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Exploring Educators' Decisions During the Era of New Professionalism : Teachers and Administrators Dialoguing Together in a Performance-Based Pay School District

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Exploring Educators' Decisions During the Era of New Professionalism: Teachers and Administrators Dialoguing Together in a Performance-Based Pay School District

A DISSERTATION

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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

We hereby approve the dissertation

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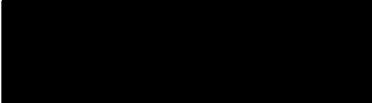
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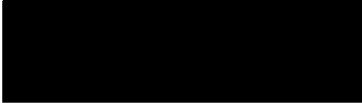
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ABSTRACT

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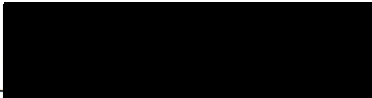
District

by Nicholas V. Vancheri

The purpose of this action research study was to examine how teachers embedded in cultures of accountability, performance, and rewards, attempted to maintain integrity and professionalism in their instructional choices, with administrators as supportive partners. In addition, I aimed to explore how teachers and administrators balance power relations while negotiating this terrain. The research questions that guided this dissertation study were:

1. When given a supportive space for ongoing dialogue in the current era of new professionalism and neoliberalism, how do we as teachers and administrators describe our educational decisions while functioning in evaluation systems?

2. What kinds of actions might teachers recommend or consider taking regarding how administrators can best support their instructional decision-making in this era of heightened accountability?

Teacher accountability policies since 2001 have changed the landscape of education in the United States, with a heightened emphasis on the yearly evaluation scores of educators. Hence, this study took place within the new era of heightened accountability and rewards cultures that prevailed in education. I conducted a participatory action research (PAR) study consisting of eight participants (seven teachers and myself, an administrator) who met weekly in a

professional learning community (PLC) and journaled online about these sessions, as well as their everyday experiences. These findings add to research regarding the effects of new professionalism on both teachers and administrators and how an in-depth look at the daily interactions between these groups can inform future legislation and local decisions regarding educator practice and evaluation systems.

Keywords: new professionalism, neoliberalism, instructional choices, educational decisions, teacher evaluation, connections

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A doctoral journey involves more than just one person. First, to my mother-in-law Marihelen, who sadly left us in 2019, your support during the busy *two classes per week* portion of this program cannot be overlooked. I could not have done this without your help and miss you dearly. To my family, I am inspired by the willingness to work hard of my siblings. I am also especially grateful for the hard work and sacrifice of my parents, Tony and Anna. My parents are first-generation immigrants to this country who instilled all of the values and skills I needed to succeed in this journey. My mom and dad had to fight tooth and nail for everything, sometimes working two to three jobs at a time, at all hours of the day. For my parents, their sacrifices were greatly rewarded by all four of their children graduating college. Mom and Dad—I hope I make

you proud and you finally have my approval to brag that your son is the first doctor in our family! My parents, by their struggles and successes building a better life for their children and their children's children, represent the American Dream—a dream achieved by blood, sweat, and tears, and an acknowledgement that nothing is handed to us in life.

And, last but not least, are the two most important people in my life: my wife, Kathleen, and our son, Nicholas. Kathleen, as my best friend and the love of my life, you inspired and challenged me to shoot for my dreams. Thank you for always being my champion and for being the rock at home during those late night classes and Sunday morning writing sessions. And to our precious little boy, Nicholas—I did this all for you. Nicholas—never let anyone tell you that you cannot accomplish your goals. When you work hard and have a laser-like focus, you can do anything. You have grown up through my doctoral studies, as you were less than two weeks old when I interviewed for this program. Now, as I finish, you are in first grade. In the words of my Super Mario Bros. loving son, "Daddy just beat Bowser, Star World, and all of the hardest levels all at once!"

Finally, I want to thank the teachers, students, and administrators who have inspired me during my two decades in education. Thank you for helping me become the educator and man I am today and for letting me serve you.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved parents, Tony and Anna, my wife, Kathleen, and my best buddy and son, Nicholas. We did it!

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PROLOGUE: THE EXPERIENCE

I am a high school principal in an urban school district that uses two different salary guides and offers teachers and administrators the ability to choose between them, a condition agreed in the district's last contract negotiations. One is a traditional guide that allows staff to move up one step each year, as long as they are rated by their supervisors as <u>Effective</u> or higher on their summative evaluations; the other is a performance-based salary guide wherein scoring <u>Effective</u> moves an individual up one step and scoring <u>Highly Effective</u> moves him or her up two steps.

On this crisp fall morning I am very busy. What am I doing? I am not monitoring the number of absent teachers and ensuring appropriate classroom coverage. I am not welcoming students into the building and encouraging them to have a great day. I am not discussing instructional strategies and life with a first-year math teacher. On this morning, I am printing piles and piles of actionable evidence and organizing examples of correspondence, agendas, and professional development sessions into specific categories of the principal observation rubric— all in preparation for the first of two observations that the district administrator who evaluates my own performance will complete this school year.

As part of the first evaluation of my own performance this year by my immediate supervisor, beyond examining the evidence presented in two very thick binders, the district evaluator and I venture out to classrooms where we will complete informal teacher visitations of five to ten minutes in length—and this information will be used by my direct evaluator to complete the first formal evaluation of me. We are sure to visit classrooms focused on the four major content areas (English, math, science, and social studies) and a non-core class (world languages) during our travels. In these very brief moments, we see highly engaging instruction,

with one exception—a tenth grade English class that was on task but transitioning from a quiz to independent work during our brief visit. Upon receiving the completed formal evaluation from my district evaluator, I am perturbed that my rating for "management of rigorous instructional settings" dropped two slots from Exemplary during my last observation to Proficient I—all because five of the twenty-five minutes of classroom visitations were not considered "rigorous and engaging enough."

Down the hall, I see a social studies teacher who I rated Highly Effective in the past school year. In working with him, I have considered him a knowledgeable and engaging instructor. Despite that, my own views and anecdotal evidence are considered irrelevant in his rating. Instead, I can only rate him Highly Effective based on the composite of his performance while being formally observed (during two, twenty-minute lessons) and the progress of his students from pre- to post-assessments (which he created, administered, and graded). By being rated Highly Effective, this teacher will move up two steps on the district's salary guide, simply because during the equivalent of one class period, he scored at the highest levels on the observation rubric. By contrast, in the next door classroom, a teacher with what in my views is of the same instructional prowess may have had two poor performances on his or her observation days and is now rated Ineffective, placed on a Corrective Action Plan (CAP), stuck on the same salary guide step, and may have his or her livelihood taken away after another, similar year.

Moving along through the school, I run into Teacher A, one of my favorite and strongest math teachers. However, these days I never look forward to the post-observation conferences with her, as they typically go beyond the designated time allotted and involve a protracted discussion of every single instructional indicator not rated as Exemplary, of the sixty-three assessed. Although this teacher is interested in improving her practice, in post-observation

conferences her focus seems purely on how she can reach Exemplary in every category on the

observation rubric, which would qualify her for a Highly Effective rating and a performance-

based salary increase of two steps.

   Upon receiving her written observation and score, Teacher A uses the three to five days

in between receipt of the final observation and our post-conference to gather evidence to argue

for higher marks in each area. For example, when we discussed technology integration in the

instructional delivery standard of the rubric during one post-observation conference, she spent

twenty minutes arguing that she should have received an Exemplary rating rather than the

Proficient II I assigned to her (two spots higher on the rubric). Based on the language in the

rubric, I assessed her as Proficient II because she had implemented technology (e.g., power

points and interactive games into her lesson). To be considered Proficient III or Exemplary, she

needed to implement data management systems or offer opportunities for students to access

materials and discuss math online (e.g., Google Classroom). After making my case for why she

deserved a Proficient II rating, I had to listen to her argument for why she considered herself

Exemplary. I reiterated why she deserved a Proficient II and explained how to improve this score

for the next observation. This left us with twenty minutes to discuss the other thirteen indicators

she wanted me to consider adjusting. At this moment, I felt useless, as my instructional leader

role was pushed aside by my role as an evaluator defending score allocations.

   In contrast, during a post-observation conference with another math teacher, who is NOT

on the performance-based salary guide, the discussion takes a different direction. After telling

Teacher B that based on my assessment of her teaching, she was performing well as the score

indicated and would move up to the next step on the salary guide [and was not in danger of

being placed on a CAP] we went on to discuss many of the same indicators I reviewed in the

post-observation conference with Teacher A. However, this post-observation conference

proceeded as a constructive conversation; we discussed ways she could improve her classroom

performance. Instead of focusing on the quantifiable performance indicated by her score, we

discussed her overall work as a classroom teacher.

Prologue: Situating the Experience

This is the reality of the new era of heightened accountability and rewards cultures that

currently prevail in education—an era in which five minutes in one day of 180 school days of

instruction is used as evidence to characterize a school and individual teachers in it as lacking

rigor and student engagement, and a mere two observations determine fates and finances. This is

especially troubling when educators believe that the best indicator of our performance is the

unremarkable and everyday events of our routine (Tripp, 2012). I explained many times to the

school staff (especially Teacher A) that the best way to meet the indicators in the new

observation rubric and obtain performance-based pay is to teach, and reflect on and discuss their

teaching with me just as we did prior to the days of heightened accountability. It is during these

tense times of heightened accountability, when ratings on indicators in a rubric take precedence

over a simple conversation on what works and does not work in the classroom, when I realize

that something needs to be done to protect the integrity of our profession and its inherent

collegiality. With accountability standards and surveillance monitoring becoming more and more

the norm in education, it is our duty to move beyond this (new) way of looking at things and

examine the ways in which this shift has become problematic (Tripp, 2012). After all, if we lose

control over decision-making in our profession, those who are pushing accountability standards

and surveillance culture monitoring will control us (Tripp, 2012).

As a public school administrator, I have evaluated teachers both before and during this new era of heightened accountability. During my informal and formal observations of teachers, I gathered much anecdotal information that shows a change in teachers' instructional choices, as well as society's perceptions of the profession (Evetts, 2011; Jabbar, 2013; Ward, 2007; Zeichner, 2010). I witnessed teachers placing the edicts of larger policy-makers at the forefront of their instructional decisions, ahead of their own teaching expertise (Evetts, 2011; Jabbar, 2013; Ward, 2007; Zeichner, 2010). In addition, I noticed teachers and administrators make decisions geared more towards obtaining extrinsic rewards such as performance-based pay, regardless of the potential effects on student outcomes. I also observed the vilification of teachers amplified in the past decade, as society blames the money allocated to teachers' salaries, health benefits, and pensions, along with the presence of strong unions, for its own financial struggles (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Evetts, 2011; Giroux, 2002; Harvey, 2005; Jabbar, 2013; Ward, 2007; Zeichner, 2010).

According to Murnane and Cohen (1986), an emphasis on meeting individual goals over the greater community good is a common consequence of performance-based pay systems and new professionalism as a whole. This raises the question of whether the focus of Teacher A on her evaluation ratings and the chance to obtain additional compensation via performance-based pay criteria, as described above, causes her to negotiate instructional decisions with the demands of accountability systems and rewards culture. Along related lines, if the opportunity to obtain performance-based pay and the demands of the current system improve her teaching, is this not a positive effect for all stakeholders involved, particularly students? And, when we speak of improving teaching performance, are we referring to the "quantifiable scores" that teachers obtain in classroom observation events or to the work they engage in routinely with their

students over a school year, which goes by unquantified? Additionally, how do we as a

community of administrators and teachers move away from mini-trials/judge and jury dynamics

to work within these systems in ways that are generative for educators?

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Teacher accountability policies promoted by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 have changed the landscape of education in the United States (Springer et al., 2012). Many scholars and educators believe that formalizing teacher accountability, as NCLB did, will produce improvements in students' standardized test scores and college/career readiness (Harvey, 2014; Murnane & Steele, 2007; Rice, et al., 2015). Some scholars contend that the new accountability policies and evaluation tools make it possible for educational administrators to remove from the classroom those teachers found to be performing at "unsatisfactory" or only "partially effective" levels and ultimately provide students with only "effective and highly effective" teachers (Springer, et al., 2012). In this early transition from the previous inconsistent system of teacher evaluations, which relied on subjective observations of the teachers' classroom performance by administrators, to the formalized system of teacher accountability that combines criteria-based observations (e.g., Danielson's Framework for Teaching and Stronge's Teacher Effectiveness Performance Evaluation System) and student growth and/or performance on standardized assessments (e.g., Partnership for Assessment and Readiness for College and Careers—PARCC), researchers and educators are giving just as much attention to teacher retention rates (especially in critical need areas such as math and science) as to student achievement results (Springer, et al., 2012). Some scholars worry, that the perennial struggle inner city, low-income school districts experience in recruiting and retaining teachers may actually become exacerbated by the intense pressure and scrutiny that formalized accountability policies have placed on teachers, which, in turn, could lead to burnout and higher turnover rates than in the past (Firestone, 2014; Harvey, 2014; Liang & Akiba, 2015; Springer, et al., 2012). As

this suggests, the new teacher accountability policies and systems have both supporters and

critics.

It is important for all stakeholders to discuss and support the everyday instructional

decisions of teachers during this era of heightened accountability. As adults, today's United

States K-12 students are likely to be competing with students from other countries for jobs that

may not currently exist, all while the country deals with teacher shortages and promotes

increased standards for academic performance (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013; Firestone, 2014;

Goldhaber, et al., 2008; Goldhaber, 2009; Ingersoll, 2007; Johnson & Papay, 2009; Lavy, 2007).

I maintain it is beneficial to the field of education for administrators and teachers to discuss their

everyday instructional decisions while operating within accountability systems and within a

rewards culture. It is important for educators, while operating in a profession where day-to-day

responsibilities potentially push us into silos, to speak with both peers and superiors to remember

that we are dealing with similar circumstances and not operating alone. By *everyday*

instructional decisions, I refer to pedagogical choices teachers make that have implications for

not only student learning but also their own personal and financial well-being. Through coming

together in a non-evaluative and supportive setting, it was my hope that the teachers I supervised

could brainstorm, discuss, and negotiate with me tensions that arose when making instructional

choices, even within this culture of heightened accountability. I wanted to continue to build

educator capacity in this setting through growth-fostering relationships, open and honest

dialogue, and healthy connections (Freedberg, 2007; Jordan, 2000a, 2000b, 2008; Miller, 2010a;

Raider-Roth, 2017). Because I saw this as essential to professional practice, I was interested in

developing and testing out ways in which administrators can support teachers' growth in this

culture. In keeping with these ideas, I argue that the study will broaden and enrich the field of

education and administrator-teacher relationships by providing a glimpse into how educators can succeed professionally and personally, support their students, and maintain healthy connections with administrators, all while working within systems of heightened accountability.

Problem Addressed in the Study

Based on the logic that both teachers' instructional practices and students' standardized test scores will improve as a result of new federal and state accountability policies, school districts (particularly those in low-income, inner cities) have been pressured into adopting formal evaluations systems (Firestone, 2014; Goldhaber, 2008; Ingersoll, 2007; Murnane & Steele, 2007). In addition, in school districts throughout the United States, performance-based pay incentives have become a centerpiece of these formal teacher evaluation systems (Firestone, 2014; Goldhaber, 2008; Ingersoll, 2007; Murnane & Steele, 2007).

The current state of education has given more credence to instructional check-ins, performance evaluations, and prescribed usage of our time. Therefore, at the heart of my research interests was a yearning to provide teachers with a voice and much needed support within these contexts, especially during this era of heightened accountability where neoliberalism and new professionalism have changed the profession. By *heightened accountability*, I refer to the current situation in education where formal evaluation systems, which produce quantifiable scores to rate and sort teachers, are at the forefront of virtually all decision-making. *Neoliberalism*, as defined by David Harvey (2005), is the "intensification of the influence and dominance of capital; it is the elevation of capitalism, as a mode of production, into an ethic, a set of political imperatives, and a cultural logic" (p. 23). *New professionalism* is a movement which takes aim at teacher knowledge, dedication, and statuses, in an attempt to de-professionalize and erode the dignity of educators (Evetts, 2011; Jabbar, 2013; Ward, 2007;

Zeichner, 2010). The neoliberal and new professionalism movements are geared towards streamlining the work of teachers and quantifying their production. In addition, the current economic, political, and educational climate continues to push for more accountability at every level (Zeichner, 2010). In this context, educators must find ways to build capacity, recognize opportunities, and reframe the profession rather than let surveillance culture affect their instructional decisions (Ward, 2007; Zeichner, 2010), as they attempt to maintain their sense of professionalism and provide their students with the best opportunities to succeed. My initial interest in the potential effects of performance-based pay incentives on teachers' instructional decisions morphed into a larger exploration of how neoliberalism and new professionalism— with performance-based pay serving as one tool utilized by proponents of these agendas/movements—affected us as professionals. It was my goal to bring professional educators to the table to identify the tensions in teaching in an era of high-stakes accountability and how we, together, might consider these demands but also hold ourselves to the ambitious purpose of quality teaching and education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how teachers embedded in cultures of accountability, performance, and rewards, attempt to maintain integrity and professionalism in their instructional choices, with administrators as supportive partners. In addition, I aim to explore how teachers and administrators balance power relations while negotiating this terrain. Consistent with this purpose, the research questions that guided this dissertation study were:

1. When given a supportive space for ongoing dialogue in the current era of new professionalism and neoliberalism, how do we as teachers and administrators describe our educational decisions while functioning in evaluation systems?

2. What kinds of actions might teachers recommend or consider taking regarding

how administrators can best support their instructional decision-making in this era

of heightened accountability?"

Significance of the Study

Current literature on heightened accountability, neoliberalism, new professionalism,

value-added models, and performativity, which I review in Chapter 2, suggests/shows that the

teaching profession has been negatively affected by these developments (Ball, 2003, 2016;

Evetts, 2009, 2011; Zeichner, 2010). In addition, current empirical research on performance-

based pay, which I also review later in Chapter 2, is mostly concerned with possible correlations

between its implementation and teacher retention and student achievement (Rice & Malen, 2017;

Springer, 2009; Stedman & McCallion, 2001). As performance assessment becomes further

integrated into everyday practices in schools, it is important to examine how teachers attempt to

remain true to their professional convictions while balancing the requirements and tensions of

this era of heightened accountability and new professionalism. It is also critically important that

we explore the effects of this balancing act, along with accountability policies and regulations,

on teacher-administrator relationships, since it is possible that disconnection amongst teachers

and administrators can hinder student growth. Educational researchers need to ascertain the

effects of neoliberal policies and attitudes towards teachers in the current era of new

professionalism since our efforts to merely survive within the profession could damage both the

profession and our students. Along related lines, the field needs to identify and understand if/how

administrators can support and encourage thoughtful practices and good instruction while

teachers operate in systems of heightened accountability.

