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An internship experience in educational leadership at the Camden County Technical Schools, Pennsauken Campus

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AN INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

AT THE CAMDEN COUNTY TECHNICAL SCHOOLS,

PENNSAUKEN CAMPUS

by
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ABSTRACT

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An Internship Experience
in Educational Leadership
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Dr. Theodore Johnson
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The purpose of this study was to evaluate the program implemented at our school to prepare students to take the reading section of the HSPT11, the state graduation test of New Jersey. Evaluation of the program promoted enhanced instructional practices to improve student achievement.

The methodology for my research relied on the theoretical framework of educational policy analysis, the interpretive paradigm of teacher cognition, and the interview as a tool for inquiry. Extended interviews of four teachers who taught at each level were conducted to access teacher cognition. The classes of these four teachers were designed to prepare students for the HSPT11. Responses were summarized verbatim.

Acting as policy brokers, the teachers demonstrated variability in the translation of policy. However, they expressed a common concern for the performance of their students; the theme of accountability was evident throughout the interviews. Accountability has been a major thrust of policy makers. The teachers' involvement was apparent when they commented on students' misconceptions about the test, the importance of reading, program strengths, and the ways to improve the program.

MINI-ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to evaluate our school program to prepare students for the reading section of the HSPT11, the state graduation test. Conclusions were drawn from teachers' responses concerning accountability, student misconceptions about the test, the importance of reading, program strengths, and ways to improve the program.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

<u>Problem Statement</u>

New Jersey's Class of 1995 was the first class which was required to pass the

Eleventh Grade High School Proficiency Test in order to graduate. Initially, schools were

concerned about their students' performance on this more rigorous test of higher-order

skills; a test which was arranged to be administered closer to the end of a student's years

in high school compared to the previous Ninth Grade High School Proficiency Test and

the previous Minimum Basic Skills Test. The results proved that passing the test is a

minor disruption for most students in New Jersey. These students might briefly spend

time preparing for the HSPT11 by studying the format of the HSPT11 or generic test-

taking skills. However, for some students in some New Jersey schools, preparation to

pass the HSPT11 has become the major focus of their educational experience in high

school.

The attention of my school has been drawn to the reading section of the HSPT11.

In the four years of HSPT11 testing, our school has not met the state standard in reading

although it has met the state standard in writing and mathematics. To help students

achieve the state standard in reading, our school has developed a program which includes several components: before- and after-school HSPT11 preparation sessions, Drop Everything and Read activities, revision of curriculum and materials, scheduling changes, and the Basic Skills Improvement Program. The components of this program have been implemented by the members of the English Department who are responsible for preparing students for the reading section of the HSPT11.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the program that has been developed and implemented by English teachers at our school to address the problem of low reading test scores. The intention of this evaluation is to improve the existing program by strengthening and modifying it if it is necessary. In order to conduct the collaborative action research to evaluate the program, the English Department's implementation of the program needs to be examined. Focusing on the ten members of the English Department is crucial since they are accountable for preparing students for the reading section of the HSPT11. The evaluation will help to encourage English teachers to reflect on their instructional practices. The participation of the members of the English Department in the program evaluation should enable them to help improve students' reading test scores for the 1997-1998 school year. Conducting the evaluation will also help this intern develop leadership skills which are necessary to successfully improve and implement this program.

Key Definitions

The following terms have been discussed in this study. I have included what researchers have said about these terms as a way to understand how I have used them.

alignment:

> Alignment means "the extent to which policy instruments and influences mutually reinforce one another in providing consistent guidance and support to practice. These terms (alignment and coherence) usually refer to technical requirements such as whether texts and tests cover the same skills and content (Sykes, 1990).

extended interview:

> Therefore, it is usually best to access a teacher's beliefs indirectly, for example, through extended interviews, when a teacher can recount specific cases and events; stimulated recall, when a teacher tries to remember interactive thoughts while viewing a videotape of his or her classroom performance; and a teacher's performance on experimental tasks (Kagan, 1990).

implementation:

> But implementation, a term frequently used as though it means straightforward compliance, is not so simple. All of the cases make clear that as teachers interpret the thin guidance they've received, they fill the gaps in their understanding of the policy with what is already familiar to them, creating the "melange" of practices David Cohen refers to in his article. Of course, interpreting the new through the lens of the familiar is, as cognitive science now tells us, how all of us construct the meaning from the information we process using our existing schema. There is no reason why teachers should behave any differently (Darling-Hammond, 1990).

macro and micro levels of analysis:

> Macro analyses operate at the level of the system. They stress regularities of
> process and organizational structures as stable outlines of the policy process and
> frame individual action in terms of position in relational network. Micro analyses,
> conversely, operate at the individual level. They interpret organizational action as
> the problematic and often unpredictable outcome of autonomous actors, motivated
> by self-interest (McLaughlin, 1987).

policy brokers, teachers as:

> In this semi-autonomous role, teachers are better understood as political brokers
> than as implementors. They enjoy considerable discretion, being influenced by
> their own ideas of what schooling ought to be as well as persuaded by external
> pressures (Schwille et al., 1983).

prescription teaching:

> More and more states are prescribing with greater and greater specificity what
> teachers are to teach, in what manner and toward what type of assessment
> (Darling-Hammond, 1990).

school organization and teacher autonomy:

> One line of work has focused on school organization. Researchers have argued
> that America's decentralized system of educational government, and our loosely
> jointed organization of schools gives teachers enormous autonomy, even if their
> formal authority seems very limited (Cohen, 1987).

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teachers' cognitions:

> For purposes of this review, the term teachers' cognitions is defined as any of the
> following: pre- or inservice teachers' self-reflections; beliefs and knowledge about
> teaching, students, and content; and awareness of problem-solving strategies
> endemic to classroom teaching (Kagan, 1990).

testing and reform:

> Baker (1991) points out that the role of assessment radically changes when it is
> conceived simultaneously to be the reform itself and the metric to evaluate the
> impact of reform. As the reform, its purposes have been variously described as to
> communicate and clarify goals, to motivate students and teachers, and to focus
> instruction (Baker and Stites, 1991).

Limitations of the Study

The focus of my study is limited by its specific context, the Pennsauken Campus of the Camden County Technical Schools. The context can be described as a school which has been greatly influenced by a state graduation test because its students have not met the state standard in the reading section of the HSPT11. There are several factors which may contribute to poor reading skills for a student population coming from a city such as Camden, which has been described recently as a city with a high level of poverty. A program has been developed in the school to help students improve their reading skills in the two years before the test is administered. The members of the English Department translate the components of this program into their individual instructional practices to help students.

The specific context of students and teachers at the Pennsauken Campus does not permit this study to extend its parameters to the other campus, Gloucester Township Campus. These two campuses make up the Camden County Technical Schools. In fact, the Gloucester Township Campus has met the state standard in reading. Although this study is limited to an evaluation of a program in a specific context, other schools facing similar sanctions due to students' poor performance on the reading section of the HSPT11 may be interested in understanding how this school is working to implement a program to improve students' reading skills.

<div align="center">Setting of the Study</div>

State Testing Policy

New Jersey's entrance into state assessment was the result of the education reform movement of the late 70s. The form of the first state test administered in 1981 was a graduation test of minimum basic skills in mathematics and reading; it was called the Minimum Basic Skills Test (hereafter MBST). After several years the MBST was described as too easy because most ninth graders were passing the test. Therefore, the state changed the graduation test so that it became a more challenging test, the Ninth Grade High School Proficiency Test (hereafter the HSPT9) which assessed skills in reading, writing and mathematics at a higher level than the MBST.

The state then became interested in raising the grade at which the graduation test was administered to provide a more accurate record of achievement as an exit test. Thus, an Eighth Grade Early Warning Test was created to inform students, parents, teachers,

and schools about students' progress toward attaining the skills which would be tested on the new Eleventh Grade High School Proficiency Test (hereafter HSPT11). Some students had been denied diplomas after taking the HSPT9 because they did not pass all sections of the HSPT9 even after retaking the failed sections of the test every fall and spring and undergoing the Special Review Assessment (hereafter SRA).

The HSPT11 has proven to be a much more difficult and rigorous test for some students. Students still have the opportunity to retake the parts of the test that they need to pass; they can retake these sections in the spring of their junior year and the fall and spring of their senior year. The SRA process is an option which is still available. However, the stakes are higher and the pressure is more intense for juniors taking the HSPT11 because the HSPT11 is a more difficult test than the HSPT9 and there are fewer opportunities for juniors to retake failed sections of the HSPT11.

Not only has the state continued raising the bar with its graduation test, it has also expanded testing into other areas. The students at our school are now required to take an occupational competency test in their career program before they graduate. The core curriculum content standards will require students to take tests in other areas besides reading, writing and mathematics. A complex schedule has been constructed for various tests which will begin to be introduced from now until the school year 2005-2006.

The state's increasing involvement in testing, especially graduation tests, can result in serious consequences for students who are denied diplomas and for schools who have not met the state standards for the HSPT11. Passing rates may be published in newspapers or in school report cards which are sent to students' homes. If the pressure

for tuition vouchers succeeds by allowing student choice in schooling, the publishing of

schools' passing rates could become an even more powerful educational indicator.

However, passing rates have already been used as powerful indicators when low scores

have caused reclassification, decertification, and increased monitoring in schools.

Ultimately, a passing rate below the state standard can contribute to the state takeover of

a school; takeovers have occurred in Jersey City, Paterson and Newark. The State

expects schools to meet the state standard for passing rates on the state graduation test,

and if some schools do not meet the standards, those schools will be sanctioned by the

state with legislated consequences.

<u>The School</u>

The state testing policy has affected the setting where I conducted my study during

the 1997-1998 school year. Students are now required to pass the HSPT11 state standard

in reading, writing and mathematics. The school has met the standards in mathematics and

writing, but not in reading. Since the test was first given in 1993, there has been a gradual

increase in the passing percentage for reading, but the state standard has never been met.

As a result, one of the school's student performance objectives for the 1997-1998 school

year is: "By June 1998, 85% of the students enrolled at the Pennsauken Campus as

sophomores during the 1996-1997 school year will meet the state standard in reading as

measured by the grade 11 HSPT."

In my previous study, I collected data during the spring of 1991 which was the last

year when ninth graders were still required to pass the HSPT9 as a high school graduation

test. The next class, the Class of 1995, would be required to pass the HSPT11. At that

time, I was concerned that some of our students would have difficulty with this more stringent test.

Our students attend Camden County Technical Schools (hereafter CCTS). CCTS has two campuses, the Gloucester Township Campus and the Pennsauken Campus; my study focuses on the latter campus where I am an English teacher for three classes, English Department Chair and Staff Development Specialist. The Pennsauken Campus is the original campus which dates the beginning of the school at 1928.

The school attracts Camden County residents especially from the city of Camden. Many students attend our school because they are interested in learning a trade. At the time of the study, there were thirteen career programs; these programs included: Allied Health, Automotive Technology, Business Technology, Cabinet Making, Carpentry, Culinary Arts, Drafting, Electric, Electronics, Floriculture, Landscaping, Printing and Graphic Arts, and Welding.

Since over ninety percent of the students at the Pennsauken Campus were from Camden, the demographics of the City of Camden greatly influenced the school population. Of the 666 students attending the Pennsauken Campus in the 1997-1998 school year, approximately 60% were Hispanic, 34% were Black, 4% were White and 2% were Asian. The education of the students was greatly affected by such factors as poverty, teenage pregnancy, teenage parenting, and dropping out from school. Our school has worked diligently to improve the chances for student success. For example, the school has worked to improve the attendance rate which now meets state standards. Mentoring and counseling programs have supported students to help them overcome

obstacles which prevent them from succeeding in school. The school provides a safe, clean, and disciplined environment for students.

The school environment has been task-oriented in order to help prepare students to pass the HSPT11. Many students do not arrive in ninth grade with the skills they will need to pass the HSPT11. The staff at the Pennsauken Campus has two years (freshman and sophomore years) and about four weeks in the junior year to prepare students for the test. Curriculum and materials have been aligned to help prepare students to pass the test. Some students have had to retake sections of the test or undergo the Special Review Assessment in order to pass the test. Some students have not graduated with their class because they did not pass the test by the end of their senior year. Not only were individual students under pressure to pass this high-stakes test, but also the entire school was under pressure to meet the standards set by the state. During the 1997-1998 school year, the pressure has been especially heightened for students to perform well on the reading section of the HSPT11 since the school has not met the state standard in this section.

