“Just Let Us Teach!”: Living Literacy Policy In And Around Maplewood Elementary School

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“Just Let Us Teach!”: Living Literacy Policy In And Around Maplewood Elementary School

by

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to Hannah and Ella. May you always “strive for peace and justice in all the earth” in whatever way you decide to follow your dreams.
Acknowledgements

When I started this journey many, many years ago, Ella was only two months old. Hannah was just two. I had no idea what I was getting myself into; I just knew a few things. I knew from watching my mom raise my sister and I as a single mother that women are strong, and I could do anything. I knew from my Dad that love will follow you to the ends of the Earth and never let you go. I knew from my Mema and Pepa that the seeds of faith they planted in me would lead me to a place where I would find a greater purpose for my life in service to others. And Jill, well, I knew you would cheer me on every step of the way as you always have on every step of my journey through life. I love each of you. And to my extended family, thanks for all your support.

There have been friends along my path who have guided me along my journey toward today. Bob, thanks for helping me come to understand in college that where the world’s great need and my deep passion intersected, I would find my vocation. I found that in teaching. Aanne, I know you are so proud of me. You asked me if I liked how my life was unfolding. Aanne, I like it very much. Everyday is a gift and blessing. I know if we could sit and talk you would say, “Look at all you have accomplished. None of this would have happened without all the hard work you did.” But truly Aanne, I would never have gotten to this moment if it were not for you. To all the kids at the Boys and Girls Clubs, especially Terrance, I am still working to make sure that you all know you have a chance.
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To my AMAZING committee, thank you. A special thanks goes to Susi and Kara. I would say they worked tirelessly, but whom would I be kidding? The labor of coaching anyone through a dissertation is exhausting. Susi and Kara, you pushed through with me, and I could never thank you enough.

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Finally, girls, mommy did it. You two have been my inspiration and motivation, and I will snuggle you in bed every night now and fall asleep by your side, as long as you let me. You are amazing, smart, compassionate, strong, young women, and I love being your mom. I look forward to savoring it in the coming years.
Abstract

Through a sociocultural lens this study explored how four teachers, a reading teacher, and their principal lived literacy policy in practice in and around Maplewood Elementary School. This work grew out of three questions: (a) How do six policy stakeholders at one elementary school—four teachers, one administrator, and one reading teacher—make meaning of literacy policies? (b) How do these stakeholders’ understandings shape the appropriation of these policies in their day-to-day literacy practices? and (c) How does the meaning-making of other stakeholders—district, state, and federal policy-makers—intersect with and inform the appropriation of policy by the six focal stakeholders? In asking these questions I hoped to meet the goals of: (a) contextualizing my study within the larger, historical policy environment; (b) understanding local policy stakeholders’ lived experience with policy at Maplewood; and (c) understanding the dialogic, co-constructed nature of policy among stakeholders at multiple levels in the policy process.

An analysis of data suggests that participants made meaning of policies dialogically as their personal and professional beliefs, experiences in the classroom, and support from colleagues mediate their interpretations of those policies. Data suggest that policymakers’ concerns about teacher quality and student achievement led to policies that significantly impacted teacher practice. Data also illustrated how one principal, Ms. Johnson, played a key role in mediating policies teachers encountered as she negotiated autonomy on their behalf.
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CHAPTER ONE
NOTICING POLICY AT MAPLEWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The halls of Maplewood Elementary School were buzzing with the sounds of administrators, parents, teachers, and students ready to start a new year. Policy of all kinds significantly shaped literacy practices in this school; there was explicit and implicit evidence of policy in practice everywhere. As I entered the school, I was greeted with banners announcing accomplishments such as, “We made AYP!” (Adequate Yearly Progress). Scores from the previous year’s State Assessment of State Standards (SASS) test were posted on the walls. I got the impression that this was a school where the district’s motto, “Together, We Can,” was realized.

As the year progressed and I collected data about literacy policies, it became clear that the path to success, particularly reading and comprehending texts on grade level, at Maplewood Elementary School in the Greenbrier School District (pseudonyms) was a complicated one. One month into the school year, I peeked into classrooms and observed teachers diligently testing students, one-at-a-time, as other students sat at desks busying themselves with worksheets. “When will we get around to teaching?” teachers wondered aloud as testing consumed the first month of school. Visiting Maplewood

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1 Names of participants, places, and state tests are pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality
2 A state standardized test administered at the end of the year to assess growth toward academic standards.
3 This citation is not included in references to maintain confidentiality
4 COP stand for Communities of Practice.
5 Titles VIII and IX outline the impact aid programs and general provisions respectively and I do not address these specifically within this historical overview.
6 A panel convened by the National Institute for Child Health and Development (NICHID) composed of experts in primarily in the field of psychology, but also in physics, medicine, curriculum and instruction,
several months later, I saw district officials conducting walk-throughs, or “drive-bys” as teachers called them, to “inspect what they expect” (Bridges, 2012, p. 49.)3. They expected to see teachers following district pacing charts, using commercial literacy curricula purchased by the district, and implementing non-negotiable literacy practices. Title I literacy consultants monitored the learning environments to make sure that teachers displayed alphabets, calendars, and other print media to meet district expectations (“Office of Curriculum and Instruction”, 2009, pg. 7).

Literacy policy in the district and at Maplewood Elementary School changed frequently. In faculty meetings and professional development sessions, some teachers commented that the frequent changes in policy made it difficult to know what to expect. Some teachers felt that these regular changes undermined their identity and agency as they had little to no control over when or how these policy changes would take place. In light of recent State budget cuts, there was a fear among teachers that jobs may be lost if they did not meet policy expectations.

At Maplewood, as in schools across the nation, a wide range of stakeholders develop, interpret, and appropriate literacy policies (Coles, 2003; Garan, 2004 & 2007; Meir et al., 2004) as teachers; school, district, state and federal administrators; children; and families, intentionally as well as unwittingly, play some kind of role in the policy process. However, it is widely documented that their voices are heard more or less depending on their place within the policy hierarchy (Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009; Shore & Wright, 1997; Sutton & Levinson, 2001). This study seeks to give stakeholders a platform to share their experiences and perspectives, while seeking to

---

3 This citation is not included in references to maintain confidentiality
understand the dynamic policy process in which stakeholders’ interactions with each other shape the way they voice their policy experiences and appropriate literacy policy.

Recognizing a national concern for the lack of stakeholders’ voices in the policy-process (Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009) and because of my experiences observing and interacting with teachers, administrators, and children at Maplewood, I was motivated to conduct a multi-level qualitative study that would examine policy stakeholders’ perspectives, lived experiences, and appropriation of policy—ways that stakeholders take up policy, change it, or acquiesce to it — at each level of the policy process (classroom, school, district, state, federal). The questions guiding this research were:

• How do six policy stakeholders at one elementary school—four teachers, one administrator, and one reading teacher—make meaning of literacy policies.

• How do these stakeholders’ understandings shape the appropriation of these policies in their day-to-day literacy practices?

• How does the meaning-making of other stakeholders—district, state, and federal policy-makers—intersect with and inform the appropriation of policy by the six focal stakeholders?

**Significance of the Study**

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is a federal education act resulting in some of the most influential legislation to come along in the past 50 years. However, that influence has not been viewed in the academic community, and in most public education communities, as positive (Coles, 2003; Garan, 2004 & 2007; Meir et al., 2004). Explained in greater detail in Chapter Two, NCLB had a long lasting impact on literacy policy at Maplewood Elementary School as it defined what was counted as research, mandated how schools
used programs backed by *scientifically based reading research* (SBRR), and urged *fidelity of implementation* of SBRR practice to ensure students’ academic success.

At Maplewood School, many teachers seemed to feel that mandates from NCLB literacy policies (including the state and district’s close monitoring of classrooms to enforce compliance with mandates) in conjunction with the school’s on-again-off-again Title 1 status—which brought consultants espousing a range of programs—made it challenging for them to teach from their own knowledge and experience or appropriate policies in ways that met the educational needs and interests of their students. This is not unlike scenarios repeated across the country (Coles, 2003; Garan, 2004 & 2007; Meir et al., 2004) as teachers feel a lack of attention to their own voices in the policy-making process. However, in spite of studies that focus on literacy policy (Coburn, 2001) there is little that focuses on understanding the co-constructed nature of literacy policy by examining the intersection of views of a range of policy stakeholders.

Some, in the field of education, believe that researchers have contributed to this silencing by adopting top-down approaches in the focus of their data collection—seeking to understand policy design only from policy makers’ perspectives and by only examining how policies succeed or fail at re-ordering behavior (Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009). More recently, researchers have begun to examine policy from a bottom-up perspective, focusing on implementation to understand local stakeholders’ sense-making related to literacy policies (Coburn, 2001). Both approaches, however, are problematic because each addresses only a part of the policy process. Focusing on the design of official policies at the macro (institutional) level, or on how those policies are implemented at the micro (local) level, insufficiently describes the complex sociocultural
nature of the policy process that unfolds across and in between these levels. Furthermore, these approaches neglect the role power plays in how stakeholders’ make meaning of policy (Datnow & Park, 2009). In other words, these approaches alone are insufficient to describe the dynamic process by which different levels of stakeholders dialogically co-construct policies and their meanings within complex webs of power.

To avoid dichotomous approaches to policy study, educational anthropologists and policy researchers have begun to describe policy appropriation as a multi-directional, multi-layered, unified process that emphasizes the interrelationships between institutional layers and actors (Datnow & Park, 2009). As educational anthropologists and educational researchers examine policy appropriation in studies such as this one, they create new opportunities for multiple stakeholders’ voices to be heard. They also create opportunities for them to shape policy through participatory democracy—a process through which marginalized local policy stakeholders can have great influence in shaping policies that inform their practice. (Levinson, Sutton & Winstead, 2009). Participatory democracy is particularly useful to thinking about the role teachers can play in shaping literacy policy in schools, which largely dictate teacher practice.

This study was designed to contribute to the field of educational policy research by considering the dialogic process of policy making among stakeholders with regard to literacy policy in particular, “questioning dominant definitions of policy, proffering alternative definitions, and reordering or de-ordering (i.e., liberating) behavior” (Levinson, Sutton & Winstead, 2009, p.788). While there is much in the literature that describes the discontent of educators regarding literacy policies, there is little that examines this questioning, proffering, re-ordering process. Levinson, Sutton and
Winstead (2009) argue that qualitative studies are needed to contribute to these goals as they:

1. Question dominant assumptions and raise questions that are often silenced by traditional policy frameworks.

2. Enable researchers to see the practice that goes into creating and sustaining the sedimented common sense of policy.

3. Allow researchers to see the practice of policy appropriation, for which local interests and meanings (often in COP\(^4\)) provide the basis.

4. Assay local conditions, excavate local knowledge, and represent such knowledge in a sympathetic albeit mediated language to policy elites.

5. Insert knowledge into a different circuit of social appropriation and social mobilization and expand the space of the public. In doing so, policy researchers can question the privileged status of scientific experts and reinvigorate public involvement in the policy process. (p. 788)

Because further studies are needed to move the field closer to the goal of understanding the process of re-ordering and de-ordering literacy policy processes (Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009), this study contributes to a limited body of research by making visible the voices of multiple stakeholders in the policy process. By examining the dialogic nature of their sense-making and appropriation of literacy policies within complex webs of power, it is my hope that this study will offer evidence to challenge dominant top-down policy theories—ones that support the view that policy can be developed at higher school system levels, such as federal level, state, and district levels and passed down to teachers to implement with fidelity—and contribute to an environment where participatory democracy in the policy process would be increasingly likely.

\(^4\) COP stand for Communities of Practice.
Research Purpose: Goals for the Study

Three goals guided this research. The first goal was to understand the policy environment, including literacy policies themselves, across federal, state, and local levels as those policies affected practice at Maplewood Elementary School. Policy stakeholders typically shape their practice in particular contexts by drawing on widely circulating concepts of how policy operates, their historical experiences with the policy process, and various circulating literacy policies. I hoped that understanding the broader policy environment as well as local (district and school-based) ones would help me understand the context in which stakeholders make meaning of literacy policies at a particular school, Maplewood. I developed this understanding by analyzing policy documents at the national, state, and local levels; engaging in participant observation in teachers’ classrooms; and conducting informal and formal interviews with various stakeholders.

As part of this goal to understand the broader policy environment, I attended to ways that stakeholders defined or framed issues related to literacy. I was guided in this focus by the work of Goffman (1974) and Tannen and Wallat (1987). In his work, Goffman discusses the nature of reality, situational meaning, and, “what one can be alive to in any moment” (p. 8). He assumes that people make meaning of events in particular situations with particular people by asking, “What is going on here?” (p. 10). Goffman defines a frame as a, “definition of a situation… built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them” (p.10-11). Goffman’s notion of frame analysis then is an examination of the organization of experience. Tannen and Wallat build on Goffman’s work to discuss an interactive notion of frames that examines, “what is going on in interaction, without
which no utterance (or movement or gesture) could be interpreted” (p. 206). Coburn draws on these notions of framing among others to understand how policy stakeholders frame policy problems. Coburn (2006) asserts that the ways stakeholders frame policy is important because it assigns responsibility and creates rationales that legitimize some policy solutions while delegitimizing others. As a result, the ways that policy actors frame issues greatly impacts the ways policy stakeholders at local levels can appropriate policy and understanding their roles was an important goal of this work. This study drew on these tenets by examining the ways participants’ described the factors that inhibited literacy development and the reforms they promoted to increase students’ literacy achievement.

The second goal of this study was to understand the lived experiences of administrators and teachers with regard to literacy policies at Maplewood. I wanted to understand, from a variety of perspectives, the process by which policy stakeholders made meaning of literacy policies and how power structures supported and constrained the ways literacy policy was practiced in the school community. I also was interested in literacy consultants’ roles and walk-throughs in connection to NCLB policy and the school’s Title I status. I wanted to understand how teachers responded to policy demands based on their perceptions of policy officials’ expectations for their practice. To meet this goal, I sought the perspectives of multiple stakeholders using participant observation, interviews, and document collection and analysis at the school. I observed district walk-throughs and interviewed observers about their roles in the school and their expectations for teacher practice.
A third goal of this study was to understand the dialogic relationship (beyond the typical macro-micro dichotomies) between stakeholders at local, state, and federal levels as they co-construct literacy policies. To understand this process, I focused on the ways policy stakeholders responded to each other’s policy moves within what Hubbard, Mehan and Stein (2006) call, “intersection encounters” (p. 16). These are the formal and informal interactions between stakeholders at multiple levels in the policy process shaped by their cultural, political and historical knowledge of each other and of the related power structures (Bahktin, 1981 & 1986). To meet this goal, I collected data at the district and school levels by focusing on data settings (e.g., faculty meetings, grade level meetings, professional development sessions, district meetings for principals, open house nights at school) in which stakeholders encountered, shared, and discussed literacy policy messages. At the national and state levels, data to meet this goal came from documents (e.g., commentary, letters, emails, policy legislation, curriculums and program descriptions etc.).

As I collected data to address the three goals of this study, participants used numerous policy terms as they described their practice. To assist the reader in understanding the key terms used throughout this study, a list of definitions are provided in Appendix A. These terms are defined throughout the study, but given the numerous novel terms encountered related to policy, terms likely unfamiliar to most readers, a review of the definitions in Appendix A is suggested before reading further.

**Conclusion to Chapter One**

The goals and process of this study were designed to allow me to understand more about literacy policy as a dialogic, sociocultural process. Through this study, I hope to
contribute to the body of work that seeks to replace existing technocratic models of policy with those that encourage participatory democracy by engaging local stakeholders in the production and interpretation of official legitimizing policies. To accomplish these goals, I collected data at Maplewood Elementary School from January to December 2010. Maplewood is located in an urban school district. At the time of the study, the school had 287 students, 21 teachers, and two administrators with two teachers at each grade level from Child Development (four year olds) through fifth grade. Three teachers led the physical education, art, and Spanish programs. One teacher, Ms. Berling, was the reading teacher charged with working with small groups of children to promote literacy achievement. Ms. Johnson was the school’s principal, and Mr. Baker was the curriculum resource administrator. Using participant observation and interview (Spradley, 1980) at the local level, I focused on four teachers, the principal, and the reading teacher. I also collected and analyzed policy documents and interviewed policy stakeholders at federal, state, and local levels to understand the ways stakeholders framed policy issues and their solutions (Goffman, 1974; Tannen & Wallat, 1987). In these ways, I sought to develop deeper understandings of policy ideologies and appropriation.

The following chapter begins by outlining the theoretical frame that guided the development of this study’s purpose and methodological design, and interpretation of data. It is followed by a review of each body of literature that was foundational to my framework as well as a discussion of the specific literacy policies that were integral to life at Maplewood Elementary School during the time of the study.
CHAPTER TWO
THEORETICAL FRAME AND REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This study of literacy policy at local, state, and national levels centered on contexts important to literacy teaching at Maplewood Elementary School in an urban setting within a moderately sized southeastern city. I was guided in the development of this research project and the analysis and representation of data by a theoretical frame that draws from several major bodies of thought. An overview of that framework is provided in the first section of this chapter followed by an in-depth review of the bodies of literature that informed the development of that frame. Those bodies of work are: (a) learning as a sociocultural process, (b) policy as sociocultural practice, (c) identity as practice, and (d) meaning-making and literacy policies. Thus, each of these areas of study is presented in this chapter not only to provide a review of relevant literature, but also to express how each area supports the theoretical framework that guides my work. In other words, to understand the theoretical framework within which this study is situated, it is important to unpack the research studies that led to my understanding of those theoretical concepts. The final section of this chapter provides a review of policies pertinent to the specific contexts of this study particularly the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Theoretical Framework

Several core beliefs guided my thinking as I set out to understand how literacy policies informed teaching practice and how teachers made sense of those policies. First,
I believe that all meaning making is a process of learning and all learning is a process of meaning making. As a result, learning theory heavily influenced my understanding of the ways teachers made meaning of literacy policy. In particular, I embrace a sociocultural view of learning—a view that learning is socially situated, as people bring their cultural understandings of the world to bear on a particular learning experience. Just as I believe that learning is a sociocultural process, I similarly believe that policy is a sociocultural practice in which policy stakeholders appropriate policies—taking them in and making them their own within particular social settings and particular cultural frames of reference (Sutton & Levinson, 2001; Shore & Wright, 1997). Following this pattern, I also believe that teachers’ identities are formed through sociocultural processes in which teachers negotiate their identities within specific sociocultural settings—settings steeped in issues of power and expectations for who individuals can be and how they should participate in particular communities of practice (Holland, Lachiotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). It is my belief that an understanding of sociocultural learning, policy, identity and the negotiation of power is necessary for policy researchers to construct a complex understanding of policy in practice that creates counter narrative to notions of the implementation of top-down technocratic policies. It is these beliefs that informed the theoretical framework for my study, diagramed in figure 2.1.
With these principles/understandings in mind, I designed a qualitative study to examine the sociocultural nature of literacy policy in practice and how teachers negotiated the socially situated meanings of those policies within school system power structures. Critical to my ability to draw on this sociocultural foundation were methodologies used in the collection of data: formal and informal interviews, extensive time spent as a participant observer in the school, and engaging participants in frequent member checking to assess my interpretations in light of their views. Building from my beliefs in the roles played by power structures and the negotiation of teacher identity, I began to construct an understanding of policy in practice.

I began developing this framework with the assumption that the way one perceives learning directly influences the way one views the policy process and that understanding how policy stakeholders make meaning of policy in schools requires a
deeper understanding of theories of learning. For example, researchers who conceptualize learning as an individual cognitive process in which information is transmitted from one individual to another will conceptualize a linear policy process in which policy is handed down to passive implementers (Wenger, 1998). However, researchers who conceptualize learning as a social practice, as I do within this study, will conceptualize a recursive policy process in which policy stakeholders dialogically, co-construct meanings of policies related to literacy within particular sociocultural-historical settings.

**Review of Literature Supporting Theoretical Frame**

**Learning as a Sociocultural Process**

At the heart of my work is a commitment to views of learning as a social and cultural process. This belief is guided by many theorists but primarily by the work of Vygotsky (1978), Bakhtin (1981 & 1986), Lave and Wenger (1991), Wenger (1998), Holland, Lachiotte, Skinner and Cain, (1998), Shore and Wright (1997), Sutton and Levinson (2001). These scholars, in particular, influenced my thinking about the ways policy stakeholders make meaning related to literacy policies and how these meanings shape the ways stakeholders appropriate policy. The following learning theories led to my current understanding of sociocultural theory and, in particular, learning as a sociocultural/dialogic process in which people are increasingly able to participate within a community of practice (Bakhtin, 1981 & 1986; Lave & Wenger, 1991 & Wenger, 1998): (a) learning through social action, (b) learning as legitimate peripheral participation, (c) learning as the ability to negotiate new meaning, (d) policy as practice and (e) identity and agency as practice. In the following pages, as I discuss elements and
intersections of these learning and policy theories, I use the terms learning and meaning making synonymously because I believe the two to be integrally related. In other words, I accept that meaning making is a central element of the learning process, and that, conversely, learning always entails meaning making. I will describe the relationship between meaning and learning later in this section as I conceptualize learning as a practice in which we experience the world and our participation in it as meaningful (Wenger, 1998).

**Learning through social interaction.** Vygotsky’s theory of learning through social interaction informed my framework by challenging notions of learning as a process of transmitting knowledge from one person to another and therefore challenging notions that policy can be transmitted from one policy level or group of individuals to another. Rather, policy—like learning—is a sociocultural process in which stakeholders actively shape their participation based on culturally acceptable ways of behaving. Vygotsky was one of the first to describe the sociocultural nature of learning and meaning making. Vygotsky (1978) described learning and the development of higher psychological processes as inherently social and historical, and challenged his fellow cognitive psychologists’ prevailing theories of human development as an individual mental process. Vygotsky viewed learning as social—as people grow into the intellectual lives of those around them, and as historical—as people bring their previous experiences and schema developed across microgenetic, ontogenetic, phylogenetic, and cultural-historical timescales to bear on new learning events. Vygotsky proposed that this learning occurs within a zone of proximal development (i.e., zpd). He conceptualized the zone of proximal development as a socio-historical construct that defines, “the distance between
the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). This concept emphasizes the way learning occurs through social interaction between people in formal learning communities.

While Vygotsky’s (1979) hypothesis brought new attention to learning through social interaction, his focus as a cognitive psychologist remained on mental processes. Therefore, he worked to understand the process by which human beings internalize socially constructed knowledge and abilities in the mind and encouraged other researchers to do the same. However, researchers who were contemporaries of Vygotsky, such as Bakhtin (1981 & 1986), and those who came later, such as Wenger and Lave (1991), conceptualized social theories of learning that challenged the internal/external dichotomy between the social and psychological dimensions cognitive psychologists emphasized. These theories further supported my understanding of policy appropriation by stakeholders within (COP).

**Learning as legitimate peripheral participation.** I drew on the concept of legitimate peripheral participation within this study to understand—and rethink—how policy stakeholders participate in the sociocultural transformation of policy through changing relationships between old-timers and newcomers. Lave and Wenger’s (1991) view of learning as legitimate peripheral participation informs my framework, and understanding of policy appropriation, by extending the importance of the informal learning settings where people implicitly become full participants in communities of practice. Lave and Wenger viewed learning as a dimension of social practice. They
recognized that existing theories of learning—including Vygotsky’s theory of the zone of proximal development—focused on the way learners internalized knowledge—whether it was, “discovered,” “transmitted” from others or “experienced in interaction” with others” (p. 47). Lave and Wenger suggested these views of learning created dichotomies between inner and outer knowing and framed the acquisition of knowledge a mental process. Lave and Wenger argued that this dichotomy reduced learning to a process of transmission and assimilation.

Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasized that issues of internalization were central to Vygotsky’s theory even though he was explicitly concerned with the social nature of learning. They argued researchers’ interpretations of Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development shape the extent to which internalization affected the learning process. Lave and Wenger suggested the common “scaffolding” interpretation that builds on Vygotsky’s (1979) definition of the zone of proximal development as the distance between what a learner can do working alone and what they can do under the guidance of an adult or more experienced peer, reduced the social nature of learning to, “a small ‘aura’ of socialness that provides input for the process of internalization viewed as individualistic acquisition of the cultural given” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 48). Lave and Wenger did not believe this interpretation accounted for the place of learning in the broader context of the structure of the social world.

Lave and Wenger (1991) offered an alternative “collectivist” or “societal” interpretation of Vygotsky’s theory based on activity theory and critical psychology. They drew on Engestrom’s definition of the zpd as the, “distance between the everyday actions of individuals and the historically new form of the societal activity that can be
collectively generated…in everyday actions,” to extend the study of learning beyond pedagogical approaches toward an, “emphasis on connecting issues of sociocultural transformation with changing relations between newcomers’ and old-timers in the context of a changing shared practice” (p. 49). This became the basis for their conceptualization of learning as practice within communities. This theory lead me to focus on the ways teachers transform their practice, and thus their sociocultural contexts, as they interact with colleagues to make meaning of literacy policies they encounter.

Lave and Wenger (1991) argued the meaning of learning was for an individual to become a full participant in a sociocultural practice within a community. Becoming a full participant in a community involved more than acquiring technical skills; it involved developing relationships between individuals, activities, and the world over time in relation to other communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). These communities of practice exist everywhere where people live and work together to establish a habitable way of life (Wenger, 1998). Communities of practice exist largely to reproduce themselves but this often occurs in informal, implicit ways. When new members join a community (e.g., religious, civic, professional) existing members initiate them into the ways of being within the community through what Lave and Wenger refer to as legitimate peripheral participation. This is also true for educators in the teaching profession. As new teachers step into schools, their initiation into the figured worlds of teaching, and more specifically their particular school culture, begins.

Lave and Wenger’s emphasis on connecting issue of sociocultural transformation with changing relations between newcomers and old-timers resulted in an understanding of learning through legitimate peripheral participation (LPP), which was most evident in
apprenticeships. Lave and Wenger present LPP as, “A particular mode of engaging as a learner who participates in the actual practice of an expert, but only to a limited degree and with limited responsibility for the ultimate product as a whole” (p. 14). To describe this process, Lave and Wenger examined multiple apprenticeship models outside of the classrooms (e.g., Yucatec Midwives, Vai and Gola Tailors, Naval quartermasters, butchers, and alcoholics). Through their observations, they discovered that learning through LPP in apprenticeships was more or less successful based on the nature of the interactions between old-timers and newcomers within those apprenticeships. At times, newcomers in communities of practice did not have equal access or opportunities to develop knowledge that allowed them to become full participants in those communities. This occurred either because of the quality of the apprenticeship or old-timers’ intentional efforts to marginalize newcomers and prevent them from becoming legitimate peripheral participants and engaging in new practices. Access to culturally appropriate ways of participating in a community created continuity or displacement of participants within those communities as they worked to reproduce themselves. These constraints on developing professional knowledge provide a framework for understanding teachers’ frustrations when they claim they are unable to develop deep professional knowledge to support their practice. This framework helped me consider whether or not teachers’ feelings of not being able to master their craft was due to a lack of access to quality apprenticeship or intentional efforts to limit teachers’ ability to become autonomous, full participants in the teaching profession.

Learning as the ability to negotiate new meaning. Wenger (1998) built on his work with Jean Lave to describe learning, meaning and identity within communities of
practice. Wenger’s perspective on learning was multifaceted. I focus only on the meaning-making facet of his perspective on learning because it provides a framework to understand policy stakeholders’ meaning making related to literacy policies.

According to Wenger (1998) learning is foremost the ability to negotiate new meanings. Meaning is not a, “mechanical realization of some routine or procedure” (Wenger, 1998, p.52). When teachers eat lunch with the same children in the same cafeteria every day, even when they are familiar with the routine, they recreate the experience anew each time they engage in the routine and produce a, “new situation, new impression, and experience: we produce meanings that extend, re-direct, dismiss, reinterpret, modify, or confirm—in a word, negotiate anew—the histories of meanings of which they are part” (Wenger, 1998, pp.52-53). From this perspective, Wenger argues that meaning neither exists in individuals nor in the world but in the dynamic relationship of living in the world.

The process of negotiating meaning occurs through the dual process of participation and reification (Wenger, 1998). Wenger defined participation as the process of taking part or sharing with others in some activity or enterprise. However, participation is not the equivalent to collaboration. Wenger argued participation, “involves all kinds of relations, conflictual as well as harmonious, intimate as well as political, competitive as well as cooperative” (p. 56). We see this kind of both conflictual and harmonious participation in educational settings where policy is appropriated. Wenger believes the transformative potential of an individual’s participation in a community affects both the participant and the community itself. Likewise policy stakeholders’ participation in a community is central to their process of negotiating the
meaning of literacy policies to transform their practice and their community. Wenger argues the ability—or inability—to shape communities is also central to the experience of participation (Wenger, 1998, p.57). Participation additionally cannot be turned off and on because it is a constituent of our identities. Teachers, for example, do not cease to be who they are when they go home at the end of a day. Rather their identities as teachers exist alongside other identities (e.g., mother, father, Christian, democrat, soldier etc.) people draw on to orchestrate their practices in various settings.

Participants also construct meaning in communities of practice through reification. Reification is the process of projecting our meanings into the world and perceiving them as existing in the world and having a reality of their own (Wenger, 1998). Through this projection we move from abstract to concrete representations of experiences. People engage in reification when they create tools to perform activities. The tools we use to reify—including historical records, poems, journals, etc.—change our participation in activity as well as the activity itself (Wenger, 1998). When abstract policies are made concrete through documents, reification occurs. But, through reification, participants can interact with policy in unforeseen ways. The ways policy stakeholders make meaning of policy for example can expand or constrain the intended meaning of the policy.

Wenger (1998) emphasizes that participation and reification are dualities rather than dichotomies. They are not opposites of each other the way something described as tacit is therefore not explicit. Participation and reification shape one another. According to Wenger, the negotiation of meaning through the interplay of participation and reification make people and things who and what they are. I adopted these notions of
participation and reification to more fully understand how participants in the policy process at, and surrounding, Maplewood made negotiated the meaning of literacy policies.

**Learning as dialogue.** Russian philosopher, Mikhail Bahktin (1981 & 1986) conceptualized learning as a dialogic process. This concept shaped my understanding of the policy process as one in which stakeholders appropriate policy. Mikhail Bahktin was a contemporary of Lev Vygotsky (1979). While there is no evidence the two ever met, they shared similar theoretical beliefs that learning, and the ways humans make meaning of their worlds, is fundamentally social, cultural, and historical. Bakhtin researched learning and meaning making through the study of speech. Bakhtin conceptualized speech as dialogic and the psyche as a social entity rather than removed from the social world. From Bahktin’s perspective, theorists such as Vygotsky, who concerned themselves with the way learners internalized knowledge and abilities, and who created dichotomies between social learning and the inner psyche, were misguided. Bakhtin departed from a theory of internalization as he conceptualized speech as a dialogic act.

Bakhtin (1986) argued speech is dialogic. To explain this dialogic process in speech, Bakhtin focused on the utterance as the unit of analysis. An utterance, according to Bakhtin, was a unit of speech determined by a change in speakers. He further defined the utterance by its necessity for a response. In so far as a single word or sentence elicited a response, it could be considered an utterance. According to Bakhtin the speaker’s expectancy of a response shaped the speakers communication and made speech dialogic. Bakhtin wrote:

The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes one’s own only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he
appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts. Serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own. (p. 77)

This dialogic nature of language causes the speaker to attend to the cultural world of the addressee. In this process, a speaker’s position and power, in relation to their addressee, greatly affects how they shape their utterance. Bakhtin argued that when we enter into dialogue with another we are aware that they are, “Shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents. The word, directed toward the object, enters dialogue” (p. 75). As we become aware of the cultural worlds of others we also become aware of the relative power of their discourses. Bakhtin described this power in terms of authoritative and personally persuasive discourses.

Bakhtin (1981) identified authoritative discourse as that which demands our unconditional allegiance. According to Bakhtin people can accept them totally or reject them totally. Teachers encounter these authoritative discourses regularly through literacy policies aimed at changing their practice. These discourses are often attached to political powers, institutions, or persons. When speakers encounter authoritative discourses and accept them, they become what Bakhtin called internally persuasive discourses. Bakhtin stated, “The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is not finite, it is open; in each new context that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever new ways to mean” (p 79). This potential to dialogize discourse in new ways makes it possible for people—and teachers in the case of schools—to liberate themselves from other’s authoritative discourses and emphasize one’s own voice.
Connections between these sociocultural theories and this study. The theories of Vygotsky (1979), Lave and Wenger (1991), Wenger (1998), and Bakhtin (1981 & 1986) help me understand learning and meaning making as a dynamic sociocultural-historical process in which meaning is co-constructed through social interaction and participation in communities. Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism particularly led me to develop an understanding of policy as practice and appropriation. Just as I accept that speech is dialogic, and must be populated with one’s own intentions, I also accept that policy stakeholders appropriate policy and populate them with their own intentions as well, thus making them their own. Therefore, understanding the meaning of policy to stakeholders at various levels requires understanding the intentions with which they populate a policy in relationship to the power structures that contextualize policy discourse.

This view led me to reject perspectives that policy stakeholders should, or could, passively comply with No Child Left Behind or other literacy policies. I accept that policy stakeholders’ appropriation of policy, or meaning making around literacy policies, occurs through practice as stakeholders’ increasingly are able to participate in social situated activities of their communities. I also accept that certain authoritative policy discourses, that demand stakeholders’ compliance to a variety of degrees depending on the power they have in the policy hierarchy, make it difficult for policy stakeholders to exercise agency as professionals and creates tension in the policy process.

Policy as Sociocultural Practice

Another belief foundational to this study is that policy is a sociocultural practice. Over the past century, educational policy, and policy more broadly, emerged as a way to
manage public spheres of life in rational and efficient ways (Sutton & Levinson, 2001). This managerial approach to policy is still dominant in today’s society. From a managerial perspective policy is often objectified as, “The ghost in the machine—the force which breathes life and purpose into the machinery of government and animates the otherwise dead hand of bureaucracy” (Shore & Wright, 1997, p. 5). According to Shore and Wright, this approach to government treats policy as, “A tool to regulate society from the top down through rewards and sanctions” (p. 5). As such, policy acts as a directive that dictates actions to be carried out to reach desired social outcomes. This managerial approach implies that policy unfolds in a linear fashion. Within this model, policy elites, including government officials and social scientists, often presume they can identify a pressing human problem, formulate a policy to address the problem, pass the policy down to be implemented by “less powerful” policy actors such as administrators and teachers, and later evaluate the policy’s success (Porter & Hicks, 1995 as cited in Sutton & Levinson, 2001). Reality shows us that policy does not unfold in such a neat, linear process. Sutton and Levinson (2001) and Shore and Wright (1997) suggest an alternative approach to understanding policy. They suggest:

1. Policy is a complex sociocultural practice.

2. Policy as practice accounts for the situated logic of activities in various settings.

3. Policy—both official (government sanctioned) and unofficial (personal policies)—produces, reproduces, and contests social norms and identities.

Sutton and Levinson (2001) asked what policy would look like if they, “re-conceptualized the notion of policy as a complex social practice, an ongoing process of normative cultural production constituted by diverse actors across diverse social and
institutional contexts?” (p. 1). Policy, they concluded, would look like a more dynamic and recursive process. There would be no need to categorize policy into stages of formulation and implementation. If we re-conceptualized policy as a sociocultural practice, we might see policies as, “Cultural texts, as classificatory devices with various meanings, as narratives that serve to justify or condemn the present, or as rhetorical devices and discursive formations that function to empower some and silence others” (Shore & Wright, 1997, p.7).

**Appropriation.** Because of policy’s sociocultural nature, educational anthropologists are more inclined to speak of policy appropriation rather than implementation. Appropriation acknowledges that “official legalized policies” are always negotiated in communities (Sutton & Levinson, 2001). More specifically, appropriation is the process by which, “Creative policy agents ‘take in’ elements of policy, thereby incorporating these discursive and institutional resources into their own schemes of interest, motivation and action” (p. 3). An emphasis on appropriation over implementation places culture at the center of policy researchers’ efforts to understand the complexities of the policy process. Implementation is inherent to the policy process rather than a separate process. Sutton and Levinson urge a more integrated approach to policy that recognizes its sociocultural nature. These newer concepts of policy and its co-construction among multiple policy stakeholders at multiple levels, builds on such a sociocultural framework.

Sutton and Levinson also viewed policy actors as cultural beings and thus examined values, beliefs, and identities as analytic tools to understand how policy actors make meaning of and appropriate policy. Building on Lave and Wenger’s (1991)
definition of practice, Sutton and Levinson (2001) argue practice, “has emerged as a way of accounting for the situated logic of activities across a wide array of contexts” (p. 3). Introducing the concept of practice to the examination of policy processes affirms the agency stakeholders exercise at every stage of the policy process. This agency pushes policy researchers to view policy as a cultural resource to be appropriated and contested in many ways (Sutton & Levinson, 2001). To understand how policy actors appropriate policy, it will help to distinguish between “official” and “unofficial” policies.

**Official and unofficial policies.** The studies in Sutton and Levinson (2001) and Shore and Wright (1997) address both official and unofficial policies. “Official” policies—policies legalized as government charters—are not given primacy in Sutton and Levinson’s view. Both official and unofficial policies shape society in powerful ways. Sutton and Levinson state that unofficial moral discourses—discourses that construct social norms and are negotiated based on local values and beliefs—regulate participation in communities in the absence of—and in the presence of—official policies. Sutton and Levinson and Shore and Wright acknowledge, however, the power legalized policy has to sanction and restrict certain administrative techniques, pedagogical practices, and other behaviors. Sutton and Levinson (2001) suggest researchers work to, “Link the discursive practices of normative control in any local-level community or institution with the discursive practices comprising large-scale structures of law and governance” (p. 3). Through this process researchers can better understand the relationship between policy and power and how policy can operate to reproduce social norms and identities.
**Power and Positionality Shape Identity as Practice**

Policy stakeholders’ meaning making related to literacy policy is intimately connected to issues of power, identity, positionality, and agency. For this study, I adopted the framework of Holland Lachiotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998), who present a theory of identity and agency that builds on Vygotsky, Bakhtin, and Lave and Wenger’s theories of learning, to conceptualize identity and agency. This research connects to my belief in learning as a sociocultural process within in communities of practice and supports my belief that identity is also constructed in sociocultural practice as follows:

1. Identity is learned through social practice
2. Identity—or a person’s sense of self—forms in relation to ways of inhabiting roles, positions, and cultural imaginaries that matter to them.
3. Identities are dialogically improvised in relation to cultural and social factors.
4. Identity is constructed in relation to one’s position in the world.
5. Identity is continuously negotiated in ‘spaces of authoring.’

Holland et al. (1998) differentiated between two prevalent ways of conceptualizing identity. The first is associated with the work of Erik Erikson who described identity primarily as one’s sense of oneself. According to Erikson, achieving a stable, consistent, and enduring identity is essential to healthy psychological processes. Identity from this perspective is seen as the essence of a person. It is universal and located within a person, rather than as a socioculturally constructed phenomenon. According to Holland et al., researchers adopting an Eriksonian approach to identity typically concern themselves with the processes and obstacles of creating an integrated, enduring and consistent identity.
The second way of conceptualizing identity is in line with the work of G.H. Mead, as discussed by Holland et al. (1998). Mead conceptualized identity in line with sociological and anthropological schools of thought in the American school of social psychology (Holland et al., 1998). Mead theorized identity as, “Dense relations between identities as aspects of self, and identities as social and cultural objects” (Holland et al., 1998). Researchers such as Holland et al. (1998) extended this theory to suggest that “people form senses of themselves—identities—in relation to ways of inhabiting roles, positions, and cultural imaginaries that matter to them (e.g., as a skater, a punk, a radical environmentalist)” (p. 103). Researchers taking a Meadian approach to identity typically concern themselves with, “The means by which individuals form senses of self—identities—in relation to roles, statuses, and cultural persona, and how these identities organize affect, motivation, action, and agency” (p. 104). This is the way I wish to conceptualize identity within this policy research. Vygotsky, Bakhtin, and Lave and Wenger’s conceptualization of learning and language as a sociocultural process supports this understanding of identity and agency. This is clearly demonstrated in the work of Holland et al. as they look at identity construction and agency in cultural or figured worlds.

The term figured worlds is used throughout Holland et al.’s (1998) work interchangeably with the term cultural worlds. By figured worlds, they mean “socially produced, cultural constructed activities” (p. 41). People historically develop figured worlds that, through traditions and rituals, give their lives meaning. In these social realms the positions, status and power of the people who participate in them matter greatly. Figured worlds are filled with figures and characters who operate within them in
various ways based on their perceptions of their own positions and statuses in relation to others. Individuals experience subjectification in these worlds as they appropriate and internalize their discourses through practice.

Holland et al. (1998) differentiate between culturalist and constructivist explanations of behavior, which influence scholars’ views on identity. Neither a culturalist explanation of behavior with “a social emphasis on cultural logics,” nor a constructivist explanation of behavior with an emphasis on “the calculus of social position by actors,” adequately explained the agency Holland et al. saw displayed in their case studies (Holland et al., 1998, p. 275). Rather, Holland et al. recognized a dialogic relationship between cultural and social influences that often led people to improvise new ways of being within their communities. Through acts of improvisation Holland et al. argued that people exercise agency. They chose to focus on these moments of improvisation in their research because they believed doing so provided opportunities to support people in their moves toward liberation within figured worlds. In the world of policy it is also neither the cultural logics of policy nor the social positions of policy actors alone that mediates participation in communities. Rather, moments of improvisation are key moments in the policy process as well and equally may support people in their moves to liberate themselves from oppressive, technocratic policy environments.

**Positionality.** The ways policy stakeholders are positioned in policy processes significantly impact the ways these stakeholders appropriate policy. Holland et al.’s statements on positionality provide a framework to understand how identity construction and positionality within the context of figured worlds is intimately tied to issues of
power, status, and privilege. Our positional identities, as Holland et al. (1998) describe them, define our place in the world in relation to others, but more importantly it involves, “A person’s apprehension of her social position in a lived world: that is, depending on the others present, of her greater or lesser access to spaces, activities, genres, and, through those genres, authoritative voices, or any voice at all” (pp. 127-128). We develop an awareness of our position within society across the life span, but as Holland et al. illustrate, our place in the world in relation to others particularly begins early in life.

Holland et al. provide a powerful illustration of how people become aware—beginning at a young age—of the positions afforded to them. They provide the illustration of a young Nepalese female child’s playfully reaching out to touch an ox drawn plow in the presence of her bother and other men. The figured world of women in Nepal, with its strict delineation between men and women’s worlds, prohibited the young girl from touching a plow—a semiotic mediating device that indexed the world of men. By touching the plow she claimed a position that belonged to men. As a result, the men ran out to scold and beat the child to remind her of her position in society. Through this experience the child learned she could not participate in the community in the same ways her brother could participate in the community (Holland et al. 1998). Her ability to act was restrained by her position, Nepalese culture, and the behaviors of others. This example shows that we often do not choose subject positions within figured worlds, but rather they are often imposed upon us. Such is the case in the figured worlds of many policy stakeholders. When policymakers decide who can and cannot create policy, and when policy documents such as NCLB focus on improving the quality of instruction teachers provide, these are issues related to positionality.
While learning our position in figured worlds can happen through explicit instructions—as in the case above—many of our understandings of how we are positioned in the world are learned implicitly through countless daily interactions with others in those worlds. As Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest in their theory of learning in practice, learning is often implicit rather than explicit. According to Holland et al. (1998) the social positions we learn become dispositions—or tendencies to act certain ways in certain contexts—“Through participation in, identification with, and development of expertise within the figured world” (p.136). Developing a disposition can mean either rejecting or taking up particular ways of acting in figured worlds. While many dispositions form over long periods of time largely through subconscious processes, these positions can be modified. As Holland et al. demonstrated, as people participate in figured worlds they may come to realize their own subordination in those worlds, fixate upon them, develop resentments, and actively reject negative positionings. As they do this, they author themselves in new ways and change the worlds in which they participate.

This process is helpful to understanding the ways teachers function in the figured worlds of schools and appropriate policy. This process is also useful for thinking about the ways teachers form their identities and the extent to which teachers recognize their subordination to powerful school system structures and the ways they negotiate their roles within those structures.

In terms of positionality, I realize that policy stakeholders’ power, position, and status matter as they dialogically construct their identities within figured worlds. As stakeholders attend to their addressees—other policy makers, parents, students,
administrators—the values, beliefs and power of others likely influences their response, or ways of constructing their identities within these worlds. At my research site, the school serves a predominantly African American population of children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Half of the teachers in the school are African American, while the other half of the teachers are White. Most teachers are female, but one assistant administrator is male. As a result, I believe issues of race, social class, gender and myriad other categories influenced stakeholders’ status, power, and position with the figured worlds as stakeholders interact across policy levels.

**Spaces of authoring.** Spaces of authoring are particularly significant for understanding the ways policy stakeholders have the potential to exercise agency in figured worlds. A sociocultural perspective of identity and agency recognizes that learning identity and agency—like other forms of learning—occurs in practice. Likewise, identities are formed in practice as well rather than passed down across generations. Holland et al. draw on Bakhtin’s (1981 & 1986) notion of dialogism to emphasize the ways identities are constructed as people are addressed and address others. Holland et al. contend that we *author* the world as we participate within it. Yet, in this authoring process we cannot creatively construct any identities we wish (Holland et al., 1998). We must engage in bricolage as we use the cultural materials around us to fashion ourselves in new and creative ways. Just as language is not our own, neither are our identities. And just as language exists in a contentious world of differing values and meanings, so do our identities. Holland et al. posit that people orchestrate multiple possible ways to identify themselves as they attend to the identities of others in their sociocultural contexts. They further argue that in order for our identities to be visible we
must, “cast ourselves in terms of the other” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 173). This framework is useful in this study to understand that while local stakeholders may have the will and potential to author themselves in new ways, they often cannot author themselves in any way they choose and have those identities recognized in their communities of practice (Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009). Policy stakeholders form their identities within existing power structures that often limit who policy stakeholders are allowed to be based on culturally appropriate practices.

As people take an authorial stance they can encounter old-timers within figured worlds who censure the way they, as new-comers, figure themselves within these worlds (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Holland et al. (1998) point out that while Vygotsky’s theory of learning explains many aspects of identity and agency development, Vygotsky’s conceptualization of the zpd failed to address the negative aspects of this process that occur through the censuring and extinction of behaviors by old-timers so new-comers will participate in the communities in acceptable ways. Holland et al. note that often people appropriated the particular identities, such as that of a good woman, “not because they [are] drawn into the image of a good woman as that they [are] ‘backing into’ it to avoid negative evaluations” (p. 219). Similarly, policy stakeholders can be backed into identities as well. According to Holland et al. overlooking these negative aspects of identity formation can lead scholars to overlook the, “social struggles and conflicts that drive aspects of inner speech” (p. 177). This is where Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism explains more in terms of identity than Vygotsky’s notion of social learning can make clear alone.
As a result of the complex dialogism involved in authoring oneself, authoring can take considerable time leaving one’s identities rarely settled (Holland et al., 1998). They write:

Sorting out and orchestrating voices is much more than sorting out neutral perspectives in some rationalists argument; the voices, after all, are associated with socially marked and ranked groups (“the in-crowd”, one’s sorority sisters) and even with particularly potent individuals (Mom, one’s brother, a hated classmate). (p. 183)

*Ranked groups* and potentially powerful individuals are also members of school communities. From policy designers’ perspectives ranked groups might include policy stakeholders who either comply with or resist official policies. Potentially powerful individuals might include principals, fellow teachers, students, parents/caregivers, literacy consultants, and administrators who conduct walk-throughs. As stakeholders struggle to define themselves in relationship to other community members, identity is always in negotiation. Yet, the negotiated nature of identities means people are not eternally imprisoned by one way of identifying oneself. Rather, there are openings in which people can remake the figured worlds in which they find themselves through acts of agency, including improvisation and controlling one’s behavior through the use of semiotic mediation.

Holland et al. (1998) demonstrated how individuals and groups orchestrated multiple voices within figured worlds to create alternate visions of themselves in these worlds. Nepalese woman created these alternate visions through song writing that spoke to the injustices Nepalese women experienced in their day-to-day living within a patriarchal society. During Tij festivals Holland et al. observed women “suspend the ‘natural’ world” where women were subordinate to men, to envision a world where
women were powerful and educated, equal to men, capable of achieving any feat, and deserving the same opportunities as men” (p.267). In these worlds, Nepalese women were able to act “as if” they were figured in alternative ways during festivals. In what Holland et al. called a space for “play”, the Tij festival allowed women to demonstrate agency and move their world in a direction toward more equitable gender relations and identities in Nepal. Similarly, figured worlds are complex sites in which policy stakeholders produce identities and exercise agency through improvisation. The identities of policy stakeholders, particularly teachers, while highly influenced by impositions of power, status, and position in society are not simply transmitted to them. Teachers can author themselves, remake their worlds, and their places within it.

Holland’s theoretical views speak to educational settings as we consider how policy stakeholders construct their identities dialogically within the figured worlds of administrators and teachers—a world where abstract policy becomes concrete as it is reified in practices and rituals that bring meaning to the policy process for stakeholders in particular settings. Within these figured worlds there are existing models of what it means to be a policy stakeholder acting in culturally acceptable ways. Culturally appropriate ways of acting vary from context to context based on stakeholders’ interactions with one another as they appropriate policy within communities of practice. Within these figured worlds there are a range of possible identities available to stakeholders, but it is likely that stakeholders in the figured world of policy have access to certain identities and not others as policies are passed down to be implemented in schools in specific ways.
Policy Research Examining Literacy Through A Sociocultural Lens: Two Approaches

With the understanding of learning, policy, meaning making and identity as complex sociocultural practices, I reviewed two research studies that specifically examined policy stakeholders’ meaning making related to literacy policies. I did this to further understand researchers’ different approaches to applying a sociocultural lens to the study of literacy policy. Two studies in particular illustrated ideologies that were central to this study: The first study examined a bottom-up approach to policy that privileged local perspectives. The second examined a co-construction approach that accessed multiple stakeholders’ perspectives at multiple levels in the policy process while focusing on issues of power and equity. By examining these two studies, I concluded that the current study would make a greater contribution to understanding of literacy policy in practice by not only examining literacy policy from a bottom up or top down approach, but by looking at the co-constructed nature of policy.

A sociocultural macro-level (bottom up) approach on policy research. Coburn (2001) researched the shifting logics around reading practices in California over a period of seven years. She took a historical approach to her research and worked closely with teachers in two schools, across two districts to understand the process by which teachers made meaning of circulating reading policies within their communities. Coburn used organizational sense-making theory and institutional theory to develop these understandings. She concluded that teachers made meaning of policy collectively rather than individually as they worked to construct shared meanings. While Coburn’s findings described the social and shared nature of teachers’ meaning making, I do not believe they sufficiently described the conflictual nature of meaning making and appropriation of
reading policies. Furthermore, focusing on meaning making among teachers—or even taking separate looks at the in-side (bottom-up) out and outside-in (top down) process of meaning making as Coburn did—did not describe the multi-directional process of meaning making across multiple policy levels and multiple policy stakeholders in relation to issues of power and politics in communities.

**A sociocultural co-construction perspective on policy research.** In contrast to Coburns’ study, Hubbard, Mehan and Stein (2006) examined the radical policy shifts in one San Diego school district over four years. They described these policy shifts as content-driven (in that they focused on literacy), centralized (in that major decisions originated at the district level), comprehensive (in that all schools in the district were expected to implement the policies), and fast paced (in that changes were made as soon as new leadership in the district took office). Within this policy context, the researchers tried to understand why a promising reform failed to materialize as expected by its designers or the public. Throughout their research, they sought to identify how policy actors at lower levels in the system changed policy, leaders’ views, and the context of reform. In this way they were able to capture the complex ways this policy unfolded in San Diego as policy actors co-constructed policy and the policy context in which they participated. This co-construction was most evident within what they termed *intersection encounters*, places where one set of policy stakeholders encountered others.

Hubbard et al. (1998) concluded that a policy’s success depended on how stakeholders interpreted and transformed a policy. They argued that policy cannot mandate what matters to local communities. Yet, their study also demonstrated that teachers feared administrators’ evaluation of their practice and the focus on doing a
policy “right” which severely hampered the ability to create dialogic policy environments. Based on these findings, Hubbard, Mehan, and Stein (2006) recommended that policy should be adapted to local circumstances; attend to technical, cultural, and political dimensions of school reform; build trust among key constituents and employ local knowledge to build trust; and that leadership should be prepared to build the capacity to support policy stakeholders’ engagement with policy over time with more capable peers. They further maintained that further on-the-ground studies of the multi-directional nature of policy processes could lead to a more complex, nuanced understanding of schools, districts, and the educational systems than can be developed by attending to micro-macro levels in isolation as has been common in policy research in past decades.

**Conclusion to Literature Review Grounding Theoretical Frame**

The review of literature presented to this point details key bodies of work that support my knowledge and therefore my belief system or the theoretically-informed framework that guides this study. Foundational to these beliefs is the notion that policy stakeholders socially reconstruct—that is, improvise—their practices in response to policy shifts. In this way, they exercise agency in the policy process. Thus, I entered this study assuming that changing participation in the everyday practices at Maplewood might necessarily lead to shifts in identity and that as those shifts occurred, policy stakeholders would claim multiple identities—some which could be contradictory. These bodies of literature also lead me to believe that teachers have the power to refuse identities policymakers’ impose upon them—although opportunities for refusal, as was the case with Nepalese women and the Tij festival—may be limited to particular contexts, such as
behind the closed doors of classrooms. In some cases, I believe that impositions of identity might come with the best intentions—as Holland describes in her reporting of old-timers who helped newcomers an Alcoholics Anonymous group see themselves in particular ways to help them quit drinking. Policy makers may believe that state standards, pacing guides, and prescriptive reading curricula support the work of new teachers. At other times impositions dehumanize people as we saw in the story of the young girl who touched the plow (Holland et al., 1998). Such is the case, when state standards, district pacing guides, and prescriptive literacy curricula shift teachers’ roles from that of professional to that of technician. In these cases, policy can impose negative identities on teachers. I see all of these issues as critical to this study.

**Review of Local, State, and National Literacy Policies Pertinent to This Study**

History plays a central role in the ways policy stakeholders make meaning of policy. As Bahktin’s (1981 & 1986) work suggests, our words—and our policies—are not our own. Stakeholders appropriate policies and identities as they draw on widely circulating models of what it means to be a particular people encountering policies in particular settings while in dialogue with other stakeholders.

Policies at the national, state and local level are significant because they reveal who significant stakeholders are in the multi-layered policy process and how they understand their relationships to one another in that process. Understanding the various policies also created a historical context in which I examined policy appropriation by stakeholders at those levels. Most importantly, reviewing policies at each level of the policy process revealed the overwhelming direction in which policy continues to flow—from the top down—in the current policy environment. The evidence of this
unidirectional flow of policy, from official levels in the policy hierarchy to local levels, reinforces the need for research that describes how stakeholders appropriate and dialogically, co-construct policy. It also reinforces the need to understand how researchers can begin to call for a policy environment that supports participation among stakeholders in that process.

Many literacy policy stakeholders—described in this study as national, state, and local administrators; and teachers—described reading as a gateway to learning. As such a gateway, policy makers invested considerable time developing literacy policies, outlining *best practices* in literacy instruction. Adopting technical-rational policy models—models that prescribe and mandate literacy reform and compliance from educators—policy makers at the national level historically pass down these policies—through federal, state, and district levels—to policy stakeholders lower in the policy hierarchy. They do so with the expectation that they will be implemented in schools like Maplewood. Policy makers anticipate students’ literacy performance will improve when stakeholders implement these policies as designed by policy officials. For nearly a decade, No Child Left Behind legislation has demonstrated both the power and the consequences of such a technical-rational model and its effect on stakeholders across policy levels (Coles, 2003; Garan, 2004 and 2007; Meir, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, Sizer, and Wood, 2004). Because this study centers on policy interpretation and appropriation at Maplewood School, it is important to review the specific policies that have the potential to impact education there beginning with policies derived from this very influential federal legislation. Those policies are reviewed in the following sections.
Federal Policy: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act and NCLB

In January of 2002, under the Bush administration, legislators reauthorized the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and renamed it the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 to reflect its goals. The chief purpose of this legislation was to ensure that by the year 2014, 100% of our nation’s children would be proficient readers by the third grade. Legislators across party lines embraced NCLB to provide all children—but particularly the disadvantage (sic)—with “a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, “Title 1 Statement of Purpose”). The architects of NCLB intended the act to increase students’ achievement and raise teacher quality. Although the designers of the policy did not intend to devalue students and teachers, many educational scholars and teachers have interpreted it as an oppressive policy. Educators and scholars have criticized NCLB for its emphasis on a one-size-fits-all, scientifically based approach to reading, its devaluing of children and teachers in schools, its emphasis on accountability through high-stakes standardized testing, its punitive measures when schools do not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) toward NCLB’s goals, and what some refer to as its hidden goal of privatizing schools (Coles, 2003; Garan, 2004 & 2007; Meir, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, Sizer, and Wood, 2004).

Federal policy makers designed NCLB’s with strict mandates for accountability. These mandates establish an accountability chain—similar to a food chain—in which policy administrators at the federal level enforce NCLB and hold states accountable for compliance with NCLB mandates. Administrators at the State Department of Education
then hold districts accountable to NCBL policies such as making AYP, and next district level administrators hold schools accountable for implementing district policies and programs with fidelity in hopes of making AYP. Finally, school administrators hold teachers accountable—teachers who ultimately end up being the objects of most policy moves to change teacher practice. This accountability chain makes issues of power and ideology particularly salient as policy stakeholders across these levels struggle to negotiate the meaning of literacy policies (Datnow & Park, 2009).

**History of NCLB.** The history of No Child Left Behind is embedded within a deeper history of struggle in the United States for educational equity. Touchstone moments in this historic struggle include the Brown v. Board of Education ruling that ordered public schools to desegregate, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that made it easier for courts to enforce desegregation, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 that provided necessary funds and resources to equip schools to provide a quality education to *all* students. Despite all these legislative changes, for children of many minority groups, and children living in poverty, quality remained an illusion, and the promise of ESEA remained unfulfilled, as gaps in achievement between minority and non-minority students increased (King, 2005).

In 2002, President Bush reauthorized the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and renamed it the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Civil rights leaders and politicians across party lines celebrated NCLB as a step to make good on the unfulfilled promises of ESEA and to—once again—provide an equitable education to all students (Meir, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, Sizer & Wood, 2004). The 10 titles of ESEA became core elements of NCLB described as “an act to close the achievement gap
with accountability, flexibility, and choice so no child is left behind” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, opening description of Act). The 10 acts of NCLB are intended to bear out this mission.

Each title of NCLB addresses a dimension of educational reform. These titles pledge to: improve the academic achievement of the disadvantaged (sic) (Title I), support the recruitment and training of high quality teachers and principals (Title II), provide language instruction for limited English proficiency and migrant students (Title III), create safe and drug free learning environments for students (Title IV), promote informed parental choice and innovative programs (Title V), ensure accountability and flexibility (Title VI), and provide a quality education to Indian (sic), Native Hawaiian, and Alaskan Natives (Title VII)5 (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, Description of Titles). While leaving no child behind is a noble goal, proponents and critics of the Act continue to debate its’ underlying assumptions about the purpose of education, how students learn, and what motivates change in schools.

The NCLB debate generalized in two short stories. When it comes to understanding NCLB, there are more than two sides to the story. Civil rights activists, politicians, educators, researchers, and many other policy stakeholders voice a spectrum of beliefs about the benefits and drawbacks of NCLB. However, as with many battles in education, policy stakeholders’ have drawn lines in the sand, chosen sides, and polarized the debate over NCLB policies. It is easier to understand the debate surrounding NCLB by weaving a story from the titles of the Act from both points of view.

5 Titles VIII and IX outline the impact aid programs and general provisions respectively and I do not address these specifically within this historical overview.
The story, told by the proponents of NCLB through its various titles, might go like this: Given that education is a human right, **all** students should receive an equitable, high-quality education. However, if this were happening vast gaps in achievement between minority and non-minority students would not exist. Schools can close these gaps with highly qualified teachers and principals, who use scientific, research-based teaching methods. Therefore, principals and teachers should be trained to use only scientific-research based practices to identify deficiencies in students, and remediate those deficiencies, to improve achievement particularly among disadvantaged (sic) minority groups. Student achievement should be measured frequently to ensure students are making *Adequate Yearly Progress* (AYP) toward a state’s measurable annual standards. To ensure that no child is left behind, all subgroups of children—including children with disabilities and limited English proficiency—should take state standardized tests and have their scores included in *Adequate Yearly Progress* data. To make sure all groups are improving, data should be aggregated to show when particular subgroups of students are not making progress toward NCLB goals. If any subgroup of students does not make *Adequate Yearly Progress*, the school as a whole should not make *Adequate Yearly Progress* and the entire school should be penalized. When schools do not make AYP for two consecutive years, state department officials should identify the school as “in need of improvement” and require it to notify parents of their right to choose to send their child(ren) to a school in the district making AYP. State Departments of Education should restructure schools failing to make AYP for five consecutive years by replacing existing administrators and teachers with highly qualified administrators and teachers.
who will be motivated to turn schools around because of the competition choice creates, thus leaving no child behind.

While I oversimplified a complex 600 plus page federal policy, this story provides a base of reference to understand the other side of the story as critics of NCLB tell it. The other side of the NCLB story might go like this: While policy designers and politicians sold NCLB as a means to ensure every child gets a high quality, equitable education, it was really a Trojan horse for those who want to challenge public education and privatize schools (Kohn, 2004). In order to move toward privatization, policy makers need citizens to believe public schools are failing. Therefore, policy makers manufacture failure through testing mandates that require all students—including students with disabilities and limited English proficiency—to take norm-referenced tests that, by nature of the test, ensure half the students who take the test will score below average (Garan, 2004). NCLB mandates then allow distant policy makers to identify the causes of the failure—in this case under qualified teachers and principals, and ineffective teaching methods—and provide cures in the form of scripted lessons based on “scientifically proven” teaching methods. However, these prescriptions dramatically narrow school curriculums and then unjustly punish schools not making AYP. Schools with the greatest diversity are at the greatest risk of not making AYP under NCLB because the failure of any one subgroup to make AYP means the entire school doesn’t make AYP (Garan, 2004 & Meir, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, Sizer & Wood, 2004). Logically, NCLB mandates will likely be met by, “well-funded districts with few students of Color or special needs” (p. 47). Ultimately, NCLB policies are not educational strategies but political strategies to bring about market-reform in schools. NCLB does not address inequalities in,
“household incomes, child poverty rate, health coverage, homeownership, or school spending” (Garan, 2004, p. 60). The result is many of the most vulnerable populations of students are left behind.

These two stories summarize the overall debate regarding NCLB mandates. At its core, this debate revolves around deeper issues of power and control in schools. These issues become even more personal as federal policy dictates teacher practice in the classroom. While educators have organized to resist these mandates, their efforts have been largely unsuccessful. Educators and researchers in the field of literacy argue NCLB’s control of teacher practice is greatest in regards to mandates on reading.

**Literacy policies under NCLB.** Educators have felt the ramifications of NCLB most deeply with regard to literacy instruction. Under the advisement of the National Reading Panel (NRP\(^6\)), policy makers crafted NCLB legislation to mandate scientifically based approaches to literacy instruction, particularly for Title I and Reading First schools\(^7\). Based on the panel’s meta-analysis of eligible scientific or experimental studies on reading, the panel determined reading growth was greatest with the use of skills-based, isolated phonics strategies (Garan, 2004). However, an independent research team re-analyzed the NRP’s meta-analysis and found the panel overstated and misrepresented its findings (Garan, 2004). Contrary to the NRP claim in its summary report that systematic phonics instruction improved students ability to read, the team concluded: “As federal policies are formulated around early literacy curricula and instruction, these findings indicate that phonics, as one aspect of the complex reading process, should not

\(^6\) A panel convened by the National Institute for Child Health and Development (NICHD) composed of experts in primarily in the field of psychology, but also in physics, medicine, curriculum and instruction, and classroom education.

\(^7\) Title I schools are those that qualify for Title I funding under NCLB based on students’ socioeconomic status. Reading First schools are those that participate in NCLB Reading Firsts professional development program which prepares teachers to use scientifically based reading strategies to teach students to read.
be over-emphasized” (as cited in Garan, 2004, p. 95). Nevertheless, the architects of NCLB cited the NRP findings to mandate the teaching of reading through systematic phonics instruction. Coincidentally, programs such as Open Court (Adams, 2002), which focus on synthetic phonics instruction and decodable texts (e.g., The fat cat sat on the mat), proliferated in schools following the introduction of NCLB. By many accounts, these programs narrowed the curriculum in a variety of ways. The cartoon in Figure 2.2 gets at the heart of the controversy. It also addresses a deeper issue with NCLB’s scientifically based reading methods, that is, how mandating SBRR is politically tied to government contracts with textbook companies, which profited greatly from the then president Bush’s Administration’s, endorsement of such methods. These textbook companies lobbied to have their resources adopted. Many of these companies funded the president’s campaign.

*Reading First Experts Decide*

![Cartoon image](image)

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*Reading First Scrutiny of Local Reading Plans: No Child Left Without Open Court*  
(“Reading First Experts Decide”, 2002)
Figure 2.2. This cartoon illustrates the political tension surrounding the NCLB literacy policies.

While proponents of *scientifically based reading research* programs claim that those programs will close the achievement gap, many educators feared that NCLB would leave *many* behind as schools strove to make *Adequate Yearly Progress* (AYP), which lead to a contentious discussion of the merits of the federal policy (Meir, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, Sizer & Wood, 2004).

**State Literacy Policies**

Since 2001, the State Department of Education (in the state in which this study is situated) has worked closely with the U.S. Department of Education to comply with NCLB mandates. This is evident in policy documents such as letters written between the office of the U.S. Department of Education and the office of the State Department of Education in the years after Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The correspondence between these offices indicates that while U.S. Education Secretary Paige commended the state’s “commitment to [hold] schools and districts accountable for the achievement of all students” (Paige, 2003, personal communication) the federal Department of Education continuously reviewed the state’s accountability plan to ensure our state’s compliance with NCLB mandates before approving its final version. Specifically, The state’s plan had to adhere to guidelines set by NCLB for determining *Adequate Yearly Progress* for all students even, for example, those with the most serious cognitive disabilities. When the State Department wrote to the Department of Education regarding the use of alternative assessments with these students, the U.S. Department of Education’s response came back as such:

> With regard to one issue in [the state’s] accountability plan, the secretary has exercised his authority to permit the orderly transition from requirements under
the Improving America’s School Act (IASA) to NCLB. [The state] proposed to include students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in its accountability system based on their performance on an alternative assessment that would hold those students to different achievement standards from those all other students are expected to meet. All students with disabilities must be included in a State’s accountability system. Moreover, 200.1 of the final Title I regulations requires all students be held to the same grade level achievement standards. In addition, 200.6(a)(2)(ii) of those regulations states that “[a]lternative assessments must yield results for the grade in which the student is enrolled.” (Hicock, 2003, personal communication)

The State Department of Education provided a transition year during which districts were required to comply with the new testing mandates. Beyond this year, the U.S. Department of Education expected full compliance with NCLB mandates and expressed their confidence that “the state will continue to advance its efforts to hold its schools and school districts accountable for the achievement of all students” (Hicock, 2003, personal communication). As a result, literacy proficiency in the state was determined based on whether all students, schools, and districts made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) by meeting or exceeding state measurable annual objectives in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics. Under this accountability system the State “expects all student subgroups, public schools, and LEA’s to reach proficiency by 2013-2014” (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, personal communication).