This study provides a window into the on-the-ground efforts of teachers and administrators working together to navigate the terrain of a heightened accountability system through dialogue. Studying the instructional decisions teachers made and the support and encouragement they received from administrators, like myself, will generate insights that might enable educators to collectively navigate new professionalism and neoliberalism in ways that retain the broader aims of education. The study might also serve as a data source for other researchers interested in learning about how teachers and administrators continue to draw on their expertise and professional judgment when making instructional decisions, despite legislation and rewards meant to create an educational climate informed by a worker-producer and top-down leadership model (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Evetts, 2011; Giroux, 2002; Harvey, 2005; Jabbar, 2013; Ward, 2007; Zeichner, 2010). Information gained from this study has the potential to provide all stakeholders in education with new knowledge that may be pivotal in the implementation of accountability policies that support teachers while still holding them to high standards. My findings contribute to the knowledge base of the daily decision-making of teachers and how teachers and administrators can navigate our educational terrain in a mutually empowering way.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past few decades, the U.S. has undergone an economic transformation from a previous focus on manufacturing of goods to a current focus on information and services (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013; Lavy, 2007; Johnson, 2012; Murnane & Steele, 2007). This economic shift directed considerable attention to the quality of the education system, and especially teachers, who are now considered key players in producing workers for the new knowledge economy (Evetts, 2011; Jabbar, 2013; Kallio & Kallio, 2012; Ward, 2007). Because current knowledge work requires more demanding intellectual skills than that previously needed by manual laborers, the poor performance of US students on international tests has become a perennial topic of discussion and an issue of public concern (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015; Dee & Wyckoff, 2013). The struggles of US students relative to their counterparts in other developed nations, as reflected in standardized test scores, is a source of concern for many who fear that the U.S. has lost the economic advantage it once held in the world (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015; Dee & Wyckoff, 2013). This fear of losing ground to other nations has placed considerable pressure on schools and teachers to better prepare students for the global workforce and has crowded out other educational aims (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Murnane & Steele, 2007). The concern that US educators are not doing enough to prepare students for the global workforce has led policy-makers to gradually pull back creative control over instruction from teachers (Cohen, 2014; Evetts, 2011; Kallio & Kallio, 2012; Ward, 2007).

The push to mesh education and market practices tightly together undermines the integrity of the teaching profession—that is, the ability of professional teachers to make instructional decisions that build on students' strengths while stretching learners beyond what they already know and can do well. A crucial element in providing all students, regardless of

their backgrounds, with equitable access to an education is giving teachers power over the educational decisions they make and trusting their professional judgment. (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). After all, it is teachers—not policy-makers—who know their students best. As such, they can make instructional decisions that build on learners' strengths while addressing their needs. As this suggests, professional teachers have their students' best interests at heart and see it as their moral obligation to do right by them (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Unfortunately, current trends in teacher evaluation do not support this notion of teacher autonomy over instructional decisions. Instead, market-driven principles push educators away from the intrinsic motivation of doing right by their students and in the direction of extrinsic rewards, such as performance-based pay.

To give a clear understanding of the current state of education, particularly as it is evident in the setting in which this study was conducted, this chapter reviews the literature on neoliberalism, new professionalism, and performance-based pay—all central ideas in this dissertation study. I served as a school principal before and during the implementation of systems of accountability and noticed a change in education during this time, particularly due to the policies and processes developed around these central topics.

Neoliberalism and The Performativity Push

Making sense of current efforts in school reform becomes possible once the influence of neoliberal ideology is recognized in the specifics of the reforms themselves. Unsurprisingly, the push toward heightened accountability and top-down practices prevalent in the business sector (for example, being on time and being held to production outcomes) now permeates education and plays its part in creating an obedient society (Cochran-Smith, 2001). However, the rise of neoliberalism has thrust the additional element of sorting and quantifying educators into this

process. Neoliberalism, quite simply, is based on market-orientated reforms. Neoliberalism has

had a dramatic effect on education during the past two decades, as the market mentality now

prevalent in educational systems is becoming the ultimate criterion of success or failure in our

schools. Whereas the mission of public education once was to develop a strong workforce, while

molding the minds of tomorrow's leaders, it has now shifted to a push to simplify and stratify a

complex profession (Zeichner, 2010).

The 1980s saw the rise of neoliberal governments, through the elections of Margaret

Thatcher as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in 1979 and Ronald Reagan as President of

the United States in 1980 (Ward, 2007; Zeichner, 2010). Consistent with the neoliberal agenda,

attempts were made to deregulate the private sector and regulate the public sector (Ward, 2007;

Zeichner, 2010). The first example of attempts to bring public entities into the private sphere via

regulation was a renewed focus on the U.S. public schools system by the Reagan Administration

(Ward, 2007; Zeichner, 2010). Although the federal government focused attention on the state of

the U.S. public schools throughout the 20th Century, particularly in the aftermath of the USSR's

launch of Sputnik in 1957, it was the release of *A Nation At Risk* in 1983 (National Commission

on Excellence in Education, 1983) that began the neoliberal push for heightened accountability

in schools. Interestingly, earlier accountability systems either failed or were unsustainable for a

variety of reasons, including firm opposition from teachers' unions, issues with procedures and

implementation, lack of money, and the lack of objective and consistent evaluation systems (Dee

& Wyckoff, 2013; Firestone, 2014; Goldhaber, et al., 2008; Johnson & Papay, 2009; Lavy, 2007;

Springer, 2009; Stedman & McCallion, 2001). However, since the authorization of NCLB in

2001, followed by Race to the Top (RTTP) in 2009, the implementation of the Common Core,

standardized tests such as PARCC, and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2016,

systems of heightened accountability were reborn and are now considered by many as the prominent way to improve teacher quality (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013; Ingersoll, 2007; Lavy, 2007).

NCLB was initially viewed as a victory regarding equity demands as it required states to report out the academic achievement information needed to prove achievement gaps (US Department of Education, 2006). In addition, NCLB required schools to take responsibility for ensuring every child was learning and provided extra help and resources to poorer schools with larger African-American and Hispanic populations (US Department of Education, 2006). However, over time, the initial good that came out of NCLB was replaced by the heightened performance and rewards cultures which began to hinder those individuals it initially intended to help (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013; Ingersoll, 2007; Lavy, 2007; Zeichner, 2010).

This new era of heightened accountability and rewards culture is a product of microeconomic and capitalist production process theories, where individuals are expected to be judged by their outputs (Evetts, 2011; Jabbar, 2013; Kallio & Kallio, 2012; Ward, 2007). The idea of management by results is assumed to encourage effective work, particularly when additional compensation is used to increase educators' motivation (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013; Kallio & Kallio, 2012). This thinking has created a new environment in which everyday successes are pushed aside in favor of the standardization and formal inspection of both educators and students (Evetts, 2011; Jabbar, 2013; Kallio & Kallio, 2012; Ward, 2007)

According to Springer et al. (2012), teachers have been domesticated by these new systems, perpetuating their role as semi-skilled workers and promoting a type of teaching that will produce more obedient and semi-skilled workers. In conjunction with the aforementioned economic transformation, teacher accountability policies promoted by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 have changed the landscape of education in the U.S. (Springer et al., 2012). Many

scholars and educators believed that formalizing teacher accountability, as NCLB did, would

produce improvements in students' standardized test scores and college/career readiness

(Harvey, 2014; Murnane & Steele, 2007; Rice, et al., 2015). According to Springer, et al. (2012)

and Firestone (2014), new accountability policies and evaluation tools have made it possible for

educational administrators to remove from the classroom those teachers found to be performing

at unsatisfactory or only partially effective levels based on the idea that doing so provides

students with only the best teachers.

There are, however, scholars who critiqued this new way of thinking. First and foremost,

opponents argued that teaching is too complex to quantify a teacher's performance and base pay

on student achievement results and yearly evaluation scores (Firestone, 2014; Goldhaber, 2009;

Johnson, 2012; Lavy, 2007; Murnane & Cohen, 1986; Springer et. al., 2012; Stedman &

McCallion, 2001). Opponents also argued that teaching is inherently a profession for those who

are intrinsically motivated to teach students and that using extrinsic rewards to motivate teachers

would likely be counterproductive because it would shift the focus of attention from their

students' needs to their own personal needs (Firestone, 2014; Goldhaber, 2009; Johnson, 2012;

Lavy, 2007; Springer et. al., 2012; Stedman & McCallion, 2001). For most educators, the idea

that their needs could conflict with the needs of their students is troublesome, as the prevailing

idea is that educators make decisions in the best interests of students.

In this early transition from the previous system of teacher evaluations, which relied on

subjective observations of the teachers' classroom performance by administrators, to the

formalized system of teacher accountability and surveillance that combines criteria-based

observations (e.g., Danielson's Framework for Teaching and Stronge's Teacher Effectiveness

Performance Evaluation System) and student growth and/or performance on standardized

assessments (e.g., PARCC), researchers and educators are giving just as much attention to

teacher retention rates (especially in critical need areas such as math and science) as to student

achievement results (Springer, et al., 2012). Some scholars worried that the perennial struggle

inner city, low-income school districts experience in recruiting and retaining teachers may

become exacerbated by the intense pressure and scrutiny that formalized accountability policies

placed on teachers, which, in turn, could lead to burnout and higher turnover rates than in the

past (Firestone, 2014; Harvey, 2014; Liang & Akiba, 2015; Springer, et al., 2012).

Within the neoliberal push to codify schools and formalize the observation process

evaluation systems encompassing value-added models, or *VAM*, started to sprout up throughout

the U.S., beginning in the 1990s (Braun, 2005). VAM are statistics that measure test score gains

by students over a period of time (Braun, 2005). The use of VAM in U.S. schools is attributed to

the research of William Sanders (Braun, 2005). By his creation of the Tennessee Value-Added

Assessment System (TVAAS), Sanders provided a method to measure a district, school, and

teacher's effect on student performance by tracking the progress of students against themselves

over periods of time (Sanders & Horn, 1998; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Sanders, et al., 1997).

Sanders postulated that teacher effectiveness, regardless of other factors surrounding a child's

education (for example, school environment), was the number one factor in student academic

growth and that VAM could accurately measure this effectiveness (Sanders & Horn, 1998;

Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Sanders, et al., 1997). Consequently, the statistics produced by VAM

have been used by school districts to distinguish teachers based on their effectiveness in

producing students' growth, as measured by standardized tests (Atteberry & Mangan, 2020).

This study took place at a school site where VAM was not factored into the yearly evaluations of

participants. However, VAM-inspired elements such as those that attempt to measure the impact

of educators on student growth on locally-administered assessments, were factored into the final

evaluation scores of educators at the study site. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge VAM

and how it paved the way for the models used at the study site, which I will describe in further

detail in the chapter to follow.

While proponents of neoliberalism, such as Dee and Wyckoff (2013), focused on

accountability as a means to improve teacher quality and, in turn, student achievement,

opponents were concerned that neoliberal ideology is penetrating political and social institutions,

such as education, and promoting capitalist ideology (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Harvey, 2005).

Opponents of the neoliberal push into education feared that the implementation of economic

measures into education, rather than supporting the knowledge and expertise of current staff,

would erode the personal connections between all stakeholders (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Harvey,

2005). Accordingly, proponents of neoliberal systems and policies looked to the private sector as

an untapped skilled labor force able to assist struggling schools (Hess, 2002). This is

accomplished by the infusing of skilled experts into school settings (Hess, 2002). Opponents, on

the other hand, argued that this push to deregulate the private sector while privatizing the public

sector is part of an overall campaign to change what is considered to be part of the public good,

de-unionize the labor force, and cut social services (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Giroux, 2002;

Harvey, 2005).

Hess (2002) postulated that merging the private sector with the public sector is all about

doing what is in the best interest of students while opponents maintained that the ultimate goal of

this neoliberal penetration is for a free market exchange to guide all human action and replace

the previously held, core beliefs of particular institutions such as education (Ball & Olmedo,

2013; Harvey, 2005). This new regime of truth forces teachers, when planning and implementing

lessons, to factor in systems and policies that make them responsible for their own performance and the performance of others (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). Unfortunately, in a profession that is too complex to make high leverage decisions based on glimpses in time such as observations, this new regime of truth does a disservice to the overall body of educators' work (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013; Firestone, 2014; Goldhaber, 2009; Johnson, 2012; Lavy, 2007; Murnane & Cohen, 1986; Springer et. al., 2012; Stedman & McCallion, 2001). In the neoliberal paradigm, education cannot meet the needs of its students unless teachers are held accountable for their performance and administrators are held accountable for the work of their teachers in particular measurable ways.

Although current empirical research highlights the effectiveness of accountability systems and performance-based pay on student outcomes (Ball 2003, 2016), it ignores the unintended outcomes and effects on the intrinsic motivation, instructional performance, and overall psyche of teachers (for example, teachers manipulating the system or leaving the profession due to stress; Jabbar, 2013). Moreover, it should be noted that even the economic literature, which has been used to create educational policy, acknowledges that accountability systems are highly problematic to implement in "knowledge-intensive areas" such as education, mainly due to the complete lack of control of variables such as a student's home-life, the imperfections and/or cultural bias inherent in standardized tests, and the overall inability to choose one's client (the student; Kallio & Kallio, 2012).

By the same token, proponents of neoliberalism utilize a bottom-line economic rationality which focuses on improvements in productivity, customer service, organizational de-evolution, and market style incentives (Ward, 2007). In addition, these economists postulate that a lack of success in a particular profession is due to workers not working hard enough or lacking the

necessary capacity and/or knowledge to do their work effectively (Jabbar, 2013). From a neoliberal point of view, an underperforming teacher should be penalized and or removed from the profession because teaching is not considered a complex task like the work in other professions, such as medicine (Jabbar, 2013).

The neoliberal movement runs counter to the idea of treating teachers as professionals, as well as informed perspectives on teacher decision-making. Proponents of neoliberalism, in their attempts to close the achievement gap, espouse a one-size-fits all approach to teaching where educators are provided with a script to transmit to students and they, in turn, can be rated and sorted based on quantifiable data. What this philosophical framework does not take into account is that: 1) teaching needs to be contextualized; and, 2) teachers are successful when they are supported as professionals. For example, neoliberalism does not account for the significant attention needed to be given to the effects of the policies on contexts of practice, as well as the evolution of teachers as professionals (Talbot & McLaughlin, 2002; Schoenfeld, 1998). Moreover, neoliberalism fails to recognize flexibility in teachers' instructional decisions and an appreciation of diverse contexts (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 1999). In addition, since the need to close the achievement gap has codified instructional and curricular practices, teachers are beginning to exercise less professional judgment and are no longer tapping into their repertoires like they were in the past, when great strides were made to shift education from a transmission model to one of meaning-making (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015; Florio-Ruane, 2002). Consequently, the neoliberal push to recreate the public sector of education into the private sector has afforded schools less and less self-governance and, in turn, further degrade the teaching profession (Ingersoll & Collins, 2018).

With fewer opportunities to own decisions, educators have been stymied in their efforts to deepen, refine, and extend their subject matter and instructional practices over time; therefore, they become less like professionals and more like purveyors of content (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). And this is a disservice to the profession as some researchers have postulated that the strongest positive effects in education are tied to teachers' authority, autonomy, and decision-making influence (Ingersoll & Collins, 2018; National Commission on Teaching America's Future, 1996).

All things considered, there is very little sympathy for educators from the neoliberal perspective. Historically, teaching has been treated as a public entity separate from the private sector (Ward, 2007). Neoliberal policies, however, have attempted to bring teachers back into the political and economic arena by shifting teaching and learning from a state regulated profession to a federal and market driven profession (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Ward, 2007). This shift in the field has advanced the idea that the self-interest of educators and the lack of an objective system for monitoring their performance have hindered student achievement; therefore, in the spirit of promoting the public interest of the U.S., it behooves educators to standardize education like the private sector (Evetts, 2011). As Ward stated in 2007, unmanaged professionals are a risk and, to neoliberals, teachers should be characterized as unmanaged professionals. From the neoliberal perspective, unmanaged educators, making unsupervised decisions, are a detriment to the potential success of their students (especially in less privileged schools), as they are not following the protocols and procedures assigned to all educators by knowledgeable decision-makers. However, some researchers demonstrated that teachers, as the real experts in their craft who have a genuine interest in their work, should not have their creativity and work interfered with, for fear of decreasing their intrinsic motivation (Kallio & Kallio, 2012).

The Performativity Push

Within the push to infuse neoliberal ideology into the teaching profession comes the push to monitor, inspect, quantify, and sort educators. And this is where the idea of performativity becomes a critical element within the neoliberal infiltration into education. *Performativity*, as defined by Ball (2003), consists of the regulations (for example, rewards and sanctions) used to employ judgment, comparisons, and displays as a means of incentive, control, and change. These systems are considered the "new common sense" as they appear logical and desirable (Ball & Olmedo, 2012, p. 89). In a system of performativity, the goal is to summarize the quality or value of an individual, group, or organization (Ball, 2003; Elliot, 2001; Shamir, 2008; Sikes, 2001; Thomson, et al., 2014) and codified expectations that the district distinguish teachers based on effectiveness (Atterby & Mangan, 2020). And, typically, these summarized performances measure productivity through output displays of quality and/or moments on inspection (Ball, 2003). For example, educator success is predicated more on meeting compliance requirements than on how they improve their instructional practice (Atterby & Mangan, 2020; Raider-Roth, 2017; Sleeter, 2014). Moreover, systems of performativity are not just systems used to manage performance or rate indicators; rather, these systems have been enacted to quantify complex and powerful work, decisions, and relations (Ball, 2003, 2016). In a way, systems of performativity are pre-empting judgment and displacing it to external drivers (Ball, 2003; Elliot, 2001; Shamir, 2008; Sikes, 2001; Thomson, et al., 2014). And, in the end, although educators are quantified and sorted now more than ever before by these systems, we continue to lack the answers to the bigger questions in schools, such as how to define teacher quality (Paige & Amrein-Beardsley, 2020; Weiner, 2020).

For educators operating within systems of performativity, more time is spent reporting on what they are doing than actually doing the real work (Ball, 2016). So much energy is consumed to meet the controls of the system via "enacting fantasy lessons" and the "staging of educational processes" that the humanity of the profession is lost in the insecurity of endless judgment and the performances become the center of competent pedagogical action (Ball, 2003). The true reality for educators readily becomes the enactment of socially prepared possibilities for action (Weiner, 2020). What has happened in education is that documenting and defending our work has begun to take precedence over our actual work, as we now have the need (and directive) to replace our knowledge and expertise with meeting socially constructed goals and requirements.