<u>Importance of the Study</u>

<u>General</u>

Although my study focuses on a specific context, it has implications for a much greater arena. At a micro-level, the school plays out the interweavings of policy and its actualization which is connected to national events. There are constant pronouncements in the United States of a disastrous education system that abandons the nation with an unfit population inferior to those of other industrialized countries (Moffett, 1994). Some

critics call for education reform to restore the nation; others fear that if reform fails so does public education. In this atmosphere of crisis, the status of standardized testing increases. At this time, President Bill Clinton is promoting a voluntary national reading test for fourth graders as a way to improve reading skills. Critics argue that another expensive test is not the answer.

Organizations other than the education system may be subject to policy directives which seek reform through compliance to guidelines and possibly through standardized testing. These organizations may find it useful to examine how one school actualizes policy.

<u>State</u>

With more and more state control of education during recent years, schools can be greatly affected by changes in political office. This study will examine the practices that develop when a state intervenes with policy directives. It is important that policy makers understand how policy is actualized in classrooms so that informed decisions can be made. Future programs that will be designed for the students most in need can be enriched by studies that examine the practices in remedial programs that exist.

<u>Local and Personal</u>

During the last nineteen years that I have taught at CCTS and for the last eight years that I have also worked as English department chair, I have become very involved in the school. During this time, I have had a unique perspective to observe the inception of state testing with the MBST in 1978 and the evolution of state testing throughout the years. Not only have I been able to observe how policy is actualized and follow its

changes through the course of time, but I have also been privileged to examine closely and write extensively about my observations concerning the translation of policy into specific classrooms in my dissertation which was completed in 1994. In my dissertation, I focused on the HSPT9 and now, in my present study, I focused on the HSPT11.

My involvement in CCTS is fueled by my concern for the future of the school and for the students who choose to attend CCTS. Instruction continues to be driven by state tests. It is disheartening to see students relegated to a remedial track and sometimes denied diplomas even after demonstrating significant growth in reading skills. The concerns I have expressed here are shared by a caring staff at the Pennsauken Campus.

Organization of the Study

Chapter One introduces the focus of the study by discussing the problem statement which includes the product outcome statements and the purpose of the study, key definitions, the limitations of the study, the setting of the study, and the importance of the study.

Chapter Two presents a review of the literature which is related to the study: at-risk students, the Chapter I program, remediation for students, standardized testing, and educational organization and policy implementation. The review of the literature provides a research context for the study and supports the significance of the study.

Chapter Three examines the methodology for the study by providing a general description of the research design, a description of the development and design of the research instruments used in the study, a description of the sample and sampling technique, a description of the data collection approach, and a description of the data

analysis plan. This chapter presents the type of evidence which was gathered through this study to prove that this evaluation project is having an impact on the school's program to prepare students to pass a state graduation test.

Chapter Four presents the findings of this study by describing and analyzing quantitatively and qualitatively the categories that developed from the teacher interviews. The significance of the information which was found is examined.

Chapter Five discusses the conclusions and implications of this study, and the need for further study in this field. Major conclusions are presented for the project, the intern's leadership development, and the change brought about by the organization. Major implications in all areas of the study are reviewed; the need for further study is supported at the conclusion of the discussion.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Standardized Testing

The State of New jersey relied on its Statewide Testing Program to "increase

public confidence in schools" (Cooperman and Bloom, 1988) as many other states did.

The idea to use minimum competency testing to raise standards became contagious

throughout the United States in the 1970s. According to Pipho (1978), the push for

minimum competency testing started rapidly - in 1975 there were only three states with

programs (California, Florida and Oregon); however, by 1978, "33 states had taken some

type of action to mandate the setting of minimum competency standards for elementary

and secondary schools."

It was not surprising that the State turned to testing as an answer to demands by

the public. The public's acceptance and trust in testing has generally increased since

World War I. Today policy makers and the public have concurred that standardized

testing is an appropriate way to assess what is happening in schools. Neill and Medina

(1989) quote a study by FairTest, the National Center for Fair and Open Testing, that

"estimated that U.S. public schools administered 105 million standardized tests to 39.8

million students during the 1986-1987 school year"; this "includes more than 55 million standardized tests of achievement, competency, and basic skills which were administered to fulfill local and state mandate." In "Preparing to Enter the Twenty-first Century: Revising New Jersey's Statewide Testing Program" (Cooperman and Bloom, 1988), the N. J. Department of Education cited state and national trends to test at higher grade levels and test higher order skills as a rationale for expanding and developing its statewide testing program; it reported its review of recent developments in state and national testing programs, commercial standardized tests, other states' graduation tests and the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Testing can be appealing because schools can be compared to businesses. When the former Governor Thomas Kean introduced the new school report cards sent home during November 1989, he compared "parents and taxpayers" to stockholders in a corporation because they annually review the New Jersey School Report so that schools will be more accountable in this "multi-billion dollar enterprise." Madaus (1989) argued that this "'bottom line' mentality . . . has made schools much more outcome rather than input-oriented."

On the N.J. School Report a school's scores on the HSPT were compared to the state's mean scores. In this way standardized testing has become an effective tool to rank schools and districts. Test scores have the aura of scientific objectivity. Neill and Medina (1989) argued that "these 'objective' instruments often produce results that are inaccurate, inconsistent, and biased against minorities, females and students from low income families."

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Critics have voiced disapproval at the unfairness of standardized testing. They were seeking alternatives (Meisels, 1989; Shepard, 1989), authenticity (Wiggins, 1989), thoughtfulness (Brown, 1989), a deemphasis (Haney quoted by Marzano and Costa, 1988), and fairness (Manzo, 1997). The voice of critics was heard not only in journals, but also in organizations such as FairTest and conferences such as the American Federation of Teachers' Urban District Leadership Consortium asnd the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative (Barrientos, 1990). Bartoli and Botel (1988) argued that use of standardized testing to confirm the efficiency of the productivity model in American public schools ignored the "fossilization" of any test; "any test freezes or fossilizes human potential at yesterday's level of development, and it tells us nothing about possibilities for development."

The N.J. Department of Education (Cooperman and Bloom, 1988) heard other voices when it proposed changes in its testing program; they listened "to representatives from all segments of society - business and industry, the military (and) parent groups." New Jersey's response to improving its testing program was the development of an Eleventh Grade HSPT which is supposed to test higher order skills, "the basic skills (reading, mathematics and writing) with an emphasis on thinking, problem solving, reasoning and decision-making skills" and an eighth grade early warning test used to determine remediation. Now there is a test for fourth graders.

The costs of standardized testing have increased in terms of money, students, sanctions, and rewards. A Madaus interview attended to these costs; he said a "good cost benefit evaluations" (1989) was needed. In the early nineties, the N.J. Education

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Department was spending nearly $4 million on its testing program which included the development, scoring and reporting of tests; it hedged on the costs for remediation which was perhaps a 5-10% increase on its $48 million in funding. Lytle (1989) contended that the cheapness of standardized testing - "about $3.50 per student including scoring and report service for the most common nationally standardized ones" - made it attractive to school administrators and legislators. Although other forms of assessment such as performance testing or portfolios might be appealing, they are considered too costly and inefficient by some administrators and legislators.

High stakes testing has denied some students a diploma. The MBST affected 1% of the student population; the HSPT9 probably affected 5% of the population; the eleventh grade test has also affected a segment of the school population because it is a more difficult test. Because it is an eleventh grade test some students face a longer period of remediation. The State encouraged the expansion of the basic skills curriculum. The State argued that "dropping out must be viewed as a result of complex social, economic, and academic factors" (Cooperman and Bloom, 1988) rather than difficulties with testing. Schools have experienced the cost of sanctions when they have been decertified. The new HSPT has implications regarding curriculum, selection of materials and instructional strategies. The department intended to have a more involved "monitoring or advisory role" to check on the alignment of materials to the skills on the HSPT11.

The department believed that "both individual and society would benefit" (Cooperman and Bloom, 1988) from basic skills testing. Gibboney (1989) asserted: "There is no pattern of evidence that state testing delivers better education; there is

evidence, however, in New Jersey, that massive state testing increases state control, red tape, and lowers morale among teachers and administrators." Neill and Medina (1989) expressed concern for the learners: "the continued domination of testing will mean that millions of students - primarily those most in need of improved education - will be dumped into dead-end tracks and pushed out of school."

Many educators agreed that New Jersey students were tested too much (Dykstra, 1990); school could be dominated by testing. Many students were placed in classes geared to the test. For students in these schools, their schools become one of the "test preparation academies" (Farr and Carey, 1986). Students are placed in classes according to their performances on standardized tests. Individual Student Improvement Plans (ISIPs) are developed to address the skills on the HSPT11. Students are facing new state tests which are being developed. Seniors now take tests in their occupational programs.

<u>Educational Organization and Policy Implementation</u>

Educational indicators seemed to command serious attention. For example, the image of Bell's "Wall Chart" was dramatically displayed and projected to a wide audience through the news (Porter, 1988). The U.S. Department of Education also issued publications of educational indicators "to help educators, policy makers, and the public track education's progress (or lack thereof) over time" (USDE, 1987).

Critics would agree that policy makers were aware of educational indicators, especially those that illustrated a lack of progress. If the numbers indicated a lack of progress, state policy makers could argue for the necessity of raising standards through policy legislation. N.J. state policy makers cited trends from <u>A Nation at Risk</u> (1983) and

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the NAEP to support their rationale for the development of an eleventh grade test that tests higher order skills (Cooperman and Bloom, 1988).

Educational indicators as statistically valid measures seemed unassailable; however, Murnane (1987) has examined problems inherent in educational indicators. There was an increasing demand for the improvement of educational indicators. When that "sophisticated" demand was met with better indicators, then a growing awareness "of things not captured by existing indicators" also developed. Murnane summarized this cycle: "sophistication leads to dissatisfaction, which leads to redefined goals." Smith (1988) stated two technical problems in developing indicators: an "inadequate knowledge base" and "a weakness in theory and empirical knowledge." Therefore, more complex and significant issues such as determining the quality of teaching and learning seemed unattainable. Development of educational indicators was also influenced by political factors (Smith, 1988) or governance (Clune, 1987). For example, a school district might report scores in a manner that served the best interests of the district when there were rewards and sanctions.

Moving beyond the problems with the development of educational indicators, Porter (1988) was concerned about who controlled educational indicators since he believed that they were "potentially instruments of control." The State could use educational indicators to externally control districts through accountability measures that coerced "low-performing schools to improve" (David, 1987). When indicators were externally imposed by states to monitor districts, problems with too much testing, inappropriate use of data, evaluation of teachers, cost and timeliness "turn up frequently"

(Richards, 1988). David proposed that districts develop their own indicators to help them improve. However, it might be difficult for a local district to develop indicators when "a crisis mentality too often pervades" (Timar and Kirp, 1987).

Educational indicators fueled the crisis mentality that forged state policy which tried to determine classroom practices. Timar and Kirp (1987) viewed reform as movement in one direction toward a goal that was often unrealized; they stated that "reforms often move from propositions and finally to educational practices that bear scant resemblance to excellence." Although policy makers might initiate reform with excellence as a priority, in the end the actualization of policy might not be excellence.

Firestone's (1989) model, the ecology-of-games metaphor, captured the dynamic nature of the process. It sought to dethrone the myth of the individual powerful policy makers and to encompass the panorama of changing relationships among various people. He stated that the ecology-of-games metaphor "highlights the messiness and discontinuities in the policy process, the variety of games played by different people for different reasons and the loose linkages between those separate games."

In the tensions between different elements of the process, Timar and Kirp (1989) saw a need for balance. However, the balance of power might have shifted in the years since the release of A Nation at Risk in 1983. Kirst (1988) summed up the shift in control: "the most striking feature of state/local relations in the last 10 years has been the continued growth in state control over education."

Increasingly, states made decisions for districts about educational policy. This might include "higher high school graduation requirements; the revision and alignment of

textbooks, tests and curriculums; the upgrading of teacher qualifications; the creation of career ladders; the provision of teacher incentives programs; and a revamping of teacher evaluation" (Kirst, 1988).

There were critics of reform who challenged the policy decisions that states have made. The above policy decisions were first order changes (Boyd, 1987; Cuban, 1988) because they did not alter the basic structure of schooling as an innovative second order change would. In these policy decisions, there was an emphasis on increasing and reporting numbers. When quantity was stressed more than quality, there were "only numbers to define success" (Timar and Kirp, 1987). John Ellis, the Commissioner of Education in 1990, recommended some possible first order changes - longer school days, Saturday classes, and summer school - for urban districts. He tempered quantity of time with the need for better use of time.