In the years between 2003 and 2008 many letters passed between the State Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Education amending the State Accountability Plan. In the summer of 2008, during the Bush Administration’s final months, the U.S. Department of Education sent a letter thanking the State for its hard work implementing NCLB, which they claimed:

Has led to real and meaningful improvements in student achievement. We have seen an increased attention on high expectations for every child, an improvement in student performance across the board and a decrease in achievement gaps. As
Secretary Spelling is fond of saying, ‘What gets measured, gets done.’ (Briggs, 2008, p.1, personal communication)

Despite increased testing in the state and the U.S. Department of Education’s claims that achievement gaps decreased over the next seven years as a result of stringent accountability measures, the state, along with The Greenbrier School District and 23 of the 27 elementary schools in the district, failed to make AYP on the 2008 State Report Card.

**Reading First (RF).** NCLB policy makers placed special emphasis on producing proficient readers by 2014. To meet this goal, the state implemented the federal Reading First program in 2004. Reading First was a federal grant program aligned with NCLB’s focus on *scientifically based reading research*. Its goal was to improve reading achievement in grades kindergarten-third so that all children would be reading at the appropriate grade level by providing funding to states meeting particular criteria. To meet these goals Reading First had three objectives:

- Enable and motivate teachers to understand and confidently implement *scientifically based reading research* (SBRR) reading programs, strategies, skills, and assessments in their classrooms.

- Support the change process from the "bottom up" by supporting collaboration and conversation at various levels to ensure the sustainability of this initiative.

- Establish and expand an increasing pool of teachers and administrators who are knowledgeable about, committed to using, and successful in teaching a comprehensive reading program based upon scientific research. (Greenbrier School District, n.d., n.p.)

To achieve these goals federal money funneled through the State Department of Education was used to develop programs organized and led by faculty members from the local state university and curriculum personnel at the State Department.

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8 This citation is not listed in the references to maintain district confidentiality.
was designed to replicate the State Reading Initiative (SRI), which was already in practice, (Stephens et al., 2011). Through this program, educators from around the state were trained over a period of three years to be literacy coaches who would work with study groups of teachers in their respective schools. The program was anchored in the belief that knowledgeable teachers produce achievement results. The literacy coaches met for monthly professional study, and over three years received up to 21 hours of graduate credit in literacy education. Federal guidelines required a focus on five components of reading instruction identified in the Report of the National Reading Panel as growing out of their review of quantitative (their designation for scientifically based) studies in reading: comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, phonics, and phonemic awareness. Despite NCLB’s emphasis on scientifically based reading research, often used to support isolated, skills-based phonics instruction, the State’s Reading First program instructors (faculty at the local university) examined the original studies analyzed by the panel to make the case that the teaching of phonics or any skill should never be in isolation from whole and authentic literacy engagements and as a part of a balanced reading program and developed the program to support literacy coaches’ understanding of literacy development as a holistic process.

**State Reading Initiative (SRI)**[^9]. The State Reading Initiative (SRI) existed prior to the Reading First (RF) program and continued after RF was initiated. Both programs followed the same model for the long-term education of literacy coaches who, in turn, worked with teachers in schools. Unlike RF, which was implemented using federal funds, SRI originated at the state level and was initiated when university faculty members

[^9]: The word “state” was substituted in the name of this initiative to maintain confidentiality.
developed the program through collaboration with the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). Participants worked together to meet the following goals of SRI:

- To enhance teacher/administrator knowledge about reading research, theory, and practice.
- To encourage reflective practice through continuous examination of beliefs in relation to practice.
- To explore with teachers/administrators the knowledge and the tools to assess students, to create appropriate contexts for them, and to instruct them in ways that nurture them as fluent, flexible, and engaged readers.
- To engage teachers/administrators in personal and collaborative inquiry into reading so that they may consider reading as a complex and strategic problem solving process.
- To assist in the development of strategies that can be used for continuous inquiry and the improvement of teaching practices.
- To create a network of teachers, principals, and consultants who have a shared knowledge base about the teaching and learning of reading.
- To develop structures within individual schools so that educators can engage in an independent and ongoing process of change.

To achieve these goals, SRI leaders supported teachers as they develop their understanding of literacy research and practices:

To expertly plan for the implementation of effective instructional strategies; evaluate materials and methods; and to articulate to colleagues, parents, administrators, and the community. These accomplished teachers use their expertise to make informed decisions that ensure all children have the appropriate instruction, opportunity, and support they need to become successful readers and writers. (SDE website, 2009, n.p.)

SRI leaders positioned teachers/administrators as professionals capable of developing the knowledge necessary to make judgments about children as readers and writers without being required to follow a scripted program.

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10 This website is not included in the references to maintain state confidentiality.
**Reading Recovery.** Reading Recovery is based on the research of Marie Clay (1993) and supports readers as they develop a broad repertoire of reading strategies. While reading recovery has been used to successfully intervene in students’ reading process (Reading Recovery, 2012), a vocal minority of critics, such as Louisa Moats (2007), have criticized Reading Recovery for not being grounded in what they define as *scientifically based research.* The Reading Recovery Council of North America (2012) responded to these claims through the work of educators and scholars who take a strategy-based approach to literacy (Allington, 2007). Reading Recovery operates within the state to reduce the numbers of first graders who have extreme difficulty learning to read and write (SDE website, 2009, n.p.). Reading Recovery teachers offer one-to-one support in 30-minute sessions, over a 12-20 week period, to students who need assistance as a supplement to quality classroom teaching, building from a strength-based perspective. Teachers offer support to students until they are reading within the average range of their classmates and then their lessons are discontinued (Clay, 1993). This program has been successful in helping struggling readers become proficient readers. However, the pressure to use federally-sanctioned reading programs, in addition to school budgets limiting funds to cover the costs of Reading Recovery’s one-to-one model of teacher/student intervention, has led state and district administrators to discontinue Reading Recovery programs in many schools.

**State Writing Project.** Various local writing projects existed in the state in association with the National Writing Project—a project begun in 1974 at the University of California, Berkeley (NWP, 2013). The National Writing Project has served as one of the most successful professional networks to support writers and teachers of writers.
(Wood & Lieberman, 2000). Two programs emerged out of the National Writing Project in the state including the State Writing Project (SWP) and the Local Writing Project to support the development of writers in all kindergarten-twelfth classrooms. The SWP’s goals, as a part of the NWP, are:

- to improve student writing and learning in kindergarten-twelfth classrooms
- to extend the uses of writing in all disciplines
- to provide schools, colleges, and universities with an effective professional development model
- to identify, celebrate, and enhance the professional role of successful classroom teachers
- to extend the services offered by NWP sites to the state’s counties without current service

(“The Local Writing Project”, 2009).12

Despite the existence of such writing projects, NCLB literacy policies that focus on reading continue to take priority over such writing projects in the state and many school districts. However, literacy consultants spend time demonstrating narrative and expository writing skills needed to perform well on standardized writing tests.

**Greenbrier School District Policies and Practices**

The school that was the focus of this study was situated within Greenbrier School District. The Greenbrier School District served a diverse urban community within the city of Coronado Springs. Many of the 29 elementary schools within the district served children from lower socioeconomic communities and qualify as Title I schools. For the 2009-2010 school year eleven of the district’s 29 schools were classified as Title I schools. No Child Left Behind’s influence in The Greenbrier School District was most

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11 The names of these writing projects are pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.
12 This citation is not included in the reference section to maintain state confidentiality
evident through its Title I programs. The district described the goals of Title I schools on its website as follows:

The goals of Title I are to help students achieve academic success in Reading/Language Arts and Mathematics; increase student performance in high poverty schools through school-wide reform; build teacher capacity through quality professional development; and enhance parents' abilities to help their children succeed through quality parental involvement activities. (Greenbrier School District, 2009)

The Greenbrier School District offered two types of programs for Title I schools, Readiness programs and Success programs. According to the district, “Readiness programs aimed to meet the needs of the earliest learners and create success in school from the very beginning” (“Title I Readiness”, para. 1). Title one Readiness programs in The Greenbrier School District included the Parent-Child Home Program (a research based, home-based parenting and family literacy program for 16-month-2-year-olds), Early Childhood Assistance Team (a team to identify 4-year-old children who need additional support to enhance readiness skills), Parent Educators (Educators who provide strategies to parents to use when reading to their child, and build relationships with families to assure active participation in their child’s school—a Title I requirement), Books and Bites, and pre-kindergarten centers (serving 880 four year olds in 44 pre-kindergarten centers across The Greenbrier School District).

Success programs in The Greenbrier School District provided continued support to older students as they progressed through school. These programs included: Family Book Club (provided families with opportunities to read and discuss books), Parent Advisory Council (PAC), SuccessMaker at Home Laptop Program (assisted schools in meeting Adequate Yearly Progress each year and having all students score Proficient by 2014 as mandated by "No Child Left Behind," by constantly monitoring each student’s
performance in ELA and Mathematics), and the Learning Adventure Bus or LAB (a mobile computer lab and reading center that travels into Title I communities as a resource for parents and children). The district terminated the Reading Recovery program in 2007.

In addition to these Title I programs in the district, the district’s overall curriculum reflected NCLB’s philosophy of comprehensive, school-wide reform. The department of curriculum and instruction provided leadership in “establishing a comprehensive system that supports district and school personnel in implementing the district's curricular and instructional initiatives.” This focus on a comprehensive system and implementation reflected the larger national push for comprehensive reform through a dissemination of policy from higher levels to lower levels that impacted entire states, districts, and schools.

The Greenbrier School District combined NCLB policies with its Plan-Do-Check-Act approach to continuous improvement in its schools, which was considered a scientifically proven method of improvement. This model originated from “total quality management” (Bridges, n.d., p. 5) practices within the manufacturing sector. As a business model, its underlying premise was that productivity improves as variability decreases. This philosophy supported a linear, technocratic approach to the policy process. According to the district, Plan-Do- Check-Act provided school and teachers tools to:

1. Plan- Identify school-wide, grade level, and classroom deficiencies; gather the data; and analyze the cause.
2. Do – Try out an improvement plan.
3. Check- Check the improvement plan.
4. Act- Determine interventions and modify improvement plan

(Bridges, n.d., p. 5-6)

The district asserts that the PDCA process will help to ensure no child is left behind in The Greenbrier School District.

Just as the U.S Department of Education held the State Department of Education accountable for student performance, and the state held school districts accountable, likewise the Greenbrier School District held individual schools accountable for making Adequate Yearly Progress through the implementation of national, state, and district literacy policies.

**Literacy Policies at Maplewood Elementary School**

Much of literacy policy at Maplewood School was shaped by the larger NCLB mandates and ideologies. The most apparent way that NCLB shaped policy at Maplewood was through accountability mandates, testing, and its Title I status. Test scores were posted on the walls as reminders to teachers that making Adequate Yearly Progress was a primary goal in the school, district, and state. For the past two years Maplewood has met this goal. It was one of only four of the 29 elementary schools in the district to do make AYP for the 2008-2009 school year. More diverse schools on the other hand had a higher probability that a single subgroup would keep the school from making AYP. NCLB required districts to offer parents of students in Title I schools that did not made AYP the choice to transfer to a higher ranked school. Maplewood was a school into which students could transfer if their school was not making AYP. Twelve students transferred from lower ranked schools into Maplewood for the 2009-2010 school year. According to Ms. Berling, some policy stakeholders at Maplewood perceive the
influx of students from schools not making AYP as a challenge to their school’s ability to maintain its existing levels of achievement.

Maplewood was also directly tied to NCLB as a Title I school. Maplewood received funding through Title I to support programs such as SuccessMaker, the Books and Bites Readiness Program, and the programs that sent books home with students. Maplewood’s Title I status fluctuated from year to year. It was renamed a Title I school for the 2009-2010 school year after not being labeled as such the previous year. Schools qualify for Title I funding based on socioeconomic criteria determined by the number of students receiving free or reduced lunches. As a Title I school, Maplewood received additional funding for school-wide programs. It also received additional visits by literacy and math consultants who, at the time of this study, supported and monitored teaching practices to ensure that teachers implemented the district’s non-negotiable literacy practices. Curriculum audits, locally known as walk-throughs, served as a means to, “inspect what [they] expect” from teacher practices (Bridges, 2009, p.49). Curriculum audits involved district administrators visiting teachers’ classrooms to observe their teaching practice. Evaluators used a curriculum audit evaluation form to notate areas of proficiency and areas for improvement. Curriculum audits were announced and took place several times a year.

The district’s strategic plan communicated and supported the district’s literacy policies. The district’s Strategic Plan Framework for 2008-2013 listed its first objective as: “Student’s will meet their optimum literacy potential” (Greenbrier School District, 2009, n.p.). In line with that objective, the district’s professional development focus for the 2009-2010 school year was Literacy across the Curriculum. To reflect their
understanding of literacy across the curriculum, teachers at Maplewood created Tri-fold displays of ways they included literacy within content areas. These displays sat prominently at the entrance of the school. At Maplewood, administrators and teachers historically worked to implement district policies while they simultaneously worked to exercise agency and appropriate these policies in ways that best suit the needs within their communities.

**Conclusion to Chapter Two**

The design of this study was grounded in understandings and ideologies, conflicts and complexities reflected in this chapter. The theoretical framework and review of literature also helped me clarify the role I hoped my study would play in the field of educational policy by emphasizing the dialogic, co-constructed nature of the policy process among stakeholders at multiple levels, as well as the underlying power structures that shape that process (Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein, 2006). Research with this focus helps me understand that attending to the dialogic nature of policy construction and appropriation is critical to understanding how stakeholders make sense of and appropriate policy (Bahktin, 1984 & 1987), an important cornerstone of my own research.

At the same time, while Hubbard, Mehan, and Stein’s (2006) research addressed both the dialogical and conflictual nature of policy, my goal was not (as was theirs) to understand why policies fail to be implemented as intended by policy makers. In fact, I find this goal problematic, as it seems to be the same goal of policy researchers taking a more technocratic top-down approach to the study policy implementation (Sutton & Levinson, 1998). I did not aim to make suggestions about how policy makers might increase *fidelity of implementation* of policy. Rather, I was interested in providing
insights about the democratic elements, or the lack of those elements, in the policy process for all stakeholders. I did so guided by the understanding that meaning-making is a dialogic, co-constructed, and, therefore, inherently sociocultural process intimately connected to issues of power, identity, and agency.

Research that uncovers power structures, and the often conflictual nature of this dialogic process, is useful in helping me gain insights about what happens when stakeholders change or attempt to change the direction in which policy flows. For example, the woman in Holland et al.’s (1998) research of Nepalese females who could not touch a plow because it indexed the world of men demonstrates that groups in society are often backed into subject positions that constrain who they can be and how they can exercise agency in particular settings. Likewise, stakeholders higher in the policy hierarchy can back other stakeholders into subject positions from which they cannot easily change the direction of policy flow; at least not while keeping their jobs and remaining within their communities. Nevertheless, policy stakeholders—like Nepalese women who author themselves in new ways through liberating song and dance (Holland et al., 1998)—can also find ways to author themselves in more powerful ways and exercise agency in the policy process. The extent to which one can author oneself in settings depends on the cast of policy players present in any given setting and their relative power to one another. In other words, while policy is a multi-direction process, the flow of policies in each direction is not always equal. The dominant policy model is still one in which policy is passed down from higher levels in the policy hierarchy to lower levels. This reality reinforced the need to study policy as a sociocultural process to understand how stakeholders make meaning of policy and how those meanings shape the
ways stakeholders appropriate policy. It also reinforced the importance of presenting alternative policy models based on participatory democracy in which all stakeholders shape official policy. This study was developed to inform that process.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To learn more about the dialogic process of policy appropriation surrounding literacy instruction at one elementary school, I conducted a 12-month qualitative study that asked: (a) How do six policy stakeholders at one elementary school—four classroom teachers, one administrator, and one reading teacher—make meaning of literacy policies? (b) How do these stakeholders’ understandings shape the appropriation of these policies in their day-to-day literacy practices? and (c) How does the meaning-making of other stakeholders—district, state, and federal policy-makers—intersect with and inform the appropriation of policy by the six focal stakeholders? In asking these questions I hoped to meet the goals of: (a) contextualizing my study within the larger, historical policy environment; (b) understanding local policy stakeholders’ lived experience with policy at Maplewood; and (c) understanding the dialogic, co-constructed nature of policy among stakeholders at multiple levels in the policy process. I adopted a qualitative design to answer these questions and meet these goals.

In this chapter, I discuss the methods I used to explore my research questions. To do this, I begin by describing my adoption of basic tenets of ethnography and critical ethnography followed by a detailed articulation of the research design including discussions of the researcher/participant relationship and elements of methodological
ethics such as: building rapport, reciprocity, subjectivity, positionality, power, and consent.

**Methodological Stance: Making a Case for Qualitative Methodology**

To pursue my research goals, I designed a qualitative study that was multi-leveled in that it sought to gather data from multiple stakeholders (i.e., administrators, literacy consultants, teachers) at multiple levels in the policy process (e.g., national, state, and local levels) (Figure 3.1). Policy researchers have suggested that questions regarding policy should be explored through multi-sited ethnography to adequately describe the complexity of the process (Shore & Wright, 1997 & Sutton & Levinson, 2001). This multi-leveled approach to data collection and analysis allowed me to develop a thick description (Gertz, 1973) of the policy process—a description that is characteristic of qualitative studies.

![Figure 3.1. The multiple levels of policy impacting teacher practice at Maplewood Elementary School.](image)

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I chose qualitative methodologies to construct and carry out this study because at the heart of qualitative research is a researcher’s desire to understand the “complexity of social interactions as expressed in daily life and the meanings the participants themselves attribute to these interactions” (Marshal & Rossman, p. 2, 1998) and it was just such complexities that I sought to understand. In recent decades, positivist approaches—defined by an assumption of researcher objectivity, pre-determined problems, controlled variables and experiences, ex post facto data analysis and writing—have dominated policy research. Largely tied to efforts to manage what some policy makers see as a linear policy process, these studies have failed to describe policy as a complex sociocultural practice in which policy is appropriated in various social settings for a variety of reasons (Sutton & Levinson, 2001).

A sociocultural approach to policy research is by definition post-positivist in that it cannot be linear or one-dimensional. It requires qualitative methods that are recursive and that support researchers in examining policy-in-practice as it is lived and experienced in day-to-day life (Sutton & Levinson, 2001). Using qualitative methods, researchers recognize their subjectivity and how it influences data collection and analysis. Qualitative researchers invite participants to help identify problems and questions. Researchers also analyze data frequently so that new questions can be identified and used to guide the researcher toward more accurate interpretations. Through the use of respectful methods, qualitative researchers are responsible for upholding the dignity and humanity of participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2001). The use of multiple methods of data collection and analysis, along with member checking and negative case analysis, brings rigor to the research process and trustworthiness to the claims researchers make in
their studies (Marshall & Rossman, 1998). This study embraced those characteristics of qualitative research as I adopted naturalistic methods, collected data in the field rather than a laboratory, engaged in a recursive process of data collection and analysis, and used multiple methods (e.g., participant observation, interviews, fields notes, recordings, transcriptions etc.) to collect and analyze that data. I strived to be ethical in this study as I built rapport with participants and used triangulation and member checking to ensure the patterns I constructed from my data accurately represented the experiences of those participants.

**Critical Ethnography**

Within the broader range of qualitative methodologies, this study was grounded in basic tenets of critical ethnography. At its core, ethnography is the study of a culture—ways of thinking, believing and participating in particular communities, social groups and organization in acceptable ways (Gertz, 1973). Ethnographers work to interpret culture by understanding it from insiders’ points of views while recognizing that researchers’ subjectivities and biases effect their interpretations. The work is naturalistic in that ethnographers seek to understand the lived experiences of participants in settings such as homes, schools, and communities. Ethnography becomes critical when data are used to examine existing power structures and to give voice to those previously or traditionally silenced (Gertz, 1973). This study has those characteristics through its focus on participants’ perspectives or interpretations and my focus on their participation and interactions across a range of communities. I committed myself to the tenets of critical ethnography by attending to the power structures that worked to order behavior through official policy. I also attended to the ways previously silenced stakeholders, namely
teachers, experienced policy environments as I worked to provide a platform for the official policy stakeholders and the larger community to hear their voices.

**Contexts**

As I developed this study, I acknowledged policy researchers’ call for multi-leveled and multi-sited policy ethnographies to describe the complex sociocultural nature of policy as it is lived and experienced in the world (Shore & Wright, 1997; Sutton & Levinson, 2001). Marcus (1995) and Candea (2007) point out that the world is increasingly connected and seamless. In an effort to understand this world more fully, Marcus suggested a more compatible research approach through multi-sited ethnography. Candea shares the belief that any local context is always intrinsically multi-sited, but raises the question, “Is there not, lurking in the shadows of multi-sitedness, a strange hope that once we have burst out of our field-sites, we can conquer a seamless world?” (p.174). As I developed this study, I adopted the view that I could not know the world of literacy policy in its totality and that, in the context of a study such as this, it was not possible to study all levels of policy-making with the same intensity (Marcus, 1995). Even within multi-*sited* research there remains an unexamined *site* which is a cut from the larger seamless tapestry (Candea, 2007). In this study, my primary site was Maplewood Elementary School. To understand literacy policy impacting Maplewood Elementary School, I collected data from other sites as necessary. In particular, I gathered data from federal level policy documents, state department professional development sessions, an interview with state department personnel, district level policy documents, and school and district level interviews.
Maplewood Elementary School

While I examined some aspects of policy-making across levels (district, state, and federal), I focused most of my data collection on meaning-making processes at the school level and cut from the larger tapestry one school in particular, Maplewood. At that school, while I collected data in faculty meetings and other large group sessions, my focus was on the experiences of four teachers, one administrator, and a reading teacher. I examined policy-making at the district, state and federal levels to provide an essential backdrop, but I focused my research on this site, Maplewood Elementary School.

By following the relationships among policy stakeholders at Maplewood in relation to the moves and views of off-site policy stakeholders, I came to understand how participants dialogically co-constructed meaning of literacy policies. Through listening to dialogue of participants at Maplewood School, I learned about how they addressed issues of power that supported or constrained their ability to participate fully in policy decisions. For example, I learned about the extent to which stakeholders were able to exercise agency to make professional decisions when those decisions were contrary to official policies. I learned about processes used by stakeholders to change the direction policy flows and influence higher levels in the policy hierarchy. Spending extended time at Maplewood school allowed me to bring these voices into policy discussion.

Gaining access. My relationship with policy stakeholders at Maplewood began in the fall of 2007. At that time I began teaching an undergraduate literacy methods course on-site at the school. Over the course of a year at Maplewood, I developed an interest in the policy changes related to the literacy teaching I observed in this setting. As I discussed my research interests with the principal, Ms. Johnson, she invited me to
conduct my research at the school. The accessibility of Maplewood, and the rich policy processes related to literacy that were unfolding in the school and district in relation to federal and state literacy policy, made this a favorable site for my study. I continued to negotiate access with individual policy stakeholders as I conducted interviews, arranged classroom observations, and attended various meetings across policy levels. I believe that the relationship I developed with teachers and administrators supported my ability to gain access to many policy sites beyond Maplewood.

**Site demographics.** Maplewood is an urban school centrally located in a mid-sized southeastern city. The school’s 2008-2009 vital statistics report indicated the student body was made up of 287 students in pre-k through fifth grade. Of these 287 students, the school identified 84% as Black, 7% as White, and 8% as Other. The school identified 84.4 % of its students as above standard achievement on English Language Arts (ELA) and identified 77.8% of its students as above standard achievement on Mathematics on the end of the year state achievement test. Maplewood identified 87.5% of students as recipients of free or reduced lunches. This factor led many policy stakeholders in this study to view Maplewood as a *high-need* school, and yet as achievement data above shows, Maplewood challenged the national pattern of students of Color from low wealth neighborhoods performing poorly on standardized tests. Maplewood actually made *Adequate Yearly Progress* (AYP) for the past two years and was among the highest performing elementary schools in the district, based on its students’ performance on standardized tests, during this study. Nevertheless, Maplewood was the object of many policies mandated to improve academic achievement, particularly in the area of literacy. See Table 3.1 for an overview of Maplewood statistics.
Table 3.1: Overview of Maplewood Demographics, 2008-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>The Greenbrier School District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student race/ethnicity</td>
<td>84% Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7% White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8% Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of students who qualify for free/reduced price lunch</td>
<td>87.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Ranked at “Above Standard” on Achievement tests in:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Arts</td>
<td>84.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Index</td>
<td>97.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Below Average)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current reform efforts</td>
<td>Title I under NCLB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Books and Bites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literacy Intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literature-based approach to reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phonics Based Literacy Packs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009-2010 Literacy Across the Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of reform efforts</td>
<td>NCLB since 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Off and on Title I status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literacy Intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High Scope Canceled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Explicit Instruction Introduced in K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading Recovery Terminated in District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phonics Based Literacy Packs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AYP Status</td>
<td>Made AYP past two years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants: Policy stakeholders

During the three years I worked with teachers and university students at Maplewood, I identified several potentially significant policy stakeholders within the school. These stakeholders were: the principal, Ms. Johnson; the reading teacher, Ms. Berling; and four classroom teachers, Ms. Herndon (kindergarten), Ms. Jefferson (kindergarten and first), Ms. Brooks (first) and Ms. Brown (second). A description of each participant and my rationale for her inclusion is explained in each section below.

Additional participants from the state and district levels include Ms. Williams, the state early childhood literacy education associate, Dr. Bridges, the district Deputy Superintendent of Education, and Ms. Lilley, the district early childhood education and Response to Intervention coordinator.

The Principal

Ms. Johnson was an African American female who, at the time of the study, had been principal of Maplewood Elementary six for years. Ms. Johnson was a graduate of Columbia University. As the primary gatekeeper in the Maplewood community, she exercised her right to restrict or grant access to outsiders who wanted to enter the school. I gained access to the school as an instructor for a university course I wanted to teach on-site at the school. Ms. Johnson granted me access to the school and its students while I taught courses there for three years. During that time, rapport seemed to be built with Ms. Johnson naturally as we often engaged in talks about literacy policy changes in the school. As we talked, Ms. Johnson shared concerns about teacher preparedness and student achievement, particularly maintaining the schools’/students’ ability to make AYP. Ms. Johnson worked to address these concerns in many ways, one of which was to
work to reclassify Maplewood as a Title I school to receive increased funding and literacy consultants. During one such conversation in Ms. Johnson’s office, I expressed a desire to study the dynamic policy environment at Maplewood and she welcomed me into the community explaining that Maplewood’s “doors are open” to me. She reassured me that she welcomed a study of policy to help her understand the ways stakeholders struggled to appropriate policy in the school.

From my initial observations, it seemed that Ms. Johnson made key policy decisions for the school (e.g., adopted and terminated policies and programs). As an important policy actor who initiated many of the policy shifts in the school, it was important to interview Ms. Johnson regarding her rationales for accepting and rejecting literacy policies at Maplewood and what these policies meant to her as a principal. Understanding the meaning of literacy policies from the principal’s perspective helped me identify and think about the possible significance of complementary or contrary meanings of literacy policies among other policy stakeholders. Understanding policy from Ms. Johnson’s perspective also informed my understanding of how stakeholders responded to one another dialogically to co-construct policy at Maplewood.

**The Reading Teacher**

The reading teacher at Maplewood, Ms. Berling, a White, Female, worked closely with Ms. Johnson to enact literacy policy at the school. Ms. Berling previously had worked with Ms. Johnson at another school within the district. Upon Ms. Johnson’s move to Maplewood, she invited Ms. Berling to join the staff. Ms. Berling’s job in the school was to attend monthly reading teacher meetings, provide reading interventions to
students at Maplewood Elementary School, and provide in-school professional development to teachers.

Ms. Berling and I first met at a Spring Conference for Literacy Leaders as she was assuming her role as the new reading teacher at Maplewood. Mrs. Berling attended district level reading teacher meetings and worked closely with teachers in kindergarten through second grades to support students’ literacy development. These factors made Mrs. Berling an important literacy policy stakeholder and participant in this study.

The Teachers

For this study, I focused on four particular classroom teachers and how they made meaning of literacy policies. I chose these teachers because I had already built strong relationships with them while teaching university courses onsite at Maplewood. I supervised student teachers and my university students partnered with students in their kindergarten through second grade classrooms. These relationships made them the best choices as participants in this study since I spent considerable time in their classrooms and knew their literacy routines and practices.

While I interviewed other teachers in the school to understand the literacy policies that impacted their practice and how they made sense of those policies, I spent a week in each focus teacher’s classroom to observe how they appropriated policy in their day-to-day routines. My observations allowed me to contextualize the experiences teachers shared during interviews and helped me better understand their contributions and reactions to literacy messages communicated through faculty, team, and professional development meetings. For example, classroom observations contextualized teachers’ descriptions of curriculum audits, or walk-throughs as teachers referred to them. District
administrators and literacy consultants often walked-through teachers’ classrooms to make sure there was a supportive literacy environment that met the district’s non-negotiable literacy guidelines (e.g., Alphabet, weekly calendar, other print on walls). My observations in teachers’ classrooms allowed me to see the literacy environment each teacher created and how teachers perceived district policies such as walk-throughs or how they interpreted non-negotiable literacy practices. Teachers’ perspectives on literacy policies like walk-throughs in the school were especially important, as teachers were direct objects of literacy policy. Understanding the meaning of literacy policies from teachers’ perspectives set a foundation for understanding how that meaning influenced the ways teachers appropriated literacy policies in their day-to-day classroom practices. This weekly time in classrooms also gave me opportunities to follow-up with teachers through member checks during the time I was analyzing data.

**Ms. Jefferson (kindergarten and first grade).** I met Ms. Jefferson—an African American, female teacher—for the first time when I taught an undergraduate course on-site at Maplewood. Ms. Jefferson sat in on several classes I taught to observe literacy strategies I used with her children as they worked alongside their undergraduate literacy buddies. During the fall of 2009, I worked more closely with Ms. Jefferson when she assumed the role of a coaching teacher for an intern I supervised. Ms. Jefferson expressed that the school’s Title I status changed from year-to-year and this meant she frequently had to alter her practices as a teacher to keep up with those changes. The district required kindergarten teachers to use district pacing charts and commercial reading programs such as *Breakthrough to Literacy*. Shortly before the onset of this study, Maplewood moved from a learn-through-play model to a direct instruction model within the kindergarten
grades. On one visit, I noticed the classroom was stocked with Scott Foresman social studies workbooks. When I asked the principal about the workbooks she said they began using workbooks when the school’s policy mandated direct instruction to address achievement issues in the lower grades. These shifts in policy in Ms. Jefferson’s kindergarten classroom, during the first six months of this study, led me to ask her to participate in this study. The last six months of the study, the principal moved Ms. Jefferson to first grade where she continued to negotiate her practice. She agreed to participate and to share her experiences and perspectives.

Ms. Herndon (kindergarten). Mrs. Herndon—a White, female, kindergarten teacher—made up, along with Ms. Jefferson, the two-teacher kindergarten team at the beginning of this study. Later in the study, Ms. Jefferson was moved to first grade. I became acquainted with Ms. Herndon when she assumed the role of a coaching teacher for an intern I supervised during fall of 2009. As in Ms. Jefferson’s class, the district expected pacing guides and scripted lessons to guide instruction in Ms. Herndon’s classroom. She expressed that the frequent policy changes made it difficult to keep up with expectations in the school. I invited Ms. Herndon to share her experiences regarding literacy policy with me and she agreed to participate in this study.

Ms. Brooks (first grade). Ms. Brooks joined this study two months into my data collection after her predecessor resigned because of poor health. Ms. Brooks, an African American teacher who had taught for nine years before coming to Maplewood from another district in the state, brought a developing understanding of literacy centers and balanced literacy she garnered from her experience in a Reading First school. Ms. Brooks communicated to students her belief that she was their teacher, not their friend, and their
job in the classroom was to learn and to do what she instructed them to do. It was Ms. Brooks’ background as a young girl growing up in a loving household, with her hard working mother, as she described her, but also growing up with limited financial resources, that led her to impress upon her students the importance of an education—an education that she believed was essential to change their life trajectories, about which she often expressed concern.

**Ms. Brown (second grade).** Ms. Brown—an African American, female—was a second grade teacher during the time of this study. I met Ms. Brown my first year at Maplewood when pairing my undergraduate students with students in her class as reading buddies. Ms. Brown told me on several occasions she was overwhelmed by the multiple policy changes in the school. I approached her during the spring of 2009 to ask if she would participate in this study. She agreed to participate and invited me to observe in her classroom. She was interested in learning more about various literacy practices to support readers and writers.

**Dr. Bridges: The District Deputy Superintendent of Education**

The Greenbrier School District hired a new District Superintendent of Education, Dr. Marshall on July 1, 2008. Dr. Marshall recruited Dr. Bridges, an African American Female, from Ohio to be the district’s Deputy Superintendent of Education. She had previously been Dr. Marshall’s Deputy Superintendent in Dayton, Ohio as well. In her position in the Greenbrier School District, Dr. Bridges was responsible for the day-to-day operation of the school district. She provided direct supervision of all district programs, Title I, professional development, accountability, instructional technology, facilities management, transportation, nutrition services, budget, and finance. In this role she made
daily decisions that impacted students, principals, faculty, and parents. Believing that Dr. Bridges initiated many of the literacy policies in the district, I decided it was important to interview her about those policies. I was particularly interested in learning more about the Literacy Teacher Collaborative (LTC)\textsuperscript{13} she began shortly after arriving in the district.

\textbf{Ms. Lilley: The District Early Childhood Education and \textit{Response to Intervention} Coordinator}

Ms. Lilley was White, female often involved in district wide professional development related to kindergarten, first, and second grades. Ms. Lilley was the Greenbrier School District’s Early Childhood Education and \textit{Response to Intervention} Coordinator. In this role she designed early childhood curriculum, planned and provided professional development to teachers of child development-second grade students. Ms. Lilley was present at all faculty professional development session I attended with teachers. She also came to Maplewood Elementary School once to introduce teachers to the district’s new Testview data collection system. After meeting Ms. Lilley at several professional development sessions, I invited her to participate in an interview to discuss literacy district policy that impacted kindergarten and second grade teachers’ practice.

Ms. Lilley particularly shared her knowledge about how the district created academic plans to respond to its’ status \textit{as in need of improvement} under NCLB. She also shared her knowledge about \textit{Dominie} reading assessments and the role of curriculum audits in the district’s accountability plan.

\textsuperscript{13} The Literacy Teacher Collaborative is a pseudonym provide to maintain confidentiality.
Ms. Williams, State Department Early Childhood Education Literacy Associate

Ms. Williams was a White, female State Department Early Childhood Education Literacy Associate. In this role, Ms. Williams planned and provided professional development opportunities to teacher throughout the state. As a policy stakeholder who had worked closely with State reading initiatives, I believed that Ms. Williams would be able to provide meaningful information about literacy policies at the national, state, district and local levels.

The Researcher

I am a 39-year-old, middle-class, White, female graduate student. As a qualitative researcher, I am the primary data collection tool in my study. Throughout this study, I recognized the quality and validity of this study depended largely on my ability to try to understand the sociocultural perspectives I brought to my observations and my ability to understand the sociocultural perspectives of the participants. I worked to develop these understandings by acknowledging my biases and assumptions (discussed in Chapter Two) regarding literacy policy and its stakeholders and by immersing myself in the research settings to understand local points of view. My history of participation in the community also shaped these understandings.

I worked at Maplewood for five years through my graduate assistantship teaching an undergraduate language and literacy methods course onsite once a week and supervising interns in the school twice a week. I participated in school life at Maplewood by working with students at each grade level from the Child Development classes (four year olds) through second grade as children partnered with my undergraduate students. I also collaborated with administrators and teachers as an internship supervisor for student
teachers. Together we supported students through their internship process by observing lessons, evaluating their progress, and discussing ways to model effective teaching practices for interns.

Through my participation in the school community, I simultaneously held outsider and partial insider statuses. As a former elementary school teacher, and internship supervisor in the school, I shared an insider status to a degree. However, my relationship with the university set up power differentials between the participants and myself because of my developing expertise in the field of language and literacy. Also, universities are often seen as places where knowledge is produced and transmitted. In teacher education programs, evaluation of teaching is a common practice. Therefore, as I worked with teachers, I reminded them that my purpose in the school was not to evaluate their practice, but to understand their experiences with policy.

As I interacted with all participants in my study, my goal was to conduct culturally sensitive research with the understanding that I would attempt to cross cultural lines in a variety of ways as my interactions with participants changed. I primarily crossed cultural lines in this setting by working across racial lines (with African American faculty and students) and economic lines, (with children, families, and staff from lower socioeconomic groups than my own). As described in detail later in this chapter, I engaged in member checking—seeking participants’ feedback on findings—to increase the likelihood that patterns I constructed from the data in the study accurately reflected stakeholders’ views. I made sure all participants signed appropriate consent forms so I could use their data in my study.
Methods of Data Collection

To gather data for this study I used qualitative methods including: participant observation, interviews, and document analysis. With each of these methods I used audio/video recordings, and field notes to record data as appropriate. I used field notes to record data as I observed in the school setting when observing the administrator, the reading teacher, and focal teachers, both in classrooms and meetings, as participants interacted with one another throughout the school. I used audio/video to record interviews and conversations with stakeholders in the school as well as talk during professional development sessions. I took field notes to record observations when I visited district and state department offices to conduct interviews. I audio-recorded interviews with district and state administrators. I collected policy documents at the state, district, and local levels using the internet as well as sources provided to me when interviewing stakeholders at the state, district, and local levels. In the section below, I describe these methods of data collection in more detail and as they relate to participant observation, interviews, and document analysis at each policy level.

Participant Observation

I developed my understanding of policy stakeholders’ lived experiences with literacy policies as I made focused observations in four teachers’ classrooms; attended weekly faculty meetings; periodic grade-level, leadership team, and professional development meetings; and conducted a focused observation with the reading teacher at Maplewood (Spradley, 1980; Sutton and Levinson, 2001). I collected data at Maplewood and used my observations to build a body of data that allowed me to describe configurations of time, space, people and their activities related to literacy policy (Dyson
Spradley (1980) refers to this process as taking a grand tour of a research setting. Genishi and Dyson (2005) call it “casing the joint” (p. 19). During this process, I mapped out the literacy policy landscape and asked broad ethnographic questions such as “What literacy policies exist in this setting?” and “How are policy stakeholders participating in literacy policy and practices?”

For two years, I conducted this grand tour informally to develop a socio-cultural grounding within the school environment. I built on this grounding, and the relationships I began, as I entered into my study. After the four teachers, reading teacher, and administrator agreed to participate in this study, I negotiated convenient times for observations based on their schedules and specific meetings I wanted to observe. Those observational and interview contexts included: (a) classrooms; (b) the principal’s context; (c) the reading teacher’s context; (d) team meetings; (e) faculty meetings; and (f) professional development meetings.

**Classroom observations.** I observed each teacher-participant in her classroom daily for a week each during the fourth and eleventh months of this study. With their permission, I spent time in each teacher’s classroom Monday through Friday from 7:15 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. to develop deeper insights into how they encountered and appropriated literacy policies in their daily practice. This shadowing included arriving at school when teachers arrived and following them through their day including team meetings, faculty meetings, parent/teacher conferences, professional development sessions etc.). To capture policy in practice, I paid attention to types of materials (e.g., text books, curriculum, literacy kits, professional resources, etc.) teachers used to support literacy instruction within their classrooms. I also looked at how the use—or non-use—of
district resources and materials reinforced and/or challenged official policy and
mandates. I looked for evidence of ways they revealed personal policies or beliefs about
literacy through their actions as well as whom they turned to as they negotiated literacy
policies. I particularly noticed the ways teachers appropriated policy dialogically in
places where their practices intersected the practice of other stakeholders. I also attended
to the ways teachers negotiated multiple—potentially conflicting—identities that
changing literacy policies created. I collected data during these observations using field
notes, audio and video recordings, photography, and by gathering documents. I
transcribed all recordings for later analysis to understand how teachers framed literacy
instruction and achievement, offered solutions to address problems, and responded to
other stakeholders’ policy moves.

The principal’s contexts. I was able to observe Ms. Johnson throughout this
study, during faculty meetings, team meetings, and other special meetings she convened
at her discretion. I used field notes and audio recordings to collect data during these
observations. I transcribed all recordings for further analysis to understand how the
principal framed literacy issues, offered solutions to address problems, and responded to
other stakeholders’ policy moves. I arranged informal interviews with Ms. Johnson to
discuss my observations and interpretations of her practice to gain her perspective on her
actions and various policy moves.

Reading teacher contexts. Over the course of this study, I attended the district’s
14 Spring Conference for Literacy Leaders, and one monthly reading teacher meeting,
with Ms. Berling, Maplewood’s reading teacher. I also observed her interactions as she
attended faculty and professional development meetings, and I observed as she worked

14 The Spring Conference for Literacy Leaders is a pseudonym to protect confidentiality.
with students throughout the day in teachers’ classrooms. I used these observations to
develop a deeper understanding of how Mrs. Berling encountered policy as well as her
responsibilities for sharing that policy with teachers at Maplewood. In the process, I also
noticed the ways Ms. Berling appropriated policy dialogically in places where her
practices intersected with the practice of others stakeholders. Additionally, I attended to
the ways she negotiated multiple—potentially conflicting—identities as a result of
changing policies that positioned her as a technician of commercial literacy programs. I
asked Ms. Berling how she interpreted policy documents she received throughout the
year with a focus on how federal, state, and district policy stakeholders framed literacy
issues and solutions through two formal interviews and several informal conversations
during school days. I then asked Ms. Berling how she made meaning of the documents
and how she framed literacy issues and set expectations for literacy policy in practice in
the school, particularly as she worked with teachers in kindergarten through second
grades. I used field notes, audio recordings, and photography to record data during these
observations. I transcribed all recordings for further analysis to understand how Ms.
Berling framed literacy issues, offered solutions to address problems, and responded to
other stakeholder’s policy moves.

**Team meetings.** At onset of this study, I planned to attend weekly grade level
team meetings, however, in a school with two classes per grade level, teacher participants
often met for their team meetings—a gathering of two people—at varied times to
accommodate their busy and ever changing schedules. This made it difficult for me to fit
regular team meeting observations into my schedule. However, I was able to attend three
team meetings and used data gathered at those meetings to try to identify the ways
teachers dialogically made meaning of and negotiated policy through their interaction with each other formally and informally.

**Faculty meetings.** Each Monday throughout the study, I attended weekly faculty meetings to identify the places and ways teachers encountered and reacted to policy. At faculty meetings, I collected evidence of policy in practice using field notes, audio recordings, photography, and by collecting documents (e.g., hand-outs, forms, etc.). I particularly focused on documents distributed at these meetings that had to do with literacy policy and practice. I audio/video recorded teachers’ conversations about these documents. I transcribed those conversations for further analysis and insights into teachers’ and the administrator’s meaning making. As I analyzed transcripts, I paid particular attention to teachers’ perceptions of policy stakeholders’ expectations as articulated during faculty meetings. I also paid attention to how teachers responded to those policy expectations and positioned themselves in the policy process. I transcribed all recordings for further analysis to understand how teachers framed literacy issues, offered solutions to address problems, and responded to each other’s policy moves.

**Professional development meetings.** I attended four district level, literacy-related professional development meetings during teacher-in-service days and at other times they occurred. These meetings were held at district schools. All teachers from Maplewood Elementary, and teachers throughout the district, attended these tri-annual sessions. Teachers circulated through sessions on various topics, which were led by district literacy consultants. At these meetings, I focused on the topics of the professional development sessions and how the topics connected to, and communicated, policies circulating at the school, district, state, and federal levels. I did this by comparing topics
and content/strategies shared at these meetings with policy ideologies found in policy
documents across various school system levels.

**Interviews**

An important form of data collection in this study was interview. I conducted
interviews with a range of policy stakeholders: Four classroom teachers, the school’s
principal, the school’s reading teacher, and three district and state administrators.
Interviews with these policy players were particularly important, as in all qualitative
studies, as they, “allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 2001, p.
341). They help researchers to understand what we cannot observe: participants’
thoughts, feelings and beliefs. As suggested by Patton (2001), within my study I relied
on both formal and informal conversational interviews and guided interviews as I
discussed policy issues with participants. This was particularly appropriate to my
methodology as the informal conversational interview is well suited to situations in which
the researcher can conduct more than one interview. Informal conversational interviews
are characterized by unscripted questions, which provide opportunities for flexible
questioning. At the same time, it was important for me to keep in mind that the
informality made it more likely that I might ask leading questions which reflected my
own biases. Researchers also use guided interviews to structure the conversation around
subject areas in which the interviewer may freely ask questions. This method adds a bit
more structure to the interview and can help a researcher stay focused on a topic and use
interview time effectively.

As I used each of these methods, I found that the richest data came from
participants who were given space to talk freely about their experiences. I tried to allow
interviewees to speak without interruption whenever possible, and I attempted to provide relevant follow-up questions to support further meaningful talk. For example, across the course of this study, I was fortunate to have frequent opportunities to talk with Ms. Johnson, the principal at Maplewood Elementary School, and get her perspective on the literacy policies I encountered. These were not formal interviews, but informal conversations, at team and faculty meetings, and in hallways. Through these conversations, I was able to ask about policies I observed in practice and her perspectives on those practices.

I conducted initial interviews with each participant—the four classroom teachers, reading teacher, principal, Dr. Bridges, Ms. Williams, and Ms. Lilley—within the first few months of my research. I began each interview with similar questions such as, “What literacy policies influence your practice?” Other initial interview questions are provided in Appendix B. I conducted further interviews when more questions arose that led me to back to participants for clarification on policies. I worked to design non-leading questions, questions that were clear, and strove to pose one question at a time to minimize confusion in the interview process. As I conducted interviews, I continued to collect data using field notes, audio recordings, and photography. I conducted follow-up interviews with each stakeholder as necessary to develop deeper understandings of policy issues that emerged during observations or through various interviews with other stakeholders. I recorded and transcribed all interviews to use in data analysis. Upon their request, I provided interviewees with transcripts of each interview I conducted to give them an opportunity to look over my questions, their responses, and to add to, or change, their responses if desired. I encouraged interviewees to contact me following interviews
if they wanted to address a question further or make additional comments. I also informed interviewees of their right to request that comments remain off the record and not be included in my research. I additionally discussed my interpretations of data with participants to ensure I represented them accurately. Again, this was especially critical in cross-cultural interviewing with groups who have often been misrepresented based on false assumptions of shared meanings (Patton, 2001). I recognized that I do not have the right to ask anything for the sake of scholarly inquiry and therefore I refrained from asking participants questions that could create tensions between their administrators and themselves. I negotiated which questions were appropriate with each interviewee throughout the interview process. For example, during interviews teachers would often want to answer something but do so off the record to further my knowledge but not put themselves in compromising positions with administrators.

**Interviews with teachers and administrators.** I began the interview process by interviewing teachers and administrators at Maplewood School. My five years in the school allowed me to build relationships with stakeholders at Maplewood that opened doors for these interviews to take place as soon as the research officially began. I started by interviewing the principal, Ms. Johnson. I arranged the interview at a time and location convenient for her. During this interview, I discussed the issue of confidentiality with Ms. Johnson given that Maplewood is a small school and my desire to make sure that all participants, including the principal, felt safe sharing their experiences with literacy policies in this setting. I then set up interviews with teachers in a similar fashion.

I conducted 10 interviews with teachers and administrators. These interviews followed a guided interview format and lasted approximately one hour. If interviewees
requested them, I provided initial interview questions in advance of the meeting. My regular presence in the school made follow-up interviews convenient; however, I was sensitive to the many time constraints teachers and administrators already faced and worked to minimize intrusions. I did however conduct follow up interview with both Ms. Johnson, the principal, in the last month to get her perspective on how the policy of fidelity of implementation and the policy that some practices were “just for show” manifested in teachers’ practices.

Interviews with district stakeholders. I interviewed district personnel who held positions related to literacy or who had a role in shaping literacy policy. I conducted these interviews to deepen my understanding of how literacy policy was negotiated in the context of NCLB to meet the district’s goal of ensuring all students, “reach their fullest literacy potential” (Maplewood, n.d., 2009). I also searched the Greenbrier School District website to identify key stakeholders to interview. Those interviewees included Dr. Bridges, the district Deputy Superintendent of Education and Ms. Lilley, the Early Childhood and Response to Intervention Coordinator.

Once I identified potential interviewees at the district level, I contacted them by phone or email to set up the interview. I arranged an interview with each stakeholder at a time and location convenient for the interviewee. Interviews at the district level followed a guided interview format and lasted approximately one hour. I provided initial interview questions to the interviewees if they requested them. I recorded and transcribed those interviews. I asked interviewees at the time of the initial interview for permission to contact them for a follow-up interview in person or via email in case I had follow up questions. I encouraged interviewees to contact me following interviews if they wanted to
address a question further or make additional comments. If they desired a copy, I provided interviewees with transcripts of interviews and made sure all interviewees signed appropriate consent forms so I could use their data in my study.

**Interview with state stakeholder.** I interviewed one state level stakeholder who held a position related to literacy that seemed significant to policy at Maplewood. To identify this stakeholder, I searched the State Department of Education’s website to find key literacy leaders to interview. In the end, Ms. Williams, an Early Childhood Education Literacy Associate, was the only state level stakeholder I was able interview because of my limited access to state level personnel.

Once I identified Ms. Williams at the state level, I contacted her by phone and email to set up an interview. I arranged the interview with Ms. Williams at a time and location convenient for her. The interview at the state level followed a semi-structured format and lasted approximately one hour. I recorded and transcribed the interview. I provided interview questions to Ms. Williams. I asked Ms. Williams, at the time of the initial interview, for permission to contact a follow-up interview in person or via email if needed. I provided Ms. Williams with my contact information in case she would like to share additional information with me following the interview. I also provided Ms. Williams with a transcript of the interview. Following our interview, Ms. Williams carefully read over our interview transcript and approved of its contents. I obtained a signed consent form to use her data in my study.

**Document Analysis**

Document analysis was important to this study for several reasons. First, as discussed in Chapter Two, official policy is reified—or made concrete—in text or
document (Wenger, 1998). Analyzing texts developed to communicate literacy policy at local, state, and national levels revealed ideologies that framed literacy issues at multiple levels in the policy process. Second, document analysis was a means to collect data at the national and state levels where participant observation was not possible because of restricted access to state and district settings. Document analysis was also a means to understand the history of policy at the local level to understand how policy has unfolded over the school year. This was particularly important at Maplewood since I began formal data collection halfway through the school year. I gathered documents from district literacy meetings, professional development sessions, faculty meetings and grade level meetings. I also gathered documents related to the literacy curriculum adopted in the school. I will explain the process of document analysis at the national, state, and local levels in more detail below.

**Document analysis at the national level.** At the national level, I focused my attention on understanding literacy policies under the No Child Left Behind Act. This act, more than any other, shaped literacy policy over the past seven years and continues to be influential. Even as new national education policies emerge—such as Race to the Top (United States Department of Education, 2009) funded under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act—the remnants of NCLB still have a powerful impact at the state, district, and local levels. To develop a deeper understanding of NCLB literacy policies, I continued to read articles and related literature regarding NCLB’s influence on literacy policy. I also analyzed federal, state and local policy documents (e.g., legislation, reports, and letters) and publications from media sources (newspapers, magazine articles) to deepen my understanding of policy ideologies and policies
themselves. I heavily relied on the U.S. Department of Education websites as a data source for policy documents since I had no connections to national level policymakers (see Appendix C for a complete list of federal documents analyzed in this study).

**Document analysis at the state level.** At the state level, I continued to focus on NCLB-related literacy policies within the state and identified additional programs that existed alongside NCLB that both complemented and contradicted NCLB mandates. I collected state policy documents, letters and media publications regarding literacy policy in the state (see Appendix D for a complete list of state documents used in this study). I depended upon the State Department of Education website as a data source since I had limited connections with state level policymakers.

**Document analysis at the district level.** At the district level, I continued to analyze policy documents related to literacy while looking for connections between national policies (e.g., NCLB), state policies (e.g., Reading First, Reading Recovery etc.) and district policies (e.g., Reading First schools, reading teachers, Reading Recovery). While I had more connection with literacy policymakers at the district level (and therefore gained more district-level insights than were possible at the state and national levels), policy documents still provided valuable information. Policy documents on the district web page explained their view on a whole host of literacy policies such as: *Response to Intervention*, a balanced approach to literacy, Title I programs, and other non-negotiable literacy practices and goals in the district (see Appendix E for a complete list of district documents analyzed in this study).

**Document analysis at the school level.** At Maplewood Elementary School, I analyzed literacy policy documents distributed at faculty meetings, grade level meetings,
and professional development meetings. I additionally examined local interpretations of federal, state, and district policy documents received throughout the school year, with a focus on local responses to the ways that federal, state and district policy stakeholders framed literacy problems and solutions. I discussed federal, state, and district policy documents with the principal to understand how she made meaning of them and how she responded to them in relation to the ways she framed literacy problems and set expectations for literacy policy in practice in the school. As described earlier, my role as a participant observer at Maplewood allowed me to gain insights into stakeholders’ perspectives of policy documents and the messages communicated to teachers at the school level (see Appendix F for a complete list of school documents in this study).

**Researcher/Participant Relationships**

Above all, qualitative research must be ethical. Since the researcher is the primary data collection tool in a qualitative study, one important area of ethical concern is the nature of the relationship between researcher and participants. These issues include rapport, reciprocity, subjectivity, and insider/outsider status—including positionality and power (Marshall & Rossman, 1998). Exploring these ethical issues is particularly important when researchers conduct studies across cultural lines (Milner, 2007). Researchers who closely examine people’s social lives—often in intimate ways—also must make every effort to ensure the privacy, rights, and welfare of participants in our studies are protected (Berg, 1998). In this section on researcher/participant relationships, I examine each of these issues and discuss in detail the most important issues that connected to my subjectivities, vis-à-vis my study, and my positionality, vis-à-vis my participants. I also discuss the ways I saw my subjectivity and positionality impact my
study and the concerns this raised for me. I close by considering other ethical issues regarding participant consent, privacy, and welfare.

**Rapport**

The nature of the relationship between a researcher and their participants is of the upmost concern to a qualitative researcher. According to Glesne (1999), “the nature of relationships depends on at least two factors: the quality of your interactions to support your research—or rapport—and the quality of your self-awareness of the potential effects of self on your research—or subjectivity” (p.95). Knowing the importance of rapport, I continued to build rapport, confidence, and trust between my participants and myself as I learned culturally appropriate ways of behaving at Maplewood Elementary School (Glesne, 1999). When I first gained access to the Maplewood school in November, 2007, I began to build rapport with policy stakeholders. When I joined the community, I started to develop a sense of the school culture by learning and following school procedures (e.g., signing in and out of the school), working with the principal to ensure student confidentiality, coordinating times to work with children while respecting teacher schedules, and being conscientious about my commitments to members of the community, and engaging in conversations to get to know community members. I also volunteered to help out with the schools literacy nights and spoke to a group of parents about reading strategies they might use at home. Each of these moves helped establish rapport between my participants and myself.

As I moved into conducting my research, I continued to negotiate the rapport I began to establish with participants before the study by showing my genuine interest in the well-being of administrators, teachers, students, and families connected to
Maplewood Elementary school as I always strove to do no harm—whether emotionally, professionally or otherwise—to participants in my study. I was open about my research goals and flexible when asking community members to participate in the study. I conducted observations and interviews in the least intrusive ways possible by scheduling these events in advance with participants. I collaborated with stakeholders as we discussed how meaning was made around literacy policies and how these meanings influenced the appropriation of policy in the school.

**Reciprocity**

I created—and responded to—opportunities for reciprocity throughout the research process. While researchers hope to learn from their research participants, the research process should be mutually beneficial to researchers and participants. Research is an intrusion into the lives of others that requires time and space within participants’ lives and therefore reciprocity is an ethical issue (Marshall & Rossman, 1998). With this belief, I created opportunities for reciprocity by sharing my research with the community and by looking for authentic ways to serve in the community. One way I was able to reciprocate the support Maplewood offered me over the years was to review their National Blue Ribbon application. I worked with Ms. Johnson, the principal of Maplewood, and Ms. Berling, the reading teacher, to read drafts of their application and make suggestions to strengthen their application using more robust connections between learning theory and the practices occurring at Maplewood Elementary School.

**Subjectivity**

As I conducted this study, I also remained conscientious of how my subjectivity influenced my research. Countless sociocultural variables shaped my subjectivity
including my race, gender, social class, age, level of education, previous job experiences, religious and political beliefs, and family experiences to name only a few. As I engaged in this study, some variables shaped my subjectivity in this setting more than others. In particular, my professional subjectivities in regards to literacy and policy shaped the way I understood how stakeholders make meaning of literacy policies and appropriate those policies in their day-to-day practices. A specific example of a subjectivity I had to wrestle with was the connection between race and ideologies about literacy practices. I found myself imposing my subjectivities about literacy practices, such as balanced literacy, and questioned African American administrators’ beliefs that back-to-the-basics or skills-based literacy instruction was necessary to accelerate the literacy learning of students of Color. Aware of my subjectivities around literacy, I turned to work by scholars of Color, such as Lisa Delpit (2012), to examine those subjectivities around literacy closely. As Delpit (1995) explained, often, White scholars and White teachers fail to hear the concerns people of Color have about the educations of their children. Such had been the case in discussions around whole language literacy instruction and the need students of Color have for teachers to explicitly provide concrete examples of how mainstream language works so they might gain control over those ways with words more easily. Based on my belief that scholars must interrupt the silenced dialogue, I deeply considered the concerns of participants of Color in this study when they were different from my own. I kept a personal journal to reflect on my subjectivities and discussed questions I had about my subjectivities with my committee chairs and other colleagues during the research process. I believe that, because I took this action, I was able to reconsider the meaning several pieces of data more deeply—which I will make clear in
my findings—and draw more meaningful implications from this study. This was my attempt to keep my subjectivities to a minimum and communicate data from my study as accurately as possible.

**Positionality**

Issues of positionality are also critical to conducting an ethical, quality study. As I conducted my research, I worked to be conscientious about my position relative to participants in my study. Since no culture is homogenous and no researcher has a definitive insider or outsider status in a research setting, it was important for me to be conscientious about my position—whether I was studying issues, or interacting with participants, closer to my own culture or crossing cultural lines—to conduct culturally sensitive research (Tillman, 2002; Merriam, Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, and Muhamad, 2001). According to Milner, researchers do not have to come from the same racial or cultural communities as those they study to conduct high quality research, but it is necessary that researchers possess or work to develop, “deep racial and cultural knowledge about themselves and the community or people under study” (p. 388). I mentioned above that I worked to develop these understanding through conversations with, and observations of, participants in the community throughout my study as I continued to go back and read literature on critical theory to examine my positions. It was particularly important for me to attend to a culturally sensitive approach as I worked to represent the experiences of all participants accurately, but particularly those of African American administrators, teachers who, as people of Color, have historically been misrepresented in research (Milner, 2007). I strove to represent the beliefs of my participants honestly by having conversations with participants to learn as much as I
could about how race and social class affected how they understood policy at Maplewood. For example, I spoke openly with Ms. Brooks about social class, race and her students’ backgrounds. Ms. Brooks described her views that literacy was not valued in her students’ homes. Through this conversation, she shared how her race and social class, and experiences growing up in Brooklyn, mediated her understanding of her students’ experiences with literacy based on their race and social class.

While I am an educator and share a degree of insider status at Maplewood after participating in the life of the school for five years, community members still perceived me as an outsider in many ways. First and foremost, I was not a faculty member at the school; I was a representative of the university. I was aware of the frequent walk-throughs in classrooms by district officials, and I intentionally reminded teachers that when I was in classrooms as an internship supervisor or researcher, I was not there to evaluate their practice. I continued to reassure teachers that in seeking to understand how they made meaning of and appropriate policy, my goal was to examine policy and their understandings of and experiences with those policies.

**Power**

Power is something that must be negotiated throughout the research process as well during data analysis and writing up research findings (Merriam et al. 2001). I attempted to balance power and create more equitable relationships between participants and myself by inviting participants to collaborate with me throughout the research process. My position as a doctoral student afforded me greater methodological knowledge, but participants in the school had greater cultural knowledge of their community, students and families as well as intimate knowledge of the workings of
policy in the school and district. Equally valuing the knowledge that participants and researchers bring to the research process is essential to balancing power within a study. In this study, even as I tried to do this, some teachers felt they had more time than others to discuss data I collected and what those data might mean. For example, Ms. Brown, the teacher in this study who felt tremendous stress and pressure to meet the many school and district requirements for her students, expressed that she did not have much time to work with me, while teachers like Ms. Brooks, Ms. Jefferson, and Ms. Herndon, were more comfortable sitting down on numerous occasions and sharing their perspectives on certain pieces of data. A central theme from this study was that teachers were greatly overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of literacy programs and policies and literacy demands they received from the district and local administrators. As a result, I tried balance power by not insisting that teachers sit and analyze data with me, however, I did engage in member checking (described later in this chapter) to get closer to local perspectives on literacy policies.

Recognizing my own positionality and power as I analyzed and interpreted data—and the fact that people of Color, and many marginalized groups, have historically been misrepresented, exploited, silenced, and taken for granted in education research (Dillard, 2000)—I strove to accurately represent the perspectives of my participants. While I attempted to be accurate in my representations, I recognized that there was no Truth to be uncovered through my research. According to Merriam et al. (2001), Truth cannot exist independently of the knower. Geertz (1973) describes the irony of qualitative research this way: “To get somewhere with the matter at hand is to intensify the suspicion, both your own and that of others, that you are not quite getting it right” (p.29).
likelihood that the researcher will not get it right is equally plausible whether one is engaged in research within one’s own culture or across cultures (Merriam, et al., 2001). Getting it right will largely depend on the quality of the relationships including the rapport, subjectivity, position and power, between my participants and myself. This idea rang true as I analyzed data. I always questioned whether I was getting my findings right and accurately representing the perspectives of the participants. As a result, on several occasions I had to step back, admit that I did not accurately interpret participants’ descriptions or actions, and re-evaluate my interpretations. I believe that re-examining my interpretations in situations like this strengthened this study and helped to balance the power structure between participants in this study and myself.

**Consent**

I thoughtfully constructed my research design to make sure no harm was done to participants physically, emotionally, or socially through their participation in my study. This was particularly important as participants shared sensitive information about fellow administrators, teachers, and colleagues. I negotiated ways to maintain confidentiality with participants to increase the likelihood that participants felt safe discussing sensitive issues with me. Confidentiality was ensured through the use of pseudonyms. I also kept all tapes and records confidential. This was particularly important given that Maplewood was such a small school—a factor that would make it easier for readers to identify participants despite the use of pseudonyms in this study.

I submitted my proposal to my research committee, the Internal Review Board (IRB), and the Greenbrier School District to get approval before I began data collection. I described my study without any intention to deceive participants or the IRB. I explained
potential risks and benefits of my study to participants and informed them of their right to stop participating in the study at anytime without penalty. I made myself available to participants at all times by sharing my email address so they could contact me at anytime with questions about the study.

Before proceeding with my study, I made sure I had received signed informed consent forms for each participant. I obtained active consent forms for each child to assure parents were fully informed of the research being conducted in their child’s classroom. This was particularly important in cases where I video recorded within the classroom. Due to the emergent nature of qualitative research, situations arose in which I gained pertinent information to my study from someone who had not signed an informed consent form (e.g., through casual conversation). In those cases, I sought consent before including these participants’ remarks or observations as data in my study. (See Appendix G for consent forms).

Data Analysis

According to Spradley (1980), “analysis of any kind involves a way of thinking. It refers to a systematic examination of something to determine its parts, the relationship among the parts, and their relationship to the whole” (p. 85). In this section, I will describe the way I systematically examined data (e.g., field notes, audio and video recordings, documents) to understand how stakeholders made meaning of and appropriated policy. Throughout the research process, data analysis was ongoing and inductive-or grounded in my data (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). This on-going analysis helped me make sense of the relationships between the data, and the patterns I constructed. I purchased Nvivo to help organize and analyze the data as well.
Units of Analysis

While my data analysis was inductive, I made connections to my theoretical framework to identify potential units of analysis. For example, I looked for ways that apprenticeship worked within this community between newcomers and experienced teachers to reinforce culturally appropriate ways of appropriating policy at Maplewood (Lave & Wenger, 1991). To do this I focused on units of analysis that included types of apprenticeship observed, identities of the experts/apprentices, sites of apprenticeship, etc. I also focused on the ways stakeholders negotiated new meanings and experienced unofficial and official (Sutton & Levinson, 1998) policy as real through reification and participation (Wenger, 2001). To do this, I focused on units of analysis that included types of official and unofficial policies, ways policies were reified (in text, in speeches, etc.), and ways participants participated in the negotiation of meaning related to literacy policies. I also worked to identify intersection encounters, or occasions when stakeholders had opportunities to dialogically (Bahktin, 1981 & 1986) co-construct policy either face-to-face, through letters, or through other documents (Datnow & Park, 2009). To do this, I used units of analysis that included locations where stakeholders encountered other stakeholders, the kinds of interactions that took place, the policies that were discussed among stakeholders, how problems around those policies were framed, etc. Finally, I coded data looking for ways policy, and policymakers’ actions, shaped the identities and agency of school level policy stakeholders such as local administrators and teachers. To do this, I focused on units of analysis that looked at the legitimizing forces behind literacy policies (such as NCLB legislation, walk-throughs, test scores etc.), occasions in which stakeholders’ with less power challenged or reinforced legitimate
policies (e.g., faculty meetings, behind closed doors, teachers’ lounges) and authored themselves in new ways (Holland et al. 1998). As I analyzed each type of data in this study, I used my theoretical framework and these units of analysis as a guide.

**Analyzing Field Notes**

I analyzed field notes from meetings, classroom observations and interviews by reading over them at the end of each day. I read through and expanded my field notes as soon as I was able, following my observations. I uploaded all field notes into Nvivo for further data analysis. I began by openly coding data using the potential units of analysis, described earlier, in addition to looking for other promising units of analysis within the data through componential analysis to search for “components of meaning associated with cultural categories” (Spradley, 1980, 131). Componential analysis was particularly helpful when identifying dimensions of contrast in the ways meaning was constructed around cultural practices. I wrote weekly in a field note journal to reflect on the potential patterns—and countervailing evidence to those patterns—I saw in the data. As I moved deeper into the analysis of the field notes, I used my field note journal to reflect on interpretations of the data and connections between these interpretations and my theoretical framework.

**Analyzing Audio Recordings**

I analyzed all audio recordings from meetings, classroom observations and interviews by transcribing them as soon possible. I view transcription as an important part of the analytic process; therefore I transcribed all recordings myself to construct patterns in the data. I transcribed most recordings using naturalistic transcription—“transcription
made less visible through *literacization*, the privileging of written verses oral discourse” (Bucholtz, 2000, p. 1461).

After transcribing recordings of interviews, conversations at meetings, and other talk, I uploaded my transcripts to Nvivo. In Nvivo, I read through the transcripts and coded them using the units of analysis I discussed earlier as a starting point. To help me understand how stakeholders made meaning of policy, and how those meanings shaped policy appropriation, I also engaged in open coding to identify categories from the data.

**Analyzing Documents**

I began analyzing documents by sorting them by policy level, author, and purpose/type of documents. I analyzed documents (e.g., policy statements, legislation, letters, commentaries, meeting handouts) heavily at the beginning of my study and as new policies emerged during the study. I read through the documents chronologically and analyzed them using open coding to identify initial categories in the data. I developed further categories based on my further reading and understanding of frame analysis. I used the categories to understand how stakeholders made meaning of policy and how those meanings shaped policy appropriation.