Opponents of performance systems claimed that "performance has no room for caring" (Ball, 2003, p.224), quantifiable value, such as student standardized test scores, displaces everyday events of value, such as helping a struggling student improve incrementally (Peters, 2001), experience means nothing (Ball, 2003), and professional judgment is the enemy of the system (Ball, 2016). Ball (2016) even goes as far as saying that systems of performativity are reducing humanity by assigning quantifiable scores to educators and the battles against it are struggles for the soul of teaching. Proponents argued that, like the neoliberal movement, the ability to quantify educators and remove those who are ineffective deregulates the profession, opening doors for others who may have been shut out in the past (Ball, 2003; Elliot, 2001; Shamir, 2008; Sikes, 2001; Thomson, et al., 2014). In addition, the supposed freedom and cleanness of data allows managers to make solid decisions regarding staffing and put the best people in positions to improve student performance (Ball, 2003; Elliot, 2001; Shamir, 2008; Sikes, 2001). Opponents countered the above-points by stating that, rather than deregulation, a system of "re-regulation" is in place, as regimentation has replaced authenticity (Ball, 2003). By

re-regulation, Ball (2003) believes that deregulation of education, under the guise of opening up

the profession to other, capable outsiders, is actually meant to reshape what we value in and how

we assess education. Along the same lines, opponents of performativity systems also believe that

managers within the system, although labeled by neoliberals as the new heroes of educational

reform, are really the technicians of the larger transformation occurring in our schools (Ball,

2003; Elliot, 2001; Shamir, 2008; Sikes, 2001;). The best example of the change in the role of

managers is by exploring the change in feedback given to the educators they supervise as

feedback shifts within these systems from dialogue about instruction to hard evidence and

numbers (Ball & Olmedo, 2012).

Theorists have also espoused that performativity not only encompasses the vehicles for

strategic change of educators but, rather, it also contains the mechanism to reform (Ball, 2016;

Zeichner, 2010). These pressures are pushed into the daily work of educators by compelling

them to meet the new controls of the system and, in turn, developing an inauthenticity of our

practice and relationships (Ball, 2003). For example, the previous authenticity of an educational

decision or interaction with a student/colleague/superior has been gradually replaced by

inauthentic decisions and practices made to meet the requirements of an evaluation rubric. This

struggle with doubt and fear also thrusts educators into developing new views of ourselves,

devoid of our daily work and interactions with students, and now based mostly on the value of

our productivity established by classroom observation and evaluation scores (Ball, 2003, 2016).

Lastly, systems of performativity give birth to some of the resistance on the part of

teachers evident in classrooms currently (Ball & Olmedo, 2012). Drawing on the work of

Foucault (1982), Ball and Olmedo (2012) describe how, as practices change and educators

become aware of these changes through the lens of performativity, teachers adopt practices of

resistance to bring to light fundamental changes in power relations taking shape in educational settings. As educators struggle to continue defining what they are doing and fear what they are becoming, the fundamental challenge becomes what to do next: fight back or give in—or both (Ball & Olmedo, 2012). Consequently, in some cases, educators have begun to offer up every day acts of resistance to these struggles. As defined by Anderson (2008), everyday acts of resistance are "tactics of the people that circumvent power rather than actively opposing it." (Anderson, 2008, p.261). In this era of performance and surveillance cultures, everyday acts of resistance are "safer than overt acts of protest and refusal" and can potentially have a "higher effect in achieving limited objectives of subordinated social actors" (Anderson, 2008, p. 261, 267). These acts of resistance serve as the catalyst in bringing to light power relations, fostering courage against the mundane and tedious, and guiding educators to overcome new, socially-accepted practices (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Foucault, 1982). In addition, these acts are aimed at practices that aim to change what it means to be a teacher, educated, and secure in all aspects of our life (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Zeichner, 2010).

The Shift from True/Old Professionalism to New Professionalism

A shift in educator professionalism has definitely occurred since the advent of neoliberal policies in education. What educators have witnessed is a shift from what some scholars have called true/old professionalism to new professionalism. True or old professionalism is defined by Gorman and Sandefur (2011) and Davidson (2005) as the ability of educators to use their expert knowledge, to assert their critical agency, to be autonomous against efforts to codify their work, to primarily serve others (particularly students), to maintain their passion, and to value individual, daily efforts over systems of quality assurance, status, income, and extrinsic rewards. True/old professionals derive their legitimacy from internal accomplishments and the value of

their practices—not from the external rewards of inspection culture (Friedson, 2001; Gorman & Sandefur, 2011; Nixon, et al., 2010). These individuals care and have affection for those they serve (their students) rather than their own needs and desires (Nixon, et al., 2010).

Since the 1980s, neoliberal policies have spawned an era of new professionalism in education which takes aim at teacher knowledge, dedication, and statuses, in an attempt to de-professionalize and erode the dignity of educators (Evetts, 2011; Jabbar, 2013; Ward, 2007; Zeichner, 2010). Since the early 2000s, scholars have documented this "old to new" shift in educational decision-making largely from insiders (educators) to outsiders (policy makers and economists; Zeichner, 2010). Moreover, the policies created by educational outsiders are focused on the final products and the bottom-line. Prescriptive accountability, top/down management styles, and auditing systems that have become the norm, create a system of judgment through domination and eliminate caring and dialogue (Ball & Olmedo 2012; Cohen, 2014; Evetts, 2011; Gorman & Sandefur, 2011; Ward, 2007; Zeichner, 2010). Over time, opponents of new professionalism postulate that educators operating within this system will have diminished efficacy, commitment to the profession, and professionalism (Anderson & Cohen, 2015; Zeichner, 2010).

It is worth noting that true/old professionalism was not perfect and that a simple return to the *good old days* is not going to cure the nation's educational problems. Rather, the point here is that ideas at the heart of teaching, such as creativity, diversity, and academic freedom, have become secondary in this era of new professionalism, as they threaten the core of neoliberal policy implementation (Cohen, 2014; Evetts, 2011; Kallio & Kallio, 2012; Ward, 2007). Correspondingly, when creativity, diversity, and academic freedom in teaching suffer, the overall quality of the product is subordinate to meeting prescribed goals (Kallio & Kallio, 2012).

Under the circumstances, new professionalism has successfully created a system in education that gives attention to organizational professionalism (competencies determined by policy-makers and enforced by managers) over occupational professionalism (decisions guided by practitioner experience and trust) (Evetts, 2011; Ward, 2007; Zeichner, 2010), as well as one that reduces autonomy by pushing educators to a more scripted form of teaching and learning (Stone-Johnson, 2014).

New Professionalism has assisted in eroding and de-professionalizing public school teaching, as controls and surveillance have more prominence in schools these days than collegiality and support (Zeichner, 2010). For teachers, the policies advanced by neoliberals during this era of new professionalism have discarded expertise, autonomy, and discretion and replaced them with bureaucratic controls, standardized work practices, performance targets, and rule through fear (Zeichner, 2010). These controls are promoted in the name of improving teacher quality by assisting teachers in achieving performance goals within evaluation systems or removing them from the profession if they do not. However, these systems of oversight have also opened up opportunities for the private sector to become further entrenched in the U.S. public schools' system (Hall & McGinty, 2015; Zeichner, 2010).

Teachers have lost creative control, are vilified in many circles, and are judged solely on performance goals. According to Ball and Olmedo (2013), who we educators are as professionals and how we think about the profession have been forever changed. Put simply, teaching is becoming *what we do* (for example, our job) rather than *what we are* (for example, our calling in life; Ball & Olmedo, 2013). In addition, *what we are able to be* is directed by a larger force and *what we are* is defined by our performativity. Elements of heightened accountability and new professionalism are seductive and alluring to educators but overbearing and burdensome to them

in the long run. These elements begin to take their place at the forefront of our moral compass and our inability to perform to these new standards of professionalism makes us feel irresponsible and inadequate (Ball, 2003). Where "old professionalism" was grounded in the educators themselves, whereby they held each other accountable, new professionalism has attempted to change what it means to be an educator by affecting our subjective existence and relations with one another (Ball, 2003). Bottom line, we are only as good as our previous evaluation score/rating.

Within this push by new professionals and proponents of performativity to transform the system is the movement of the profession from one of thought, reflection, and intellectual inquiry to a purely technical occupation where wonderful ideas are replaced by edicts (Raider-Roth, 2017). Our concept of what an educator is has changed from a creative and engaging individual to what Raider-Roth (2017) described as an "educational clerk." These educational clerks, in their limited roles where they do not exercise judgment (Zeichner, 2010), are "purveyors of skills who do not make decisions about the content and pedagogy in the classroom but deliver that which others—often remote experts—deem important" (Raider-Roth, 2017, p.1). Bottom line, attempts to socialize teachers into teaching and learning have been countered by a push to recreate educators into educational clerks (Johnson, et al., 2005). As Zeichner (2010) concluded, the need to develop deep and meaningful decisions at the local level has been replaced by "product implementation."

History, Perspectives, & Empirical Research of Performance-Based Pay

Within neoliberal attempts to recreate teachers and school administrators as new professionals comes the need to attract and retain high-quality individuals into the profession—and many of these efforts to attract and retain strong workers resemble similar attempts in the

private sector. Not only has the neoliberal agenda attempted to implement educational policies

that resemble the accountability standards of the private sector, it has also promoted the idea of

performance-based pay in education (Jabbar, 2013). Neoliberalism espouses that "good teachers"

should be rewarded for their performance (which is determined by calculating a "score" based on

teacher performances during classroom observations and student performance on standardized

and/or school-based assessments; Jabbar, 2013; Johnson & Papay, 2009; Lavy, 2007; Rice &

Malen, 2017; Springer, 2009; Stedman & McCallion, 2001). Although performance-based pay is

not new to education, it has shifted from initially being a reward given to educators for the

completion of additional tasks (for example, writing curriculum) to a reward tied to the outputs

of students on tests and classroom performance at small intervals throughout a 180-day school

year (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013; Firestone, 2014; Harvey, 2014; Heneman, et al., 2013; Ingersoll,

2007; Lavy, 2007; Stedman & McCallion, 2001; Weiss & McGuinn, 2016).

Based on the logic that both teachers' instructional practices and students' standardized

test scores will improve as a result of new federal and state accountability policies, school

districts (particularly those in low-income, inner cities) have been pressured to adopt

performance-based evaluation systems (Atterby & Mangan, 2020; Firestone, 2014; Goldhaber,

2008; Ingersoll, 2007; Murnane & Steele, 2007). Performance-based pay is a broad term used in

several ways within the field of education. Teachers can earn performance-based pay by

acquiring additional knowledge and skills, taking on increased roles and responsibilities in their

current positions, and/or by teaching in hard to staff subjects or schools (Johnson & Papay,

2009). However, as used in this dissertation study, I have adopted the definition of *performance-

based pay* (also referred to as *merit pay* or *pay-for-performance* in the literature) proposed by

Johnson and Papay (2009) as pay earned by teachers for effective instructional practice, as measured by student test scores and professional evaluations.

School districts throughout the country made attempts to implement performance-based systems throughout the 20th Century, particularly in the aftermath of the USSR's launch of Sputnik in 1957, and then again subsequent to the release of *A Nation At Risk* in 1983 (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013; Firestone, 2014; Goldhaber, et al., 2008; Johnson & Papay, 2009; Lavy, 2007; Rice & Malen, 2017; Springer, 2009; Stedman & McCallion, 2001). However, these systems either failed or were unsustainable for a variety of reasons, including firm opposition from teachers' unions, issues with procedures and implementation, lack of money, and most important to this study, the lack of objective and consistent evaluation systems (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013; Firestone, 2014; Goldhaber, et al., 2008; Johnson & Papay, 2009; Lavy, 2007; Paige & Amrein-Beadrsley, 2020; Rich & Malen, 2017; Springer, 2009; Stedman & McCallion, 2001). However, since the authorization of NCLB in 2001, followed by Race to the Top (RTTP) in 2009, and the implementation of the Common Core, standardized tests such as PARCC, and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2016, performance-pay has been reborn and is now considered by many as a prominent way to improve teacher quality (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013; Firestone, 2014; Harvey, 2014; Heneman, et al., 2013; Ingersoll, 2007; Lavy, 2007; Weiss & McGuinn, 2016; Stedman & McCallion, 2001).

Since the advent of NCLB, performance-based pay systems have become an attractive option within structured systems of teacher evaluation (Firestone, 2014; Goldhaber, et al., 2008; Ingersoll, 2007; Murnane & Steele, 2007; Rice & Malen, 2017), which replaced subjective and unstructured systems of "check-ins" (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013). As applied here, performance-based pay systems call for teachers to be compensated based on the academic outcomes of the

specific students they teach, not their credentials and/or years of experience, central indicators

used in the past in teacher salary scales (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013; Firestone, 2014; Goldhaber, et

al., 2008; Ingersoll, 2007; Murnane & Steele, 2007).

      Proponents of performance-based pay systems argued that, to prepare students to

participate competently in today's knowledge-based economy, every classroom must have an

effective teacher (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013; Firestone, 2014; Goldhaber, et al., 2008, 2009;

Ingersoll, 2007; Johnson & Papay, 2009; Lavy, 2007). They believe that extrinsic motivators, in

the form of monetary rewards, will improve teacher pedagogy and help school districts recruit

and retain the "best and brightest to teaching" (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013; Firestone, 2014;

Goldhaber, et al., 2008, 2009; Ingersoll, 2007; Johnson & Papay, 2009; Lavy, 2007). Generally,

advocates of performance-based pay assume that improvement in pedagogical practices and the

ability to provide a highly effective teacher in every classroom would translate directly into

improved standardized test scores for students (Firestone, 2014; Goldhaber, et al., 2008;

Ingersoll, 2007; Murnane & Steele, 2007; Rice et al., 2015).

      Since most school districts with poor standardized test scores and poor track records for

teacher recruitment and retention are in low-income, inner-city districts, performance-based pay

systems have come to play a salient role in these settings (Goldhaber, 2009; Johnson, 2012;

Murnane & Steele, 2007). With an increased sense of urgency to improve student test scores and

to recruit and retain quality teachers, urban school districts have looked to neoliberal incentives,

such as performance-based pay, to better their schools (Goldhaber, 2009; Johnson, 2012;

Murnane & Steele, 2007). More to the point, performance-based pay became incorporated into

teacher evaluation systems in states such as Texas and Arkansas, which embrace a neoliberal

agenda that emphasizes individualism and deregulation (Lavy, 2007). From the reformers'

perspective, performance-based pay will ultimately reward the hardest working and most effective teachers by allowing them to obtain status in school (intrinsic reward) and increase pay (extrinsic reward). Consequently, proponents also believe that performance-based pay will either force poorly performing teachers to improve or to leave the school and/or the profession. It is further argued that since the stigma of lower, fixed salaries will disappear with performance-based incentives, the "best and brightest" are likely to be drawn to teaching because there's the opportunity to earn substantially more—like jobs in the private sector (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013; Firestone, 2014; Goldhaber, et al., 2008, 2009; Ingersoll, 2007; Johnson & Papay, 2009; Lavy, 2007).

In sharp contrast to the above thinking, opponents of performance-based pay contend that because teaching is a highly complex activity, it is impossible to quantify a teacher's performance and validly base his or her pay on student achievement results and yearly evaluation scores (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013; Firestone, 2014; Goldhaber, 2009; Johnson, 2012; Lavy, 2007; Murnane & Cohen, 1986; Springer et. al., 2012; Stedman & McCallion, 2001). Opponents have also argued that teaching is inherently a profession for those who are intrinsically motivated to teach students and that using extrinsic rewards to motivate teachers is likely to be counterproductive because it shifts the focus of their attention from the needs of their students to their own personal needs (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013; Firestone, 2014; Goldhaber, 2009; Johnson, 2012; Lavy, 2007; Murnane & Cohen, 1986; Springer et. al., 2012; Stedman & McCallion, 2001). As a result, current accountability systems and accompanying rewards culture may push teachers to teach to the test and the observation tool used to evaluate them in an attempt to achieve status and obtain additional pay.

Relational Cultural Theory (RCT)

I am drawn to RCT because from this perspective, the process of change in education is conceptualized as relying on the dynamic relationship between client and worker, and the development of said relationship is not considered a one-way street (Freedberg, 2007; Jordan, 2000a, 2000b, 2008, 2010; Miller, 2010a). Although the bulk of research grounded in RCT occurred in mental health systems, researchers have used this theory to successfully frame educational research (for example, Abrams, 2016; Stieha & Raider-Roth, 2012). In this study, the basic tenets of the theory apply to the current state of education, with the client representing the teacher and the worker representing the administrator. The idea of mutuality in RCT is critical given its stress on the need for mutual acknowledgment and co-existence between all stakeholders (Freedberg, 2007; Jordan, 2000a, 2000b, 2008, 2010; Miller, 2010a).

RCT focuses on the importance of relationships within a particular context (Freedberg, 2007; Jordan, 2000a, 2000b, 2008, 2010; Miller, 2010a; Raider-Roth, 2017). Moreover, RCT is comprised of six major tenets. First, there is mutuality, or the sharing of feelings or actions between two or more parties, is vital to daily functioning. The ability to be open about strengths and weaknesses with colleagues and, most importantly, those who hold evaluative power over us is critical to providing the best education possible to our students (Jordan, 2010). Without mutual respect and understanding amongst evaluators and evaluatees, any type of negative feedback will put both sides into adversarial positions and push them farther away from the bonds needed to lead successful learning environments. Second, there is the idea that growth is determined by relationships (Jordan, 2010). Without a strong relationship of trust and mutuality between evaluators and those whom they evaluate, growth will be stunted as all parties will focus on individual success—regardless of how they get there. Third, mutual empathy and mutual

empowerment are at the core of growth-fostering relationships (Jordan, 2010). Once mutuality

and a strong, trusting relationship has been established, both parties begin to empathize with each

other's plight and seek to empower through their words and their actions. Next, authenticity, or

the act of being genuine in one's actions, is necessary for full participation in growth fostering

relationships (Jordan, 2010). This is an important step beyond mutual empathy and

empowerment as it is accompanied by genuine actions on the part of both parties that are

noticeably authentic and done without looking to receive praise or incentives. Fifth, all people

contribute or benefit in growth-fostering relationships (Jordan, 2010). Once the first four tenets

are in place, both evaluators and those whom they evaluate become equal partners in the learning

whereby the success of the group leads to a successful and nurturing environment. Lastly, human

development occurs when relational competence, or the art of learning to give and take freely in

a relationship, increases (Jordan, 2010). Here, in the sixth and final tenet, we see that both

evaluators and those whom they evaluate—when the other tenets have been fortified—no longer

look to relationships as a means to end but, rather, an everyday action to ensure success of the

school community.