The State legislated external policies that influenced not only the district but also the individual classroom. Schwille et al. (1983) provided a framework of external policies which could "affect teachers' content decisions"; they included: "mandated or recommended time allocations, press for specific topics, press for differentiating content among students and press for standards." According to Schwille et al., the teacher as a "policy broker rather than as an implementor" made content decisions for the classroom by adapting two policies: external policy and teacher policy. These researchers reversed the traditional approach so that their study proceeded "bottom-up" deemphasizing hierarchical control which was intrinsic to a top-down approach. Schwille et al. found that within a rigid Management-by-Objectives System, the teacher adopted a

"semiautonomous" role in determining content. Researchers as well as critics have shown interest with <u>how</u> rather than <u>which</u> policies are implemented (Timar and Kirp, 1989).

In the classrooms that McNeil (1988a) described, teachers occupied pivotal positions because they were central to the conflict between "educating individuals" and "credentialing large groups." For some teachers, course content was kept in "place" like the students were. It was kept in place by deliberately presenting "simplified, fragmented bits of information" which were covered superficially without debate.

Recent reform encouraged the parceling of content because they endorsed much of the "spirit of the effective schools movement" which encouraged teacher-centered instruction for inner-city classrooms (Cuban, 1986). The educational organization did not allow "equal access to knowledge" (Goodlad, 1984) to all learners.

When external policy was implemented, it was often the educational organization of inner-city classrooms that were affected. It was possible for an entire school to be on the "low track" (Goodlad, 1984) in preparation for a high school graduation test so that a school district could achieve an acceptable percentage of passing scores. In this context, the individual learner, the school and society were affected.

The learner was denied equity and excellence when content became fragmented and simplistic. The learners with the greatest need were hostages to these classrooms; Goodlad (1984) stated that "minority students were found in disproportionately large percentages in the low track classes of the multiracial schools in (his) sample."

Boyd (1987) argued that it was imperative that reform worked in order to ensure the survival of public education; he feared that "decay and disillusionment" would create

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the "privatizatioon of education." The solution was "effective leadership" for the "organization" and "the just society."

Demographers such as Hodgkinson (Duckett, 1988) said that not only was it just for society but also selfish to care for all our students when one worker in three was nonwhite in 1990. At this time, "the bottom third" was neglected by "higher standards that students can't meet" (Duckett, 1988). Hodgkinson stated that "we track the bottom 25% to 30% of our students for nonachievement and failure." While reformers state that they legislate policy to help low achieving students, the outcome might be "morally undesirable" from another perspective; therefore, "in the making of school policy the price to be paid must be salient consideration in charting a course of action" (Dreeben, 1968).

<u>Summary</u>

To conclude this section of the study, it was necessary to summarize the contrasting positions of the State and its critics.

The State was concerned about its future economic survival. It was sensitive to the demands of business, industry and the voting public to provide a reservoir of qualified workers. In fact, it was politically advantageous for the State to join or lead these powerful constituents in the preparation of qualified workers through educational reform.

The State targeted educational reform at the bottom group of high school students. This population of students could usually be described as poor, urban and minority. The State assumed that these students were unqualified for work because they did not possess the basic reading, writing and math skills that are essential for the work place. The State further assumed that the read on some students did not possess basic skills was that

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schools had been lax by allowing unqualified students to receive high school diplomas.

In order to reform education, the State of New Jersey has exerted its authority through legislation of high school graduation tests as well as other policy reforms. Local control over graduation has diminished with the development of a state testing program since 1978. Legislation passed in 1979 required that students who entered ninth grade during the 1981-82 school year or thereafter must pass a state high school graduation test. The state's recipe for reform was: If the state issued policy, then schools had to comply; and, thus, students' skills would improve.

As students' scores on these tests improved gradually year by year, the State accepted these indicators as an affirmation of its position that tougher policy standards forced students, teachers and schools to work harder to improve basic skills. Decreasing failure rates have been the impetus for the State to develop a more difficult test; better test scores supported the contention that progress was occurring.

The State also believed that it knew how to prepare students to pass the test. The State assumed that local districts could be trusted to prepare students for the graduation. It monitored closely how state money was spent on programs to help students and how curriculum and texts were aligned to skills on the tests. Staff development programs, pamphlets, and information were also offered by the State to help schools.

Critics (Cuban, 1986; Farr and Carey, 1986; Madaus, 1989; Shepard, 1989) might agree with the State that students' scores on graduation tests had improved over time, but their explanations for this improvement would vary. The State would argue that students performed better because their basic skills had improved, while critics would argue that

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students performed better because they had been extensively prepared to take a particular test. For some schools, critics argued, the test became the content for classes and these schools taught to the test. The curriculum for these classes was fragmented and reductionist according to the critics. Other courses were eliminated so that students could be remediated to pass the test.

Critics (Dreeben, 1968; McNeil, 1988; Timar and Kirp, 1987) would agree that the State was concerned about a qualified work force. To accomplish this goal, the State adopted the model of the factory-school which produced and stamped out masses of high school graduates. Graduates were qualified on the basis of a high school graduation test with a very narrow focus. Critics (Gibboney, 1989; Lytle, 1989; Madaus, 1989; Taylor, 1989) might discredit this test just as the State discredited earler social promotions. Critics assumed that students did not need more testing and remediation, but that they needed more meaningful instruction and assessment.

Developing and implementing a high school graduation test was not educational reform for critics of the State. This tactic acted as a placebo to mollify constituents' demands. However, reform that might dramatically alter the structure of schools and thereby influence the quality of education for disadvantaged students was not addressed by the State. Although the State professed concern about the individual and society, critics (Haney, 1981; Timar and Kirp, 1987; Duckett, 1988; McNeil, 1988a) asserted that it was the interests of society that dominated and imposed themselves on the individual. These critics (Bartoli and Botel, 1988; Goodlad, 1984; Maeroff, 1988; McNeil, 1988b; Neill and Medina, 1989) assumed that concern for the individual must be foremost in education.

CHAPTER THREE

The Design of the Study

General Description of the Research Design

The methodology for my project was supported by the theoretical framework of

policy analysis, the interpretive paradigm of teacher cognition, and the extended interview

as a tool for inquiry. Policy implementation research provided an approach to examine the

interweaving of the macro-level of state policy and the micro-level of the classroom. How

policy is implemented at the micro-level of the classroom was examined by focusing on the

pivotal position of teachers. Teachers implemented policy based on their particular

"incentives, beliefs, and capacity" (McLaughlin, 1987). One way to access teacher

cognition was through the extended interview. When teachers had an opportunity to tell

their stories, the researcher gained access to understand how teachers "make sense of and

give meaning to their experience" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990).

Design of the Research Instruments

Policy Analysis

A thirty year history of federal and state policies has been examined by policy

analysts. This new field of study, policy implementation research, has evolved through

three generations of analysts (McLaughlin, 1987). The model for the first generation of implementation analysts was positivistic because it stressed implementation problems and their parameters at the institutional level. The importance of the individual in the implementation process dominated the second generation. When the focus of research turned toward the individual teacher, variability and complexity were more apparent. Schwille et al. (1983) followed a bottom-up approach when they examined how seven individual teachers reacted to "a great deal of variation in what might be taught in elementary school mathematics." However, they called the teachers "policy brokers" rather than "policy implementors." This title acknowledges their unique position: "They enjoy considerable discretion, being influenced by their own ideas of what schooling ought to be as well as persuaded by external pressures" (Schwille et al., 1983).

Research has also emphasized the need for analysts to focus on the classroom level rather than on the district level. Although the power at the school board level has been diminished by federal and state policies, the power at the classroom level remains undiminished because teachers still maintain "a 'pocket veto,' carried out quietly behind the classroom door" (Boyd, 1987).

The methodology for my study is supported by policy implementation research which stresses the individual teacher's process of negotiating policy. This approach emphasizes that what happens in the classroom is also influenced by the teacher's "incentives, beliefs, and capacity" (McLaughlin, 1987).

Teacher Cognition

During this generation of reform many federal and state policies in education are

directed at changing the content of the classroom. Policy makers initiate policy in order to influence "the pivotal position" of teachers so that teachers follow policy guidelines. Koffler (1987) discusses how the statewide minimum competency tests were mandated in New Jersey so that "these tests served as a catalyst to change the schools' curricula." Teachers were encouraged to align their curriculum to the skills outlined on the test. The state's intervention into curriculum through testing was justified because the state was concerned "by the continuing decline of test scores and by educators' apparent inability to solve educational problems" (Koffler, 1987).

One of the underlying issues is the autonomy of teachers. Do teachers hold pivotal positions in which they can determine the actualization of policy in their classrooms? McNeil (1988a) seems to imply that teachers are not autonomous because administrative and reform policies can deskill teachers by "transforming their knowledge of the subject into 'school knowledge.' " School knowledge is "the kind of content that can be readily consumed by millions of students trying to satisfy course requirements" (McNeil, 1988a).

To summarize, policy makers legislate educational reform policies to influence classroom practice. However, policy is implemented into classrooms by individuals according to their "incentives, beliefs, and capacity" (McLaughlin, 1987). To understand how policy is implemented by the individual, it is necessary to examine the individual teacher's cognition.

Kagan (1990) has reviewed and critiqued five approaches to the assessment of teacher cognition. After discussing the ambiguous nature of a definition for teacher cognition, she argues that teacher cognition is best accessed indirectly . One way is

through the extended interview.

Although the qualitative work that is involved in transcribing interviews is demanding, researchers have accessed teacher cognition through the extended interview. Two studies that have used this methodology are relevant to my research. One study (Schwille et al., 1983) concentrated on how seven teachers covered content in their mathematics classes. Given that there is variability in the content teachers cover in their classes, the researchers in this study asked "how do teachers react to this variation" (Schwille et al., 1983). Because the teacher's role is semi-autonomous according to Schwille et al., there is variability in content decision-making. In order to understand how each teacher's variability was influenced by teacher cognition and external policy, the researchers conducted weekly interviews, beginning-of-the-year interviews and end-of-the-year interviews among other data collection procedures. Other studies which have used interviews are the California Study of Elementary Mathematics (Peterson, 1990) and Corbett and Wilson's research (1991).

I have proposed a methodology for this study that examines teacher cognition through extended interviews among other data collecting procedures. If state policy is designed to influence what happens in the classroom (Koffler, 1987) and if teachers demonstrate implementation variability based on their "beliefs, interests and incentives" (McLaughlin, 1987; Schwille et al., 1983), then it is necessary for researchers to examine teacher cognition.

The findings of teacher cognition may be critiqued for limiting the generalization of studies (Kagan, 1990). However, the classroom door needs to be opened to understand

the micro-reality of the teacher's perspective (Cohen and Ball, 1990). In this way, the macro-level and micro-level can be linked (McLaughlin, 1987). Cohen and Ball speak for third generation implementation researchers: "Researchers have relatively little experience in direct study of how innovations affect teaching practice. We had much to learn from the teachers we proposed to observe about how teachers respond to policy" (Cohen and Ball, 1990).

Interviewing for Research

Policy implementation research that is concerned with teacher cognition uses interviewing as a tool for inquiry. Interviewing simply defined as the asking and answering of questions can be an effective research method. However, Mishler (1986) probes the distinction between the standard practice of interviewing and the model for interviewing he proposes. The standard practice of interviewing is the survey interview which is based on the positivist paradigm. He argues that: "By adopting an approach that is behavioral and antilinguistic, relies on the stimulus-response model, and decontextualizes the meaning of responses, researchers have attempted to avoid rather than to confront directly the interrelated problems of context, discourse and meaning" (Mishler, 1986). The issues of context, discourse and meaning are addressed in the definition of interviewing that he proposes; his definition "centers on a view of the interview as a discourse between speakers and on the ways that the meanings of questions and responses are contextually grounded and jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent" (Mishler, 1986).

Seidman's (1991) rationale for in depth interviewing supports Mishler's new

definition for interviewing. Seidman argues against the use of the stimulus-response model of the natural sciences for interviewing because the respondents in the social sciences are language users. Humans as language users differ from the subjects of the natural sciences. To be human is to engage in the discourse of questions and answers; interviewing is a basic speech event for language users. Rather than focusing on the differences between the models like Mishler and Seidman, McCracken (1988) focuses on the differences between the responses for quantitative methods and qualitative methods. Although it is difficult to separate context from discourse and meaning, some researchers discuss context in terms of access. Interviewing allows the researcher access to the context of the respondents. Seidman (1991) states that: "Interviewing provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of the behavior" (Seidman, 1991). For McCracken, the purpose of the qualitative method is "to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world" (McCracken, 1988).