**Trustworthiness**

I took several steps to strengthen the trustworthiness of this study. In order to align the patterns I constructed from the data with the raw data, I first immersed myself within the research setting. I also used triangulation—collecting data using different sources, methods and theories (at least three)—to gain multiple perspectives on an issue (Maxwell, 2005). I systematically coded data to look for patterns and conducted negative case analysis to identify variations in the data and instances where data did not support
the patterns I constructed. I shared findings with participants in the study and incorporated their perspectives into the final findings. I will discuss each of these methods of strengthening the trustworthiness of my study below.

**Immersion in the Setting**

To strengthen the trustworthiness of my observations, and the sense I made of these observations, I engaged in “prolonged and persistent observation” (Glesne, 1999, p. 32) in the research setting. A 12-month time period of data collection—in addition to the two years I had already worked in the school and another year in the school while analyzing data—allowed me to develop what felt to me like trust and rapport with participants over time (as discussed earlier), understand the culture in the setting, and check my assumptions about policy meaning making and appropriation in the research setting (Glesne, 1999, p. 32). Prolonged observation helped participants and me relax in the presence of one another creating opportunities for more authentic observations. This was particularly important with regard to issues of policy and politics, areas in which words were often measured carefully to put a particular face on a policy, a district, a school, or a person. This was evident in my interviews with state and district level interviewees. However, as meaningful as it might be to have state and district level policymakers, such as Ms. Williams and Dr. Bridges, speak authentically about policy—to speak openly without measuring their statements—stakeholders’ policy performances were equally informative in understanding how they made meaning of and appropriated policy in response to other stakeholders’ expectations. In essence, all behavior was authentic to a particular setting given the cast of policy players and power structures at play in that setting. This was an element of the sociocultural situatedness of policy.
Triangulation

I used triangulation to increase the validity of this study’s findings by gathering data from several different sources (e.g., stakeholders at the national, state, and local levels—including teachers, administrators, students, and parents—and policy documents), collecting data using multiple methods (e.g., participant observation, field notes, interviews, audio recordings, transcription, photography), and drawing on several relevant theories to make sense of my data (e.g., sociocultural theories of learning, policy and identity, and frame analysis). However, I went beyond combining a variety of data collection sources, methods, and theories, and looked at the ways each of these categories related to one another to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study (Glesne, 1999).

Negative Case Analysis

I used the method of negative case analysis to strengthen the trustworthiness of the patterns I constructed from the data. I did this by comparing the patterns I constructed to the raw data (e.g., field notes, transcripts, documents, etc.) and looking for countervailing evidence to the theories I constructed from those patterns. This process revealed the variation I expected to exist in the data (Glesne, 1999). I built in variation to the findings and conclusions to reflect the variation that exists even within patterns in the data.

Member Checking

I used the method of member checking to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study by sharing data and findings with participants—or members—of the study to make sure the patterns I constructed from my data and the conclusions I arrived at accurately reflected the experiences and perspectives of the participants in the study. As mentioned
earlier in the section on research ethics, this is particularly important when trying to understand the perspective of frequently misrepresented or underrepresented groups such as women, African Americans, Latinos, and persons from low socioeconomic groups, many of whom were participants in this study. As I analyzed data, I conducted informal member checking with Ms. Brooks, Ms. Jefferson, Ms. Herndon, and the Principal, Ms. Johnson, every couple of weeks about theories I was generating from my data to see if they believed those theories to be sound. I conducted a formal member checking interview with Ms. Johnson at the end of my data collection process to get feedback about theories I had developed as well during the research process.

As a final member checking act, I sent my completed research findings to the teachers and principal at Maplewood Elementary School, as well as to district and state interviewees, to give them the opportunity to share feedback with me about my interpretations of data. Participants asked me to make a few small but significant changes which emphasized the importance of this final round of member checking to ensure that I represented participants in ways that were accurate and comfortable for each of them.

From Methodology to Findings and Implications

In the following three chapters, I build from this discussion of methodology to share findings that illustrate the sociocultural nature of policy and how participants dialogically co-constructed meanings around policies in and around one school setting. To best describe this process, I chose to divide findings into three chapters based on the origins of particular literacy policies. In Chapter Four, I discuss themes of policy definitions, how policy makers framed literacy problems, proposed solutions to address those problems (e.g., academic standards, data-driven instruction, AYP, scientifically
based reading research, and fidelity of implementation), and, I illustrate local stakeholders’ responses to national policy moves.

In Chapter Five, I take a closer look at district and school level literacy policies within the context of the larger policy landscape. As in Chapter Four, I use data excerpts from school level stakeholders such as administrators and teachers to show how they responded dialogically to district policies to change literacy practice at Maplewood.

In Chapter Six, I take a close look at one literacy policy, the policy of a balanced approach to literacy. I chose to examine this policy closely because the district adopted it as its overarching literacy framework. Additionally, all of the professional development I observed was an effort to develop teachers’ understandings of what the district termed balanced literacy practices (e.g., guided reading, reading assessments, writing instruction, word study etc.). In Chapter Six, as in each of the findings chapters, I demonstrate how teachers at the local level worked to exercise agency and carve out space to teach autonomously which was not always easy to do. I illustrate how teachers’ identities were impacted by federal and district policies that often removed power from their hands to make professional decisions about classroom instruction. The dissertation closes with Chapter Seven, which explores implications from this study for future policy research, professional development, teacher education, and pedagogy.
CHAPTER FOUR

“JUST LET US TEACH!”: POLICY ORIGINS AND PARTICIPANTS’ RESPONSES TO POLICY

Prior to collecting data at Maplewood Elementary School, I spent two years teaching an undergraduate class once a week at the school. As I arranged for the university students to spend time with children and as we worked with children each week, I worked to build relationships with teachers and staff. After class one Tuesday, I stopped to thank second grade teacher, Ms. Brown, for allowing her students to work with my undergraduates and to ask how her school year was going. Ms. Brown responded:

[I feel] overwhelmed! Stretched! Like a rubber band. I feel like I am going to pop! Everything [is] rush, rush, rush, rush, rush...Sometimes I feel like I am [growing in my practice] and sometimes I feel like I'm not. To be honest with you, when we go to these workshops, they keep saying the same things over and over and over, the same thing, Empowering Writers (2004), Dominie (2004), word study, how to teach the Four Blocks (2002), and I'm thinking, we just had a workshop on this. You keep hearing the same things, over, and over, and over, and over, so in that way, it's not helping. [When consultants come in], they make suggestions, which is helpful... But many times, I can't get to it. Or I don't get to it...I just really wish they would just let us teach. Let us teach!

Ms. Brown shared this feeling about struggling for autonomy with three other teachers in this study—first grade teachers, Ms. Jefferson and Ms. Brooks, and a kindergarten teacher, Ms. Herndon. In their collective struggle, these teachers expressed two primary concerns. First, they had difficulty making sense of the sheer quantity of literacy polices
they encountered, particularly those originating at the district and school level\textsuperscript{15}. Second, they had trouble negotiating restricted autonomy and what I interpreted as the de-professionalization of their practice. On a variety of occasions, these teachers voiced concerns that the district, and less often, local administrators, questioned their professional knowledge and their ability to use their knowledge to make instructional decisions. Teachers’ struggles were particularly evident as they negotiated the use of commercial literacy curricula (such as \textit{Breakthrough to Literacy} (2004), \textit{SuccessMaker} (2001), \textit{Dominie} (2004) and \textit{Empowering Writers} (2004)) which the district asked teachers to implement with what the district termed, fidelity or “whether an intervention is implemented according to how it was designed,” (“response to intervention”, n.d., para. 5). Teachers’ feelings of being overwhelmed by the number of literacy policies they encountered and their desire for autonomy led me to wonder what literacy policies impacted their teaching practice and why teachers believed they could not (paraphrasing Ms. Brown’s words), “just teach.” To begin to understand teachers’ experiences with policy, I asked, “What constitutes the literacy policies in and around Maplewood Elementary School?” “Who determines those policies?” and “How do those literacy policies inform educators’ practices?” Focusing on the socially situated nature of policy talk, and how policy positioned teachers—two themes overarching in this chapter—I began to understand specific policies that made some teachers feel that it was difficult to “just teach.”

As I began to collect data to answer my research questions, I not only came to understand teachers’ experiences with policy more fully but, by examining policy through a sociocultural lens, I also came to understand more about how policy is a social

\textsuperscript{15} In this study, the use of the term level does not imply that everyone at that level shared a policy position.
and cultural practice. Early in this study, I wrestled to understand what constituted policy and came to believe that policy is best understood through the dialogue among stakeholders as they interact with one another—bringing their personal beliefs, histories, and social situatedness to bear on policy—around educational problems that policies aim to solve. I also came to understand how teachers and local administrators—as the objects of policy—appropriate policy, that is take policy in and make it their own to serve local goals (Sutton & Levinson, 2001). Through my analysis of this recursive process of addressing and answering—a process that included the creation and recreation of policies, literacy tools, and teaching strategies through word and deed—I found that participants understood and appropriated policy in many ways.

**Organization of Chapter Four Findings**

In this chapter, I share findings that contextualize the experiences of five teachers at Maplewood Elementary School within larger policy contexts. I begin by sharing educational concerns from all policy levels about teacher quality and student achievement and how those concerns were sometimes used as rationales for specific policies. I then discuss differences across stakeholders in terms of their actual use of the word, *policy*, as well as their varied perspectives on which of the policies were considered mandates and which policies were considered suggestions or guidelines. Finally, I discuss findings that describe policy origins and local responses to those policies. In the process, this chapter offers descriptions of contexts, decisions, texts, actions, and reactions which led the teachers in this study to exclaim, “Just let us teach” and the reasons each teacher in the study believed that *just teaching* was an unattainable goal at the time the study was conducted.
Federal, State, District, and Local Concerns
About Teacher Quality and Student Achievement

Data presented throughout this chapter suggest that Dr. Bridges’ (deputy superintendent for the school district in which Maplewood School was situated) and Ms. Johnson (Maplewood School’s principal) felt a sense of urgency about improving teacher quality and student achievement while expressing concerns that some teachers were underprepared to teach in ways that addressed the needs of all children (e.g., teaching writing, phonics and assessing reading). Federal policy documents, particularly Title II of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2001), echoed (and in some cases, led to) these feelings of urgency, expressing the importance of training teachers to provide high quality instruction to meet the needs of their students, typically students of Color from low-income families and students learning English as a new language. According to Darling-Hammond (2010) policies aimed at developing highly qualified, competent teachers reflected a belief that “teachers in the United States typically enter the profession with dramatically different levels of knowledge and skill—with those least prepared teaching the most educationally vulnerable children” (p. 197). Because Maplewood Elementary School largely served students of Color from low-income families, its teachers were direct objects of policies such as NCLB, aimed at increasing the quality of their instruction.

At both district and school levels, there was concern that many children came to school without the foundation to easily acquire school-styled or academic literacies. This concern, explored later in this chapter, was expressed by Dr. Bridges, Ms. Johnson, and Ms. Brooks. Such concerns contradict the theoretical orientation of leading literacy research that suggests that all children come to school with a wide range of literacies and
literacy knowledge that must be acknowledged and utilized if they are to have access to academic literacies (Dyson, 2003; Gregory, Long, & Volk, 2004; Long, Hutchinson & Niederhiser, 2011; Souto-Manning, 2010.)

When district and school level concerns that some teachers were under prepared to teach all children converged with concerns about some students’ under preparedness for learning school-based/academic literacies, that intersection powerfully shaped district literacy policies aimed at improving teacher practice and accelerating student achievement, particularly as Dr. Bridges designed professional development to improve teacher quality. At the district and federal levels, those literacy policies often focused on mandating specific programs and practices that were to be followed with “fidelity” meaning they were to be implemented as intended by their creators. Those programs and practices were considered to be potentially successful in improving practice and raising achievement because they were considered, according to federal descriptions, to be scientifically based. Federal documents describe “scientifically based” as “experimental or quasi-experimental designs in which individuals, entities, programs, or activities are assigned to different conditions and with appropriate controls to evaluate the effects of the condition of interest” (NCLB, 2001, “Sec. 1208. Definitions”).

In the following pages, I suggest that federal and district appeals to fidelity in the implementation of practices and programs backed by scientifically based reading research (SBRR) led to policies which imposed standardized procedures on the teachers in this study and took away their autonomy to make informed professional decisions.

While the district’s deputy superintendent, Dr. Bridges, preferred to offer professional development that helped teachers understand complex concepts, create and use diagnostic
assessments to inform their teaching, and provide teacher constructed culturally relevant, integrated curricula to their students, the requirement for fidelity related to policies of pacing guidelines, academic standards, and data-driven instruction undermined that goal. This led to teachers’ concerns about their own autonomy and their desire for being allowed to, “just teach.” In this chapter, I will discuss the findings/policy moves that led teachers to ask for greater autonomy to engage in their practice.

Policy as Mandate: Differing Perspectives

My analysis of data suggests that participants in this study had varying levels of comfort with employing the word, policy as they talked about literacy policy. Some used the word explicitly, saying it aloud as they talked about teaching and learning. Others expressed views about ways to teach and conduct professional development that indicated the existence of policy but without using the term. In those cases, policy talk was embedded within other kinds of talk. These differences seemed to correlate with participants’ positions within school system levels. At the state level, use of the term policy, was commonplace. Ms. Williams—an Early Childhood Education Associate working closely with literacy initiatives at the State Department of Education, employed the word policy as she discussed programs and practices that impacted the state. In contrast, when I asked participants at the district and local levels, “What literacy policies impact your practice?” participants usually talked around the word by describing their practices rather than directly referring to those practices as policy. In each case, whether participants talked about policy by explicitly naming it as such, or implicitly by describing their practices without labeling them as policy, the act of naming or not naming policy reflected the socially situated nature of each participant’s policy talk. In
particular, it reflected the degree of power that participants (at each level) had in the
development of policy.

The socially situated nature of policy not only shaped how participants talked
about policy, either explicitly or implicitly, but also how participants’ interpreted policy’s
influence on teacher practice. Data also show that Ms. Williams, a state level participant
who spoke about policy explicitly, had greater power to define policy as something that
did not dictate district administrators’ and teachers’ practice. Conversely, data show that
district and local level participants who spoke about policy implicitly had less power to
claim that policy did not dictate their practice; however, at district level, educators
seemed unsure of what constituted policy per se and, under pressure to make *Adequate
Yearly Progress* (AYP)\(^{16}\) they perceived policies as mandates that dictated literacy
practice and limited teacher autonomy.

These issues are discussed below as I describe both explicit and implicit policy
talk, as well as the extent to which participants across school system levels (school,
district, state, federal), saw policies as mandates as opposed to guidelines or suggestions.
I organized those discussions around (a) a state level perspective and (b) several school
and district level perspectives. The reason that these perspectives are important (bearing
in mind that they represent the views of only one or a few stakeholders at each level) is
that they provide some insight into differences in policy interpretation and how they
affect the lives of teachers. They suggest that policy interpretation at one level may or
may not be communicated or appropriated in the same way at other levels or by particular
stakeholders within any one level. In other words, policymakers and policy enforcers at
the federal level may have a different interpretation than those at the state level.

\(^{16}\) See Appendix A for definitions.
Likewise, those at the state level may perceive policies differently than educators at
district and school levels or within those constituencies.

One State Level Perspective: Federal Policy Does Not Dictate Practice

Ms. Williams, a state department early childhood education coordinator, spoke
explicitly about policy. She defined some policies as mandates, but she did not equate
federal literacy policies with requiring or mandating particular instructional practices.
However, as will be explained later in this section, this was not always interpreted as
such at the district and school levels. Policy that came under Ms. Williams’ jurisdiction
focused primarily on federally authorized policies, particularly those tied to No Child
Left Behind (NCLB) which continued to influence literacy practice in the state. Ms.
Williams communicated that, from her perspective, federal policy: (a) dictated broad
guidelines and (b) did not dictate instructional practice.

Federal policies dictate non-instructional practice. Ms. Williams was the only
participant in this study who defined policy explicitly and who used the word *policy*
when talking about practices and programs regarding federal government work and
implications for schools and districts. According to Ms. Williams, while mandates existed
in federal policy language they did not dictate practice. For example, NCLB listed several
“required uses” for Reading First grant money, including the following:

(A) REQUIRED USES- Subject to paragraph (8), an eligible local educational
agency that receives a subgrant under this subsection shall use the funds provided
under the subgrant to carry out the following activities:

(i) Selecting and administering screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based
instructional reading assessments.

(ii) Selecting and implementing a learning system or program of reading
instruction based on *scientifically based reading research* that —
(I) includes the essential components of reading instruction; and

(II) provides such instruction to the children in kindergarten through grade 3 in the schools served by the eligible local educational agency. . . (NCLB, 2001, “Sect. 1202. “Formula Grants to State Education Agencies”)

Ms. Williams argued that the reach and influence of such language over literacy practice in schools was limited. She explained that the elements of federal policy that she saw as mandated (requirements for every teacher) “are very broad and apply to everyone across the board, for example how many students are allowed to be in a classroom.” These mandated policies, in her view, were non-instructional. Ms. Williams clarified:

The only things that can really be called policies are regulations . . . [NCLB looks at] . . . who’s qualified to teach what, and what that means—what standards have to be in place and assessments and those kinds of things that apply to everybody.

From Ms. William’s perspective, NCLB provided autonomy to states to adopt literacy practices that met state needs. According to Ms. Williams, the state’s role, given this federal autonomy, was not to dictate instructional practice to districts but to require schools to address the state’s academic curriculum standards,17 to measure students’ performance by using the statewide assessment, and to use practices that work for particular teachers and students. Data from State assessments were then used to demonstrate whether or not students, schools, and districts were making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in compliance with NCLB. In other words, making AYP was seen by the Department of Education and State Department of Education as a way to demonstrate that students were proficient in their knowledge of standards-based skills and content, particularly the ability to read on grade level by third grade.

17 To maintain confidentiality, I do not provide a citation for the state’s literacy standards or its assessments, nor do I provide a link to the state’s website.
**Federal policies do not dictate literacy instruction.** Entering this study, I expected to see policy manifest as mandates that governed literacy practice in schools. I based this expectation on a large body of literature describing NCLB’s impact on teachers, students, and schools (Allington, 2002; Allington & Garan, 2002; Coles, 2000 & 2003; Garan, 2004 & 2007) as well as policy researchers’ descriptions of the pervasiveness of top-down mandates (Sutton & Levinson, 2001; Shore & Wright, 1997). I was surprised, however, to hear Ms. Williams communicate a counter narrative that, in her opinion, literacy policy did not mandate literacy *practice*. Over the past decade, I understood that NCLB—federal legislation mandating student performance standards and common targets for meeting those standards—largely influenced state and district mandating of particular practices— in particular, practices that focused on teaching skills in isolation from application (explicit, systematic, synthetic phonics instruction for example) and implementing commercial programs that provided teachers with scripts to read instead of relying on their own knowledge and abilities to decide what to say and do in their classrooms—in efforts to meet such performance standards. Furthermore, I felt that the National Reading Panel’s (NRP) (2001) report\(^\text{18}\) would likely shape literacy practice in the state based on the body of literature that explained ways educators often misread the studies associated with the NRP and even the NRP itself. Coles (2000) suggested one might misinterpret the studies in the NRP by concluding that (a) phonemic awareness is the chief causal factor in learning to read, (b) skills training remediates reading problems, (c) research has shown skills based approaches to surpass whole language approaches in remediating readers, (d) the effectiveness of a widely used skills

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\(^{18}\) The National Reading Panel report analyzed experimental reading research; consolidated and reported the findings of that research; and made recommendations for instruction in five areas of literacy including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.
based program is proven effective by research, (e) difficulties with phonemic awareness can be attributed to “brain glitches” or genetic cues. But many believe a skills-emphasis misrepresented reading research and posed dangers to the education of students (Allington, 2002; Allington & Garan, 2002; Coles, 2000 & 2003; Garan, 2004 & 2007).

Anticipating this, I asked Ms. Williams which literacy policies informed the literacy practices in the state. I was surprised when she responded briefly, “It’s a big misconception that there are policies regarding practice, which there really aren’t.” I explained that many educators interpreted NCLB and the NRP’s recommendations as mandates for explicit instruction of phonics and phonemic awareness. Ms. Williams made clear:

NCLB doesn’t say that . . . [With] Reading First, there certainly were . . . technical assistants we received, or a meeting we went to, [that had] a slant on how instruction should occur, but when you got down to what it really said, a lot of that was left up to interpretation, and certainly we have never, and never would, say that you ignore [phonemic awareness and phonics], it’s just that it’s all part of the larger goal, which is for children to read and understand and make meaning from print. And you do all those things—phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary building . . . in an effort to ensure that children read and understand and make meaning not just for the act of doing it. And that was the way all our professional development was designed and was shared.

Ms. Williams suggested that not only were NCLB and the NRP’s policies not intended to dictate instruction, but in light of that fact, they also did not prescribe the teaching of literacy through synthetic phonics’ instruction or any skills in isolation from their application in authentic reading and writing events. Ms. Williams explained that technical assistants—federal literacy consultants hired to oversee19 Reading First—may have encouraged teachers to use explicit, de-contextualized methods of phonics and phonemic

19 Reading First was a policy of professional development birthed by NCLB. Literacy consultants from the Department of Education, monitored Reading First professional development sessions to see that
awareness instruction. However, she also felt that, at the state level, neither she nor her colleagues interpreted this slant as a mandate to teach phonics or any one skill or aspect of the reading/writing processes according to any single instructional method. Rather, she felt that, literacy leaders at the State Department of Education believed that educators should draw on diverse bodies of literacy research and their consequent professional beliefs to negotiate NCLB policies and encourage skill instruction as one component of a comprehensive approach to the teaching of reading.

**Instructional mandates originate at the local/district level.** While Ms. Williams acknowledged that, even though federal policies like NCLB stopped short of mandating instructional practice, some teachers and administrators in districts still interpreted various policies as federal or state mandates. She explained her view that most of the instructional mandates for teachers originated at the district level:

A lot of districts require teachers to do things, but most often, all of those things are district decisions. Now, sometimes people will tell you, somebody else told us we have to do things this way, but those are district decisions about what kinds of programs they use and implement, what kinds of things teachers are required to do. The only things that the state has statewide are standards and implementation, those curriculum standards for all.

Ms. Williams reiterated that the state only mandated that districts and schools address the state curriculum standards, but not that they follow any particular program or instructional practice to meet those standards. This finding ultimately helped me understand the origins of literacy policies that impacted teachers at Maplewood Elementary School. My discussions with this representative of the Department of Education for the state led me to begin to consider that limitations that this study’s professional development providers—in the state in which this study was situated, these were often literacy professors from a local university—trained literacy coaches using practice supported within the National Reading Panel report.
teachers felt with regard to autonomy to “just teach” were more likely to be district or school mandates than policies mandated at the state or federal levels as was assumed by many educators.

While formal federal policies may not have dictated teacher practice, literacy politics at the national level had a powerful impact on the district’s literacy policy development. As I will explain in detail later in this dissertation, the policy of Response to Intervention—a tiered-intervention approach to determine a student’s response to instructional intervention in the classroom—for example, while not directly mandated by federal policy, did contain federal policy language that legitimized the approach and created a powerful incentive for districts to adopt it in order to demonstrate they were taking appropriate action to accelerate students’ learning.

**District and School Perspectives: Embedded Policies Are All Around Us**

Most participants, particularly those who were district and school-based, unlike Ms. Williams, did not name and talk about policy directly. As a result, to understand how most participants viewed policy, I had to listen for ways in which policy was embedded in participants’ talk about practice. By listening to participants’ descriptions of their practices, as well as through observations, I was able to understand more about how policies functioned within educators’ beliefs systems and in their teaching even if they did not name their actions formally as policy-driven. Thus, an ultimate finding was that, while many participants did not name policy as such, policy was all around them, guiding them, sometimes. For example, when I asked Dr. Bridges, the Deputy Superintendent of Education in the Greenbrier School District, to name literacy policies that affected teacher practice in the district, she referenced the district’s assessments—Measure of
Academic Progress (MAP) and the State Achievement Challenge Test\textsuperscript{20} (SACT).

Without using the word policy, she explained district guidelines surrounding those assessments, guidelines that were, in fact, policies:

Well, it is interesting that you ask that question, because . . . [according to] this gentleman from the State Department of Ed . . . there is no literacy focus at the state department . . . And, I don’t know if policy is the right word for it, but based on our student academic achievement and looking at our assessment data—MAP and at that time [the state standardized test]—it was evident to me that there needed to be a focus on literacy in the district because it affects all the other curriculum areas.

This data sample is representative of most participants’ uncertainty as to what to label as policy: Was policy the literacy focus passed down from the state level to the districts in a technocratic fashion? Was policy homegrown in local district and school beliefs about literacy practice and their responses to technocratic literacy policies?

Despite the sparse use of the term policy at district and school levels, literacy policies surrounded and permeated Maplewood Elementary School. Persons in power including federal policy makers, state policy makers, district administrators, the principal, and teachers themselves, enacted an array of literacy policies as they addressed and answered each other through ongoing policy conversations and practices and yet, when I asked, “What policies impact your literacy practice?” they talked about policy implicitly as they talked about their practice. I will provide data to support this finding later in this chapter.

**Policy as It Positioned Teachers and Students**

Trying to understand the socially situated nature of participants’ talk —especially whether participants spoke of policy explicitly or implicitly—made it possible to identify the myriad ways that named and unnamed policies, aimed at improving the academic

\textsuperscript{20} I assigned pseudonyms to the state’s standardized tests as well to maintain confidentiality.
achievement of students of Color and the quality of their teachers, positioned those students and teachers. The literacy policies I identified within this study, whether they originated at local, state, or national levels, were actions related to attempts to reform literacy education at schools across the state and country such as Maplewood Elementary School. As Tyack and Cuban (1995) writes, these policies as with all educational reforms were designed as “planned efforts to change schools in order to correct perceived social and educational problems,” (p. 4). Policies I identified within and around Maplewood Elementary School (originating at federal, state, district and school levels) seemed to position students and teachers on a spectrum between being prepared or unprepared to learn and teach based on the views of various policymakers.

**Literacy Policy Positions Some Students as Disadvantaged**

At the local, district, and national levels, policies examined in this study seemed to frequently position students of Color as disadvantaged because of differences between knowledge and experiences in homes and communities and the kind of knowledge necessary for success in school. Thus, those policies positioned many students as underprepared for academic success and sometimes perpetuated deficit perspectives of students and their families. I discuss examples of this kind of positioning in the following sections with regard to the language of specific policies.

It is important to note that it was clear throughout this study that all participants believed in students’ inherent value and ability to succeed. By saying that policies and participants perpetuated deficit perspectives, I do not mean that they did not care deeply for or create a culture of genuine caring for their students, or that they did not have high expectations for student success. I do mean that, not having access to current thinking in
the field about countering deficit notions, and charged with the responsibility to identify and address factors that *impeded* students’ literacy success in school, the tendency was to identify either problems with home and community support and/or problems with teachers preparedness to teach.

**NCLB positions students as disadvantaged.** National education policy has historically, and contemporaneously, reproduced and perpetuated deficit views of students of Color and the teachers who teach them primarily through the language used in official policy (King, 2005). For example, in the 1980’s, under President Reagan, *A Nation at Risk* ignited a firestorm of debate over whether American schools were failing (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) added fuel to this fire through its sense of urgency to improve schools, but more important, to improve academic achievement for students identified as “dis-advantaged” (NCLB, 2001, Sect.101 “Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged”). The terms “at risk” and “dis-advantaged” are just two examples of language use that has been widely questioned because of the deficit view they communicate with regard to children of Color and children from low income households. For example, King (2005) suggests that policymakers use words such as at-risk and disadvantaged as codes to represent Black and Blackness (pg. xv) or children of Color. Language in Title I of NCLB (2001) does this directly by using the words “minority” and “non-minority” to positions students as disadvantaged as the legislation describes its purpose to “[improve] the academic achievement of the disadvantaged” (n.p.) and to:

[Close] the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers. (n.p.)
While the term minority could apply to many groups, at Maplewood, it referred to groups minoritized in the larger society—African American, biracial, and Latino/a students. Thus, students, teachers and administrators at Maplewood were objects of NCLB policies intended to impact the education of “minority” students. Knowing whom NCLB addresses in its policies prepared me to explore how participants at and around Maplewood Elementary School shaped NCLB-related policy with the intent of improving the academic achievement of Maplewood Students.

NCLB’s emphasis on “minorities” as disadvantaged perpetuates a single story (Adichie, 2009) of students of Color—a story that defines students of Color as lacking pre-requisite knowledge, resources, and experiences that prepare them to be successful in schools while neglecting a focus on the cultural assets and knowledge that all students bring to school from their homes and communities (Cowhey, 2006; Gay, 2000; Sleeter & Cornbleth, 2011). This turns educators’ and policy makers’ attention to what students cannot do rather than focusing on what students can do, building on those strengths and extending students’ knowledge. This is problematic because research on learning has emphasized the important role schema and background knowledge play in a student’s process of constructing understandings of new concepts. Teachers must help students connect the known to the unknown. This is why connecting students’ knowledge of home literacies to school literacies is essential (Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Kinloch, 2011; Michalove, Shockly, & Allen, 1995).

**Deficit assumptions as implicit policy.** As administrators and teachers shared their beliefs about students’ home literacy experiences, many implicit policies at the district and school levels seemed to surface that were rooted in deficit assumptions about
students’ home literacies. Data analysis lead me to suggest that three beliefs were at work underlying policies of various kinds: (a) students of Color from low-income families had limited home literacy resources and therefore students would not be able to learn to read as easily as other students, (b) families do not communicate the value of literacy to their children, and (c) literacy knowledge is transmitted in one direction: from the district and school into homes rather than knowledge also emanating from homes and communities into schools. Below I discuss these three beliefs as policy in practice or implicit policy.

**Belief/implicit policy number one: If you don’t have a book in your house, you won’t learn to read.** In the Greenbrier School District, many of the messages I encountered echoed “the prevailing explanations of crisis in Black education that attribute ‘school failure’ to presumed deficiencies in Black students’ culture, behavior, attitudes, or their families and communities,” (King, 2005, p. 1). Administrators and teachers expressed beliefs that students of Color lacked immersion in language and literacy experiences within their homes that would prepare them to learn to read and that they lacked motivation to learn to read and write. For example, as Dr. Bridges’ explained, “Our kids come in behind…because they don’t have anyone speaking to them at home; they don’t have anyone reading to them at home.” Dr. Bridge’s perception that many students lacked the kind of home literacy experiences that would support their success in school heightened the sense of urgency and sense of responsibility the she felt to provide literacy interventions.

Dr. Bridges believed that many of the Greenbrier School District’s students did not get support at home—meaning they did not have books in their homes to support literacy development and their family members did not talk to students in a way that
supported school-based literacies. Based on this belief, Dr. Bridges believed (as illustrated below) that it was important for teachers to get to know students to determine if they might learn to read better through a “phonics approach” or a “whole language” approach. Dr. Bridges explained:

You still have to know whether a kid learns best with a phonics approach. You still need to know that, because some kids, they’re just not going to get it through osmosis; their brains don’t work that way and they don’t get the support at home. The whole language piece is fine, because you have the support at home, but if you don’t have that support at home, you don’t even have a book in your house, you’re not going to learn how to read.

Dr. Bridges believed students who did not get support at home, support defined by her as family members not reading books to students, would need additional support in school. For these students, she felt that a whole language approach—which she described as learning “through osmosis” and which is often misinterpreted and poorly implemented as a whatever-goes/no direct instruction approach (Harris, n.d., p.51)—did not provide the explicit instruction that she felt students without books in their homes would need. Dr. Bridges words echoed Lisa Delpit’s (1995) call for explicit language instruction that teaches students of Color how dominant language structures work. Dr. Bridges’ seemed to believe that having books in homes was an important component to support students’ literacy development.

To bolster students literacy resources, Dr. Bridges also believed it was important to get books into the homes of students. Dr. Bridges explained:

We . . . created a campaign so kids would read more books. We have a book hour campaign because many students do not have books of their own at home. We expect them to read more, but then they don’t have any books at home…That was part of our commitment, you know because kids lose what they learned over the summer. So over a period of time, they don’t have formal instruction, so we felt it was important to do something over the summer for those kids who weren’t in
summer school. So, that’s why we made a big financial investment getting those books, and I think it was a real positive thing.

Clearly Dr. Bridges believed that books in the home were very important if students were to develop and then maintain literacy gains they made across the school year. To mitigate the problem of lost learning over the summer months, Dr. Bridges spearheaded an effort to get books into the homes of Greenbrier students who might not have as many books in their homes. Under Dr. Bridges’ direction, the district sent home a letter with summer reading tips (Appendix H) and book packs to each student at Maplewood elementary school. The summer reading tips encouraged adults to “lead by example” by reading in front of their children, “talk it up” by talking with their kids about what they read, “help kids find time to read” by leaving time in students’ busy summer schedules for reading, “relax the summer rules” by not setting time limits for reading and letting students select books that are fun, “have plenty of reading material around” including newspapers, magazines and informational material, “use books to break the boredom” by using books to fill summer hours, and “read aloud with kids” by taking children to hear a local storyteller, reading aloud enthusiastically, or dressing up in character as you read. I was present at school when teachers handed book packs to students to take home for the summer break. Students peered inside their bags curiously and smiled as they saw their books. While I saw actions such as this planned for the purpose of injecting literacy into the homes of the Greenbrier School District students, I was not able to observe if or how students used these books in their homes to achieve the district’s goal of getting students to read more often. However, the bottom line was that, one way that Dr. Bridges lived her conviction about the importance of supporting literacy learning for students from homes
where she perceived there was little support for book reading, by introducing and
working to sustain a program of book distribution.

**Belief/implicit policy number two: Some students’ home environments don’t communicate the value of literacy.** At Maplewood Elementary School, Ms. Brooks, an African American first grade teacher, also seemed concerned that students’ home environments – in this case, largely African American and some Latino – did not communicate the value of literacy to students in the school. The following conversation suggests Ms. Brooks’ frustration with what she saw as her students’ lack of motivation to learn the strategies needed to be able to read, which she attributed to the home literacy environment:

Ms. Brooks: [Literacy problems are] all environmental, because I can teach my heart out, I can do all that I can do, because a lot of time when these children come to this table, they don’t want to focus on what I’m doing. They want to tell me everything else, but they don’t want to listen to those strategies that I’m trying to put forth for them.

Cindy: And what do you think that is a product of? What do you think?

Ms. Brooks: (sighs) It’s a product of their environment. I’m sorry.

Cindy: And you mean home environment?

Ms. Brooks: The home environment. I think it’s a bunch of things. It’s a bunch of values in the home, education in the home. Now I don’t want to pass judgment on anybody, but I just feel [literacy] is not valued, that they don’t show the importance of education, that I don’t want you to be what you see right now, and that was instilled in me.

Remembering growing up in the boroughs of New York City, Ms. Brooks reflected on her reading experiences with her siblings and a single working mother. She drew on these experiences to make sense of the literacy learning of the children in her
classroom and her views (implicit policies) about the importance of book reading at home:

I grew up in part of New York City, in the Bronx, so I understand socioeconomic struggles. My mother worked to ensure we were going to school, and there were three of us, okay. She instilled in us, that whatever it is that you want to be, you can be it. And, I don’t remember my mother reading to me, but I still loved to read. I saw her reading because she was studying and trying to get her degree and finish up and get us out of there. And I saw her studying her books. I saw her studying the newspapers.

Ms. Brooks’ personal history helped to shape the connection she saw between parental demonstration of literacy in use and students’ motivation to read. This experience also reinforced her desire to address students’ needs in her classroom. She believed that students needed encouragement to succeed as readers, and she was worried many of her students did not receive that encouragement at home. Ms. Brooks explained the passion she felt to help her students succeed in light of what she viewed as little family literacy support:

I just always have a burning, and I try to tell the children [education] is the key… You need to listen. You need to listen to me. You need to try to do those things that Ms. Brooks is trying to get you to see. If you would just study your words, you know, and do those simple [things]. And I said, even if you don’t have anybody at home doing it for you or with you, try to sit down and read it. Listen to what we’re saying in here, and then take it home, you know, and try to do it if there’s nobody encouraging you. So, I try to encourage them.

Across these examples, Ms. Brooks seemed to affirm her history of literacy growing up in the Bronx in contrast to her views of her students at Maplewood. While she remembered seeing her mother reading papers and books, and studying, on this occasion, she did not imagine that students in her class while also from low-income households might receive similar support. I wondered if Ms. Brown might be adopting this belief/policy as a sort of unexamined “schizophrenic bind” (King, 2005, p. 8) that is
suggested to exist when African American educators adopt mainstream deficit discourses as they adapt within dominant views in educational systems. Feeding that schizophrenic bind, it also seems likely that, Ms. Brooks’ own experiences in teacher education and professional development did not directly address deficit discourses, particularly because most pre-service and in-service programs for teachers neglect the notion of deficit discourse and the bodies of research surrounding it (Compton-Lilly, 2004; Delpit, 1995 & 2012; Ladson-Billing, 2006).

**Belief/implicit policy number three: Knowledge sharing flows one-way.**

From a strength-based perspective, however, Ms. Brooks’ students would be seen as having many literacy experiences at home from which she could build in the classroom. I saw a powerful example of this with Sasha, a six-year-old girl in Ms. Brooks’ class. In an interview with Sasha’s mom, she explained Sasha’s interests and curiosities:

[Sasha’s] into bugs. We stayed in Lansing until she was three. She was staring at the ground and she was telling me about this big worm she found that was black, red, and white, and I said, ‘Oh my God, that is a snake.’ On her way to school every morning she picks up rocks. She collects them. I don’t know exactly what she likes about them, rocks, spiders…she definitely is curious. And, she likes to read. She likes to know things. She likes to be right. I think that is why she likes to read so much. I didn’t even know dogs were allergic to chocolate, but Sasha told me.

Given professional development that led to beliefs and policies that valued home knowledge, Ms. Brooks might have been supported in using this kind of information to find books about bugs, rock, and snakes, and other non-fiction texts for Sasha to read. Sasha might have become the resident expert on these topics during scientific investigations, or inquiry units might have been designed around these topics (and others that connect to students’ interests) to create a culturally relevant curriculum (Cowhey, 2006; Gay, 2000; Sleeter & Cornbleth, 2011). However, given the professional
development opportunities accessed in the district and school, Ms. Brooks did not have opportunities to develop the background that would allow her to hear possibilities in stories like Sasha’s for building on students’ literacy knowledge and interests.

Building from the previous example about possibilities for teachers to use students’ home knowledge to inform instruction, the view seemed pervasive in my analysis of Maplewood data that literacy knowledge was shared from school to home but not the other way around. In spite of a large body of literature that demonstrated the impact of drawing on home and community knowledge to support teachers in constructing curriculum (Cowhey, 2006; Gay, 2000; Sleeter & Cornbleth, 2011), I did not observe instances in which teachers or administrators identified or discussed families’ funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzalez, 1992) and I saw no support or opportunities for them to learn strategies for using that knowledge in the classroom. Instead, educators offered support to families by sending literacy into students’ homes and by inviting families into the school to see students’ literacy achievements – for example, Maplewood Elementary School, with district support, sent home summer reading packets to promote home literacy and held literacy nights once or twice a year to spotlight student writing (Figure 4.1).
During one literacy night event, kindergarten, first and second grade teachers explained the school’s writing focus to parents, and students read books they had written to their families. During this literacy night, teachers shared school-based literacies with parents. Explaining the purpose of literacy night at Maplewood Elementary, the reading teacher said to the audience of family members:

You can see we have a wealth of knowledge. So, I invite you to go around and look at the different writings, the students did a fantastic job. We really appreciate your coming tonight to celebrate what your children do with us because that is what it is all about. At the end of each table, right here are some handouts for first grade parents about ELA and writing.

It was important for students to share their work with families. And it was important for the school to share the students’ knowledge—and the school’s—as reflected in students’ writing. Families were proud of their students’ writing as they took pictures and browsed the tables where students’ books rested. These efforts brought families into schools, but literacy events such as this largely existed to share information with parents and were not
structured as opportunities to tap into home literacies and \textit{funds of knowledge} to connect classroom learning to such knowledge.

\textbf{Literacy Policy Positions Teachers and Teaching Practice}

As I reviewed data, it seemed clear that literacy policy reflected at Maplewood positioned teachers in three important ways. First, policy at all school systems levels positioned them as responsible for students’ achievement. Thus, policy largely focused on improving the quality of teachers’ instruction. At the district level, Dr. Bridges set policy to improve teacher instruction in two areas she believed they were under prepared to teach—phonics and writing.

\textbf{Policy positioned teachers as responsible.} District administrators like the District Superintendent, Dr. Davis, justified many of the district’s literacy policies and programs based on his views that teachers were responsible for the success of their students. This was evident in statements such as his explanation at a district \textit{Spring Conference for Literacy Leaders} in the summer of 2010, when he emphasized teachers’ responsibility for supporting student achievement while expressing his belief in the Greenbrier School District students’ ability to achieve. He explained:

\begin{quote}
A child’s history does not determine their success, nor does their neighborhood. Teachers determine students’ success. If teachers feel that because of a child’s history they cannot move forward, we fail them. We have to have high expectations for all students. Right now our students are in a holding pattern; if [teachers] give them clearance, they can take off.
\end{quote}

In this way, the superintendent communicated to teachers that it was their responsibility to change their practice to move students out of “holding patterns” and allow students to soar academically. Dr. Davis’ statement that teachers needed to “give them clearance so
they can take off” seemed to reflect the district’s belief that teachers had power to either help students excel or hold students back.

This belief was also evident at the federal policy level in NCLB’s call for highly qualified teachers, especially in Title I schools like Maplewood Elementary. National policy positioned teachers as responsible for children’s achievement through NCLB goals to:

1. increase student academic achievement through strategies such as improving teacher and principal quality and increasing the number of highly qualified teachers in the classroom and highly qualified principals and assistant principals in schools; and

2. hold local educational agencies and schools accountable for improvements in student academic achievement. (n.p.)

At Maplewood Elementary School, Ms. Johnson also expressed the belief that teachers were responsible for student achievement. Her belief echoed the stance expressed in NCLB. During a meeting with kindergarten-second grade teachers, Ms. Johnson reiterated that students had to make “gains”—increase their assessments scores—while in their classrooms. She emphasized that teachers had to efficiently use instructional time to ensure those gains. She also kept a list of students’ names on chart paper hanging in her workroom to monitor students’ progress and support Maplewood faculty’s discussions about student achievement. Ms. Johnson used the chart to talk about students by name and reminded teachers that those students were capable of academic success, and that it was teachers’ responsibility to make sure students progressed. She raised concerns about the performance of Maplewood students during one meeting and challenged teachers to take responsibility for all students’ progress saying:

That is my big thing: I don't want any down time in instruction. We have students listed over there (pointing to chart), and we are looking at those kids and we are
looking at those students’ progress. One of the things the district is very adamant about, and I am too, is your students can't remain in your class and not make gains. If your child has a problem and you think it is an issue in which you have done everything possible, which has to be documented, then we can take a look at that, but your kids have to move. We can no longer make excuses.

In this conversation, Ms. Johnson aligns her belief that teachers are responsible for student success with the district’s beliefs in teachers’ responsibility for students’ achievement. Ms. Johnson expressed concern when one student did not make academic progress she expected, particularly when that student received one-on-one instruction from the reading intervention teacher, Ms. Berling—at times referred to as a teacher who provided extra “resources” to students who needed interventions. When Ms. Berling shared with Ms. Johnson that there were some students who had not shown any growth, Ms. Johnson reiterated her view that teachers must take responsibility for moving students forward:

Those are the ones we have to make sure that they are on level. There are no ifs, ands, or buts, about it. Because this kid right here (pointing to chart), he is just as smart as he can be. . . . Just as bright as he could be. This is resource, this is resource. There is no way that this kid [should not move]. See that's my concern.

Ms. Johnson was concerned that a student, in the highest level of intervention the school offered in resource, was not making gains. She wanted teachers to know that it was their responsibility to address these concerns by improving their practice and raising student achievement.

Policy positioned teachers as under prepared to teach phonics. As Dr. Bridges expressed concerns about the progress students were or were not making, she sometimes focused on whether or not she felt they were prepared to teach phonics. Dr. Bridges identified several causes of teacher unpreparedness to teach phonics and felt that, as a result, there was need for classroom programs that, according to her, would build
teachers’ content knowledge of phonics. Dr. Bridges specifically addressed problems she saw in teacher education programs, which she felt insufficiently prepared teachers to teach reading, especially phonics. She believed that students in colleges of education should not only take more literacy courses, but that key objectives in those courses should include mastering the teaching of phonics and phonemic awareness instruction. She explained:

> When you look at teacher-education programs, teachers might get one or two courses in reading in their undergrad program, but most of their work in the classroom is around reading. So, I think there are some issues at the higher education level; that is my personal opinion. Because really [colleges of education] should be aligning with what schools need. There are a lot of programs out there that teach teachers how to teach phonics and phonemic awareness, because that’s what [teachers] are not getting in their undergrad programs.

In this way, Dr. Bridges expressed her own policy about the need for excellence in phonics instruction based on her perceptions of teacher and student needs—along with her belief that explicit phonics instruction was necessary for readers to excel. The district used commercial literacy curricula such as *Breakthrough to Literacy* (2004) and *SuccessMaker* (2001) to remediate teacher practice because Dr. Bridges viewed many teachers as unprepared to teach phonics effectively. I will discuss such programs in more detail in Chapter Five.

**Policy positioned teachers as under prepared to teach writing.** In addition to Dr. Bridges’ belief that teachers were under prepared to instruct children in phonemic awareness and phonics, she also believed most schools and teachers in the district insufficiently taught writing. She explained experience that she had three years prior to this study when she first arrived in the district:
We looked at some of that national data and we started drilling down to our data, and we saw that reading and writing were gaps in many schools. We also discovered that writing wasn’t being consistently taught across schools and across grades, and we know that writing supports reading and reading supports writing. So, it wasn’t happening.

Thus, just as Dr. Bridges relied on data to identify areas of concern in reading instruction, she used data, largely state standardized writing scores, to identify areas of concern in writing instruction. Dr. Bridges’ view that teachers insufficiently taught writing eventually led her to adopt *Empowering Writers* (2004), a commercial writing curriculum. She adopted this program to improve teachers’ instruction with the view that improved instruction would lead to gains in students’ writing abilities and consequently their writing scores on standardized writing tests.

**Policies Designed to Improve Teacher Practice**

Based on the perspectives that federal and local policymakers and participants communicated about teachers and students of Color, stakeholders set policies to address their perceptions of students’ and teachers’ positions on a spectrum of preparedness—policies that had great impact on teaching practice and led the teachers in this study to long for the autonomy to “just teach.” As is widely reported in the literature, at the national level, policy makers emphasized that teachers and districts should implement literacy practices based on a narrow definition of scientific research (Allington, 2002; Allington & Garan, 2002; Coles, 2000 & 2003; Garan, 2004). At all school system levels, stakeholders promoted data-driven instruction based on the same definition of scientific research as a primary way to focus teachers’ instruction around tested concepts and increase student achievement on those tests. At the national level, policymakers mandated that teachers’ curricula address state academic standards and that students
make *Adequate Yearly Progress* toward those standards. To better understand these policy moves, I constructed several policy themes (or policies) based on an analysis of NCLB (2001) legislation, interview transcripts, and professional development workshop field notes. Those themes are: (a) the policy of academic standards; (b) the policy of *Adequate Yearly Progress*; (c) the policy of *scientifically based reading research* (d) the policy of data-driven instruction, and (e) the policy of *fidelity of implementation*. As I describe and discuss each of these structures and strategies to improve teacher quality, I will follow each with a discussion of how teachers responded to and appropriated the structures and strategies at Maplewood Elementary School.

**The Policy of Academic Standards**

At the national level, the NCLB Act of 2001 under Title I worked to change teacher practice as it emphasized the importance of aligning instruction with rigorous state standards. These standards were meant to lead to a high-quality education for all students and improve student achievement as explained in NCLB/Title I materials:

> The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments. (n.p.)

While NCLB did not begin the standards movement, it placed standards at the core of practices designed to improve students’ achievement, particularly for students of Color. As mentioned earlier, terms used in NCLB materials such as “minorities” and “disadvantaged” communicated this emphasis on the education of children minoritized in U.S. schools and society. The United States Department of Education aligned its professional development for teachers with national policies that required states to base instruction and evaluation of student achievement on academic standards. Ms. Williams
explained how state standards formed the basis for all the state’s support to districts and schools:

   Everything is focused on or coming from our standards, because that is what we are held accountable for, are our standards. So, whatever support, resources or materials we can provide are always research based and tied to our state standards.

The national mandate for standards-based-instruction controlled state practice. The states’ accountability to the Department of Education for students’ progress toward mastering standards led districts and teachers to emphasize those standards as well. Standards-based instruction was, therefore, a technocratic policy that trickled down into classrooms and largely influenced teacher practice in ways described in the following sections.

   Maplewood responds to academic standards. Teachers responded to NCLB’s mandate for standards-driven instruction as they discussed aligning instruction to state standards and questioned the developmental appropriateness of those standards for students. This was reflected in teachers’ discussions around curriculum. Both Ms. Herndon, a kindergarten teacher, and Ms. Brooks, a first grade teacher, were required by the district to keep standards at the forefront of their minds when making instructional decisions. District literacy specialists asked all teachers to post academic standards at the front of their rooms aligning specific standards with their daily lessons (Figure 4.2). Teachers were also required by Dr. Bridges to read the academic standards to students at the beginning and end of each lesson.
A district Early Childhood Education Coordinator, Ms. Lilley, explained the move in the
district to require teachers to post, and reference, the standards while teaching saying:

I now think that the [district] is communicat[ing] to [teachers] that the non-negotiable [is] to post those standards. And one of the things we did in early childhood was we actually printed out the standards for them in kindergarten through second grade, on different colored cards, just because we wanted them to have them where they didn’t have to waste time writing them up. . . . They would have a way to organize them in a box, and they could just pull it out and put it up there.

Requiring teachers to post standards in their classroom communicated to teachers that
their teaching should be standard-driven. Conversation with teachers during team
meetings and faculty meetings showed that a policy of standards-driven instruction
permeated teacher talk and planning.

**Standards influence teacher instruction.** Ms. Herndon, a Maplewood
kindergarten teacher, described how standards influenced how she made decisions about
what to teach as she examined literacy tools she was required to use such as the
Breakthrough to Literacy (2004) textbooks. Her description of teaching according to those texts indicates her work to align curriculum with state standards by pulling those standards out of commercial curricula:

With each Breakthrough to Literacy big book there is a guide. I’ll show you, each book has a—I don’t want to say basal—but you know how a basal has the guides? Now, it doesn’t have the number standards and all written next to it, but you can go to the guide and find standards to pull out. A lot of them though don’t really go together all that great I don’t think. There is a book, Colors ABC, and one of the [lessons] to [teach] is . . . Colors and . . . that’s not a standard. I mean there are a lot of [lessons] in there that aren’t standards. Now, would I like them to know the Color words? Yes, and I’m going to talk about [Color words] and all, but that’s not a standard . . . You just have to pull out the [lessons] that are.

Ms. Herndon’s focus on “pulling out” lessons that directly connected to the standards, as well as her negotiation of how to teach concepts not aligned with standards, reflected the policy of standards in practice and her response to that policy. She affirmed the school and district’s policy in general that teachers’ instruction had to be standards-driven.

While Ms. Herndon engaged in many other literacy practices without using books from Breakthrough to Literacy (2004), as she explained, the standards heavily guided her teaching choices.

Standards constrain student-centered teaching, but some autonomy can be found. Ms. Brooks responded to standards-driven instruction by communicating her view that standards constrained student-centered teaching. Ms. Brooks believed she should offer student-centered, responsive teaching that met students where they were:

First . . . you’re like ‘Oh, what do I do?’ And [the district] gives you these manuals but to me it’s still not…I don’t know, what am I trying to say? They give you all this stuff and we have to use . . . the standards and all this kind of stuff, but we have to look at the child and see where they are and then take it from there.

Ms. Brooks acknowledged that when she first started teaching, the district gave her
manuals and standards to guide her practice. As she gained experience teaching, she became frustrated with students’ lack of understanding that occurred when she was mandated to teach to particular standards before students were ready for a particular skill:

I am willing to [teach a standard], if my children can get it. … I was trying to teach cause and effect, [but] they [didn’t] understand it from the very beginning. You know what I am saying? You got to keep going back over it, going back over it. And I’m saying to myself, ‘why does a first grader really need to know that right now?’ But then they’re telling me because the third grade is going to take the [state standardized test] . . . in a couple years. Then, yeah, I need to introduce that to the child. So, I tried it, but I’m saying to myself, these kids are not really paying attention. . . . But I’ll still [teach it], but I’m not going to spend a whole lot of time on that. I’ll introduce it to [them], and I’ll show [them], and I’ll keep trying to get them to get it. Just like . . . when I first got here we were doing fact and opinion, but I’m saying to myself, ‘they don’t understand that concept yet.’

In spite of this view, Ms. Brooks conceded to teaching to standards under pressure to prepare students for standardized tests that the students would take in third grade, but she also negotiated the extent to which she let academic standards control her practice—her own autonomy—by not spending much time on concepts she felt her students did not understand. Nevertheless, because of strict policies set by the district, Ms. Brooks felt pressure to teach and assess students on particular standards each week and turn in common assessments based on students performances on skills addressed in the standards to the principal whether she felt students were ready to learn the concepts or not. Most teachers, like Ms. Brooks, reluctantly complied with this standards-driven policy that they felt, in some cases marginalized student-centered teaching. In this way, they felt that standards sometimes inhibited their license to “just teach” based on their ongoing assessment of students, student interests, and teachers’ professional judgments.

Teachers, like those in this study, may feel like they cannot “just teach” because they have not had professional development to learn to interpret standards in ways that
keep students and culturally relevant instruction at the center of the curriculum. Emerging literature around making senses of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (Long, Hutchinson, & Neiderhiser, 2011) explains the importance of providing teachers with professional development that empowers them to negotiate standards based on their professional knowledge and students’ needs and interests.

The Policy of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): A Key Measure of District Performance

Another way that policy impacted practice was through policies related to Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). In order to ensure that students made AYP—meaning students’ met the state-determined thresholds for proficient performance on standards-based skills and content—students were frequently assessed using benchmark tests and end-of-the-year standardized tests. In the Greenbrier School District, Ms. Lilley, a district Early Childhood Education Coordinator, communicated her belief that AYP was a key measure of district performance in the Greenbrier School District. Ms. Lilley explained in an interview that the state recently placed the school district under corrective action for failing to make AYP (see Appendix I for Corrective Action letter). Although many individual schools in the district made AYP, several subgroups of students in the district did not make sufficient progress, which led to the entire district not making AYP. While discussing the importance of balancing teacher autonomy with district intervention, the coordinator explained the pressure educators felt in the district to improve student performance on tests and implications for instruction in schools when students, schools and the district were in need of improvement:

The whole district is in ‘District Improvement.’ That means that for two or three years we have not made the AYP standards for the district…That’s because there are students in every school, even the school where you are at, that have not made
adequate progress, and so the district is in corrective action, in district improvement. So, there are certain things that they have to do. And, there are certain sanctions, and protocols. We have to have a district improvement plan. Just like we have a Title I plan, we have a district improvement plan. [The plan shows] you where we missed it across the district for AYP, the different categories, and [the plan] shows the initiatives that we have had over the years to try and support the learners a little better.

Because the state held the district accountable for making AYP, the Greenbrier School District had to create policies that would address low-student performance on tests and teachers’ ability to improve student achievement. These policies were visible in the district’s improvement plan titled *Academic Excellence: Back to the Basics*, 2008-2013. In this plan, the district set policies to demonstrate their efforts to create new initiatives to increase student performance and comply with federal and state accountability policies by returning to the basics. According to a document distributed during a Maplewood faculty meeting, that highlighted key components of this plan, the Greenbrier School District set *Bold Goals* to increase their performance and make AYP, two of which applied directly to elementary students in the district including:

1. All kindergarten students will be reading by first grade as measured by *Dominie* (2004).

2. 85% of third grade students will score met or exemplary on the [state standardized test] writing, ELA and math exams. (n.p.)

By setting these bold goals, the district formed district policy in direct response to the federal mandate to make AYP—a mandate enforced by the state. The state required the Greenbrier School District to respond with detailed plans to address its “in need of improvement” status to avoid an inevitable restructuring if the school repeated its pattern of failing to make AYP. Policies to improve the district’s status were additional factors that seemed to constrain possibilities and opportunities for teachers to “just teach.”
The Policy of Data-driven Instruction

Data show that the Dr. Bridges and Ms. Johnson valued data-driven instruction. According to Dr. Bridges’, data-driven instruction meant that teachers and school administrators used a wide range of data (both formative and summative) to create a student-centered, responsive curriculum that addressed students’ academic needs. Darling-Hammond (2010) emphasized the importance of instruction driven by these kinds of data as teachers learn to “teach diagnostically, rather than from scripts or by merely plowing through the text, insensitive to student learning,” (p. 214). Darling-Hammond also suggested that high quality teachers “learn to adapt their lessons based on ongoing assessment of students’ needs, and they acquire a wide range of practices which they can apply judiciously based on what is needed for different students and different goals in different circumstances” (p.214). In this sense, a focus on data-driven instruction is essential to quality instruction.

While teachers at Maplewood certainly valued and used formative assessment formally and informally every day, data from this study show that they and their administrator felt pressure to focus primarily on summative assessment data (that is data from benchmarks tests, end-of-the-year standardized tests, and summative assessments generated by SuccessMaker (2001) and Breakthrough to Literacy (2004) programs) and to use results from those assessments to identify indicators in the state standards necessary to re-teach in order to increase students’ achievement. Transcripts from faculty meeting discussions show how Ms. Johnson and the teachers parsed standardized test data to make sure students and the school made Adequate Yearly Progress on standard-
based skills and content. Data in this study also show that making AYP in the past placed pressure on the school and its teachers to continue to make AYP in subsequent years.

**Parsing test scores to make AYP.** At Maplewood Elementary School, the pressure to make AYP led to district policies that mandated data-driven instruction, which led teachers and administrators at Maplewood to parse test scores in efforts to make AYP. Administrators and teachers gathered score reports from numerous sources (e.g., state test scores, Measure of Academic Progress or MAP scores, *SuccessMaker* (2001) Scores, *Dominie* (2004) outcomes), analyzed the scores, identified standards to re-teach, and ultimately increased scores to make AYP. Participants responded to NCLB’s mandate for districts to make AYP as faculty met to discuss how they would support students whose standardized test scores indicated they would not reach that goal. The district appeared to view standardized tests as legitimate measures of student achievement and therefore as key tools for monitoring students’ progress.

Pressures to meet AYP coupled with the perceived legitimacy of standardized tests created a discourse of progress driven by testing at Maplewood Elementary School. In the following faculty meeting conversation, parsing test scores illustrates how the school’s data driven instruction was intimately linked back to efforts to make AYP. Teachers negotiated the meaning of test data as they determined which academic standards and which students to focus on more closely. The school’s curriculum resource administrator began the conversation by referencing a district report:

Mr. Baker: This report [was] formulated by our office of accountability and research. [It is] looking at where the child is and what they met, how many points they need to go backwards and how many points they need to go forward. If you look at grade five, student A’s writing scale score is 595. The next number is 600. When you are at 600 you meet expectations. Looking at student B who is 684,
that is very good. So he would have to drop 15 points to get to the next level, and the likelihood of that happening is slim. In math he is a 662 which means he is an exemplary fourth grader. He could probably drop to met, and that is something we don't want to happen because he is already exemplary. In science, he probably met expectations. So, he met three. So he is good to go…We don't want him to drop. Now when we look at social studies… he could go down.

Ms. Johnson: So, he has the opportunity to go higher?

Mr. Baker: Yeah, he could.

Teacher: So, [students] have Not Met One or Not Met Two, they will take points?21?

Ms. Johnson: They don't take points, they give points.

Teacher: So if we, if we get more points, [Maplewood Elementary School] will get met?

The principal, curriculum resource staff, reading teachers, and teachers closely scrutinized test score data in this way to monitor how near or far students were from making AYP, and subsequently how near or far the school was from making AYP. They believed that doing so would enable them to focus on students whose scores they could move up the most, or those they could prevent from slipping down, to maintain AYP.

It is important to note that I am not implying that teachers or Ms. Johnson, or teachers, only cared about test scores—I saw multiple examples of how they deeply cared for students and for formative formal and informal assessments—but pressure to meet AYP meant the faculty and administrators felt the need to carefully examine data in hopes of increasing students’ performance on tests. This need to focus on data-driven instruction, typically defined as a focus on standardized test scores, in order to make AYP

21 State Standardized test cut-off scores are determined by the state. State Standardized Test 1 cut-off scores identify students as performing Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, or Advanced. State Standardized Test 2 cut-off scores, discussed above, identified students as Not Met 1, Not Met 2, Met, Exemplary 1, or Exemplary 2.
was a further factor that teachers felt limited their ability to “just teach” according to their beliefs and formative assessments of students.

*Making AYP created pressure to maintain academic success.* Within the same faculty meeting conversation referenced above, faculty communicated their pride in Maplewood’s students’ ability, and the schools’ ability, to make and maintain AYP and the district’s recognition of the school’s academic success. To maintain that success, administrators and teachers looked closely at test data, determined student weaknesses, and discussed how teachers would adapt instruction to meet students’ needs and raise both students’ and teachers’ performance. The state’s recent changes to methods of determining AYP led to conversations during faculty meetings about cut-scores – the scores needed to make AYP—and changes in terminology that categorized student performance (e.g., “below basic” changed to “Not Met”).

During faculty meetings, administrators’ and teachers’ conversations about standardized assessment data revealed how important it was for Maplewood to maintain student achievement and also uphold its reputation as one of few elementary schools making AYP in the district. In conversation led by Mr. Baker, the curriculum resource administrator, he expressed his belief that the state had reduced the rigor of the content of the test even though the state raised the cut-scores required to meet AYP. Ms. Johnson communicated pride that, had Maplewood been evaluated using the new scores the previous year, the school would have been one of only four schools in the district to make AYP, a fact they were proud of as a Title I school recognized for closing the achievement gap. Mr. Baker began:
Mr. Baker: One, two, three, four [points]. The name met, not met, and exemplary is all the same other than the criteria, because you all know they did drop the rigor, and by the rigor I mean the content. Because a 600 when we were [using a former test] it was a little different. I guess what I am saying is they made it easier for schools to do well, because nobody wants to be viewed in a negative light.

Ms. Johnson: I just want to say that, the [district] shared some data with us, that our scores this year, if we had the new goals for this coming year last year, there would have been only four schools that made AYP and Maplewood Elementary School would have been one of them. So, we have to continue to work hard to move our students. Now, we have to look at data. We do have to look at the bottom students within the 15 pt. range. That means we have to look at all of our students and say, okay, we have to pull all these kids up.

This extended conversation points to the way Ms. Johnson took pride in, and encouraged teachers to take pride in, Maplewood’s achievements and illustrates the pressure felt by educators to make AYP at Maplewood Elementary School.

While, Ms. Johnson and others believed the state’s new cut scores and changes in language terminology for making AYP meant little, Ms. Johnson explained to the teachers that they must maintain their intense focus on students’ scores to ensure the school maintained its AYP status. The district considered Maplewood an exemplary Title I school, and Maplewood was nominated for, and was later recognized, as a 2012 National Blue Ribbon school\(^{22}\). In light of Maplewood’s many accolades, the staff worked hard to maintain high levels of success. However, because Maplewood served a student population largely comprised of students of Color from low-socioeconomic backgrounds—students positioned by NCLB as vulnerable to low achievement—Maplewood’s faculty did not, and could not, take their achievement for granted.

\(^{22}\) The National Blue Ribbon award “recognizes … schools where students perform at very high levels or where significant improvements are being made in students’ level of academic achievement,” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., n.p.).
The Policy of Scientifically Based Reading Research (SBRR)

To further improve teacher quality and raise student achievement, national policymakers authorized the use of SBRR—that is experimental research—to inform practice. Specifically, the NCLB Act (2001), under Title I, sought to increase student achievement by, “promoting school-wide reform and ensuring the access of children to effective, scientifically based instructional strategies and challenging academic content” (n.p.). SBRR, originating at the federal level, led to many district-and school-adopted commercial literacy programs designed around a narrow definition of research. While the term SBRR refers to reading research, the term scientifically based reading research more generally referred to literacy practices that extended to both reading and writing curricula. In the documental data I reviewed, the term scientifically based research was often joined with the term “proven methods” (“Proven Methods”, n.d., n.p.), for example, on the What Works Clearing House on the Department of Education website—or “proven approaches” (“Empowering Writers”, n.d., p.1), as seen within the district’s Empowering Writers (2004) curriculum. This section shows how the policy of SBRR was appropriated in practice at the national, state, district, and school levels.

A national perspective on SBRR. At the national-school-system level, data show that policymakers defined scientifically based reading research as experimental science which thereby led to “proven methods” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.) of instruction. This policy can be traced back to Public Law 107–110 which states that

scientifically based reading research:

(A) means research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs; and
(B) includes research that—

(i) employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment;

(ii) involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn;

(iii) relies on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and valid data across evaluators and observers, across multiple measurements and observations, and across studies by the same or different investigators;

(iv) is evaluated using experimental or quasi-experimental designs in which individuals, entities, programs, or activities are assigned to different conditions and with appropriate controls to evaluate the effects of the condition of interest, with a preference for random-assignment experiments, or other designs to the extent that those designs contain within-condition or across-condition controls;

(v) ensures that experimental studies are presented in sufficient detail and clarity to allow for replication or, at a minimum, offer the opportunity to build systematically on their findings; and

(vi) has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review.

(NCLB Act, 2001).

Within this definition, the NCLB Act situated scientifically based reading research within quantitative, experimental methodologies and set a policy of positivism\textsuperscript{23} which considers only the existence of single truths.\textsuperscript{24} However, anthropologists such as Fred Erickson (1985) have long challenged the value of positive approaches for educational research asserting:

The history of mainstream positivist research on teaching for the past 20 years is one of analytical bootstrapping with very partial theoretical models of the teaching process, on the assumptions that what was generic across classrooms

\textsuperscript{23} Positivism is rooted work of 19\textsuperscript{th} century French philosopher, Auguste Comte (1848).

\textsuperscript{24} Positivism suggests that metaphysics—reality that lies beyond objective experience—is an insufficient source of knowledge and positive knowledge is developed through empirical observation of natural phenomena (Miriam Webster, 2012).
would emerge across studies, and that the subtle variations across classrooms were trivial and could be washed out of the analysis as error variance. (p. 131)

Other educational researchers, moving the post-positivist paradigm into a critical and sociocultural stance, point out that it is the teacher’s responsibility to pay attention to variance in the classroom and differentiate instruction, including using culturally relevant pedagogies and socially just educational practices, to meet all learners’ needs (Gay, 2009; Lazar, Edwards, McMillon, 2012; McIntyre, Hulan & Layne, 2010). Sociocultural research supports educators in understanding the unique educational strengths and needs of students across cultural and linguistic groups through an interpretive approach. As long ago as 1973, anthropologist, Clifford Geertz contributed significant arguments for an interpretive approach to research that would attend more to the nuanced sociocultural ways people make meaning, phenomena that cannot be understood through experimental methods. More recently, qualitative researchers have continued to take up and extend this message that attending to the sociocultural nature of learning is important to understand a range of human practices (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Wolcott, 1990). Despite arguments for interpretive, qualitative research in education, NCLB drew from a positivist stance in setting policy that teacher practice in schools would be based on research that is, in the view of the federal government, objective, experimental, replicable, tests hypotheses, and draws generalizable conclusions ignoring qualitative studies, many of which have been instrumental in shaping some of the most important literacy theory and practice of the past forty years (Heath, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzalez, 1992 to name a few).