From the RCT perspective, the level of connection/disconnection we have with particular

individuals within a specific context will have social implications. Specifically, RCT postulates

that quality relationships and connections have positive effects on all those in a shared context

that are subjected to growth-fostering practices and supports (Freedberg, 2007; Jordan, 2000a,

2000b, 2008, 2010; Miller, 2010a; Raider-Roth, 2017). Positive connections will then lead to

mutuality, empathy, authentic connections, and empowerment which, in turn, fosters

vulnerability (Freedberg, 2007; Jordan, 2000a, 2000b, 2008, 2010; Miller, 2010a; Raider-Roth,

2017). And this vulnerability is seen as essential to creating and building the trust needed for

self-improvement. Jordan (2008) further contends that our capacity to function and flourish in a

given context will increase when provided with the healthy coexistence that growth-fostering

relationships and connections generate (Jordan, 2008).

RCT researchers highlight *five good things* that need to happen to shift relationships from

one-way streets to growth-fostering connections (Jordan, 2008; Miller, 2010a, 2010b). These

growth-fostering connections are meant to build clients/teachers up rather than judge and/or

break them down (Jordan, 2008; Miller, 2010a, 2010b). They are: 1) a sense of zest, 2) clarity

about oneself, 3) a sense of personal worth, 4) the capacity to be creative and productive, and, 5)

the desire for more connection. Conversely, work suffers when there is a drop in energy, a

decrease in sense of worth, lack of clarity and confusion, less productivity, and withdrawal from

relationships (Jordan, 2008). In an educational setting that embraces RCT, individuals work

together to achieve social change (Lewis & Olshansky, 2017; Raider-Roth, 2017), all while

balancing personal convictions and accountability standards when making decisions.

According to RCT, the growth of all human beings is influenced by culture and power

practices within a larger socio-cultural context. Moreover, supportive growth is nurtured by the

relationships we engage in, which cannot be isolated from the culture in which those

relationships are embedded. As human beings, we have an innate need to connect and grow

through connections (Freedberg, 2007; Jordan, 2000a, 2000b, 2008, 2010; Miller, 2010a; Raider-

Roth, 2017). Unfortunately, neoliberal policies and the influence of new professionalism, have

created a top/down, evaluative culture within education, thereby promoting interactions that are

antithetical to the nurturing connections/relationships promoted by RCT and considered vital to

effective educational change. That is, to foster growth among educators, mutually empowering

relationships must develop and flourish in a non-evaluative and inclusive setting (Freedberg,

2007; Miller, 2010a). On the contrary, disconnection between client and worker leads to a loss of a sense of purpose in the evaluative process, which in turn produces a drop in energy, decreased sense of worth, lack of clarity, confusion, reduced productivity, and further withdrawal from the relationship. RCT espouses the creation of a safe haven for the client to move out of isolation and experience a sense of autonomy and connection (Jordan, 2000a; Lewis & Olshansky, 2017; Raider-Roth, 2017).

New professionalism potentially interrupts the positive relationships between teacher and administrators that advocates of RCT seek to create and maintain by attenuating a top down dynamic that is not growth enhancing to anyone. Neoliberalism and new professionalism have created an expectation that the ultimate goal of the U.S. public school system is to create human capital that can compete in the global workforce. However, Cohen (2014) argues that when policies and regulations are based on this premise, it is the role of school administrators to assist teachers in negotiating their instructional decisions. Moreover, the shift in focus from developing civic-minded individuals to producing human capital has narrowed educational aims, which is more reason for educators to find a balance between personal and professional convictions and policy (Cochran-Smith, 2001). As heightened accountability standards and rewards cultures further pervade the U.S. public school system (for example, the increasing number of assessments used to evaluate educators and measure student growth), the costs to all stakeholders and relationships of this constant vigilance and antagonism are becoming evident. Thus, this is a critical time for administrators and teachers to work together to balance their integrity and abilities with current policies and regulations (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Cohen, 2014). And it is a big first step for both administrators and teachers to realize that they share this same level of

discomfort with the demands of accountability systems and rewards culture that have taken over

education (Ball & Olmedo, 2013).

RCT also stresses the need for bio-directionality in relationships between administrators

and teachers in the school, which reflects a mutual relational flow between them. In heightened

educational accountability systems, mutuality does not mean sameness or equality (Miller,

2010a) and power is a very real thing to be confronted (Miller, 2010b). Therefore, the

identification of these so-called barriers and efforts to obtain mutuality in engagement are

important when trying to negotiate the terrain of educational change. Since members of the

supposed subordinate class (the client/the teacher) affect change, these healthier and mutual

relationships will create a culture of inclusiveness in a hierarchical context that is built on

empathy, reciprocity, connectedness, and mutual empowerment (Freedberg, 2007; Jordan,

2000a; Lewis & Olshansky, 2017; Miller, 2010a, 2010b; Raider-Roth, 2017). Relationships of

respect between teachers and administrators will lay the foundation for how they teach the

students they serve and whether they nurture dialogical classrooms rather than authoritarian ones

(Freire, 1998).

Beyond the mutual empowerment and open relationships, the administrator brings more

of herself/himself into the relationship (Freedberg, 2007), a factor that promotes responsive,

respectful, and empowering relationships. If the teacher sees an impact on the administrator and

the administrator shares his or her own vulnerability, much good can happen. For example, a

sense of authenticity and safety will be fostered, the negotiation of shared circumstances will

take place, and a pathway through the rocky landscape of unsettled assumptions to new

understandings will be created (Freedberg, 2007; Jordan, 2000b; Lewis & Olshansky, 2017;

Raider-Roth, 2017).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Participatory Action Research

In a time where educators are vilified and major decisions in the profession are made based on economic principles of production (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Evetts, 2011; Giroux, 2002; Harvey, 2005; Jabbar, 2013; Ward, 2007; Zeichner, 2010), it is important to study the work of administrators and teachers who are trying to negotiate their personal convictions with the tensions brought forth from the edicts of neoliberalism/new professionalism. As a researcher, I am interested in how teachers and administrators communicate and work together to navigate through elements of new professionalism (for example, performance-based pay systems) when making decisions, particularly during formal classroom observation events.

After previously serving for three years as the building principal, I was considered an insider in the school that served as the site for this investigation. Hence, my initial knowledge was based on informal conversations and anecdotal observations made throughout the years. In addition, like the teachers, I too was observed and evaluated on a yearly basis and had the opportunity to obtain performance-based pay based on my own yearly evaluation scores. I spent extensive time building relationships and leadership capacity among staff members. It was my hope that a Participatory Action Research (PAR) study would allow me to learn something more about the topic than when I started, especially about teachers' instructional decisions and the perceived efforts of administrators such as myself in supporting teachers in these systems of accountability and rewards culture. By working jointly on this study with the participating teachers and providing a safe space for conversation/dialogue together, I aimed to get a sense of how we balanced personal convictions with the neoliberal policies and regulations that dominate the profession. For clarification, the usage of *we* in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 encompasses all study

participants, including myself. According to Merriam (2009), "qualitative research is a

systematic process by which we know more about something than we did before engaging in the

process" (p. 4). Even though I was keenly aware of the strides we made as educators to break

down traditional power dynamics during these tense times in education, I was eager to uncover

new insights into this topic. Therefore, my goal in using *we* is to acknowledge that my fellow

study participants and I were immersed in this struggle and conversation together. In addition,

through constant data analysis, member checking, and analysis tweaking, I feel my usage of *we*

was vital to my work as a participatory action researcher.

Building on work by de Shutter and Yopo (1981), Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (2007)

characterize PAR as a "vision of social events as contextualized by macro level social forces" (p.

25), an integration of theory and practice, a "subject-subject relationship through dialogue" (p.

25), tying of research and action into a single process, and the (hopefully) immediate application

of findings to the current situation. In the study, which drew on RCT, described in the previous

chapter, I hoped to promote educational change via mutuality between administrators and

teachers in a specific setting. It was my belief that a setting where teachers and administrators

worked together to build capacity and negotiate personal convictions with educational edicts

could provide the field with a glimpse into ways of co-navigating through new professionalism.

PAR is value laden, particularly because it is a catalyst for changes to broader societal concerns

and challenges in possibly non-responsive institutions such as education (Herr & Anderson,

2015). As such, my aim as a researcher was to break down the barriers of traditional researcher-

subject power relationships and create a setting where participants wanted to come together for

the common good of the location and profession (Herr & Anderson, 2015). As a result of this

fostering of empowering relationships, I aimed for all stakeholders to develop the knowledge and

consciousness necessary to reflect upon and operate within the technical and social dimensions of their daily instructional practice (Tripp, 1990).

Elements of the new professionalism, such as performance-based pay, are now part of the educational landscape of teachers and administrators (Ball & Olmedo 2012; Cohen, 2014; Evetts, 2011; Ward, 2007; Zeichner, 2010). Using PAR, I strived for a dialogue with teachers about the ways in which we could negotiate our beliefs with policy and legislation. It was important for me to safeguard teachers from negatively influencing the educational experience of students and their own professional experience by providing them with outlets to negotiate what it means to be an effective teacher with all that federal, state, and local decision-makers now require. Ultimately, I aimed to learn about ways in which administrators, such as myself, could support teachers and ways teachers could collectively negotiate the constraints encountered in current performance-pay systems, while holding on to what it means to be a good teacher.

Context and Participants

I am a public school administrator in Northern New Jersey. At the beginning of this study, I was the principal of the school which served as the study site. The site for this study was a large high school in an urban school district in Northern New Jersey, which was in the midst of its third decade of state control. The school district was taken over by the state department of education for many reasons, most notable to this study being poor student performance on standardized tests and a lackluster instructional program. At the time of the study, the school district was very close to regaining local control, especially since the state department of education changed the requirements to regain local control in the area of student performance. Previously, the district was required to have a certain percentage of students in the school district meet performance standards in math and language arts; however, at the time of the study, the

state had shifted to a growth-based model whereby the district needed to set and meet benchmarks of adequate growth at particular grade levels.

The school consisted of approximately 650 students and 45 teachers. In addition, the school was one of four schools within a single educational complex. Although the schools co-mingled for certain electives and content area classes, they did operate as separate entities within the complex, albeit with each school's administration focusing solely on academics and a fifth principal leading the operations portion of all four schools (for example, student discipline, facility issues, and athletics). The goal of this setup was to free up school-based administrators to focus solely on the instructional portion of the job and not get bogged down with the daily operations of the physical plant. The total population of students in the building exceeded 2000 and the total population of teachers was close to 200. Each school within the complex had a particular career and technical theme and the population was made up almost entirely of Latino (57%) and African-American (40%) students.

The school, since it did not consist of students in grades 3-8, was considered a non-student growth percentile (SGP) school; therefore, standardized testing did not factor into the final evaluation scores of the teachers participating in the study. The school's teachers received a yearly summative score consisting of formal observations (85%) and student growth objectives (SGOs) (15%). Non-tenured teachers were observed a minimum of three times per year, while tenured teachers were observed a minimum of two times per year, for 20-40 minutes at a time. Staff members received quantifiable summative ratings at the end of each school year which ranged from *Highly Effective* (3.5 or higher), *Effective* (2.5 to 3.49), *Partially Effective* (1.5-2.49), and *Ineffective* (1.0-1.49).

At the time of salary guide ratification by the teachers' association in the spring of 2013, all teachers under contract had the option to choose between placement on the *universal salary guide* or the *traditional salary guide*. The *traditional salary guide*, unlike the *universal salary guide*, had a higher base salary but limited teachers to moving up only one step per year, as long as they scored *Effective* or higher on the yearly summative evaluation. On the *universal salary* guide, if a teacher was rated *Highly Effective* on a yearly basis, s/he moved up two levels on the yearly salary guide. If a teacher was rated *Effective*, s/he moved up one step on the salary guide. Regardless of salary guide, if a teacher was rated *Partially Effective* or *Ineffective*, s/he did not move up on the salary guide and was placed on a CAP. Additionally, if the teacher scored *Partially Effective* or *Ineffective* for two consecutive years, the school district could seek tenure charges and have the teacher removed from their position.

It should be noted that all new teachers hired on September 1, 2013 or later were automatically placed on the *universal salary guide* and the choice of salary guides at the time of contract ratification was binding; therefore, teachers would never again have the chance to choose between salary guides. Furthermore, regardless of which salary guide a teacher chose, s/he was no longer able to move up the guide for any reason other than their yearly summative performance. For example, obtaining an advanced degree had no bearing on salary guide placement and equivalencies for such degrees were eliminated. Lastly, like all teachers and other certificated staff in the district (for example, child study team members), all district administrators had the opportunity to earn performance-based pay. However, unlike the teachers' association's members, all district administrators were placed on the *universal salary guide*.

Unlike years past where losing tenure and jobs involved a lengthy process in which the burden of proof rested with the school district, at this point teachers and administrators could

lose their livelihoods with two consecutive years of poor performance on the evaluation rubric. To reiterate, poor performance during four to six formal observations over the course of 360 school days (two school years) could cost us our jobs. Moreover, the current financial situations of educators are vulnerable given the rising cost of health insurance contributions, the increase in deductions from our paychecks for pension contributions, and the capping of yearly percentage increases. Furthermore, opportunities for extra pay are narrowing with the implementation of performance-based systems tied directly to yearly evaluation and student performance (unlike in the past where it was obtained by completing extra work or duties) and school districts, such as the one which served as the site of this study, moving away from additional compensation based on attainment of advanced degrees in favor of performance-rewards. Lastly, the competing demands of the relationships we are in and the conflicts within each of these connections have heightened the pressures on educators more than ever before, as we are being blamed for the falling standardized test scores of American youth compared to the scores of their peers worldwide, particularly within inner cities such as the site of the study (Harvey, 2014; Murnane & Steele, 2007; Rice, Malen, Jackson, & Hoyer, 2015).

I served six years as a principal in the school district that the study took place, including the final three years at the school site of the study. A timeline of my service in the school district which served as the study site is below in Table 1.

Table 1

Timeline of Events

Month/Year	Event
October 2011	Started working in the district as a content area supervisor.
December 2012	Named principal of a middle school within the district.
January-June 2013	Extensive professional development provided to all certificated staff on the new teacher evaluation system.
September 2013	New teacher evaluation system and performance based-pay incentives take effect for teacher and administrators.
July 2015	Named principal of a high school within the district that serves as the site of the study.
February 2018	My research study began.
March 2018	Left the school district for my current position. Simon, the school's vice principal, was named principal upon my departure.
March-June 2018	My research study continued after my departure. I visited the school one time per week to continue to lead the PLC.
July 2018	The district regained partial, local control of its schools.
June 2019	Performance-based pay incentives for teachers in the district were discontinued (a development I discuss in Chapter Four).
September 2020	The district awaits word from the state department regarding full, local control.

My role of principal required me to complete substantial formal and informal observations of both teachers and administrators under my purview. Additionally, during the six years as a principal in this school district, I was provided with informal and formal observational feedback of my own work from six different evaluators. Like the teachers I supervised and evaluated, I too was affected by the experience of heightened accountability measures.

During my tenure as principal of this high school, the school's vice principal and I dedicated considerable time to working closely with teachers with the goal of empowering them to feel like active participants in the profession. We recognized the disproportionate emphasis by stakeholders on the observation process and regularly discussed ways to negotiate our work as educators in the current surveillance culture. Therefore, I was interested in working with teachers at the urban high school where I was principal, at the time, given our extensive and ongoing efforts to create and nurture an empowering educational setting for all stakeholders.

Since I was the school's fourth principal in six years, the overall sense of defeat and hopelessness that permeated the setting was obvious to me. To address this problem, the vice principal and I developed a plan to empower the staff gradually over time. Aside from my personal ways of communication (e.g., referring to the staff and students as a "family," asking staff to call each other by first names, and having an open-door policy), I was very interested in breaking down traditional power barriers through the use of PLCs. Since we were just one of multiple schools in a larger complex and the entire student body had lunch at the same time, the master schedule allowed for nearly all teachers to be off from teaching during the same period daily and all PLC meetings took place during this time.

Prior to beginning this study, I had completed five PLCs in which I served as the chief facilitator. Previous topics were based on the work of Daniel Pink (*A Whole New Mind, To Sell is*

Human, and Drive), the Disney business model (*The Imagineering Pyramid*), and Sun Tzu (*The Art of War*). Simply put, interested teachers and I decided on a topic, selected a book that fit said topic, and held our PLC every Friday for one semester. At the beginning of a PLC, I typically introduced the topic and then, working as a group, we divided the book into different sections, whereby PLC members (me included) teamed up, presented on a select aspect of the topic, and led a discussion about the practical applications for the entire school and in our classrooms. At the end of the semester, PLC participants would begin implementing new strategies into their classroom lessons. In addition, participating teachers led professional development sessions for other interested teachers who had not participated in the PLC. Lastly, what may appear to be a book club is far from it. Our process of building mutuality and empowerment in our school was supported by the PLCs' emphasis on teacher motivation, establishing school-wide norms for discourse, strategically implementing instructional changes, and building our brand as teachers and as a school—all of which came to life through the reading and discussion of the selected books.

A key element of breaking down barriers and making this a truly inclusive PLC was the establishment of session norms. The norms that we collectively established at the first PLC and reiterated during ensuing PLCs (especially as the group grew) were as follows: we called each other by first name; we were (brutally) honest; we did not judge each other; and what was discussed in the room, stayed in the room. I reiterated to teachers that when I participated, I was an educator named Nick and not their evaluator (or former evaluator by week 4 of the study). Beyond the collective creation of norms, we also took other steps to break down the traditional barriers of administrator-teacher relationships such as: holding PLC meetings on Fridays because the urge to grade papers and work on lesson plans dwindled towards the end of the week;

providing coffee and snacks to further move away from the traditional view of faculty meetings and/or professional development sessions; and, alerting school staff to refrain from interrupting us during that time.