Although McCracken's purpose emphasizes context, it also encompasses the issue of meaning. Researchers examine "the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world" in order to understand the meaning respondents make of their experiences in one culture (McCracken, 1988). Seidman argues that the "root" or rationale for in depth interviewing is "an interest in understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 1991).

Kagan's study (1990) on the assessment of teacher cognition states that

researchers "Connelly and Clandinin (1990) have moved beyond the metaphor and begun to use teachers' narratives and biographies to understand their perceptions of curricula." Interviewing provides narrative data that researchers study (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). They cite Mishler who emphasizes the importance of narrative in understanding the experience of the respondents; he states that "one of the significant ways through which individuals make sense of and give meaning to their experiences is to organize them in a narrative form" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). When respondents tell stories during interviews, researchers are close to their meaning-making process (Reason and Hawkins, 1988).

Acknowledging Vygotsky, Seidman states that "every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness (Vygotsky, 1987)" (Seidman, 1991). Researchers recommend the careful recording and transcription of interviews so that every word is captured. Mishler also recommends relistening to recordings of interviews.

Not only have I carefully recorded and transcribed my teacher interviews as other researchers suggest, but I have also used the telephone for interviewing. Many of the benefits that Frey (1989) outlines for survey research apply to the extended interviews which I conducted. Frey discusses three norms of telephone use that benefit the interviewer:

> When a call is made, each respondent feels an obligation to answer, an obligation
>
> to negotiate termination, and a pressure to carry on an active part in the
>
> conversation. This is accompanied by an initial feeling of trust that the call is

activated by a legitimate desire to seek the respondent's assistance (Frey, 1989).

Although my interviews were prearranged for the convenience of the respondents unlike

the sampling conditions for survey research, the norms of telephone usage were equally

helpful. Using the telephone enabled me to interview teachers with privacy and without

school interruptions. "Complete attention is required" on the telephone expecially during

"an instrumental activity" according to Frey. He cites McLuhan (1984) when he calls the

telephone "a technological innovation that has altered our social relations perhaps more

than any other device" because it "demands our complete participation, whereas the other

media do not" (Frey, 1989). The length of the interviews I conducted support this

description of the telephone.

In summary, the research interview is a powerful tool for inquiry. The extended

interview, such as Mishler's model, provides the interviewer with the perspective of the

respondent's world by resolving the standard practice issues of discourse, context and

meaning. Careful, well-prepared recordings and transcriptions are essential for the

extended interview. Interviews are enhanced by the use of the phone.

<u>Sample of the Study and the Sampling Techniques</u>

The four English teachers who were interviewed included teachers at each level:

English IA, IIA, IIIA and IVA. At our school there were two tracks: the regular English

students were placed in English I, II, III and IV and the "A track" students were placed in

the English IA, IIA, IIIA and IVA classes due to poor performance on standardized tests

and teacher recommendation. Each of the A track students had an Individual Student

Improvement Plan (ISIP) which was maintained by the student's English teacher. The

ISIP broadly addressed the clusters on the reading and writing sections of the High School Proficiency Test. The English instructors teaching the A level classes were expected to prepare students to take the High School Proficiency Test by addressing the skills listed on the ISIP.

Although there were ten teachers in the English Department, I selected four teachers to represent each A level taught by the English Department. Each of these teachers was selected because of the number of English A classes the teacher taught at a particular level during the 1997-1998 school year. Usually, the teacher with the most A classes of a particular level was selected to be interviewed. I also considered the number of years the teacher had spent in the English Department. A teacher in our department for a number of years would have experienced the various changes in the state graduation test.

Among the four teachers, all four were female. None of the teachers had master's degrees; however, one was close to obtaining a master's degree and one had taken courses for ESL certification. All of the teachers were tenured and had taught at the Pennsauken Campus for many years - an average of 16 years. Three of the teachers had previously taught at other schools.

The four teachers were willing participants in the study. I assured them their interviews would be anonymous. Many teacher interviews were extensive lasting a half an hour to over an hour. I believe that teachers wanted to be heard, that there was a need to share their teaching experiences. The act of teaching is so intrinsic to the self that teaching cannot be separated from the teacher's strongest beliefs. After the interviews, many of the

teachers stated that the process of observations and interviewing had been a rewarding experience for them.

I also interviewed the Basic Skills Improvement Program Coordinator and the Director of Student Personnel Services because they were involved in setting up and coordinating the program to help prepare students for the High School Proficiency Test.

Data Collection

My primary data were the teacher interviews. However, I collected data in other relevant ways. The teacher and I would make arrangements for an evening interview on the telephone; my telephone was equipped with a recording device. When the appointment was made, it was at the teacher's convenience. At this time, the interviewer explained the procedure and answered questions the teacher had about the interview. If there were any conflicts or problems, the interview was rescheduled.

Not only was convenience a factor, but also relatively unrestricted time was a factor in conceptualizing the interviews. During the interviews, the four teachers were encouraged to talk in depth. Although a questionnaire had been designed for the interviews, the purpose of the interview was to balance the interviewer's questionnaire with the teacher's interests. As McCracken (1988) states: the questionnaire does not "preempt the 'open ended' nature of the qualitative interview" because "within each of the questions, the opportunity for exploratory, unstructured responses remains." The questionnaire focused the interviews while the unstructured length of the interviews which varied from a half an hour to over an hour encouraged the teachers to talk and allowed the interviewer to discover what was foremost on teachers' minds. This method provided the

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teachers with an opportunity to articulate their thoughts into language (Vygotsky, 1978). The thoughts the teachers expressed centered on their experiences and the meaning they made of those experiences (Seidman, 1991). The rationale for the four extensive teacher interviews was to provide teacher cognition data in the form of transcribed texts in order to understand teachers' experiences in the actualization of policy into classroom practice and the meaning they made of those experiences.

Other Interviews

I also interviewed students who were scheduled to take the HSPT11 in the spring. These included juniors and seniors who had failed a reading or writing section of the test.

The interview with the Basic Skills Improvement Program coordinator was audiotaped at night

Document Review

I reviewed school and state documents that related to my study. Written records included state and school directives, newspapers, journals, reports such as test results and state report cards, and state documents. These written records were read not only as sources of information, but also as "social products" to be critically examined (Hammersly and Atkinson, 1983).

Interactive Reflective Journal

Journals were written as interpretive responses to observations such as faculty meetings and department meetings.

Triangulation

Collecting data from various sources provided triangulation for the study (Patton,

1980). Triangulation as a framework of multiple perspectives cross-validated the information.

Data Analysis Plan

Data collected from existing archival sources, interviews and documents were analyzed for this study.

Transcriptions

The transcriptions were made by listening to the audiotape while keying the text into a computer. A foot pedal was used to control the playing of the tape. Although transcribing was a laborious and demanding task, I believe that attending so closely to the teachers' words heightened my understanding of each teacher's perspective. The language of the speaker was intrinsic to the self (Vygotsky, 1978); each text represented the individual teacher.

Data Coding

After the four teacher interviews were transcribed, the interview data were qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed. As I read and reread the interviews, I cautiously identified the categories which emerged. My perspective for identifying the categories were similar to Seidman's (1991):

> I do not begin to read the transcriptions with a set of categories for which I want to find the excerpts. The categories arise out of the passages that I have marked as interesting. On the other hand, when I reflect on the types of material that arouse my interest, it is clear that some patterns are present, that I have certain predispositions that I bring with me to my reading of the transcripts.

As the categories were developing, I was also aware that my coding was limited to my predispositions. Although coding relies on the experienced judgment of the researcher, it is nevertheless a process of interpretation which presumes researcher bias and predispositions. As a reader interacting with a text (Seidman, 1991; Rosenblatt, 1978), I needed to acknowledge my own biases and predispositions. Because I had been a teacher in a district for twenty years, I had to reexamine my predispositions about the students I taught and about the teachers I had known for many years. It was necessary to reflect on my beliefs about teaching and learning which had developed over many years of teaching and schooling.

Although the coding that developed became clear to me as I worked through the process of allowing categories to emerge while acknowledging my predispositions, I also had to work to make the categories clear to others. I marked each transcribed text using the categories that had developed. It was possible to determine quantitatively what was foremost on teachers' minds. This information was analyzed for the individual teacher as well as the group. These findings are discussed in Chapter 4.

Examining the data quantitatively supported what was developing qualitatively. Excerpts from the transcribed teachers' texts were highlighted and compared. As the categories were developing, I analyzed the individual teacher's perspective as well as the group's perspective. During the process of analysis and interpretation, categories connected into patterns or themes which revealed how teachers perceived their experiences.

Qualitative and quantitative data were organized and summarized into reports

using guides from action research and school program evaluations. The qualitative data from archival sources, interviews, and documents were organized with key examples using a data matrix similar to Sagor's illustration (1992). I also analyzed and summarized the results of my data collection from interviews by following some of the methods outlined in Brainard's <u>School Program Evaluation</u> (1996). Interview responses were reported by categories. I reported the actual responses that participants provided to specific questions. The development of these questions was structured using some of Brainard's focus points. The information gathered from this data which was then organized and summarized provided the evidence to support the results of the evaluation of the program which has been developed to prepare students for the HSPT11. These findings are presented in Chapter 4 of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Presentation of the Research Findings

<u>Overview</u>

Chapter Four presents the findings of my research by describing and analyzing the

observations which were the result of the interviews I conducted. The observations of the

teachers were obtained during extended interviews during which they responded to a

script of ten questions. Each question is followed by a description which defines and

elaborates the question. The text from the four teacher interviews follows; these are the

observations of each of the teachers. Each set of teacher observations to a specific

question is followed by a summary which discusses the meaning of the teacher

observations. While most of the chapter focuses on how the reading program is

implemented in the present, the chapter ends with a glimpse of teachers' reactions to

future state testing.

<u>Question 1: How does preparation for the HSPT11 affect what you teach and your</u>

<u>teaching practices?</u>

    <u>Description</u>

    High-stakes testing such as graduation tests have been known to influence teaching

practices. The Eleventh Grade High School Proficiency Test is meant to influence what teachers teach and how they teach.

Observations of the teachers

I think that everything I do in the classroom is pretty much geared for the HSPT.

I have students that have to take the test. It is actually helping them because that is the main thing that I am teaching. I try to apply it to regular literature.

I think preparation for the HSPT11 overwhelms my teaching. All seems to be geared for the HSPT.

I am dealing only with students that have failed the HSPT 11 one time. They will take it again in April so it is my job to prepare them for taking it the second time.

Summary

Recently, teachers received a memo advising them to focus on the HSPT11 skills between the time of the memo and April when the test is given. At all four levels of the English A classes (ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades), English A teachers seem to understand and comply with the expectations of the school by addressing the HSPT11. Preparation for the HSPT11 seems to directly and totally affect what teachers teach and their teaching practices. Zancanella (1992) discussed two variables, "curricular alignment" and "curricular power" which determined the magnitude and manner of policy influence on the three Missouri teachers he interviewed. The four teachers I interviewed were influenced by an external test in the same way as Zancanella's first two teachers; these four teachers expressed acceptance with the test. Jaeger (1991) discussed similar

findings in Alaska by observing how Alaska's test exerted greater curricular alignment on those students who were determined to need more remediation as a result of their performance on a state test. The four teachers I interviewed acknowledged that their students will need to focus on preparation for the test because the performance of students on the test has been poor.

Question 2: How does preparation for the HSPT11 differ from preparation for the HSPT9?

Description

Preparation for the HSPT9 meant that teachers covered a list of specific skills in an isolated manner. Each skill was taught and then tested for mastery. Preparation for the reading section of the HSPT11 focuses on four kinds of text (narrative, informational, argumentative/persuasive and workplace). Teachers address the multiple-choice and open-ended questions for each of these four texts.

Observations of the teachers

I think that there are more things that have to be covered. There's just more information that has to be taught. To be covered. I know there was a lot of stuff on the ISIP for the HSPT9. The ISIP for the HSPT11 is not as detailed as it was before. Sometimes that is not a good thing because you don't have specifics . . . I still teach to that kind of ISIP (HSPT9). (I cover) a lot of them (HSPT9 skills). Main idea. Any kind of inference skills. Fact and opinion. Things that are not on the new ISIP, but you know that you have to teach. They need those skills on the test. Even today when I was doing HSPT after school, I was trying to explain to the kids, the two kids who showed up, that

they have to consider things, they have to use context clues. Before when I had a whole unit on context clues, they knew that was what they were learning. Now it is not we who are doing context clues on Monday. It's like everything together. I really liked that other ISIP; it gave me more direction.

It was easier to prepare for the HSPT9 than the HSPT11. In the ninth grade, the test was a reality. Now if they fail maybe they should get serious about it. You prepare for something that is a reality.