**Scientifically Based Research is “What Works”**. The U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES) (2011), at the time of this study,
privileged and promoted programs supported by SBRR through the creation of the *What Works Clearinghouse* (WWC). This clearinghouse was a repository for research on the effectiveness of educational programs, products, practices, and policies reifying the national policy that experimental studies can lead to the development of practices that, if implemented with fidelity, will “work” to increase students’ achievement. The IES developed the WWC to support teacher practice based on NCLB’s definition of scientific research. The U.S. Department of Education’s *What Works Clearinghouse* website explained that, “By reviewing and synthesizing scientific evidence, the WWC is fulfilling part of IES’s overall mission to ‘provide rigorous and relevant evidence on which to ground education practice and policy’” (Para. 1). The U.S. Department of Education (2011) website goes on to say:

> There are a number of ways to conduct this research, and we want to focus on those that make us the most confident that the effect we see is due solely to the intervention alone, and not to the many other factors that are at play in schools and in the lives of students, such as teachers, school, and family. This type of research provides causal evidence about the effectiveness of interventions and provides the basis for WWC reports. (para. 3)

According to this definition, a district or school educator looking for teaching ideas could expect all of the studies in the *What Works Clearinghouse* would be based on either experimental or quasi-experimental reading studies. Additionally, because of the nature of experimental studies which do not examine sociocultural factors, an educator could also predict that the programs identified by the clearinghouse would likely ignore the cultures, linguistic knowledge, beliefs and values of students and teachers, and the circumstance of individual schools and families—all of which are at the forefront of cutting edge qualitative educational research and reports of pedagogies that examine
effective education for diverse learners (Long, Hitchinson, & Neiderhiser, 2011; Laman, 2013; Souto-Manning, 2010).

A state level perspective of SBRR: Multiple definitions of science. At the state level, both positivist policy language and ideology of SBRR but also policies language grounded in constructivist views of science acknowledging multiple ways humans construct reality based upon their sociocultural-historical experiences (Golafshani, 2003) were evident in policy documents and transcripts from an interview with Ms. Williams, a State Department of Education Early Childhood Education Literacy Associate. While most participants in this study appropriated the federal definition of science, at the state level, Ms. Williams expressed her view of the state’s policy on SBRR explaining that it could be defined both qualitatively and quantitatively. While NCLB mandated the state to use quantifiable data (e.g., standardized tests) to measure district and school performance, Ms. Williams used a broader definition of what constitutes scientific research as the basis for the kind of professional development she felt that teachers should and did receive:

[Professional Development] is based on what we know about research and practice . . . So, whatever support, resources, or materials we can provide are always research based and tied to our state standards. . . . I think . . . early on when . . . you had NCLB and Reading First . . . the intent from the federal level was to push certain kinds of research, but I also think they got their hand slapped on a lot of that, and certainly in this agency we don’t do anything that’s not research based. . . . You can debate and argue about what is scientific and what is not, but . . . from the National Writing Project perspective and NCTE, and all the research, . . . all of our balanced practice regarding reading and writing . . . are certainly research based, and you could say scientifically based.

This excerpt demonstrates, from Ms. William’s perspective, that the state’s policy for professional development was based on a flexible interpretation of SBRR and what counts as science. Her definition of SBRR neither precluded the use of qualitative studies
conducted by leaders in the field of literacy nor the use of professional literature
grounded in paradigms beyond positivist ideologies.

An example of the state drawing on a broadened definition of what constitutes
SBRR was apparent when I attended a state-sponsored workshop on *Exemplary Writing*
with two Maplewood teachers. During this workshop, presenters foregrounded the work
of educators such as Donald Murray (1982) Donald Graves (2003), Ralph Fletcher
(1998), and Lucy Calkins (1994) each of whom theorize about literacy practice based on
qualitative studies of literacy learning and rather than solely experimental studies. Ms.
Felice, the workshop’s leader, explained:

> Don Murray… He’s really the great grandfather of writing process. We know Don
Graves, but this is the man that I think Don Graves, and I think most of those like Lucy
Calkins, Nancy Atwell, Ralph Fletcher, credit [for championing a process approach to
writing].

The state embraced writing instruction policies based on the work of educators
who encouraged pedagogical approaches grounded in sociocultural learning theories
supported by the work of researchers like Lev Vygotsky (1979) and Brian Cambourne
(1988). This seemed to reflect the state’s flexible interpretation of SBRR. Maplewood
teachers, however, had limited access to these workshops or the messages they
communicated. Only two teachers, Ms. Herndon and Ms. Brown attended this workshop
to learn how Maplewood could be identified as an Exemplary Writing school—state
recognition for of schools implementing rigorous writing programs—by the state. After
attending one state professional development session, there was little discussion at the
school of how to include exemplary writing practices into teachers’ practice.

**District level responses to scientifically based reading research: Complying
with SBRR.** As a result of a national emphasis on SBRR, at the district level, policies
around this term were prevalent. This was indicated across several data sources including an interview with Dr. Bridges, documental data collected during professional training sessions about specific programs (e.g., *Empowering Writers (2004)*, *Accelerated Reader* (2004)—programs I will describe in Chapter Five), and literature defining *scientifically based research* in school lobbies (Appendix J). For example, during an interview with the district deputy superintendent of education in the Greenbrier School District, Dr. Bridges emphasized that *Empowering Writers (2004)* “has a research base” indicating that the district was complying with national policy to use SBRR. The frequent reference to programs’ “research base” led me to examine how SBRR policy manifested in practice as companies promoting curricula appropriated the term to legitimize their products. Based on an examination of the studies that supported programs Dr. Bridges and sales representatives referred to as “research based”, it became clear that that research was largely experimental in nature and thus aligned with NCLB’s definition of SBRR.

I began by looking at the research base supporting *Empowering Writers* to which Dr. Bridges referred. When I examined the *Empowering Writers (2004)* research base I found that the program’s developers provided one research article, and test data from states around the nation, to legitimize its program. The research article was entitled *Empowering Writers (2004): A Balanced and Proven Approach to the Teaching and Learning of Writing* (*Empowering Writers*, 2012, n.p.). While this article is not a study in and of itself, it provides a meta-analysis of other scientific studies such as Hillock, 1984 and 1986—some of which are meta-analyses in themselves—that have yielded their stance on proven approaches to writing. *Empowering Writers (2004)* also used statistical analyses of state test score data to further support its claims that its program was proven
through scientific research. These data suggest that companies like *Empowering Writers* legitimized their curricula using SBRR.

I also heard the terms “research” and “science” evoked in the district at the *Spring Conference for Literacy Leaders*. Dr. Bridges created this professional development opportunity to support the district’s reading teachers. During the institute, a representative from a major educational company, Renaissance Learning, came to promote *Accelerated Reader* (AR) a program through which students take computerized tests after they read specific books. To legitimize AR, the Renaissance representative pointed to the company’s research on the program explaining, “We have done lots of research and you can go back and look at our research. There’s a science behind these assessments.” Examining that research, I found that AR cited 171 studies that supported the efficacy of their product (Figure 4.3). Thirty of these studies are experimental or quasi-experimental studies that NCLB explicitly defines as *scientifically based reading research*. The majority of the other studies (107 of them) were correlational studies—meaning the studies looked for relationships among variables, such as students using AR and their reading growth) and case studies—examining a single individual or group.
These references to science by Dr. Bridges, *Empowering Writers*, and the sales representative for *Accelerated Reader* seemed to be their way of legitimizing and justifying the use of commercial literacy programs. Because the kind of research they cited was typically experimental and quantitative rather than qualitative, they also seemed to argue for the efficacy of the practices in their programs based on the premise that experimental science yields proven results. Based on the science behind *Accelerated Reader*, the sales representative for program specifically pointed out *AR’s* ability to accelerate student learning when used as an intervention within another district-promoted program, *Response to Intervention (RTI)*. The Greenbrier School District purchased those products based on that research, illustrating how SBRR manifested in, and legitimized, professional practice.
Maplewood responds to SBRR: Embracing SBRR-based practices as proven strategies. At Maplewood Elementary, Ms. Johnson, on more than one occasion, shared her belief that programs were secondary to professional judgment, but like many educational leaders (Darling-Hammond, 2010), she expected teachers’ to base their professional judgment and practice on scientifically based research. For example, when she or teachers were required to use programs to accommodate district policy (such as using Empowering Writers), she believed it was important as a school leader to ask teachers to negotiate those programs, using the parts they felt were effective. In addition, Ms. Johnson frequently lifted up examples of effective practice in the form of strategies, independent from programs, which she believed teachers could implement flexibly. These strategies were backed by experimental research—research she believed yielded proven practices for effective instruction. One set of strategies in particular was that developed by Marzano (2009). During a meeting with kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers, Ms. Johnson asked them to adopt at least five Marzano Strategies25 and incorporate them into their teaching. In order to legitimize this policy move, Ms. Johnson connected Marzano to its research base explaining:

One of the research-based . . . or practices that we are going to use is Marzano's Strategies. Marzano has nine instructional strategies that have a research base and have been proven to be effective.

Again, this example shows that the discourse of experimental science, and promises that the practices emerging from that science would yield proven strategies to increase student

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25 Based on the research of Dr. Robert Marzano and his colleagues (Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001) Marzano Research Laboratories (MRL) www.marzanoresearch.com identifies nine strategies to increase student achievement including: similarities and differences, summarizing and note taking, reinforcing effort and providing recognition, homework and practice, non-linguistic, representations, cooperative learning, setting objectives and providing feedback, generating and testing hypotheses; and cues, questions and advanced organizers.
achievement and improve the quality of instruction, was pervasive, in this case, at the school level.

**The Policy of Fidelity of Implementation**

Another wide-spread literacy policy aimed at improving teacher practice and increasing student achievement, was *fidelity of implementation*. *Fidelity of implementation* refers to implementing practices, typically derived from experimental studies, in a way that will replicate the outcomes reported in those studies. During this study, the term *fidelity of implementation* entered the discourse of literacy specialists, consultants, administrators, and teachers as they discussed practices grounded in SBRR, particularly those tied to the program, *Response to Intervention* (RTI)\(^\text{26}\). While the term *fidelity of implementation* was often associated with the RTI framework, participants across contexts appropriated the term in many ways as they talked about the importance of implementing many programs “with fidelity.” The term appeared during district workshop presentations, interviews with district administrators, on district websites, and in discussions of teacher practice at Maplewood Elementary School. At times, participants explained their feelings about the push for *fidelity of implementation* restricting their autonomy, at other times, participants interpreted *fidelity of implementation* positively as a policy that created consistency in literacy practice within the district and at Maplewood Elementary School. I will discuss the literacy policies around *fidelity of implementation*, and participants’ interpretations of those policies, at the national, district and school levels more closely in the following sections.

**Views of fidelity of implementation at the national level: Fidelity is seen to create predictability in performance outcomes.** At the national level, discussions of

\(^{26}\) A tiered approach to offering instructional interventions to students.
fidelity emerged in policy statements associated with *Response to Intervention* (RTI)—a new initiative in the Greenbrier School District during this study. Data at the national level illustrated how fidelity was seen as a way to increase the predictability of students’ performance outcomes but teachers were not always clear about what was meant by the term. As one teacher asked on The National Center on *Response to Intervention* website “We hear a lot about *fidelity of implementation* when talking about RTI. What does this really mean?” (“Ask the Expert”, 2010, n.p.). David Fuchs (2010), at The National Center on *Response to Intervention* responded:

> [Researchers] develop a program, an explicit, carefully delineated program, [so] that through research you can say that if this program is implemented as the researcher implemented it you can expect X, Y, or Z student outcomes. The researchers then share these instructional programs with practitioners and they should be saying to practitioners, ‘Look, this is how we developed the program; this is the program. If you deliver the program the way we have detailed it, it’s a good bet that you will get results as we did.’ So what we’re really saying is, we’re encouraging fidelity of treatment implementation, meaning we’re encouraging you to implement our program the way we implemented it when we validated it. (n.p.)

Fuch’s continued to make the important point that teachers can “tweak” a program, but doing so could lead to unpredictable results—students may perform better or worse than those in research studies. This definition of fidelity, not only illustrates the term’s link to RTI, but also offers a strong definition of *fidelity of implementation* that recognizes the tensions between following practices as delineated in programs based on research, and “tweaking” those practices to meet students’ individual needs.

*Fidelity prevents teachers from making inappropriate decisions.* In reviewing additional policy statements, I found more evidence that fidelity was promoted based on the view that it would ensure that specific programs would be taught with what was termed “integrity” (Deshler, 2008). Realizing that *fidelity of implementation* was a term
used specifically within *Response to Intervention* (RTI) to refer to consistently using practices backed by SBRR, I went to the RTI Action Network website to see if there were any national policies that would help me understand local policies around *fidelity of implementation*. On the RTI Action Network website, I discovered that fidelity functioned as another policy to improve instruction. Deshler (2008) communicates this far-reaching policy on fidelity as he writes:

> One of the critical elements of any RTI program is having in place a set of procedures to ensure that the evidence-based practices used at the various tiers are being implemented with high fidelity. In the absence of regular checks on *fidelity of implementation*, we won’t know if the interventions are being taught with integrity. In order to make sound judgments about a student’s responsiveness to an intervention, we must be assured that the intervention is being taught in a way that is consistent with its initial design. If we don’t know if the intervention is being taught correctly, inappropriate decisions may be made about student performance — i.e., we may attribute poor performance to the student when it may be due primarily to ineffective implementation.

Deshler’s description communicated the policy that *fidelity of implementation*—implementing evidence-based (another term for *scientifically based*) practices according to their design—would safeguard students from teachers’ “inappropriate decisions” clearly indicating a lack of trust in teachers to make instructional decisions on their own.

**District responses to *fidelity of implementation***. Within the district, I identified several district level responses to the federal requirement for *fidelity of implementation*. Dr. Berber, a district consultant, indicated that fidelity meant implementing a program as designed, echoing national definitions of fidelity. Dr. Bridges believed too many district programs made it difficult to implement programs with fidelity and for the district to monitor *fidelity of implementation*. I will discuss these two district views below.

**Fidelity means implementing programs as designed**. I first encountered the term *fidelity of implementation* at a district *Spring Conference for Literacy Leaders*. During
this presentation, Dr. Berber, a district literacy consultant, communicated that the
district’s policy of fidelity to district programs should be central to teacher practice. This
meant that teachers were required to implement district programs according to and not
deviating from each program’s design. In her presentation *Catching Students Before They
Fall* describing *Response to Intervention*, Dr. Berber distinguished between fidelity and
the term, “dosage”:

> While this attention to fidelity is appropriate, it is not sufficient! It is equally
> important to know that interventions are being taught in the right dosage. An
> intervention may be delivered correctly every time (i.e., the intervention has high
> rates of fidelity), but if it is only taught two days a week when it should be taught
every day of the week, outcomes may be compromised because dosage is not
> being carefully monitored.

Dr. Berber clarified the district’s policy on and definition of fidelity as a program being,
“delivered correctly every time.” Dr. Berber’s definition of fidelity aligned with other
district definitions. For example, in the district’s Early Childhood Education Resource
Guide Pre-Kindergarten through Second Grade (n.d.), fidelity was communicated by
explaining, “Fidelity refers to whether an intervention is implemented according to how it
was designed” (p. 2). While this definition was applied by an outside consultant, the
definition reflected the district’s overall policy of *fidelity of implementation* as it applied
to all its adopted curricula and programs in early childhood education.

*Reducing the number of programs supports fidelity of implementation.* At the
district level, Dr. Bridges, the Deputy Superintendent of Education, communicated the
district’s policy that too many programs impeded the district’s efforts to build teachers’
capacity to implement programs with fidelity. Therefore, supporting *fidelity of
implementation* meant staying the course with fewer programs. Upon Dr. Bridges’ arrival
in the district she observed numerous disparate programs that undermined the district’s efforts to monitor *fidelity of implementation*. She shared:

There was no consistency across the district and sometimes no consistency across the school. And, although we had curriculum frameworks, some of those were implemented with fidelity and some…were not. There was a school who wanted to attend a Singapore math conference. I was like, well we’re not using Singapore math; we don’t know anything about Singapore math. How are we going to support you? Why are you going to go off on that tangent? So, I denied that. We’re not having one school use Singapore math while everyone else is using Harcourt Brace, because then we cannot support that school. I need to have my curriculum people investigate it, learn it. There should be someone on staff at the district level that knows every program in the district. Because then how do you support it? Where is the accountability? What if you try that this year and it doesn’t work, and so you try something next year and it doesn’t work? There is very little difference between these programs. Most textbooks align to state standards. They are not 100% aligned. No textbook is 100% aligned, but all the textbooks have basically the same components really. So, I think, in my experience, it doesn’t matter if I get a program from Harcourt or Houghton Mifflin or Pearson; it doesn’t matter. It is the fidelity of the implementation that matters.

In this excerpt, Dr. Bridges outlined several ways multiple programs impeded the district’s ability to build teacher capacity and implement programs with fidelity, including:

- Numerous programs decreased instructional consistency.
- Numerous programs impeded the district’s ability to be knowledgeable about their schools’ programs.
- Numerous programs impeded district monitoring of those programs.

Because Dr. Bridges felt that an abundance of programs inhibited the district’s ability to implement programs with fidelity, she worked to reduce the number of programs in the district and make sure the programs that were in the district were monitored closely.
Ms. Lilley, a district Early Childhood Literacy Coordinator also felt that reducing the number of programs in the district would allow for more fidelity of implementation of those programs. According to Ms. Lilley, fewer programs provided an opportunity for teachers and schools to stay the course with those programs rather than having to adapt their practice to new programs introduced each year because previous programs failed to work. Ms. Lilley, who had worked at the district through several leadership changes, described the district’s current efforts to increase fidelity of implementation. She specifically addressed Dr. Bridges’ commitment to fewer programs and closer district monitoring of those programs. She explained:

There’s been a lot of transition from the upper leadership in the district. So, [I have] to give credit to Dr. Bridges since she has been at the helm of some of these initiatives and everything. For the first time really, I am starting to hear some specific things about some of our initiatives, like no one before would have said, how is Empowering Writers going? She is following through from her level. She is saying, “I want to know. Are they using it? What are they doing?” And you kind of hear that conversation and that buzz and everything...The buzz is trickling down, through those layers to the classroom.

In this excerpt, there is evidence that, according to Ms. Lilley, fidelity of implementation means commitment to specific programs and can be monitored by fidelity checks in schools and classrooms. Ms. Lilley appeared to welcome these changes by crediting Dr. Bridges for keeping the existing initiatives in the forefront of discussions.

School level responses to fidelity of implementation. I discussed the term fidelity of implementation with various educators at Maplewood Elementary School to understand how they made sense of it. Few of them had heard of the term, but many experienced the effects of related policies as they felt requirements not to deviate from district-mandated programs and practices such as Dominie (2004), Empowering Writers (2004), and new pacing guidelines, to name a few. Those who had heard the term had
mixed views about it. Some saw it as constraining at times, but also as a useful tool for creating consistency in teachers’ practice.

**Fidelity of implementation means complete, effective, wholehearted instruction.**

Ms. Berling, Maplewood’s reading teacher, described *fidelity of implementation* as complete, effective, wholehearted instruction. Ms. Berling and I had both attended the *Spring Conference for Literacy Leaders* where we first encountered the term. Knowing Ms. Berling recently learned about the term, I asked what the term meant and which policies she felt she had to implement with fidelity:

Ms. Berling: (laughs) Everything. No . . . what it means to me is that whatever you do, you have to do it completely and effectively and whole heartedly. So . . . it means when I have my intervention groups, [when I] have the kids in here everyday, that I have them for the entire time, that I am hitting all the parts of the lesson. It's not, well, all we did today was read aloud. It is, take them through the parts everyday.

Cindy: And when you say take them through the lesson, are you designing those lessons yourself or are you following a curriculum?

Ms. Berling: With the majority of my group I use the *Soar to Success* curriculum and that has the components: It has read aloud, the re-reading; it has direct instruction; it has guided instruction and application—all in the 35-40 minutes lesson. Of course, with every lesson . . . there are some days when you realize, no, they are not getting this. I need to take them back a step.

In this interchange, Ms. Berling demonstrated her understanding of fidelity with regard to the *Soar to Success* (2008) program. She saw it as consistently implementing the program while simultaneously responding to student needs. She did not seem to see fidelity as parroting the program or sticking only to the script or the teachers’ guide, but she saw it as a way to create consistency in literacy policy in the district. Ms. Berling appeared to build her understanding of fidelity using language from district professional
development documents and presentations. As in Dr. Berber’s descriptions of fidelity, Ms. Berling emphasized that fidelity included a commitment to meeting with students consistently throughout the week for the allotted period of intervention time and using knowledge from those meetings to inform instructional decisions. This description of fidelity closely echoed the description of fidelity in documents distributed during the Spring Conference for Literacy Leaders.

**Fidelity of implementation means making time to implement.** Ms. Berling also defined fidelity as “sticking with a program” long enough to see if it works. She described her frustrations with revolving-door policies, when programs were continuously replaced with new programs:

> I am glad the district is beginning to use the word fidelity, because I spent the majority of my career in the Greenbrier School District, 22 years, so I use the district as an example. And, they always say, let's do this, let's do this, and they only give it a cursory, “tried that, didn't work, yep, tried that didn't work,” and we never [stay with something], even with the Principles of Learning. We had the Principles about six years ago. We did them for a couple of years and then we tried something else. And we had a consultant a couple of years, so we've never, I won't say never, but in my opinion, we don't give things enough time. So, I guess that goes back to fidelity, too. The complete time to implement.

In this excerpt, Ms. Berling demonstrates how her history in the district mediated her understanding of *fidelity of implementation* and what she hoped fidelity would mean for her practice—less change and more consistency. She did not recognize, or experience, fidelity as a tool to restrict her practice and prevent her from making inappropriate instructional decisions. Like Dr. Bridges, because of past numerous program changes in the district, Ms. Berling seemed to feel that *fidelity of implementation* would potentially provide her with space and time to follow through with a program versus building a superficial understanding of numerous new programs each year. Nevertheless, fidelity of
implementation did mean she had to follow a district purchased commercial literacy program rather than designing and intervention program of her own based on her knowledge of her students as readers.

*Fidelity creates consistency in teacher practice.* At times, Ms. Johnson used the concept of *fidelity of implementation* as a tool to create consistency in teachers’ practices at Maplewood Elementary School. Ms. Johnson disliked mandating scripted programs, but she embraced strategies teachers could use flexibly, such as Marzano Strategies—strategies adopted by the district from Marzano Research Laboratories, strategies that she believed teachers needed to implement with fidelity in order to facilitate effectiveness. Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned Ms. Johnson’s introduction of Marzano Strategies at a kindergarten-second grade faculty meeting. The language she used echoed other participants’ discussions of fidelity and dosage—making sure interventions were delivered as often and in the ways that policymakers designed them to be implemented.

Ms. Johnson spoke to teachers saying:

> So, you guys look... decide which of the Marzano Strategies you are going to use. ... How often do you [use the strategies]? Do you do it once or twice and then you stop? You can't do that. Because our kids fade in and out and we know that. We know we have a group of kids who fade in and out. And if we are not constantly implementing then they are not going to get it.

In this excerpt, Ms. Johnson addressed her view that teachers would be better able to help students stay focused through fidelity to Marzano Strategies. While Ms. Johnson was less enthusiastic about implementing programs that she felt restricted teachers’ ability to make instructional decisions, she was willing to ask for fidelity to strategies she believed would help students achieve. Ms. Johnson explained:

> We've worked with Marzano for years. They are strategies that I truly agree with and it does work. ... When you look at it [Marzano] it is about summarizing,
comparing contrasting, repetition. It clearly states that children have to be exposed to something 20 times or more before they retain it. . . . I think these are things that we are already doing, but we are not doing them consistently. We have to commit in ELA to do at least five strategies everyday.

While Ms. Johnson believed that students at Maplewood needed this consistency to increase their achievement and that students needed repetition to master content before moving to the next grade, she also believed that teachers should have freedom to choose which research-based strategies they would implement. She emphasized that teachers were already using these strategies, but impressed that they needed to be more consistent in implementing them.

Fidelity’s impact on district programs. Any program that closely dictates teacher practice is suspect of being what some have labeled a “teacher-proof” curricula. In 1996, Darling-Hammond wrote:

As recently as 10 years ago, the idea that teacher knowledge was critical for educational improvement had little currency. Continuing a tradition begun at the turn of the 20th century, policymakers searched for the right set of test prescriptions, textbook adoptions, and curriculum directives to be packaged and mandated to guide practice. Educational reform was "teacher proofed" with hundreds of pieces of legislation and thousands of discrete regulations prescribing what educators should do. (para. 5)

Teacher-proof curricula is that which promoters proclaim can be implemented successfully regardless of teacher background, knowledge, and awareness of individual student needs. This is often reflected in scripts that accompany programs and that tell teachers what to do and say as they teach. In the case of Breakthrough to Literacy (2004), rather than a script, there was a “guide” (as Ms. Herndon discussed in a previous section) for teachers to use that provided guidance but did not dictate moment-to-moment practice (Appendix K). However, Dr. Bridges’ views of what would bring fidelity to the program included requiring teachers use the same big book for instruction each week and to
administer the same computerized assessment tests. In addition, regular district monitoring of teachers’ use of and students’ performance on the Breakthrough assessments contributed to the “teacher-proof” quality of the implementation of the program. Data from faculty meetings in which Ms. Johnson reminded teachers to assess students regularly using Breakthrough’s computerized component, and conversations with teachers about district monitoring of Breakthrough to Literacy (2004) usage also reinforced a “teacher-proof” tone. As is demonstrated in other sections of this dissertation, teachers felt that mandates to use Breakthrough to Literacy (2004) without deviating from its guidelines hindered their ability to teach based on their professional judgments (for example, allowing students to continue listening to a read aloud rather than interrupting instruction for students to take Breakthrough tests). Teachers did, as I will later illustrate, negotiate mandates to use Breakthrough to Literacy (2004) to meet the needs of their students, but as district monitoring increased, negotiations became more difficult.

**Conclusion**

At the opening of this chapter, I shared the experience of one teacher, Ms. Brown, who expressed her feelings of being stretched and pulled in many directions by the multiple demands on her practice. Data from this chapter support several important findings that create an understanding of the wider policy landscape at the national level that contributed to her concerns and those of her colleagues, and led some to say, “just let us teach!” First, policy, as identified in this study, whether official, explicit policy or embedded unofficial/implicit policy was situated within a wide range of sociocultural practices. Specifically, participants’ positions at various school system levels, their past
experiences, and their current knowledge of literacy practices informed whether they spoke of policy explicitly or implicitly and the extent to which they believed that policy mandated practice. Data in this study suggests that a teacher’s inability to talk about policy explicitly made it difficult for her to join policy conversations, take a more active role in policy development, and reinforced her position as an object of policy.

As objects of policy, teachers encountered policy that aimed both to improve the quality of their teaching and students’ academic achievement. As teachers and students became objects of national, state, district, and school level policies, deficit views of students and teachers tended to emerge around those policies. Evidence from this study show that policies such as mandates for teachers to teach academic standards-based skills and content, make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), base instruction on standardized test data, use practices backed by scientifically based reading research (SBRR), and implement practices with fidelity were seen by teachers as constraining their autonomy and led some teachers in this study to say, “just let us teach.”

Data in this chapter show, that the policy of academic standards was one national tool to improve teachers’ instruction. Teachers hung indicators that aligned with standard-based skills on their classrooms walls, looked for lessons that aligned with standards-based skills in their teaching guides like Breakthrough to Literacy (2004), referred to standards at the beginning of their lessons, and negotiated standards that were sometimes frustrating when they felt they had to privilege those standards at the expense of students’ needs. Nevertheless, teachers relied heavily on state standards to guide their instruction.
As teachers taught with academic standards guiding their practice, pressure for students and Maplewood Elementary School to make AYP was high. The school’s history of making AYP placed added pressure on faculty to maintain the school’s AYP status. Data in this study show that some teachers believed that if Maplewood did not make AYP it would reflect poorly on the school’s reputation and lead outsiders to ask, “What happened to Maplewood?” This pressure to make Adequate Yearly Progress, and to make sure students “moved” academically, as Ms. Johnsons described, was reflected in interviews and faculty meeting conversations.

In efforts to make AYP, the policy of data-driven instruction heavily shaped teacher practice. As teachers parsed test scores, data-driven instruction appeared to focus narrowly on data derived from state standardized tests, district benchmark tests, Dominie (2004), SuccessMaker (2001), and Breakthrough to Literacy (2004)—the same tools used to monitor and evaluate students’ achievement. Data in this study demonstrate that, while using assessment to inform practice and create a culturally relevant, responsive curriculum is essential, a focus on standardized test scores limited conversation about pedagogy to the topics of standard-based skills and content on various district tests. While examining test data in this way resulted in students’ academic success on those tests, and the school being recognized with the National Blue Ribbon Award, teachers’ concerns about autonomy raised the question of whether the current policy environment could sustain teacher practice.

The policy of scientifically based reading research (SBRR) also had a powerful influence on teacher practice. This study provides evidence to suggest that national policy’s definition of SBRR as experimental science led commercial literacy companies
to appropriate the language of SBRR to legitimize their programs. The Greenbrier School District purchased and asked teachers to implement some of those programs, often referencing their research base. These data suggest that the national policy of SBRR as reflected in NCLB (2001) had far reaching affects in schools and on teacher practice.

Finally, the policy of fidelity of implementation, as defined at the national, district, and school levels also significantly influenced teacher practice. At the national level, the policy of fidelity meant implementing a program according to its research design in order to replicate the outcomes of that research. Data in this study show that this view of fidelity ignored the reality that educators would, by necessity, negotiate programs and practices in light of their professional history and knowledge about literacy practices as well as their beliefs about literacy, students’ needs, and their local settings. Although this complete denial of sociocultural interpretations of literacy policy is a central cause of what some policymakers and educational companies might deem as policy failures, in reality, these failures are what naturally happen when the objects of policy—teachers—negotiate policy meanings and incorporate them into their practice in ever-changing ways. The goal of fidelity of implementation therefore is unattainable.

In the next chapter, I share findings that scrutinize literacy policies that originated at the district level, including how the district’s policy of professional development, pacing guides, model lessons, and commercial literacy programs placed additional strains on teacher practice and contributed to their calls for the district to “just let us teach!”
CHAPTER FIVE

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL POLICIES IN PRACTICE

This study revealed that while many policies to improve the quality of teachers’ instruction and student achievement originated at the federal and state levels, district administrators initiated many more policies locally. These district policies were not necessarily named as policy but were often embedded in the language in and around other structures such as district pacing guides, commercial literacy programs (e.g., Breakthrough to Literacy (2004), SuccessMaker (2001), and Soar to Success (2008)), reading assessments (Dominie, 2001), and district resource guides. In this chapter, I will examine district and school literacy policies and structures as I observed them in teachers’ and administrators’ practices in the Greenbrier School District. Looking at local responses to these policies, I will also explore how these policies contributed to the teachers’ sense of not being able to “just teach.”

My analysis of data suggests that teachers’ worked in close proximity to district administrators and the policies they authored. Because the policies originated locally, policymakers could monitor teachers’ practice regularly to make sure they implemented those policies with fidelity. Therefore, teachers’ negotiations of these policies were more nuanced and complex as they decided which policies to attend to, what parts to implement, and how to explain their acts of agency to the district when they chose to deviate from district policy. Policies that originated locally tended to be the policies that had greater power to shape teacher practice, but teachers also were better positioned to
discuss and respond to local policies compared to federal policies. Teachers’ responses to
district policy demonstrated that, in this study, it was local policies more than state and
federal policies that led teachers to ask policymakers to “just let us teach!” Each of the
policy themes in Figure 5.1 describes a facet of policy aimed at improving teacher
practice and raising student achievement. I begin this discussion of policy themes by
discussing the policy of restricted autonomy followed by themes that illuminate teachers’
and administrators’ instances of negotiated autonomy.

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Figure 5.1. Policy themes presented in Chapter Five

**The Policy of Restricted Autonomy**

The first policy I identified that the district implemented to improve teachers’
instruction and increase student achievement was the policy of restricted autonomy. This
policy illuminates important issues about who had the right to decide which literacy
policies would be implemented, when, and in what fashion. My data analysis indicated
that teachers’ and local administrators’ practice shifted along a spectrum of autonomy. At
times, Maplewood teachers, and Ms. Johnson, were able create local policy
autonomously, exercise agency, and negotiate their professional practice to meet local
needs. At other times, district accountability policies and monitoring created situations in
which it was more difficult for teachers to teach autonomously (such as when the district
monitored teachers’ usage of *Breakthrough to Literacy (2004)*). In these cases, administrators and teachers appropriated policies and aligned their practice more closely to district expectations. Several factors, such as test scores/making AYP, student transience, school leadership, and teacher preparedness mediated the degree of autonomy the district afforded schools and teachers.

In the coming section, I will discuss how Dr. Bridges, the deputy superintendent in the Greenbrier School District, and other administrators and teachers negotiated autonomy through appeals to “instructional consistency” in response to student transience, “high test scores” in response to low scores in some schools, high teacher and principal quality in response to beliefs that teachers in low performing schools were underprepared, and “fidelity” in response to needs to provide evidence of research-based practice. I included a local administrator and teachers’ responses to the district’s construction of autonomy within this section to illustrate their negotiation of the policy of restricted autonomy. As many of the data examples illustrate, teachers were aware that their position in relation their practice shifted along a continuum of autonomy. They could not always reject the policies national, state, district and local policy makers mandated. They could, however, respond to those policies, in word and in practice, as they voiced and enacted their pedagogical beliefs, considered the school’s capacity to implement district policies, and met their students’ needs.

**Student Transience Makes Autonomy Problematic**

According to Dr. Bridges, student transience made autonomy particularly problematic. Dr. Bridges believed that, because students’ transience interrupted the
instruction students received, it led to gaps in those students’ learning because of inconsistency in how students were able to move through the curriculum. She explained:

If a teacher should go in another building, it shouldn’t be so different. And our kids are transient. So, that is why autonomy doesn’t work for us. Because they could be in Maplewood Elementary School one day and J.B. Carter the next...There has to be some consistency across the district so that [students] are not constantly falling behind.

Several important points can be drawn from Dr. Bridge’s explanation of why autonomy would not work in the Greenbrier School District. First, from Dr. Bridge’s perspective, autonomy undermined instructional consistency. The concern was that with autonomy came many ways of teaching, and pathways through the curriculum. Teachers might teach the same standards but in a different order or for different lengths of time. Dr. Bridges saw this as problematic for students who moved frequently and thus likely changed schools frequently. With inconsistency across the district in teacher practice, she felt there would be gaps in students’ learning. Students might arrive at a school where the teacher already taught a standard their previous teacher had not yet covered. Dr. Bridges believed restricting teacher autonomy was an effective way to create instructional consistency across the district and would ensure that all students received instruction on all the standards for their grade level across a year. This explanation for one reason that autonomy was problematic from a leader at the district level, provided a deeper understanding of why educators in local settings struggled to exercise agency which they felt was grounded in their professional knowledge, and why many said they could not “just teach”.
Test Scores Restrict (Or Support) Autonomy

Another barrier to autonomy in the Greenbrier School District was low test scores and, because the lowest test scores in the district tended to be from students of Color and students from low income households (SDE Test Summary, 2010) this issue was tied closely to issues of race and socioeconomics. Schools with low test scores—schools often with larger numbers of students of Color from low socioeconomic households—did not have the same degree of autonomy as schools with high scores—schools that often had larger numbers of White students and students from middle and upper-middle class socioeconomic households. In an interview, Dr. Bridges described how students at Pearson Elementary School—a school in which 26% of students were Black, 67% were White, and 7% were “Other” with only 30% of students receiving free/reduced price lunches—scored at high levels on writing tests. As a result, teachers at Pearson Elementary School received more autonomy to more flexibly and minimally implement Empowering Writers as they continued using their existing curriculum. Dr. Bridges and I continued to discuss the district’s new writing program, Empowering Writers, and the degree of autonomy teachers had to negotiate use of the program. Dr. Bridges explained how Pearson Elementary School would be able to continue using their writing workshop approach because of their high test scores. Dr. Bridges explained:

We put [Empowering Writers] in place this winter. And we have a school that is not using Empowering Writers. They started working on writing a couple of years ago, before I came, and they are using Columbia University’s Writing Project with Lucy Calkins, and I am very familiar with it. I was trained by Lucy Calkins. So, they started on that and their writing scores are off the charts. So, I’m not going to say, put that aside and use a different program, Empowering Writers, because they have evidence that they focus [on writing]. The principal has a plan. She is trained for teachers, and the scores prove this. And, if you go into the building, you see the writing . . . So, I told her, ‘you can send your teachers to the
writing training, because I think the more training you have in any kind of writing is helpful,’ but I’m not going to make you stop that to do this. Those are the kinds of decisions we make. But, most of the schools did not have a writing program and their scores showed it.

Within this setting, the principal (viewed as a strong instructional leader), the teachers (viewed as highly qualified), and the students (viewed as high performing), were able to exercise agency and engage in a process approach to writing within their school rather than follow the district policy to fully implement Empowering Writers, which ultimately resulted in scores that were, as Dr. Bridges said, “off the charts.”

Schools with lower test scores did not receive this degree of autonomy. Teachers in these schools, which were populated more heavily with students of Color and students from low-income households, received less autonomy from the district level and were required to follow district curricula more closely. Figure 5.2 illustrates the cycle that seemed to constrain autonomy based on test scores in schools with large numbers of students of Color from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. It is difficult to pick a beginning point to discuss this recursive process, but for the sake of looking at each part, I will begin with low test scores (e.g., writing scores). Low test scores occur for many reasons, but when students scored low on standardized writing tests in the Greenbrier School District, Dr. Bridges believed those scores indicated that teachers were under prepared to teach the tested content, like writing. To increase teachers’ ability to provide quality writing instruction, Dr. Bridges adopted a commercial writing program, Empowering Writers. Programs like Empowering Writers, depending on teachers’ interpretations of the curricula, shifted teachers’ professional roles from that of a professional to that of a technician who implemented the Empowering Writing lessons.
Students of Color then receive skills-based, technical writing instruction, instruction that often minimally improved students’ writing.

Figure 5.2. A potential cycle in which test scores restrict autonomy

Analysis of data in this study suggests that test scores were powerful tools that determined the amount of autonomy that teachers and schools were provided. This spectrum of autonomy, and schools’ and teachers’ position on that spectrum, had unique implications for Maplewood Elementary School because it had a large number of students of Color and the students had raised their test scores and made AYP for numerous consecutive years. So the school’s demographics and test scores were not aligned with the trend across the state for students of Color and from low-income households to score lower than other students on standardized tests. At the same time, the higher test scores at Maplewood did not earn the school the same degree of autonomy as
Pearson Elementary School. Maplewood might have had a higher degree of autonomy than schools with very low test scores, but, the district still monitored their implementation of *Empowering Writer*. The district—expecting fidelity to the program, looked for the *Empowering Writers Narrative Writing Diamond*—a visual graphic to remind students to write a beginning, middle, and end to their story—in teachers’ classrooms.

**The Policy of Pacing Guidelines**

In response to concerns about the deleterious impact of student transience and perceptions about instructional inconsistencies across schools and classrooms, two weeks into the 2010-2011 school year, teachers were introduced to new week-by-week pacing guides (see Appendix L for a sample page of the district pacing guide) to guide their instructional planning. The policy of pacing guidelines was a significant step the district took toward improving the quality of teachers’ instruction and raising student achievement.

This policy of pacing guidelines, created by Dr. Bridges and her staff at the district level, seemed to catch the four focus teachers in this study off guard as they scrambled to rethink their lessons for the first month of the 2010-2011 school year. My analysis of field notes from team planning meetings show that Ms. Brooks and Ms. Jefferson talked about how they had already begun planning instruction for the 2010-2011 school year without the pacing guides. As a result, they felt they had to quickly change their plans to align with this new district mandate. At first glance, pacing guides look similar to many scope and sequence guides—guides that broadly outline topics a teacher should teach across a year—but pacing guides in the Greenbrier School District
were more restrictive than broader scope and sequence guides. An analysis of pacing guides suggested that as David (2008) explained:

Pacing guides… map out the topics that are expected to be on the annual state test and schedule these topics before the spring testing dates. In fact, many pacing guides are tied to benchmark assessments that take place quarterly or even more frequently, further delineating what teachers must teach and when they must teach it. Some pacing guides specify the number of days, class periods, or even minutes that teachers should devote to each topic.

Pacing guides in the Greenbrier School District, like those described above, delineated the number of days teachers had to teach a particular topic. As a result, an analysis of data suggested that teachers felt the pacing guides pushed students, and them, through the curriculum. Ms. Johnson exercised agency to encourage teachers to create their own pacing guides to better meet students needs, but also asked teachers to align the weekly indicators the pacing guide asked them to teach with weekly common assessments to prepare students for standardized tests. I will discuss each of these issues in the following sections.

**Pacing Guides Push Students and Teachers Through the Curriculum**

The Greenbrier district also implemented new pacing guidelines to increase the quality of teachers’ instruction and raise student achievement by making sure that teachers covered all of the state standards according to the district’s timeline. This plan was aligned with the district’s acceleration model—a model that was developed for the purpose of accelerating students’ learning by spiraling instruction around curricula (teaching a concept, moving on, then coming back to it). The new pacing guidelines were designed to keep everyone moving forward according to a predetermined plan. Dr. Bridges explained:
You have to have an acceleration model. You are not reviewing, reviewing, reviewing because the kids didn’t get it the first time. You have to scaffold [instruction], spiral [instruction], and come back to it. Go on to the next thing. They might get the next thing but you have to come back to the thing they didn’t get.

This acceleration model undergirded the district’s new pacing guidelines as the district worked to address the problem of low student achievement. Keeping pace functioned to address this urgent need to close what many perceived as an achievement gap between students of Color and White students and ultimately change students’ academic trajectories. As I will show in Chapter Six, the district adopted a balanced literacy framework to support literacy instruction. As teachers discussed their balanced literacy practices, teachers like Ms. Brooks disagreed with the pacing guidelines. She did not understand why she had to teach particular standards to students according to a pace determined by someone who did not know her students, in other words, when she felt students may not be ready to learn the skills or content indicated by the standards/indicators. Nevertheless, Ms. Brooks and other teachers followed the guide with the understanding that they were preparing students for material they would encounter on future tests—tests that placed the school’s reputation and teachers’ jobs, along with the school and teachers’ autonomy, at stake if students performed poorly.

**Local Decisions Around Pacing Guides**

Assessing district policies through a local lens, Ms. Johnson, principal of Maplewood Elementary School, would at times, ask teachers to set their own policy around pacing guidelines—appropriate policy—to create more student-centered, responsive teaching. Ms. Johnson pointed out two issues, and made two important decisions, regarding pacing guidelines. First, as teachers strictly followed pacing
guidelines, she realized that they were working to cover numerous indicators27 that aligned with state standards but not teaching them well. Ms. Johnson emphasized the idea that “keeping pace” accelerated student achievement when keeping pace meant teachers taught indicators superficially to simply move through the curriculum. Ms. Johnson realized that asking teachers to create their own pacing guides to support students’ deep understanding of fewer standards-based skills/concepts conflicted with district policy, but emphasized her right to appropriate district guidelines as she saw fit. For her, this meant ensuring that teachers were not covering indicators so quickly that they taught none of them well:

So, my thing is, you do as you are directed to and that comes from here. Because my thing is, we are moving kids from one grade to the next, trying to meet all of those [indicators], but not teaching them totally well. What I expect from you as professionals, is to look at those indicators and say, what will get our kids to the next level?

In making the comment that teachers were trying to move students from one grade level to the next by covering dozens of indicators, I saw Ms. Johnson challenge the value of the district’s acceleration model and replacing with her own model that would she believe would more effectively accelerate learning by directing teachers to rely on their professional knowledge to determine what students needed to excel. With the exception of professional development at the state department level around the Exemplary Writing program—described in Chapter Four—Ms. Johnsons’ acts of agency around pacing guides and her charge to teachers to rely on their professional knowledge

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27 Each state standard had numerous indicators or in other words definitions of skills students should be able to perform to demonstrate proficiency in a standard. For example a state standard for Kindergarten reading was “the student will begin to read and comprehend a variety of literary texts in print and non-print formats,” (State Standards, 2008). An indicator of the students’ ability to comprehend a text was that the students could “summarize the main idea and details from literary texts read aloud,” (State Standards, 2008).
were some of the few instances I observed that affirmed teachers as professionals, acts that teachers at Maplewood seemed to recognize and appreciate.

A second issue Ms. Johnson raised around pacing guides was that her analysis of students’ data pointed to a need for teachers to deviate from the pacing guide. This belief led Ms. Johnson to act with agency and encourage teachers to design their own pacing guides, based on their assessment of students’, to guide their teaching. Teachers responded to this act of agency with both acceptance and trepidation. Ms. Jefferson, after pausing to consider the implications of the local policy, accepted the policy—at least outwardly. Ms. Brooks on the other hand responded to Ms. Johnson’s act of agency with trepidation and voiced concerns that local policy contradicted district policy to follow pacing guidelines and teach in each content area for a specified period of time. Whereas Ms. Jefferson was more comfortable appropriating policy, Ms. Brooks felt insecure about teaching in ways the district might consider contrary to their policies. Ms. Brooks, believed in following the requests of her administrators, and so she was conflicted when, wanting to follow both district and school administrators’ policies, she found that she could not follow both. This tension created anxiety in Ms. Brooks. That anxiety was visible during one faculty meeting when Ms. Johnson exercised agency by encouraging teachers to create their own pacing guides to meet Maplewood students’ needs, particularly in the area of writing. The conversation unfolded in this way:

Ms. Johnson:  I want you to indicate those indicators that you are going to re-teach now, you can't follow [the district’s] pacing guides, and you have to make your own. . . . One of the things I want to ask, and you probably already do this, is make sure at some point you have atleast a forty minute writing block daily for your kids.

Jefferson:  Okay now, we had to redo our schedule, and how is that, I mean?
Johnson: Okay, how would you put your writing in?

Brooks: It's going to have to be after lunch then, if you want forty full minutes of writing, and then I have to move everything back? And then we go right into our math?

Johnson: Just let me know what you do. See what we want to do is infuse writing more for our kids. How do you feel about that Ms. Jefferson?

Jefferson: But, then how? Okay.

Brooks: Okay, now you've got my brain churning, because I always look at the fact that, and it always goes back to, if somebody comes in our room they are looking for us to have, what, how much science and social studies? Forty-five minutes, that is going to cut that. I'm just keeping it real Ms. Johnson, you know me. I'm just asking.

As the principal gave teachers autonomy, Ms. Brooks wrestled with how her appropriation of this local policy might impact the district’s perceptions of her job performance if the district conducted a curriculum audit and she were not on pace or teaching particular subjects for pre-determined amounts of time which the district set.

Ms. Brooks expressed two points: First, she felt there was not enough time in the daily schedule to extend writing instruction and teach other subjects for the district required lengths of time. Second, she worried that during district curriculum audits, she would be caught not following district expectation, be written up, and eventually lose her job for not following district policy. In another act of agency, Ms. Johnson reassured Ms. Brooks and other teachers as she emphasized that if the district brought up any concerns through the curriculum audit that “during the curriculum audit debriefing principals [have] an opportunity to address any concerns. The district does not write-up teachers for not being on pace with their lessons. These are addressed by the principal.” Ms. Jefferson went on to emphasize that as Maplewood teachers and administrators worked to meet the
students’ needs that “looking at our data clearly justifies our need to be flexible in our schedule [with] pacing guides at Maplewood Elementary School. Our goal is to improve student achievement. I would need to logically justify to the district why you are not on pace with the pacing guides with valid reasons to support what we are doing.” As Ms. Jefferson looked at data to justify deviation from district guidelines, she carved out spaces of autonomy for Maplewood’s teachers.

**Pacing Guides and Standardized Tests**

An analysis of data suggests that pacing guides were designed for the purpose of preparing students for standardized tests. In support of this goal, the district required teachers to create assessments, in concert with the weekly pacing guides, and suggested that teachers pull reading passages from various resources and construct multiple choice comprehension questions to accompany those passages based on classroom instruction. The district emphasized the connection between *common assessments*, standards, and the district pacing guidelines in the District and State Assessment Calendar (2010-2011):

> Frequently assessing students’ mastery of concepts is an integral part of the teaching-learning process. *Common assessments* are aligned with the district’s pacing guides and are designed to provide student mastery data for teachers and administrators. Common assessments are administered according to the district’s pacing guides; therefore, they are not included on the district’s assessment calendar. They are to be administered as a part of the teaching-learning process. Teachers must follow the district’s pacing guides and administer the common assessments as indicated on the guides. Discussion and review of the data generated from the administration of the common assessments will occur during monthly CRT/API meetings and meetings with school principals. (p. 2)

The district expected that common assessments would not only assess mastery of standards but would be a way to monitor teachers’ *fidelity of implementation* of pacing guides. Despite the autonomy that Ms. Johnson provided teachers to create their own pacing guides, Ms. Johnson also asked teachers to turn in weekly common assessments
that aligned with the indicators they taught. She read each class’ assessments and asked teachers about the performance of particular students. Despite the depth of knowledge this provided Ms. Johnson about students, turning in weekly common assessments created more paperwork for teachers to complete. Ms. Johnson’s local policy to comply with the district to administer and monitor common assessments was one instance in which school policy contributed to the teachers’ reasons they felt they could not just teach and tensions over whether they truly had autonomy to deviate from pacing guides or if, because of common assessments, they had to follow the pacing guides after all.

**The Policy of Model Lessons**

Hand-in-hand with the district pacing guides, as the 2010-2011 school year unfolded, the Office of Curriculum and Instruction introduced model lessons to support improved teacher practice—particularly the practice of writing lesson plans. A district literacy consultant expressed the district’s desire to provide teachers with an example of the type of lesson plan they would expect to see teachers write. The Office of Curriculum and Instruction in the Greenbrier School District realized teachers were required to write detailed lesson plans but had no examples of how the plans should look. The Office of Curriculum and Instruction therefore, according to one district literacy consultant from the department, wrote model literacy lessons to make it easier for teachers to pull together the pieces of what district leaders, such as the Deputy Superintendents’ literacy team, saw as a strong literacy lesson. An example of a model lesson can be seen in Appendix M. Each model lesson incorporated the weekly pacing guide indicators, resources and literature to support that indicator, suggested read aloud texts, and a detailed lesson that included instructions for what teachers should say during the lesson.
The Office of Curriculum and Instruction believed these models would help teachers provide stronger instruction and produce higher test scores.

**Is the Model Really a Model?**

While the district pacing guidelines presented the lessons as models, the office of Curriculum and Instruction continued to send fully written lesson plans to teachers weekly. This led Ms. Jefferson and Ms. Brooks to question whether the model was really a *model*. Ms. Jefferson and Ms. Brooks came to believe that the models were actually mandates that they should implement as written by the district. Furthermore, Ms. Jefferson simply did not see why she should write another lesson if the district provided one for her. She explained, “Maybe I am just lazy, but if they are going to write the lesson out for me, then why should I spend the time writing the lesson again?” Despite remarks such as these, Ms. Jefferson and Ms. Brooks also realized that they knew their students better than the district and believed that they were better positioned to respond to their students needs in the classroom than the district. But, uncertainty about the degree of autonomy they had to adapt the lessons, and pressure they felt to comply to keep their jobs in an uncertain economy, led Ms. Jefferson and Ms. Brooks to largely use the model lessons to inform their instruction. Ms. Jefferson particularly emphasized the pressure to comply with district initiatives in light of budget constraints: “Most people [use programs] because they are told to. They want to keep their job, because someone else will come in here and do it if you don't, especially now.”

Teachers’ act of interpreting the model lessons as mandates tended to de-skill teachers at Maplewood. In other words, rather than use the model lessons the district previously gave them as a true model to create their own lessons, Ms. Brooks and Ms.
Jefferson waited for new model lessons to arrive from the district before planning their instruction during weekly team meetings. In this way, the model lessons became scripts to follow as teachers made very few changes (the exception was changing out texts used to teach the week’s indicators). When I met with the first grade team for a planning meeting, Ms. Brooks and Ms. Jefferson explained ways that they interpreted the model lessons and focused their curricular decisions heavily on the pacing guide’s mandated skills letting the model lesson dictate what and how they should teach. My field notes from one team-planning meeting illustrated this point:

Ms. Brooks and Ms. Jefferson met to plan for their upcoming week using the district’s new pacing guidelines as a tool to inform their instruction. They each shared what they would be on for that week. Ms. Brooks shared that she would be on cause and effect and that the district suggested book for this indicator, *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*, was one she liked and often used to teach this indicator. Ms. Jefferson shared that she would be close to discussing cause and effect. They looked at the pacing guidelines and the model lessons and shared that they felt obligated to use the district model. They felt it was less of model and more of a mandate. Team planning was largely a process of aligning their teaching with the pacing guide, model lessons and to each other’s teaching to ensure they were on pace.

Writing this reflection, I was struck by the fact that the teachers insisted that the district meant the model to be a mandate and that the model must be used in their planning. They did not seem to see it as a model at all. However, I had attended the same district meeting in which they were told about the pacing guide and model lessons, but I constructed an entirely different meaning from the district representative’s presentation. As an outsider to the institution with little at stake, I looked for spaces where teachers could find autonomy. I therefore interpreted the district consultant’s use of the word *model* as something that teachers could use, or not, based on their need for the model.
The Policy of Professional Development: A District Perspective

The district’s desire to increase the quality of teachers’ instruction and raise student achievement through the policies of restricted autonomy, pacing guidelines, and model lessons had direct implications for how the district structured professional development including the content they presented during that professional development and how local level educators participated in that training. Dr. Bridges identified areas for professional development by “drilling down into data” to find areas of instructional need, and by creating supports to strengthen those areas. This process of examining data led Dr. Bridges to identify reading and writing as significant areas for teacher growth during this study. To address these areas of need, the district both trained teachers to implement components of the district’s balanced literacy framework (described in detail in Chapter Six) as well as instructed them on how to implement commercial literacy, all while following district pacing guidelines, using model lessons, and following programs with fidelity. In doing so, the district addressed its concerns about teacher preparedness and student achievement and, as Dr. Bridges described, “[took] the district to the next level through a laser-like focus on literacy learning” (Bridges, n.d., “Literacy Manifesto”).

Dr. Bridges believed that an important step in reaching the district’s literacy goals was to operationalize its literacy framework. To begin this process, she identified five components critical to literacy success including: expectations, instructional leadership, creating a culture of continuous improvement, using data to drive results, and professional development (Bridges, n.d., “Literacy Manifesto”). The Greenbrier School District expected all schools to “place the instruction of reading, writing, listening speaking, viewing, and technology in the context of meaningful activities that [were]
interdisciplinary and culturally responsive,” (Bridges, n.d., “Literacy Manifesto”) at the center of their practice. Strong instructional leadership, leadership that extended beyond the walls of the school, to include the entire larger community (teachers, para-professionals, interventionists, parents, and community leaders) was expected to support this work. The district, schools, and faculty, were also expected to adopt a continuous improvement cycle—Plan-Do-Check-Act (Deming, 1986)—to “ensure that we implement programs with fidelity and inspect what we expect . . . and identify which programs we need to abandon” (Bridges, n.d., “Literacy Manifesto”). As a result of checking Maplewood’s fidelity of implementation and monitoring students’ performance on district tests (e.g., benchmark, Breakthrough to Literacy (2004), SuccessMaker (2001), and other tests), the Greenbrier School District generated more data, taught teachers to use data to inform instruction, and constructed the district’s identity as a “learning organization”—one in which educators engaged in recursive the Plan-Do-Check-Act process to improve their practice.

The literacy components the district identified as central to literacy success manifested in the Literacy Teacher Collaborative, tri-annual district wide professional development events, and on-site literacy consultations. To support the district’s literacy goals, the district created academic support documents (e.g., curriculum resource guidelines and pacing guidelines etc.), identified and enforced non-negotiable literacy practices, and adopted numerous programs such as Dominie (2001), Empowering Writers (2004), Soar to Success (2008), SuccessMaker (2001), Breakthrough to Literacy (2004), and Accelerated Reader (2004); the implementation of these programs became the focus of many of the professional development sessions that I attended with teachers.
According to district documents, the district believed “professional development must be meaningful to the participants. It must help staff attain the skills they need to improve students’ achievement and performance;” (Bridges, n.d., “Literacy Manifesto”). The district defined meaningful professional development, not as a single event, but as a comprehensive approach that addressed a few topics in depth with no fewer than 14 hours of professional development focused on a single topic (Bridges, n.d, “Literacy Manifesto”). Below, I will discuss the ways the district sought to impact teacher practice specifically through its professional development offerings and how, although the district strove to provide comprehensive, meaningful professional development that was responsive to teachers’ needs, the teachers in this study often felt disenfranchised from it and described it as fragmented, repetitive, and largely meaningless, undermining the district’s goal to improve the quality of teacher instruction.

**Responding to Literacy Gaps Through The Literacy Teacher Collaborative**

The *Literacy Teacher Collaborative* was a significant component of professional development in the Greenbrier School District during this study. Through the *Literacy Teacher Collaborative*, Dr. Bridges was able to train reading teachers, or direct her literacy consultants to train teachers, to carry the districts’ literacy policies into schools, communicate to teachers the need to implement those policies with fidelity, and support teachers in doing so. The district made a significant investment, over a million dollars, to support this initiative; therefore, it seemed that this component of professional development was intended to be significant, long-lasting, and have a potentially powerful impact on teacher practice. It was, therefore, an important initiative to examine with regard to professional development.
The deputy superintendent of the Greenbrier School District, Dr. Bridges, emphasized that the *Literacy Teacher Collaborative* was a structure she put in place to address many of her concerns about student achievement and teacher quality and what she identified earlier as a, “lack of focus at the state level on literacy.” Dr. Bridges shared her concerns about student literacy as she talked about the origins of the *Literacy Teacher Collaborative*:

I decided that literacy would be the focus of the school district, and that meant, bringing everyone’s awareness to the fact, that students who are not literate, who cannot read, those are the students who are incarcerated, those are the kids that drop out, those are the kids that get into trouble, for the most part, and that literacy piece was affecting our graduation rate and our dropout rates, so everybody really got on board with that notion. I shared a lot of national statistics around that, particularly as it affects African American males.

As a part of the literacy focus through the *Literacy Teacher Collaborative*, Dr. Bridges initiated the *Million Dollar Club*—a group of reading teachers the district trained to support literacy in district schools. Dr. Bridges also laid plans to formalize the role of reading teachers in schools across the district. She emphasized grounding curricular decisions in data and building professional resources for teachers. Reading teachers coached classroom teachers and provided reading interventions to students one-to-one and in small groups, but they also appeared to provide another means to monitor and enforce *fidelity of implementation* of Greenbrier’s schools’ curricula.

**The Million Dollar Club.** Dr. Bridges, with the backing of the Greenbrier School District, invested over a million dollars to train reading teachers to address the concerns she identified around student literacy. The deputy superintendent referred to the group of reading teachers, professional development leaders, and support staff that worked with
this initiative as the district’s Million Dollar Club to reflect what the district referred to as its investment in literacy.

To build the Million Dollar Club, each principal in the Greenbrier School District was charged with the task of identifying a teacher on his or her staff to serve as a reading teacher in the school. Once a school appointed a reading teacher, the reading teacher chose between three models of support: a coaching model involving one-to-one and group work with teachers, a direct instruction model involving pulling students for one-to-one and small group instruction, or a combination of the two models. During my data collection, two teachers held the reading teacher position at Maplewood Elementary School. Ms. Johnson hired Ms. Berling, the school’s new reading teacher, after working with her as her principal at her previous school. Ms. Berling chose to use a mixed method of literacy coaching and intervention with students to fulfill her reading teacher responsibilities at Maplewood Elementary School. As a reading teacher, the district required Ms. Berling to attend monthly reading teacher meetings. Ms. Berling carried the literacy messages from these meetings back into the school setting as she worked closely with teachers in kindergarten through second grade. I observed Ms. Berling mediate literacy messages surrounding Progress Monitoring and Dominie (Deford, 2001) implementation, and numerous other local literacy policies at Maplewood Elementary, which Ms. Johnson initiated.

Training reading teachers. According to Dr. Bridges, although principals in the Greenbrier School District had appointed reading teachers in their schools, no one at the district level was supporting reading teachers within those roles. Dr. Bridges believed it was essential for the district to support reading teachers so they would perform their jobs
effectively. To do so, she explained the need to formalize reading teacher roles through

the Literacy Teacher Collaborative:

We instituted . . . reading teacher positions [right away] at every school, but no
one at the district level was focused on those teachers. So, what I did was create a
model for how reading teachers could service schools. [The model stipulated] that
they must come to our monthly meetings [and] that they must complete a monthly
report to be . . . submitted to my office. So, I put some structure in place for
reading teachers. Then I did some training with them—sending them to
conferences, local conferences, as well and getting them all memberships to
ARA 28—they didn’t have that—and purchasing [teachers] some professional
books. We did book studies. . . . We really formalized [reading teachers’] roles.
They were . . . taught how to coach, how to deliver professional development,
they learned content, but they also learned how to work with other teachers
around literacy issues.

In support of Dr. Bridges description of the formalization of reading teacher roles, I
observed that Ms. Berling consistently attended the district’s monthly reading teacher
meetings. Some of these meetings included training on how to implement district
programs such as the Dominie portfolio assessment system (Deford, 2001). I also noticed
many professional books in Ms. Berling’s reading resource room (some of which the
district provided and some that entered school from unknown providers) to support her
own and teachers’ professional development (Figure 5.3).

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28 Area Reading Association (ARA) is a pseudonym for the state level association of the International
Reading Association (IRA)
Figure 5.3. Professional literature in the reading teacher’s resource room at Maplewood Elementary School.

The professional literature seen in Figure 5.3 likely entered the school over a period of time, but it nevertheless represented literacy tools available to teachers at Maplewood. Each of the professional books represented a particular theoretical lens on literacy development and how teachers might support that development. An overview of the titles, content, and perspectives presented by each work are listed in Appendix N. These books collectively reflected both current and historical messages about what was important in literacy at Maplewood Elementary School.

**Grounding decisions in data.** To further formalize literacy teachers’ roles, Dr. Bridges also emphasized the need for teachers to ground curricular decisions in assessment data. “Data walls” were tools the district used to hold administrators and teachers accountable for students’ progress. Required for each school by the district, the data wall was intended to function as a key means of keeping data at the forefront of
administrators’ and teachers’ minds (see example, Figure 5.4). The data walls displayed the school’s most recent standardized test scores. Dr. Bridges explained the importance of data walls in schools as a tool to maintain a focus on literacy:

Schools were required to have data walls in their building to make their data transparent, so that we could see what the problems were, because if you weren’t looking at the data, you ignored the problem.

Figure 5.4. A data wall prominently displayed near the entrance of Maplewood Elementary School.

According to Dr. Bridges, the data walls in the school district, including the one shown above at Maplewood Elementary School, made literacy problems visible. Dr. Bridges believed that without data walls, administrators and teachers at local schools had, and would continue to, ignore literacy problems. Above Maplewood’s data wall included a banner praising teachers and students for making Adequate Yearly Progress, emphasizing the schools success.
Building professional literacy resources. Finally, through the Literacy Teacher Collaborative, Dr. Bridges believed it was important to supply teachers with the instructional materials they needed to perform their jobs effectively. It was important that the district provided teachers with tools that matched the practices the district wanted to see implemented in schools, for example, using leveled texts to support differentiating instruction in small groups. Leveled texts were available to all teachers in the reading teacher’s classroom (Figure 5.5) at Maplewood and reflected the district’s effort to provide resources to support teacher practice.

![Figure 5.5. Literacy resources—in this photo leveled texts—used to support differentiation.](image)

Dr. Bridges explained the district’s efforts to provide teachers with resources “We looked at the instructional materials, made sure the schools had leveled books, and made sure the teachers knew how to use those leveled books. We talked about small group intervention.” It was evident to Dr. Bridges that if the district set the policy, that the students should engage in a balanced approach to literacy, then it was important to provide teachers with the necessary tools and training to implement that policy. The
district did so by providing tools such as leveled texts to reify their policy that students reading books that matched their reading level, and small group instruction, should be essential to teacher practice.

**The Reading Teacher model implemented at Maplewood Elementary School.**

At Maplewood Elementary School, the *Reading Teacher* model played out in the following ways. Ms. Berling attended monthly reading teacher meetings and returned to Maplewood Elementary School to share what she learned with Ms. Johnson. Together, Ms. Johnson and Ms. Berling then set the literacy agenda for the school. This agenda largely focused on differentiation of instruction based on literacy data collected through *progress monitoring* and *Dominie* (Deford, 2001) assessments. Ms. Johnson and Ms. Berling used these data as they worked with teachers to plan and implement reading interventions to ensure that students met local literacy goals—namely, reading and comprehending texts on grade level. This process was visible during the school’s *Moving Monday* meeting—discussed in detail later in this chapter—in which Ms. Johnson, Ms. Berling, and teachers discussed students’ reading assessments and how to adjust teaching to increase students’ performance. As I observed Ms. Berling work with teachers, it was evident that the district intended for her to carry literacy messages to Maplewood, model approved literacy practices, and monitor teachers’ usage of those practices.

**Supporting Teacher Practice Through District-Wide In-service Workshops**

Teacher in-service workshops, a major venue for professional development, occurred district wide three times a year in February, August, and October. These workshops, hosted by different schools across the district, were designed to address the district’s core literacy goals and components of a balanced approach to literacy, and how
to implement the district’s literacy programs. During the 2009-2010 school year at the beginning of this study, the district’s theme was *Literacy Across the Curriculum*. Teacher in-service sessions I observed in February 2010 included a session entitled *Guide Them And They Will Read* to support guided reading, *Using Dominie Data to Make Instructional Decisions* to encourage students to follow students’ leads, and *Differentiating Instruction* to encourage teachers to be what one consultant called, “a guide on the side rather than a sage on the stage,” as teachers flexibly grouped students based on their observations of students’ work.

August professional development workshops also introduced teachers to the district’s newly adopted *Empowering Writers* curriculum and reviewed using *Dominie* data to inform instruction. October’s district wide professional development session focused on how teachers should use the *Dominie* assessment system to create flexible guided reading groups as well as how teachers should implement *Empowering Writers* to support student writing (e.g., adding details to writing). District professional development focused on both developing teacher knowledge and also training teachers to implement commercial programs such as *Dominie* (Deford, 2001), *Empowering Writers*, *Accelerated Reader*, and others. However, professional development on how to implement commercial programs seemed to overshadow the sessions that sought to deepen teacher professional knowledge, such a session that demonstrated how teachers might use semantic cues to support students’ reading process and sessions that supported teachers understanding of guided reading.
Supporting Teacher Practice Through School-site Literacy Consultations

In addition to tri-annual, district wide in-service professional development workshops, the district also funded additional on-site professional development sessions in schools through literacy consultants. On-site literacy consultations were an important component of the district’s policy to offer ongoing professional development. Literacy consultants worked directly with teachers and as they did so, they mediated district and school level literacy policies teachers encountered through the consultations. Maplewood Elementary School engaged in one such school-wide professional development session focusing on progress monitoring, a process of monitoring student reading progress as a key component of Response to Intervention (RTI)—a multi-tiered early intervention approach to screen students for potential reading difficulties, provide students with support that matched their needs, and monitored student progress toward reading goals.