What started out as my own attempts to break down barriers and empower a defeated staff blossomed into something I never imagined. By the start of this study, the school had eight other teacher-led PLCs (beyond those I facilitated) that ran during the school day on a weekly or bi-weekly basis on topics such as resiliency, digital learning platforms, environmental science instruction, and teacher-student relationship building. Under the terms of the teachers' contract, each high school teacher had a preparation period, lunch period, and professional period, along with their five teaching class periods. This professional period could be used as an extra planning period or be utilized by teachers to plan and meet with other teachers. Since the entire educational complex where the study took place housed four schools and each school had its own, assigned lunch period, every teacher at the school where the study took place was off during the same professional period daily; therefore, all of the teachers at the school had the ability to join or lead one or more PLCs. At the time I left this school for a new position, I facilitated a Friday PLC and was an active participant in two, teacher-led PLCs. In fact, one of the PLCs that started out as the brainchild of two teachers became the focal point of future school-wide action plans and professional development sessions. As I see it, the PLC approach described above empowered the staff, built our professional capacity, and positively changed the culture and climate of the school.

During my initial experiences as school principal and from our conversations in prior PLCs, I felt it was time to explore a book on relationships since these seemed to be the key to our current and future success in this era of heightened accountability. Consequently, since my

facilitating of a PLC became a part of the school's regular routine, I planned on having the next

scheduled PLC be the context for the PAR study. Typically, ideas for new PLCs were presented

in person or via email by those willing to lead them prior to the next semester. For this PLC

about relationship building within school communities, my gauging of teacher interest was no

different than in years past. I provided the staff with information about my intended PLC and my

targeted audience (teachers on the performance-based pay salary guide). Additionally, I made it

clear to the staff that this PLC would serve as the datapoint for my dissertation. Along with the

overall idea of my study and its focus on relationships, I presented the idea of reading

Professional Development in Relational Learning Communities: Teachers in Connection by

Miriam B. Raider-Roth (2017) after our initial conversations about the purpose of the PLC.

During these tension-filled times in education, a book about relationship building in open and

authentic learning environments would hopefully help us stay true to our professional identities. I

was interested in how we made meaning of our circumstances, how we weighed educational

decisions, and how I as an administrator, as well as those administrators above me, could support

us as we navigated these waters. It was my hope that the mutually empowering relationships

already established prior to this study (and hopefully further heightened during it) would lead to

openness of communication.

It was my expectation and hope that the PLC would be a place where we would grow into

our roles as change agents. Consequently, I anticipated that the everyday pedagogical decisions

of these teachers were exerting a positive influence on their students and the profession as a

whole. Next, it was important to view ourselves as empowered decision makers who could

provide verbal and written feedback about the impact that national, state, and local policies such

as performance-based pay had on our daily decisions and discuss it in a mutually beneficial

setting without ramifications from their chief evaluators. Lastly, I too wanted to share my experiences and responses to new professionalism and heightened accountability measures. The study was part of the regular routine of professional learning communities (PLCs) that the new principal of the target school (who served as vice principal during my principalship) and I, with the then vice principal, established when I took over as principal in September 2015. In this capacity, improving the culture and climate of the school and reinvigorating the teaching staff was our number one priority. These PLCs, unlike professional development sessions, provided teachers and administrators with opportunities to identify problems, analyze available data, and make informed decisions to improve the instructional practice and climate of the school. As a reminder, I left as principal of this school in March of 2018, which was three weeks into the study. After my departure, the school's vice principal replaced me as principal.

In my continued efforts to be inclusive and empower the staff, I did not directly select fellow participants. Instead, the first seven teachers on the performance-based pay salary guide and were willing to participate in the study were included in the group. In addition, although the school's new principal, Simon, was not part of the PLC, the group agreed to invite him to our final session to share our discoveries and feelings. It should be noted that the final PLC session which Simon attended took place after the evaluation process for the school year of the study was complete. The first seven teachers (who self-selected) and I participated in this study, a number that fell within the typical size range of previous PLCs. Study information was provided via a handout and participating teachers were given a consent form. This form reiterated to teachers that their participation was voluntary, they could leave at any time, and they should not expect any ramifications from the study's findings.

A summary profile of the eight participants in the study (including me) is presented below in Table 2. All names other than my own are pseudonyms.

Table 2

Profile of Study Participants

Name	Position	Yrs in Education	Yrs in District	Status
Ava	English Teacher	3	3	NT
Donald	Social Studies Teacher	4	4	NT
Gary	Social Studies Teacher	12	12	T
Gina	Special Education Teacher	17	1	NT
Nick	Principal	14	7	T
Otto	English Teacher	8	7	T
Roger	English Teacher	8	7	T
Warren	Social Studies Teacher	16	15	T

Organization of the Study

Data Collection

At the start of the study, I was in the process of leaving my role as principal of the study site and moving into a central office position in a nearby district. I facilitated three PLC sessions while still in the role of principal and continued participating in the remaining sessions after changing jobs. To ensure that our work remained true to the basic tenets of PAR such as fostering communities of inquiry to address significant problems, the group determined if and how our findings would be shared with Simon, the former vice principal, who replaced me as

principal upon my departure. At the beginning of the study, we agreed to have the new principal

join the last study session and review the findings with us.

Like previous PLCs, we read a book together. During this PLC, we read *Professional*

Development in Relational Learning Communities: Teachers in Connection by Miriam B.

Raider-Roth (2017). During initial conversations about the intended topic of the study, I

recommended this book to the group, as the idea that we were going through the motions of our

work and doing the bidding of larger policy-makers dominated these early. For my approach to

data collection, I used notes and audio files collected during PLC sessions. I delineate my

approach to data collection below.

Weekly PLC. Our PLC met during the school day for forty-five minute sessions, once

per week, for fifteen weeks (except for two sessions cut short due to schedules adjusted for

standardized testing). All PLC sessions were tape recorded and transcribed for purposes of

analysis. The intent of our weekly PLC was to create rich conversations from participant

journaling, the reading of our book on RCT, and any "critical incidents" that occurred during the

week. The topic for each PLC session corresponded to a particular topic/chapter(s) in the

selected book and as participants, all of us were expected to read the chapter and journal via the

shared Google Doc. Journaling consisted of reactions to the reading; reactions to any events we

participated in within the evaluation system (for example, a pre-conference, post-conference, or

observation); comments that other participants made in a previous session or in our journals; and

any critical incidents that took place between PLC meetings. By "critical incidents," I refer to the

"underlying structure which both limits and facilitates what we consciously and unconsciously

choose to attend to" (e.g., making an instructional decision that contradicts one's personal

convictions but meets a standard on the observation rubric) (Tripp, 2012, p. 13). These critical

incidents were either brought up directly to the group within the PLC discussion or they were documented in the journaling via the Google Doc. In keeping with this format, each PLC session was guided by the following questions: (a) "What are some of the tensions you face in making instructional decisions?"; (b), "How did you negotiate your practices in the face of these tensions?"; and (c), "What support do you need or appreciate from administrators in facing these tensions?" I asked each of the participants (including myself) to use the book's weekly topics/chapter(s) as the lens by which to analyze our respective actions and the actions of other stakeholders we interacted with.

Journal submissions. We kept individual, weekly journals to log thoughts regarding our assigned readings from the book and/or discussions during the PLC. Each of us kept a journal, which was shared by all participants via a Google Doc. Each participant had his or her own section in the Google Doc; therefore, our responses were visible at all times to everyone else. Additionally, we were encouraged to journal whenever a "critical incident" took place, as well as after the specific events of the classroom observation process. Participants, for the most part, journaled on a weekly basis, with journal submissions consisting of critical incidents, action within the evaluation process, and/or reactions to the book or the thoughts of their colleagues. The vast majority of participants, myself included, journaled on a weekly basis, with one exception. I also kept both a participant and researcher journal to document my own experiences in the evaluation cycle and as the researcher.

I was aware that teacher journaling went beyond the scope of the daily work of participants. As such, I gave all other participants a $20 gift card at the start of the study, as well as an additional $100 gift card to one participant at the end of the study, via a random drawing. The time and energy that my fellow participants gave to this study during the school day and

after hours journaling meant a lot to me; therefore, it was the least I could do to recognize their efforts. To provide a designated period each day for journaling, the new principal agreed to waive the teaching participants' daily supervision period (e.g., office duty and student attendance monitoring) during the study.

Data Analysis

Throughout the study, data collection and data analysis occurred simultaneously. Although I hoped to compare units of information collected with the next, in search of finding recurring regularities (Merriam, 2009), I understood that the book selected for discussion and any "critical incidents" that occurred on a typical day would take precedent during our weekly discussions—and this happened at times. All means of data collection provided significant findings for teacher instruction and administrator-teacher relationships as the economic and professional livelihoods of educators were at stake. Moreover, since I pursued this topic in this school setting largely due to anecdotal evidence I gathered during my time as principal and my yearning to see the effect that mutually empowering administrator-teacher relationships potentially had on instructional decisions in the context of heightened accountability, it was important for me to analyze data when my assumptions were negated. By discussing ways to do things differently given our circumstances, I wanted the teachers to feel empowered to positively affect change in the school and the profession.

At regular intervals throughout the study (every two weeks), I reviewed participant journal submissions, attempted to find themes, and used this data to forward the discussion in our weekly PLC. I began each PLC by sharing noticings and wonderings from journal submissions and how the book on RCT potentially applied. Prior to the study, we agreed to use our journals to generate themes and share these themes with the whole group via an electronic platform such as

Google Docs. All data collected via journals and discussions were first analyzed via open coding.

Once I identified key concepts, categories, and properties (Anderson, et al., 2007), I constructed

themes via descriptive coding, as this was a useful tool for analyzing a wide array of data forms

(Saldana, 2009). Additionally, as Saldana (2009) points out, descriptive coding is vital for the

reader to "see what you saw and hear what you heard" (p. 71). Since data collection and analysis

were ongoing and simultaneous, it is important to reiterate that I completed another level of data

analysis after all data had been gathered and collection was finished.

Memo writing (Saldana, 2009) served as my outlet to make meaning of/connections

between my data throughout the collection and analysis process. According to Saldana (2009),

writing is analysis, and analytic memos expand on the meanings of codes and themes as the

researcher transitions this information into a more logical account of the research study.

I reported data obtained from all participants thematically. Since I clearly stated my intent

to provide teachers and administrators with opportunities to negotiate personal convictions with

prescribed policies and regulations, a thematic approach enabled me to bring the voices of all the

participants to life. My goal as a researcher, participant, and author was to offer a view of the

countless ways that teachers and administrators negotiated personal convictions with neoliberal

policies and elements of new professionalism while making educational decisions (e.g., teachers

and administrators negotiating their way through this). Individual voices were empowered to

give a comprehensive, insider account from teachers and administrators in a heightened

accountability system and a rewards culture.

Ethical Considerations

Since my study involved research on human subjects, I obtained permission from the

Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct it. I considered the risks to all participants minimal,

as we are adults who volunteered our time and were already comfortable sharing our experiences. However, I was sure to continually reinforce the norms of RCT, as I was an insider-researcher who once had evaluative power over teacher participants in the study. Teacher participants were free to leave the study at any time. Additionally, to protect the confidentiality of teacher participants, pseudonyms were used in the collection, analysis, and reporting of all data.

Researcher Positionality

I am a veteran educator who has observed and evaluated teachers before and during this new era of heightened accountability. At the time of the study, I was in my fourteenth year in education, serving six years as a teacher and eight years as an administrator. I began the study as the principal of the school that served as the research site and, as such, I was the direct evaluator of the teacher participants; therefore, I was an insider with power at the beginning of the study. I transitioned out of the role as school principal after the third PLC session.

The current political climate of public education, as well as my own professional experiences, influenced my research. My research interests stem from my own firsthand experiences as a classroom teacher, as well as the anecdotal evidence I accumulated during my six years as a school principal in a district that offers performance-based pay to teachers based on their yearly evaluation ratings. I, along with administrative colleagues and teachers, have become disheartened, stressed, and penalized all too often within this system of quantifying and sorting. Therefore, I believe that the work teachers and I did in this school setting represents positive ways in which teacher convictions have been negotiated effectively in a heightened system of accountability and rewards culture. As such, I brought much conviction to my work. As an

insider to both the profession and this school, I am able to see the task that lays ahead for

educators, how difficult it may be, and how I am just as important a part as they are.

Administrators are affected just as much as teachers by policies and regulations

perpetuated by neoliberalism and new professionalism, and they play a vital role in the

negotiation of personal convictions and prescribed accountability measures. In this study, I

wanted to learn from the teachers, ways in which they feel administrators can help them maintain

their professional integrity in the face of the demands of accountability systems, as well as make

a contribution to the field via an authentic account of what is happening in schools to teachers

and administrators. As a reminder, I too felt the tension of the new systems of heightened

accountability, as I was also observed and evaluated like teachers in the school. It was difficult

dealing with this hierarchy since for the sake of performing well when I was observed, at times, I

felt forced to choose between what I saw as working well in my leadership position and the other

types of decisions thrust upon me by the powers above.

Validity & Trustworthiness

The first step in ensuring validity and reliability in qualitative research was to carefully

design the study (Merriam, 2009). I took several measures to ensure the validity of my work.

Journaling and Memoing. First and foremost, as an insider in a PAR study, it was

important for me to keep a running account of research decisions via a researcher journal

(Anderson, et al., 2007; Merriam, 2009)—which complimented the participant journal I

previously described. Since qualitative researchers cannot expect a replication of our account, we

can focus on explaining how we arrived at our findings (Merriam, 2009). Keeping a participant

and researcher journal was important for me in establishing the study's trustworthiness. I also

used memo writing to make meaning of/connections between my data throughout the collection and analysis process.

Prolonged engagement. We as participants were engaged over time (weekly) for 15 sessions. This allowed the conversation to unfold in complex ways while we strategized on ways to negotiate the current educational context.

Triangulation. It is vital for an insider researcher in a PAR study to triangulate all forms of data to see if different perspectives are offered and to heighten the credibility of the study (Anderson, et al., 2007). By using multiple data sources and opportunities for us as participants to express ourselves, many, differing ways to answer the research questions were built into the study. For example, educators talking together during the weekly PLC sessions offered one vantage point, while our writing (journaling and critical incidents) offered another view.

Member checking. Lastly, I met with my fellow study participants on multiple occasions throughout the process and provided multiple opportunities to have their voices heard. Along these same lines, I brought back to the group identified themes in the continuous conversation. I cross-checked my ongoing meaning making from a variety of sources with the teacher participants to see if they recognized themselves in the themes and descriptions presented. They had the opportunity to refine these and to comment further on these emergent findings (Merriam, 2009). This process was in line with action research in that the ongoing findings were brought back to the group for larger meaning making, as well as to inform fellow participants about any ongoing decision-making they might be engaged in day-to-day.

Critical friends. Since I was an insider/researcher with an angle, I chose a colleague who was a principal in another school district to serve as a critical friend to help me identify my assumptions and make sense of journal submissions, "critical incidents," and PLC discussions

that pushed against my original angle. Later on in the study, I asked two doctoral colleagues to critically review my findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Setting the Stage

In this chapter I describe the findings from my PAR study. I embarked on this study because I saw a noticeable change in my school since the implementation of performance-based pay. The pressures of this new system, due to the increased importance of final evaluation scores, shifted conversations between teachers and administrators from those focusing on instructional improvement to those fixed on attaining higher scores on the evaluation rubric. Additionally, on a personal level as a school principal within this system, I too felt these same pressures and shifts in my decision-making. As I began to witness the change in the teachers at our school, as well as myself, I felt I needed to explore what was happening to us within the large frame of neoliberalism and the creation of the new professional. I was also interested in attempting to figure out ways for us to operate moving forward, as these systems became embedded into our daily work.

I hoped that providing an open and non-evaluative space would allow a group of teachers and myself an opportunity to discuss how we weighed our personal and professional interests while operating within surveillance and rewards cultures (Freedberg, 2007; Jordan, 2000a; Lewis & Olshansky, 2017; Miller, 2010a, 2010b; Raider-Roth, 2017). The subsequent research questions allowed me to explore the following in this era of new professionalism and neoliberalism:

1) When given a supportive space for ongoing dialogue, how do we as teachers and administrators describe our educational decisions while functioning in evaluation systems?

2) How can I, as an administrator, along with the other administrators with whom I work, best support teachers' instructional decision-making during the current era of heightened accountability?

During the study and the iterative process of meetings, observations, journaling, and analysis, we all shared feelings and experiences regarding our educational choices by engaging in frank discussions (in person, online, and via journaling) and sharing a sense of vulnerability. In addition, we discussed how, as teachers and administrators, we could best co-navigate educational decision making in our school, which offered performance-based pay incentives based on final yearly evaluation scores. My data is organized in a way meant to narrate our interactions and decisions. My first theme is: What We Faced—The Push and Pull of New Professionalism. Within this first theme, I explore the different types of pushes we faced, such as accountability measures and standardized practices; and, the pull of new professionalism, most notably performance-based pay incentives. My second theme is: What Happened to Us—The Onset of Insecurity, Powerlessness, and Disengagement, the by-products of the push and pull of new professionalism. My third theme is: How We Responded—The Everyday Acts of Resistance we used to fight back against the system. My fourth and final theme is: The Collateral Damage of the System, such as the disconnect in our relationship with the district and our evaluators, and the pushing of ethical boundaries.

What We Faced: The Push and Pull of New Professionalism

Education is currently in an era of heightened accountability where neoliberal decision-makers have created policies and procedures aimed at recreating educators into new professionals. In her book, *Professional Development in Relational Learning Communities: Teachers in Connection* (2017), Miriam B. Raider-Roth described educators who are purveyors

of skills and who do not make decisions about the content and pedagogy in the classroom. She

terms these people, who deliver that which others- often remote political experts- deem

important, educational clerks. Reading her book together at the start of the study, we quickly

recognized that the system was attempting to push and pull us in this direction—and we

acknowledged that this recreation was already taking place in our setting.

Within the current performance and rewards culture, educators are faced with constant

pushes and pulls of new professionalism. The pushes and pulls, described below, are factors that

both thrust (pushes) and lure (pulls) us into accepting this new way of thinking and teaching.

Educators in general are dealing with the policies and procedures that push us into embracing

new professionalism; however, our specific setting, which was a high school in a performance-

based school district, had the added pull of performance-based pay incentives. Throughout the

study, we shared our educational decisions and discussed the complicated route by which we

came to them. We confirmed that we were being pushed and pulled by the forces of new

professionalism toward becoming educational clerks in our school rather than the professionals

we knew ourselves to be.

The Pushes of New Professionalism

By the *push*, I refer to the policies, practices, and tools at our school that moved us away

from decisions made from years of experience and accumulated knowledge, as well as

knowledge of our specific students, towards decisions predicated on following the mandates and

quantifiable indicators of the evaluation rubric that would recast us into educational clerks. The

pushes included: 1) accountability measures with their heightened emphasis on performance; and

2) the standardization of practices, which we felt lessened our autonomy and creative control.