There are the same type of questions, but the new test (HSPT11) is more difficult and challenging. The problem is that I have to explain more; it is high level thinking skills. The questions are a lot more challenging. It is harder.

The HSPT11 is on a much higher scale. There is more inferential and critical thinking. On the HSPT9, there was some of that, but it was looking inside a story for a few questions.

Summary

Although all teachers seem to attest that the HSPT11 is more rigorous than the HSPT9, there appears to be variability in their responses to this question. The two teachers who work with students who have failed the test in eleventh or twelfth grades strongly agree that the test is much more difficult. Perhaps they have experienced the challenge that the test has presented to students. The teacher who has ninth graders reverts back to the long list of skills of the HSPT9 because she works with students who have not mastered these necessary skills. The teacher who has tenth graders seems to believe that students begin to take the test seriously only after they fail. When the test was

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a ninth grade test, teachers of tenth grade students had credibility concerning the demands of the test because some students had already failed it the previous year. Eleventh graders can postpone the reality of the HSPT11 for the first two years of high school. All four teachers have experienced both tests; their perceptions on preparation for both these tests are based on their past and present experiences.

Question 3: What curriculum, tests, skills and materials do you use in your classroom?

Description

Teachers have an array of possible approaches to the HSPT11. Although they have access to the same components of the program, they can weave curriculum, tests, skills and materials in a variety of ways; in their pivotal role, they can stress some options more heavily than others. Their observations may reveal what is most important to them as they make content decisions.

Observations of the teachers

Everything you can think of in writing. I try to get to open-ended questions. I use EWT Reading and Writing. I use a lot of stuff. I use Coronado. I use Reading Literature. I use stuff that I have in my cabinet. Daily Oral Language. I used the rubric because I want them to continue to refer to that. The holistic scoring. At least that way they will know what they are responsible for. Sometimes they just don't understand. But if I explain it, sometimes it will stay with them. I started to use things from the Internet. Also I share things with people. Sometimes I bring out my old worksheets on fact and opinion.

I do use the literature books, and I use the accompanying worksheets for

vocabulary. I use the Test Best Books as thoroughly as I can. We got the new materials on the SRA frameworks.

I am using the Coach series right now. I am also using something called Advanced Reading. I don't know who the publisher is on that. The Coach 11 Reading and Writing has been in the school for several years. The students have access to the answers. They want a good grade and think nothing of getting (the answers) from somebody else. With the new books, they don't have the access to the answers yet. The students had the Coach books to practice all summer long. The books were considered consumable; students could practice all summer long with the books because the test is four weeks after school starts. They would come to us and ask what they could use. One student finished the workbook almost immediately and she said she may have seen the workbook in the after school program. We need to make an all-out effort to get new materials and when we get them, we have to get everybody to just use their materials even when somebody has a good idea or uses something else. It is like the problems we used to have with the old English books.

The strategies for Success in Reading; some of the questions are more difficult than the test. The Amsco. It is the first time I am using it. What I have to do is make active readers. We go through and highlight or write alongside. Then go back to the material. Even when they do this by themselves for each paragraph, they can answer the questions much better. I guess they have to adjust to the time thing so that they are a lot quicker. They can do it slowly at first, but later they can do it a lot better on the multiple choice. One student went from a 33 to a 100 by highlighting. It does work. I do all this

stuff.

Summary

All four teachers mentioned HSPT11 materials that they use in their classrooms. The ninth grade teacher reviewed a variety of materials that she uses; the tenth grade teacher seemed to weigh the literature text and the HSPT11 materials equally. At the eleventh and twelfth grades, the teachers focused on the HSPT11 materials. One teacher discussed the problems that develop when teachers use materials assigned to another level. There is also the search for more materials that address the HSPT11. The twelfth grade teacher is using the materials to make the students better readers. It seems that before students take the test they are provided an array of materials; once they fail the test, the materials are narrowed to test preparation materials.

Question 4: How do you decide what to teach?

Description

After considering the possibilities outlined in Question 3 as well as other factors, teachers must make final content decisions.

Observations of the teachers

I use the curriculum and then I know that they really need help in reading so I concentrate on reading as much as I can. But the deciding factor is what they are doing in the HSPT in eleventh grade and their EWT scores and the curriculum. I spend more time on reading, more classroom time trying to do reading skills and working out of EWT. My plans for the year was to do EWT two or three days and then do Reading Literature and

Sustained Silent Reading. The Reading Literature has fallen by the wayside. But, even when I do Reading Literature, I would carry over what they learned in the worksheet instead of just reading articles out of EWT or an SRA framework. So that they can actually see those things in a book in a story. The HSPT11 is not the most important thing I consider, but that is always in the back of my mind. It's not definite that the kids I have in ninth grade are going to score the way the eleventh graders scored. But it is pretty much the same thing. It just gives me something else to consider. I think also when you hear the reading scores are so low, they're so low, they're so low, that motivates me to spend more time on reading.

Usually, I look to see from their test that they took before. If they took a Spring HSPT, I look at their scores. There are four different types of texts. The problem is with the persuasive texts; how many of the students haven't done well with persuasive text. Overall, I consider how many have not done well on one type or section and I will look at that. Also the different types of applications that you have to fill out. If they don't have to fill it out, it doesn't get read. Sometimes there is valuable information there and they don't read it. Narrative was the next one. I thought we would do better on it. It is pretty straightforward. I look at how the students are doing.

I try to determine where their weaknesses are and try to concentrate on that.

I feel very strongly about this. I give each student a copy of their state test. I give them a form that I have made up that has the four areas. I am doing the reading right now. I show them how to read it and how they can figure our the raw score and then they write down their strengths on their tests. They have yet to pass the test, they will know

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what their strengths and weaknesses are. So that's where I begin teaching. They know what they want to get out of it. I am not just talking. And the other thing is that if they have a question, they have to ask it. There is simply too much to teach them. And they already know many things. They catch on, they really do, especially after awhile. I also show them on a computer just exactly how many days it is until the test. They are amazed that they only have six weeks. And there are six areas to cover and I use a week on each of these texts and I throw in a timed test on Friday. I give them the answer key what they are working on to check their work. Read the story; check the multiple choice questions all within a thirty-minute period. They begin to judge how fast they are doing. They would say to you that they didn't have enough time. I think that was just an excuse. They read very slowly; some actually point to words that they are reading. That slows you down.

<u>Summary</u>

Although one teacher's response was sparse, all the teachers spoke about evaluating students' strengths and weaknesses to determine final content decisions. Three teachers elaborated that these were strengths and weaknesses based on students' performance on state tests, the EWT or the HSPT. Teachers were influenced by the scores; one teacher stressed how she worked to make the students accountable for their scores. They considered the performance of their present students as well as the students who have taken the test in the past. This is one of the reasons why reading was emphasized so much. Corbett and Wilson (1991) organized four categories of local responses into a matrix with a vertical axis of high and low-stakes and a horizontal axis of

high and low pressure too improve performance. Their matrix of local responses was based on "Merton's (1968) typology of individual adaptations to cultural socialization." Using this matrix, the local response in my study would fit into the category of rebellion in which there is a setting of high-stakes and high pressure. Corbett and Wilson described how a local response could be categorized as rebellion:

> That is, under extreme pressure to improve scores on a very important test a district might substitute the more narrow goals of accepting and using the test scores themselves as the key outcomes of schooling for the broader goals of accepting and using the test results on the basis of their validity as indicators of student learning.

For the teachers in my study who worked within a local response framework of rebellion, the HSPT11 consumed their time since it seemed to be the only indicator that counted. Getting students to pass the HSPT11 was the teachers' greatest concern; the success of students and teachers depended upon student performance on the HSPT11.

Question 4a: Given policy constraints, how do you exercise personal judgement?

Description

In a setting of high-stakes testing where teachers are pressured to teach to the test, teachers may also favor practices other than direct preparation for a graduation test.

Observations of the teachers

I don't really take any chances because I just don't want to get into any trouble. So I just follow the curriculum and do as suggested. But a lot of times I would like to blow off Daily Oral Language. It takes ten minutes of class time. I like to go through and

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explain why you use a semicolon there and why not. I like to do that, but it takes ten minutes of class time. So it is a short period in which you have many things to do. That's why block scheduling looks good to me and that's the only reason.

Sometimes if I think personal judgement is more important, I go with personal judgement. I use the curriculum as a guide and don't use everything there.

All right. Now I think I understand the policy that the school has. Right now I am covered because I just received a letter from the assistant superintendent telling me that from February to March I will concentrate entirely on skills. That's what I see as the purpose of my class. Yes, it is valuable for them to learn English, Junior-level English. But if they don't graduate from high school having learned Junior-level English, it is not going to help them somewhere down the road. If they can learn to read and read well and express themselves in some written form with some skills, then they can carry this over into college. What I do is use personal judgement in choice of material. If I read an article in the newspaper and I feel that they should know something about that (because the state testing uses things that happen in the world), I'll bring it to their attention. I just finished an article on bulimia which I got off the Internet. I do things on abortion rights; we did things with uniforms a couple of years ago. And sure enough that ended up as a question on the reading area of the test. So I look at current events; I look at what's in the newspapers. Informational texts - I feel that I can handle it. I guess that would be using my own judgement in stressing vocabulary words. I ask students to write down the words that they don't know. Then I make lists. It is very interesting the words that they come up with, words that the book would not have picked out for them at all. Words like

propose and that shows why they are having difficulty with the test. The vocabulary that they are missing.

We have technology in the classroom. With technology, I have taken the time to finish the job assignment and even go into America's Job Bank and other things that are going to help them get a job. The Internet. We visited the Internet public library. A whole section on teen interest including cars and sports. I'll give you the address and web sites. It even had dating advice. It is a way to get them interested in subjective reading. There is something for everyone. If they have to look up something, they can go on the Internet Library. Some girl had a complete article about date rape from the teen section. All students got on WNJPIN. I even have proof of training, a job search worksheet. After the test is over, we will get back into the curriculum but not exactly.

Summary

The teachers seemed resigned to focus on preparation for the HSPT11. Two teachers used sources of information as a way to infuse personal judgement: one used articles and another used the computer. The teacher who said that she was using personal judgement in her choice of materials is still selecting materials because they might be topics on the test such as the issue of wearing school uniforms; she also used the materials as examples of informational text and as a source of vocabulary words to enable students to prepare for the test. Only the teacher who has the seniors who have failed the test diverged by using the Internet. However, some of these activities are part of her curriculum. Ultimately, her curriculum is the test; helping students with the sections of the test which they have not passed.

When one of the four teachers was asked to give her metaphor for teaching, she responded: "Sometimes I feel like a little, little bird just chirping. I just feel like all this stuff is on your head." The pressure of the test demanded that English A teachers restrict their content to preparation for the test. There seemed to be complete acceptance of the goals and means of the HSPT11 in the instructional practices of teachers.

Question 5: To what do you attribute the rise in this year's Pennsauken Campus scores in reading?

Description

The 1997 fall scores for the reading section of the HSPT11 went up 5.5% compared to the 1996 fall scores. Although our reading scores are still low, this was a positive step in improving these scores.

Observations of the teachers

Our scores went up. I don't know. I really don't know. I don't have a clue. Sometimes I think with some of them I think that it is just luck. I had a couple of kids who passed all three sections of the Fall HSPT11. Now I don't know about the math, but when these two kids in particular passed the reading and writing, it's a miracle. Maybe sometimes it is just luck. A girl staying after school for the HSPT11 Tutorial (I never had her in class, but I know her) - I can't believe that she didn't pass reading. She just missed it, but even still. And then when I see a student I had as a freshman and sophomore, he failed the test. He did nothing all year. Then another teacher had him last year and he failed the first time, but he passed the second time. So I don't understand that. I think (practice tests) help. I think anytime they can see a model of the test that's a good thing,

that helps them. Like teacher-made tests. You can tailor them to the HSPT test. I

thought the SRA frameworks were great. I thought they were terrific. My students said I

can't do this; it's going to take too long. And they get a sense of the HSPT. And they're

not going to take three days to finish it or they can't take it home to finish it. So in that

sense it helps. If nothing else it helps them realize that the test is not going to be a bunch

of paragraphs or a few paragraphs and a few questions that follow. It gets them to see the

open-ended questions and what they are really like. So I think practice tests are good.

The After-school Program helps for those kids who show up. We worked for two full

hours. They read and we went over the multiple-choice questions. How the questions are

worded. And we talked about open-ended questions and how they should answer them.

When it was about five minutes after 5:00 and one kid was finished, I asked, "Did you

learn anything today?" And they said, "Yes, it's going to help me." So if they think it's

going to help, I guess it will help them. Of course, you don't get a lot of kids coming in.