The district required Maplewood to participate in RTI, and offered professional development to teachers and staff on ways to monitor students’ progress between benchmark assessments, and tri-annual Dominie (2004) assessments.

Teachers also had opportunities to work with consultants on a one-to-one basis to address areas of concern related to classroom practice as identified by the principal and teachers. During these one-to-one consultations, consultants would meet with Ms. Johnson before they met with teachers to understand her literacy goals for the school. During the spring of 2010, Ms. Johnson identified differentiating instruction as a goal for her teachers. This theme carried into the 2010-2011 school year. I observed one reading consultant demonstrate guided reading in both Ms. Brown and Ms. Herndon’s classrooms and debrief with teachers following her demonstrations. After a day’s work in the school,
the consultant debriefed the principal about her demonstrations with teachers, what she noticed about teacher practice, and discussed future visits and goals.

At the end of my data collection period, the district sent another consultant to Maplewood to continue modeling guided reading for teachers. The presence of these consultants made evident the district’s efforts to build teachers’ professional knowledge around differentiating reading instruction, but teacher training that prepared teachers to implement commercial programs or assessment tools backed by scientifically based reading research (e.g., Dominie, 2001 & Empowering Writers, 2004) dominated many professional development sessions I attended and permeated teachers discussions about their practice.

Teacher Responses to Professional Development

Teachers responded to professional development in the district in a number of ways. Most striking was their feelings about the lack of real learning they derived from the professional development sessions as expressed in Ms. Brown’s quote at the opening of Chapter Four (see pg. 121). Our extended conversation about professional development more fully illustrates Ms. Brown’s struggles. I asked if she felt that she was growing in her practice through the professional development sessions she attended. She replied:

Brown: [I feel] overwhelmed, stretched, like a rubber band. I feel like I am going to pop! It is just, we did learn this, but everything was rush, rush, rush, rush, rush…Sometimes I feel like I am [growing in my practice] and sometimes I feel like I'm not. To be honest with you, when we go to these workshops, they keep saying the same things over and over and over, the same thing. [They keep talking about] Empowering Writers, Dominie, word study, how to teach the Four Blocks, and I'm thinking, we just had a workshop on this. You keep hearing the same things, over, and over, and over, and over, so in that
way, no it's not helping. [When consultants come in], they make suggestions, which is helpful. They give helpful suggestions. Last year we did working with small groups, one or two children, looking at data, what help they needed in what skill. Data like our test assessments, our MAP assessment, looking at where they are weak…and things like that. She has given helpful suggestion like put this up, put that up, and I am like, “I do that.” And she is like. “Well make it more visible so they can see it,” things like that. And I am like, “Okay. Alright.” But many times, I can't get to it. Or I don't get to it…I just really wish they would just let us teach. Let us teach.

Cindy: So, it's not helping you to become a better teacher?

Brown: No. A lot of this stuff we have already heard or have already been doing, or we are doing or we did, or we tried it, like some of these workshops, over and over, the same people come back, and other people complain. How many times can we sit in a workshop like that?

Cindy: So, teachers aren't recognizing, if it is Dominie this time and Dominie next time, that they are talking about different things.

Brown: They're not. It's the same old thing.

Cindy: You are saying it's not. It's the same old thing.

Brown: It is. Pretty much. Pretty Much. Pretty much…[Professional Development] is not working. And, sometimes, it's chopped up and it's not flowing.

Ms. Brown felt stretched and stressed. Ironically, her frustration was a response to a district policy intended to increase the quality and meaningfulness of professional development by addressing “fewer topics in more depth with no fewer than fourteen hours of professional development focused on a single topic (Bridges, n.d., “Literacy Manifesto) thereby hoping to create a more cohesive professional development experience for teachers. The redundancy of professional development (e.g., learning about Dominie (Deford, 2001) on numerous occasions or even Empowering Writers...
(across two days) left Ms. Brown feeling overwhelmed and asking district administrators to “just let us teach!”

**The Policy of Non-Negotiable Literacy Practices**

The district also put in place the policy of non-negotiable literacy practices to raise the quality of teachers’ instruction and student achievement. This policy was visible in the district’s *Early Childhood Education Resource Guide, Grades Prekindergarten-Second* (2010-2011)—also known as support documents (Appendix O). The Early Childhood Education Resource Guide includes a section with the bold title “Non-Negotiable Expectation of Good Literacy Practice,” (p. 7). Each teacher had a copy of the Early Childhood Education Resource Guide in her classroom. During school faculty meetings and district workshops, administrators at both levels often directed teachers to “go back to their support documents” to find guidance for their practice. For this reason, examining the policies embedded within the resource guide was important to this study. The district saw it as a key tool to shape teachers’ literacy practice communicating that the practices in the guide were non-negotiable. The nature of non-negotiable literacy practices are important to understand because they revealed core district literacy beliefs about how teachers should enact the district’s literacy values.

I first came across the district’s non-negotiable literacy practices while reading through support documents that the teachers kept on hand in their classroom. I decided to examine the district’s expectations for teachers’ practice communicated through these non-negotiables more closely. According to the district’s *Early Childhood Education Resource Guide, Prekindergarten-Second Grade* for the 2010-2011 school year, these non-negotiables mandated that:
• Classrooms are print and literacy rich;

• Teachers use the process of literacy: reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, thinking, and communicating with multiple symbol systems;

• Teachers read to and with students on-grade-level texts;

• Teachers teach, model, and practice strategies of expert readers and writers with students;

• Students read independently with accountability;

• Teachers provide explicit word analysis instruction, including phonics, build word knowledge, and directly teach skills and strategies for word analysis (phonemic awareness, phonics, word recognition, structural analysis, context clues, vocabulary);

• Teachers continuously monitor and assess the reading levels and progress of individual students. The ongoing evaluation directs and informs instruction;

• Teachers plan instruction considering three phases of reading: pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading;

• Students have the extensive opportunities to read and write for a variety of purposes and to apply what is read every day. Students use writing, listening, and speaking to organize their thinking and to reflect on these experiences;

• Students are taught and given opportunities to apply the following comprehension strategies to construct meaning: making and confirming predictions, visualizing, summarizing, drawing conclusions, making inferences, making connections, and self-monitoring understanding;

• Students are taught and given opportunities to use cognitive strategies to synthesize, analyze, evaluate, and make applications to authentic situations (p. 7)

The district’s support document also required all teachers to know the following terms: concepts about print, cuing strategies, English language learner, invented spelling, metacognition, miscue, miscue analysis, print-rich environment, running record, self-monitor, word walls (Early Childhood Education Resource Guide Grades Prekindergarten-Second, 2010-2011, p. 7). The district’s Informal Observation Checklist
(Appendix P), which district administrators used during curriculum audits, was also aligned with the district’s non-negotiable practices. At the school level, Ms. Johnson’s walkthrough notes also reflect an emphasis on non-negotiable literacy practices such as posting standards-based indicators, using anchor charts, posting vocabulary etc. (Appendix Q).

**Environmental Mandates Create Superficial Change in Teacher Practice**

Many of the non-negotiable practices (listed above) related to instruction, but many other practices governed classrooms’ physical environment. The district and Ms. Johnson were able to initiate environmental changes that supported a balanced approach to literacy such as leveled libraries (Figure 5.5), anchor charts, academic word walls, sight word walls (Figure 5.6), and academic standards (see pg. 142), and deeming them non-negotiable practices. These environmental teaching tools provided evidence that teachers were following district policy.

![Figure 5.6. A word wall on cabinet doors in one classroom at Maplewood.](image)

While the district, as well as Ms. Johnson, initiated environmental changes as one
strategy to change teachers’ literacy practice, often these environmental changes created superficial shifts—such as hanging the *Empowering Writers Narrative Writing Diamond* (Figure 5.7).

![The Narrative Writing Diamond](image)

Figure 5.7- The *Empowering Writers Narrative Writing Diamond* that hung in all kindergarten-second grade classrooms.

Teachers implemented non-negotiable practices, but an analysis of data suggest their understanding of how to use these tools to support instruction was still developing, as the data below illustrates, in some cases, environmental changes did not reflect the struggles
a teacher might have to deeply understand balanced literacy practices. During a debriefing following a literacy consultation, a consultant acknowledged ways Ms. Brown changed the room environment over the year to meet district and local literacy expectations:

Consultant: To sum up some things we’ve done this year, we talked about the environment, how the room environment has to support the literacy. We began the year with that, making sure we had anchor charts.

Brown: Anchor charts.

Consultant: Anchor words in the room and the appropriate level of vocabulary, for example we had high frequency words.

Brown: Right.

Consultant: We had the word wall, tier two words, which were the high utility words, and then specialized words, which would be math or science words, and that type of thing. So, we want to make sure your room environment, and you’ve come a long way with what you’ve put in, you have a lot of graphic organizers and a lot of support, and we talked about organizing the books and getting them ready. You’re doing conferencing working with the independent reading and conferencing and giving the kids feedback, keeping records, you all started the small group work.

Brown: Yeah, it’s coming.

Consultant: So you all are doing a lot of things. Again, like we said, it’s a process over time.

The environmental features the literacy consultant identified (e.g., anchor charts, the word wall, anchor vocabulary, and the classroom library) were all visible components that reflected the district’s non-negotiable literacy policies to improve the quality of teachers’ instruction under the district’s balanced literacy framework. The consultant recognized that change was a process.
Ms. Brown, like many teachers at Maplewood, put up word walls, hung anchor charts, and referenced the standards hanging in her room before she taught a lesson, but it was more difficult for her to make substantial changes to her thinking that would deeply change her literacy practices. An example was her challenge to understand students’ reading processes and use that understanding to craft lessons that would help the students use a repertoire of strategies to figure out unknown words and make meaning of texts. This process of drawing on many strategies was first described by Goodman & Goodman (1980). In reading conferences, like Ms. Brown’s below, Goodman & Goodman suggest that teachers help students learn to use a balance of cueing systems (e.g., semantic, syntactic, grapho-phonemic, and pragmatic) to make sense of text. Johnson (2006) further suggests that teachers avoid over relying on the grapho-phonemic cueing system (i.e., sounding out words) to help readers figure out unknown words. Rather, Johnson suggests teachers, as one strategy, model how to figure out unknown words by reading past the word, thinking of a word that would make sense, and then using the letters/sound relationships (grapho-phonemetics) in the word to cross-check and monitor their reading process. A district workshop teachers attended early in this study emphasized supporting students’ use of semantic cues in this way. However, in Ms. Brown’s work with a student below, she prompted the student to use grapho-phonemic cues as a primary strategy to figure out an unknown word in the text, the word even:

Brown: Alright, let’s take a look at one word . . . that you had some difficulty with and the word has the long e sound.

Student: (frustrated). Every?

Brown: Yes, you said every earlier. Let’s take a look at it. The long e sound for e is what? E, e says its name. So, let’s see e. (waiting for student who doesn’t respond) I’m listening.
Student: e

Brown: Okay, but this isn’t the long e sound (pointing to every) it’s eh, eh. What does the short e sound say? Eh?

Student: I knooooow.

Brown: (looking at the word even again) Let’s try. N says? Vuh, V says vuh. N says n.

Student: N.

Brown: Long e says e.

Student: even.

Brown: even, so what’s the word?

Student: (trying to sound it out again) even.

Brown: Alright, so what’s the word?

Student: Even.

Brown: Alright, let’s read this sentence again. Let’s start at the top.

Student: (student reads mumbling, inaudible)

Brown: Alright, very good. Okay, when you come to a word and you’re not sure what it is even when you read it and it didn’t make sense in the sentence, go back and look at the words around it to help you figure out what the word is or break the word into syllables. Okay, what’s the long e say? E, e says it’s name. Short e says what?

Student: eh.

In Ms. Brown’s case, she asked the reader to sound out the word repeatedly, and repeat back to her the word in the text rather than modeling for that student how to orchestrate a balance of cueing systems to figure out the word “even”. As she wrapped up her conference, she mentioned additional strategies such as thinking about what word would
make sense, looking at words around the unknown word, and breaking the word into syllables, but she prioritized the strategy of sounding out the word in her demonstration with her student. So while Ms. Brown made non-negotiable environmental changes to her room, like hanging anchor charts and incorporating a word wall into her room, she was still in the process of coming to understand how to support student’s reading processes. Environmental changes began to create a superficial look of a balanced approach to literacy in her classroom, which would likely be misleading when the district representative conducted curriculum audits to check for fidelity of implementation, but this image evaporated upon closer inspection. Ms. Brown, as a learner, approximated balanced literacy practices, but the dearth of consistent modeling through professional development opportunities, the long passages of time between professional development sessions, and Ms. Brown’s perception that professional development was repetitive and meaningless, made it challenging for her to fully develop her professional knowledge, move beyond approximations, and align her practice with the district’s balanced literacy approach to instruction.

The Policy of Curriculum Audits

The district also carried out the policy of curriculum audits to improve teachers’ practices and raise student achievement. According to district documents, the district believed they must “inspect what they expect” (Bridges, n.d., “Literacy Manifesto”) and that meant visiting teachers’ classrooms to evaluate their practices for alignment with district expectations—particularly non-negotiable literacy practices. During these curriculum audits, evaluators looked for word walls, anchor charts, academic standards posted and other non-negotiable practices, but also questioned students about how they
used tools to get a deeper understanding of teachers practices based on student reports. As demonstrated in the coming sections, Ms. Jefferson believed this process led district administrators to make inaccurate judgments about her practices during these brief curriculum audits.

Using Questioning During Curriculum Audits to Accurately Assess Teachers’ Practice: A District Perspective

Curriculum audits were important tools district administrators like Dr. Bridges used to assess teacher practice. District evaluators walked through classrooms to look for non-negotiable literacy practices put in place to improve the quality of teachers’ instruction. A district evaluation sheet used during walk-throughs (Appendix P) illustrated the district’s emphasis on how non-negotiables manifested in the physical environment of the classroom. During an interview with Ms. Lilley, who conducted walk-throughs, I asked how much the district could really know about teacher practice during such a walk-through simply by observing the physical environment (such as word walls). I wondered if the look of balanced literacy gave evaluators a false impression of change in teacher practice. Ms. Lilley explained:

Lilley: I don’t think it [does].

Cindy: But, if they have all the bells and whistles of the looks, and you came in, how would you know?

Lilley: Well, for instance, if I came in, and I saw a word wall, and I saw 200 words in September, then I know they are not using the word wall appropriately, because it’s been there all year. Or, I’ll look at the word wall and I will look at the kind of words they are putting on there and I will know right away. Or, I will look at student writing that they are doing, and if I can make a connection to the word wall, in some cases I can, then I am like, “WOW, they really do understand.” When I see the kids, or ask the kids a question, a lot of times that’s a way that I find out things by asking them—like, “When you have trouble what do you do? How do you solve the problem with spelling words?” And, if the children can tell you
in a second, and then you can just watch them [to see] the way they are interacting with things in the classroom, the language that the teachers are using, and then, does that go back to what we were talking about. You can dress it up, but you can tell whether there is real understanding of that practice there. And there are often times if you go in and talk, that you can tell that kids aren’t getting that in the classroom on a regular basis, so that you would expect to hear that kind of talk or discourse. [The students] would say, “When I don’t know, I look at my word wall,” or “I use these words.” Words are going up and words are coming off, and things like that you would say, okay, [this teacher] understands that this is a resource.

Ms. Lilley was confident in her ability to know if teachers used non-negotiables effectively to change their practice. For example, evaluators’ knowledge of how teachers should use tools such as word walls made it possible for them to notice if tools were implemented superficially or incorrectly (such as putting up words on a word wall all at once, rather than building the wall over time with students). Ms. Lilley made visible the district’s process of questioning students to get deeper understanding of teachers’ practices as well. By asking students how they used tools like a word wall, Ms. Lilley believed she and others could get a window into instruction in the classroom. Ms. Lilley agreed that some teachers did put up non-negotiable tools superficially, but she also believed district assessors could identify these teachers, and make sure they received professional development, along with the tools, to help them use these instructional tools meaningfully.

Are Judgments Made During Brief Curriculum Audits Accurate?: A teachers Perspective

Ms. Jefferson, a first grade teacher at Maplewood, believed that district personnel made inaccurate judgments about her and her colleagues’ practices based on the curriculum audits. She was aware of how walk-throughs worked in her school and how administrators assessed her practice and students’ understandings based on these brief
observations in her classroom environment. Ms. Jefferson felt that the district’s assessment of her practice during evaluators’ short visits to her classroom failed to provide them with an accurate picture of her practice as someone who effectively implemented non-negotiable tools and met the needs of children. Ms. Jefferson described her views about the shortcomings of this practice and why it would not accurately reflect her teaching:

Cindy: So, one of the interesting things about the district and the non-negotiables is that the non-negotiables are very visible. Visual things. So they can see those things when they walk through.

Jefferson: But just because it is up doesn't mean it was done. You know what I mean? They are to make [the district] happy. Not because we use them or maybe that is why they are asking kids, “What is that? Why are you using that?” And, my thing is, you can use a tool all day long, and they ask the kids, and the kids freeze up. They don't know what to say.

Cindy: So, they are speaking to kids when they come in here?

Jefferson: Yes they do, and they tell you, you know, don't put your lower kids by the door, because that is who they are going to go right to.

Cindy: And who is they?

Jefferson: Well, you know, not just your principal, but it just kind of comes out, say in staff meetings.

Cindy: So you talk among yourselves as teachers?

Jefferson: Right. Like J, he will be targeted because he is sitting by himself. So, they already know he is a behavior problem. So they will probably go to him and ask him, "What do you do in this class?" J isn't going to be able to tell them. So, that's going to look like I never did it? Do you understand what I am saying?

Cindy: Yes. I do understand.

Jefferson: Regardless of whether they did it or not. So, you have target kids. So, they will tell you, you shouldn't even put kids out there like that by themselves [during walkthroughs], because they are
targeted. And, he's not a behavior problem, he just can't focus. Well, he is a behavior problem, but he just can't focus in the group. So he has to sit by himself. But they don't look at it like that. They look at it as, he's a trouble maker, let's go see if he knows what he is doing.

Cindy: So, I think that goes back to the anchor charts. So, do you have these up because someone is really taking the time to explain why and how it is useful, or is it because you have to put it up?

Jefferson: We are doing it. I mean some people understand why it is useful, but most people do it because they are told to. They want to keep their job, because someone else will come in here and do it if you don't, especially now.

This conversation illustrated several ways that Ms. Jefferson experienced and negotiated walk-throughs. First, Ms. Jefferson believed she and her colleagues understood the district’s system for evaluating her practice, particularly how “target kids” played a role in evaluating her practice. Ms. Jefferson said she and her colleagues responded to this policy by seating all students together during walkthroughs so no student was “out there by themselves” as a target for questions.

Ms. Jefferson also illustrated how teachers changed the physical environment (e.g., put up anchor charts such as the Empowering Writers Narrative Writing Diamond) to give district evaluators the impression that they were conforming to district non-negotiable literacy practices. But she suggested that even when she and other teacher used the environmental literacy tools the district expected them to use, she did not feel the district curriculum audits accurately captured her teaching. Specifically, she believed relying on students’ reports about how they used the tools did not reflect what she taught. As a result, she felt that relying on environmental evidence and student descriptions of tools to evaluate her implementation of district non-negotiables led to inaccurate judgments that she did not use those tools effectively. As for other teachers, Ms.
Jefferson maintained that some “do it” (implement the non-negotiable practices as required), but she felt that most teachers put up environmental tools because they were told to, not because they intended to change their pedagogy. Given that some teachers put up anchor charts for show, district consultant’s seeing those charts on the walls would not necessarily mean teachers had changed their practice.

**The Policy of Response to Intervention**

During the course of this study, the Greenbrier School District also implemented the policy of *Response to Intervention* (2004)—a multi-tiered early intervention approach to screening students for potential reading difficulties, providing students with support that matched their needs, and monitoring students’ progress toward reading goals (see Appendix A for definitions). Through this policy, the district also intended to advance teacher practice and improve student outcomes. Dr. Bridges viewed this as an important framework for addressing perceived student reading challenges as well as perceived concerns about teacher preparedness to provide interventions to raise students’ achievement. In the fall of 2010, Greenbrier began to fully implement *Response to Intervention* (RTI). The intent of RTI was to provide in-class interventions for students in order to decrease referrals to special education. Using benchmark assessment data as a universal screening tool (a central component of RTI), teachers evaluated student performance to determine students’ instructional tier. RTI tiers include Tier I (core instruction given to all students), Tier II (small group intervention focused on strategic, supplemental instruction), and Tier III (Renaissance Learning, 2011). The main components of RTI include: data-based decision making, universal screening, tiered
intervention, and progress monitoring (National Center on *Response to Intervention*, 2010, pg. 1).

The components of RTI implemented during this study were progress monitoring and small group, targeted instruction. In this section, I will discuss how the district intended to impact teachers’ practice and improve student achievement by asking them to implement these components of RTI. I will also discuss local responses to the district request to group students for targeted instruction, and how teachers exercised agency by planning for targeted instruction on paper—“for show”. As Ms. Jefferson explained, she did not expect to have to implement the plan they put in place for targeted instruction because there were insufficient numbers of teachers to provide the targeted intervention as suggested by the district.

**Progress Monitoring**

During the fall of 2010, teachers received professional development focused on the progress monitoring component of RTI so they would be able to more frequently assess students’ reading progress and determine proper student tier placements. Teachers administered *Dominie* (Deford, 2001) tri-annually. Up until the point when teachers began to learn about progress monitoring through RTI, they did not appear to conduct running records of students reading regularly within the classrooms. After learning about progress monitoring, teachers reported assessing students’ reading progress more often through running records—a reading assessment, developed by Marie Clay, that provides a window into a child’s reading process—using Fountas and Pinnell (2007) Benchmark Assessment System (BAS) with leveled texts. Teachers used these data to discuss students’ reading progress during *Moving Monday* meetings—a meeting in which
teachers reviewed progress monitoring data and noted students’ movement up reading levels. As teachers implemented progress monitoring, my analysis of data suggest how national policies for readers to reach proficiency by third grade, and monitoring students’ progress toward that goal, contributed to an assembly line educational model. This occurred as teachers processed students through systematic evaluation to determine if they were keeping up with minimal expectations for grade level performance. My analysis of data in the following section suggests that teachers wrestled with making sense of discrepancies between scores on reading assessments as they worked to move students down that assembly line as well as negotiated the discrepancies between progress monitoring assessments results and Dominie (Deford, 2001) assessment results.

**Progress monitoring: Moving students down the education assembly line.**

Within the practice of progress monitoring, an analysis of data helped me construct an interpretation of this practice as reflective of an assembly line model of education. First, the title of the meeting, *Moving Monday*, elicited images of moving toward a goal at a predetermined minimum pace. During the *Moving Monday* meeting, Ms. Berling began by explaining to the kindergarten-second grade teachers gathered for the meeting: “We are going to take a look back at where we were and where we are going.” This language further created a sense of linear movement through time. The issue here was not just moving forward, but moving forward on a particular preset timeline based on what it meant to be on grade level. In the following excerpt, Ms. Berling described the students’—and subsequently the school’s—status and progress toward meeting grade-level reading expectations:

> These are the [forms] we used to indicate which students are at Tier 1 instruction, the next group of students who are slightly below grade level, and then we use
this as the cut off for students who are significantly below grade level…At the beginning of the year, we already had 20 students who were on grade level. We had 12 students who were below grade level, but seven of those were right at the end of kindergarten and we had three students who were significantly below grade level. In second grade at the start of the year we had 20 students who were on grade level, 11 who were below grade level and of those 11, 6 were very close to being on grade level and we only had one student who was below grade level.

This focus on grade-level benchmarks for reading performance required teachers to keep moving students along at a steady pace. This linear movement through time was reiterated as teachers stood during the Moving Monday meeting to share their students’ progress and move their students’ names forward on a chart—located in the reading teacher’s resource room—which displayed appropriate levels of progress for kindergarten through second grade students. Consider the following exchange between Ms. Brooks and Ms. Berling:

Jefferson: Well this is a five year old reading 2.3, what is that second grade third month? Latonya\textsuperscript{29}, was also a high reader. She came in at a 1.7 now she is at a M3\textsuperscript{30} right at third grade in November. Sasha, he hasn't had any growth. I expected more from him. Patrick, …now he is on an F.

Berling: And, one of the things we talked about is how many months growth. We are not half way through the year. We've kind of had three months of school. So, we can talk about months.

Jefferson: Right, from August until now, three months. Except for Sasha.

Teachers’ focus on month-to-month gains to meet mid-year goals further emphasized an assembly line model of education and the importance of keeping pace.

While Ms. Berling on one occasion noted that students might have plateaus in their

\textsuperscript{29} All student names are pseudonyms.

\textsuperscript{30} M3, 2.3, 1.7 etc. are text difficulty levels associated with various commercial literacy assessment systems. Maplewood used the Fountas and Pinnell (F & P) system as one way to determine the level of text a student could read independently. The F & P benchmark assessment uses an alphabetical leveling system (A (easiest)-Z (hardest)). Accelerated Readers, uses a numerical leveling system that correlated with where average students performance might fall during a particular point in the school year (for example 1.7 would be the equivalence for first grade in the seventh month).
development and then continue to progress, federal and district policy for students to read on grade level by third grade and meet upcoming grade level expectations led teachers to attended more to keeping pace.

Federal, State, and district structures, such as mandates to meet AYP as demonstrated through state standardized tests, and district reading assessments such as Dominie (Deford, 2001) (the district reading assessment first through third grades) largely shaped teachers’ assembly line discourse. This was seen as Ms. Berling explained the importance of focusing on comprehension in literacy to prepare students for upper grades and district assessments. She explained, “When they get into the upper level of Dominie, they have to talk about the book, draw inferences. They have to figure out unfamiliar words from the context. So, we will use this data as a ballpark for Dominie.” These data reflect Maplewood's emphasis—and the district’s—on vertical alignment between grades to prepare students for upcoming academic expectations.

**Reconciling discrepancies between progress monitoring and Dominie.** To know if teachers were providing appropriate interventions for students or if those interventions were improving students achievement, teachers had to reconcile discrepancies between progress monitoring assessment data using the Fountas and Pinnell *Benchmark Assessment System* (BAS) and the Dominie (Deford, 2001) assessment tool. In addition to progress monitoring leading to an assembly line model of assessment and instruction, because the district also required teachers to use the Dominie assessment system, they had to reconcile the differences between the two systems. For example, Ms. Berling and Ms. Jefferson discussed some incongruence’s between the leveled texts used
with progress monitoring and the texts used in *Dominie* and what this meant for their practice. Ms. Berling explained:

[Students] don't have background knowledge to bring to [some *Dominie*] books. When I come in here (pointing to Fountas & Pinnell leveled texts), I'm selecting a book I feel they have some knowledge about, but when we give *Dominie*, we don't have a choice. We have to give them *Running Wolf* even if we feel they don't have much knowledge of Native Americans. We have to give them the rock book, even if they might not have had the science background with fossils and sedimentary rock. So, what we are looking at here is word accuracy. And we have a lot of students here with word accuracy, but we have not deeply assessed their comprehension.

Teachers’ lack of opportunity to choose books to administer for *Dominie* assessments raised concerns for teachers and administrators. Ms. Johnson and Ms. Berling recognized the important role that background knowledge played in students’ comprehension of texts. They realized that without being able to use that background knowledge on the *Dominie* assessment, students might not do as well on that assessment as they would on the Fountas and Pinnell assessments. Ms. Johnson and Ms. Berling noted that students’ lack of comprehension would impact student learning and assessment scores even more as they moved into the upper grades. Ms. Berling explained:

When they get into upper level *Dominie*, they have to talk about the book, draw inferences, they have to figure out unfamiliar words from the context, so we will use [Fountas and Pinnell] assessment data as a ballpark for [how they will perform on] *Dominie*, but we might expect these students right here even to backslide a little with *Dominie*. . . . So, especially for these students down here, I have these packets down here, the teacher’s guide, review it for these kids, otherwise, when it comes to them reviewing the retelling and answering, they are going to slide back.

Drawing on teachers’ professional knowledge, Ms. Berling mediated teachers’ understanding of the discrepancies between the Fountas and Pinnell assessment used for progress monitoring and the *Dominie* assessment tool. She helped them understand the difference between students’ background knowledge of texts used in progress monitoring
and how students may not have that knowledge with Dominie texts. To address the discrepancies between the two tests, Ms. Berling suggested that teachers focus more on comprehension than on word accuracy, to minimize the discrepancies in students’ performance on each reading assessment. Ms. Berling believed that greater attention to comprehension and students’ retelling of passages they had read during progress monitoring would allow teachers to provide stronger interventions to increase students’ comprehension under RTI.

“For show”: Negotiating Autonomy and Managing Literacy Policies

Ms. Johnson, the principal at Maplewood Elementary School, required teachers to plan for Focused Targeted Instruction—a method of providing additional instruction beyond that received in the classroom, to meet the requirements of the RTI framework. Targeted intervention sessions were scheduled to take place outside of regular classroom instruction time for a thirty-minute period in which teachers would distribute their students among a team of teachers who would teach lessons to meet students’ instructional needs. Implementing this practice, according to Ms. Jefferson, would require more teachers—or human capacity—than Maplewood could offer. As a result, Ms. Jefferson created a Focused Targeted Instruction plan that was “for show” meaning that she did not expect to implement the plans she wrote for targeted instruction. Data from a team meeting between Ms. Brooks and Ms. Jefferson demonstrated the way Ms. Jefferson carved out spaces of autonomy by naming some practices “for show.” This became a strategy for managing the many literacy policies.

As Ms. Brooks and Ms. Jefferson discussed scheduling and which of their plans was for show, Ms. Brooks, a teacher who had only taught at Maplewood for a year,
expressed concern about scheduling demands. She listened as Ms. Jefferson, who had been teaching at the school for eight years, explained why she believed that writing the schedules for *Focused Targeted Instruction* was merely “for show” and why Ms. Brooks should not worry about the logistics of her scheduling because what they put on paper would not really impact their teaching at the moment:

Brooks: Yeah, I told [Ms. Johnson, the principal] I would adjust my schedule as necessary. I am going to have to do a lot of adjusting in order to do all of the stuff that they want. So now I can go from 9:05-11:05 for ELA?

Jefferson: It's okay here at Maplewood. It's okay. She's not really. Ms. Johnson is like me. She is [jumps from idea to idea] and flies with the wind. 'Okay let's try this. Okay let's try this.'… You saw yesterady when she was going to do this reading and today… We are just putting [*Focused Targeted Instruction*] there. So, you know, I used to set aside one day for intervention which used to be Wed. So, I have to go back to all of that stuff.

Brooks: So, what's going to happen? So, I don't need to include 9:05 to what?

Jefferson: 11:05. You are going to put ELA/social studies.

Brooks: I am? I am?

Jefferson: Yep, just give it to her. This is something for what? *Show.* Until they say okay, do it. Because right now we are not doing this because we don't have the capacity to do this. Why we have to sit here and make this schedule? I don't know. But when she asks for it we will have it.

Ms. Jefferson and other teachers believed that they were introduced to many new ideas/policies intended to change teacher practice and increase students’ performance. This tendency to change policies frequently led Ms. Jefferson to dismiss *Focused Targeted Instruction* as something that was just to show that she was implementing a component of RTI. She realized Maplewood did not have the human capacity to staff all
the interventions groups necessary to fully implement *Focused Targeted Instruction*. As a result, she made sure she penciled in *Focused Targeted Intervention* time on her schedule in case Ms. Johnson asked for it, but Ms. Jefferson did not expect this superficial schedule change to impact her practice.

Ms. Brooks, on the other hand, interpreted Ms. Johnson’s request to recreate her schedule through a different lens, one of compliance with district and school mandates. While many teachers complied with mandates for many reasons, Ms. Brooks developed a deep belief that complying with authority was part of her identity:

*Ms. Brooks:  When they come to a workshop and the district tells us what they want to do, they still fighting it tooth and nail not too. And they told us, “Okay, we’re going to come, we’re going to give you X amount of time to prepare.” So, there’s not any reason why when they come into my classroom that I’m not prepared to see, or them to see me put that training in action. There’s no excuse. There’s no excuse. I’m sorry. Because I am here, everyone else is here. Someone else is telling them what to do, and someone is telling me what to do, and how dare I not comply, You see what I’m saying? I’m sorry, that’s just me.*

Ms. Brooks wrestled with the frequent literacy policy changes in the district and school but for her, the bottom line was compliance: “If they tell me to do something, how dare I not comply. I have no excuse.” Ms. Brooks worked to negotiate her practice with the help of Ms. Jefferson to create some continuity in her practice—something she felt was desperately missing, however, engaging in a practice “for show” contradicted Ms. Brooks’ personal and professional identity. She took what administrators said at face value, and was uncomfortable with Ms. Jefferson’s non-compliance and subsequent negotiation of literacy policy.
Unlike Ms. Brooks, for whom teaching contrary to district policy was uncomfortable, Ms. Jefferson echoed Ms. Johnson’s self-identification as a non-conformist. As the principal, Ms. Johnson was one who acted autonomously on behalf of Maplewood Elementary School by creating her own benchmark assessment schedule that conflicted with the districts. Ms. Jefferson identified herself as a non-conformist, too, to justify her autonomy and agency in her classroom:

Jefferson:  Ms. Johnson says she is a non-conformist. Well, I'm a non-conformist too, okay, (laughter). Every day, my day is just like Whhoooo! (Indicating spontaneity). And that is why my kids are probably whooo! I don't follow a routine. Something will just come in my head, and I'll be like oooh, I'm going to do that, and I will forget whatever I had planned.

Brooks: That's here, but where I came from we had to have everything set up like that.

Jefferson: So, that is me, so whatever they tell me is like in one ear and out the other, and so like, say, table of contents, I may use my social studies book, copy that front page, and that's where I'm going to get my table of contents for my lesson. And meanwhile, we are doing social studies, facts and opinion, there's plenty of facts and opinion in the social studies.

Brooks: And I know, but I can't get it out of my head that they told me to create a schedule at the beginning of the year. Where I had to have forty five minutes of science, forty five minutes of social studies…

Jefferson: Because [Ms. Johnson] has to show that to the district, that is for show, this is what you have to get about Maplewood Elementary School, okay, everything we do here, (laughter) paperwork, is for show, most of the time.

Brooks: But then I still have to get a grade?

Jefferson: Eighty percent of the time it's for show right? The district wants these things down on paper, so that is what we give them, we give it to them down on paper, it doesn't mean..

Brooks: If you tell me I have to do x,y,z, I'm going to do x,y,z…
Jefferson: Eighty percent of time, it's for show. Twenty percent of the time, they really want it, like for real, like those tiers, they want to make sure your kids are grouped.

As Ms. Jefferson claimed her identity as a non-conformist, she reasserted her belief that most of the top-down policies that pressed in upon her practice at Maplewood Elementary School was “for show.” But then, 20% of the time, policies were, “for real,” and demanded conformity. Ms. Brooks felt this was the case for tiered instruction within RTI because, in her opinion, RTI was a very serious practice that might be around to stay.

Ms. Jefferson also believed literacy practices were for show when administrators changed them frequently and presented them as fleeting ideas rather than substantive programs or policies. She felt that district programs that required an investment in training and materials were longer lasting, and gave these more attention. While Ms. Jefferson understood that teachers might not implement much of their planning, she still believed in being prepared in the case administrators asked her to implement a program. She and Ms. Brooks discussed how frequent policy changes made it difficult to know if a policy was important. Ms. Jefferson explained how she knew a policy was for show. She explained her logic this way:

Jefferson: [It’s for show when] things get switched up.
Brooks: Yeah! that's what I can't take!
Jefferson: That's for show.
Brooks: I cannot take that!
Jefferson: That's for show. Things that are like serious, are like, we are having a conference on this, bring it with you, it comes through the email! So, email is the real deal. Other stuff is just for show.
Brooks: So, you are going to have to tell me when it is for show and when it's for real, cause Ms. Jo sure don't know. (laughter). I'm confused right now.

Labeling a policy as “for show” was a key means of carving out spaces of autonomy. This negotiating of policy helped teachers mitigate their confusion and create a policy environment that was more stable for them in the midst of a fast changing policy landscape. This conversation also illustrates that the teachers had views about which policies held the most power—policy reified in documents the district asked teachers to bring to conferences (like Dominie assessment data and district support documents), messages the district put in writing through emails and other forms of written communicated, and programs backed by a significant district financial investment.

The Policy of Commercial Literacy Programs and Curricula

Other key tools to increase the quality of teachers’ instruction and students’ achievement were commercial literacy curricula. District’s concerns about teacher practice, and the belief that teachers needed commercial literacy programs to support their practice to ensure students’ success, prompted the district to invest in numerous literacy programs. In this section, I will describe in greater detail the use of commercial programs in the district, how those programs entered Maplewood Elementary School, and Ms. Johnson’s and the teachers’ responses to those programs.

The programs I observed teachers use most frequently included: Breakthrough to Literacy (2004) in kindergarten, Dominie in first and second grades, Empowering Writers (2004), SuccessMaker (2001) across first and second grades, and Soar to Success (2008) for students in the pull-out reading intervention program. Each of these programs (described in detail in Figure 5.4) was promoted by Dr. Bridges, the district deputy
superintendent of education, to address concerns about some teachers’ unpreparedness to offer certain types of instruction including: differentiating instruction, assessing student reading, teaching phonics and phonemic awareness explicitly, and implementing effective writing instruction in their classrooms. I examined each of these commercial literacy programs to understand district decisions about using them to improve teachers’ quality of instruction through these programs. I also examined these programs to understand the extent to which teachers appropriated commercial curricula overtime at Maplewood Elementary School.

**Abundant Commercial Programs Backed by Federal Policy**

An abundance of programs and curricula existed in the district. Some of these programs existed as resources for teachers to use to supplement their practices (e.g., *Read-at-Home Backpacks*), but Dr. Bridges intended other programs to more deeply change teacher practice as they implemented them with fidelity. Dr. Bridges’ had concerns about teachers and students’ performance in light of the state identifying the district as in need of corrective action because the school district had not made *Adequate Yearly Progress* for two consecutive years. As a result, she purchased, or supported the continued use of, several commercial literacy programs to strengthen the quality of instruction and raise academic achievement. Nearly all of these were connected to *scientifically based reading research* (SBRR) or attached in some way to Reading First, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), or the National Reading Panels (NRP) literacy recommendations (see explanations of these programs and legislation in Appendix A). These programs and the various appropriated labels used to legitimize them — in other
words to send the message that their programs aligned with federal policy—are displayed in Figure 5.8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Programs and Appropriated Federal Policies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program</strong></td>
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<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trophy Reading Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Breakthrough to Literacy (2004)</em> (BTTL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Empowering Writers</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Accelerated Reader</td>
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</table>

\(^{31}\) *Scientifically based reading research* (SBRR) and describes research that is experimental or quasi-experimental in nature.

\(^{32}\) No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is federal legislation focused on increasing the academic achievement of students who have historically underperformed on state standardized tests, particularly students of Color from lower socioeconomic groups and students from rural areas.

\(^{33}\) National Reading Panel (NRP) was a panel convened to conduct a meta-analysis of studies on reading and make recommendations for literacy policy in schools.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SuccessMaker (2001)</strong></td>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td>Provides individualized programs to develop essential reading skills and provides “outcome-based” data to inform educational decision making.</td>
<td>SuccessMaker affiliates itself with the What Works Clearinghouse, linked to NCLB, and scientific research that demonstrates the effectiveness of its program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dominie Reading Assessment</strong></td>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td>A reading assessment to understand the strategies students use while reading in order that teachers may design lessons to help students progress as readers.</td>
<td>None observed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CenterStage Literacy (2007)</strong></td>
<td>Developed by ETS/Cuisinaire</td>
<td>Provides teachers with 5 CenterStage Literacy Centers for Kindergarten including: - Print Awareness and Alphabet Knowledge Awareness Center - Oral Language: Speaking, Listening &amp; Vocabulary Development Center - Phonological Awareness Center - Phonics and Word Work Center - Writing Center</td>
<td>According to ETA/Cuisinaire: Literacy expert, Miriam P. Trehearne, (2007) brings the research-based, classroom-proven strategies in her Comprehensive Literacy Resource Books to these unique learning centers. (Paragraph 1).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Leveled Texts | MONDO Publishing | “BOOKSHOP Phonics provides direct teaching of letter-sound relationships in a clear sequence, along with easy-to-use materials that provide substantial practice for students in application and practice of their phonics knowledge.” (Mondo, n.d., para. 1) | According to Mondo Publishing (n.d.):
All of our lesson booklets support learning the five critical aspects of reading as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, text comprehension, and fluency.” (paragraph, 1) |
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<tr>
<td>Follett Library Resources</td>
<td>“Read-At-Home Backpacks provide a direct home-school connection using language-rich activities. These activities target your school's literacy efforts to support critical early literacy skills at home.” (Follett, 2011, para. 1)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to Intervention</td>
<td>Tiered, early intervention Program</td>
<td>“Response to Intervention (RTI) is a school-wide, multi-tiered approach to help struggling learners. The graphic to the left illustrates the RTI model's three tiers of intervention ranging from less intensive (Tier I) to most intensive (Tier III).”</td>
<td>“RTI is: A general education initiative that has evolved from No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and IDEA 2004 legislature.” (The Greenbrier School District, n.d., para. 6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According The Greenbrier School District (n.d.), “Progress Monitoring is a scientifically based practice to continuously measure student performance growth and provide objective data to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction and interventions,” (para. 4.)

![Figure 5.8. Literacy programs observed in the Greenbrier School District School District](image)

Looking at the table, it is evident that each of the programs made efforts to communicate that their programs aligned with federal policy through the use of logos and emblems associated national literacy initiatives. Marketing for each program showed the common language and labels drawn from NCLB and/or the National Reading Panel Report that companies used to legitimized their products based on federal policy. For example, *Breakthrough to Literacy* (2004), attached the *Reading First* logo to its product,
communicating that, as a reading intervention program, it aligned with some of the many goals of *Reading First. Breakthrough to Literacy* also aligned itself with federal policy by appropriating the term *scientifically based reading research* (SBRR).

Other programs adopted the language of federal policy as well. *Accelerated Reader* (2004) emphasized its “scientific research base.” *Soar to Success* (2008) pointed to its focus on the five elements of reading highlighted in the *National Reading Panel* report including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. *SuccessMaker* (2001) highlighted that the Department of Education designated it as a program that worked in the *What Works Clearinghouse*. *CenterStage* (2007) adopted language connected to SBRR to claim that its program used “proven” strategies. The *Mondo’ Phonics* book and RTI acknowledged their connection to key policies in NCLB. Each of these moves to align a program with federal policy was a way to legitimize the product and make it appealing to districts, like the Greenbrier School District, that looked for programs with a research base and federal backing.

**Commercial Curricula, Implemented with Fidelity, Intended to Improve Practice**

The commercial literacy curricula and programs analyzed in this study claimed that their programs, if implemented with fidelity, would ensure students’ academic achievement (*Accelerated Reader*, 2004; *Breakthrough to Literacy*, 2004; *SuccessMaker*, 2001; & *Soar to Success*, 2008). This was a powerful claim in a policy era where districts and schools must provide evidence that they are using *scientifically based reading research* to raise student achievement. These claims were particularly appealing, if a district, like the Greenbrier School District, was labeled as requiring corrective action, because they are even more tightly observed through the state microscopes. The term,
fidelity, was used to mean that teachers must follow the scripts or the guidelines of the program precisely, without deviating, if successful outcomes were to be achieved. In other words, these programs were developed to closely control teacher practice. In controlling teacher practice—often by not only telling teachers what to teach, but also when to teach it and how to teach it—curriculum designers sought to remove the possibility that teachers might make inappropriate and ineffective professional judgments. This seems to be premised on the belief that teachers lack knowledge about some content areas (e.g., phonics, writing, reading assessment) and, therefore, need a detailed program to follow to deliver effective instruction. In a discussion on why commercial curricula (phonics programs in this case) were important components of the district’s literacy policy, Dr. Bridges, the district deputy superintendent of education, explained why some teachers needed scripts to support their practice:

I can take *Ms. Wishy-Washy* [a children’s book used for instruction], and I can teach phonics within that, but you have to be skilled to know what to pull out of [a text] and not just what is in the little lesson plan they give you with the book. If the teacher knows what to do [not using a script is okay]. Now, if the teacher doesn’t, then the script is better than nothing. . . . some teachers can’t even teach a phonemic element. They don’t know how to teach a long e. They don’t know how to teach a short a within the context of *Ms. Wishy-Washy*. They may not even be able to identify a short “a” in there. That’s what I’m concerned about. I can teach phonics with *Ms. Wishy-Washy*, but not everyone can teach phonics with *Ms. Wishy-Washy*. . . . [The scripts] are interventions for students and teachers. . . . And that is why when we create the literacy plan for the district, we have to take that into consideration because some teachers are more skilled than others, but still, kids have to learn how to read. If they’re not learning how to read by the end of first grade, then we have a problem.

This data excerpt reflects Dr. Bridges’ belief that it takes skilled teachers to teach a phonemic element contextually but that, in her opinion, many teachers need a commercial program because they do not know how to teach such skills; therefore, the district’s
policy was to purchase commercial curricula with scripts for teachers to read and/or close guidelines for teachers to follow to ensure that phonics and phonemic awareness instruction was included in teacher practice. Dr. Bridges believed that, with proper implementation, specific programs would ensure that children learned how to read, regardless of a teacher’s skill level.

**Breakthrough to Literacy.** *Breakthrough to Literacy* (BTL) (2004)—a commercial early childhood reading curriculum—(see Chapter Four and Appendix A for full description) was widely discussed at Maplewood Elementary School. This program was one of many that I saw which Dr. Bridges’ intended to be an intervention for students, but also for teachers in order to change teaching practice. According to the publisher’s website, “Breakthrough's implementation and professional development helps classroom teachers gain the content knowledge and classroom management skills to become successful teachers of early literacy” (*BTL*, 2011, n.p.). This statement emphasized a professional development component of *BTL*. If the intent of the BTL developers was for it to serve a professional development role—and if the Dr. Bridges intended *BTL* to be an intervention to change teacher practice by developing teachers’ content knowledge and management skills—data from this study seem to indicate that, for the teachers studied at Maplewood school, the *Breakthrough to Literacy* curriculum did not serve that purpose.

To support teacher practice and create continuity between schools, the district required teachers to follow a *Breakthrough to Literacy* pacing guide—a document that delineated which standards-based indicators a teacher should address at any given point in the year (Appendix L). In child development classes (four-year-olds), the district
supplied teachers with weekly lesson plans via email to accompany the *Breakthrough to Literacy* curriculum. In my role as an internship supervisor with the university, I visited many kindergarten classrooms in the district and I saw teachers displaying the same *Breakthrough to Literacy* Book-of-the-Week on their easels and implementing nearly identical lessons each week. This was an outcome the district encouraged. Yet, despite the superficial appearance that all classrooms were implementing *Breakthrough to Literacy* with the same books on easels and students completing computerized assessments, teachers negotiated some autonomy within the walls of their classrooms to create more student-centered learning. That negotiation did not mean outright rejection of the entire curriculum. In fact, as discussed in the following sections, teachers’ fatigue around negotiating autonomy, and worry about the consequences for not implementing the program, led them to appropriate some parts of the curriculum even when they felt it was not best for their students.

**Balancing compliance with negotiation of autonomy.** District monitoring of *Breakthrough to Literacy (BTL)* (2004) meant that teachers had to work even harder to negotiate autonomy around *BTL*. Teachers in this study reported that trying to limit *BTL* use because they believed the program was redundant and the big books that accompanied the program were boring to children. One component the district monitored more closely (and that teachers were required to use frequently), was the Individual Software Support component, which includes informal assessments that software generated and sent to the district. According to an appendix in BTL assessment overview ("Appendix C", n.d., n.p.), these assessments include:

**Alphabet Assessment:** uppercase alphabet letter recognition, lowercase alphabet letter recognition, uppercase letter sounds, lowercase letter sounds.
**Phonological Assessment:** assesses phonemic awareness and phonological concepts through assessments teachers schedule in the Teacher Application of the ISI. Each objective includes six word lists that focus on a single concept (e.g., longest sentence, beginning sounds, nonsense words). The phonological concepts are sequenced from easiest to hardest. The results of the Phonological Assessment help teachers:

- identify phonological objectives a student has or has not mastered;
- identify small groups for targeted instruction; and
- determine the next stage of phonological instruction for targeted students.

**Explore Words:** curriculum monitors and records each child’s progress in Listening, Blending, Segmenting, Identifying, Ordering and Word Recognition,

**Book Activities:** monitors and records each child’s progress in one-, two-, and three-step directive tasks using modifiers and in comprehension questions about the book.

**Answer Questions: Comprehension** assesses comprehension of the Featured Books.

(www.btl.com, 2009, n.p.)

Although BTL included several components (e.g., Book-of-the-Week, Take-Me-Home Books, and Individualized Software Support), Ms. Herndon felt most compelled to use the computerized component of BTL because of the reports the software generated which the district monitored. Ms. Herndon commented:

> I don’t read the [Book-of-the-Week] everyday like Breakthrough says to do. The students just get bored. The books aren’t that interesting. But, I do get them on the computers every day. They have to do that because the district monitors students’ use of the computer assessment.

Ms. Herndon felt that carving out time to implement the Breakthrough assessment disrupted her teaching and student learning. She often had to send students to computers to take reading assessments during her lessons to be able to squeeze assessments into her daily schedule. Every time I sat in Ms. Herndon’s class for an observation, I witnessed one or more of her five and six year olds, engrossed in a story she was reading aloud, receive a tap on the shoulder from the teaching assistant indicating that it was time to take
their *Breakthrough to Literacy* test. During these moments, Ms. Herndon felt students missed important instruction, but she felt powerless to reject the practice because of district monitoring of the program (which occurred electronically through the *Breakthrough to Literacy* software).

Ms. Jefferson and Ms. Brooks made similar comments about the disruptions the program caused. During a conversation during a team-planning meeting, Ms. Jefferson explained how the district monitored her use of *Breakthrough’s* computerized component, but how little she actually used of the rest of the program:

Cindy: Now, they have this monitoring system to monitor [teacher’s usage of *Breakthrough*].

Brooks: Isn't that crazy!

Jefferson: Well, they had it last year, and mine (laughs), because Ms. Nancy didn't like *Breakthrough*, because she wouldn't keep on track. So, I was like, ‘Ms Nancy, you really need to keep up with it!’ Because [my report] was like 10% usage when [Ms. Johnson] read how often we used *Breakthrough*.

Cindy: And Ms. Johnson was celebrating that you all were using *Breakthrough* consistently [in the faculty meeting].

Jefferson: Yeah, they are getting serious now.

Cindy: But your students did well without relying heavily on *Breakthrough*?

Jefferson: They did. I didn't do *Breakthrough*. I am telling you the honest truth. I really didn't. I maybe had read them the big book, But I never used [*Breakthrough*]. I really didn't.

Ms. Jefferson equated increased district monitoring of *Breakthrough to Literacy* with an increased seriousness about compliance with district literacy demands. Despite the district’s increased monitoring of *Breakthrough* usage however, Ms. Herndon and Ms. Jefferson selected which elements of *Breakthrough* to use. Ms. Herndon shared that
she often sent elements of *Breakthrough* home as homework to reinforce her classroom teaching, or left such work for substitute teachers as a strategy for being able to say that she met the requirement to use the program. But she did not use the curriculum often in her daily teaching. She made her own decisions regarding which books to read aloud, and which lessons to teach. Ms. Jefferson reported a similar strategy for complying with the computerized component of the program, which the district monitored, while creating autonomy to teach without the curriculum in other ways.

As teachers exercised autonomy, however, they expressed concern (as demonstrated with Ms. Brooks early in this chapter) about repercussions if their practice contradicted district mandates. Ms. Jefferson explained that she and other teachers could safely practice according to their beliefs on a spectrum of autonomy:

> [How much autonomy we have] depends. [Ms. Johnson] will ask the teachers, “Do you think *Breakthrough* is working?” Because I told her I didn't really like *Breakthrough*, so she said, “Tell me what you are going to do?” I had to give her like a plan of action instead of Breakthrough. So, I told her I was going to use the Lucy Calkins’ model for writing, and I was going to use the Four Blocks for reading. And I had to break it down and show her exactly what I was going to do. I was still going to incorporate *Breakthrough* because I was going to use the small books to take home. And I was still going to use the computer component. So, in that case, if [the district] comes in, they are still going to see me doing whatever. And if they go back to her, she is going to say, ‘Well Ms. Jefferson and I already discussed this. Here is the plan of action and we are going to pilot that.’ So, everything is going to be a pilot if you're not doing what they said. So, you have to go and let her know. Don't just get caught out there. If you can back it up, she'll let you do it? If you don't feel comfortable, you won't be able to do it effectively and the kids won't learn. But like with the *Empowering Writers*, she still wants us to use some components of it, because she isn't going to tell the district, we aren't using it at all after they have put all this money in it, but you work it the way you feel comfortable and let her know how.

In this excerpt, Ms. Jefferson explained how Ms. Johnson carved out spaces of autonomy for teachers at Maplewood Elementary School despite the district’s calls for *fidelity of implementation*. To do so, Ms. Johnson had to recognize the financial commitment the
district made to particular programs such as *Breakthrough to Literacy* and *Empowering Writers*, retain parts of those programs, such as book sets, that allowed them to maintain a minimal level of compliance, and create an alternate plan for teaching in lieu of mandated programs. Ms. Jefferson called these plans that deviated from the district as “pilot plans”—or plans they would tell the district they were testing to see how they impacted students’ achievement. These pilot plans prepared Ms. Johnson and teachers at Maplewood to defend their practice, if necessary, and teach in ways they believed were effective and would support student learning.

**Surrendering the fight for autonomy.** While knowledgeable and therefore able to argue for autonomy, Ms. Jefferson sometimes chose not to fight to teach in ways that aligned with her pedagogical beliefs. This often occurred when district monitoring of programs changed and practices that once were “for show”—like placing the *Breakthrough to Literacy* Book of the Week teachers were supposed to read daily on an easel at the front of the classroom—now had to be implemented with fidelity. This meant that Ms. Jefferson had to embrace more of the *Breakthrough* curriculum than she had the previous year despite her belief that if she was uncomfortable with those teaching practices her teaching would be ineffective and the kids would not learn. Knowing she exercised agency to teach less of the program in the past, I asked why she chose not to do that now. She explained her struggle for autonomy and why she surrendered the fight in the case of *Breakthrough to Literacy* and other commercial programs:

> At first [they were] for show, but now [the district] is really cracking down to make sure you are using your [commercial programs]. . . . *Breakthrough* used to be for show, but now [the district] started doing time reports, [and] you have to look at how much money [the district] is putting in. It may not be meaningful to the children, but at the same time, I need my job. You know what I mean?
Ms. Jefferson shared that even if she disagreed with the approaches to instruction in *Breakthrough* lessons, she was willing to adopt those approaches to keep her job. While some literacy programs or approaches entered the school one year and were gone the next, Ms. Jefferson believed programs such as *Breakthrough to Literacy*, that cost tens of thousands of dollars, were more likely to require long-term commitments because of the district’s investment in those programs. And of course, district monitoring and reports (e.g., electronic *SuccessMaker* (2001) reports and using *TestView* to compile assessment data) sent the message that teachers were required to take *Breakthrough to Literacy*’s implementation seriously. In these instances, fighting district programs and mandates seemed too challenging to Ms. Jefferson, thus, she accepted the programs constraints on her teaching.

**Dominie: Getting up and running with running records.** According to Ms. Lilley (the Early Childhood Education Coordinator in the district), the district purchased the *Dominie Portfolio Assessment System* (2004) —*Dominie* for short—because, prior to its adoption, district staff members who monitored teaching in classrooms observed few instances of teachers using reading assessments, such as running records\(^\text{34}\), to guide instructional decisions. As Ms. Lilley put it, *Dominie* was selected to “get teachers up and running with running records.” *Dominie* was seen as a way to provide teachers with methods (e.g., running records, sentence writing, oral questioning) and materials (e.g. leveled texts, assessment forms, teacher guides) to assess students’ knowledge of reading strategies, phonemic awareness, and comprehension, so that teachers could use the results of those assessments to inform instruction. However, as demonstrated in this section, as

\(^{34}\) Developed my Marie Clay (1993), and building on the work of Goodman and Goodman (1980), running records are a way for teacher to assess student reading process and orchestration of semantic, syntactic, grapho-phonemic, and pragmatic cueing systems to make sense of texts.
the district appropriated Dominie, the assessment was less of a formative tool to inform teacher practice and more of a summative tool to monitor whether or not students were making adequate progress toward reading on grade level.

**Teachers’ appropriate Dominie as a summative assessment.** During the two weeklong Dominie (2001) assessment windows in fall, winter, and spring, I observed teachers administer Dominie consistently across classroom settings as a summative assessment. Ms. Brooks, Ms. Jefferson, and Ms. Herndon each had some previous professional development in using running records (although not necessarily within the Greenbrier School District) through Reading First study groups, Reading Recovery training, or learning the Four Block\(^{35}\) model when employed in another state. Even so, these teachers were still trying to figure out how to balance instruction in their classroom while meaningfully assessing students and using that assessment to inform instruction.

To administer Dominie, teachers at Maplewood sat one-at-a-time with each student, usually at a desk in the back of the classroom, and began reading a script from the program to introduce the student to the assessment text. Meanwhile, other students typically worked in literacy stations, completed worksheets, or read books independently. While teachers had begun to put some structures in place to conduct reading conferences, hold guided reading groups, and engage students in meaningful independent work while they assessed readers, they did not feel like they were teaching during the time they administered Dominie. That might have felt this way in part, based on my observations, because teachers had received little professional development to support them in using

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\(^{35}\) The Four Block Literacy Model (Cunningham, P. & Hall, D., 2002) is a comprehensive framework for reading and writing that includes guided reading, self-selected reading, writing, and working with words. One teacher mentioned receiving Four Block training in another state but this training was not offered in The Greenbrier School District.
the assessment during regular reading conferences with students (as intended by the
design of the program) to inform their instruction. Instead they were required by the
district to administer the *Dominie* assessments three times a year. Thus, *Dominie*
assessment became more obligatory and separated from actual teaching than the creator
of the program intended. On one visit to a classroom, Ms. Berling whispered, “We are
almost done. Now, we can get back to teaching.”

After completing *Dominie* Assessments, teachers were required to report students’
assessment data to the principal and to the district through TestView—a district-level,
data management system used to collect and analyze school assessment data submitted by
teachers. Despite numerous district workshops on using *Dominie* data to inform
instruction, teachers continued to believe that *Dominie* was a tool for the district, not
teachers. Data in this study, whether from Ms. Johnson, Ms. Jefferson, Ms. Brown or Ms.
Brooks consistently showed that they believed that the main purpose of *Dominie* at
Maplewood Elementary School was to determine and report a student’s reading level, not
for the purpose of creating guided reading groups to demonstrate reading strategies the
assessment data indicated students needed to learn. Ms. Herndon explained that she
believed *Dominie* had evolved into this kind of district monitoring tool, “another
standardized test.” She explained the noticeable shift this way:

I think when the district first introduced *Dominie*, they meant for it to be a reading
assessment tool teachers could use to inform their instruction, but now it is just
another standardized test. We don’t have standardized tests in kindergarten
through second grades, so *Dominie* is our standardized test.

Ms. Jefferson also described her understanding of *Dominie’s* purpose and the
disconnection between *Dominie* and instruction. She acknowledged that the district might
have once encouraged teachers to use *Dominie* to guide instruction based on whether
students were using semantic or visual cues, but Ms. Jefferson said she believed that

*Dominie* no longer guided instruction. She now believed the district and Ms. Johnson intended *Dominie* to identify a student’s text level. Based on this belief, she felt she was supposed to simply “get [*Dominie*] done” so she could report students’ levels, rather than use it to inform her instruction. Ms. Jefferson explained:

> I guess *Dominie* is just to see what a [student’s] level is really. Text leveling, for me, personally. Cause to me this reminds me of what we used in NY, the Rigby text leveling. . . . That is gone. That component, use it to guide your instruction, is gone. Right now, they just say do it to get it done, not to look and see, oh, they are using semantic cues, did they use visual cues.

Ms. Jefferson connected her current practice with her past practices as a teacher in NY using another commercial assessment program. Through that lens, she did not see *Dominie* as an assessment to guide her instruction.

Ms. Brown also believed that the purpose of *Dominie* was to identify students’ texts level. Like Ms. Jefferson, Ms. Brown did not see *Dominie* as a teaching tool, but as a way to see if her students were making “gains”, or moving from one reading level to the next. I asked Ms. Brown if the *Dominie* data drove her instruction. She explained:

> No, no. We can find that out during our reading conferences if they are using the strategies, not necessarily having to use the *Dominie*. I see the real reason for it is to see if the children made any gains. Are they where they need to be as far as [text-leveling]. So, I think that is the real purpose of *Dominie*, to see if they made gains. That's how I feel.

As a result of using *Dominie* to identify students’ text levels, teachers hurried to complete *Dominie* in short periods of time, as Ms. Berling described, to “get back to teaching students.” Thus, in the case of the teachers in this study, the district’s move to implement *Dominie* as a tool to monitor students’ reading levels seemed to undermine the district’s goal to support teachers in using reading assessment to make data-driven
decision to inform their practice. As a result, while mandating *Dominie* led teachers to go through the motions of implementing the assessment, it did not get teachers “up and running with running records,” in a meaningful ways that informed teachers’ instruction as Diane Deford, the creator of the assessment system, intended explaining, “While there are many purposes for evaluation, [*Dominie*] is designed to help teachers observe and document children’s growth in reading and writing to improve instructional decisions,” (Deford, 2001, n.p.).

**Administrators and teachers question the validity of *Dominie* test results.**

During this study, Ms. Jefferson and Ms. Johnson questioned the validity of *Dominie* (2001) assessment results, but for different reasons. In both cases, questioning the validity of *Dominie* assessment data inhibited teachers’ ability to use that data to inform instruction. Ms. Jefferson, believed student transience undermined the validity of *Dominie*. During the *Dominie* assessment, a teacher dictates a sentence to a student to write down. For the student to complete this task, the student must first distinguish the separate sounds they hear (phonemic awareness) and the write those sounds down as letters on the page (grapho-phonemics). Ms. Jefferson believed students, having taken these tests in other schools, had memorized the sentences. Therefore, she believed that when they came to Maplewood and she tested them again, the results were invalid:

> You see, [*Dominie*] ha[s] . . . sentence writing. [Students] sound out the word, and you had to grade them on how many phonemes they got correct and how many words they got correct. But the teachers [at other schools] had already given the sentence, so the kids would practice the sentence! Kids would come from other schools, and before you ever read the sentence they would already know the whole sentence. So, [teachers] practiced the sentence with them. So to me, it doesn't even matter what is on *Dominie*, because it isn't valid to me.
As a result of Ms. Jefferson’s feeling about *Dominie*, it became a tool that she implemented to report students reading level. Because she saw the assessment as invalid, she no longer felt compelled to use the tool to inform her practice.

Ms. Johnson also questioned the validity of *Dominie* test results because of concerns she shared at one faculty meeting that teachers’ subjectivity in administering the test created discrepancies between high *Dominie* assessment scores and lower state standardized test scores in reading. During an April faculty meeting, Ms. Johnson’s asked teachers to consider if *Dominie*, as they administered it, “painted a true picture of your students.” Ms. Johnson was concerned that teachers inconsistently administered *Dominie*. Even teachers wondered if they were administering *Dominie* consistently across classrooms. One teacher shared that she disagreed with another teacher about whether or not to code a word read by a child in African American English (AAE) as a miscue. One teacher believed a child’s use of AAE should not be recorded as a miscue while another believed it should. Given that teachers made different decisions about how to administer *Dominie*, and because there were discrepancies between *Dominie* and state test data, Ms. Johnson brought the issues to teachers’ awareness. She did this to help teachers reflect on their assessment process, to improve administration of assessments, and to ensure that she would get valid data on which she could form accurate understandings of “where [Maplewood] students [were] at” academically.

While Ms. Johnson drew teachers’ attention to her concerns about their administration of *Dominie* assessments, shortly thereafter, she discussed with teachers her plan to get outside teachers to administer *Dominie* to their students. This decision would

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36 Marie Clay’s (2006) work explains that teachers should not consider students’ language variations, including dialect variations, observed during running record as miscues. This is because meaning is central to the reading process.
further inhibit teachers’ ability to use assessment data to inform their practice beyond determining text levels and would further position Dominie as an accountability tool. To address issues with Dominie assessment, Ms. Johnson planned to create a team of teachers (most of whom taught pull-out Reading Intervention classes) and administrators (such as curriculum resource personnel) to assess first and second grade readers. Thus, she planned to remove the responsibility for Dominie assessments from the teachers and give it to teaching specialists who would pull students out of class to assess them. While Ms. Johnson required teachers to use Dominie data that resulted from these assessments to group students, her decision to remove the assessment process from teachers reinforced Dominie as an accountability tool rather than a meaningful instructional tool. Once Ms. Johnson removed teachers as administrators of Dominie, they no longer had the opportunity to use that data in the moment of assessment to inform instruction as the Dominie program intends.

Mixed messages about how to use Dominie data to form small groups. There was evidence during professional development sessions that district literacy consultants encouraged teachers to use Dominie (2001) data to group students flexibly—meaning that teachers should group students for short periods of time around instructional needs and change the composition of the groups with students’ changing needs. For example, at a district-wide workshop in the fall of 2010, teachers were asked to bring their students’ Dominie data to support discussions about creating guided reading groups using those data. However, even during this professional development session, I observed that most teachers grouped students based on their reading levels rather than according to needed reading strategies identified in the Dominie data. Thus, an old pattern of creating high,
low, and middle ability reading groups persisted. I frequently heard teachers say “these are my highflyers,” and “these are my low kids.” I also noticed workshop leaders affirming teachers’ leveled groupings as they shared how they made meaning of assessment data with the whole group. So, while, on the one hand, teachers received the message that they should group students flexibly using assessment data, they received another message affirming traditional ability grouping.

**The Policy of Empowering Writers**

During this study, Dr. Bridges adopted a new writing curriculum, *Empowering Writers* (2004). In this section, I will share my analysis of data around this program, which illustrates Dr. Bridges’ perspective on *Empowering Writers* and how teachers appropriated the program in the school setting. I particularly illustrate the ways teachers at Maplewood Elementary School implemented parts of the curriculum “for show” to communicate that they were implementing *Empowering Writers* while at the same time negotiating which parts of the curriculum to use and how to use them to best meet the needs of their students.

**A District Perspective On Empowering Writers**

In response to the perception, based on standardized test data, that teachers were not teaching writing, or not teaching it effectively, the district adopted *Empowering Writers* (2004). Dr. Bridges felt that while Pearson Elementary School—described earlier in this chapter—successfully adopted a writing workshop model based on the work of Lucy Calkins (founder of the Teachers’ College *Reading and Writing Project*), this model would be difficult to implement throughout the district. Dr. Bridges believed a program like *Empowering Writers* that was research-based, less expensive, based out of a
nearby city—making consultants readily available—and required less training than approaches such as Lucy Calkins’ writer’s workshop model would be more appropriate for the Greenbrier School. Additionally, she felt *Empowering Writers* addressed all of the same components of writing as the writing workshop model. Dr. Bridges emphasized the assets of *Empowering Writers* this way:

*Empowering Writers* has a research base. And it has some of the same elements. All writing programs have basically the same elements, but the training needs aren’t as intense or expensive. And the trainers are local. And we don’t have to fly someone in from New York, and we don’t have to fly teachers to NY. These folks are in [a nearby city]. And we can visit other districts that have it. All of those components are part of the decision making…. And, you have to have the right teachers [for writer’s workshop].