By standardization of practice, I refer to the curricular pacing, resources, and instructional strategies dictated by local, state, and national decision makers that affected our everyday work. These mandates dictated instructional choices and practices, and in striking contrast to our previous experiences limited our ability to make the work we did our own. We were saddened, angered, and fearful that we were being pushed into such regimented and pressurized systems. Unfortunately, because we needed to survive in the profession, we fell prey more often than not to the onslaught of this push.

Push: Accountability Measures

The accountability measures' push consisted of the evaluation system and the observation rubrics required by ESSA and implemented at the local level to measure and sort us. This evaluation system and its accompanying observation rubrics produced a composite of our performance in one to three formal observations (85%) along with our progress on SGOs (15%), served as the determining measures of our yearly performance. The push of new professionalism was alive and highly visible to all of us during the study. We shared numerous instances where the push of the evaluation rubric was at the forefront of our educational decisions. For example, Gary recounted a specific formal observation where he admitted to having the observation rubric in mind when making instructional choices—more so than the needs of his students. Gary stated that:

> [The evaluation rubric has you] doing the things that don't make you better just to get the necessary points. It's like doing extra moves to dunk a ball into the basket. It's still two points but the moves just make you look good.

Here, Gary's recollection of the lesson, as well as his decision-making process, demonstrated that he took accountability measures into consideration and acted accordingly; therefore, the

heightened importance of his performance and meeting specific criteria of the observation rubric pushed him towards becoming a different teacher, potentially one who added more flare without relevant substance.

In the PLC Gina discussed a newfound fear while teaching at our school. For example, Gina described colleagues at another school in the district spending more than the typical amount of time on the processes and procedures needed to carry out a successful formal observation than focusing on what would best benefit their students. Gina shared with the group a story she had heard at a meeting of newly-hired teachers because she thought it was relevant to our discussion:

> An author was coming to the school to read and conduct a poetry workshop for students. English classes were invited several weeks before the event. The day before two teachers backed out because they were going to be observed later in the week. They wanted to be sure their students were prepped for behavior, procedures, and be at the specific point in their learning. They told the organizer that the students behaved okay and had routines but they had to be sure and that they actually wanted to pre-teach some of the material. Apparently, the 'observer' is well known for knocking teachers on the most minor things. These are not novice teachers, they are tenured and in the district for years but fear this supervisor's wrath. So much so that their students missed what was described as a fun and worthwhile learning experience that broadened the students' ideas about poetry.

The story Gina relayed paints a picture of seemingly experienced and knowledgeable educators sacrificing a rare opportunity for their students out of fear—a fear of performing poorly on an upcoming formal observation. This fear of poor performance was a typical example of how we changed as educators due to internal and external factors.

Push: Standardized Practices

Along with the influx of accountability measures and a heightened emphasis on performance, the standardization of our practices provided another example of how we were pushed into systematic directions as educators. Throughout the study, we lamented the fact that our decisions/choices were becoming more regimented and our ability to maintain autonomous and creative control in our positions was lost. For example, pacing guides and recommended instructional practices, once elements in our toolbox to choose from, now dictated our educational choices and changed our decision-making. Roger described a situation in which he felt not only losing creative control of his work with students, but what was being dictated for him to do was actually wrong. Yet, he was required to comply with this standardized assessment and process.

> I was recently administering district assessments—AP Language and Composition. I cannot explain how tiresome and frustrating it is to be forced to give an exam, to grade an exam, to count this exam towards the student's score, and to use the score towards my own evaluation, when the exam is full of mistakes! The district, time and time again, prints hundreds of copies of exams which are littered with errors. Some errors are simple, such as citing the wrong lines, and some, like this AP Lang and Comp Post Assessment, pull an excerpt from an entirely wrong passage, and then ask questions which are of no correlation to the wrong passage.... but rather must be asking questions about the mystery excerpt. The idea that days are pulled from my instruction to administer these exams, to grade them, to go to meetings to then analyze them... is insane to me. If the test editing and creation process is done with such low fidelity, then why should I be asked to treat it with any more seriousness than the test makers have?

The excerpt above epitomized the effect that the standardization of practices had on changing our decision-making. Although Roger believed that he had been asked to administer an inferior and inaccurate assessment to his students, he could not break away from this mandated assessment based on the fear that his evaluators would use this lack of compliance against him—even if it could have negatively impacted his SGO score and did not truly assess the progress of his students. The system and the standardization that came with it frustrated Roger; however, he had to follow it or suffer negative evaluative consequences. Since scores on the rubric used to assess a teacher's teaching performance accounted for 85% of his yearly evaluation score, while his SGO scores accounted for only 15%, Roger focused more on what he could to ensure compliance on the evaluation rubric rather than worrying about student progress on his SGOs. In this instance, to make certain success on the evaluation rubric, Roger had to give up the autonomy and creative control he valued and which he felt his students needed to do well in his class.

For us, the push of standardized practices was not only frustrating because it infringed upon our autonomy—it was also frustrating because we, especially during formal observations, sacrificed creativity for standardization, as following mandated instructional and curricular choices were the safest ways to accrue higher points on the formal observation rubric by blatantly documenting to administrators who evaluated us that we met indicators on the evaluation rubric. Roger, the English teacher who groaned about losing autonomy over his assessments, pined for the opportunity to be creative during a formal observation, but he felt the cost was too great for him. Roger, a fairly new teacher and former union delegate, had fought mightily against what he perceived as an unfair school district that kept teachers on the same salary guide for four years; therefore, he needed to do everything he could to clinch the highest

scores possible on the evaluation rubric. This idea is palpable in the situation Roger described in

the following journal entry.

> It is a big risk [to stray from the curriculum during a formal observation]. Like in the
>
> standard curriculum I could either do this super safe and know that I have a good
>
> argument for a better score or I want to try this because it sounds more creative and that's
>
> a little more for my kids. But then the risk is someone is walking by and then didn't like
>
> it.

As the above excerpt suggests, Roger felt pushed away from taking a creative chance in his

teaching based on fear of being rated poorly on a formal observation by his evaluators. Like

Roger, others in the group had also internalized the importance of scoring well on the

observation rubric which. This, in turn, pushed us into placing the accountability tools and

standard practices at the forefront of our decision-making simply to survive in our jobs. This

continued loss of autonomy and creativity, coupled with the knowledge that two consecutive

years of poor performance on yearly evaluations could lead to our dismissal, enticed us further

towards new professionalism.

The Pull of New Professionalism

Where the push consisted of the policies, practices, and tools at our school that moved us

away from our decisions of yesteryear, the *pull* was comprised of what moved or lured us toward

becoming educational clerks. More specifically, the pull was the potential personal, financial,

and/or professional security that we could attain with an above average performance, as dictated

by the observation rubric. The pull was the element of the evaluation system, performance-based

pay, meant to attract us to adhering to the mandates and standardization of practice of new

professionalism.

Performance-based pay pulled/attracted/lured us to new professionalism by means of the personal, financial, and/or professional security it potentially offered. The ultimate goal of performance-based pay was to incentivize us to perform in ways that were consistent with the newly adopted criteria embedded in the evaluation system, which were assumed to be the types of teaching behaviors that would result in improved student performance on standardized tests. Unfortunately, the by-product of this movement was our transformation into educational clerks. We were becoming regurgitators of the knowledge and skills that the powers that be thrust upon us. However, the pull of performance-based pay, although pressurized like the pushes I described in the previous section, provided us with the chance to benefit from playing the system by teaching to the evaluation rubric.

As a reminder, the opportunity to attain performance-based pay by reaching a score of 3.5 or higher (out of 4.0) on our yearly evaluation was very appealing to us for personal, professional, and/or financial reasons. If we scored 3.5 or higher on our yearly evaluation (equivalent to highly effective) we moved up two steps on the salary guide in the following school year; whereas, scoring between 2.5-3.4 (effective) only moved us up one step (like the traditional salary guide did) and scoring 2.4 or less (partially effective or ineffective) placed us on a corrective action plan. And, another year of being rated partially effective or ineffective while being on a corrective action plan would allow the district to seek tenure charges against tenured participants for performance and remove us from our positions—while non-tenured teachers, to reiterate, could be released for any reason within the first four years of employment, regardless of performance. With our positions now less secure and each of us trying to do what we could to increase our standing and status, performance-based pay was both attractive and nerve-wracking. This extrinsic reward provided us with an opportunity to attain increased

financial rewards in a profession with ever-increasing costs (for example, rises in health

insurance and pension contributions) and less contributions to us from our employers (for

example, decreases in cost-of-living adjustments, the elimination of salary guide adjustments

based on the attainment of advanced degrees coupled with a virtually empty pool of money for

tuition reimbursement).

Throughout the study, we discussed how/if the pull of performance-based pay incentives

played a role in our daily educational decision-making. Although we, at times, operated with the

idea that sound educational decisions grounded in our professional knowledge and experiences

would ultimately lead us to attain performance-based pay rewards, this was not the norm. Our in-

person conversations and journaling suggested that we made educational decisions in line with

the evaluation rubric and the lure of performance-based pay, even when our professional

knowledge and experience did not support these decisions. When asked to describe his mindset

when making educational decisions under the performance-based pay system, Gary explained

that:

> Well that's the thing, I always want to be a better teacher and I always want to do things
>
> to make myself better, and I think it's like, most people we work with are intrinsically
>
> motivated teachers, but specifically with those evaluations, I felt like I was doing it to get
>
> the highest score possible not necessarily the best way to teach the lesson.

When I prodded Gary further on the topic, especially if the district (as rumored) would

potentially eliminate performance-based pay in the next school year, he elaborated further.

(Please note that below, by "cutesy stuff", Gary is referring to the addition of extra instructional

strategies and resources that both heighten the learning environment for students and increase

their odds of scoring higher on the evaluation rubric.)

My instruction isn't going to change but I'm not going to put as much effort into the

planning. What I have is solid and there will be no need to go beyond because highly

effective isn't available. You are not going to see the cutesy stuff. I am not going to put as

much time into the planning for these incredible lessons. I don't think much of the stuff

would come out. What will be eliminated is what I could add if there was pressure on me

to do well.

During this particular PLC session, we got to the heart of the pull of new professionalism and its

effects on us. Performance-based pay, via the opportunity to gain more money, lured us closer to

becoming educational clerks as our decisions were changing in and out of formal observations.

We knew what we needed to do to score high on the evaluation rubric to attain performance-

based pay, and when it was unavailable (whether during formal observations or in the

elimination of the opportunity), we believed that our efforts would be toned down because we

had shifted from intrinsic to extrinsic satisfaction. Warren, in his not-so-poetic way, put it bluntly

when summing up this particular PLC session:

For people like Gary, [the elimination of performance-based pay] will be positive,

because he can be creative. But for certain people, what's the incentive to do well? As

long as I am not a complete idiot the two or three times I get observed, I am going to do

whatever I want to do.

At the very end of the study (during post-PLC journaling), the district announced that

performance-based pay would be eliminated the following school year because people were

mastering the observation/evaluation rubric and more money was allocated to compensate highly

effective teachers than the district originally allotted to this. It is worth noting that, although

performance-based pay for teachers would be eliminated, the evaluation system and

accompanying rubric would remain in place. The overall feeling from the group was that,

although performance-based pay was seemingly a slap-in-the-face to their professionalism (for

example, having to work harder for our yearly keep), it was at least something for which we

strived to attain during difficult financial and professional times. However, with the elimination

of performance-based pay came further resentment towards the evaluation system, its elements,

and the people responsible for its implementation. Otto provided a poignant account of his

feelings toward the introduction of performance-based pay (and his gradual movement towards

embracing new professionalism) and then its eventual elimination:

> Our value as employees is constantly decreased based on how the district sees us. We are
>
> a burden, a drain, over paid, underworked, and all we do is complain (possibly true). Yet,
>
> the district cannot function without us. Our compensation has never directly reflected our
>
> value, yet they continue to squander finances and ensure that we never receive a livable
>
> wage. To add insult to injury, they remove the one thing [performance-based pay] that
>
> was reasonable. While the plight of a mismanaged district is very real, it does not account
>
> for the sheer lack of respect and support that we as educators are denied. The district
>
> wonders why things are so bad, why nothing they do works. There are hundreds of
>
> reasons why, but the most glaring is their inability to look at its staff and students as
>
> humans, instead of cogs. With that, it is important to remember these words 'I know what
>
> I bring to the table, so trust me when I say I'm not afraid to eat alone.' Sometimes you
>
> have to walk away.

The above comment, from Otto, was the quintessential example of performance-based pay luring

us into becoming new professionals but also affecting our outlook on the profession which, in

turn, affected our educational decisions. As Donald further explained: "This job is stressful

enough, but it is almost to a point where it's not worth it anymore. The perks that used to make teaching attractive are disappearing and the pay isn't improving, so at some point we are going to ask ourselves 'What am I doing here?'" In analyzing the data, the pull of new professionalism was very real and the lure of performance-based pay definitely altered our mindset.

Push and Pull Summary

The push and pull of new professionalism was born out of the pressurized performance and rewards cultures created in our school by an increased focus on evaluation tools, mandated curricular and instructional methods, and performance-based pay opportunities. The ability to lose tenure after two consecutive years of being rated as ineffective and/or partially effective, the lure of performance-based pay during tough, economic times, and the loss of what we held sacred in the profession (for example, creative choice) all led us to feel and weigh the push and pull of new professionalism. Next I describe this push and pull through an examination of how we made educational decisions, all while we were thrust towards new professionalism via fear and/or reward, my second theme: The Onset of Insecurity, Powerlessness, and Disengagement, which was a by-product of the push and pull of new professionalism.

What Happened to Us: The Onset of Insecurity, Powerlessness, & Disengagement

Based on my analysis of the data collected, insecurity, powerlessness, and disengagement, by-products of the push and pull of new professionalism, began to influence our educational decision-making process. The systems in which we operated decreased our sense of financial, personal, and professional security, which in turn, created a sense of powerlessness as rubrics and individuals other than ourselves exerted control over our livelihood more than ever before. As a reminder, with the implementation of performance-based pay incentives, teaching staff could no longer move up on the salary guide for attaining a higher degree or completing

coursework. That is, salary guide movement rested solely on yearly evaluation scores. Moreover, fear of financial, personal, and professional loss, coupled with a loss of power over our circumstances, led to our heightened disengagement from work, beyond doing what was needed to survive. During the PLC sessions and online journaling, we discussed how these by-products of the push and pull seeped into our daily work. More often than not, we conveyed how unsettling these changes were to all of us. Throughout this section, I show that each of these were by-products of the new mandates (pushes) and enticement (pulls) we dealt with. I also explain how these by-products affected our educational decision-making. Below, I define and present these individual feelings. However, while I present these components as distinct feelings we experienced and discussed during the study, they tended to occur in tandem as by-products of the push and pull of new professionalism.

Insecurity

By *insecurity*, I refer to fear of our personal, professional, and/or financial well-being that permeated our daily work and decisions. Through our discussions and actions, we illustrated a heightened insecurity in our jobs, something we attributed to the intense scrutiny and pressure that the evaluation system and its tools exerted on us, especially during formal observations.

Throughout the study, it was palpable that insecurity at home and at work played a major part in the professional decisions we made. Feeling insecure with the tenuous nature of our jobs and livelihood caused us to make instructional choices with the goal of obtaining high scores on the observation rubric. This can be credited to the system increasing the level of scrutiny on our work and the newly, tenuous nature of our jobs. During our in-person discussions and on-line journaling, it became clear that our sense of security affected how we interacted with our evaluators and peers during work hours, as well as with our family during afterhours. For

example, some participants (especially those who were non-tenure) with tenuous financial

situations begrudgingly pushed aside family time, especially when preparing for formal

observations, in order to plan exceptional lessons to score as high as possible on the evaluation

rubric which, in turn, would hopefully improve the family's financial situation.

Feelings of insecurity wore on us, as I discussed above. We argued that the anxiety the

system created over scoring as high as possible on the rubric to obtain the highest amount of

performance-based pay available on the salary guide played a vital role in our educational

decision-making. Further, beyond the idea that we were *fighting for our supper* more than ever,

we were also battling a major increase in the costs of living, particularly in the area of health

benefits. For instance, Donald and Gina identified the need for second jobs solely to make up for

increased health benefits costs. Others like Ava and Roger took their chances on the Affordable

Healthcare Exchange to receive a stipend for waiving district-offered health benefits. These

additional details of the difficult financial straits of the vast majority of members in the group

weighed heavily on our educational decisions. We had human responsibilities that were getting

more difficult each year and our personal and financial needs absolutely affected the choices we

made in our school. The statement below, from Ava, summarizes the idea that making

educational decisions is not so cut and dry when one's personal, financial, and professional

livelihood is hanging by a string.

> The need to pay my bills outweighed my healthcare. Thank god I am healthy but what if
>
> that changes quickly? I'm very happy that we have a contract after hearing everyone's
>
> horror stories. However, and I know that being a new teacher plays a big role in this, I
>
> can't help but feel that our district teachers are conditioned to settle. However, with this
>
> new contract, I take longer to reach the top of the salary guide, my cap has been

decreased, I no longer have a way to get a raise as performance based pay is gone and I

don't get anything for furthering my education. I can't raise a family in this district.

Donald further described the overall feeling of the group regarding these burning

obligations in his journal entry below.

This whole situation is disheartening to say the least. One of the most attractive reasons

to become a teacher is the pension and the way above average health insurance, take one

of those away and teaching isn't a very attractive profession. Knowing my family is well

cared for, medically speaking, if any issues with their health arise makes it a lot easier to

accept the not so attractive salary, it is a tradeoff almost all of us are willing to make and

have made. I will gladly take less money for the comfort of knowing my family is

protected by some of the best health insurance available to people, but now that the

district is changing to a ″cheaper″ insurance that is supposedly equal in quality, this job

has lost any attractiveness it may have had. Let's be honest, none of us became teachers

to become rich, personally I became a teacher to help kids, to be a positive role model

like some of my teachers were for me, to provide my family with good health benefits,

and to ensure that I would be secure in retirement, all while making a comfortable living.