Some who attend the program just missed the cut off point for passing the test. Then you

have another kid who missed it by 50 or 60 points who doesn't show up. I don't know

what you can do. Some students have sports and a lot of them work. They want to take

the bus home. They want to go home right away. And you can't blame them. A lot of

them don't really understand how important it is to pass the test. Even some of the

juniors. I mean I see those kids another teacher had and they just don't get it. I think that

they think at some point something is going to drop out of the sky and make them get a

passing score. The DEAR Program helped. Because it just exposes them to reading so

it's got to help. My students' attitude toward the DEAR Program is very good. I have no

problems with my first period class. SSR this year is not like pulling teeth. In the past, it has been. My kids are pretty good. Now it's only February. Maybe in April, they'll be throwing those SSR logs at me. Maybe they won't. They seem to be into it. Now I've had some kids read ten books. I really do believe they're reading the, not just saying they read them. But I think that's a success, DEAR, and I think SSR is too, in my classroom. I'm doing it every Friday.

We're working; the kids are better on it. Before Drop Everything and Read, the kids had not read a book through. Now they have read ten - twelve - fourteen books and I am not talking about little hundred page things. They have done some serious reading. They complete a form and on this form there is a section about problems they encountered. I make them think. This is a three page form. I get an idea where they need help. There is always one student who says that the After-school Program didn't help them at all. We are working on the SRA and running out of time. Students needed work on the multiple choice. The students are getting closer together, getting to know the other kids. It is inspiring for the kids who don't work too hard.

Maybe Drop Everything and Read. Before they never finished a book. Now they are reading, not top drawer stuff, but they are reading. It made them concentrate a little bit more. Maybe they are paying attention to what they are reading. Yes, the After-school Programs definitely helps.

About three years ago, the students would have never thought about just reading a book. A few years ago if you asked them to read two pages they would ask, "Both pages?" Now Drop Everything and Read has gotten them into it." Extending the reading

time another five minutes was helpful. They really get into it. Another thing we have done is Sustained Silent Reading in which they have to read the whole period and stay awake while doing it. I tell them it is to train them to get through the state test. Some of them have eye problems which have never been addressed when they read so much. We can recommend anytime that we see a child has problems to go the school nurse. She has an excellent program in which she brings doctors in and gets glasses for a number of kids. When students have lost or broken glasses, she can get them a new pair. I personally am not involved in the After-school Program because of my own commitments and also because of the one year that I did it. I found that I had the very same students that I had during school as after school. After awhile once you have told them what you have to tell them and they think that there is a magic pill out there, that the right person is going to tell them the right stuff and that they will pass, I don't know how productive the after-school program is because I haven't seen any facts or figures on it. Like who attended the after-school program and then passed the test. Another thing that I do is just after the test while it is still very fresh in their minds to write down anything that they felt that the teacher did not tell them about the state test. We made a list of everything that they wished that they had known before the test. And I then ask them, "Do you feel that you were prepared for the test?" I ask them to really critique the course, to be honest. And I have gotten some excellent ideas. The timed test was one; the vocabulary came out of that. They have been prepped and prepped for the test. Is that what you call it "decompression" or "debriefing"? They do need a debriefing because they all worked for it. They need a chance to talk about it.

<u>Summary</u>

Teachers attributed the increase in the percentage of the fall 1997 reading scores to several factors. One of the factors was luck; for some teachers it is difficult for them to understand why some students pass and others fail. A second factor was practice with simulations of the test such as practice tests, SRA frameworks, open-ended questions, and the length of the test. A third factor was the HSPT After-school Program; however, teachers varied in their confidence in the program because many students did not attend. One teacher spoke about debriefing students as a way to learn what students felt they needed to know; the results of her inquiry were timed tests and specific vocabulary.

The one factor that all teachers shared was the effect of the Drop Everything and Read Program on students' reading. Teachers believed that it encouraged the Sustained Silent Reading activities on Fridays in the English classes, reading comprehension, attending to the process of reading and the extension of the length of time that students spent reading at one sitting. Because the Drop Everything and Read Program began during the 1996-1997 school year, the juniors who took the test during the fall of 1997 had experienced only one year of the program. The program has increased the amount of student reading. The results of a student survey showed that students had doubled the number of books they read during the 1996-1997 school year compared to the number of books they read during the 1995-1996 school year. The importance of reading was stressed by modifying the school schedule to allow a minimum of fifteen to twenty minutes for reading in the morning. During this time the school was silent as students and staff

read their books. Students selected books from classroom libraries maintained by the English teachers.

When the teachers were asked the above question about the improvement in students' reading scores, teachers also discussed failure which they attributed to students' misconceptions about the test. Teachers expressed their concern that students did not always understand the importance of the test. Some students believed that passing the test could be achieved not through effort, but with "a miracle" or "a magic pill." A way to overcome misguided conceptions about the test was to build camaraderie among those students who still needed to pass a section or section of the test.

Question 6: Will the report of this year's results and other years' results affect your content decisions?

Description

The 1997 fall test results arrived in January; the scores of students are made available to students and English teachers. The school received information on the performance of individual students as well as the percentage of students passing each of the three sections of the test.

Observations of the teachers

No. I don't want to let up. I am just concentrating on the skills.

The ones that we just got recently. I am trying to get all the students individual reports. The break downs. As soon as I have it, that will be one class lesson. Interestingly, once you finish that, the students have a clearer idea of where they are going. So that's what I do very intently. I make up a test. Everything that I teach them I

put on the test. That serves two purposes: 1. It clears up in their minds what is important about the test and 2. Let's me know their weak areas. If I do it a week before the test, I still have time to say here is something else that you might like to look at.

I look at the scores and decide what text to teach first. Right. I am dealing with seniors; unfortunately, the students who were not successful in October. It would be better to have a test before April. Some students have been working so hard. Even when they approach the SRA and open-ended questions I have seen improvement. I'll continue to do that.

Summary

The teachers of juniors and seniors seemed more interested in the specific results of the test compared to the teachers of freshmen and sophomores. The teachers of juniors and seniors who instructed the students who had taken the test in the fall seemed more accountable for the test results than the teachers who did not have these students in their classrooms.

Question 7: How effective is the SRA process for helping our students pass the test?

Description

The Special Review Assessment (SRA) is a way to help seniors pass the HSPT11 if they have failed a section or sections of the test during past administrations of the test. Students were provided frameworks in a supportive classroom setting. This year the seniors who still needed to pass the test were scheduled for a double period of English. These back-to-back periods provided an uninterrupted time for students to work on their SRA and to address the skills needed to pass the test.

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<u>Observations of teachers</u>

I guess it is helpful for some them to get over the obstacle of passing the test. But I am not real impressed with some of the stuff that I have read so far. I have talked with another teacher about the quality of what they turn in. Are they just waiting for a miracle? Some students think that if they do the SRA, they will pass the test for sure. The SRA process is pretty much the same this year as last year. Although she is working with some of these same students in the after-school program, the students just blow it off. I don't think that they realize that they are running out of time. Maybe they should talk to a senior who didn't graduate because of the test. Just somebody to come into the classroom and speak to them about it. A lot of them think it is a joke and some how along the line, they will get thrown a couple of points.

Before the names were anonymous, now they are not. Absolutely, this could hurt some students and prevent them from passing. I'm a bit removed from it.

This year the process is very effective. Yes, absolutely. This year you finally got one teacher with back-to-back groups in small areas. They see it as a one block period. Another point is that the teacher can use the time to teach the objective all the way through. Also I would teach part of something and overnight they would forget it. One of the problems with the SRA this year is that we are going to run into a time crunch. Teachers have so many meetings. I don't know how students are progressing along. My recommendation is that you don't have to go to that room because if I had the in-house

material I would save time.

If most of the students pass the HSPT, it will be due to a little bit of both (preparation for the April test and the SRA process). Even if they don't pass SRA, just the fact that they did SRA helped improve their thinking skills. Actually, they are very thorough. However, I will have to focus on multiple-choice. Having students for two periods back to back helps because I don't want students to socialize. They are able to stay on task a lot better. Most definitely, this is something we should continue next year. They get used to your little group. We don't know what materials we will have for SRA next year. It is a lot easier for them.

Summary

The two teachers who were more involved with the SRA process seemed to focus on how the process of SRA had improved through the introduction of scheduling two periods back-to-back. One teacher believed it eliminated distractions and increased the amount of time students were on task; the other teacher believed that teachers had more time to follow-through with their teaching objective. The two teachers who were not directly involved with students taking the test seemed to focus on problems with teachers assessing students' work for the SRA.

Question 8: What differences do you see between the HSPT9 ISIP and the HSPT11 ISIP?

Description

The Individual Student Improvement Plan assesses the progress students are making to address the skills on the HSPT. The HSPT9 was a hierarchical list of specific

skills for both reading and writing; skills for reading included "draw a conclusion" and "catalog cards." Teachers circled whether students had been remediated or not, dated when remediation occurred, and signed off the skill with their signature. The HSPT11 reflected the higher order skills of the test: four kinds of text (narrative, informational, argumentative/persuasive and workplace), six general areas that address the multiple choice writing section of the test such as mechanics and usage, and the three kinds of essays.

Observations of the teachers

I don't want to get on the topic of frustration. There is not enough time to do all the things that you have to do. We need to streamline our curriculum. There are a lot of things. Remember years ago when I taught juniors, one of the things we had to do was a term paper. That is so legitimate to teach students to write a term paper in English. There were so many other things that I talked to the assistant superintendent about. It took so much time. I showed him a term papers and he said just don't do it anymore. I don't know what I would choose to drop out because everything has to be done. I just don't know. There are building blocks. They start in ninth grade and work up to eleventh grade when they take the test. They come in with skills so low in reading and writing, it is tough; it is really frustrating. And now with the listening, speaking, and viewing rubrics, I just think that sometimes like my head is going to explode. I really do. Because I take it seriously and try to do my best. There is not enough time to do everything at the end of the year. There is never enough time to do everything. Never enough time on open-ended questions. The only way that I can rationalize that is that somebody will spend time

with that in tenth grade. They still have time because they are in ninth grade.

The eleventh grade ISIP is easier, a lot less work. It can always be modified or improved. Do you want my suggestions? Off-hand, it's better than the last one. Putting down grades as compared with the HSPT9. We need more information on open-ended questions. I go over how they should be answering the open-ended questions, what they should have included and how they should have thought it out.

The current ISIP's show the students they did so low such as a 38 or 35. They scored very low, a 25 or 30. The students are afraid that that will be their grade so you to walk a fine line showing them the ISIP paper and that I have to document their scores. But I cannot say it doesn't count. "So why do this?" would be their reaction. It is very difficult to put down a number grade on the ISIP and have a piece of paper to back it up especially for tenth graders. But students change. You get to show advancement on tenth graders I have again this year. When I teach open-ended questions, I give them some informational text and spend time with multiple choice. I have them write and spend time in the library. I make overhead projections and every student gets open-ended question in the room. One by one, I put the open-ended questions on the board on the overhead. Then I have the students answer and grade the answers. The students will say, "That is a 1" and then one student yells out, "What do you mean? Why is that a 1?" Then the class teaches each other. The student gets to see what is required. The other things we tell them is to read the question first.

I definitely use the ISIP's. You have to sign them off. I can keep track of where

they are. I can see if there is any improvement over the marking period. The text was different. I do have it broken down as to what is important in narrative text; in informational skills need to know study skills. I question some vocabulary. I used QAR and author and me. They really like it but it was kind of easy. They know how to approach an open-ended question. The whole test is open-ended. They put the main idea first and then find something to back it up.

Summary

The teachers seemed to have forgotten the narrow and fragmented approach to teaching which was structured by the ISIP's for the HSPT9. One teacher had to be prompted to recall the format of these ISIP's. The teachers seemed more concerned with the ISIP's for the HSPT11 which they were working on now. Their concerns included having enough time to address all the curriculum and also showing students their ISIP grades which could be disheartening if the scores were low or encouraging if the scores reflected improvement. Teachers spoke about addressing open-ended questions; however, open-ended questions were not included on the ISIP's. The ISIP for the HSPT9 was a daunting list of skills which had to be covered and tested for mastery; the ISIP for the HSPT11 was broader and more challenging than the ISIP for the HSPT9 which was based on the basic skills model. Critics argued that the basic skills model focused mainly on lower level skills. Perhaps teachers expressed less resistance to the ISIP for the HSPT11 because it "fostered (the) complex thinking skills" (Smith and O'Day, 1990) which teachers value.