In addition to the many benefits Dr. Bridges saw to using *Empowering Writers* over a writing workshop model listed above, she also believed that implementing writer’s workshop required “the right teachers”. This meant teaching writing from a deep understanding of the writing process(es), writer’s craft, how to conference with writers to move their writing forward, and how to manage the overall workshop environment to make that work possible. Dr. Bridges believed that *Empowering Writers* was easier to follow and required less training to “get a critical mass of teachers up and running.” In fact, *Empowering Writers* (2012) marketed its curriculum based on its ease of use and emphasized teachers’ difficulties implementing a writers’ workshop model as well. The program’s materials explain:

Most teachers find the traditional writer’s workshop model difficult to manage and implement. How can you conference with individual students while keeping the rest of the class on task working independently? How can you move students through the writing process in a timely way? . . . Our methodology (whole class instruction/modeling/guided practice/application) along with our fully annotated resource materials make the writing process realistic, manageable, and practical while optimizing instructional time. Together, the K-1 guide and the Comprehensive Narrative, Expository, and Persuasive Collection of Resource
Books provide enough lessons and materials for eight years of valuable instruction and guided practice. (n.p.)

The characteristics of the *Empowering Writers* program mentioned above appealed to Dr. Bridges who expected the curriculum to help teachers manage and implement a writing curriculum. Particularly *Empowering Writers* aimed to help teachers conference with students and move students through the writing process in a timely way. To reach this end, *Empowering Writers* offered “eight years worth of lesson and materials” to make teaching writing easier for teachers.

To support teachers’ use of *Empowering Writers* lessons, the district provided a two-day orientation to the curriculum in August before the start of the 2010-2011 school year. The curriculum materials included teachers’ guides and reproducible charts for teachers to use in their classrooms. The district required teachers to implement the curriculum during the year. Overall, teachers’ orientation to *Empowering Writers*, and the program’s easy to follow curriculum and writing tools (such as the *Narrative Writing Diamond*), seemed to communicate that supporting the work of young writers was a simple step-by-step process that teachers could learn to follow in a two-day workshop. After completing the first day of training, and returning for a second day of training, one teacher commented, “We already had one full day of *Empowering Writers*. Do we really need another day?” This comment demonstrated how *Empowering Writers* training seemed to reduce the complex process of supporting writers to an oversimplified process of following a manual—a practice one teacher felt she could implement with one day of training.
“That’s for show”: Autonomy and *Empowering Writers* Appropriation at Maplewood

As conversations around writing unfolded at the school level, teachers’ and Ms. Johnson viewed *Empowering Writers* as another district program to implement in the school. Ms. Johnson, someone who opposed programs, made efforts to carve out spaces of autonomy around writing instruction. During a planning meeting, Ms. Johnson echoed Ms. Jefferson’s comment that some actions the school and teachers took to comply with district mandates to implement certain programs with fidelity were “just for show.” For example, to implement *Empowering Writers* program, the district asked all teachers to hang the *Narrative Writing Diamond*—a visual tool to remind students of the parts of a story including, the beginning, middle and end (Figure 5.6)—in their classrooms to illustrate the parts of a narrative story. Ms. Johnson expressed concerns about the putting up displays “just for show” and wanted to ensure that she and her teachers were doing what they found to be successful.

I told my teachers to just put it up. That’s for show. What is important is that I know what is going on in my teacher’s classroom. I know what she is doing in there.

The CRT informed the principal that they would be looking for the writing diamond posted in all classrooms. The principal ensured the teachers that “we don’t do things for show but that we need to make sure that they see what we actually do to be successful.” In this instance, creating spaces for autonomy meant questioning *fidelity of implementation*. This did not mean, however, that Ms. Johnson outright rejected the district’s policy that required teachers to put up the writing diamond, but Ms. Johnson protected her right as principal to make the decisions she deemed best for Maplewood.
students, which allowed teachers to use the parts of Empowering Writers they felt supported their practice and students’ learning.

**Teachers decide how to appropriate Empowering Writers.** On several occasions, teachers discussed how they incorporated *Empowering Writers* into their teaching. An analysis of observational data from team meetings suggests that while Ms. Johnson gave teachers permission to put the writing diamond up “for show” and make their own decision about how to use the curriculum, the presence of the chart seemed to persuade teachers to weave the tool into their practice as they planned their writing instruction. Such was the case during a team meeting when Ms. Jefferson and Ms. Brooks discussed how to incorporate the essence of the writing diamond—teaching students to write strong beginnings, middles, and ends to their stories—into their plans to weave more writing into their instruction as Ms. Johnson requested. In the following excerpt Ms. Jefferson asks Ms. Brooks how she is implementing *Empowering Writers*. More specifically, she asks her what strategies she will use from *Empowering Writers* illustrating how the two teachers made choices about which parts of the curriculum they would adopt and which they would not. Ms. Jefferson took the lead as she suggested what each of them should write in their plan to convey in some way, specifically to the district, that they were using the curriculum. Their conversation began with Ms. Jefferson asking:

Jefferson: (Speaking to Ms. Brooks) How are you going to use *Empowering Writers*? Or what strategies are you going to use with *Empowering Writers*? [Let’s write] ‘Ms. Brooks, will begin using *Empowering Writers*, beginning, middle, end, and summarizing framework, and writing diamond.’ And then I am going to continue to use the beginning, middle and end, summarizing framework and the writing diamond and will begin elaborative detail. With
Empowering Writers, I put that you will begin to implement, beginning, middle and, end and summarizing framework. And the writing.

Brooks: I've already introduced that.

Jefferson: Will continue. Are you going to be getting to the elaborate detail lesson?

Brooks: No, mine are not ready for that yet.

Cindy: But are you using the writing diamond?

Brooks: What is the writing diamond?

Jefferson: It is beginning, middle, and end.

Brooks: Oh, I just don't call it that.

Jefferson: But [the district] wants to see that, so I have to put it up, too.

Brooks: Oh, okay.

As Ms. Jefferson and Ms. Brooks planned, they highlighted the most salient features of the Empowering Writing curriculum to their practice at the time. Ms. Jefferson chose to use Empowering Writers to teach students to write beginning, middles, and ends to their story using the Narrative Writing Diamond, how to use the summarizing framework to summarize a story, and how to include elaborative details in their writing. Ms. Jefferson told Ms. Brooks that she would write in the plan that Ms. Brooks would be teaching the same concepts. Selecting these strategies did not mean the teachers used Empowering Writers lessons in their entirety, but they used elements of the program as tools to support their work and writers.

While Ms. Jefferson planned to use Empowering Writers, I was curious if this plan was just “for show” as other plans sometimes were, or if she planned to use
Empowering Writers in the way she laid out. Ms. Jefferson explained how the curriculum informed her practice explaining:

I really use it. Because when we [read] the Polar Express, I tried to show them how the author didn't just write Sally ran. So, this is what that focuses on. So we do that through books. This was like reading in the beginning... I've been doing it more like a reading lesson than a writing lesson... And, here is where kind of writing came in, using sentences for elaborative detail, what you heard or what you saw. I am going to start with that.

Ms. Jefferson referred back to a reading lesson in which she drew on concepts emphasized in the Empowering Writers (elaborative detail) to teach a writing lesson using the book The Polar Express. I had the opportunity to observe her teaching on that day. During Ms. Jefferson’s read aloud of The Polar Express, she highlighted ways that the author used elaborative detail to describe the snowy scenery and the children’s excitement as they journeyed to the North Pole. Making a connection between reading and writing, Ms. Jefferson explained to the students how they could use similar details in their stories as they describe a snow day the recently experienced (Figure 5.9).

![Image of student's writing sample](image-url)

Figure 5.9. Student’s “My Snowy Day” writing sample showing use of elaborative details (e.g., items she is collecting for the snow man).
While Ms. Jefferson did not implement, with fidelity, the entire *Empowering Writers* curriculum, she pulled concepts from the curriculum to support her practice as she taught students to read like writers—learning from what other authors do—to improve their writing.

My analysis of data from team meetings also suggested that Ms. Jefferson and Ms. Brooks drew from *Empowering Writers* lessons to teach writing mechanics (e.g., sentence structure and using proper punctuation). As Ms. Brooks and Ms. Jefferson continued creating their lesson plans using the *Empowering Writers* curriculum guide, it was evident was how their knowledge of their students mediated how they decided to appropriate *Empowering Writers*:

Jefferson: (recording notes) Both teachers will implement a sentence a day.

Brooks: So, we have to use these [lessons] to make sentences or something? All I do is underline that they began with a capital letter and that they ended with a period.

Jefferson: I think this is just more for sentence structure.

Brooks: Yeah, it is. For the lower. I don't really think your kids need…

Jefferson: They really don't. I mean, some of them do. See they don't know where to put periods though. And I guess using adjectives.

Brooks: Because the biggest thing is where to put the periods. They have these long sentences and maybe one or two periods etched in somewhere, or they have a period where they are not at the end of their sentence.

Jefferson: Right and I try to tell them, um put your period where you take a pause. And then some of them would have a period like, I like to go to… And I will read it, “I like to go to” and I will take a long pause, and they're looking at me like, “huh?” And that is how readers are going to read it, they are going to take a pause at your period.
This dialogue illustrated Ms. Brook’s and Ms. Jefferson’s emphasis on teaching writing mechanics based on the *Empowering Writer’s* curriculum, such as punctuation, capitalization, etc. Both teachers however considered whether their students needed this lesson and who could benefit from it. Carving out spaces of autonomy around the writing curriculum in this way allowed teachers to use parts of the curriculum they felt applied to their students and ignore the parts they felt were irrelevant.

**The Policy of People at Maplewood Elementary School**

“*It is people, not programs, that matter,*” I would often hear Ms. Johnson say as we walked the halls of Maplewood Elementary School or as I sat with her in her conference room talking about literacy practices. This phrase reflected Ms. Johnson’s policy to support effective teaching by relying on the professional knowledge of her staff. While district administrators expressed concerns about some teachers’ preparedness to offer quality instruction, Ms. Johnson communicated that she believed it was people, not programs, who increased students’ achievement. This did not mean that she identified all teachers at her school as prepared instructors, nor did it mean that she felt that no program in the school supported good instruction, but she meant that she believed in providing flexibility for teachers to negotiate use of the programs in their classrooms.

Several characteristics defined what I came to call this *policy of people* including: (a) a de-emphasis on programs; (b) an emphasis on teachers’ professional knowledge; and (c) an emphasis on her knowledge of teachers’ and each student’s performance. Ms. Johnson enacted these personal policies within a broader policy environment, within which she supported teachers’ professional identities.
“It’s the People that Matter, Not the Programs”

I first became aware that Ms. Johnson’s policy of people meant she avoided the use of certain scripted programs. This avoidance was visible during a conversation with a school literacy consultant. I listened as Ms. Johnson and the consultant discussed potential methods of literacy intervention. The consultant recommended one model and one program for intervention. The model she recommended was a “walk to intervention” approach in which students would attend intervention for 30 minutes each day with a teacher other than their classroom teacher. The consultant also suggested a program called Systematic Instruction of Phoneme Awareness, Phonics and Sight Words (SIPPS, 2001) to assist teachers in differentiating instruction. When the consultant suggested SIPPS as an intervention choice, Ms. Johnson responded, “We don’t need SIPPS in this school. We don’t have programs here.”

As data in this chapter show, there were programs at Maplewood Elementary School—programs that the district selected and distributed to support instruction, but Ms. Johnson did not invite these programs, or any others, into Maplewood Elementary School. My analysis of data suggests that when Ms. Johnson had the opportunity, she provided teachers with autonomy to decide how they would use commercial literacy programs. So, while Ms. Johnson was interested in identifying a method of intervention that would raise students’ achievement and support teachers, adopting a program like SIPPS was not the answer she was looking for. As she mentioned in one faculty meeting, Ms. Johnson believed, “We have to get away from that box teaching.” Ms. Johnson’s statement that they did not have “box teaching”, or in other words commercial programs, demonstrated that these programs were not at the heart of improving instruction at
Maplewood. Ms. Johnson exercised agency to examine programs that made their way into the school via district mandates to determine the extent to which commercial programs would inform instruction at Maplewood Elementary School. As an analysis of data in this study suggests, she was unable to keep all programs out of her school, but she was able to mediate how teachers engaged with some of those programs.

At the same time that Ms. Johnson tended to steer away from programs, as described in Chapter Four, she welcomed learning principles or strategies teachers could use to flexibly negotiate their practice. For example, Ms. Johnson eventually worked with teachers to create an intervention plan that drew on Marzano Strategies for teaching. Based on the research of Dr. Robert Marzano and his colleagues, (Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001). Encouraging teachers to use these strategies was a part Ms. Johnson’s policy of people in that it differed from programs because teachers could select strategies to implement with more autonomy.

**Relying on Teachers’ Professional Knowledge**

Ms. Johnson believed that her teachers’ professional knowledge of content, as well as of their students, led to teaching that would support real academic growth in students. Ms. Johnson expected that teachers would access their professional and personal knowledge to mediate state, district, and local literacy goals. At a faculty meeting, she demonstrated her trust in the teachers’ knowledge and ability to use it when she asked teachers: “When you think about where your students are now, what do you think you could have done differently? And if you are satisfied, what did you do?” This type of question was common for Ms. Johnson to ask during faculty meetings. In some meetings, she communicated her belief that the faculty could work as a team to
understand how data might give them new insights into teaching strategies. She also invited teachers to help her control her propensity to embrace too many ideas in the name of progress (such as an attempt in previous years to embrace single gender education). In the following data excerpt, Ms. Johnson invited teachers to reflect on their practice to come up with ideas for the following school year. This involvement reflected her policy of people as she encouraged teachers to be reflective practitioners and to help hold her accountable when she stepped out too far with too many ideas:

Johnson: [Looking at this data] what would you do differently at the beginning of next school year? Why can’t my students do X right now? I am always reflecting on what I need to do differently. That is why I come up with so many ideas.

Teacher: Get one and stick with it!

Johnson: You are right! There are some things I just need to stop! I am going to change my focus. I am going to assign each of you to a task, because you will help me contain myself from stepping out too far.

By assigning teachers tasks, such as inviting Ms. Jefferson to head the writing team, Ms. Johnson involved her staff in making instructional decisions about how to meet students’ needs and gave them power to limit her numerous new plans for students’ improvement. This did not mean that Ms. Johnson never imposed her policies on teachers, she made it clear that she was the last word of authority at Maplewood, but there was evidence that she expected teachers to take personal responsibility for analyzing data, deciding how to adapt their instruction based on those data, and making sure instruction increased students’ achievement.

You have to know your teachers and students. Ms. Johnson believed her knowledge of teachers’ practices and their collective knowledge of students’ progress,
more than programs, would improve student achievement. Thus, her policy of people over programs manifested as she made efforts to know what was going on in teachers’ rooms by making frequent rounds through classrooms. She also invited teachers to share their practices in weekly faculty meetings. For example, it was common to hear Ms. Johnson say, “Tell me where your children are—the areas that are their strengths and then tell me the areas where you have some concerns.” In making statements such as these, Ms. Johnson demonstrated that teachers made important professional judgments about Maplewood students. During a meeting focusing on Progress Monitoring, Ms. Johnson engaged in the following conversation with Ms. Jefferson about the reading progress of one student:

Ms. Johnson: One of the things I want to ask you, Ms. Brooks, about is Jerome…. One of the things I noticed on the assessments you turned in this week, is that he didn't do well on either of them. And that did concern me. Because I knew, with the kids, he does well. But what is happening? What do you think is happening with him because I was a little shocked?

Ms. Jefferson: He's having some home issues.

Ms. Johnson: Okay, I noticed that when I looked at the assessment that that assessment was not what I wanted to see there from him. Now, when we take a look at the Dominie in first grade…we know…Jerome is excited about books. And we didn't see that before, so that is a good thing. So, when we have children at this level who want to share more about books and talk more about books and wanting to read, and when we see that we need to take advantage of that.

This conversation was representative of many conversations between teachers and Ms. Johnson about the progress of students at Maplewood. Ms. Johnson expected teachers to know their students, and held teachers accountable for students’ progress by reading over assessment reports teachers sent her on a weekly basis. When she noticed
that certain students were not performing as well as she expected, she asked about each by name and expected teachers, like Ms. Jefferson to give an account of why the student was struggling and how the teacher would change their instruction to address the student’s needs. Ms. Johnson encouraged teachers to intimately understand each student’s progress and nurture their developing passion for reading and talking about books. Through acts such as these, Ms. Johnson placed teachers and students at the heart of her policy of people as she mediated the numerous literacy policies and curricula that bore down upon all of them in the Maplewood Elementary School Community.

**Conclusion**

This chapter opened with data that situated teachers’ practices against a backdrop of district policies aimed at improving the quality of teachers’ instruction and student achievement—policies that contributed to teachers feelings that they could not “just teach.” Figure 5.10 illustrates how the various policies in the district encompassed the larger goal to change teacher practice and ensure student success.
Each of these district policies impacted teacher practice in some way. As my analysis of data in this chapter illustrates, teachers responded to these policies in a variety of ways. In all cases, their professional knowledge and position in the school system mediated their interpretation of these policies. Those interpretations then informed their practice.

One key finding my analysis of data pointed to in this chapter was how the district intended the policy of restricted autonomy to improve the quality of teacher instruction and student achievement. As Dr. Bridges explained, autonomy did not work for the Greenbrier school district because of student transience, low test scores in many schools, and the district needing to know all of the programs being implemented in its schools in order to monitor and support teachers’ implementation of those programs. Through this oversight and support, Dr. Bridges believed the district would improve instruction and
improve student outcomes as measured by standardized test. These were additional reasons teachers felt responsible to implement district programs and why they felt they could not “just teach” according to their professional knowledge.

Because of the district’s policy of restricted autonomy, there were many policies that made teachers dependent on the district. One such policy was pacing guidelines, which delineated when teachers would teach certain standards-based content and for how long. Another policy of model lessons, which the district wrote to support teachers in writing plans that aligned with the pacing guides, also created dependency in teachers as they relied on those lessons to plan their instruction. In the case of both policies of pacing guides and model lessons, teachers who were already independent and confident in their teaching found ways to creatively negotiate those policies. Those who were dependent on other curricula (e.g., basal texts, internet lessons, workbooks) such as Ms. Brown, seemed to become more dependent on the new tools, like pacing guides, and grow increasingly anxious about how to implement the new policy, strengthening her call to “just let [her] teach.”

My analysis of data in this chapter further illustrated how non-negotiable literacy practices, particularly those in the form district expectations for teachers to change their classroom environments, did not always bring about actual change to how teachers taught. In some cases, teachers put up word walls and anchor charts, but they needed more long-term mentoring from literacy professionals to understand the complexity of students’ reading processes and how that understanding should inform instruction. In other cases, teachers’ use of non-negotiable environmental changes permeated teacher talk as they looked to charts—like the *Empowering Writers Narrative Writing Diamond*
to inform their planning. At other times, participants acknowledge that environmental
changes they made were “just for show” and allowed teachers to carve out spaces of
autonomy to continue teaching in ways they deemed useful for their students.

Another important finding in this chapter was that professional development,
intended to strengthen teacher practice and improve students’ achievement, largely
frustrated teachers who felt the training was redundant and disconnected from their
practice. Data in this chapter suggest that frustration was most intense when it focused on
preparing teachers to implement commercial literacy curricula such as *Dominie* and
*Empowering Writers* and *Breakthrough to Literacy* (2004). The district adopted these
programs—all of which the district claimed were based on *scientifically based reading
research*—when their observations of teachers’ practices or test score data pointed to an
area of weakness in teachers’ instruction. Thus, these commercial curricula served the
purpose of raising both students achievement and improving teacher practice. While the
district claimed to adopt programs such as *Dominie* and *Empowering Writers* to scaffold
teachers into desired literacy practices, these scaffolds remained in place as tools for the
district to monitor teacher practice and student progress. Because of this, many district
tools ceased to hold real meaning for teachers who saw the tools primarily as “new
standardized tests” for kindergarten through second grade students, especially since
students in these grades did not have a state test to monitor their progress. Despite
teachers’ frustrations with implementing commercial literacy curricula, the district’s
increased monitoring of those programs to “inspect what they expected” and check for
*fidelity of implementation*. District monitoring complicated teachers’ negotiations of
literacy policies and at times led them to appropriate programs in ways that constrained their practice and further contributed to teachers’ requests to just teach.

One of the most important findings of this chapter is the key role an administrator can play in mediating district policy and the degree to which teachers are expected to implement programs with fidelity. While Ms. Johnson could not keep programs out of her school, she clearly communicated her belief that people—specifically teachers—not programs were the most important factor in Maplewood students’ success. As Ms. Johnson questioned the value of programs, she also reminded teachers that it was what they did with programs that mattered more than the program itself. Therefore, while the district implemented a policy of restricted autonomy, Ms. Johnson and teachers often subtly contested that policy through acts of agency. These acts included practices like creating local pacing guidelines and selectively implementing parts of Empowering Writers. By negotiating the role commercial curricula would play in learning at Maplewood Elementary School—and through her inclusion of teachers’ voices in examining assessment data and making curricular decision to address the assessment data—Ms. Johnson enacted a policy of people—a policy that mediated the district’s policy of commercial literacy programs. This process supported the professional growth of teachers and the academic growth of students at Maplewood Elementary School. It also empowered her teachers to shape local policy.
CHAPTER SIX

BALANCED LITERACY: LITERACY POLICY IN PRACTICE

Chapter Four provided a careful description of explicit and implicit ways that participants communicated literacy policies and specifically the federal and state policies aimed at changing teacher practice. Chapter Five built on those descriptions by focusing on literacy policies designed to impact teacher practice—in particular the numerous literacy programs the district adopted and disseminated through its professional development to bring about teacher change.

In this chapter, I focus more closely on literacy policies as related to a particular framework favored by the district. Dr. Bridges, the deputy superintendent of the Greenbrier School District, along with the district’s website, named this framework, “balanced literacy” (Bridges, n.d., “Literacy Manifesto”). This chapter is written to communicate how district and school level definitions are situated with national and state conversations about a balanced literacy approach. It begins by discussing how the term balanced literacy entered into discourse about literacy instruction, then explores state perspectives on balanced literacy, and finally examines local iterations of the term in practice. Thus, findings are organized according to the themes delineated in Figure 6.1:
I begin this chapter with a discussion of the origins of a balanced approach to literacy education. Understanding those origins helps to define the term and situates local definitions from this study within a broader discourse about literacy practice. After building an understanding of the origins of balanced literacy at the national level, I move on to describe one participant’s, Ms. Williams’, description of a balanced approach to literacy at the state level. Her definition was significant in that it reflected, from her perspective, how the state communicated a balanced approach to literacy to teachers through Reading First professional development offerings. Following the discussion of a state level definition of balanced literacy, I discuss in detail a district level view of a balanced approach to literacy as communicated by Dr. Bridges, the deputy superintendent of education in the Greenbrier School District. As data in this chapter will show, Dr. Bridges’ definition mirrored national trends to merge whole language and phonics-first approaches into a conglomeration of practices to support literacy development. I conclude this section with a close look at teachers’ appropriation of a balanced approach at the school level. Teachers and administrators reflected their understanding of balanced literacy largely through their practice in Maplewood Elementary School.
Balanced Literacy: Origins in the National Policy Discourse

It is important to understand the origins of the balanced literacy\(^{37}\) approach and its definition (as generally used in national literacy conversations) to further appreciate local definitions and how the notion of a balanced literacy approach came to play such an important role in literacy education at state, district, and school levels. Thus, before sharing supportive data, I outline in the following sections an evolution of the balanced literacy approach and a brief overview of its appropriation at the district and school levels.

The Term, Balanced Literacy Emerges

The idea of a balanced approach seems to have first emerged in the 1980’s to quell debates between proponents of: (a) whole-language\(^ {38}\) as a philosophy that

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\(^{37}\) It is important be clear that balanced literacy is *not* a program. The term is a widely, and diversely used and encompass, and exclude, a variety of reading practices depending on who is defining the term.

\(^{38}\) From a socio-psycholinguistic perspective, a whole language approach according to Goodman (1986) is one in which the reading process, and literacy development more broadly, is seen to parallel the language acquisition process. From this point of view, literacy, like language, develops easiest under conditions similar to those that exist when children learn to speak (Bruner, 1983 & Cambourne, 1988). The assumption behind whole language is that literacy learning is akin to language acquisition. Brian Cambourne is a theorist who is often cited in explanations of some aspects of parallels between the acquisition of language and the acquisition of literacy. In his research, Cambourne described conditions under which children acquire language. He then applied those conditions to understand children’s process of developing other language facilities, like reading. Cambourne (1998) posits that specific conditions support both language and literacy learning including: high expectations for student learning, immersion in authentic language activities, demonstration of language use by more accomplished users, engagement in purposeful activity, opportunities to approximate language while receiving contextualized feedback, and supporting students in learning strategies that will allow them to take responsibility for their own learning while using language for authentic purposes. Therefore, a teacher who builds practice from a whole language philosophy might: imbied and integrate literacy learning (speaking, listening, reading, & writing) into purposeful and authentic tasks; attend to individual growth; fill the environment with a diverse forms of texts (books, magazines, signs, posters etc.); provide thematic literacy centers that integrate literacy purposefully; and support students work. When teaching with a WL philosophy, skills like phonemic awareness and phonics instruction are embedded into whole text experiences in which the teacher starts with the whole, targets a part of that whole—a skill/component of language—for explicit instruction, and then helps students connect the skill/component knowledge back to the whole in what is called a Whole-Part-Whole teaching method (Weaver, 1998).

A synthetic phonics approach to literacy assumes that learning to read is a different process than learning to speak (Moats, 2000 & 2007). From this perspective, phonemes, phonics (letters/sound
undergirded methods of reading instruction (Cambourne, 1988 & Wevaer, 1998), and (b) explicit, skills-in-isolation based proponents of reading instruction (Moats, 2007).

According to Coburn (2001), the term balanced literacy originated in literacy politics in the late 90’s within the state of California when “the logic of literature-based instruction came under very swift and public attack and was subsequently dismantled from state policy” (p. 44). Following the dismantling of whole-language from public policy, various stakeholders came together to define a new logic of literacy instruction based on what they called a “balanced approach” (Coburn, 2001, p.44).

Since the late 90’s, various policy actors including teachers, administrators, researchers, and politicians have debated what is meant by a balanced approach to literacy. Policy actors connected to special education tended to favor definitions that emphasized explicit, phonics-based instruction, and, more precisely, systematic phonics’ instruction that introduces letter/sound relationships in decontextualized ways. As balanced literacy gained popularity, the same educators who advocated for systematic phonics instructions expressed concern that balanced literacy was a merely a continuation of whole language practices—practices they believe marginalized the role of phonics in reading and did not focus explicitly enough on discrete skills. For example, Finn (2000), a proponent of isolated phonics instruction, and others, such as Dr. Louisa Moats (2007)—who has a background in psychology, special education, reading and human relationships) are better learned when taught in isolation. The belief that learning these parts must precede learning the whole (experience with texts) led to several isolated phonics practices including: using Basal texts that isolate and teach letter/sound relationships in a systematic (predetermined sequence), divide reading into “grade slices” (Goodman, 1986, p. 34), simplify and control sentence structure and vocabulary in texts, equate reading with test of sub-skills, separate skills from its use in reading and writing.

39 These shifts in reading logic occurred under the leadership of CA State Superintendent, Bill Honig—an ardent supporter of phonics based reading instruction.
development—voiced frustration that the whole language philosophy lived on merely renamed as balanced literacy and she encouraged educators to intensify efforts to root out whole language practices in classrooms. Those opposed to a whole language approach saw it as an ineffective, or, at best, an incomplete, approach to literacy instruction (Moats, 2007) while whole language proponents argued that balance had always existed within the wholeness of whole language as phonemic awareness and explicit phonics instruction were embedded intentionally within the context of whole literacy experiences (Weaver, Stephens, Vance, 1990; Mills & Clyde, 1990; Goodman, 2005).

Coburn (2001) suggests that participants in this discussion about literacy education tended to describe literacy trends in the past decades by explaining a quasi-evolution of reading instruction logics: first there was a phonics-based approach, then there was whole language, and then, balance—in which the first two approaches simply merged. Coburn (2001) suggests that researchers need to complicate the overly simplistic narrative of changing literacy policy. She argued that a simplistic view of whole language and isolated phonics instruction coming together seamlessly under a balanced literacy whole “obscures the deep differences in fundamental assumptions about the nature of reading, the nature of learning, and the nature of teaching that lay at the core of the different approaches to reading instruction” (p.42).

**Greenbrier District Definitions of a Balanced Literacy Approach**

Against the backdrop of the national debate to define what is meant by balance in a balanced literacy approach, four classroom teachers; a state level participants, Ms. Williams; the district superintendent, Dr. Bridges; district professional development leaders, and teachers at Maplewood Elementary school defined what a balanced approach
meant to them. Overwhelmingly, district and local level participants’ definitions represented efforts to seamlessly blend whole language and systematic phonics-based practices as if they were two halves of a whole (Coburn, 2001, p. 42) without understanding how attempting to do so often violated the core assumptions under each approach. The assumption supporting literacy development through isolated phonics instruction is that literacy learning is quite different than language acquisition—and must be taught through isolated, sequenced, lessons in phonemic awareness and phonics, which precede engagement with connected and purposeful text. Simply put, according to one approach, children learn skills while applying them; according to the other, they learn skills before applying them.

**Teachers’ View of a Balanced Approach to Literacy**

Various literacy tools, like textbooks and trade books, exist along a spectrum between supporting whole language practices or phonics in isolation practices. Some teachers, like Ms. Jefferson, noticed contradictions between the district’s literacy message (e.g., use trade books to teach) and literacy tools offered to teachers in schools (e.g., basal texts, computerized isolated phonics programs). While the district provided teachers with trade books, Ms. Jefferson wondered why basal texts even existed given the district’s balance literacy framework—one she believes precluded the use of textbooks. Ms. Jefferson’s definition of balanced literacy and its associate practices, conflicted with the district’s definition and the tools (like basal texts) they gave her to support her practice; this conflict created confusion and frustration. Amidst this confusion, I observed teachers appropriate balanced literacy in ways that fit their personal beliefs and their perceptions of students’ needs. Teachers engaged in balanced literacy practices based on
their personal literacy histories, previous professional development in literacy, and their position—as degree of autonomy available—in the school system.

My View of a Balanced Approach to Literacy

Because my own view of a balanced literacy approach shaped how I interpreted teachers’ practice I believe it also important to share my lens on the topic. Against this national backdrop, I view a balanced literacy approach chiefly as a political term constructed to assuage the tensions between a whole language learning theory and a phonics first-and-only approach to reading instruction. According to Weaver (1998), for many teachers and district administrators nation-wide, balanced literacy came to mean a balance-scale” (Figure 6.1) view of literacy with isolated phonemic awareness and phonics instruction on one side and reading texts on the other.

Figure 6.1. Weaver’s (1998) balance-scale metaphor is one interpretation of how whole language and phonics have come together under balanced literacy.
My definition of balanced literacy contrasts with a balance-scale view. In line with Weaver’s (1998) view of balanced literacy, I believe that an appropriately balanced approach to reading, writing, and literacy will:

- Focus not merely on reading, but on literacy, broadly defined;
- Integrate language and literacy across modes of language and across disciplines
- Attend to reading, writing, and other kinds of skills and strategies in context—that is, in the context of reading, writing, and learning from whole and meaningful texts (texts that children themselves find meaningful);
- Reflect a coherent integration of the best research available.

(p.4)

This stance on balanced literacy provided a lens through which I interpreted definitions of balanced literacy in Greenbrier District and deeply informs my understanding of literacy instruction. I believe that explicit instruction to build phonemic awareness and knowledge of and ability to use letter-sound relationships while engaged in the shared reading of culturally relevant poems, songs, big books, rhymes, and chants in essential. I believe, however, that using knowledge of phonics is only one tool used by readers as they make sense of words in the process of constructing meaning from texts and that teachers must make explicit how knowledge of phonics can help readers in the act of making meaning.

**Balanced Literacy: A State Perspective**

At the state level, Ms. Williams, an Early Childhood Education Literacy Associate, communicated that balance meant avoiding dichotomies that would send the impression that the state was biased toward a whole language or phonics-first approach.
Ms. Williams felt it was important for the state to project a neutral stance and distance itself from the aging whole language vs. phonics debate. Ms. Williams explained:

We aren’t a proponent of whole language versus nothing else…We are very much about balanced literacy and research based practice. And that is what we focus all of our efforts on. We’ve worked hard to avoid those situations where people think we are promoting one thing over the other, and consequently, we have been able to do a lot of good work in our Reading First schools in the state and to…put aside [those differences]. You hardly hear people talk about whole language versus phonics anymore. And that is a good thing, because that wasn’t really helping anyone.

In this data excerpt, Ms. Williams explained the state’s policy of avoiding dichotomies between whole language vs. phonics and the importance of the state remaining unbiased in its literacy approach in order to make progress. She also described her personal belief that historical debates between whole language and phonics stymied that progress.

Moving beyond these debates under the term balanced literacy was a way to “do a lot of good work” that otherwise might not have been possible within polarizing whole language vs. phonics debates. According to Ms. Williams, the state’s efforts to avoid dichotomies were reflected in several state initiatives—the State Reading Initiative, State Reads, and Reading First—as the state trained literacy coaches to work in schools through a balanced literacy framework. Within these initiatives, workshop leaders provided professional development to teachers to demonstrate how they might explicitly teach phonics and phonemic awareness in a holistic fashion that marginalized neither purposeful literacy engagements nor explicit instruction. Reading First additionally trained teachers to engage in a whole host of practices that supported a balanced approach to literacy. Some of the Greenbrier School District’s schools participated in these workshops as Reading First schools—meaning the school (typically a Title I school)
received federal grant money to participate in Reading First training—but Maplewood Elementary was not among those. However, as mentioned earlier, Ms. Brooks’ prior participation in Reading First in her former school district had a lasting impact on her classroom literacy practice and how she continued to make sense of literacy practice during the course of this study.

**Balanced Literacy: District Perspectives**

In this study, I inquired extensively to find out how Dr. Bridges, the district’s deputy superintendent of education, defined balanced literacy and how she supported teachers in using this framework through the district’s professional development. I had already observed teaching practice at Maplewood and documented numerous literacy tools supplied by the district to support teachers’ practice such as basal text books; leveled books; commercial reading programs such as *Accelerated Reader* (2004), *SuccessMaker* (2001), and *Breakthrough to Literacy* (2004); subscriptions to online literacy tools such as *Book Flix* (2013); as well as support documents such as pacing guidelines, and non-negotiable literacy practices. I wondered how each of these fit within the district’s definition of balanced literacy.

As Dr. Bridges described her understanding of balanced literacy, she expressed several district literacy policies, connected to the balanced literacy framework, that were both implicit and explicit in the district discourse: (a) balanced literacy was a conglomeration of whole language ideologies, phonics-based practices, and federal policy statements; (b) balanced literacy is good for some students, but not all; (c) teachers need phonics programs to provide effective instruction to students; and (d) teachers
should avoid dichotomies between literature-based and phonics based approaches to literacy and “just teach children to read.”

**Balanced Literacy is A Conglomeration of Whole Language Ideologies, Phonics Based Practices, and Federal Statements**

In her description of a balanced approach to literacy, Dr. Bridges expressed how whole language ideologies, phonics based practices, and federal statements about key components that support literacy development came together to form what she defined as balanced literacy. Dr. Bridges’ description of a balanced approach included, on one hand, a core *value* of understanding the whole child as a reader and learner (a key tenet of whole language). Her view was that balanced literacy also included several instructional *practices* such as guided reading, sustained reading, guided writing (also key elements in reading and writing workshops which were whole language philosophy manifests). But Dr. Bridges’ compartmentalization of practices, such as grouping phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary etc. together, show that Dr. Bridges was still developing her understanding that whole language also included these elements. Dr. Bridges’ definition also included her policy—set apart from her initial description with the use of the word “but” below—that phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension were key—and perhaps marginalized—elements in balanced literacy. Dr. Bridges explained these components of balanced literacy:

Balanced literacy is looking at the whole child as a reader and learner. Of course, it incorporates guided reading, sustained reading, guided writing, direct instruction, all of that. But, [students] do need the phonics. They do need the phonemic awareness. They do need the fluency. They need the vocabulary instruction. And, they need specific instruction and comprehension strategies in addition to the balance. And that is the balance. And they need that. [Balanced literacy] has a lot of whole language methods because it has the schema piece so that kids don’t compartmentalize their learning, and it has probing prior...
knowledge so kids know they are building on their knowledge base, and it has strategies.

Dr. Bridges’ description creates an image of balanced literacy being a conglomeration of beliefs and practice from whole language and components emphasized in more recent federal language in the NRP (phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension as key pillars to support literacy development). The word conglomeration—a mixed collection of literacy practices in this case—seems to describe the balanced approach to literacy Dr. Bridges illustrated. Her description of these components also echoes the notion of a balance-scale view of balanced literacy as described by Weaver (1998). In her definition, I interpreted a tension between keeping a balance between whole language practices and emerging “scientific-based reading research” practices backed by the NRP report (see Chapter Four). Dr. Bridge’s belief in the importance of all of these components offered an explanation for why programs like *Breakthrough to Literacy* (2004) existed in schools alongside, trade books, basal texts, and other computerized phonics programs like *SuccessMaker* (2001). Because of her role in shaping literacy policy in the district, Dr. Bridges’ definition of balanced literacy—shared with her literacy coordinators and teachers at the *Reading Teachers Initiative*—a professional development initiative designed to prepare reading teachers to support literacy in schools—had a powerful role in shaping the district’s definition of balanced literacy.

**Balanced Literacy is Sufficient for Some Students, but Not All Students**

As Dr. Bridges continued to discuss a balanced approach to literacy she seemed to feel that it neglected phonics instruction and, therefore, was sufficient for some students.
Dr. Bridges believed that the whole language components of balanced literacy were appropriate for students coming to school “ready”. However, she believed that students coming to school without those experiences needed explicit instruction in phonics. Dr. Bridges explained:

If you have kids that are coming in reading well, all you need to do is balanced literacy, because they come in [ready]. When you have kids that aren’t, you better do some phonics approach. I’m not saying I subscribe to the way Breakthrough does it, but they need to have that, and that’s one of the things we are looking at.

This data excerpt illustrates Dr. Bridges’ belief/policy that students not coming to school already reading needed a “phonics approach”—in this case described as something separate from a balanced approach—to accelerate students’ learning. She felt that whole language components of a balanced approach alone were sufficient for children coming to school with school-based literacy experiences (e.g., having had exposure to books, as she communicated was important when she sent book packs home to students for summer reading).

**Teachers Need Phonics Programs to Provide Effective Phonics and Phonemic Awareness Instruction**

As Dr. Bridges separated a balanced literacy approach from explicit phonics instruction, she revealed an additional policy—teachers need phonics programs to provide effective phonics and phonemic awareness instruction to students within the balanced literacy framework. She seemed to believe that some teachers lacked the knowledge to teach phonics explicitly. As a result of universities not teaching how to teach phonics, she felt that a commercial program would provide teachers with the necessary support:
You look at teacher education programs and teachers might get one or two courses in their reading or undergrad program, but most of their work in the classroom is around reading, so I think there are some issues at the higher ed. level, personally. That is my personal opinion, because really [schools of education] should be aligning with what schools need. There are a lot of programs out there that teach teachers how to teach the phonics and phonemic awareness, because that’s what they’re not getting in their undergrad programs.

Dr. Bridges justified the district’s choice to adopt commercial phonics programs based on the argument that schools of education were not preparing teachers to teach phonics\textsuperscript{40} and were responsible for doing so. As a result, she believed that teachers neglected to provide direct instruction in phonics in the classroom, which she believed was critical to helping readers, particularly many of the Greenbrier School District’s readers, progress when they came into the district “two years behind” kindergarten expectations.

\textbf{It Doesn’t Matter How You Define Balanced Literacy if You Teach Kids to Read}

Following Dr. Bridges’ description of balanced literacy, she also expressed her belief that, ultimately, it did not matter how teachers defined balanced literacy as long as students progressed as readers. Dr. Bridges explained that teachers ultimately needed to “just teach kids to read.” With teaching kids to read as an end goal, at times Dr. Bridges believed the district had to purchase and implement commercial literacy programs to support teachers practice to reach that goal. As discussed in Chapter Four, teachers at schools with high test scores typically had greater autonomy to determine what practices they embraced.

\textsuperscript{40} It is worth noting that Dr. Bridge’s criticism of schools of education is embedded within a growing national discourse framing schools of education as responsible for teacher and student failures. Currently, policymakers at the national level are crafting policies to evaluate, grade, and hold schools of education accountable for the performance of their graduates’ students by withholding funds to schools of education deemed as turning out poorly prepared teachers.
In some ways, Dr. Bridges’ statement, “just teach kids to read,” mirrored state policies to avoid dichotomies between whole language and phonics-based approaches to “do good work” in the state. As she explained, “teachers have to have a lot of tools in their tool box” to meet the needs of all the students in the Greenbrier School District. Dr. Bridges believed that debates over whether whole language practices were more effective than phonics-based practice, and vice versa, were unproductive. But in contrast to state level efforts to unify whole language and phonics-based instruction by training teachers to embed explicit phonics lessons within whole text experiences, at the local level, many district literacy tools like SuccessMaker (2001) and Breakthrough to Literacy (2004), sent a message that programs which “taught” phonics and phonemics awareness to students in isolation were needed in addition to the instruction teachers offered to ensure effective phonics and phonemic awareness instruction. Dr. Bridges believed that teachers should not rely on one method of literacy instruction to reach all students and she was emphatic about her frustration with the reading wars, sharing, “We have a problem with literacy because there [has been this reading] war. Just teach the kids how to read. That’s what I want [teachers] to do. I don’t care what [they] call it.” The statement reflected the urgency Dr. Bridges felt to increase students’ academic achievement, particularly in literacy. That sense of urgency led the district to remain open to many literacy approaches in hopes of finding an approach that helped students develop as readers. At times that urgency led the district to restrict teachers’ practice to those prescribed by commercial literacy programs when a school’s test scores did not demonstrate that teachers were using effective teaching practices.
Balanced Literacy: School/Teacher Perspectives

At the school level, the four focus teachers in this study, Ms. Jefferson, Ms. Brooks, Ms. Herndon and Ms. Brown; the principal, Ms. Johnson; and the reading teacher, Ms. Berling, described their practices in ways that revealed their definitions of balanced literacy. During one faculty meeting, the focus teachers and other teachers in the school worked to construct charts that listed practices and tools associated with six concepts: instructional strategies; Plan, Do, Check, Act; differentiating instruction, support documents, progress monitoring, and Principles of Learning (Figure 6.3). As they talked, they identified key practices that analysis of observational data across several sources also demonstrated as at the core of balanced literacy definitions at Maplewood Elementary School.
Figure 6.3. Teacher-created charts, which reflect Maplewood’s core practices within a balanced literacy framework.

To highlight ways literacy policy was reified in local documents, I bolded specific terms within the charts in Figure 4.3 to reflect the role that differentiating instruction, pacing guides, Accountable Talk®, building students’ vocabulary, websites, various
assessments, and cooperative learning manifested in the school’s response to balance literacy policy.

In addition to these areas of emphasis, data from interviews with teachers illustrated the literacy beliefs that informed how they negotiated balanced literacy within their classrooms. Teachers articulated their beliefs about a balanced approach to literacy regarding helping students see themselves as readers, what tools support balanced literacy, how to differentiate instruction, ways to teach phonics systematically, and their degree of confidence in their ability—and their colleagues’—to teach within the balanced literacy framework. Many of these practices overlapped with practices highlighted in Figure 4.3. Some provided additional understandings not listed on those charts. While data reveal that, in practice, a balanced approach to literacy in their classrooms was more than the practices listed below, during my time at Maplewood, the principal, Ms. Johnson and the focus teachers emphasized these beliefs about a balanced approach to literacy the most:

- A balanced approach includes helping students see themselves as readers
- A balanced approach includes avoiding the basal
- A balanced approach includes Accountable Talk®
- A balanced approach includes building students’ academic vocabulary
- A balanced approach includes explicit direct instruction, eliminating opportunities for learning through play
- A balanced approach includes systematic phonics instruction
- A balanced approach includes ability grouping
- A balanced approach includes guided reading
A balanced approach includes matching readers to leveled texts

A balanced approach includes “back to the basics” teaching: Embracing rote memorization and skills-based teaching

A balanced approach to literacy: Limited understanding of practice leads to teacher resistance

These beliefs did not always represent shared definitions of balanced literacy at Maplewood, but they did represent the diverse definitions of balanced literacy that informed individual teacher’s practice. Within this wide array of definitions of balanced literacy, teachers communicated ways they appropriated and challenged the literacy messages and practices federal, state, and district policymakers asked them to implement in order to improve the quality of literacy instruction teachers provided students.

**A Balanced Approach to Literacy Includes Helping Students See Themselves as Readers**

Ms. Brooks, a first grade teacher in this study, believed that a key part of her balanced literacy practice was helping students see themselves as readers, and that meant more than just calling out words. Ms. Brooks was introduced to this balanced literacy concept as she participated in the state’s Reading First initiative. This initiative, as Ms. Williams from the state department described, was grounded in a definition of balanced literacy that presented phonics and phonemic awareness as means to an end—comprehension of texts—not an end in and of themselves in literacy instruction—a tool to simply sound out words. As a result of this professional development, Ms. Brooks included literacy centers in her classroom, which allowed students to engage in self-selected reading, buddy reading, reading books with tapes, word work, and re-reading big books. All of which she put in place to support students’ understandings of themselves as
readers. While students were engaged in center work, Ms. Brooks met with students one-on-one in reading conferences or worked with groups of students in guided reading at a side table. When asked what was most important to her regarding literacy in her classroom, Ms. Brooks’ explanation revealed a strong belief in wanting her students to want to read, to choose to read, and to see themselves as readers:

My ultimate objective is for the children to see themselves as a reader, and for me to do everything in my power to ensure that they do become successful readers, and when they leave my classroom are able to pick up a book and read it, and understand what they are reading, not just calling words. The comprehension, the fluency, and the vocabulary . . . it all goes together, and I think I garnered that from the Reading First.

Ms. Brooks felt confident in her growing understanding of balanced literacy based on her professional development in a Reading First school. Her emphasis on making sure students saw themselves as readers meant they would comprehend what they read beyond just calling words. Her reference to comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary also illustrated how national policies communicated through the NRP, permeated her discourse on balanced literacy, as it did Dr. Bridges’ at the district level. But all of Ms. Brooks’ efforts reflected her commitment to help students become independent readers before they left her first grade classroom.

**A Balanced Approach to Literacy Includes Avoiding the Basal**

Both Ms. Jefferson and Ms. Brooks shared their personal policies that a balanced approach to literacy meant removing the basal text—typically a commercially developed text written to delineate how to teach reading—from their practice. On more than one occasion, I heard Ms. Brooks state to her colleague or me, “I don’t use the basal.” They felt that using the basal was antithetical to a balanced literacy approach. Ms. Brooks
shared her thoughts on basal texts after I noticed a district-supplied basal series on her shelf:

I don’t use [the basal]. I don’t use it at all because I didn’t have it [at my last school]. I had it my very first year of teaching and I used it then. I think I used it my second year, but you get tired and it gets monotonous and mundane. And I’m saying, if I read Silly Sally (laughs) one more time! You see what I’m saying? So that’s why I try to pull different stories that I know. And I like it and the children enjoy it. We read all of the . . . If You Give a Mouse series. I just read . . . the wolf’s’ version of the three little pigs, so, just giving them different things.

Ms. Brooks’ personal policy was that she did not use the basal—at least not anymore. The basal did not fit what she learned about balanced literacy instruction through Reading First-sponsored professional development provided in her previous district. Ms. Brook’s also expressed that she had outgrown and become bored with basal texts—texts she felt bored her students as well. As Ms. Brooks reflected on her reasons for using trade books over the basal, she negotiated her personal policies and practices through her history of professional development in Reading First and let these largely guide her evolving understanding of balanced literacy at Maplewood Elementary School. To do so, she used texts that she enjoyed and that she felt her students enjoyed, and taught standards-based lessons to students around those texts to provide more engaging instruction.

Ms. Jefferson, another first grade teacher in this study, also believed balanced literacy meant avoiding the basal. She believed the existence of basal readers was contradictory to the district’s balanced literacy framework. She expressed her bewilderment that they would be able to coexist, saying, “[The district] still uses the basal, but they shouldn’t be using a basal if they are going to do Four Blocks with guided
reading.” In this excerpt, Ms. Jefferson also equated the district’s balanced literacy approach to the Four Block model (1999) that she learned when teaching in New York. Because she believed there was a contradiction between the district’s balanced literacy model and this particular tool offered to teachers (basal texts), she questioned the value of much of the district’s professional development because she did not believe district consultants fully understood the practices they asked teachers like herself to use. Consequently, she used her prior knowledge to fashion practice in a way that made sense to her and for her students. She explained, “They don't really have a clue how to use the Four Blocks\textsuperscript{41} model. They really don't, so I kind of use it, but I don't use it the way I know it should be used. I can use bits and pieces.” Despite Ms. Jefferson’s belief that basals were antithetical to a balanced literacy approach, because the district made this tool available to her, she used district-provided basal texts as a resource from time-to-time. For example, while using trade books for the basis of her literacy instruction, she pulled bits and pieces from the basal, the Internet, and the district’s commercial literacy programs to use for instructional purposes.

**A Balanced Approach to Literacy Includes *Accountable Talk*®**

Across the course of this study, observational data from faculty meetings and team meetings reflected the importance of a practice called *Accountable Talk*® that was a part of Maplewood’s balanced literacy framework. According to Resnick (2010) in the *Accountable Talk*® Sourcebook: *For Classroom Conversations that Works*, *Accountable Talk* refers to talk that supports learning in classrooms. Classrooms with *Accountable

\textsuperscript{41} The Four Block Model (Cunningham, Hall, Sigmon, 1999) consists of four literacy components including guided reading, self-selected reading, writing, and word work.
Talk share key characteristics. First, they include talk that “seriously responds to and further develops what others in the group have said,” (p. 1.). They also include talk that “demands knowledge that is accurate and relevant to the issue under discussion,” (p.1). Accountable Talk, therefore, requires students to provide evidence for the points they make through their talk. Resnick and her colleagues emphasize that it takes time to develop the kinds of classrooms in which Accountable Talk takes place. Teachers play an important role in establishing the environment to support Accountable Talk by providing demonstrations of focused, substantiated talk and by “questioning, probing, and leading conversations,” (p.1).

At Maplewood Elementary School, Ms. Johnson emphasized the importance of Accountable Talk in teachers’ classrooms and listened for that talk when she visited teachers’ rooms. Ms. Johnson explained to teachers, “[students] have to talk about the book, draw inferences, they have to figure out unfamiliar words from the context.” During another faculty meeting, a district literacy consultant emphasized that students understand more when teachers get them talking about what they read and learn by posing questions—the answer to which would give teachers insights into students’ thinking. Ms. Johnson responded to this suggestion enthusiastically saying, “Yes! Yes! I love that. Put that in your notes. Talk to each other. That is powerful.” Ms. Johnson believed that talk should be central to supporting comprehension in a balanced literacy framework. She encouraged teachers to listen to Maplewood students, students she believed Maplewood teachers had taught to be silent as they offered too much direct instruction.
A Balanced Approach to Literacy Includes Building Students’ Academic Vocabulary

Another key concept circulating at Maplewood during this study was the notion of building students’ academic vocabulary as critical to their literacy learning. Based on a website resource that Ms. Berling provided for teachers to support their understanding of the term, *academic vocabulary* “is the vocabulary critical to understanding the concepts of the content taught in schools,” (School District U46, n.d., n.p.). This term and definition originated in the work of Dr. Marzano, whom Ms. Johnson often referenced when she advocated for new teaching strategies. An emphasis on vocabulary also reflected the National Reading Panel’s emphasis on this pillar of effective literacy instruction. This wider policy talk around vocabulary instruction seeped into Ms. Johnson’s and other teachers’ discourse at Maplewood. One of the best examples of teachers’ focus on academic vocabulary was visible during a school faculty meeting. During this meeting, the reading teacher, Ms. Berling, carried the district’s emphasis on vocabulary (seen earlier in Dr. Bridges emphasis in her definition of what matters in balanced literacy) into Maplewood Elementary School. As Ms. Berling addressed teachers, she emphasized how U46, an Indiana school district, focused on students’ vocabulary and significantly improved students’ test scores. She also provided teachers with District U46 website resources, on which the definition above was found, to support their incorporation of vocabulary instruction into their practice. Ms. Berling highlighted important statistics she found on the website’s page (Appendix R) as justification for teachers’ use of academic vocabulary:
Academic Vocabulary. I am going to reference a few things I found on line from a school district in Indiana, U46. [A district literacy consultant] was talking about why we teach Academic Vocabulary … .The strongest action a teacher can take to ensure students have the academic background knowledge they will need is to provide them with direct instruction on the academic terms [listed on this website]. Especially when we [know] …students who are now at the 50th percentile in reading comprehension without direct instruction, can be bumped up to the 83rd percentile with more specific vocabulary instruction. So, that is what got me excited about this website. So, are we exemplary in teaching vocabulary? Are we strong? . . . [This website] gives you examples to look at [to understand] what we can do to have exemplary vocabulary instruction.

An impetus for focusing on academic vocabulary, as illustrated above, was the link between vocabulary instruction and a rise in students’ percentile rank as determined by standardized tests. Ms. Berling encouraged teachers to reflect on the quality of academic vocabulary instruction they offered students by comparing their practices to those described on the U46 School District’s website. Ms. Berling also encouraged teachers to look at the U46 School District’s list of academic vocabulary words to consider how they might incorporate those terms into their instruction.

Ms. Berling also pointed out to teachers that they could use the school’s copy of Katie Wood Ray’s (1999) popular professional book, Wondrous Words to get ideas about how to integrate vocabulary instruction. Ms. Berling shared some suggestions with teachers:

You come up with a definition to a word. You draw pictures, you bring this up and work on it and at the end of the 9 weeks they have to explain their illustration to each other and then use a rubric to say how well they know the word. These are just some ideas. Some suggestions on how we can address academic vocabulary. We are already doing great things so these are just some suggestions.
As teachers borrowed ideas about how to teach academic vocabulary at Maplewood Elementary School from a district in another state and professional trade books, they also had to keep in mind their state’s academic standards. Ms. Berling reminded teachers that the district and state would hold them responsible for teaching academic vocabulary that deepened students’ understanding of concepts in their state’s academic standards:

Maybe look at this, think about it, talk about it and see [what] you think. But all of these don’t match our standards, so if it something we like, we would have to develop [a lesson] for us.

As Ms. Johnson and the teachers considered how to support academic vocabulary, they shifted how they used familiar classroom tools such as word walls. Ms. Berling encouraged teachers to put up academic word walls to support students’ understanding and use of academic vocabulary. Teachers wrestled with this request since, for some, this meant dismantling their sight word walls to make room for academic vocabulary. And, since sight word walls were a non-negotiable literacy practice (as mentioned in Chapter Five), this local policy seemed to conflict with district expectations.

A Balanced Approach to Literacy Includes Explicit Direct Instruction, Play-Based Activities Not Essential

At Maplewood Elementary School, an analysis of data suggest that Ms. Johnson, Maplewood’s principal, believed that explicit direct instruction was an important component of a balanced literacy framework and a key approach to improve students’ literacy achievement at Maplewood Elementary School. According to teachers, Ms. Herndon and Ms. Jefferson, this meant that Ms. Jefferson asked them to move away from
play-based learning models in kindergarten like the state-adopted HighScope model (HighScope Educational Research Foundation, 2013). I asked Ms. Johnson about why HighScope was no longer in the school. Ms. Johnson explained, “We don’t have time to play; we have to work.” Dr. Bridges, Ms. Johnson, and the focus teachers viewed Maplewood’s students as coming to school as limited or “below expectations” in terms of their alphabetical and phonological knowledge, phonemic awareness, and practices such as writing their names, to name but a few. As a result, they felt that learning through play took time away from much needed direct instruction. Administrators and teachers seemed to think that explicit, direct instruction would maximize learning time and accelerate learning—a NCLB Title I requirement. Ms. Jefferson, who was a kindergarten teacher during the spring of my data collection, and a first grade teacher for the fall of my data collection, described the shift from a learning-through-play philosophy to learning through explicit direct instruction: “Basically what we are seeing is the 4-Child Development class is becoming the new kindergarten, and kindergarten is becoming more like first grade.” As I observed, this shift resulted in kindergarten students spending less time circulating through various learning centers, (e.g., housekeeping, dramatic play, and art) and more time sitting in front of the teacher for mini-lessons and whole group demonstrations followed by independent practice at tables.

I most clearly saw evidence of the shift from learning-through-play to direct instruction in Ms. Herndon’s kindergarten classroom. At first glance, Ms. Herndon’s room bore resemblance to many kindergarten classrooms: Students’ work filled the hall

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42 HighScope’s early literacy curriculum is based on child-centered and teacher guided work with an emphasis on “active participatory learning,” (HighScope, 2012, n.p.). Teachers at Maplewood often referred to this model as “learning through play.”
outside her door; a large carpet edged with the alphabet covered the floor in the center of the room; a housekeeping center was organized against one wall of the classroom; a rocking chair, big books and other book baskets sat next to an easel by a large dry erase board containing a calendar and daily math activities. But, upon closer observation, it was clear that efforts to accelerate student learning through explicit direct instruction manifested in Ms. Herndon’s classroom. Programs, like MONDO publishing company’s Bookshop Reading (2007) leveled texts with accompanying teacher scripts, and CenterStage (2007) literacy center kits, both purchased with Title I funds, rested—albeit dusty and unused—on shelves. There were very few housekeeping items (e.g., pots, pans, dress-up clothes and dolls) for children to use in the housekeeping center. The wooden blocks and the red cardboard building blocks rarely, if ever, came off the shelves according to Ms. Herndon. The centers existed as remnants of an abandoned approach to learning-through-play.

During an impromptu, unrecorded conversation in her classroom, Ms. Herndon explained that she thought Ms. Johnson’s concerns about students coming to school below expectation for kindergarten prompted the shift to a direct instruction model. Ms. Herndon agreed that the shift in emphasis from a HighScope model to a direct instruction model made it possible for teachers to cover more standards-based skills in a single school day, thus, on the surface appearing to accelerate the learning process. Ms. Herndon added that, while she knew there were some classrooms in the district that continued to use their housekeeping and block centers frequently, she did not know how those teachers met all of the district requirements while incorporating center play.
Teachers’ descriptions of transitions from kindergarten to first grade further delineated how policy led to the demise of play and exploratory learning opportunities. As students transitioned to first grade, teachers emphasized to the children, “This is not kindergarten anymore. We have a lot of work to do in here.” Teachers began to ask students, “Are you ready for second grade?” These phrases worked together to create an environment where explicit direct instruction was privileged and play was obsolete in efforts to accommodate district and school policy designed to accelerate student learning and meet NCLB’s mandate that students read on grade level by third grade. Each of these statements reflected the pressure that administrators and teachers experienced to move students down the educational assembly line, leaving play behind as a luxury Maplewood students could not afford.

**A Balanced Approach to Literacy Includes Systematic (and, at Times, Isolated) Phonics Instruction**

Mirroring the district’s policy that systematic phonics’ instruction was essential within a balanced literacy framework, Ms. Brooks appropriated what she called systematic phonics instruction in her classroom. These data support the finding that a balanced approach to literacy functioned as a balance-scale with systematic phonics instruction on one side isolated form whole texts. She described her personal policy of the role of phonics’ instruction sharing:

One thing I do that is systematic [is phonics] . . . In the beginning when I came to Maplewood Elementary, I introduced [to the students] the vowels. Then I did the long vowels, diagraphs: We are reviewing digraphs right now. So, I do word study and the phonics. . . . There is no particular order. I just do short vowels, then long vowels, then the diagraphs . . . just trying to get them to see, if you see this, this should help you be able to read. When you see this word and you see those chunks or those spelling patterns or those things, that is going to help you read.
that particular word. [If students] know that the wh- is going to have the whuh sound . . . [they can] try to put it together.

During my observation in Ms. Brooks’ classroom, I watched her teach these phonics lessons. Ms. Brooks described how she helps students make connections between their phonics instruction and the work they do as readers—a practice I did not have an opportunity to observe—before she gathered students on the carpet for a read aloud in the morning. She often took a letter pattern, “-ed,” for example, written on the top of a large laminated piece of poster board cut into the shape of a sled, and called upon students to repeat a list of “–ed” words that were written below the drawing of the sled (Figure 6.4).

![Figure 6.4. Ms. Brooks includes weekly word study work using word families](image)

At other times, Ms. Brooks gave students worksheets in which they cut and pasted the -ed ending to different beginning letters to form–ed word families, such as add b to –ed to form bed as modeled above on the chart. When I asked Ms. Brooks if she contextualized
word study or phonics instruction, she shared that she tried to embed phonics instruction within the reading of poems. She explained:

What I have are poems. We’ll have a poem, and so that will be their homework. They will have to read the poem and circle the word that has the whuh [sound] or whatever the [sound] may be that particular time. I may blow the poem up and they will circle the words in it. So . . . I try to [teach phonics] with the poem and I have them try to identify the [sounds] as well.

Ms. Brooks’ policy of providing explicit word study and phonics instruction aligned with district policies. I did not observe her make explicit connections for students about how they could use the concepts explored in word study and phonics lessons to figure out unknown words in texts, but it could be that Ms. Brooks’ beliefs about the importance of making those connections were ahead of her practice. My observations support the finding that a balanced approach to literacy included systematic phonics instruction—often in isolation from whole texts.

Ms. Brook’s colleague, Ms. Jefferson, believed in the importance of connecting phonics instruction to the books and poems she read to students during shared reading and read alouds. However she observed, in classrooms in the school and district, that phonics was being taught as isolated from whole texts explaining, “They aren't teaching phonics in context …[teachers and the district] are doing everything in isolation. They are.” These data support the finding that a balanced approach to literacy, as Weaver suggests, existed as a balance-scale for some teachers, with systematic phonics instruction on one side isolated from whole texts.

**Computerized programs support phonics and phonemic awareness instruction.** To support students’ literacy development, Dr. Bridges, as mentioned
earlier, believed that explicit direct instruction, particularly in phonemic awareness and phonics, would accelerate student learning and close literacy gaps between students of Color and higher performing, White students. Toward that goal, the district provided technology tools, in the form of computerized reading programs based on the assumption that teachers were under prepared to effectively provide this instruction. Dr. Bridges explained that these computerized programs were one way to assist teachers in providing explicit direct instruction in phonics and phonemic awareness to students. One of these programs was *SuccessMaker* (2001). Once a week, teachers walked students to a computer lab to take a 15-minute *SuccessMaker* test.

Table 6.1- *SuccessMaker* Sequence of Language Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Name</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>Picture of Hamster labeled “Hamster” appears</td>
<td>Build vocabulary and word recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Listen to the Word</em></td>
<td>Narrator says “ship”. A picture of a ship is displayed. Student selects -sh onset for ship.</td>
<td>Build knowledge of Letter/sound relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Find It</em></td>
<td>From a chart of words (e.g., some, these, her, would, so), students select the word they hear.</td>
<td>Build word recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Two Letters Making One Sound</em></td>
<td>W + H = Wh</td>
<td>Build phonemic awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Narrator reads several “wh” words emphasizing “wh” sound.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mix It Up</em></td>
<td>• Word Building: Narrator says the word sting. Student adds St + -ang, -ing, or -ung to build the word sting.</td>
<td>Build recognition of rimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sentence Completion: Student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Build awareness of what</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
selects from list to complete sentence (e.g., The ___ fit well on the finger. Choices: sting, ring, song) makes sense within a sentence

**Build or Break**  
A train rolls across a trellis pulling a word (e.g., r-ing, m-o-th, gr-a-ph, br-u-sh) segmented to boxcars for each phoneme. Three screens rest beneath the trellis upon which a picture of an eagle, ring, and king appear. The narrator reads each word emphasizing isolated phonemes. Students select a picture that matches the word on the boxcar.  
Build phonemic awareness

**Season of Change**  
Read aloud/Shared Reading (e.g., As the narrator reads, the program highlights text, sentence-by-sentence, to provide a read aloud/shared reading experience.)  
Simulate a shared reading experience.

The district required teachers to use the *SuccessMaker* program weekly with their students. As shown in Figure 4.2, this program reinforced the district’s policy that phonemic awareness and phonics instruction (seen as blending and segmenting letters/sounds in this game) were essential within a balanced literacy framework.

While the district and school required that students use the *SuccessMaker* program on a weekly basis, teachers’ opinions about the usefulness of the program varied. Some teachers believed that it significantly cut into class time and was a distraction, and others thought it was one measure of what students could do and helped them monitor student performance. The district monitored Maplewood Elementary
School’s use of *SuccessMaker* and student performance through weekly reports. The district used these reports to monitor teachers’ use of *SuccessMaker* and to assess students’ reading progress.

**A Balanced Approach to Literacy Includes Ability Grouping**

From the beginning of the data collection process, Ms. Johnson talked about the importance of teachers differentiating instruction through ability grouping within classrooms but also about the teachers’ struggles to do so, resulting in what she felt was “teaching to the middle” rather than differentiating instruction based on students’ needs. Consequently, she pursued a plan to ability group whole classes in each grade level attempting to mitigate the impact of centrist teaching. Anticipating teachers’ concerns about who would teach lower performing students, Ms. Johnson explained during a faculty meeting, “Next year we are doing ability grouping, and we will pull names out randomly so no one says, I don’t want that group of students.” While Ms. Johnson was aware of consultants’ concerns about ability grouping—particularly that students of mixed ability levels would not be able to support one another’s learning—her belief that Maplewood Elementary School teachers needed to meet students’ needs one way or another led her to act autonomously and make the decision to ability group students. Ms. Johnson understood that a range of abilities would still exist in ability-grouped classrooms, but she believed narrowing that range would make it easier for teachers to meet the needs their students.

**Ability grouping challenging teachers’ beliefs.** Ms. Johnson felt strongly that ability grouping was an answer to instructional problems based on the belief that teachers would meet students’ needs more efficiently if all of the low-performing students sat
together at a cluster of desks in the classroom so the teacher could meet with those students collectively as she circulated in the room during classroom instruction. Thus she required teachers to group students within classrooms by seating them in clusters according to ability. At times, this local policy conflicted with teachers’ beliefs in flexible, mixed ability groups to support social learning. Ms. Jefferson reflected on her struggle to follow her beliefs while teaching according to Ms. Johnson’s policy:

If I am going to [teach] the right way, I need to group [students] according to the strategies that they need, but [Ms. Johnson] wants me to ability group, and [challenging her] is going to be too much, because she is really into ability grouping, and that is something I am not even going to mess with, because I know that is what she is looking for. So, I am not going to even try to justify and go through all of that, because that is…a non-negotiable…for her. Group them according to their ability and that is how we are going to run this show. Because even when I had my kids mixed up, you remember at the beginning of the year, I had a high, medium and low in each group, and [Ms. Johnson] wanted to change it. Keep all the high together, all the low…together.