When the district takes away my family's insurance, it says to me ″we don't care about

you or your family″ and that makes it quite a bit harder to come to school in the morning,

especially when I was up late working a second job because I accepted less money in

exchange for the benefits that are being taken away. I know the district said the new

benefits are equal in coverage, but I don't see how they can be when the district is being

so secretive about it and everyone at central office in charge of this has different answers

to the same question. This is a disaster waiting to happen and the collateral damage is our

health and well-being. This district is notorious for mismanaging money, so what is going

to happen when they eventually run out of money to pay for some of the claims and we

are left responsible for the doctor bills? It is not a question of "if" this will happen, but

"when" it will happen and "how" bad it will be for all of us when it does happen. This job

is stressful enough, but it is almost to a point where it's not worth it anymore. The perks

that used to make teaching attractive are disappearing and the pay isn't improving, so at

some point we are going to ask ourselves 'What am I doing here?'"

Through the above discussion about pension and healthcare costs, we see how our

newfound insecurity further complicated the assumed, easy process of providing the highest

quality of instruction to our students. We were people with real-life problems and our students

suffered when we put our own financial and professional needs over the needs of our students

when making educational decisions. We resented the added feelings of insecurity that

pressurized planning and loss of quality time at home brought about. Consequently, we cut back

on our after-hours planning, especially while at home, although this response varied among us

based on our individual circumstances.

Powerlessness

By *powerlessness*, in this context, I refer to the loss of creative and autonomous control

over our educational decisions. We felt a loss of power/control over our own actions and

decisions, as the system and its accompanying rubrics seemed to dictate more and more what we

did and lessened the curricular and instructional choices we had.

In almost every PLC discussion and the vast majority of journal entries, we described

power as a major factor in fostering positive or negative connections. Members of the PLC

vociferously debated the issue of power throughout the study. Non-tenured participants, such as

Donald, Ava, and Gina, expressed a resounding feeling of hopelessness as they felt cheated of the opportunity to make additional money by the power their direct evaluators had (in their estimation) to deliberately rate them lower on the observation rubric. When speaking as a group, the non-tenured participants described how the system made them apprehensive about taking educational risks—especially during formal observations. They described a fear of going above and beyond the call of duty, as these types of educational decisions were not clearly identifiable to observers on the evaluation rubric. For example, Gina commented that the person who evaluated her, a "clueless and script-following administrator" who struggled with in her evaluating role, "made sure non-tenure teachers, such as herself, did not score high on the evaluations." In addition, Ava lamented the fact that she continually had to "second-guess her instructional decisions" because she certain direct evaluators, particularly her content-area supervisor, "showed you who was in charge every time we talked during post-conferences." And, to Donald, the power many evaluators yielded by way of the evaluation rubric—especially with non-tenured staff—enraged him. For instance, Donald's content-area supervisor told him directly that he could teach the same lesson as a tenured teacher in the building yet he would receive lower scores on the observation rubric. The content-area supervisor did this because of the edict he was given regarding the rubric scoring on non-tenure staff members and because he could not argue with seasoned, tenured staff in the building. One would think that creativity could never be viewed as something negative when working with children; however, for these non-tenure participants, creativity was pushed aside in favor of what guaranteed success on the formal observation rubric.

On the other hand, tenured participants (myself included) with self-described clout as established, effective staff members and, in some cases, union leaders, fought back against this

notion of powerlessness since we were given more leeway on observation rubrics—and with this came more of a feeling of control over our circumstances. For tenured participants such as Gary and Otto, there were times when we stayed true to our convictions since we had less fear of repercussions. It is true that since the advent of systems of heightened accountability, a tenured teacher can be removed from his or her position after two consecutive years of inefficient and/or partially-efficient performance; however, tenured staff have more stability than non-tenured teachers who can, for the most part, lose their position at any time for numerous reasons (e.g., not being "a good fit"). Therefore, when Otto was asked whether or not he followed through with nonsensical decisions, especially during formal observations, it was far from surprising that he asserted he was "not making a one-time change for irrelevant feedback." Here we see Otto stating that he went into every lesson (whether it is a formal observation or not) looking to do the best by his students—regardless of how it might have affected his evaluation score and, in turn, his security. Otto's tenure, and the political clout that came with it, empowered him to continue being authentic in his teaching. Other tenured participants in the group shared instances in which their actions were in agreement with Otto's approach. We agreed with Otto because we felt we had some control over our circumstances, more security than our non-tenured colleagues, and some wiggle-room to fight back against a system that was gradually attempting to remove our yearning to put our students first.

The power dynamic is also brought to life through an interaction between Donald and Gary. Both teachers felt that if they taught identical lessons, Gary (tenured) would receive better rubric scores than Donald (non-tenured). Gary remarked how their particular content-area supervisor "doesn't waste his time with me and he has told me many times that since [I] know the [observation] rubric inside out, [he doesn't] even go nuts with spending time on [my]

observations." Donald followed these comments by stating that "And I get it, you work hard and you earned it but isn't it supposed to be a blind rubric as they always say at our trainings—it definitely isn't one that is blind."

The narratives above from the non-tenured staff show individuals believing that control over their circumstances and potential for success was lost and that the system was further pulling evaluators into making decisions based on statuses. And this led us to the perception that the system allowed these evaluators to carry out traditional power roles, which, in turn, pulled non-tenure teachers into feeling powerless. It could also be said that the system and its tools created a regimented and tedious system of assigning quantifiable scores that required our evaluators to adhere to traditional power structures because there was not enough time to debate/discuss assigned scores on formal observations. However, it is quite likely that, due to the failing status of the district, we all became cogs in a wheel in the same fraught system. We understood that our evaluators were feeling the same pressures of the evaluation system that we were; however, we could not help believing that they had the best interests of the system in mind over our own. Just as teachers were viewed by parents and students as representatives of the district and its policies and procedures, administrators were viewed by those they supervised and evaluated in the same light.

Disengagement

By *disengagement* in this context, I refer to decreases in our levels of enthusiasm and energy while teaching and leading in our school. We expressed frustration and disenchantment for the ways in which the system attempted to eradicate our passion and spirit for our work. Salient categories of these energy dips included but were not limited to: the lack of flexibility in curricular and instructional decisions; the assigned scores on our formal observations trumping

open discussions about improving our work; and, the overall feeling that we were not valued in our workplace.

We became further disengaged as our lack of flexibility in our curricular and instructional decisions heightened. Further, we developed a mindset that the district was dictated more of our curricular and instructional choices and there was not much we could do—especially if we wanted to score well on our summative evaluations. Roger explained this thought-process below:

> When you are given dictated units, this is day 1, lesson 1, I come in without a worry in the world that I am going to teach that exact same lesson and if anyone says that wasn't good enough, my defense is this is what the district told me that I had to do, that better be a perfect lesson. If it is not a perfect lesson, that is the district's fault. That's me taking, I don't know what that is, maybe playing the system a little bit. But they are giving me what to do so it better be great.

Moreover, we became less enthused with implementing creative and exciting lessons due to the rigidity of the observation rubric and the fear that missteps (for example, a technology-heavy lesson not working during a formal observation) would stop us from scoring high on the evaluation rubric. Donald, by rehashing an earlier conversation he had with Warren, presents this dilemma and mindset below:

> And something Warren always told me that I always respect it he creates his regimented curriculum and he has it all planned out and I asked him well why do you do that. And he said to me well I used to teach a different way but then once you got used to working here under this rubric you could not depend on technology every day. So what happens if I'm getting observed and I make a lesson that's surely based in technology and just it

doesn't work? Working in a place like this you can never fully trust that, especially

during the day of an observation.

Beyond our disdain for the lack of flexibility we had over curricular and instructional

decisions, we stressed the fact that our evaluators too were going through the motions of the

evaluation system and let the tools and instruments push aside our ability to be cognitively

engaged. The result of these actions perpetuated the perception that our evaluators no longer

cared for us and/or were not looking out for our best interests in the system. Warren highlighted

these feelings below:

> Cause I knew [previous building administrators] couldn't teach or didn't care, so
>
> knowing that, you have to focus on the boxes if you are concerned about merit pay. There
>
> are other admins that can't interpret what is going on and, if you don't do verbatim, in 20
>
> minutes, there are not checking that box for you. I'm done with this.

By our evaluators not having the time, skills, or political capital to deviate from the system and

its tools, we fell into a state of disengagement. Below, Ava's description of an interaction with

her content-area supervisor summarized this struggle:

> During the Post-Conference, which took a long time since these were only a few of many
>
> scores I disagreed with, I felt that Mr. Franklin was raising my score to either appease me
>
> or to dodge answering, "How could I have improved so that this category could've been
>
> exemplary?" I felt that Mr. Franklin was very hesitant to score me exemplary, he rarely
>
> answered how I could achieve exemplary but would be happy to give me a Proficient 3 as
>
> a compromise instead. His advice for Exemplary scores was to be detailed and up to date
>
> on my online data binder, despite the fact that I had brought in a copy of the [student

data] scores, class work to demonstrate my analysis of student strengths, and a group

seating chart highlighted and color coordinated to display each student's in-class average

as it is also considered when grouping. If I wanted to be exemplary, I had to do more. I

had to have it logged in the format and categorized the way the district approved of.

Here we see Ava lamenting that she could not have a simple conversation with her content-area

supervisor about improving to improve her teaching; rather, this post-conference was an element

of the system that needed to be completed and her observation was one of many on her

evaluators list to be submitted.

Ava went on to further show this feeling of disengagement and a loss of mental and

physical energy in her job:

Yea, I had a 20-minute observation, I think it went okay but some stuff was maybe

missed but I am just tired of being inspected. I have stuff to do for my kids with post

assessments and PARCC—I'm tired of being bothered. It went well on paper and it a

little confusing at the beginning and end of the period because the seniors who have had

crazy schedules. I know Simon and he is great but he didn't get to see the big stuff I

wanted him to see. They did not get to share. I wasn't scored low but it wasn't fair

because he didn't see the beginning where you could see student leadership and sharing

and so on. I showed him some stuff and he bumped the score up but I shouldn't have had

to do that.

Ava fell prey to the pull of the system, as she went into the post-conference ready to fight for her

"points" on the evaluation rubric. And, as a non-tenured teacher, she was forced into

regurgitating content and sticking to the script during formal observations. Moreover, since Ava

was new to the profession, I feared that the creativity for which I hired her, and also saw her use

on a regular basis, may have been pushed aside for the more regimented decisions that benefited her on the formal observation rubric. In addition, like Gary earlier, I feared the system's pull towards regimented instruction and the lack of rewards for anything beyond that may have begun to also affect Ava's daily instruction. And this can be traced back to many things but, most noticeably, to her interactions with a superior whom she perceived, through his regimented actions, as not being authentic.

Insecurity, Powerlessness, and Disengagement Summary

In this section of chapter 4, I summarized our struggles with insecurity, powerlessness, and disengagement, the by-products of the push and pull of new professionalism. The system complicated our decisions since its pressurized nature affected our ability to balance these critical elements, resulting more often than not in having us give into the push and pull of new professionalism. It was an unending cycle that we were trying to navigate through, all while educating our students and attempting to maintain some semblance of security, power, and engagement in our work. In the section to follow, I show that we responded to the feelings of insecurity, powerlessness, and disengagement with everyday acts of resistance.

Our Resistance to Being Remade as Professionals

We were faced with amplified pressure to perform in certain ways during the formal observation process; hence, this pressure made us fear failure more than ever before. When insecurity, powerlessness, and/or disengagement set in and we began to feel ourselves being remade as professionals, we responded with what I came to recognize as resistance. Throughout the study, we offered examples of how we directly and indirectly fought back against the push and pull to recreate us as educational clerks. When analyzing my data, I gravitated to the idea of *everyday acts of resistance*. Everyday acts of resistance, as defined by Anderson (2008), are

"tactics of the people that circumvent power rather than actively opposing it." (Anderson, 2008, p.261). In this era of performance and surveillance cultures, everyday acts of resistance are "safer than overt acts of protest and refusal" and can potentially have a "higher effect in achieving limited objectives of subordinated social actors." (Anderson, 2008, p. 261, 267). We followed through with these acts of resistance when we felt we had strayed too far from what made us the educators we were and when we felt ourselves being recreated into something we did not like.

In our setting, these acts of resistance were most often delivered indirectly. We did however, on some occasions, enacted direct acts of resistance by actively and openly opposing our evaluators. Although direct acts of resistance intensified the definition of everyday acts of resistance beyond covert actions, they do fall into my overall theme of resistance. Direct acts of resistance consisted of the times we pushed back directly and/or stood our ground against the system and our chief evaluators. Indirect everyday acts of resistance consisted of withholding our time after hours and scaling back our instructional planning and delivery. It should be noted that the ability to resist and/or the method by which we enacted these forms of resistance (direct or indirect) varied based on our statuses and the clout we had in our school. For example, those of us who were tenured, like I was, had some semblance of security and accumulated clout; hence, if we so chose we were able to push back more than our non-tenured colleagues. In summation, these actions consisted of decisions that changed the course of education for, in our opinion, the better, and/or, brought back to us a sense of control over our professionalism.

Direct Resistance

By *direct resistance*, I refer to our efforts to resist the system's push to transform our teaching that were blatantly obvious to our evaluators. Direct resistance took the form of

instructional decisions that went against the standard curricular and instructional methods we were directed to utilize in the classroom. It also took the form of pushing back against what we perceived as subjective evaluations of our work or unfair treatment by our evaluators. Non-tenure participants, although frustrated with what they perceived of as an unfair system, mostly avoided resisting our evaluators directly for fear of retaliation. Of the tenured participants—other than Otto, Warren, and I—also avoided direct resistance because they believed that "toeing the company line" was the best way to be successful in their positions. It is interesting to point out that the three of us who fought back directly either left our positions in the district for other positions in education (Otto and I) or left education altogether (Warren) within a year the study ended. The three of us fought back directly and made instructional decisions that extended beyond the curricula and strategies the district mandated us to use. Some of the participants pushed back directly against those evaluators we perceived as unfair. In these cases of direct resistance, our evaluators knew what we were doing. Confronted with our direct attempts to maintain our sense of professionalism, our evaluators were forced to react.

We presented examples of direct resistance where we refused to be remade as new professionals and stood our ground regarding our teaching convictions. In these cases, we made decisions in line with our knowledge and professional experiences and refused to let the system and its tools change who we were professionally. For example, Otto was tired of making decisions that contradicted his own expertise. Based on his tenure status and overall disdain for what he was mandated to implement in his classroom, Otto purposefully decided to teach in ways he felt would best serve his students. Below is an example of Otto's direct resistance to a system he felt was doing a disservice to his students by forcing him and his colleagues to put on shows during formal observations.

Maybe it is different because I am tenured, you know it is different because I am tenured and I do not care for stupidity anymore. I am not changing to put on a show. Why am I changing for a one-time to show to receive mostly irrelevant feedback? I know you and I have had some talk about more engagement and I get it. I did not agree with most of it because it was not my style but I get it and respect (that) because you take pride in your feedback. But my (current) supervisor? The guy is afraid of his own shadow and could not teach! I want more questions about how an admin can support me, (that's) what am I interested in. I want genuine lesson feedback and I refuse to put on a show.

Otto went on to highlight other elements of his professional decision-making that did not involve putting on shows. Instead, he chose to do what was best for kids, which in many instances contrasted with the mandated curricular and instructional choices rewarded by the district.

Transitions [in the evaluation rubric] are so stupid. Multiple parts are "I got you" and there are always parts where bad or dumb admins can pull the rug out from you. To get everything into each lesson because the money is dangled in front of you is pointless for me because they can score you whatever way they want to score you. I always knew kids; I would teach kids the way it would benefit them. It's all about the relationships and what you need. If the admin is a joke and you need the money, you will go through hoops. My hoop days are over.

Otto's example is one of a teacher who, because tenure gave him a sense of security and because he was tired of putting on a show f during observations, directly resisted the system and his evaluators. Otto understood what was required of him to score high on the formal evaluation rubric; however, his conscience could not allow him to, as he described, "jump through hoops," for a district he felt no longer had his best interests in mind.

When we resisted, as evident in the examples provided above from Otto and Warren, it was more about stopping the system from redefining who we were as professionals. I also shared with study participants an example of my own experience during the school year of this study in which I fought back directly during my first formal observation and the post-conference that followed. In this instance, my administrative performance was downgraded by my evaluator during a formal observation visit to our school because one teacher did not have an assignment on hand after her students completed a quiz. When I attempted to explain my case in defense of the teacher, I was not given an opportunity to do so. This tactic on the part of my evaluator was troublesome and contradicted the way in which I observed and evaluated staff in our school. Upon having my attempts to argue my points dismissed by my direct evaluator, I took the case to my direct evaluator's evaluators (not before calling out sick the next day and questioning my purpose in education). This action was a direct act of resistance, as I was taking on a superior with evaluative power. Within a month, I noticed that my scores were changed to better reflect my instructional leadership; however, I was never notified of this change and noticed the changes in scores only accidentally during a random log-in to the evaluation system. I was told through reliable sources that my direct evaluator was advised to make the changes based on the evidence I had provided. Even so, my direct evaluator never alerted me of the changes, as he was, in my opinion, clearly not interested in being magnanimous and possibly embarrassed. The quantifiable nature of the evaluation rubric and the post-conference had potentially empowered or pushed my superior to assign me a score without bothering to discuss the results with me or even consider making changes—until his superior called him out for the error of his ways.

I suspect my pushback would have been used negatively against me if I had remained in the school principal position for the second observation of the school year. And I have no doubt

that I would have continued to push back because I knew my heart was in the right place and I refused to make different decisions just to appease my evaluator and the system. I had tenure in the district as a principal and had built up much political and social capital. Therefore, my own overt resistance was coming out of a position of strength, something the majority of my fellow participants did not have.

Indirect Resistance

By *indirect resistance*, I refer to our efforts to resist the system's push to transform our teaching, which were private to us and not obvious to our evaluators. Indirect resistance consisted of decisions we made that, although not apparent to our evaluators, were meant to serve as a way of retaking some control over our professional lives. This type of resistance ranged from withholding time after hours to plan lessons to scaling down effort and creativity in our planning and delivery of instruction. Although it was not our intention, our acts of indirect resistance directly affected the well-being of our students. This effect will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Indirect Resistance: Scaling Down Our Efforts & Withholding Our Time

As we progressed through the school year and faced the uneasiness and difficulties of pressurized evaluations, we became physically and mentally exhausted and broken. Otto summed up this exhaustion and brokenness as follows:

> While the plight of a mismanaged district is very real, it does not account for the sheer lack of respect and support that we as educators are denied. The district wonders why things are so bad, why nothing they do works. There are hundreds of reasons why, but the most glaring is their inability to look at its staff and students as humans, instead of cogs.