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<u>Question 9: In what ways can we improve our program to help students pass the HSPT11?</u>

<u>Description</u>

Although our campus has shown improvement in its reading scores on the fall HSPT11, the scores were still poor compared to the state standards. Therefore, the English teachers have been asked to provide specific suggestions on ways to improve the program.

<u>Observations of the teachers</u>

It is important to just get rid of the excess. There are a lot of things that we do that don't need to be done. I wish that we had larger periods. It would be so cool to have double periods of English. Or maybe for the first half of the year concentrate on reading skills and the next half writing skills along with all the other things. I don't have a solution. I just don't know.

The literature books that we have for 3A's. We have to concentrate on skills. Those English 3's have difficulty in making associations with books. It is better than the Coach books. Better than the gray book. A way to improve is evaluating the materials we have for each level.

Small classes. If there were large classes in block scheduling, it is not good. With a large class, the third student from the teacher can hear, but the others sometimes cannot. I think that your questions covered all aspects. You did not talk about our essay scores being down because before we dropped that program where we wrote the essay in English class and Lab class. We pulled back from that and now our scores are going down.

We have new books, but they are difficult. After they have used the books for a few years, it will change. They were not accountable for what they read earlier. Class size is important. Maybe they have to do quality reading. What effect does motivation have on students? Never full concentration. Danny Glover gave the facts on a man accused of a life of crime and he was black. Three witnesses weren't questioned. One of the witnesses didn't pass a lie detector. The questions in the new book are more challenging. The students don't realize that the answers are not going to hit them in the face.

Summary

The suggestions for improving the program were very specific: streamline the curriculum, evaluate the HSPT materials for each level, ensure small class size, and provide challenging materials. One teacher strongly asserted that perhaps there was too much to address in one year and preparation for the test should be viewed as a two stage process.

Another teacher spoke about the need to evaluate the HSPT materials used at each level; HSPT materials have always been a concern. Materials are assigned to certain levels, but these boundaries are not always kept. Students may take books home with the answers so that the materials are no longer secure. Some materials are better than others. New materials do not seem available; perhaps publishers are waiting for the arrival of the new test.

Most classes seem to be relatively small. However, this suggestion could be examined to determine if there are some areas where class size may have affected preparation for the test.

The new literature books have caused some controversy. This teacher argues that they have provided challenging material which is necessary for our students.

The four specific suggestions above must be added to the suggestions made throughout the interviews.

Question 10: What changes do you anticipate in the future for state testing?

Description

Teachers have received a schedule for statewide assessment administration which is planned by the New Jersey State Department of Education. In this schedule, a new test, the High School Proficiency Assessment or HSPA will be due-notice/field tested for Language Arts Literacy on October 16, 1998. This will be the fourth round of state testing in reading.

Observations of teachers

I think that they are so out of control with testing. I think that our own kids are going to be "tested to death." I think that you should have to pass a test to graduate and students should have to meet certain standards to graduate, but speaking, listening and viewing rubrics - I just don't know about that. If they cannot read, I think that I should be teaching them how to be better readers rather than better viewers. I am dying to see how they are going to test in physical education. I have to tell you that I am really overwhelmed with the technology lesson plans, the cross-content workplace readiness standards. I spend so much time. Sometimes I come home and think when are you going to get all this stuff done.

I know that there will be additional changes.

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Some students are beginning to understand some testing. But I feel the state is going to make it more difficult and our students are at a disadvantage.

They have already done it.

<u>Summary</u>

The teachers seemed overwhelmed and resigned to another state graduation test. They are overwhelmed because the new state test may be an even more rigorous test. Beginning with the Minimum Competency Test twenty years ago, each succeeding test has been perceived as more difficult than the previous test. Not only will the state begin administering a more difficult reading test, but the state is branching out to test in other areas. Using more classroom time for testing and preparing for more tests may mean less time to spend on the skills and content that teachers believe students need.

The sparse responses of three of the teachers seemed to convey an attitude of resignation: "They have already done it" and "I know that there will be additional changes." Zancanella (1992) studied a group of California teachers who had experienced less conflict with the introduction of a new math assessment than a group of Missouri teachers with a new assessment. At first he argued that there was less conflict because the California test was part of a larger reform movement. Then he considered that the California teachers might be "numbed by increasing layers of reform" (290) as Cohen and Ball (1990) argued. The teachers in my study also appeared "numbed" by the prospect of another state graduation test as well as testing in other areas.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study

Major Conclusions for the Project

There were five major conclusions for the project:

- Teachers believed they were accountable for the performance of students on the HSPT11.

- Students seemed to have misconceptions about the HSPT11 which can affect their HSPT11 scores.

- Teachers emphasized the importance of improving students' reading skills as well as the amount of reading.

- There were components of the reading program which worked by helping students prepare for the HSPT11.

- There were specific ways to improve the reading program.

Implications for the Project

The first conclusion drawn was that teachers believed that they were accountable for students' performance on the HSPT11. Teachers' acceptance of accountability forms one side of the equilateral triangle that policymakers have constructed; the other two sides

are standards and assessments. Policymakers are encouraged by the growth in accountability systems: "At least 32 states and 34 big city districts now have accountability systems based, in part, on test scores. And the numbers are climbing fast" (Olson, Education Week, February 11, 1998).

Perhaps it is necessary to take a step backward to ask if teaches should be held accountable for their students' test scores. Bracey (1997) answers "yes" they should be, but then Bracey warns that the metaphor of the factory looms behind the acceptance of accountability. He (1997) elaborates on four points:

- Test scores may well not reflect what was taught.

- Many things outside of school greatly affect test scores.

- Children are not raw material.

- The Law of WYTIWYG (What You Test Is What You Get) must be taken into account.

At our school, the test scores should reflect what was taught because the Individual Student Improvement Plans and the curriculum were designed to address the components of the test. Those students who have failed a section or sections of the test dealt strictly with the components of the test. Therefore, the closer students were to the test, the more narrowed the curriculum. However, it was difficult to address every area of the test. The test makers had raised the bar: the HSPT11 was more rigorous and more encompassing than the previous graduation tests.

When Bracey discussed the second response, he listed the four variables that "Glen Robinson and David Brandon (1994) of the Educational Research Service found that

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could account for 83 percent of the variability in NAEP test scores among states" (Bracey, 1997). They were: "parental education, number of parents in the home, type of community, and state poverty levels for ages 5-17" (Bracey, 1997). Lindsay (1998) discusses in Education Week's "Quality Counts '98" how Leo Klagholz, Governor Whitman's commissioner of education, would like the poor-performing districts of New Jersey to reform like Union City. Lindsay states:

> That is no easy task. Union City transformed itself, but it had a core of strong
>
> leaders and a community cohesive enough to rally around its schools. That may
>
> not be the case in cities such as Paterson, where there are few businesses and
>
> civic groups powerful enough to lead a school reform campaign, or Camden,
>
> where there is crippling poverty (1998).

Critics argue that accountability should consider factors such as poverty. The principal of DuSable High School in Chicago argued:

> Though he says he supports high standards . . . (he) questioned whether
>
> his high-poverty school should be compared with others around the state,
>
> as if they were all on a level playing field (Olson, Education Week,
>
> February 11, 1998).

The value-added approach might view test scores not in terms of the cut-off scores, but rather in terms of the improvement students have made. By focusing on such a "value-added approach, the researchers suggest, Chicago could avoid penalizing schools whose students have improved substantially but started at a low point" (Olson, Education Week, March 25, 1998). The value-added approach could also haunt teachers if their students'

performance were tracked over a four year period. According to the Sanders model, teachers are divided "into five categories - from low to high effectiveness - based on whether their pupils score better or worse than anticipated over a four year period; (this) could change the whole landscape of building-level management" (Pipho, 1998).

The teachers at my school would agree that there are many factors outside of school which greatly affect our test scores. An analysis of the students' performance revealed that students entering the school with low EWT scores usually performed poorly on the test and those students with higher scores usually performed well on the test. It seems as if it were an impossible task for teachers to affect the academic growth of their students which is in contrast to Pipho's statement (1998). Our teachers believe their efforts have contributed to this year's 5.5% improvement in the reading scores.

The above remarks underscore Bracey's third response that children are not raw materials. Teachers do not determine the students who enter their schools and students are not passive raw material to be molded to teachers' wishes. But the factory model of schooling persists. Bill Watson is quoted in "Quality Counts '98": "'New Jersey spends $12 billion a year on education,' says Bill Watson, the executive director of the John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy in Trenton and a policy advisor to the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association. 'For that kind of money, we should be providing a better product'" (Lindsay, 1998). Viewing students as raw material in the factory model denies their uniqueness.

Bracey's fourth response was apparent in previous remarks, "that if teachers are held accountable for test scores, teachers can be expected to spend more time on material

that the test covers." This is the foremost implication of the first major conclusion of the study. Students are already intensively prepared for the three sections of the HSPT11, as well as their occupational areas. As the state expands its testing program into other areas, teachers wonder if there will be enough time to prepare students for the demands of all these tests.

The second major conclusion is that students have misconceptions about the HSPT11 which can affect their HSPT11 scores. There is a sense of unreality about the HSPT11 for students. Students become more focused on the test the closer they are to taking the test. Until then it seems that students can attribute their passing the test to luck rather than to effort. Teachers want other people to reiterate the message of the test's importance to students.

The implication is that some students do not seem to feel accountable to the test. Increasing accountability for students and parents has been a concern for states such as North Carolina. Their solution was to pass "a student accountability policy last year" which "calls for intense remediation, and retention, if necessary, of students who do not score at a proficient level on the state exams" (Manzo, 1997). Although districts may extol the tests as a way to focus on the curriculum in order to be promoted to the next grade, parents have sued. In Johnston, N.C., "the plaintiffs say that the policy is unfair to students who do not perform well on tests in general, and is especially detrimental to minority and special education students" (Manzo, 1997).

Some students do not perform well on tests. The emphasis on tests seems to increase student passivity; student passivity is an obstacle for teachers who feel

accountable to the test. Teachers who are concerned by student passivity frequently resort to drill-type teaching before a test. Wagner describes this detrimental cycle:

> There have been very few reports about the impact on students of the
>
> increased emphasis on standardized tests. But many teachers can tell you.
>
> More time spent going over multiple-choice questions and test-taking
>
> strategies means less time for real learning and fewer interesting things being
>
> done in school. Sadly, such a "tougher" approach to increasing teacher and
>
> school accountability for improving test scores is likely to increase student
>
> passivity, diminish motivation for learning, lessen the amount of class time
>
> spent on challenging and interesting material, and undermine the development
>
> of real academic competencies (Wagner, 1998).

He suggests that graduation by exhibition of mastery, peer review and upward coaching are better alternatives for assessing student learning until better tests are created.

The commissioner of education believes that we have a better test, but seems to admit that there are missing elements in the process of educational reform. "Mr. Klagholz is creating two new divisions that will be charged with forming resource teams to help failing districts identify educational and fiscal needs and draw up improvement plans" (Lindsay, 1998). Critics argue whether this can be accomplished:

> Critics of the state education department also question whether it has the
>
> staff or expertise to lead or even nudge failing urban districts to reform.
>
> The state has focused for so long on fiscal matters and monitoring districts,
>
> they say, that helping schools improve teaching and learning will be a new

venture (Lindsay, 1998).

The emphasis on increasing accountability needs to be redirected toward improving teaching and learning. An emphasis on teaching and learning can motivate "passive students." As Darling-Hammond states: "Motivating students requires an understanding of what individual students believe about themselves, what they care about, and what tasks are likely to give them enough success to encourage them to work hard to learn" (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Perhaps these lessons learned from state reform will be passed on to the national level if national testing is legislated in the future.

The third conclusion implies that teachers recognize and value reading as a way to help students become more successful. There has been an explosion of interest in reading recently. For example, "Read Across America" received much attention on March 2, the birthday of Dr. Seuss. Failing districts need to celebrate and promote reading throughout the year.

Alvarado, the superintendent of New York City's District 2, has made "literacy - reading and writing - the single focus of all efforts to improve teaching and learning" for nine years (Wagner, 1998). For him, literacy is foremost because it affects all academic areas. Other low-performing districts have focused on literacy as a way to improve school performance. One New York district has adopted "a 90-minute period devoted to literacy" (Olson, Education Week, March 25, 1998) and another San Diego school has devoted "half of one school day a week to reading" and parents were asked "to make sure their children read for at least 20 minutes every night" (Reinhard, 1998).

Our teachers recognize the benefits in supporting student reading. Every morning

we read in our first period classes for fifteen to twenty minutes after the morning announcements and Friday's English classes are devoted to Sustained Silent Reading. It has been very gratifying for the staff to see student interest in reading develop during the past two years of our program. Our school has taken a program designed for elementary schools and successfully adapted it to a high school setting.

