angela obtained her Masters in Educational Administration in 1997 and her Specialist in Educational Administration in 2004 from The University of Missouri-Kansas City. In 2004 Angela transferred to the Kearney School District as a special education process coordinator. Then in 2005 she moved to the Platte County School District, in the same position, to be closer to home.

Angela has been blessed with a loving husband, Steve, and three wonderful children, Breann, Zachary and Abigail.