Ms. Jefferson explained to Ms. Johnson why she wanted mixed ability groups, but Ms. Johnson still felt it was best for students to group them by ability. As a result, Ms. Jefferson decided not advocate for mixed-ability groups in her classroom. As demonstrated in the excerpt above, Ms. Jefferson negotiated the degree of autonomy she had, and in this case she chose to abide by Ms. Johnson’s request to ability group students knowing that this was one of Ms. Johnson’s non-negotiable practices.

**Contradictions in grouping policies.** Later in the year, Ms. Johnson, at the request of the district, instructed teachers to use Marzano Strategies to shape

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43 Based on the research of Dr. Robert Marzano and his colleagues (Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001) Marzano Research Laboratories (MRL) www.marzanoresearch.com identifies nine strategies to increase student achievement including: similarities and differences, summarizing and note taking, reinforcing effort and providing recognition, homework and practice, non-linguistic, representations, cooperative learning, setting objectives and providing feedback, generating and testing hypotheses; and cues, questions and advanced organizers.
instruction, strategies in which Marzano, Pollick and Pickering (2001) argue that “organizing groups based on ability should be done sparingly, “(p. 87). Ms. Johnson believed Marzano Strategies would help to raise student achievement and explained this view in a team K-2 teacher planning meeting:

You are going to group your students according to their performance level, and you will devise strategies that you will use in order to move our kids. One of the research-based practice or practices that we are going to use is Marzano's Strategies. We've worked with Marzano for years. They are strategies that I truly agree with and it does work. It does work.

Ms. Johnson not only set the local policy for teachers to use Marzano Strategies for general classroom instruction, but also in conjunction with RTI adopted by the school. But in both classroom settings, and within RTI targeted intervention, teachers grouped students by ability and text level rather than strategies students of various ability levels might need to become stronger readers.

As Ms. Johnson shared her vision for incorporating Marzano Strategies with teachers during a school wide faculty meeting, teachers noticed some contradictions in these approaches: Marzano Strategies discouraged ability grouping while RTI and Ms. Johnson encouraged it. This mixed message—to create ability groups and then use strategies that discouraged ability grouping—puzzled teachers like Ms. Berling who brought up the discrepancy during a faculty meeting as she spoke to other teachers. She noted, “Marzano says not to ability group students.” Throughout this study, when contradictions or mixed messages occurred, teachers typically followed Ms. Johnson’s policies. In Ms. Jefferson’s case, she simply chose to implement the aspects of Marzano Strategies that did not conflict with those local policies.
A Balanced Approach to Literacy Includes Guided Reading

To address issues of student achievement, district and school level administrators asked teachers at Maplewood Elementary to differentiate literacy instruction particularly through small, guided reading groups and the newly formed Response to Intervention targeted instruction groups. At the district level, Dr. Bridges offered professional development about one method for differentiating instruction: guided reading. Using leveled texts as I observed at the first district workshop I attended with teachers in February of 2010, leaders introduced guided reading to teachers and showed a video to demonstrate how to introduce a book, de-bug challenging vocabulary, and support students’ comprehension around the text through a mini-lesson. As teachers continued to attend workshops and work with consultants in their school, they began to develop, or extend, their understanding of guided reading but also other differentiated instruction practices such as identifying student reading levels, and incorporating computerized programs as interventions to instruct students and assess their reading progress. As they incorporated these practices based on brief professional development sessions and consultations, confusions and frustrations arose particularly around the nature of guided reading and how teachers should implement it. Those confusions and frustrations are described in the following sections.

Confusion and contradictions in guided reading terminology. Two teachers expressed confusion over guided reading terminology and what constituted guided reading during this study as they received professional development to prepare them to engage in the practice. This confusion existed for different reasons. Ms. Herndon’s
confusion with guided reading reflected her difficulty in making sense of the varied and multiple meanings of literacy terms circulating in Maplewood Elementary School, such as guided reading and shared reading.

Ms. Herndon asked Maplewood’s literacy consultant to demonstrate how to lead a guided reading group with a small group of her kindergartners. Following the demonstration, Ms. Herndon reflected on what she observed (providing an introduction to the text, predicting what would happen in the text, reviewing tricky vocabulary words, reading the books in unison, and independently while listening to readers). She believed that she already used all of the strategies demonstrated during whole group instruction, but it reassured Ms. Herndon to see the consultant demonstrate how to use these same strategies in small groups. Watching a guided reading demonstration helped Ms. Herndon think through how she would tailor this small group instruction time to meet individual students’ needs. But, even though Ms. Herndon believed this model of guided reading was helpful, she was still frustrated and confused by the language the district used to explain guided reading groups.

Following Ms. Herndon’s observation of the consultant’s demonstration of guided reading, Ms. Jefferson, a first grade teacher, entered Ms. Herndon’s room. Ms. Herndon shared what she observed by referring to it as “shared reading.” Her use of this term initiated a conversation between the two teachers about the differences between guided reading (working with small groups around shared texts to practice specific reading strategies) and shared reading (students reading a text in unison). Ms. Herndon considered the small group she observed as shared reading because there was a bit of shared reading embedded within the guided reading session as all of the students shared
in reading multiple copies of a single text. Ms. Jefferson corrected Ms. Herndon and explained guided reading as a practice in which a teacher and students may read in unison, but overall the focus is on guiding students through reading a book and reading strategy instruction. Ms. Herndon responded:

   Well, when I went to the district training, they were calling this shared reading. They don’t even understand what they are trying to teach us. That is why we are so confused. I wish they would just let us teach!

Ms. Herndon had difficulty differentiating between all the new literacy terms associated with practices she encountered and felt district professional development providers bore some responsibility for the confusion she experienced as new literacy terms frequently entered Maplewood Elementary School from the district. Although Ms. Herndon taught at Maplewood for over 10 years, and was familiar with many literacy practices, she saw that many of them, such as taking running records, were often rebranded and given new terminology like progress monitoring—same practice, new name. In this case Ms. Herndon’s comment, “just let us teach” seemed to reflect that it was the practice, not the name of the practice that mattered to her or her students. As long as she could lead a small group of children and move them forward as readers, that was what mattered, not whether it was called guided or shared reading.

I observed another teacher, Ms. Brown, also manifesting contradictions in terminology and practice as she named two similar yet distinct practices according to the professional literature (interactive read aloud and guided reading) both as guided reading. This contradiction did not so much confuse Ms. Brown, as it did Ms. Herndon, because Ms. Brown did not recognize the contradiction, understandably, as the practice was new to her. To illustrate this point, on the first occasion that Ms. Brown engaged in what she
called guided reading, she read aloud the book *If you Take a Mouse to the Movies* to her class of students as they sat on the carpet in front of her. She referred to this practice as guided reading because she interacted with students around a text and guided them through it as they conversed about the text. After asking her students to notice compound words when she read, a portion of her conversation with students unfolded in this way:

Brown: Okay, every time you hear a compound word what are you going to yell?

K: Yell “stop.”

Brown: You’re going to yell “stop.”

Sh: If you take a mouse the movies it’s an alliteration in the title.

Brown She said, in the title if you take a mouse to the movies it is an alliteration.

What makes it an alliteration?

SH: Because of the letter M.

Brown The letter M in the word?

Sh: Movies and mouse.

Brown: Movies and mouse, alright, thank you and two or three other students brought that up earlier this morning about alliteration. Thank you, but we are going to be talking about compound words. Alright, let’s continue. (Reading) ‘If you bring a mouse to the movies he’ll ask you for some popcorn.’

Students: STOP!

Brown: What’s the word S?

Student: Popcorn.

Brown: Popcorn is a special word. What kind of special word?

Student: A compound word?
Brown: Is he right? What is a compound word?

Students: It’s two smaller words, It’s two smaller words

Brown: Two smaller words…

Students: Put together to make up one long word.

Brown: Okay, a longer word, and the longer word that make up popcorn, S, is?

Student: Pop and corn.

Brown: Pop and corn.

This large group reading lesson fell outside the district appropriated definition of guided reading sometimes narrowly defined as small group instruction (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996). For example, in this conversation around If You Take a Mouse to the Movies, students were in a whole group setting. Students also listened to the teacher read a single book aloud, rather than read a book on their instructional reading level in a small group as recommended by the most dominantly accepted ways to lead guided reading (Calkins, 2001; Taberski & McNeive, 1996; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The above interaction more closely reflected what some professionals call an interactive read aloud—a conversation teachers and students have around a read aloud text (Hoyt, 2007).

Later, during the same day of observations, I watched Ms. Brown refer to the following small group reading experience as guided reading, which aligned with commonly agreed upon definitions of guided reading as small group instruction around a common text. Ms. Brown gathered a small group of four students around a kidney shaped table at the back of her room to introduce a book about Paul Bunyan. Each student had his or her own copy of the text. Ms. Brown began by introducing the book and discussing
what might have been more difficult parts of the text with students as they engaged in a picture walk through the book. She stopped at the word frontier to define the term. Ms. Brown continued explaining:

Brown: Alright let’s go to page two. We are going to begin reading. Magic finger, use your pointer. Your pointer. Let me see your magic finger, your pointer. Let’s go to page two. Let’s read. . . .

Students: They took a lot of food: flour, rice, corn, salt and tea. Why? There would be no stores on the frontier to buy these things. Meat would not stay fresh on the long trip.

Students: They would have to hunt along the way.

Brown: Alright, very good, next page.

Students: Some families traveled together in the spring. Why? The weather is warm in the spring. It was safer to travel in groups on a long trip.

Brown: Why do you think the pioneers, that’s who these people are called…

Students: What’s a pioneer?

Brown: Well, they are people who travel.

Students: People who don’t got homes?

Brown: Well, they travel, across the country like across the west and they traveled across America and they built new homes. Why do you think they wanted to be, I’m asking a question first, why do you think they would want to be safe from the animals? Why do you think they want to be safe, BR? What is it they want to be safe from? I kind of gave you a clue.

Student: Oh, they want to probably be safe because like if werewolves...

Brown: werewolves?

Student: They might eat them.

Student: Oh, I can say it.
Brown: Why do you, why do you think they want to be safe? What is it they want to be safe from? Thank you S for sharing.

Student: Coyotes.

Brown: Why do they want to be safe from coyotes?

Student: ‘Cause coyotes want to eat them.

Brown: That’s a possibility. Okay.

In this example, Ms. Brown approximated guided reading—based on the examples she had seen—in good faith. Students read the text together, they used their “magic finger” to point to words as they read—just as the literacy consultant had demonstrated—and Ms. Brown asked questions—questions that supported Accountable Talk®—to support students comprehension. However, as was the case with Ms. Herndon, differentiating between various literacy practices (e.g., interactive read aloud—talking with students through texts—and guided reading) created confusions and contradictions in teachers’ practice.

Guided reading decisions based on pacing guide not student need. Ms. Jefferson and Ms. Brooks, both first grade teachers, incorporated guided reading in ways that approximated what they observed during consultations. I observed as each teacher led guided reading sessions and discussed their different approaches to guided reading during a team meeting. After having observed both teachers for some time, Ms. Jefferson asked what I noticed in their practice. What I noticed was that each teacher typically grouped students’ based on ability as determined by Dominie (2004) assessments. As they called small groups of students to the guided reading tables, they used multiple copies of shared texts to teach a particular strategy to their guided reading groups.
However, when they worked with the next group—children performing at a different level—only the text difficulty changed. Both teachers typically, but not always, taught the same strategy lesson to both groups of students regardless of the groups’ reading needs. Ms. Jefferson described her practice this way:

Cindy: So, in your guided reading groups you are teaching the same skill to each group with different levels of books?

Jefferson: Yes.

Cindy: Everyone is focusing on the same strategy?

Jefferson: And, if I notice that somebody is way off the wall. Like I don't know, just read something that didn't make sense and just kept on going, I was going to make it known. You know we will go over it in a little mini-lesson, even if it wasn't my focus. Something like that. And, that is how I kind of get in the different strategies.

My observation in Ms. Brooks’ classroom revealed a similar practice of teaching a single strategy to various groups of students using different levels of texts. This was due to the fact that both teachers relied primarily on district pacing guides, rather than their observations of students’ reading during reading conferences and whole group discussions, to determine their mini-lessons. Since pacing guides did not take into account students’ needs to learn different strategies and concepts at different paces, teachers taught the same strategies across guided reading groups. In this way, pacing guides seemed to work against and even contradict the district’s and school’s goals of helping teachers guide student’s reading based on their observations of students’ work and reading assessment data.
A Balanced Approach to Literacy as Matching Readers to Leveled Texts

At Maplewood Elementary School, teachers often spoke of the importance of identifying student reading levels and matching students to appropriate leveled books. Ms. Brooks, a first grade teacher, was one of the teachers in this study who emphasized the importance of leveled texts to her practice. Ms. Brooks first arrived at Maplewood Elementary School late in the fall of 2010. She was uncertain if her position at Maplewood was permanent, so she left many of her personal literacy tools in storage—including her leveled texts. She was also waiting for leveled texts from the district to support her balanced literacy practice. She explained the importance of leveled texts and matching books to readers within her reading workshop:

What I really, really, really want [is] my leveled texts; I don’t have my leveled texts the way I want them to be so children can switch the books out every week. Because like D today, it was her turn . . . I didn’t have enough books for her to have in her bag of books for her to sit down and read. So, I sort of felt bad about that. And that is why these are piled here (pointing to a stack of books) because I was trying to find books on her level. So, that’s going to be another one of my goals to definitely work on over the summer, if I’m still here—to put my leveled readers together to make sure the children have what they need when they read. That’s just something I am use to them having, their bag of books, so when it is independent reading time, grab your bag of books, whoever’s day it is, they can go sit wherever they desire and read.

Ms. Brooks’ need for leveled texts to appropriately support students’ self-selected reading was reified in practice the following year when she returned to Maplewood Elementary School with numerous baskets of leveled books, which eventually lined the shelves of her classroom library. As she was waiting for her books, she searched for other books for the students and set goals to improve her practice (e.g., getting her leveled readers together for students).
Level of text valued over student interests. The policy to identify students’ reading levels, while essential to balanced literacy approach policies at Maplewood Elementary School, also marginalized other important factors that support literacy development, such as considering student interests when selecting texts for instruction.

Ms. Berling, the school reading teacher explained:

[With] guided reading it's, here's a book that is on your level. That is what our first thing is. Let's find a book that is on their level. And even . . . in the upper grades, when the big push is Accelerated Reader, the first consideration is the level, is it in their zone? And they can read above or below their zone once in a while, but the first thing is the level, not their interest.

Teachers and administrators repeatedly emphasized the importance of identifying students’ text level to support reading development. While teachers understood the importance of selecting books that interested readers, teachers focused more on choosing books on students’ level to monitor their progress toward reading on grade level—a practice tied to pressures to make AYP and moving each student to be reading on grade level by the end of the third grade. Evidence that NCLB contributed to this pressure is supported by documents provided by the Department of Education which explain:

Reading First is designed . . . to ensure that every child can read at grade level or above by the end of third grade through the implementation of instructional programs and materials, assessments, and professional development grounded in scientifically based reading research. (NCLB Desk Top Reference, 2002, p. 11)

To reach this goal, important reading factors such as students’ reading interests or their balance of cueing systems often ended up sidelined as teachers and administrators made sure students could read appropriate leveled texts.

Leveling students shifted teachers’ focus away from analyzing reader’s miscues to guide instruction. As reflected in conversations around the Dominie (2001)
literacy assessments, reading assessment although designed to provide a wide variety of information for teachers, was primarily used to provide teachers with a text level. The Dominie assessment system draws on the work of Marie Clay (1979) and Ken and Yetta, Goodman (1980). Both Clay and the Goodman examined the reading process from a socio-psycholinguistic perspective. In other words, they understood the reading process in relationship to spoken language and social contexts. From this perspective, they researched how students balanced their use of semantic, syntactic, grapho-phonemic, and pragmatic cues, to support reading (Goodman, Watson & Burke, 2005). In spite of this broad base for Dominie, I observed that the depth and breadth of its possibilities were not often realized in practice. In fact, the district requirement to report reading levels as a result of Dominie assessment seemed to prevent teachers from focusing on analyzing students as readers and then using those analyses to plan instruction. Ms. Jefferson described her appropriation of Dominie:

Dominie is just a way for kindergarten-second grades to monitor their students’ reading level and what they know. . . . [Dominie] is text leveling, for me, personally. That is gone. That component, use it to guide your instruction, is gone. Right now, they just say do it to get it done, not to look and see, oh, [students] are using semantic cues. Did they use visual cues?

Ms. Johnson confirmed Ms. Jefferson’s view. As noted in previous discussions of Dominie in Chapter Five, Ms. Johnson had plans to ask teachers and administrators, other than students’ classroom teachers, to administer Dominie to avoid teacher bias in the assessment process and to more accurately determine students’ reading levels. When I asked Ms. Johnson about Dominie and suggested that it should be administered by classroom teachers to more effectively inform their instruction based on their assessments, Ms. Johnson disagreed and explained her view:
I understand that piece, but I disagree that Dominie should be for that, because you should be reading with the child everyday. You should be doing something. The only purpose [of Dominie] for us is that we truly want to know where they are.

Ms. Johnson believed the sole purpose of Dominie was to determine a child’s text level and she expected teachers to use other forms of assessment to inform their instruction. Thus, she defined Dominie as a type of standardized assessment to monitor students’ progress. I asked Ms. Herndon for her view about this as a teacher. I asked if she thought Dominie was meant to be used to assess the cueing systems and to inform practice. She explained, “I think it used to be for that in the beginning, but now, it’s just a standardized test for kindergarten-second grade since we don’t have a standardized test.” A body of literature supports the argument that teachers are students’ best assessment tools and that they play a central role in analyzing miscues in running records in order to understand a reader’s reading process and model how to use a balance of cueing systems to make meaning of texts (Clay, 1993; Johnson, 2006; Weaver, Stephens, & Vance, 1990). The designer of Dominie actually based the development of that system in the work of theorists like Marie Clay (Deford, 2001). However, these data show that, in the instances reported in this study, Dominie ceased to be that tool.

**A Balanced Approach to Literacy as “Back to the Basics” Teaching**

To meet students’ needs, Ms. Johnson supported “getting back to the basics” which she described as including rote memorization and skills-based teaching. She explained that she had skills-based instruction when she was in school and that she believed students at Maplewood needed to participate in drills in addition to hands-on constructivist learning experiences (such as using math manipulatives, independent
reading, (Martin & Loomis, 2013)). Ms. Johnsons explained, “One of the things I say to first, second, and kindergarten is, you have to go back to the basics.”

As a kindergarten teacher, Ms. Herndon also believed that there was a place within a balanced approach to literacy for rote memorization. She also believed there was a place for practices she learned through Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993) training early in her career. Ms. Herndon implemented many of the practices she learned through Reading Recovery in her teaching. For example, she provided students time to read self-selected texts; listen to read alouds; learn through literacy mini-lessons; engage in shared reading, guided reading, word work, daily writing; and gain support through reading and writing conferences. Her proclivity to use whole language based practice within the district’s balanced literacy framework, illustrated that Ms. Herndon also believed that sometimes it was necessary to teach a literacy lesson, such as sight word recognition, through rote memorization. She shared this belief as she discussed the difference between her view of a balanced approach to literacy and the view of her teaching assistant:

If I had [taught these words in isolation] when Ms. Valerie was here, she would have told me this is not the way it’s done because that is all she is hearing in her teacher program is you have to contextualize everything. But I think it’s fine to teach sight words in isolation. You don’t have to contextualize everything.

Ms. Herndon felt comfortable in her practice and believed that rote memorization practices, such as using flashcards, were essential components of a balanced approach to literacy. Based on this belief, she often used flashcards to drill students on their sight words while students waited to go to lunch or for dismissal. This practice did not form the core of Ms. Herndon’s literacy instruction; therefore, she did not feel it violated her overall policy that emergent readers should be immersed in whole book experiences to
develop as readers, but she felt that memorizing sight words was one practice that supported their success with whole book experiences.

Ms. Jefferson also felt comfortable with an isolated skills-based approach to reading as an important element of balanced literacy. As she described her dislike of the *Breakthrough to Literacy* (2004) program, Ms. Jefferson explained important skills-based literacy practices that she felt created strong readers:

My thing with the little ones was skill, and just drilling it into them; reading all the time. We read so many books, looked at the popcorn words [high frequency words]. You know the word is “Is” and we chant the word, shout the word, whatever, and they really get into it, “Wow! We can use these words to make a sentence.” And so, they got really excited about that.

Ms. Jefferson believed students’ literacy success depended on reading all the time, memorizing high frequency words, and realizing that those words could be used in writing. As Ms. Jefferson understood the district’s balanced literacy approach, skills-based instruction had an important role to play in her implementation of that model and consequently of the policy she enacted in her classroom.

**A Balanced Approach to Literacy: Insufficient Professional Development Leads to Lack of Confidence and Ability**

The teachers who were participants in this study were confident in their abilities to support students’ literacy development even if they had questions about what a balanced literacy approach was supposed to look like in their classrooms. And, while they were confident in their own practice, they often had concerns about their colleagues’ level of confidence in being able to implement balanced literacy practices. Ms. Jefferson attributed this lack of teacher confidence—and at times their lack of knowledge about particular practices—to insufficient professional development—professional
development that, from Ms. Jefferson’s perspective, was slow to explain the deeper fundamentals of particular practices. She explained:

Running records? The [district] doesn’t teach you anything about that. They did this year—meaning, semantic, visual cues—they just did it. They just showed us. [Teachers] learned that this year. I have been here six years already, and they learned that this year—this is what a running record is for. And so, if I [had not] moved down here [from NY], I still would not know what a read aloud is for, I would not know what anything is for.

Ms. Jefferson expressed concern that the district was just beginning to explain practices that she felt teachers nationwide had understood and used for some time, such as analyzing students’ miscues to support instruction. She attributed her knowledge not to the Greenbrier School District professional development, but to training she received in New York—training her colleagues were only just receiving.

Ms. Brooks also had confidence in her previous literacy training through Reading First study groups led by a literacy coach in her previous school elsewhere in the state. Like Ms. Jefferson, she believed that other teachers lacked confidence in their ability to incorporate significant components of a balanced approach to literacy, in particular, being able to provide differentiated instruction in small-guided reading groups. She shared:

[Teachers] are fighting [small groups] because they don’t understand it. They don’t understand that you need to get the other ones in these workstations doing authentic things, reading, simple stuff. Get them on the computer reading, get them in buddy reading, big books; the kids enjoy that. And once you model it for [the students], there’s no such thing as, “Oh, they won’t!” They will, because I came in here November 6th, and maybe mid December, I started them on the workstations. And it was a ruckus, it still is from time-to-time, getting [the students] to understand. But if you started from the beginning you could make it happen.

Ms. Brooks believed that most teachers resisted the small group component of balanced literacy because they did not understand it. She also felt that some teachers
might redirect their lack of confidence by choosing to see problems of instruction as more related to the student’s inability to function within small groups. Within this conversation, Ms. Brooks made known her personal policy that small groups, and other balanced literacy components, would work for students at Maplewood Elementary School if she and other teachers understood those practices and demonstrated them for students. She felt that this could only happen if the district provided more comprehensive professional development, as Ms. Jefferson described, to build teachers’ deep understanding of those practices.

**Conclusion to Findings’ Chapters: Literacy Policies in Practice, “Just let us teach”**

In Chapters Four through Six, I shared findings that demonstrated how teachers responded to many national, state, and local literacy policies and how they created their own policies as they said, “Just let us teach.” The teachers were objects of literacy policies: at the federal level, there were mandates to build instruction around academic standards and *scientifically based reading research*, and to implement programs with fidelity; according to state and district policy, teachers followed balanced literacy principles. At the district level, they were asked to implement programs like *Empowering Writers* (2004), *Breakthrough to Literacy* (2004), *SuccessMaker* (2001), *Accelerated Reader* (2004) and practices like *Response to Intervention* and assessments like *Progress Monitoring, Dominie*, and *Benchmark* assessments “with fidelity;” and at the school level they were asked to ability group students, make data-driven teaching decisions, know Maplewood students, and above all, “move” Maplewood students forward academically. At the local level, teachers noted that they felt less pressure to meet district mandates. While Ms. Johnson asked teachers to keep her thoroughly informed about students’ needs
and progress, she also asked teachers how they believed they could best support students’ success. Ms. Johnson acknowledged, along with teachers, that implementing district programs with fidelity was not always the best choice for Maplewood students, and in these cases she and the teachers exercised autonomy to teach according to the needs of Maplewood’s students. This meant that at the local level, but not necessarily at the district level, teachers believed they had space to develop their own personal policies by drawing on prior knowledge and experience, but these personal policies had to be negotiated within the district’s policy of reducing teacher autonomy. Consequently, teachers were constantly struggling to negotiate and adapt new literacy policies and to reconcile those policies with their own views and with the needs of their students.

This conclusion brings together key ideas across findings chapters to focus on seven overall concluding statements: (a) participants’ social settings determined whether they spoke of policy explicitly or implicitly and whether they believed policy dictated practice; (b) policymakers limited teacher autonomy based on concerns about teacher preparedness and students’ “disadvantages”—largely those associated with perceived views of students’ preparedness for school based on their race and socioeconomic statuses; (c) the district’s goal for comprehensive professional development that covered fewer topics in greater detail on a more frequent basis and did not support teachers’ deep understanding of literacy practices, but rather, led to pressure to meet expectations; (d) some literacy policies—those in the form of requirements to implement commercial curricula, scripted lessons, and pacing guides with fidelity—subjugated teacher knowledge; (e) participants had diverse definitions of balanced literacy and where those definitions conflicted, teachers experienced frustrations; (f) teachers and administrators at
Maplewood Elementary, took up agency and professional knowledge as a tool to negotiate district, state, and federal policies.

The first key idea from this study, examined in Chapter Four, is that *participants’ social settings determine whether they spoke of policy explicitly or implicitly and whether they believed policy dictated practice.* Teachers’ and administrators’ ability to speak of policy explicitly supported the ability to dismiss policy as dictating practice. Conversely, the inability to speak of policy explicitly inhibited participants’ opportunities/agency to negotiate within and beyond policies in terms of day-to-day classroom practice. As mentioned in Chapter Four, Ms. Williams’ position as a state-level literacy associate—and thus her proximity to the development of federal policy—seemed to empower her to discuss the limited role of policy in dictating practice. However, district—and school—level participants farther removed from federal policy development did not appear to feel the same sense of agency to be able to claim that policy did not necessarily dictate practice. A detailed examination of national education policy demonstrated that phrases such as *scientifically based reading research* and *fidelity of implementation* helped construct local understandings of policy as something that dictated practice. The prevalence of commercial literacy programs, which appropriated the term, *scientifically based reading research* and emphasized the importance of *fidelity of implementation* further contributed to the district’s adoption of such programs and asking teachers at Maplewood to implement those programs as their designers intended—with fidelity. Data related to *Dominie* illustrates, however, that the district did not call for *fidelity of implementation* for all programs since *Dominie* was
often used to identify students’ reading levels rather than to understand their reading process and inform instruction.

A second key idea from this study, also outlined in Chapter Four, was that policymakers’ limited teacher autonomy based on concerns about teacher preparedness and students’ “disadvantages”—largely those associated with perceived views of students’ preparedness for school based on their race and socioeconomic status.

Concerns about both teachers and students created a sense of urgency to implement programs for the purpose of accelerating student achievement. Scientifically based reading research and fidelity of implementation of programs backed by that research, were tools used by Dr. Bridges to reduce teacher autonomy because she felt that autonomy meant that teachers who were less prepared than others (by teacher education programs) would not be able to meet the needs of their students and thereby meet federal education goals such as NCLB’s goal for all students to read proficiently by the end of third grade. As objects of policy, the teachers in this study and their administrator, particularly bore responsibility if their practices did not yield results promised by scientifically based research. As seen data across Chapters Four through Six, the pressure from the weight of this responsibility led many teachers to exclaim, “Just let us teach!”

A third key idea from this study, developed in Chapter Five, was that the district’s goal for comprehensive professional development that covered fewer topics in greater detail on a more frequent basis, did not support teachers’ deep understanding of literacy practices, but rather, led to anxiety and confusion. Teachers like Ms. Brown and Ms. Herndon who exclaimed “just let us teach,” and those who rushed to finish Dominie so they could “get back to teaching,” did not experience professional
development around *Dominie* or other topics as meaningful, but rather experienced the district’s efforts to cover fewer topics in more depth across many professional development sessions as repetitive and redundant. Teachers would look at agendas for professional development and ask “*Dominie? Again?” or attend a second day of an *Empowering Writers* (2004) session and say, “We already had one whole day of *Empowering Writers*. Why do we need a second day?” While teachers reported that support from consultants who modeled practices in their classrooms was most beneficial to them, they still felt consultants’ demonstrations offered a single strategy to implement—such as a new way to introduce vocabulary during word study, which they would admit trying out—but did not deeply change their thinking or practice. In many cases, the literacy demands from professional development led to a stress, a feeling of being stretched too thin, and an inability to “master their craft” as Ms. Jefferson described. In addition, the limited professional development teachers received across the year contributed to a feeling of being rushed to implement practices, like *Dominie*, and led to surface level understandings which meant teachers only used the assessment tool for reading level data rather than as it was intended, to understand a readers’ processes for making sense of texts.

At the end of the data collection period, I asked the teachers in this study if they could point to a professional development experience that significantly changed their practice or that allowed them to gain clear understandings of literacy practice. Each had difficulty naming any significant changes to their practice based on professional development. Rather, numerous literacy policies, and the professional development related to it, yielded fragmented literacy knowledge.
A fourth key idea from this dissertation, also illuminated in Chapter Five, was that some literacy policies—those in the form of commercial curricula, scripted lessons, and pacing guides—subjugated teacher knowledge. At the local level, many participants felt that the requirements related to many policies reflected a systemic lack of confidence in their abilities as teachers. Ms. Jefferson particularly seemed to feel that district policies did not acknowledge her contribution to her students’ success. Ms. Jefferson encapsulated this feeling in a comment she made to me as we walked together down the hall one afternoon after leaving the SuccessMaker (2001) computer lab. She said:

Jefferson: You see how they do us?

Cindy: Who is they?

Jefferson: You know, the district people. If our kids do well on the test, it isn’t because of us; it’s because of these programs.

The teachers in this study felt that numerous district policies represented efforts to intervene in their practice and subjugated their professional knowledge. This subjugation directly impacted teachers’ identities - how they viewed their roles as teachers. Ms. Jefferson believed the district relegated her role to that of technician as she saw herself simply administering the district’s programs. Ms. Jefferson appeared to wrestle with this identity of teacher as technician, at times challenging the district’s actions to control her practice and other times embracing elements—such as ability grouping, implementing Empowering Writers (2004), and using Breakthrough to Literacy (2004). She negotiated her practice in this way not only in order to keep her job and address district requests, but also as a way to choose her battles, feeling that some requirements were more important to address than others. As a result, Ms. Jefferson, who had extensive training in literacy
theory and practice, often abdicated her professional role as a teacher capable of making instructional decisions feeling pressure to rely on district programs.

A fifth key idea from this work, identified in Chapter Six, was that participants had diverse definitions of balanced literacy and where those definitions conflicted, teachers experienced frustrations. Teachers’ diverse definitions of balanced literacy stemmed from professional development and teaching experiences outside of the Greenbrier School District, and professional development within the Greenbrier School District. Teacher frustrations seemed to emerge around ability grouping, conducting reading assessments, implementing guided reading, and monitoring students’ reading progress. Many of these frustrations emerged from required practices—such as the Dominie reading assessment—meant to inform teachers’ instruction, but that often manifested as accountability tools that teachers believed they needed to just get done, in order to get back to teaching. Because of a lack of understanding of how reading assessment informs instruction, the assessment was typically used merely to indicate students’ reading levels as a measure of student achievement, rather than to reveal information about students’ reading process—information that could have been used to guide instructional decisions. Federal literacy—such as NCLB and Response to Intervention—played a key role in the way teachers used the Dominie reading assessment to monitor student’s progress in that it was used to monitor progress toward federal literacy goals—specifically reading on grade level by third grade.

I close with a final key idea that I see as significant from this study drawing largely from data presented in Chapter Five. In that chapter, I described how Ms. Johnson, the principal of Maplewood Elementary, took up agency as a tool to create a
policy of people, which she used to mediate the district’s policy of programs so that her teachers could make sense of them as they related to the needs of their students. Although Ms. Johnson exercised authority in her role as educational leader at Maplewood and sometimes restricted teachers’ autonomy, she spoke clearly about what I have termed, her policy of people. Ms. Johnson negotiated within and around programs on many occasions in support of knowledgeable teachers making professional judgments that would inform their instruction and “move students” academically at Maplewood Elementary School.

Teachers spoke favorably and appreciatively of the autonomy Ms. Johnson provided teachers. It is important to note that the autonomy provided for them did not come without responsibility or accountability to Ms. Johnson. She often said, “I need to know,” meaning that she expected frequent reports about student progress. While some teachers felt that one of those reports—a weekly common assessments report—placed an additional burden on their time to teach and plan, in general, the teachers I interviewed felt and appreciated that Ms. Johnson carved out spaces of autonomy for them to make professional decisions and do whatever they deemed necessary to move students.

The year after I collected data, Maplewood received a national award. It was recognized for success in closing the achievement gap between students of Color and White students. Whether the schools success was a result of teacher autonomy, the focus on analyzing test data and making data-driven curricular decisions, or Ms. Johnson’s concerted effort for teachers to know each students’ strengths and weakness is beyond the scope of this study. However, juxtaposing this achievement with the strain teachers felt as they worked to improve student learning and develop expertise as teachers of literacy, it is important to consider whether literacy policies, as they experienced and described them
during this study, always supported teachers as professionals. Certainly at the local level, Ms. Johnson worked to position teachers as professionals who must rely on their knowledge to make informed decisions about instruction, but data from this study show that this same professional positioning from federal, state, and district levels would further support their professional development.
CHAPTER SEVEN
IMPLICATIONS

As I began to examine policy as a sociocultural practice in and around Maplewood Elementary School, I noticed that policy was woven into the very fabric of school life. Policy was visible in banners announcing that the school made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and on Data Walls revealing the school’s standardized test scores. Literacy policy lined classroom shelves in binders, professional literature, unused play blocks and kitchens, and in commercial literacy curricula such as instructional technology and basal textbooks. It permeated teacher talk, faculty meetings, and professional development sessions. This dynamic policy environment—even though teachers were not consciously aware of all of the policy that was all around them—often overwhelmed teachers and led them to share with me their desire that the district “just let them teach.” Despite their feelings, teachers engaged with this policy process to negotiate their practice as they worked to provide high quality instruction and raise student achievement. Examining data helped me begin to answer the questions that guided my research:

• How do six policy stakeholders at one elementary school – four classroom teachers, one administrator, and one reading teacher—make meaning of literacy policies?

• How do these stakeholders’ understandings of policy shape the appropriation of these policies in their day-to-day literacy practices?
• How does the meaning-making of other stakeholders—district, state, and federal policy-makers—intersect with and inform the appropriation of policy by the six focal stakeholders?

An analysis of data revealed that teachers’ professional knowledge, personal experiences in their classrooms, and colleagues’ support mediated how they negotiated literacy policy in their day-to-day practice. The intersection of beliefs, experiences, and support reflects the dialogic (Bahktin, 1981 & 1986) nature of policy, described in Chapter Two, in that, through using these tools, teachers often spoke back to policy and in doing so sometimes negotiated and remade those policies in local settings. The act of addressing policy demands from higher school-system levels provided teachers a degree of autonomy. But like the Nepalese women in Holland’s (2001) study, also shared in Chapter Two, teachers’ could not simply interpret policy anyway they wanted and teach with full autonomy: In the changing “figured world” (p. 41) of what it meant to be a teacher—a world in which the district and commercial curricula developers expected teachers to implement programs with fidelity and increasingly positioned teachers as technicians—teachers had to negotiate many policy tensions. For example, teachers like Ms. Brooks had to negotiate the tension between local social norms (such as engaging in some literacy practices “for show”) and policy mandates from administrators like Dr. Bridges at the district level that required teachers to implement programs with fidelity. Given that teachers’ knowledge of policy, and their role within the policy process, seemed to mediate their practice, this final chapter draws conclusions across the findings of this study, particularly focusing on ways to deepen stakeholders’ knowledge of policy related issues that directly impacted teaching and learning.
• Deepening Understanding of the Issues Underlying Urgency to Improve Teachers’ Instruction and Students’ Achievement
• Deepening Knowledge and Expertise Related to Policy for Professionals at All Policy Levels
• Deepening Knowledge about the Process of Policy Development
• Deepening Ability to Identify and Critically Examine the Research Used to Promote Policies
• Deepening the Ability to be Strategic in Using Knowledge to Approach Policy
• Deepening Knowledge to Foster Teachers’ Independence
• Deepening Knowledge of Literacy Theory and Practice to Evaluate Policies for their Potential to Impact Student Learning
• Deepening Pre-service teachers’ Knowledge of How to Negotiate Literacy Policy
• The School Administrator: A Most Important Role

In this chapter, I will also offer recommendations for both the fields of teacher education and policy studies and for future research based on these conclusions.

**Implications for the Field**

A key finding of this research is that participants’ knowledge and expertise about policy mediated how they interpreted those policies at all levels. As a result, the findings of this study imply that developing stakeholders’ knowledge in several policy-related areas would allow them to more consciously engage with and appropriate policy in explicit ways that benefit both the teacher and their students. Specifically, findings in this study point to the importance of deepening stakeholder’s knowledge related to: (a) the issues underlying the urgency to improve teachers’ instruction and student achievement that policy aims to address; (b) the nature of policy itself including what constitutes policy, how policy is produced, and how it functions in daily practice; (c) how to structure professional development to build teachers’ professional knowledge; and (d)
preparing pre-service teachers to navigate an increasingly dynamic policy landscape in their schools.

**Deepening Understanding of the Issues Underlying Urgency to Improve Teachers’ Instruction and Students’ Achievement**

To engage in meaningful policy discussions about literacy, it is important that administrators and teachers understand the underlying issues that contribute to the growing sense of urgency to raise teacher quality in efforts to improve student achievement. As Dr. Bridges described, she was particularly concerned with the dropout and incarceration rates for Greenbrier School District students, particularly as those statistics related to African American males. First grade teacher, Ms. Brooks, also shared her concern that her students’ families did not value literacy and therefore were not positioned to offer literacy support to their child at home. Ms. Johnson also believed that students were not coming to school as prepared as they were in years past. In this study, participants shared legitimate concerns about their students’ learning—some of which perpetuated deficit beliefs about families and students, but others that were symptoms of real inequities in society and the education system. Many scholars have urged looking beyond the symptoms to the root cause of the challenges students of Color face. (Delpit, 2012; King, 2005; Tatum, 1997; Tatum, 2005; Tatum, 2007). Only by looking at the causes of academic problems can administrators and teachers begin to make powerful pedagogical decisions and create policy that might lead to more effective teaching and higher student achievement.

In this study, Dr. Bridges made clear that she believed low literacy was a root cause of the district’s dropout and incarceration rates. Therefore, she perceived an urgent
need to improve literacy instruction in the district. Dr. Bridges and teachers shared the same goal of helping students attain success, but Dr. Bridges’ and the teachers’ respective positions in the school system mediated how they responded dialogically to the urgent need to improve teacher practice and raise student achievement. For administrators, that urgency—that need for immediacy in creating policies to address students’ needs—led increasingly to quick-fix prescriptive programs, pacing guides, data-driven instruction, close monitoring of programs, and reduced teacher autonomy. For teachers, the urgency to improve teacher practice and raise students’ achievement led teachers to say, “just let us teach.”

Administrators’ and teachers’ in and around Maplewood Elementary School believed that they had to respond immediately to national policy that required students to read on grade level by third grade. They also had to respond to Dr. Bridges’ calls for teachers to accelerate students’ learning to make *Adequate Yearly Progress* toward that goal. At the school level, teachers had to respond to Ms. Johnson’s local mandate that students “could not stay in [their] class and not make gains” as they worked to “move students” forward academically. Teachers further responded to the urgency to improve students’ achievement by teaching explicitly and minimizing play in kindergarten classrooms and reminding students they had to be ready for the next grade. As Ms. Brown explained, because of district and local efforts to improve teacher practice and raise student achievement, teachers’ professional development, the time teachers had to learn and implement programs, and the rate at which administrators expected students to grow academically was “rush[ed], rush[ed], rush[ed].”
Thus, to move beyond “just teaching”, findings from this study suggest that it is necessary that teachers and administrators engage in conversations across school-system levels about what conditions precipitate the urgent need for action. They need to understand the underlying inequities that are often masked by education policies focused on just improving teacher practice. It is important that they discuss the best ways to address those issues and raise students’ achievement. My study leads me to believe that open discussions between teachers and administrators, about societal and educational inequities, could lead to a reevaluation of literacy policy—particularly policy that privileges dominant ways of knowing and learning while it undermines culturally relevant pedagogies—and create opportunities for creating what King (2005) describes as a transformative education for students of Color.

Deepening knowledge of families and communities as assets to improve instruction and raise student achievement. A compelling way to address the underlying inequities in the school system must include deepening all policy stakeholders’ knowledge about how families and communities are assets to improve instruction and raise students’ achievement. An analysis of data from this study demonstrated that, as administrators and teachers in and around Maplewood Elementary voiced concerns about students coming to school below the district’s expectations for kindergarten, they tended to position families as not valuing literacy or doing little to support literacy development in the years leading up to their formal schooling. While Maplewood held literacy events, to which they invited parents, often the sharing of literacy knowledge flowed only one way—from the school to the home. It is important that educators create opportunities for literacy sharing to flow into the school from
families. When we reach out to deepen our understanding of the cultural resources and language assets that exist in communities of students of Color, we can then respectfully build on that knowledge to explicitly teach mainstream language. Accessing students’ home languages and literacies would enable educators to build on students’ assets to provide culturally relevant literacy instruction, begin to pay down the debt owed to students of Color in the U.S. school system, and address inequities in a way that would truly accelerate their learning (Ladson-Billings, 2009.) A growing body of literature (Allen, 2007 & 2010; Cowhey, 2006; Edwards, McMillon, Turner, Lee, 2010; Long, Volk, Tisdale, Baines, 2013; Tatum, 2005 & 2007; Kinloch, 2011 & 2012) offers suggestions for building home school relationships, learning about home/community knowledge, and using that knowledge to plan rigorous, culturally relevant instruction for students. Jo Beth Allen’s book *Literacy in the Welcoming Classroom* (2010) offers several helpful suggestions. Some of the suggestions for building strong home/school connections include:

- Have intentional conversations about parent involvement, conferences, home visits at your school;
- Making home visits in which your primary goal is to learn about the students’ home literacies and funds of knowledge rather than instruct the caregivers;
- Invite families to participate in literacy in the classroom through photography, family journals, me-boxes, family literacy nights, co-authoring with their child within the classroom;
- Frequent and diverse methods of communication (e.g., emails, texts, phone calls, newsletters, cards)

In this text, Allen recommends that students’ home languages and literacies are used key tools for improving teacher practice and raising students’ achievement.
Another example of using home/community knowledge to make connections to support school-based literacy can be seen in the work of Long, Tisdale, Volk, & Baine (2013). Both Carmen Tisdale and Janice Baines, teachers whose classes are highlighted for their use of critical, culturally relevant pedagogies, connect to their students’ African heritage (e.g., using songs from Sierra Leone), community language (e.g., raps, chants, and call and response) and community interviews as resources in which to embed lessons while meeting the district’s expectation to use weekly pacing guides and standards to guide instruction and prepare students for standardized tests. In doing so they were able to challenge classroom power structures, value not only the local community but the heritage community of their students, move beyond deficit perspectives of their students, support syncretic learning experiences, and recognize the valuable learning that took place when students had opportunities to interact purposefully. These examples of critical and culturally relevant pedagogies could be beneficial to students throughout the Greenbrier School District.

**Deepening Knowledge and Expertise Related to Policy for Professionals at All Policy Levels**

The findings in this study imply that teachers would benefit from a stronger knowledge of how policy is created at all school system levels and how to speak about that policy. Data suggest that being able to speak explicitly about policy, as was seen with Ms. Williams at the state level, influenced how she interpreted NCLB’s policies not dictating literacy practice. At the same time, administrators and educators at the local level, whose policy was implicit in their practice, policy documents (e.g., pacing guides), commercial literacy curricula, and environmental print, who had trouble talking about
policy explicitly, interpreted policy differently and believed that policy did dictate practice. In this case, the old saying holds true that knowledge is power—to an extent. Certainly, more than knowing about policy enabled the state level participant to reject the idea that policy dictated practice. Her position, and the power it afforded her within a state agency, also enabled her to make such a claim. Nevertheless, knowing about policy and being able to talk about it explicitly, might equip teachers, in part, to challenge the idea that large federal policies like NCLB mandate practice. Teachers need to be able to recognize and name literacy policies—whether federal mandates or locally initiated policies—, determine the quality of the research undergirding that policy, and to critically consider which research policymakers marginalize (e.g., qualitative research). This type of policy analysis would equip teachers and administrators to engage in dialogue about those policies, how they hinder or support student learning, and how they inhibit or encourage teachers’ professional development.

The task of educating teachers and local administrators about federal policy falls to many policy stakeholders including, teacher educators, federal policy makers, state policy makers, and local administrators and teachers themselves. I recommend teachers and administrators familiarize themselves with NCTE’s policy briefs (available at http://www.ncte.org/policy-research/briefs) to deepen their understanding of emerging policy issues surrounding literacy instruction. Policy savvy administrators and teachers can use their knowledge of policy to engage in critical conversations about those policies.

One way to create opportunities to talk about policy might be to bring policy issues to the forefront once a month for discussion at faculty meetings. Ideas for talks around policy could come from policy documents created by professional organizations,
like NCTE. Another source to draw on to generate conversation around policy might be social networking sites like Twitter. A principal, like Ms. Johnson, might join with her teachers in choosing to follow an educator who focuses on topics of education policy, like Susan Ohanian (http://susanohanian.org/bbtj.html), and discuss in faculty meetings issues that emerge through her tweets or webposts and articles. Or, teachers could follow a blog, such as the one created by Diane Ravitch (http://dianeravitch.net), to generate conversation about literacy policy. An additional policy related blog to follow would be that of policy expert Linda Darling-Hammond who blogs at http://forumforeducation.org/blogs/linda-darling-hammond. Using blogs, Twitter, and other social networking tools would be one way to help teachers stay on top of key policy issues in a fun way that would not just add learning policy on to teachers’ exhausting to do list. Through using these tools, teachers and administrators could come together at least once a month and talk about policy from a critical perspective in small chat sessions, large faculty meetings, one-to-one in the hall, or through other online networking tools like Facebook. The goal would be to make talk about policy second nature so that teachers and administrators are positioned to consider their role in the policy process, implications for their students when they engage with those policies more explicitly.

**Deepening Knowledge about the Process of Policy Development**

Key pieces of data in this study illustrated the way policymakers at the national level (e.g., those writing NCLB and members of the National Reading Panel) set a course for educational practices to be guided by experimental, scientifically based reading research (SBRR). The National Reading Panel then used NCLB’s definition of research to select only studies that met NCLB’s criteria for scientific research. To replicate
practices found to work within those studies, curricula developers appealed to teachers to implement programs based on that research with fidelity. Quotes from the U.S. Department of Education’s What Works Clearinghouse (shared in Chapter Four) showed that the goal of scientifically based reading research was to find causal evidence for specific literacy practices that would result in student achievement. However, because much research tells us that literacy teaching is most effective when grounded in the social and cultural worlds of students (Long, Tisdale, Volk, & Baine, 2013), a policy of fidelity of implementation is problematic in that it is decidedly un-sociocultural. Fidelity suggests that teachers follow programs as designed, without regard for their professional knowledge; teachers’ understandings of students’ strengths, cultural and linguistic knowledge, interests and motivations for learning; and myriad sociocultural factors. In reality, each classroom is full of unique individuals who come to school with expertise and resources for learning, and that uniqueness should, and does, shape teaching and learning.

Thus, while the Greenbrier School District may label certain practices “non-negotiable,” according to a sociocultural view, all practices are negotiable. Within communities of practice, members negotiate practice daily, never engaging in the same practice in the same way more than once (Wenger, 1998). As this study shows, moment-to-moment, teachers in classrooms constantly negotiate in this way as they determine the extent to which they will alter practice which sometimes means deviating from policy expectations, whether they realize they are doing so or not. This negotiation in turn, creates new policy—the policy of negotiated policy. The uniqueness of teachers’ negotiation of policy was evident in this study even as teachers differed on what the term
fidelity meant, with some defining it as an oppressive policy that constrained their practice, and others seeing it as a way to bring consistency to practice and stop the revolving door of policy.

With an understanding that implementing programs with fidelity is unattainable, it is important to shift teachers’ and administrators’ attention to how their interpretations of policy inform their policy appropriation—or how they take it in and make it their own based on their personal beliefs, professional knowledge, classroom experiences, position in the school system, and available mentors. An analysis of data from this study suggests that teachers tend not to have knowledge of differences in policy interpretation across policy levels nor do they have knowledge of where particular policies originate or the research used to develop and promote those policies. This all constitutes what researchers call the sociocultural and critical nature of policymaking and policy appropriation. Knowledge of how policy is negotiated in local settings would support educators in examining policies at all levels as well as examining the interpretations of policy across stakeholders. Understanding the various interpretations of policy would open up possibilities for envisioning policy in new ways and allow teachers and administrators to use that knowledge to negotiate teaching their practice in relationship to those policies. Based on data from this study, it seems if local level administrators and teachers understood policy as socioculturally constructed, that understanding might help them communicate how and why they appropriate policy to district, state, and federal system level policymakers rather creating a more honest and straightforward relationship between policy-creators/enforcers and policy enactors/negotiators.
To learn more about policy, teacher and administrators might explore the policy briefs of professional teachers’ organizations like NCTE (mentioned above). NCTE offers resources that enumerate the many policies impacting literacy practice broadly. With these resources in hand, educators at the district and school level could discuss pressing policy issues with teachers and role play ways to negotiate their practice in particular scenarios.

Deepening Ability to Identify and Critically Examine the Research Used to Promote Policies

In order to engage in policy conversations, teachers and administrators must first identify, and critically examine, research used to promote policies. This applies to both large federal policies like NCLB and the National Reading Panel Report (NRP) but also to local policies such as, in this study, moves to adopt Response to Intervention. But how do you identify the research that underpins policies? Federal policies like NCLB are explicitly linked to documents such as the National Reading Panel Report, which provides a meta-analysis of experimental (not qualitative or even quasi-experimental) research on teaching reading. However, as educators who have closely examined the research in the NRP have noted, teachers must be cautious in trusting summaries of research which may overstate findings and, therefore, teachers need to be aware of the kind of research used to justify programs and legislation as well as the kinds of research left out of such supportive documents. Some researchers, questioning the NRP summary conclusions, dug deep into the original studies to determine if the reading policy espoused by the summary report was accurate (Stephens, 2008) and found that panel members misrepresented some of the findings in the teaching of reading to support, for
example, a stronger emphasis on phonemic awareness and phonics instruction than the original studies suggest (Garan, 2007). National literacy organizations can provide this kind of information as teachers work with administrators to evaluate policies and practices. For example, they might look to the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) http://www.ncte.org, the International Reading Association (IRA) http://www.reading.org, the Literacy Research Association (LRA) http://www.literacyresearchassociation.org and the peer-reviewed journals such as Language Arts, The Reading Teacher, Reading Research Quarterly, and the Journal of Literacy Research. There are also numerous professional books that examine research related to current literacy practice in schools (Allington, 2006; Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2011; Johnston, 2010).

Given teachers’ hectic schedules, administrators could support collaborative critical examination of research by taking responsibility for guiding teachers in getting to the bottom of policies. Administrators can provide support by going beneath and beyond the claims of commercial programs and legislation to understand the research claimed to support particular practices as well as to be knowledgeable of the research left out. Additionally, administrators could take responsibility for communicating deeper policy information to teachers, for opening spaces for critical dialogue about programs, and for examining research, programs, and policies together developing knowledgeable eyes. They could do this both in their schools and with their peers in administrative meetings.

Deepening the Ability to be Strategic in Using Knowledge to Approach Policy

Administrators and teachers, strengthened by their understanding of research used to support policy, are well positioned to use that knowledge strategically to examine
policy and determine which ones support their practice and student learning and which ones constrain them. With policy knowledge, administrators and teachers would be prepared to engage in robust and substantive conversations about literacy policy: examining why some programs might not be warranted and why other programs (or aspects of programs) might be effective. Further reading of research would ensure that teachers were not just haphazardly rejecting policy, but rather creating their own research base upon which to justify and advocate for sound teaching practices that meet the needs of all students.

It is important to point out that knowledge of research underlying programs cannot be the only factor upon which teachers and administrators critically evaluate programs and policies. In addition to understanding research, it is imperative that administrators and teachers find ways to deeply get to know children, their families, and their communities. As administrators and teachers learn more about students’ funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzalez, 1992), their interests, and linguistic diversity, administrators and teachers can also use that knowledge as a critical tool to evaluate and negotiate programs and to raise student achievement (Long, Tisdale, Volk, Baine, 2013).

**Deepening Knowledge to Foster Teachers’ Independence**

As the findings of this study illustrate, teachers had a difficult time making meaning of professional development offered by the Greenbrier School District. This was reflected in Ms. Brown’s words at the beginning of Chapter Four, and through various other teachers’ accounts of their experiences with professional development. In this section, I will theorize about what went wrong when teachers experienced frustrations with professional development. After considering what went wrong, I will then suggest
steps that teachers, administrators, and district literacy leaders might take to further strengthen professional development as a part of local literacy policy.

**Provide long-term professional development that builds deep pedagogical knowledge.** Based on my observations of professional development, time spent in teachers’ classrooms, and conversations with them across several years, I developed an understanding of why professional development did not work in certain instances and why teachers often perceived it as meaningless and redundant. I believe their feelings of dissatisfaction were, in part, due to the contradiction created when district consultants tried to offer in-depth professional development around programs advertised as easy-to-follow. It is important to ask what purpose in-depth professional development on prescriptive programs serves? What is the point of professional development that simply demonstrates how to implement a program with fidelity when the instructions in the program guides spell out exactly what teachers are to say and do? Thus, school and district leaders might reconsider the time and expense allotted to bringing in commercially-based professional developers to explain programs that teachers can read for themselves.

Data from this study suggests that the school district’s goal of offering more in-depth, on-going professional development on fewer topics was an important one. Ironically, the teachers in this study did not experience the school district’s repeated professional development sessions on implementing *Dominie* or *Empowering Writers* as meaningful; rather, these led to confusion and frustration for them. In each case the professional development that frustrated teachers centered on programs the district bought as easy-to-follow curricula intended to help teachers infuse reading assessment
and writing into their practice quickly to address the urgency described at the beginning of this chapter. But there were obvious contradictions and incongruities in offering long-term professional development on programs intended to offer step-by-step guidance on how to assess reading and teach writing. Teachers recognized these incongruities. Teachers had difficulty making meaning of repeated professional development sessions on how to implement commercial curricula and saw these as unnecessary, monotonous, and redundant. However, they found long-term support around practices they implemented without commercial curricula as more meaningful—such as literacy consultants’ demonstrations of how to lead guided reading groups, or how to monitor students’ literacy growth through progress monitoring as a part of RTI.

This finding has implications for future professional development and confirms findings from existing studies. Longer-term professional development on fewer topics seems to be important and this is substantiated in other literature (Darling-Hammond, 2010), but equally important is offering those professional development sessions on substantive topics that help teachers grow in their professional practice rather than just learning to implement a program with greater fidelity. With many others in the field of teacher education, I suggest that administrators, literacy coordinators, literacy consultants, and reading teachers working in schools offer teachers more professional development that develops teachers’ deep pedagogical knowledge. Teachers found that kind of on-going professional development meaningful because ultimately they did want to develop expertise in their practice.

Provide professional development that builds independence. Despite their appeals to “just teach,” teachers recognized their need for some form of meaningful
professional development. But since they did not typically see professional development at the district as meaningful—with the exception of consultants coming in their rooms to demonstrate practices like guided reading—I wondered what might be more meaningful. During a conversation in her room one afternoon, I asked Ms. Jefferson this question. She described her desire for a professional mentor who would become a member of the school—someone who would provide a permanent presence for a couple of years—to build a relationship with her and mentor her in her practice. In some schools, this is the role that literacy coaches have played (Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010). This is then one implication that I offer as a focused form of ongoing, in-depth professional development.

While literacy coach positions have diminished due to budget constraints, the Greenbrier School District did provide reading teachers in each of the district’s schools. However, these teachers’ sole purpose was not to support teachers. I suggest that reading teachers consider the important role they could play in supporting classroom teachers. If reading teachers feel underprepared to support teachers’ professional development, collaboration with university literacy professors or literacy consultants who enter the school might be a potential way to learn how to model practices for teachers, create opportunities for them to try out new practices, reflect on those practices, and read literature around those practices to help them become exemplary teachers of literacy.

Teachers largely did not have the kind of support Ms. Jefferson wished she had to develop her professional knowledge and become a more independent practitioner. The current state of professional development often created a degree of dependency in teachers. Data from this study showed that commercial literacy tools were often interventions for teachers as well as students. As such, they seemed to function at first as
scaffolds to support teachers’ growing knowledge of how to implement running records (Dominie), teach writers (Empowering Writers), or engage in some semblance of practices (e.g., repeated familiar read alouds) that support emergent readers (Breakthrough to Literacy). Although the district offered professional development on how to implement these curricula, data from this study did not show that these programs effectively prepared teachers to use literacy structures to support readers, implement reading assessments, or teach writers. Even if they were improving teacher practice, there did not seem to be a plan for removing this commercial curricula scaffolding once teachers became proficient in the practice these tools were meant to foster.

This finding has several implications. First, while programs offer a type of scaffolding to support teachers’ emerging understanding of literacy practices, teachers increasingly need literacy leaders with knowledge of how to erect scaffolding to support teacher practice, how to draw down scaffolding to allow teachers to take fuller responsibility for their practice, and finally remove scaffolding so that teachers may engage in their practice independently. This is the same process teachers use to support children as they become strategic readers. Effective teachers want readers to learn to self-monitor so they can become increasingly independent. This does not mean they work in isolation once they are independent. To the contrary, this independence fosters deeper conversations with peers as they discuss engaging texts, extend their learning around those texts, think critically, and engage in increasingly complex tasks as readers (Johnson, 2006).

Teachers deserve this same type of thoughtful support as they grow as professionals. There is evidence that the Greenbrier School District was working to
provide this type of support through literacy consultations, but to borrow language from *Response to Intervention*, that support was offered in far too small “doses.” Like a teacher who unknowingly and unintentionally gives a reader answers and prevents them from constructing knowledge, so too a district creates dependency in teachers through the use of commercial literacy programs, when they become permanent scaffolds. This dependency subjugates teacher knowledge and shifts teachers’ role from professional to technician. Eventually teachers lose trust in their own knowledge, a phenomenon that has been well documented (Long, 2006).

It is worth considering, if teachers can engage in their practice independently, why continue to require *fidelity of implementation* to a program? Why not remove the scaffolds? Data in this study suggest that the scaffold of commercial literacy programs remain in place largely as accountability tools rather than to truly help teachers grow in their practice. Ms. Herndon suggested this when she explained that *Dominie* had become a standardized test for kindergarten through second grades. Ms. Jefferson also reiterated this point when she emphasized that *Dominie’s* sole purpose, from her perspective, was to identify students’ reading levels. Although removing the scaffold of commercial curricula would not be popular with companies who provide that curricula, data in this study suggest teachers, as professionals, needed just this kind of shift. In the place of programs, however, this study’s findings also suggest that it would be important to increase the amount, quality, and depth of support teachers receive through school and district professional development on their journey to becoming independent practitioners.

*Provide professional development that builds from needs expressed by teachers.* Throughout this study, I heard teachers plead with the district to “just let us
Given the rapid policy changes and the sheer quantity of policies in the district, I can empathize with this plea, but it is also important to think about the role of the professional community and how it should support professional development in meaningful ways. When I hear teachers say, “just let us teach,” I hear them saying to policymakers that they are overwhelmed by policy demands, which inhibit their professional growth and ability to meet students’ academic needs.

How might policymakers respond? They might begin by asking teachers why literacy policy and professional development is failing to help them hone their craft. Policymakers might ask teachers about the challenges they face that inhibit their engagement in professional learning activities such as reading professional literature, conversing with colleagues, trying out new practices, and attending professional conferences that would support their growth. These are potential lines of policy research that would be worth pursuing to build on this study. Teachers in this study knew that “just teaching” was not enough. Knowing that, it is important that all policy stakeholders who support teachers inquire into how we can offer teachers the meaningful support they need and to do that by starting with the teachers.

**Provide professional development that positions teachers as professionals.** To support teachers in their commitment to their professional development, this study’s findings suggest that teachers need support to be able to reclaim their identities as professionals—identities that federal, state, district, and local policies, like *fidelity of implementation* seem to be stripping away. Teacher educators, administrators, and policymakers can play a role in helping teachers regain their professional identities by helping guide teachers in exploring literacy policies, the research that underlies those
policies, and using their knowledge of research to negotiate their practice, particularly as it relates to prescriptive programs. To help teachers see themselves as professionals, administrators and teacher educators have to remind teachers, and those who create and enforce educational policy, that they, rather than programs are the most important factor in a student’s success (Darling-Hammond, 2010). As Ms. Johnson often pointed out, it is teachers, not programs or fidelity of implementation to those programs, who bring about students’ achievement. Scholars like Lisa Delpit (2002 & 2012), who write about equity and excellence in the education of students of Color, reiterate the central role qualified teachers play in successfully educating children. But, as this study illuminates, commercial literacy programs and fidelity to those programs can undermine teachers’ ability to understand, generate, and provide rigorous, critical, culturally–relevant instruction that promotes students’ success. Rather than commercial literacy curricula, this study corroborates other work (Long, Hutchinson & Neiderhiser, 2012, p. 87) that suggests that teachers would benefit from professional development that positions teachers as professionals through increased opportunities to:

- Read professional literature;
- Meet with colleagues to engage in conversations around professional literature to extrapolate implications for practice;
- View videos of teaching and explore websites.
- Attend national and state literacy conferences
- Take turns observing other teachers and literacy leaders (in and out of the state) engage in practices they would like to try out;
- Try out practices in their classrooms;
• Return to professional learning groups to discuss how particular practices worked in their classrooms with their students;

• Ask new questions and seek out new reading or opportunities (such as conferences) to observe master teachers and pursue answers to those questions.

At Maplewood I observed evidence that Ms. Johnson encouraged teachers to share their classroom practices with one another during faculty meetings and team meetings, but teachers struggled against a swift current of policy demands, including demands to create weekly common assessments that aligned with district pacing guides, that significantly limited the time they had for critical reflection and collaboration with colleagues. Administrators can mediate the policy demands that teachers encounter by creating time and space for teachers to engage in professional conversations, observations, engagements, and reflections with colleagues. Principals need to make tough choices about what type of professional development practices teachers should engage in. Ideally, the best choice would be for principals to create space for teachers to spend their time in pursuits that build their professional knowledge. But, this means that principals will also have to consider how to cut out the more meaningless paper work that overwhelms teachers. As teachers in this study show, teachers are overwhelmed when asked to grow professionally while juggling a myriad of programs and policies. If we want teachers to grow we must help them think deeply about fewer policies rather than widely, and superficially, about many. Interestingly, Ms. Johnson, as described in Chapter Four, believed deep learning of fewer academic standards and indicators, rather than teaching “numerous standards but none of them well,” was also exactly what
students at Maplewood needed to grow academically. Teachers need this deep growth as well.

**Provide opportunities for teachers to develop a network of professional partnerships.** Data from this study show teachers needed additional professional support than what was offered by the district in order to grow in their craft. Knowing that districts cannot be solely responsible for administrators’ and teachers’ professional development, it is important that teachers and schools develop a wide network of professional partnerships to support their own and others’ professional growth. The potential for partnerships exists between schools and faculty at neighboring universities; literacy leaders associated with state, national, and federal literacy organizations; and numerous on-line literacy organizations including:

- The National Writing Project at [http://www.nwp.org](http://www.nwp.org)
- The Teachers’ College Reading and Writing Project at [http://readingandwritingproject.com](http://readingandwritingproject.com)
- Read, Write, Think at [http://www.readwritethink.org](http://www.readwritethink.org)

Literacy leaders at local institutions of higher education can partner with schools, begin professional study groups, and work with teachers in their classrooms to offer ongoing support in areas teachers identify as needs (Long, Hutchinson, Neiderhiser, 2012). Teachers, more than anything, need supportive, accomplished teachers, with whom they can work and discuss their practice. Partnerships with local colleges and universities can also give teachers access to literacy expertise, often at no cost, and support an apprenticeship model of professional development. An apprenticeship model in other professions and trades has existed around the world for thousands of years as an
effective way to pass on knowledge within communities of practice (Wenger, 1988). Within this model, apprentices are immersed in a holistic situated learning environment, where they understand the whole of their practice as they gradually take over new aspects of a practice that require greater degrees of expertise. Data from this study suggest that teachers want this ongoing support from accomplished teachers and literacy leaders who have a permanent presence in their communities rather than the temporary presence of professional developers and evaluators as they drop in periodically to demonstrate activities or monitor practice.

As professional partners, college and university literacy leaders can listen and learn about each unique school setting, teachers’ beliefs and needs surrounding their students’ literacy strengths and areas for growth, and help teachers determine lines of inquiry to support their professional development. In these partnerships, educators can collaborate to develop teachers’ professional knowledge and assist teachers as they learn to negotiate literacy programs and scripted curricula they encounter (e.g., Breakthrough to Literacy, Soar to Success, SuccessMaker, Dominie, Empowering Writers) based on their knowledge of current research and practice. Together, they can also generate new practices based on their mutual study of current research and pedagogy.

University/school partnerships could also support teachers as they consider culturally relevant teaching, an area in which the Greenbrier School District and Maplewood Elementary School were relatively silent. Teachers need support to negotiate commercial literacy programs in ways that build on the culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds of their students and support culturally relevant teaching. And since new policies are always entering the policy landscape, university educators can help
teachers negotiate new policies and connect them with resources to understand those policies more fully, including the research and politics behind those policies. New literature focused on supporting linguistically diverse readers and writers, particularly students learning English as a new language, is increasingly available and much of it is grounded in university-school collaborations. For example, Laman’s recent book (2013) grew out of her collaboration with teachers through a university/school partnership she established and nurtured over many years. These kinds of partnerships are mutually beneficial to teachers and researchers and offer enormous potential for the professional growth for both teachers and literacy researchers.

**Deepening Knowledge of Literacy Theory and Practice to Evaluate Policies for their Potential to Impact Student Learning**

As the district supports teachers’ professional development, data from this study suggest the importance of offering professional development in two areas: how to embed phonics instruction with authentic reading experiences, and how to teach explicitly and effectively while keeping play in the curricula as a developmentally and culturally appropriate practice for children. Data in this study pointed to several implications for learning literacy theory and practice to better evaluate the impact of policies on student learning. Specifically, data in this study suggest the importance of deepening administrators’ and teachers’ knowledge of how to embed explicit instruction within play, how to use reading assessments to understand a student’s reading process and use that data to inform instruction; and how to embed explicit, systematic phonics instruction within the whole text experience and connect those explicit lessons to the work students do as readers and writers (Hornsby & Wilson, 2010). Building a knowledge base around
these practices would help teachers evaluate policies that marginalize the role of play in learning, and incorporate phonics through technology, which marginalized teachers as professionals.