There needs to be other programs which provide high school students "a second chance to learn to read." Showers et al. (1998) reported on a plan developed at San Diego's Morse High School with the preface that "we need to create programs for adolescents that will teach them to read effectively enough to profit from secondary education and instill habits of regular independent reading." Their multidimensional course encourages extensive reading: "Clearly, we must encourage the students to read much more than they are currently reading. Many of the participating students had not read a book outside of school in years and reported little in the way of a reading habit." Their plans for the future include "rewards and incentives for greater out-of-school reading, as well as renewing our efforts to involve parents in encouraging young people to read at home" (Showers et al., 1998).

These are goals that we are also working on for our students. The commitment to reading that our staff has demonstrated with the initiation of the Drop Everything and Read Program will carry us through the implementation of future designs to improve reading in our school.

The fourth conclusion recognized that there were components of the reading program which teachers believed worked by helping students prepare for the HSPT11.

The components that teachers discussed were practice tests, SRA frameworks, debriefing

students after the HSPT11, the double period of SRA and the Drop Everything and Read

Program (DEAR). Except for the DEAR Program, all the components that teachers

believed were successful were strategies which directly prepared students for the test by

focusing on the test and simulating the test.

These strategies seem to be in opposition to the goals of the test makers. The

HSPT11 was a test designed to be a higher level test in which students and teachers could

not merely cover a long list of skills to prepare for the test. However, teachers have found

ways to analyze the test and then present it to students in "pieces."

The need for direct preparation of the test seems to be fueled by the ever-present

undercurrent of accountability. Teachers feel pressured to prepare students directly for

the test. This pressure is apparent in the example of Massachusetts as the state prepares

for its new challenging tests, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, or

MCAS: "Like many states ushering in tough new assessments, harried school officials

in the Bay State are using words like "frenzy" and "fevered" to describe their efforts to

get teachers, students, and parents ready (White, 1998).

Direct preparation also has the effect of narrowing the curriculum. For failing

districts under the pressure of accountability, narrowing the curriculum seems to be an

unwanted consequence:

> Critics of what are known as high-stakes tests warn that they can distort and
>
> narrow instruction, encouraging teachers to focus solely on what is tested and
>
> obscuring richer ways of judging schools. They say there is only limited

evidence that such systems will actually raise achievement in the long run

(Olson, Education Week, February 11, 1998).

Unfortunately, schools feel pressured to narrow the curriculum; fortunately, our school

has implemented "a richer way," the Drop Everything and Read Program. Over time, this

richer way to help our students become better readers may also raise their achievement

scores.

The fifth conclusion lists ways that teachers believed the program could be

improved. Although teachers believed that they have done everything possible to prepare

students for the test, they offered some suggestions which continued to narrow the

curriculum. These suggestions included "streamlining the curriculum" so that the areas of

the test could be divided into two. This would mean covering half of the elements of the

test in the freshman year and covering the other half in the sophomore year.

Teachers also suggested examining the grade level use of consumable HSPT11

materials, focusing on open-ended questions, encouraging more students to attend the

After-school Tutorial, and scheduling smaller classes.

The suggestions that teachers have made reveal how overwhelmed they feel as

they seek ways to reduce their accountability. Teachers did not include suggestions about

the DEAR Program although they have demonstrated their commitment to its success.

There were no suggestions for expanding the program. The pressure to prepare students

for the test seems to blind teachers to the realization that "a rich way" to help students is

by encouraging the extensive reading of students.

<u>Major Conclusions for the Intern's Leadership Development</u>

During this project, I enhanced and extended my leadership competencies in the following areas:

<u>Leadership</u>:

- Identify, reflect upon, and articulate ethical beliefs and values

- Assume the roles and functions of school-based management.

- Apply human relations skills in interacting effectively with others.

- Analyze and solve problems using appropriate decision-making techniques.

- Initiate and effectively manage change as both leader and member of a leadership team.

<u>Communication Skills</u>:

- Communicate with individuals and groups in a positive manner.

- Listen actively and respond appropriately to the ideas and opinions of others.

<u>Group Processes</u>:

- Facilitate group processes in shared decision-making.

- Use group activities to enhance the motivation and self-esteem of the staff.

- Plan and conduct effective meetings.

<u>Curriculum</u>:

- Apply principles of effective curriculum development.

- Communicate and consistently reinforce the teaching of skills and concepts identified in the curriculum.

- Involve others in developing and assessing the scope, content and sequence of a

balanced curriculum.

- Promote a multicultural, non-sexist, adaptive, and developmentally appropriate curriculum.

- Incorporate state curriculum mandate and guidelines in gaining program approval.

Instruction:

- Recognize, encourage, and monitor the use of effective teaching methods and strategies, especially in relation to special needs population.

- Apply principles of teaching and learning with children and adults.

Performance:

- Apply behavior management strategies that will enhance the overall performance of the school.

- Identify existing and potential support services to enhance staff and student performance.

- Create a school climate which encourages optimum performances of students and adults.

Evaluation:

- Apply effective strategies for assisting school programs.

- Apply effective strategies for evaluating students and staff.

Organizational Management:

- Use strategic planning skills in managing change.

- Develop procedures which comply with local policies, state and federal rules and regulations, and contractual agreements.

- Identify, recruit, select and assign qualified personnel to assure accomplishment of the school's mission.

Political Management:

- Identify and respond appropriately to the dynamics and interrelationships of local, state, and national politics that impact on the school.

Implications for the Intern's Leadership Development

I extended my leadership competencies by helping to analyze and solve the problem of low reading scores on the HSPT11; this is one of the student performance objectives for our school. Analyzing and solving this problem involved a school-based management approach including various personnel - teachers, guidance counselor, department chair, Title I Coordinator, parent/school liaison coordinator and principal.

There have been many opportunities for me to develop my communication skills while implementing the action plan to improve reading. I have spoken at a parent meeting, faculty meetings and department meetings. At these meetings, I have improved my listening skills, as well as my ability to respond appropriately to others.

Our department meetings provided an opportunity for the English Department to engage in shared decision-making. Meetings are generally held on Mondays at 3:20 P.M.; teachers receive an agenda before the meeting. Our chairs are arranged in a circle; everyone has an opportunity to share their opinions at each meeting. Frequently, other staff such as the guidance director choose to join us.

During the summer of 1997, I was involved in developing curriculum for the English III and English IV classes. While we were developing this curriculum, we

promoted "a multicultural, non-sexist, adaptive, and developmentally appropriate curriculum." It has been especially important to widen the lens to allow a more multicultural perspective in our curriculum. We were also faced with core curriculum content standards for literacy and workplace readiness which we effectively incorporated into our curriculum. Throughout the school year, I have worked to "communicate and consistently reinforce the teaching of skills and concepts identified in the curriculum."

As Staff Development Specialist and English Department Chair, I have promoted the use of effective teaching methods and strategies. I have mentored several teachers this year. I have also arranged in-services which have focused on instructional strategies for at-risk populations.

One of the most important ways I have helped to improve performance this year was to facilitate the DEAR Program. I observed how the program was working in academic classes and occupational areas. I spoke with teachers about the program and helped them increase the performance of students. During these observations and conferences with staff, I was applying effective strategies for evaluating students and staff.

I displayed skill in organizational management by arranging the HSPT11 After-school Tutorial in the fall and in the spring. I had to assign qualified personnel, select materials, arrange a schedule and develop a curriculum.

Preparing students to pass the HSPT11 and implementing an action plan to improve reading scores has meant opportunities to "identify and respond appropriately to the dynamics and interrelationships of local, state, and national politics that impact on the school" especially in the areas of standards, assessments and accountability.

The implication of enhancing and extending my leadership competencies in the above ways is that I understand the skills that are necessary to be an effective leader. I know that I have practiced and experienced many of these skills and that I can continue to learn how to improve and refine these skills in the future.

Major Conclusions for the Change Brought About in the Organization

- The innovative scheduling for the Special Review Assessment for seniors who have failed the HSPT11 has been successful during the 1997-1998 school year and plans to continue this double period are scheduled for the 1998-1999 school year.

- The reading scores of the 1997 Fall HSPT11 have shown a 5.5 % increase over the 1996 Fall HSPT11 scores.

- Enhanced teaching practices are the result of teachers' examination of instructional practices, the literature on testing, and review of classroom materials.

- Teachers are participants in an ongoing process of reflection and evaluation to continually improve the reading program for our students.

Implications for the Change Brought About in the Organization

Implementing an action plan to improve the reading scores of our students has brought change to our organization.

One of the changes was innovative scheduling for the SRA process. Because this change was so successful, it will continue next year. The seniors were able to work uninterrupted for a double period; this provided more time to learn and to complete the SRA process. The seniors developed a comraderie while working together over an extended period of time. The teacher felt there was more time to help students. The

implication is that seniors who have still not passed sections of the test need to concentrate their efforts in a special setting. The double period was an idea initiated by a teacher; I helped implement the idea by listening to the teacher.

The reading scores have improved 5.5%. The implication is that whatever we are doing to improve reading should be continued and enhanced. Our plan to encourage extensive reading seems to be contributing to this increase so we have ordered more classroom library books, scheduled book chats and arranged trips as incentives.

The teachers in the English Department have opportunities to examine instructional practices, the literature on testing and classroom materials. This has enabled them to enhance their teaching practices. For example, this year and last year we determined that our students needed more challenging materials, materials that do not water down the curriculum. Now our students are reading a variety of texts including those which would be called more challenging. Teachers are a vital part of the decision-making process; they must participate in the dialogue concerning instructional practices.

For teachers to participate in the dialogue, a climate of trust must be built and maintained. This trust carries over into reflection and evaluation to improve school programs. The teachers at my school have worked collaboratively with me to collect data to discuss how we can improve our program (Brainard, 1996; Sagor, 1992). This is the "constructivist approach" to change that Wagner (1998) promotes. The implication is that it is not the top-down approach which is most effective, but rather "a process of action research and development in which everyone works to understand the problem, engages in discussion to reach agreement on the goal, and shares in the responsibility for

implementing change, assessing progress, and achieving results" (Wagner, 1998). When

we engage in this process of action research, the participants change:

>As people begin to share ideas and develop common aspirations, the goal
>
>is no longer simply to do only what is necessary to comply with the demands
>
>of the boss. Rather, people begin to work to earn the respect of their colleagues
>
>and to create something truly worthwhile together (Wagner, 1998).

This is the process for organizational change that we are encouraging at our school.

<div align="center">

The Need for Further Study
</div>

There is a need for further study in assessment as long as the state continues to

implement new graduation tests which are each more rigorous than the previous test. The

new test, the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) Language Arts Literacy Test

will be due-notice/field tested this October 1998. It will be a new test with more

components; speaking, listening and viewing, science, and visual and performing arts are

scheduled for due-notice/field testing during the next few years. As teachers face new

tests, they will find themselves again negotiating between the constraints of policy and

their own concepts concerning the nature of teaching and learning. Because these changes

are taking place now, I believe my study and studies about state assessment are germane

today and in the future.

The reform movement bolstered by accountability measures has continued to rely

on standardized tests as the sole way to improve student achievement and direct teachers'

instructional practices. Perhaps the state needs to look at alternative ways to help improve

student achievement and teachers' work. More studies of the linking between the macro

level and the micro level may provide direction that will result in better alternatives.

This study has provoked questions for me. If the macro and micro levels share common goals for students (that is, both levels want students to become skilled, productive members of society), are they best serving students by legislating and preparing students to take a graduation test? If test makers know before the test is given which students will probably fail, why is money and energy spent on a graduation test? Are there better ways to use these scant resources to help the students who seem to need them the most? This questioning is apparent in the remarks of Charles E. Mingo, the principal of DuSable High School in Chicago; his school was recently placed on the "academic early-warning list." Education Week quoted him:

> "I feel a lot of pressure," said Charles E. Mingo, DuSable's principal. But, he added, "you tend to pay attention to those people who pay you. The state is down the line. Vallas (the district's chief executive officer) is right here." Though he says he supports high standards, the embattled principal questioned whether his high-poverty school should be compared with others around the state, as if they were all on a level playing field. "If I'm the poorest school in the nation, then compare me with like schools," Mr. Mingo argued in a recent interview. "Don't compare me with schools that have selective admissions and higher socioeconomic status" (Olson, Education Week, February 11, 1998).

If predictions are accurate, these are some of the students who now make up the minority population which will soon become the majority. It is essential to ask again if we are serving the best interests of our students and society.

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