**Deepening knowledge of reading assessment.** Data from this study demonstrated that teachers used the *Dominie* assessment system, despite it designer’s intentions, primarily to determine reading levels and which books students’ could read independently. *Dominie* was not, however, used by teachers to examine students’ reading processes closely and use that knowledge to inform their assessment when that was, in fact, the intention of the program’s developer (Deford, 2001). Even workshops at the district level which encouraged teachers to use *Dominie* assessment data to inform instruction, merely repositioned the program as a tool to determine students’ reading levels and how to group students for guided reading. Repeated sessions reiterated its use in determining reading levels. Yet, if they had been guided to use the assessment tools in more complex ways—to understand how students orchestrate a network of reading strategies—perhaps the assessment would have been used more effectively and purposefully. As it existed in the district, administering *Dominie* to all students, three times per year, did not help teachers become more conscientious, or increasingly more independent, in their assessment of students.

To reevaluate whether or not administrators and teachers are using assessment tools like *Dominie* effectively, it is important for them to read primary sources about reading assessment such as Clay’s (1993) research on observing and coming to know readers to use that knowledge to guide instruction. Because an emphasis on students’ reading levels was pervasive throughout the school and district, it would also be
beneficial for administrators and teachers to explore literature about how over focusing on reading levels at the expense of developing a deeper understanding of a students’ reading processes inhibit students’ achievement. (Mere, 2005; Peterson, 2001; Szymusiak, Sibberson, Koch, 2008).

**Deepening knowledge of teaching explicitly through play.** The disappearance of play from kindergarten classrooms, like Ms. Herndon’s, poses a pedagogical dilemma: On one hand, the studies show we have not been serving all students, particularly students of Color from low-income families, well with kindergartens that provided too little explicit instruction for students from non-dominant language backgrounds to acquire school-based literacies (Delpit, 2012). However, in the push to accelerate students’ learning, it is important to ask if eliminating play is the answer. While little has been written about how to teach standards-based skills within play-based learning for students of Color in urban schools, this is an important area to explore in future research. Amy Polk, a professor and researcher at the University of Georgia, is currently exploring the role of play in the learning of mathematics with African American children from low-income families. Similar research in the area of literacy may produce strategies for integrating play, a key element in the culture of childhood, which should not be eliminated from the curriculum (Owocki & Bird, 1999; Souto-Manning, 2010).

**Deepening knowledge of embedding phonics.** Although teaching phonics explicitly and systematically was important to Dr. Bridges, and is certainly supported in the literature as an important teaching strategy (McIntyre, Hulan, & Layne, 2011), I did not observe any professional development workshops that showed teachers how to embed phonics instruction explicitly and systematically within whole text experiences. Given
that teachers’ level of preparedness to teach phonics was a concern for the district, it would seem important that district consultants provide opportunities for teachers to see demonstrations that prepare them to teach phonics explicitly yet contextually. Instead of providing this kind of research-based professional development about how to teach phonics, the district provided schools and teachers with instructional programs such as Breakthrough to Literacy and SuccessMaker, which decontextualized phonics from the real work of reading and writing. Across many decades, scholars have demonstrated how phonics can be taught explicitly in contextualized ways (Mills, O’Keefe, Stephens, 1992; Hornsby & Wilson, 2010). Readwritethink.org, a website created through a partnership between the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association, also offers numerous resources to support teachers as they prepare mini-lessons that explicitly teach phonics (including onsets, rimes, blends, etc.) through inquiries into how language works in high quality children’s literature, poems, and songs.

Deepening knowledge of how to engage in cultural relevant pedagogy within high-stakes tests, pacing guides, and academic standards. This study demonstrated that teachers’ interpretation of policy tools like high-stakes tests, pacing guides, and academic standards determined how those tools mediated their practice. For teachers in this study, these tools largely constrained their teaching. Particularly, because of the emphasis on test score data during meetings, there was little opportunity to talk about other important aspects of teaching which would raise students’ achievement, such as engaging in culturally relevant pedagogies.

Understanding culturally relevant practices. Joyce King (2005) cautions that an overemphasis on test scores and standards can distract educators from engaging in
conversations about how to offer a transformative education for Black students and students of Color—that is an education that provides transformative knowledge to preserve a cultural human consciousness. King suggests that discussion about standards and standardized tests mis-focuses discourse on the symptoms of the crisis in Black education rather than the causes—those being, according to King (2005), the cultural dispossession of a people, their mis-education, and their need for a transformative education.

While teachers’ interpretation of the role of high-stakes tests and standards-based instruction have power to constrain teacher practice, teachers have found ways to embrace culturally relevant pedagogy within a system of tests, standards, and pacing guides (Long, Hutchinson & Neiderhiser, 2012; Sleeter & Cornbleth, 2011). A growing body of literature also describes culturally relevant pedagogies aimed at preserving a cultural human consciousness and offers suggestions for how to engage in culturally relevant teaching practices (Gay, 2000; Lazar, Edwards, McMillon, 2012; McIntyre, Hullan, & Lane, 2011). This literature suggests that culturally relevant teaching should empower students on many levels and build competence, accomplishment, confidence and efficacy. That achievement must also be “academic, social, emotional, psychological, cultural, moral and political.” (Gay, 2000, p 250). To reach these goals Gay recommends that teachers:

- Get to know students in their classrooms to develop positive perceptions of their life experiences, background and intellectual capabilities (p. 23)
- Create a culture of caring, beyond feelings, that cares for personal well-being and academic success through action that supports student success (pg. 48)
• Understand the unique ways cultural groups communicate so the academic performance of students’ whose communicative styles differ from mainstream school discourse are not misdiagnosed or trapped in communicative mismatches (p. 77)

• Provide curriculum content—derived from various sources within and outside formal school boundaries—that includes accurate information about the histories, cultures, contributions, experiences and issues of their respective ethnic groups (p. 128)

• Create continuity between the learning process of ethnically diverse students and the strategies of instruction used in the classroom by contextualizing instruction of students of color in their various cultural forms, behaviors, and experiences (p. 176)

Explorations of culturally relevant pedagogies were missing from professional development sessions I attended at all school system levels, interviews, and federal, state, district and school level policy documents even though great concern was expressed about the education of children traditionally marginalized in schools. Each of the above strategies to support culturally relevant teaching, explored through the professional development arenas described earlier in this chapter, would help teachers take significant steps toward offering all students a transformative education that King (2005) envisions.

**Use pacing guides flexibly.** In this study, data showed that the way teachers interpreted pacing guides also inhibited data-driven instruction. With pacing guides present, teachers in this study relied less on their deep knowledge of their students and in-class, on-going formative assessments of students’ learning and more on the guide itself to tell them what to teach. For example, under the dictates of pacing guidelines, teacher’s professional discussions in this study were limited to whether or not they would use particular books to teach the week’s objective on the pacing guide or if they would use another text. A key question that emerged during this study, which Ms. Johnson
addressed during one faculty meeting, was: How can day-to-day instruction be data-driven, if it was pacing-guide driven? The district’s answer to this question seemed to be that spiraling instruction, or a curriculum that “spirals back around” to allow teachers to move on through the pacing guide and later revisit topics, would still allow for responsive teaching. However, this approach was problematic from teachers’ perspectives because they felt they had to teach topics students were not ready to learn and that they had to move on from teaching topics that students had not yet fully understood. Other educators have pointed out how spiraling prevents teachers from helping students understand a concept deeply before moving on to the next concept (Maniates & Mahiri, 2011).

**Deepening Pre-service teachers’ Knowledge of How to Negotiate Literacy Policy**

Given that pre-service teachers are entering into a profession that is, at its heart political, it makes sense that teacher educators would talk to them about literacy policy. It is important, as mentioned above, that administrators and teacher educators introduce them to literacy policies, where to go to stay abreast of literacy policy trends, and how to investigate the research that underpins those policies. With this knowledge, pre-service teachers can then evaluate policy as they enter their first teaching position to determine if it supports or constrains their practice and how they should respond. Teachers’ knowledge of policy would equip teachers to negotiate the policy landscape in school by being able to develop measured, informed responses to mandates that have the potential to lead to an alternate plan for teaching grounded in research.

**Teach pre-service teachers about literacy policy and how to negotiate it.** The findings in this study led to specific implications for teacher education as suggestion that teachers, although required to teach with fidelity to particular programs and policies,
actually appropriate policies within specific social settings, bringing to bear their entire professional history, personal literacy beliefs, position in the school system, and support form colleagues on the appropriation process. This process of negotiating literacy policy is complex and laden with issues of power between experienced teachers and newcomers—pre-service teachers. Thus, it is critical that teacher educators prepare newly initiated teachers to negotiate the complex literacy environments they will join. In these new settings the culturally relevant teaching practices they have learned in their education programs might be missing from professional development opportunities in their new teaching environments and commercial, one-size-fits-all literacy curricula and pacing guides may be in place. Further, the dispositions of experienced educators may be that there is no negotiation around such curricula and they may communicate their ability to teach responsively.

Teacher educators can take several actions to prepare pre-service teachers to negotiate the complex policy environments they will encounter as they begin teaching. First, it is important for teacher educators to be explicit about the literacy policy environment their students will encounter upon entering the workforce. This can be done by administrators, teacher educators, and teachers keeping abreast of dominant literacy policies controlling teacher practice in schools. At the writing of these implications, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are an example of dominant policy that shapes teacher practice. In understanding policy deeply, and ourselves as language and literacy professors/teacher educators, we can demystify (Long, Hutchinson & Neiderhiser, 2012) those policies and counter the hegemonic messages they will encounter about such
policies in schools. In the case of the new CCSS, it is important to counter the belief that CCSS prescribe teacher practice, that CCSS are a curriculum, and that CCSS should create uniformity across classroom settings. Certainly, literacy messages such as these are already emerging around CCSS, but teacher educators—anticipating the messages our students will receive in schools, can assist them in preparing to engage in conversations around this new policy and build evidence that supports authentic, culturally responsive pedagogies to all students in a way that positions teachers as the most important assessment tool in the classroom. Resources that will be helpful in countering reactions that do not see possibilities for innovative teaching within standards movements include: NCTE’s series of books on the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS) including Long, Hutchinson, Neiderhiser, (2012) as well as other books on teaching under the new CCSS (Calkins, Ehrenworth, Lehman, 2012; Owocki, 2012).

Connect pre-service teachers with professional communities. Teacher educators can also connect university students to networks of support outside of their schools early in their careers. Such networks of support might include national and local professional literature organizations such as National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the International Reading Association (IRA), American Educational Research Association (AERA), as well as their state level affiliates. The organizations above give teachers opportunities to see presentations of current research, share research of their own, network with others in the literacy field, explore teaching resources, and consider their practice within a broader literacy backdrop as new literacy policies emerge.

Ensure that interns’ cooperating teachers understand policy issues and how to negotiate policy. Within teacher education, it is also critical that pre-service teachers
observe their cooperating teachers’ negotiation of literacy practices. It is particularly helpful for cooperating teachers to make known to students how they negotiate practice to bridge their theoretical and pedagogical knowledge within the world of the classroom which is influenced by local, state, and national policies. Teacher educators and internship coordinators need to seek out cooperating teachers who understand the delicate negotiations that have to take place between teacher and district, professional development providers, commercial curricula, and personal and professional literacy beliefs. Colleges of education need cooperating teachers who can help interns negotiate their practice in a policy world where it is increasingly difficult for teachers to simply close their doors and ignore policies that mandate literacy practice. To lead teachers to believe that they will walk into a school where their beliefs seamlessly integrate with the beliefs of the school is to set our teachers up for certain frustration and failure. Instead we need to help them see how their emerging beliefs will have to be negotiated and provide strategies for engaging in those negotiations. The list of strategies below, based on my work in this study and several years of teaching undergraduate education majors, provides some suggestions for helping pre-service teachers negotiate policy.

- Be knowledgeable about policy yourself.

- Get out of the university and into schools by holding class on-site in schools where pre-service teachers will have internships, offer to facilitate professional study groups with teachers in schools, and meet with district literacy leaders to understand current policy trends.

- Familiarize yourself with the programs and pacing guidelines of a district. Without teaching to programs or pacing guidelines, model how pre-service teachers might evaluate these tools based on their knowledge of a students and
research on practices embedded within the curriculum (e.g., evaluating the Daily Five, Boushey & Moser, 2006)

- Role play scenarios in which teachers often have to negotiate policy in schools, such as team meetings, in which teachers are often expected to create cookie cutter lessons and activities, and conversations with principals, in which teachers might need to build a case for not using a scripted program.

In doing so, teacher educators take steps to make teaching a more navigable profession for newly initiated teachers.

The School Administrator: A Most Important Role

An analysis of data in this study showed, as the principal of Maplewood Elementary School, Ms. Johnson, played an essential role in mediating, interpreting, and communicating policy to teachers in ways that created spaces of autonomy for them to teach as professionals. For example, in this study, Ms. Johnson mediated the policy of pacing guides and created space for teachers to create their own pacing guides that allowed teachers to engage in responsive teaching. Ms. Johnson also mediated policy as she helped teachers determine which practices were for show, and communicated that she was the final authority on which literacy practices would influence teacher practice, and which ones would not (like certain commercial literacy programs). Although not specific in the data, I speculate that Ms. Johnson’s ability to negotiate autonomy for her teachers was related to the school’s success in making Adequate Yearly Progress. Administrators in schools where test scores are lower may have more difficulty negotiating autonomy for their teachers. Nevertheless, I believe administrators, like Ms. Johnson, can play a powerful role in mediating literacy policy messages which, in turn, dialogically shape how teachers’ interpret those policies as well.
This leads to the implication that principals and other school level administrators might engage in policy mediation in several different ways. Within a school, a principal might broker professional development that prepares teachers to become more knowledgeable about policy, such as bringing in speakers who play key roles in designing policy at higher school-system levels, speakers from teaching organizations that work as policy advocates at the national level, and most importantly experienced teachers who can share their knowledge of policy and stories about negotiating policy beyond the cliché of teaching behind closed doors. Since consultants explicitly ask principals about a school’s professional development goals before consulting with teachers, a principal might specifically ask consultants to address policy within some of their professional development sessions by providing models of how to negotiate curricula based on diverse bodies of research. While participating in policy means coming to compromises between divergent ideas about how to improve teachers’ instruction and increase students’ achievement, at times it is necessary, for a principal to help teachers understand how to band together to take stands to question policies, based on sound evidence and research, when programs undermine students’ learning. In providing these opportunities, administrators can position teachers as key policy players and make a case that their knowledge about policy positions them as professionals capable of meeting students needs with greater degrees of autonomy around pacing guides, commercial literacy curricula, and myriad other policies that impact their teaching and student learning.
Implications for Further Research

This study offers a couple of insights for future research. First, while this study broadly defined policy across school-system levels, a limitation of this study was that, by taking a wide view of policy from the perspective of many stakeholders, it was difficult to deeply understand the more nuanced ways that policy manifested in teachers’ practices over a year’s time. Conducting a similar study with fewer teachers, conducting the study in phases—examining one school system level at a time—or recruiting research team members to help collect and analyze data when conducting a multi-site qualitative study, could lead to further insights regarding the ways teachers interact with policy on deeper levels. As a solitary researcher, it was challenging to collect data at numerous sites, examine abundant policy documents, and synthesize a large data set single-handedly. Therefore, I recommend that researchers break down multi-sited policy studies into more manageable parts or prepare to collect data as part of a longitudinal study with a team.

Findings from this study contributed to a growing body of research that describes how policy is lived and negotiated dialogically in practice within learning communities like Maplewood Elementary School (Franzak, 2008; Maniates & Mahiri, 2011; Mills, 2011; Spencer, Falchi, Ghiso, 2011). As new national education policies like the Common Core State Standards roll out, it is more important than ever to continue to examine and understand how teachers make sense of and negotiate policies as they consider them in conjunction with their personal beliefs, professional histories and knowledge, experiences in the classroom, and knowledge of the children in their classrooms.
The teachers in this study called for their district to “just let them teach.” This plea rings true with other teachers with whom I have discussed this research since I conducted it at Maplewood. Around the new national policy of Common Core State Standards, teachers are particularly struggling to negotiate standards they believe support their teaching fewer concepts deeply over time and a testing system that continues to evaluate students on broad knowledge. Now more than ever, teachers, administrators, and schools of education need to understand the policy landscape and then use that knowledge to help all educators make sound decisions, informed by diverse bodies of research, that will improve their instruction and raise student academic achievement. Further research studies on strategies teacher educators, principals, and teacher allies of all kinds take to support teachers’ negotiations is essential in this process.

**Conclusion**

In this study, teachers’ descriptions of their experiences with policy offered important opportunities to understand how one group of teachers experienced pressure to implement programs with fidelity, meet accountability requirements, and accelerate student learning. Teachers, like Ms. Jefferson, felt they often taught against a tide of commercial literacy programs and accountability measures aimed at shifting their role from one of a professional to a technician. In the role of technician, Ms. Jefferson did not feel that the district credited her with her students’ success and she was led to believe that if the students did well on the standardized tests, it was not because of her, but because of the programs the district put in place to raise students’ achievement. Other teachers, like Ms. Brown, felt that the repetitive professional development sessions around commercial curricula distracted them from the important work they needed to do to teach students.
Within the social setting of Maplewood Elementary School, the principal, Ms. Johnson was able to mediate the extent to which programs and policies drove instruction. But there were, nonetheless, programs and policies that district administrators like Dr. Bridges, and the consultants she sent to schools, expected teachers to pay attention to. Ms. Johnson, and her teachers, had to engage with ongoing NCLB demands to make *Adequate Yearly Progress*, use *scientifically based* reading practices, implement *Response to Intervention*, use a formative assessment system (*Dominie*) largely as a summative assessment, examine assessment data to guide their instruction, and grapple with how to negotiate their use of commercial programs, whether they liked them or not.

Teachers also had to make sense of practices the district defined as key components of a balanced approach to literacy such as read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, reading assessment, word study, independent reading, and conversation. In the midst of these tensions, teachers wished they could get about the business of teaching.

In order to improve teacher quality and raise students’ achievement, the goal of each of the policies in this study, it seems clear that administrators and teacher educators must help teachers become professionals who are able to negotiate the complex policy environment in which they teach, through a deepened knowledge of policy, research underpinning those policies, and their role within the policy process. In helping teachers and administrators understand and thereby navigate the policy landscape, policymakers position teachers to advocate for their practice and for their students. If teachers feel valued in their roles at all school-system levels, perhaps teachers’ calls of “Just let us teach!” will switch to calls to “come help us teach” and through increased collaboration administrators and teachers can further raise student achievement.
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Appendix A: Definition of Terms

A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform: A 1983 federal report under President Ronald Regan that delineated numerous ways the United States education system was failing.

Academic Standards: Benchmarks for student achievement. Benchmarks or state standards have historically been set by states, but are now being set at the national level under the Common Core State Standards, a federal effort to bring state curricula in alignment with one another.

Academic Vocabulary: Content specific vocabulary (such as trapezoid in geometry), which is necessary for communicating about that content area.

Accelerated Reader: A commercial literacy program, developed and marketed by its parent company, Renaissance Learning, which encourages students to read leveled books and take a computerized comprehension test on each book read to earn points intended to motivate readers.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): A NCLB mandate for students to progress toward meeting academic standards set by states.

Anchor Charts: Charts that record the learning and thinking around instruction in a classroom. Teachers hang these so they become resources to support students on-going work.

Appropriation: The act of taking on a policy, changing it, and making it one’s own to meet local needs.

SCIRA: (pseudonym) State Council International Reading Association.

Balanced Literacy: Defined diversely, balanced literacy is a political term constructed to bridge whole language approach to literacy learning and phonics in isolation approaches to literacy learning.

Basal Textbooks: Typically, in regards to literacy, a basal text is an anthology of narratives, poem, and other genres. Each student is provided with the same basal reader. Teacher Guides accompany basal texts and often include pre-written lessons to guide teachers through instruction around the reader.
Books and Bites: A Title I supported program run by parent educators in schools who provide demonstrations of ways families can support literacy practices at home.

Breakthrough to Literacy: A district wide early childhood education reading curriculum. The district adopted *Breakthrough to Literacy* for teachers to use in child development and kindergarten classes. The Breakthrough to Literacy curriculum consisted of whole-group instruction with a Book-of-the-Week or Feature Book, teacher-directed small group instruction, student-centered instruction including: individualized software instruction, listening and reading, expressive arts and writing, and writing instruction and workshop. Breakthrough to Literacy conceptualized each of these components as embedded within the ongoing professional development of teachers. Teacher guides accompanied the curriculum, Book-of-the-Week, and classroom management tools.

Buddy Reading: A strategy to support readers in which students read a text with partner.

Common Assessments: Weekly summative assessments that align with academic standards in district pacing guides. Teachers construct assessments to be similar to state standardized tests in order to prepare students for end of the year assessments.

Cueing Systems: Identified by Kenneth Goodman (1969), cueing systems are bodies of information readers orchestrate to make meaning of text and include:

Syntactic cues: Cues related to the structure and grammar of a text

Semantic: Cues related to the meaning of the text

Grapho-phonemic: Cues related to the letter/sound relations in words in the text

Pragmatic: Cues that relate to a readers’ prior knowledge the context that supports the content in the text

Cultural Deficit Model: The act of explaining students’ lack of achievement by situating the problem within the students’ culture, family or community.

Cultural Asset Model: The act of recognizing that students’ communities and culture contribute to their literacy development—and learning in general—in meaningful, but often unrecognized, ways.

Curriculum Audits: District evaluations of teacher practice in which a team of evaluators visits a teacher’s classroom during instructional time to assess teacher efficacy.

Data-Driven Instruction: The act of using data (anecdotal, formative, summative etc.) to inform instruction. There is a strong emphasis on data-driven instruction based on standardized test results.
Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP): A federal agency that oversees special education instruction in the United States. OESP approved Response to Intervention as a practice to identify students for special education services.

Dialogism: The act addressing and answering by a speaker and listener—a process through which meaning is made.

Dominie Reading and Writing Assessment Portfolio: A reading assessment developed by Diane Deford. “Based on National Reading and Writing Standards and Best Practices Research, the Dominie Reading & Writing Assessment Portfolios feature original fiction and nonfiction stories, leveled books, rubrics for story writing and reading fluency, case studies, essential phonics and spelling components, convenient reproducible assessment forms, and a scoring guide for spelling accuracy that is based on an analysis of developmental spelling tests,” (Pearson, 2013, http://www.pearsonschool.com/index.cfm?locator=PSZu68&PMDBSUBCATEGORYID=28139&PMDBSITEID=2781&PMDBSUBSOLUTIONID=&PMDBSOLUTIONID=6724&PMDBSUBJECTAREAID=&PMDBCATEGORYID=3289&PMDbProgramID=19381)

Empowering Writers: Empowering Writers is an educational publisher and professional development provider specializing in the instruction of writing (Empoweringwriters.com, 2012).

Exemplary Writing: A state level writing initiative that trains and encourages teachers to use exemplary writing practices in state schools to work toward earning Exemplary Writing status as a school.

Fidelity of Implementation: The act of implementing a policy or program according to the intent of its developers.

Focused Targeted Instruction: A component of Response to Intervention in which students receive additional instruction, beyond classroom instruction, in an area of need to accelerate students learning.

Four Blocks: The Four Block Literacy Model (Cunningham, P. & Hall, D., 2002) is a comprehensive framework for reading and writing that includes guided reading, self-selected reading, writing, and working with words.

Funds of Knowledge: A term coined by researchers Luis Moll, Cathy Amanti, Deborah Neff, and Norma Gonzalez (2001) “to refer to the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p. 133).
**Guided Reading:** A literacy method used to provide literacy demonstrations to a small group of readers often using a shared text.

**HighScope:** An early literacy curriculum based on child-centered and teacher guided work with an emphasis on “active participatory learning,” (HighScope, 2012, n.p.).

**In Need of Improvement:** A NCLB designation, which identifies a school as not having made Adequate Yearly Progress toward state academic standards for two years in a row.

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):** A law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities. (US Department of Education, idea.ed.gov)

**Independent/Self-selected Reading:** A literacy practice that support students independent reading of texts to support literacy development.

**Leveled Texts:** Texts that are placed on a scale of difficulty based on text features.

**Marzano Research Laboratory:** A research group that supports and disseminates the work of Dr. Marzano as professional development for teachers.

**Measure of Academic Benchmark (MAP):** A benchmark test, given each marking period, to assess the academic achievement of students. At Maplewood, the benchmark test also served as the school’s universal screening for RtI.

**National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE):** A professional organization that support the work of teachers of English through professional publications, conferences, professional development, professional networking, and the development of a national literacy platform.

**National Reading Panel (NRP):** A panel convened by the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, to conduct a research assessment on reading instruction approaches.

**National Writing Project (NWP):** A network of sites, anchored at colleges and universities and serving teachers across disciplines and at all levels, early childhood through university. The NWP provides professional development, develops resources, generates research, and acts on knowledge to improve the teaching of writing and learning in schools and communities. (National Writing Project, http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/doc/about.csp)
**No Child Left Behind (NCLB):** A bi-partisan, federal education act, enacted under George W. Bush, which re-authorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), is “an Act to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind,” (US Department of Education, http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/beginning.html)

**Non-negotiable Literacy Practices:** District literacy practices, which the district required teachers and schools to implement as indicated in teachers’ literacy support documents.

**Pacing Guide:** A district document that delineates, which state academic standards must be taught on a per week basis, according to a district-determined timeline.

**Phonics:** A method of literacy instruction that emphasizes decoding words based on letter sound relationships.

**Phonemic Awareness:** The ability to hear individual phonemes in language.

**Plan-Do-Check-Act:** A district, four-step process to manage continuous improvement.

**Positivism:** A philosophy of science that authoritative knowledge can only be derived from sensory experiences, logic, and mathematics.

**Principles of Learning:** The Principles of Learning are condensed theoretical statements summarizing decades of learning research. They are designed to help educators analyze the quality of instruction and opportunities for learning that they offer to students. (Institute for Learning, http://ifl.lrdc.pitt.edu/ifl/index.php/resources/principles_of_learning)

**Progress Monitoring:** A component of Response to Intervention in which an assessor evaluates a student or students’ academic performance to quantify their rate of improvement toward academic standards.

**Read aloud:** A literacy practice in which a book is read aloud.

**Reading First:** A federal reading program focused on, “putting proven methods of early reading instruction in classrooms. Through Reading First, states and districts receive support to apply scientifically based reading research—and the proven instructional and assessment tools consistent with this research—to ensure that all children learn to read well by the end of third grade.” (US Department of Education, http://www2.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/index.html)

**Reading Recovery:** Reading Recovery is a short-term intervention of one-to-one tutoring for low-achieving first graders. The intervention is most effective when it is available to all students who need it and is used as a supplement to good classroom teaching.
Spring Conference for Literacy Leaders: A district professional development institute for district reading teachers.

Response to Intervention (RtI): A multi-tiered instructional approach in which students are assessed to determine the extent to which they are meeting instructional goals, provided additional tiered instruction to support academic progress.

Running Record: Developed by Marie Clay (2002), a running record is a reading assessment that allows an assessor to listen to a child read, record reading behaviors, and analyze those behaviors to gain insight into a student’s reading process and offer appropriate instruction to support a student’s reading development.

Scientifically Based Reading Research (SBRR): As defined by NCLB, research that uses experimental or quasi-experimental designs.

Shared Reading: Developed by Don Holdaway (1979), shared reading in an instructional practice in which a group of readers shares in a reading—reads in unison—a common text.

Sight Words: Words that children in primary grades or taught to read “on sight.”

State Reading Initiative (SRI-pseudonym): A collaborative endeavor with NCTE to offer multi-year, site-based, state-wise staff development in literacy.

Systematic Instruction of Phoneme Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words (SIPPS): “The SIPPS (Systematic Instruction in Phoneme Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words) program, a [program] for struggling readers, is a decoding curriculum that teaches the prerequisites for developing reading fluency and comprehension,” (Developmental Studies Center, http://www.devstu.org/sipps)

Soar to Success: Instructional software that provides elementary students with, “adaptive, personalized paths for mastery of essential reading and math concepts and delivers outcome-based data to inform educational decision making,” (Pearson School, http://www.pearsonschool.com/index.cfm?locator=PSZkAe)

Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD): “When a child does not achieve adequately for the child’s age or to meet State-approved grade-level standards in one or more of the following areas, when provided with learning experiences and instruction appropriate for the child’s age or State-approved grade-level standards OR The child does not make
sufficient progress to meet age or State-approved grade-level standards in one or more of the areas identified in 34 CFR 300.309(a)(1) when using a process based on the child’s response to scientific, research-based intervention; or the child exhibits a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in performance, achievement, or both, relative to age, State-approved grade-level standards, or intellectual development, that is determined by the group to be relevant to the identification of a specific learning disability, using appropriate assessments.” (IDEA, http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cdynamic%2CTopicalBrief%2C23%2C)

SuccessMaker: A commercial computerized reading program that provides learning outcome-based data to schools and districts to support curricular decision.

State Academic Challenge Test [SACT-pseudonym]: The state’s end of year state academic assessment test.

What Works Clearinghouse (WWC): A national clearinghouse for research-based practices considered “to work.”

Whole Language: A continually developing philosophy, “that draws upon scientifically based research from many areas including psycholinguistics, socio-psycholinguistics, linguistics and cognitive psychology, and from on-going classroom research. It is a set of underlying principles that inform teaching practice. It is not only a philosophy of language learning; it also embraces a progressive ideology based on the goals of democracy and social justice: as such it embraces all learning.” (NCTE, Whole Language Umbrella, http://www.ncte.org/wlu/beliefs)

Word Wall: A literacy tool, consisting of words place on a wall or other surface—typically organized alphabetically—which serves as a resource to readers and writers as they engage in their work in the classroom.
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Possible Questions for State and District administrators:

- What is important to you as an administrator in terms of literacy?
- What practices are important to you? Which ones are not? Why?
- What is the history of literacy policy in the state or district?
- What are the literacy policies that affect the state or district you now?
- Where do the policies come from?
- When are they helpful?
- When are they intrusive?
- What is your role in relation to literacy policies?
- What is the role of other policy stakeholders in relation to literacy policy at state, district, and local levels?
- How do you, or can you, take literacy policies and make them your own in the state, school?
- What say do you have in the literacy policies that inform practice in the state, district?
- What is your overall approach to policy at the state, district and local levels? How does policy work in these settings? What is policies purpose in these settings?
- What say do you have in changing policies or refusing them in the state, district, schools?
- What say to principals, teachers, parents, students have in changing or refusing particular literacy policies?
• Do you have, or have you ever had, a role in developing policy? Explain role. Describe the policies you develop or developed.

Possible Questions for the principal:

• What is important to you as a principal in terms of literacy?
• What practices are important to you? Which ones are not? Why?
• What is the history of literacy policy in the school?
• What are the literacy policies that affect you now?
• Where do the policies come from?
• When are they helpful?
• When are they intrusive?
• What is your role in relation to literacy policies?
• How do you take literacy policies and make them your own in the school?
• What say do you have in the literacy policies that inform practice in the school?
• What is your overall approach to policy in relation to the school, the district, the state? How does policy work in these settings? What is policies purpose?
• What say do you have in changing policies or refusing them? Why?
• Do you have, or have you ever had, a role in developing policy? Explain role. Describe the policies you develop or developed.

Possible questions for teachers:

• Describe your practices.
• What is important to you as a teacher of literacy?
• What practices are important to you? Which ones are not? Why?
• What is your personal history with literacy policies as a teacher?

• What are the literacy policies that affect you now?

• Where do the policies come from?

• When are they helpful?

• When are they intrusive?

• What is your role in relation to literacy policies?

• How do you, or can you, take literacy policies and make them your own in the school?

• What say do you have in the literacy policies that inform practice in the school?

• What say do you have in changing policies or refusing them? Why?

• Do you have, or have you ever had, a role in developing policy. Explain role. Describe the policies you develop or developed.

Possible questions for Reading Teacher:

• Describe your practices.

• What is important to you as a teacher of literacy?

• What practices are important to you? Which ones are not? Why?

• What is your personal history with literacy policies as a teacher?

• What are the literacy policies that affect you now?

• Where do the policies come from?

• When are they helpful?

• When are they intrusive?

• How do you support literacy practices in the school community?
• How do you take literacy policies and make them your own in the school?

• What say do you have in the literacy policies that inform practice in the school?

• What is your overall approach to policy in relation to the school, the district, the state? How does policy work in these settings? What is policies purpose?

• What say do you have in changing policies or refusing them? Why?

• Do you have, or have you ever had, a role in developing policy? Explain role. Describe the policies you develop or developed
Appendix C: List of Federal Policy Documents Analyzed

- Letters between State Department of Education and Department of Education
- Department of Education Website
- NCBL Legislation
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) documents
- What Works Clearinghouse website
Appendix D: List of State Policy Documents Analyzed

- State Department Website
- Letters between the State Department of Education and the Department of Education
- Workshop Handouts (e.g., Exemplary Writing Handouts)
- PowerPoint presentation slides
Appendix E: List of District Documents Analyzed

- District Website

- District Professional Development Literature (e.g., Dominie and RTI binders)

- Email correspondence to teachers

- Letters from district to school and families

- PowerPoint presentation slides
Appendix F: List of School Policy Documents Analyzed

• School Website

• Commercial Literacy Curricula and Guides

• Email correspondence between district and teachers

• District Support Documents

• Faculty Meeting Handouts

• Lobby literature

• Teachers’ instructional materials (Worksheets)
Appendix G: Consent Form

I agree to participate in a dissertation research study examining the way policy stakeholders make meaning of literacy policy and how those meanings shape the ways they appropriate policies in their day-to-day practice, which is being conducted by Cindy Anne Morton-Rose, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Language and Literacy, University of South Carolina, under the direction of Dr. Susi Long, Department of Language and Literacy, and Dr. Kara Brown, Department of Educational Research and Foundations. I understand that I do not have to take part in this study; I can stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

1.) The purpose of this study is to understand how policy stakeholders make meaning of literacy policies and how those meanings shape how stakeholders appropriate literacy policies in their day-to-day practice.

2.) I (the participant) will not benefit directly from this research. However, my participation in this research may lead to information that will deepen the understanding of how policy functions in the state, district, and schools.

3.) If I participate in this study I will be asked to:
   A. Allow the researcher to use notes and information gathered from observations of my practices as data.
   B. Agree to be interviewed about my experiences with literacy policies and to have those interviews recorded and transcribed and used as data.

4.) I understand that I will have an opportunity to read and respond to interview transcripts and make additional comments or revisions.

5.) No discomforts or stresses are expected during this process.

6.) No risks are expected during this process.

7.) No deception will be involved in this study.

8.) My identity will be kept confidential in all resultant manuscripts by the use of a pseudonym. I understand the researcher will keep my audio tapes indefinitely unless I indicate otherwise. The only people who will know that I am a research subject are Cindy Morton-Rose. No information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission, except if necessary to protect my rights or welfare (for example, if I am injured and need emergency care); or if required by law.

9.) I can ask further questions about the research by contacting Cindy Morton-Rose at xxx-xxxx.

By signing this form I agree that I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Signature of Participant______________________ Date__________________

Signature of Researcher______________________ Date__________________
Appendix H: Summer Reading Letter and Reading Tips

May 5, 2010

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Experts agree that children who read during the summer months keep their reading skills sharp and are better prepared for the challenges of the next grade level. With this in mind, District One is happy to provide you with the enclosed books and activity sheets designed to motivate students to read this summer.

This book pack will also provide you with an opportunity to spend quality time with your child while you help to build their comprehension, vocabulary, and critical thinking skills. The tips for families listed on the reverse side of this letter provide strategies and suggestions to help you make the most of summer reading opportunities. There are lots of fun ways to extend the learning and incorporate reading into vacation time!

In addition to the books and activity sheets, be sure to check out the Scholastic Summer Challenge website at www.scholastic.com/summer for free summer reading resources, including games, message boards, book logs, a book trivia Web cast, and information about reading for the world record.

I hope that by exposing children to exciting books written by popular authors, featuring a wide range of engaging characters, we can encourage all students to become lifelong readers and learners.

Sincerely,

Superintendent of Schools
Summer Reading Tips for Families

1. **Lead by example.**
   Read the newspaper at breakfast, pick up a magazine at the doctor's office, and stuff a paperback in your beach bag. If kids see the adults around them reading often, they will understand that literature can be a fun and important part of their summer days.

2. **Talk it up.**
   Talking with your kids about what you have read also lets them know that reading is an important part of your life. Tell them why you liked a book, what you learned from it, or how it helped you - soon they might start doing the same.

3. **Help kids find time to read.**
   Summer camp, music lessons, baseball games, and videos are all fun things kids like to do during the summer. However, by the end of the day, children may be too tired to pick up a book. When planning summer activities with children, remember to leave some time in their schedules for reading. Some convenient times may be before bedtime or over breakfast.

4. **Relax the rules for summer.**
   During the school year, children have busy schedules and often have required reading for classes. Summer is a time when children can read what, when, and how they please. Don't set daily minute requirements or determine the number of pages they should read. Instead, make sure they pick up books for fun and help find ways for them to choose to read on their own. You may even want to make bedtime a little bit later if you find that your child can't put down a book.

5. **Have plenty of reading material around.**
   Books aren't the only things that kids can read for fun. Be sure to have newspapers, magazines, and informational material on hand that might spark the interest of a young reader.

6. **Use books to break the boredom.**
   Without the regular school regimen, adults and kids need more activities to fill the hours. Books that teach kids how to make or do something are a great way to get kids reading and keep them occupied. Don't forget to take your kids' favorite books along on long road trips.

7. **Read aloud with kids.**
   Take your children to see a local storyteller or be one yourself. The summer months leave extra time for enthusiastic read-alouds with children no matter what their age. Don't forget to improvise different voices or wear a silly hat to make the story that much more interesting!

*Reading is Fundamental, Inc. (RIF) 2010*
Appendix I: District Corrective Action Letter

Office of the Superintendent

November 23, 2010

Dear Parent,

Based upon the guidelines set forth in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the [Redacted] Public School District has been identified as in Corrective Action of District Improvement for the 2010-2011 school year. The district has received this classification because it failed to meet at least one student achievement goal on its standardized testing for four consecutive years. The Department of Education will work with [Redacted] to ensure that actions implemented in 2010-2011 are conducive to effective improvement efforts already established and are in line with the reform strategies outlined in No Child Left Behind.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is used to measure how much a district has improved in reaching the student achievement goal of No Child Left Behind. The AYP goal of No Child Left Behind is for each district to make yearly gains to show that all students will score met or exemplary on PASS and proficient or advanced on HSAP no later than the end of the 2013-2014 school year. This is a very high standard, and the district is working diligently to meet the goals set forth by the legislation.

The district met 29 of the 33 AYP objectives. The district did not meet the AYP goal for 2009-2010 school year in the following student performance categories:

- **English Language Arts**: Disabled Group.
- **Math**: African-American, Disabled, and Subsidized Meals Groups.

The following strategies have been implemented by the district to assist in meeting the AYP goal for the 2010-2011 school year:

- The district is fully implementing the district’s ELA and Math instructional plans.
- The district is utilizing 10% of the district’s Title I allocation for high-quality, ongoing professional development.
- The district has implemented Dominie, an assessment in grades K-2 that will assist teachers in teaching to individual needs to have all students reading on grade level.
- The district has implemented MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) to determine the reading and math levels of all students in grades 2-9.
• The district has received and implemented a three year SIG -- School Improvement Grant for two high schools which will target improved student achievement in ELA and Math.
• The district has identified priority schools (2 High, 4 Middle) and is giving additional training and support for its administration, teachers and parents in TargetTeach/PALS.
• Each district teacher has the use of TargetTeach fundamental lessons and strategy lessons to assist in teaching the [REDACTED] effectively.
• Teams of district personnel are visiting each school to determine areas of strength and what professional development would be needed to increase student achievement.
• The district has implemented the SuccessMaker laptop at home program in twelve (12) Title I schools which have the highest free-reduced percentages to increase students’ fluency, comprehension and problem solving skills.

To support the district’s efforts in meeting the AYP goal, parents are asked to provide the following assistance:
• Monitor your child’s attendance at school.
• Help your child with his/her schoolwork.
• Volunteer in your child’s classroom.
• Participate in parent workshops and parent-teacher conferences.
• Stay informed about your child’s education.
• Serve on the School Improvement Council, Title I or School Improvement Planning Team.

[REDACTED] is working diligently to ensure each student is provided an effective and high quality education. If there are any questions concerning the District Improvement status for the 2010-2011 school year, please do not hesitate to contact [REDACTED] in Title I.

Sincerely, ...
Appendix J: Scientifically Based Research Brochure

What is Scientifically Based Research?

Using research and reason in education
BECOMING A WISE CONSUMER OF EDUCATION RESEARCH

More than ever, educators are expected to make decisions that guarantee quality instruction. As knowledge emerges, so do philosophies, opinions, and rhetoric about definitions of instructional excellence. From policy makers to classroom teachers, educators need ways to separate misinformation from genuine knowledge and to distinguish scientific research from poorly supported claims.

Effective teachers use scientific thinking in their classrooms all the time. They assess and evaluate student performance, develop Individual Education Plans, reflect on their practice, and engage in action research. Teachers use experimental logic when they plan for instruction: they evaluate their students' previous knowledge, construct hypotheses about the best methods for teaching, develop teaching plans based on those hypotheses, observe the results, and base further instruction on the evidence collected.

In short, teachers use the concepts of rigorous research and evaluation in profoundly practical ways.

Teachers can further strengthen their instruction and protect their students' valuable time in school by scientifically evaluating claims about teaching methods and recognizing quality research when they see it. This booklet, distilled from the monograph Using Research and Reason in Education: How Teachers Can Use Scientifically Based Research to Make Curricular and Instructional Decisions, provides a brief introduction to understanding and using scientifically based research.

The federal perspective on scientifically based research

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 encourages and, in some cases such as Reading First, requires the use of instruction based on scientific research. The emphasis on scientifically based research supports the consistent use of instructional methods that have been proven effective. To meet the NCLB definition of "scientifically based," research must:

- employ systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment;

- involve rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions;

- rely on measurements or observational methods that provide valid data across evaluators and observers, and across multiple measurements and observations; and

- be accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparatively rigorous, objective, and scientific review.
Appendix K: *Breakthrough to Literacy* Sample Unit

**Day 1**

**Oral Comprehension Strategies**

*Activate Prior Knowledge and Predict*

**Book-of-the-Week Bag Suggestions**
- seashells (or pictures of seashells)
- a selection of kindergarten books by Karen Gerald Wheaton
- story cards
- Take-Me-Home™ books

**Software Tip**
Tell the children that 100 Years is found on the Come Outside shelf in the software. Encourage them to read the book every day of the week.

**Elephant Letter**
Hi Friends,
This week, we will read about a boy who finds some interesting ways to hide. Elephants can't hide very easily, because we are so big. One of our legs is always sticking out!
Your Friend,
(elephant name)

---

1. **Engaging**—Getting Ready to Learn
   - Display seashells (or pictures of seashells). *What are these?*
   - When have you seen a seashell? *Where?*
   - Why don't all of these seashells look the same?

2. **Previewing**—Looking It Over Before Reading
   - Display the cover of the big book and introduce the title, author, and illustrator. *What is the author's name?*
   - What other books have we read by Karen Gerald Wheaton?
   - Display a selection of books by Karen Gerald Wheaton.
   - What do you see on the cover of this book? *What season is it? How can you tell?*

3. **Predicting**—Using What We Know to Make Guesses
   - Take a picture walk through the book. *What do you think the title of the book means?*
   - What do you think the book will be about? *What makes you think that?*

4. **Read Aloud—100 Years**

5. **Responding**—Sharing What We Think and Feel
   - What surprised you most about our Book-of-the-Week?

6. **Confirming**—Making Sure
   - Were our ideas about the book correct?

7. **Recognizing**—Knowing What It Is
   - Display the front cover and introduce the term *main character.* Who is the main character in the story? *What do we know about the boy?*
   - Display page 2. *Where is the boy playing in this illustration?*
   - Display page 6. *Where is he playing here?*
   - Display page 10. *Now where is he?*
Display page 14. How can you tell the boy is outdoors?
Display page 16. Where is he now?
As the children respond, help them locate the appropriate story card and attach it to a graphic organizer (web).

![Diagram of locations]

8 Considering Alternatives—Thinking about Other Ideas
Where are some other places the boy can play?
What are some places where you like to play?
Help the children add their ideas to the graphic organizer.

9 Distribute Take-Me-Home Books
Explain to the children that they will be reading, drawing, and writing in their Take-Me-Home books every day of the week. After helping them write their names in the books, collect the books and tell the children that at the end of the week, they will take their books home to share with their families.

10 Home Conversation #1
Read aloud the Home Conversation. Distribute photocopies to the children for family discussion.
Ask your family members where they liked to play when they were little. Tell them about the places in the Book-of-the-Week.

Mystery Message
There's rain on my ___ and mud on my _____.
Have the children identify whether words or letters are missing from the Mystery Message. Brainstorm words that would make sense (e.g., hair, head, face, boots, shoes, feet) and write them on chart paper. Provide the clue that the mystery words name parts of the body, then ask the children to identify words naming parts of the body from the list. Provide the clue that the first word begins with an /h/ and the second with an /f/ and ask the children what sound each of those letters makes. Discuss which words solve the mystery.
Appendix L: Sample First Grade ELA Pacing Assessment Guide

**GRADE 1 English Language Arts**

**INSTRUCTIONAL PACING GUIDE**

**Based on 110 Minutes of Instruction Daily**

**NOTE:** Reading, Vocabulary, Writing & Research Indicators that should be throughout the marking period.

### Unit One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATES TAUGHT</th>
<th>LESSONS</th>
<th>SUGGESTED PACING</th>
<th>RESOURCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FIRST NINE WEEKS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit One</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>LG</td>
<td>1.1.2</td>
<td>Use pictures and words to make and review predictions about a given literacy text.</td>
<td>ELA Literacy Unit 1 - &quot;R-Selections Lesson Guide&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.1.3</td>
<td>Generate a reading list that identifies the characters and the setting and links this to a roleplay.</td>
<td>Scholastic Books: Bickman &amp; the Elephant, The Company of Marmalade, The Furry Princess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.1.4</td>
<td>Use color and times to decode and generate words.</td>
<td>Suggested Literature: Fire Station Cat by V-Y Woo-Sum is a Mouse, Too Many Turtles, Jamaica's Find</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.1.5</td>
<td>Use knowledge of letter names and their corresponding sounds to spell words independently.</td>
<td>Empowering Writers: Getting Ready to Write</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.1.6</td>
<td>Spell three- and four-letter short vowel and long vowel words.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2.0</td>
<td>Use pictures and words to construct meaning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2.1</td>
<td>Distinct among letters, words, and sentences.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2.2</td>
<td>Use grammatical conventions of written Standard American English, including:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2.3</td>
<td>Place the subject in the first word of a sentence, and - proper nouns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2.4</td>
<td>Use the correct use of written Standard American English, including:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2.5</td>
<td>Couple narrativé (first name, first name, and journal entry) about people, places, actions, or things.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Unit Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATES TAUGHT</th>
<th>LESSONS</th>
<th>SUGGESTED PACING</th>
<th>RESOURCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administrative Teacher-made Interim Assessment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UNIT TWO</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LG</td>
<td>2.1.1</td>
<td>Summarize the main idea and supporting evidence in a literary text during classroom discussions.</td>
<td>ELA Literacy Unit 2 - &quot;R-Selections Lesson Guide&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.1.2</td>
<td>Use relevant details in summarizing stories and mad aloud.</td>
<td>Scholastic Books: A Walk in the Park, The Art Lesson, Ben's Treatement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.1.3</td>
<td>Create responses to literature through a variety of methods (for example, writing, creative expression, and the visual arts and performance arts).</td>
<td>Suggested Literature: A Chair for My Mother, Akesha (Lobel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.1.4</td>
<td>Use vocabulary acquired from a variety of sources.</td>
<td>Online Resources: Common Core - Scott-Foresman Leveled Readers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.1.5</td>
<td>Distinct among letters, words, and journal entry about people, places, actions, or things.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix M: Sample Model Lesson

English Language Arts Unit of Study
Literary Text ~ Unit 3

Teacher: Ramona Quimby, Age 8 by Beverly Cleary
Grade Level: 3rd
Duration: 7 Days

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intent of the Indicators</th>
<th>Informal Assessment</th>
<th>Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students use figurative language devices.</td>
<td>See and hear students: Distinguish between and use similes, personification, and onomatopoeia.</td>
<td>Students will use onomatopoeia and similes in writing a comic strip.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students read and spell high frequency words encountered in text and when writing.</td>
<td>See and hear students: Use high frequency words.</td>
<td>Students will be able to use high frequency words in writing as well as read them from the word wall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students use strategies to analyze the use of author’s craft.</td>
<td>See and hear students: Change word usage and sentence structure to enhance the story.</td>
<td>Students will use trade books to categorize mood words. Students will create dialogues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students utilize strategies to determine the relationship among words.</td>
<td>See and hear students: Distinguish between and use synonyms, antonyms, and homonyms.</td>
<td>The students will use synonyms and antonyms in writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students create personal narratives that include characters and settings and follows a logical sequence.</td>
<td>See and hear students: Write complete sentences in their journals. Use a logical sequence in writing personal narratives.</td>
<td>Students will use &quot;WOW&quot; words and dialogues to enhance their writing pieces.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
English Language Arts Unit of Study

Text: Grade 3 Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Area: ELA</th>
<th>Grade Level: 3rd</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unit Title: Literary Text – Unit 3 (Ramona Quimby, Age 8) Chapters 6-9</td>
<td>Duration: 7 Days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Indicators:**

3-1.4 Distinguish among devices of figurative language (including simile, metaphor, personification, and hyperbole) and sound devices (including onomatopoeia and alliteration).

3-1.6 Analyze the effect of author's craft (for example, word choice and sentence structure) on the meaning of literary text.

3-1.11 Read independently for extended periods of time for pleasure.

3-1.4 Read high frequency words in texts.

3-3.3 Use context clues to determine the relationship between two or more words (including synonyms, antonyms, and homonyms).

3-3.6 Spell high frequency words.

3-4.2 Use complete sentences (including compound sentences) in writing.

3-4.6 Edit for the correct use of written Standard American English.

3-5.2 Create narratives that include characters and setting and follow a logical sequence.

**Unit Formatted Assessment (Create assessment prior to instruction)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Resources</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Suggested Read Aloud Texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>RCSD1 Lesson Guide</em></td>
<td><em>Journals</em></td>
<td><em>Ramona Quimby, Age 8</em> by Beverly Cleary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.readwritethink.org">www.readwritethink.org</a></td>
<td><em>List of high frequency words</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://library.thinkquest.org/12092">The Comprehensive Narrative Writing Guide</a></td>
<td><em>Dictionaries and thesauruses</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Comic Creator on</em> <a href="http://www.readwritethink.org">www.readwritethink.org</a></td>
<td><em>Index cards</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Scholastic library books</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Sentence strips</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Markers</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Examples of Comic strips</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Comic strip planning sheet</em></td>
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<td><em>Comic strip Rubric</em></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Office of Curriculum & Instruction

Literary Text – Unit 3 August, 2010 pg. 1

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English Language Arts Unit of Study
Literary Text ~ Unit 3

Teacher: Grade 3 Teachers

Date: __________

Lesson Summary:

The lesson focuses on using author's craft to develop the story. Using word choice to enhance the story and personal writing will be entwined to show students how another author's work can help them write their own pieces.

Introduction:

Introduce author's craft by saying, "A skilled author uses many tools and different techniques of language and storytelling to craft a story. These tools and techniques help develop a unique and detailed story. Two of the tools we will use are word choice to create moods and dialogue. Today, we will focus on word choice." Ask the students to think of words that describe moods and record them. Give each student a trade book and have him or her find any mood words that they can. Add them to the list for later use in writing. Ask the students to categorize them into "WOW" words and "Blah" words. Explain that writers like to use "WOW" Words to make the readers feel what the characters are feeling. The students will be instructed to use "WOW" words in their writing later in the lesson.

Direct Instruction:

The teacher will introduce the use of tableau (posing to enact a scene from a story or posing to show feelings.) The teacher can show the video from www.teachertube.com while reading the text and stopping to discuss the possible scenarios for each tableau viewed. After viewing the video, the teacher will give each literature circle an index card with a mood scene on it. The circles will be given approximately five minutes to decide how to act their scene in a tableau. After they practice, each circle will present their tableau to the class. The class will guess what they think is happening in the scene (including the mood word used).

Guided and Independent Practice (Active Engagement):

The teacher will read aloud chapter six of Ramona Quimby, Age 8 by Beverly Cleary. As the chapter is read, stop to discuss the mood words: sober, serious, cheerful, comfortable, funny, concerned, caring, terrible, miserable, horrible, dreadful, awful, shamed, shock, calm, weak, wavery, feeble, exhausted, grateful, worry, gentle, important, doubtful, pitiful, surprised, sneezy, and anxious. The teacher will guide the students through the facial expressions that occur when these moods are expressed.
English Language Arts Unit of Study
Literary Text ~ Unit 3

Teacher: Grade 3 Teachers

Date: __________

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

DAY 1

Subject: ELA

Unit of Study: Literary Unit 3 Ramona Quimby Age 8 by Beverly Cleary

Indicators:

- 3-1.6 Analyze the effect of author’s craft (for example, word choice and sentence structure) on the meaning of literary text.
- 3-1.11 Read independently for extended periods of time for pleasure.

Lesson Objectives:

- The students will be able to show how author’s craft affects the literary text.
- The students will read self-selected books for an extended period of time.

Essential Questions:

- How can word choice and sentence structure affect literary texts?

Lesson Resources and Materials:

- Ramona Quimby, Age 8 by Beverly Cleary - Chapter 6
- www.teachertube.com/viewVideo.php?video_id=79333&title=Reading_Comprehension_and_Tableau&vpkey=&album_id= (www.teachertube.com then search tableau and click on Tableau and Reading Comprehension
- index cards with teacher created scenes that show moods
- Index cards with scenes from Chapter 6 of Ramona Quimby, Age 8 by Beverly Cleary
- A variety of short trade books from the scholastic library
- The Comprehensive Narrative Writing Guide
English Language Arts Unit of Study
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The teacher will instruct the students to divide into their literature circles. Each circle will be given an index card with a particular scene to perform through a tableau. The circles will create a tableau and be given time to practice. The students will come together into the reading circle, and each circle will perform its scene. The other students will guess which scene from the story they are performing. After the tableaus have been performed, the teacher will have the students put the tableaus in order so that the story is in a logical order-using tableau. The teacher should take pictures to be posted on the bulletin board.

The teacher will choose a lesson from The Comprehensive Narrative Writing Guide—the Elaborative Details Section.

The students will Drop Everything and Read for 15-30 minutes while the teacher holds book chats. (Continued from the previous unit).

Reflection and Closure:

Each student will write a short description of the scene his or her literature circle performed through tableau using the appropriate mood words. The teacher will post the students' descriptions under the pictures of the scenes.
## Appendix N: Overview of Professional Texts at Maplewood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Content/Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Books on Phonics and Spelling</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Books on Vocabulary</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen, J. (1990). <em>Words, words, words: Teaching vocabulary in grades 4-12.</em> Portland, ME: Stenhouse</td>
<td>Seeks to provide strategies for teaching vocabulary, beyond weekly vocabulary tests, by activating and building background word knowledge and making word learning meaningful and lasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Books on Writing</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray, K. (1999). <em>Wondrous words: Writers and writing in the elementary school classroom.</em> Urbana, IL: NCTE</td>
<td>Describes concepts of how to teach students to write by studying other writers. Writing workshop model for supporting writers as they learn to read like writers and writer for a variety of authentic purposes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Books on Small Group Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opitz, M. (1999)</td>
<td>Flexible grouping in reading: Practical ways to help all students become better readers. New York, NY: Scholastic</td>
<td>Describes flexible groups arranged by interest, ability, student choice, random selection, and genre. Strategies include anticipation guides, cut aparts, response logs, think alouds, cooperative reading, book murals. Favors flexible grouping over ability grouping: The former allows teachers to demonstrate needed strategies to students and disband groups. The later leads teachers to label students and leave them in a single group all year.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Diller, D. (2007) | Making the most of small groups: Differentiation for all. Portland, ME: Stenhouse. | Focuses on teacher’s role in small group instruction and grapples with questions about:  
  - How to find time for groups  
  - How to organize for small groups  
  - How to form small groups, How to differentiate instruction to small groups. |

### Books on Comprehension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Appendix O: Non-negotiable Practices in the Physical Environment

Details of Consistency Rubric for Physical Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Environment</th>
<th>The physical environment includes space and materials that are inviting to students and instructional areas that support individual, small group and whole group instruction.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inconsistent</th>
<th>Consistent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The classroom is</td>
<td>- The room is sparsely or overly decorated with commercially or teacher-produced skills-based charts and materials. There is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not inviting; there</td>
<td>- The room is colorfully decorated and generally organized. There is some formulaic student work displayed; commercially or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are no displays of</td>
<td>- teacher-produced skills-based charts and materials. There is little or no existence of student work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student work. The</td>
<td>- student work displayed; commercially or teacher-produced skills-based charts and materials dominate the physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>room may be overly</td>
<td>- environment. There may be areas for differentiated instruction, but they are not used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cluttered or sparse.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Generally inviting room with some authentic student work displayed. The room is pleasantly arranged, but little thought has been</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- given to student access to materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Authentic student work is often visible. The room is pleasantly arranged. The room is pleasantly arranged to provide easy access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- to numerous and diverse materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- There are no areas</td>
<td>- Teacher provides differentiated instructional areas for small group reading or writing instruction, but they may not be used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for differentiated</td>
<td>- regularly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instruction.</td>
<td>- The differentiated instructional areas clearly function and are consistently used for both instructional and student purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Desk is organized to facilitate student-to-student interaction. Such interaction is sometimes encouraged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Desks are organized</td>
<td>- Desk is organized to facilitate student-to-student interaction. Such interaction is encouraged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in rows. Teacher's</td>
<td>- Teacher provides differentiated instructional areas for small group reading or writing instruction, but they are used regularly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>desk or work station</td>
<td>- The differentiated instructional areas clearly function and are consistently used for both instructional and student purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is prominent so that</td>
<td>- Desk is organized to facilitate student-to-student interaction. Such interaction is encouraged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instruction can be</td>
<td>- Teacher provides differentiated instructional areas for small group reading or writing instruction, but they may not be used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>delivered from one</td>
<td>- regularly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>location in the room.</td>
<td>- The differentiated instructional areas clearly function and are consistently used for both instructional and student purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(teacher to student).</td>
<td>- Desk is organized to facilitate student-to-student interaction. Such interaction is sometimes encouraged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Desks may be in</td>
<td>- Desk is organized to facilitate student-to-student interaction. Such interaction is encouraged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rows, in a U, or</td>
<td>- Teacher provides differentiated instructional areas for small group reading or writing instruction, but they may not be used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>groups of three or</td>
<td>- regularly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>four. Space may not</td>
<td>- The differentiated instructional areas clearly function and are consistently used for both instructional and student purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>foster student</td>
<td>- Desk is organized to facilitate student-to-student interaction. Such interaction is sometimes encouraged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interaction, and</td>
<td>- Desk is organized to facilitate student-to-student interaction. Such interaction is encouraged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student interaction</td>
<td>- Teacher provides differentiated instructional areas for small group reading or writing instruction, but they may not be used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is seldom encouraged.</td>
<td>- regularly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The differentiated instructional areas clearly function and are consistently used for both instructional and student purposes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taken From National Council Of Teachers Of English Publication

411
Non-Negotiable Expectations of Good Literacy Practice

- Classrooms are print and literacy rich.
- Teachers use the processes of literacy: reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, thinking, and communicating with multiple symbol systems.
- Teachers read to and with students on-grade-level texts.
- Teachers teach, model, and practice strategies of expert readers and writers with students.
- Students read independently with accountability.
- Teachers provide explicit word analysis instruction, including phonics, build word knowledge, and directly teach skills and strategies for word analysis (phonemic awareness, phonics, word recognition, structural analysis, context clues, and vocabulary).
- Teachers continuously monitor and assess the reading levels and progress of individual students. This ongoing evaluation directs and informs instruction.
- Teachers plan instruction considering three phases of reading: pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading.
- Students have extensive opportunities to read and write for a variety of purposes and to apply what is read every day. Students use writing, listening and speaking to organize their thinking and to reflect on these experiences.
- Students are taught and given opportunities to apply the following comprehension strategies to construct meaning: making and confirming predictions, visualizing, summarizing, drawing conclusions, making inferences, making connections, and self-monitoring understanding.
- Students are taught and given opportunities to use cognitive strategies to synthesize, analyze, evaluate and make applications to authentic situations.

Terms Every Instructional Leader Should Know

- Concepts About Print
- Cuing Strategies
- English Language Learner
- Invented Spelling
- Metacognition
- Miscue
- Miscue Analysis
- Print-Rich Environment
- Running Record
- Self-Monitor
- Word Walls

(See the "Richland One Glossary of Literacy Terms"-Appendix)
Print Rich Classroom Environment

A self selected reading area provides a variety of fiction and non-fiction books for students to choose from.

Literacy centers build alphabet knowledge, phonological and print awareness and provide choice for students.

Labeled containers and shelving using pictures and words provide organization and environmental print.

Tracking the day through a linear daily schedule shows and tells students what is happening and what will be happening next.
## Appendix P: Informal Observational Checklist

### Office of Curriculum and Instruction

**INFORMAL OBSERVATION CHECKLIST**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher:</th>
<th>School:</th>
<th>Class Size:</th>
<th>Grade Level/Subject:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Start Time:</th>
<th>End Time:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**INSTRUCTION**

- **Instruction is indicator-focused and standards-based.**
  - YES
  - NO

- **Daily lesson plans reflect instruction guided by data.**
  - YES
  - NO

- **Lesson is planned to promote rigor.**
  - YES
  - NO

**THE TEACHER:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NO</th>
<th>IN</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Began instruction with strategies to motivate students and activate prior knowledge.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Provided direct instruction (i.e., explaining, showing examples, modeling/doing practice, checking for understanding, guided practice, application, conferencing, appropriate use of technology).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Asked varied levels of questions to promote thinking.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Used flexible groupings to promote learning (small group, cooperative group, paired or individual).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Communicates expectations for students who have/have not completed assigned work. Work should relate to current lesson objectives and address the needs of individual students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Maintains a classroom that reflects an appropriate print-rich environment, including display of students' written work and projects. The classroom arrangement is functional.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Treats students and adults with courtesy and respect.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Uses all available instructional time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**THE STUDENTS:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NO</th>
<th>IN</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Participate in tasks that are developmentally appropriate and reflect the current curriculum.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Are actively engaged in meaningful instructional activities which may include graphic organizers, kits, manipulatives, models, technology and/or demonstrations.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Participate in guided and/or independent practice activities, small group activities, cooperative learning groups, centers, individual conferencing, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Demonstrate understanding of the intent of the indicator.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Begin each task in a timely manner and remain on task for the duration of scheduled instructional time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Follow established classroom routines and procedures.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Ask questions, share ideas and participate in classroom discussions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Participate in an activity that allows them to summarize, review or reflect upon the lesson objective (closure).</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Observer's Signature**

This observation is reflective of an observation visit and may not be indicative of the daily teaching and learning practices.
Appendix Q: Principal’s Walkthrough Notes

Principal First Week Walkthrough
August 16-August 20
2010-2011

Notes from Observations:

Positives:
• Students were interactive and working independently of teacher's expectations.
• Saw teachers reviewing homework which means teachers issued homework; kids are eager and wanted
more from the teacher.
• Tone seemed calm and peaceful with some teachers.
• Materials were ready and available for students.
• Some classes working very hard and kids very engaged.
• Modeling in one class.

Observed: (Let's Work On...)

• Non-attentive children, not engaged in instruction. Teachers remaining stationary in the room asking
global questions, receiving global responses and not checking to make sure that there was some
understanding. Too many passive children waiting for others.
• Pacing of content too quick. Introduction of vocabulary and symbols must be posted as a reference
that students can reference later.
- Teachers are not referencing indicators, no bridging back to indicators. Did not go back and refer back to indicators. Written and posted but not referenced.
- Teachers need to train students with all procedures. Go over every day as this will decrease instructional interruptions.
- Not teaching to every child.
- Anchor charts need to be posted in rooms
- Heading expectations on papers? Did not see proper headings on papers.
- Teachers repetitious; seemed like students were not taking teacher seriously.
- Make sure all students are authentically engaged in lesson.
- Make sure all students are sitting attentively and monitor the temperature of the classroom so that it is at a comfort level for the students.
- Homework should be given every night.
- Preparations for lessons need to be ready and available for kids. Artifact go beyond regular paper and workbooks. Bring in other resources like newspapers, magazines, etc., to make home/school connection.
- Plan questions with preparation that should be visible to the eye. (At least 5 to start)
- When students are engaged in professional development via consultant, interventionists, reading teachers, etc. teachers must be actively engaged with the students. The primary purpose is for both the students and the teacher and it is important for the students to see the teacher involved as well.
Appendix R: Ms. Berling’s Summary of U45 Website Vocabulary Statistics

Academic Vocabulary

What is Academic Vocabulary?
Academic vocabulary is the vocabulary critical to understanding the concepts of the content taught in schools. In identifying academic vocabulary for instruction teachers must remember that not all terms are of equal importance.

- Some terms are critically important.
- Some terms are useful but not critical.
- Some terms are interesting but not useful.

Staff of U-46 developed a “draft” list of academic vocabulary words that students are expected to understand and use at each grade level. You can find the “draft” list on the U-46 web site.

Why teach Academic Vocabulary?
According to Marzano (2005) the strongest action a teacher can take to ensure that students have the academic background knowledge to understand the content they will encounter is providing them with direct instruction in these terms. When students understand these terms, it is easier for them to understand the information they will read and hear in class.

Factoids

- Vocabulary assessed in first grade predicted over 30% of reading comprehension variance in 11th grade (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1977).
- While four encounters with a word did not reliably improve reading comprehension, 12 encounters did (McKeown, Beck, Omanson, and Pople, 1985).
- One of the most critical services a teacher can provide, particularly for students who do not come from academically advantaged backgrounds, is systematic instruction in important academic terms (Marzano and Pickering, 2005).
- The same student placing at the 50th percentile in reading comprehension, with no direct vocabulary instruction, placed at the 83rd percentile when provided specific instruction in academic vocabulary (Stahl and Fairbanks, 1986).

ELL Students and Academic Vocabulary

Marzano and Pickering (2005), emphasize the importance of teaching ELL academic vocabulary in a systematic approach. They suggest that vocabulary programs that emphasize high-frequency terms fail to provide the background knowledge needed for student success in the content areas. Students learn high-frequency words through wide reading of fiction and informational text.

Six step process for teaching Academic Vocabulary

The process of teaching Academic Vocabulary includes six steps. The focus of steps 1-3 is on introducing new terms and steps 4-6 offer ways to review the terms providing students with a deeper insights.

1. Provide a description, explanation, or example of the new term. If working with ELL students the teacher should first provide the description in the native language and a visual representation of the word.

2. Ask students to restate the description, explanation, or example in their own words. ELL students may write their definition in their native language.

3. Ask students to construct a picture, symbol, or graphic of the term. This activity is critical for ELL students.

4. Engage students every other week in activities that help them add to their knowledge of the terms.

5. Every other week ask students to discuss the terms with one another.

6. Once a week involve students in games that allow them to play with the terms.

References