With that, it is important to remember these words: "I know what I bring to the table, so trust me when I say I'm not afraid to eat alone." Sometimes you have to walk away. And this physical and mental exhaustion and breaking point led us to scale back the time and energy we put into our lessons outside of formal evaluation days. Lacking adequate and secure outlets to fight back and feeling the need to ensure yearly success, we did subtle things like not spending extra time after hours planning lessons for a system we felt did not do the same for us. Although the standardization imposed by the evaluation system severely limited our autonomy and creative control of the pacing, scope, and sequence of curriculum for our grade levels and/or subject areas, the evaluation rubric did require us to invest a level of lesson-based effort to attain an effective or higher score. Thus, due to the physical and mental exhaustion I previously mentioned, it became common practice for us to only provide what was required of us in the observation rubric in lessons delivered during formal observations. Consequently, this approach trickled into everyday lessons not carrying such scrutiny/weight. If we were going to expend high levels of effort for a district we felt did not respect us, we were going to only do it when the stakes mattered the most—during formal observations.

Prior to the study, Gary was well-known by all stakeholders at our school as an excellent teacher who developed great relationships with his students. More than midway through the school year of the study, and during the time period of which standardized testing took place, Gary was faced with a dilemma. He wanted to teach an in-depth lesson on a particular topic of interest to his students, but, due to the revised schedule precipitated by the administration of the state tests, he was questioning his methods. Prior to this new era in education, Gary stated that he regularly did extra planning (especially after hours from home) for intellectual curiosity and to benefit his students; however, the pressure of the observation process, the dissatisfaction he had

with the implementation of the teacher evaluation system, and the relief of completing formal observations, led him to scale back his efforts and indirectly resist a new teacher identity the evaluation system forced on him. Where it seemed to many that the pressurized requirements of the evaluation system should have made us work harder and longer after school hours, this could not be further from the truth. This resistance to going the extra mile during after school hours (which was more prevalent prior to this new era of evaluation) was a direct result of the pressure and scrutiny that we faced on a daily basis. As a subtle form of resistance, we withheld our efforts after hours, as an expression of our unwillingness to be remade as professionals—a remaking that required us to constantly fight for our keep, in lieu of spending time in more gratifying situations (for example, with our families).

Gary ensured success on his yearly summative evaluation by receiving three highly-rated formal observations from his evaluators. However, this simple act of toning down his instruction outside of formal evaluations was an indirect act of resistance. Gary was no longer going above and beyond the call of duty, as he "felt that there was no way that I was going to stay up until 11 pm to plan this lesson. I'd rather watch a hockey playoff game. There wasn't any pressure to get it done so I didn't go crazy—I just reviewed for the test." Here, we see a prime example of how Gary, drained and frustrated by how hard he had to work to potentially attain performance-based pay, indirectly fought back against the system. That is, Gary indirectly showed dissatisfaction with his circumstances by refusing to go above and beyond the call of duty for a system that he felt viewed him more and more as a cog and an evaluation score, rather than the professional he saw himself being. He had done what the district required of him and he had ensured above-average performance on his formal evaluation, but was not going the extra mile for a district that

no longer went the extra mile for him. Unfortunately, his actions indirectly hurt his students by denying them of his best teaching on a daily basis.

Time was very precious to us and we devoted our time and energy to the people and things we felt supported us as individuals and as educators. As such, we withheld additional planning time for everyday lessons (especially outside of school hours) because we did not feel the system cared as much about us as we cared about education—even if it negatively affected our students. Later in this chapter, I will further describe how we were consciously aware of the decisions we made which negatively affected out students. And these feelings lessened our dedication to the profession (one that we felt was trying to remake us on a daily basis) in comparison to our relationships and interests after hours. We shared examples of indirect resistance whereby we chose to forego completing work after hours because of the perceived poor treatment we felt we were receiving at work. For instance, Otto stated that he would "not waste away a minute of watching cartoons" with his son (which was a gratifying experience) for a district that stopped caring about him." Otto went on to describe, with much agitation, his choice to spend more time with his family. As a tenured teacher with increased financial pressures at home, he felt able to put the security of his family first. However, his decision to shun work after school hours was also a sign of his decreased enthusiasm with the system/his pay and an everyday act of resistance. Otto went on the state the following:

> Considering I have not had a formal observation since round one, I will discuss my thought process for switching from "traditional" to "universal (performance-based pay)." Economics was the answer. I simply realized I would make more, faster, with an MA than I would on the traditional guide. The extra step incentive merely allowed me to advance to what I was "owed" at an accelerated rate, but never actually thought that it

would materialize. Even with the potential to not receive my extra steps, it made better

financial sense to switch over. I have no regrets about the decision as I knew I would be

underpaid either way. Now I'm just less underpaid.

For these tenured educators, spending time after hours being present in the lives of their

families was important. For example, Otto described "Daniel Tiger Time" with his son and

Donald explained how he put his instruction on cruise control rather than provide his students

with the level of instruction he thought they needed and deserved. These subtle yet important

actions, were the ways we provided indirect resistance to what we deemed to be an increasingly

relentless system. As professionals, we felt obligated to put forth the best effort possible when

planning and delivering instruction for our students. Unfortunately, the badgering that we took

from the system throughout the school year led us to gradually reduce our everyday teaching

efforts to the bare minimum given the pressure of what we needed to do to reach performance-

based incentive goals. In brief, we could not directly resist the system and our evaluators during

formal observations by teaching in a way that contradicted standardized practices and evaluation

rubric indicators. We could, however, resist internally what we considered to be a cruel and

flawed system by cutting down on our planning and teaching efforts outside of formal evaluation

in order to make time for situations that gave us long-term gratification, such as spending quality

time with our families. We did change as professionals; however, by subtly refusing to put the

system and its tools at the forefront of everything we did professionally and personally, we were

able to maintain some autonomy over our decision-making.

Direct and Indirect Resistance Summary

In this section of chapter 4, I summarized how we responded to our feelings of insecurity,

powerlessness, and disengagement through direct and indirect acts of resistance. When we

became frustrated with any or all of these elements geared towards remaking us as professionals, we resisted—sometimes blatantly in public, but more often than not privately. In the section to follow, I discuss the collateral damage that resulted from our actions.

Collateral Damage of the System

The pushes and pulls of new professionalism gave rise to the feelings which clouded our professional decision-making and, in so doing, redefined us as professionals. These feelings and changes, in turn, pushed us into resisting the system and our evaluators either directly or indirectly. Combined, our acts of resistance inflicted collateral damage in our workplace. By *collateral damage*, I refer to the unintended damage inflicted as a result of the performance evaluation system and its by-products. This collateral damage consisted of: the pushing of ethical boundaries, which mostly affected our students; and, a disconnect in our relationships with the district and our evaluators.

As I presented earlier in Chapters 1 and 2, as well as in the introductory portions of this chapter, performance and rewards systems were created to improve teacher performance, which in turn, would hopefully improve student performance. What is left out of this supposed relationship (improved teaching as related to improved student performance) are the unintended consequences of this new world of educator evaluation. As we were beset with the anxiety of performing well on yearly evaluations to protect ourselves, we were tempted into engaging in unethical practices. These unethical practices (e.g., system gaming) started out as attempts to indirectly resist in order to succeed on the student-driven portion of the evaluation process; however, over time, system gaming became just one element of unethical behavior that resulted from the tedious nature of the evaluation system. In our attempts to succeed under what we

perceived as daunting circumstances, we changed as professionals—and this change became

evident in the onset of unethical decision-making.

Additionally, while operating within a system we regarded as potentially rigged for us to

fail and/or set up for us to struggle to achieve high evaluation scores, we began to remove

ourselves from relationships with our evaluators. In a profession where teachers and their

evaluators can only benefit from growth-fostering connections, we found ourselves, as an

unintended consequence of the system and its tools, becoming further disconnected from our

evaluators. The pressure to score as high as possible on our yearly evaluations, coupled with our

evaluators having increased control over our evaluations via the new system, drastically affected

these relationships. By our evaluators having the increased power to directly influence our

salaries and future employment (for example, salary increases tied to yearly performance and

decreases in the times and processes to remove tenure from staff members) we grew leery of

working as closely as we did with them in the past, as, we feared, any knowledge of our

inadequacy could be used negatively on our evaluations. This leeriness of our evaluators'

motives was warranted as evaluators were advised to avoid rating too many educators highly

effective on the observation rubrics. In addition, administrators were constantly reminded that we

were a *failing district* due to our standardized test results and status under state control; therefore,

it was not a good look for the district to have a large number of highly effective teachers while

standardized test scores remained stagnant or plummeted.

We began to reexamine our relationships with our evaluators as anxiety set in and the

task of attaining high evaluation scores proved daunting. Throughout the study, we mostly

viewed our evaluators as agents of the system attempting to keep us from being successful—

rather than the growth-fostering leaders for which we yearned. Our evaluators had a job to do,

which was to observe, evaluate, and sort us, as well as keep down the number of highly effective

ratings. They, in turn, were evaluated based on the classroom observation reports they completed

and how they followed the districts' prodding to be cognizant of how many educators we rated

highly effective; therefore, there was a shift in their work from individuals whose primary focus

was to support us in improving our daily work to those also being evaluated and scrutinized more

than ever before by their own evaluators. Hence, our evaluators were not able to provide the

growth-fostering leadership we needed and wanted since they had their own evaluations to worry

about and were being evaluated on their ability to implement the evaluation processes as

prescribed. By describing my own struggles as an administrator under these same circumstances

to the group, I tried to present the case that their other evaluators (some who were my colleagues

or reported directly to me) and I were facing the same pressures that they were. I worried about

the disconnection that was taking place between us, as administrator-teacher relationships were

an important aspect of what I believed made our school successful. In the section that follows, I

discuss in detail unintended consequences that clouded our ethical decision-making (e.g., system

gaming) and disconnected us from our evaluators.

Pushing of Ethical Boundaries

An analysis of the data showed that we made educational decisions geared towards

attaining performance-based incentives—and these decisions typically involved us regurgitating

curricular and instructional strategies demanded of us by the powers that be. Roger describes this

dynamic, one where his own need to score high on the evaluation rubric to obtain performance-

based pay, in detail below:

We do not have the required novels available for my class to read, so I am reliant upon

teaching the mandated PARCC Writing unit, which I find to be outdated, poorly paced,

and underwhelming. However, the risk I take in modifying these lessons is great when possible observations can reprimand one for deviating from approved lessons. This doesn't stop me from delivering what I believe to be superior lessons, utilizing my own creativity and professionalism in lesson designs; however, I do feel it to be a risk. I am fully confident that my nerves will relax, and my lessons will once again be more organic and natural after my observation. Until then, I feel that the safest route to a highly effective observation is to adhere to the district lessons with minor improvements, and that I won't feel safe to further deviate into better lessons until after my observation.

In a system where extrinsic rewards took center stage over our intrinsic orientations, producing stress in us all, we changed—and this was evident in our willingness to make unethical decisions. Although we attempted to maintain intrinsic satisfaction over the extrinsic rewards the system offered us, our professional decisions became increasingly focused on our own benefit and/or survival, not necessarily on what was best for our students. We discovered was that we pushed aside our educational Hippocratic Oath of *Do No Harm* to students, especially during formal observations, to ensure our own well-being (for example, choosing an instructional strategy we considered non-beneficial for our students, but which would allow evaluators to check off a box on the formal observation rubric). These unethical choices eventually became the norm for us and, from our day-to-day interactions with colleagues throughout the district, we can confidently say it became the norm to the vast majority of them as well. We felt that the district no longer cared about us and, due to the fact that we feared losing out jobs or not earning performance-based pay, our first priority became ourselves—even if our students were lost in the shuffle. To summarize, making unethical decisions became a part of our

everyday repertoire because we were fed up with the direction in which our profession was headed.

Illustrating our pattern of pushing ethical boundaries, Gina described an experience she had during which she made a professional chose that was based on self-interest. As Gina explained, in her first formal evaluation she received a low score on "implementing instructional technology." To improve her chances of obtaining performance-based pay for the year, she had to score high on this domain of the evaluation rubric in the last two formal observations. As a result, during her second observation, Gina made a decision to overlook the needs of students in the class who were struggling with basic math skills and focused instead on highlighting her usage of embedded video clips and graphics, even though she knew some students were struggling with the content of the lesson. Making matters more complex for Gina, who was a non-tenured educator who could receive unannounced formal observation at any time and could be fired for almost any reason with only sixty days' notice, instructional decisions that benefited her started to take over her everyday decision-making. As this example illustrate, the system and its pressures forced Gina into decisions that she knew were wrong; however, she felt the need to make them to score high on her formal observations, retain her job, and benefit from available performance-based pay incentives.

In our meetings, we highlighted our conundrums and described how torn we were when making educational decisions to ensure evaluators had clear evidence during formal observations to score us high on the corresponding rubrics. What's more, what was good for formal observations became the norm for daily instruction since the fear of one poor unannounced observation lingered with teachers until the evaluation cycles concluded for the year and scores were finalized. We spoke candidly and sadly about choosing unnecessary video clips, handouts,

and district-preferred multiple response strategies such as *think-pair-shares* in order to fulfill a requirement of the observation rubric—and not necessarily to meet the instructional needs of our students at a given time. In essence, teachers and administrators cease being professionals when they concern themselves more with checking off boxes on an observation rubric rather than exercising their professional judgment.

Although we did not agree with the educational methods we were choosing most of the time during formal observations, as a group we acknowledged that these decisions had to be made—regardless of the impact they had on our students. In so doing this, we were deprofessionalizing our own practice. When Roger was presented with a chance to speak about this process of giving in to extrinsic demands, he described how, during a week in which he anticipated receiving an unannounced formal observation, he consistently "threw in a random video clip that did not affect the lesson" just to ensure he met the technology requirements of the rubric. Along these same lines, Ava reported how she "always had PARCC-specific handouts ready to share with students, even if they did not line up with the lesson objective." Gary went on to candidly comment that during formal observations he would be "doing extra, fancy moves just to dunk the basket, even though every basket is worth just two points." Gary also remarked that he did "so much work to create these things, that in the end, it is not something I would use again because it was unnecessary and gimmicky to get me a score." These comments implied that educational decisions were becoming more about our end-goal of scoring high enough on our observations to qualify for performance-based pay—regardless of ethics. As educators, prior to the implementation of the new performance-based pay evaluation system, we strived to do the best we could for our students and always looked to experience success through their growth.

However, this professional approach to teaching began to change with the lure of performance-based pay incentives and the pressures of the system.

Sadly, these unethical educational decisions were not only quite apparent to our group, but also to our students. In our discussions, it was easy to discern that we knew the difference between right and wrong in our decisions; however, it was becoming easier (and necessary) to make unethical decisions in order to ensure our success. We discussed specific observations where students commented on how different our approach was on a given day. For example, Gary recounted a formal observation where, upon providing students with manipulatives never before used in his classroom, "the students had to take time to figure out what they had or how to handle these objects." He went on to tell how he "remembered one group in particular hitting the manipulatives on the table like a ball and having such uncertainty as to what to do next." Even the students knew that something was not copacetic but Gary went on, as his success was, at least during this formal observation, more important than the success of his students.

At the heart of this section is the ethical predicament we were faced with on a daily basis during the study. As I describe previously, Gina detailed a formal observation during which she (unwillingly) ignored her students' strengths and weaknesses to deliver a lesson solely focused on scoring high on the formal observation rubric—even though she knew this decision would only benefit her (and not her students). As Gina pointed out, "my kids are working on a third grade level but, if I don't teach 'rigorous, grade level lessons,' my observation score will go lower. I had to do it and leave them behind." Otto unapologetically supported similar decisions he had made by exclaiming that district teachers "sold their souls when they agreed to a performance-based pay evaluation system, as the all-mighty dollar would serve as an educator's low-hanging fruit."

When further analyzing the data pertaining to our own exploitations of the system, I was drawn to the work of Huriya Jabbar (2013). In her writing, the author argued that, under pressurized evaluation systems, teachers "gamed the system" by manipulating data to show greater student achievement gains. By *system gaming* in our context, I refer to the covert decisions we made to score as high as possible on our yearly evaluations. Basically, system gaming referred to the times we manipulated data for our own benefit. Previously, I described how our decision-making began to focus on our own success over what we thought would work best for students and could potentially improve our formal observation scores (which made up 85% of our yearly evaluation score). System gaming was another example of unethical decision-making that assisted us in scoring as high as possible on the student achievement portion of the evaluation rubric (15%). System gaming, just like the other unethical instructional decisions described above, became part of our daily of decision-making process.

A quick review of what makes up a teacher's yearly evaluation will clarify how system gaming worked. As I previously mentioned, yearly evaluations for teachers in this study consisted of the composite score of their formal evaluations (85%) and the average of their scores on SGOs (15%). The majority of SGOs were based on the demonstrated growth from the pre-assessments given to students during the first month of the school year to the post-assessments given in April of that same school year. For each grade level/content area, every student in the district takes the same pre- and post-assessment. SGOs, unlike standardized test scores, are created, implemented, monitored, and scored at the local level by the teacher and the principal/administrative designee. These SGOs are created from the data obtained during the administration of district-created, pre-assessments. Additionally, in this lower-performing school district that was in the midst of fighting back against social promotion, students' growth from

pre- to post-assessments (or lack thereof) determined whether or not they would be promoted, retained, or required to attend summer school. For students in the school where the study took place, they would be required to attend summer school in Math and/or English if they had not demonstrated the district-assigned levels of growth from the beginning to the end of the school year via the aforementioned post-assessments. Therefore, the opportunities for unethical decisions involving SGOs, which determine 15% of teachers' evaluations, were abundant due to the newfound shared desire that students and teachers had to succeed.

System gaming required teachers to work with students to ensure that both sides were successful (e.g., preparing students for specific questions on formative assessments). English teachers such as Ava, Roger, and Otto regularly admitted to having discussions in class with students regarding the importance of SGO pre-assessments. For example, these teachers would review questions on the pre-assessments in advance with students and, at times, remind students to score lower on pre-assessments in order to demonstrate growth later on during the post-assessments. It was well-known between these teachers and their students that an increase in scores from pre- to post-assessments would benefit teachers on their yearly evaluations and help students avoid summer school. Ava, although mortified by how prevalent this type of system gaming became in our school, defended it was a "necessary step in proving that prescribed teaching and [policies], such as SGOs, are not an accurate representation of how her students improved from September-April." These narratives demonstrated that we knew what needed to be done to be successful on different elements of the evaluation system, and under the high-anxiety circumstances inherent in it, this form of unethical behavior happened more often than we wanted to admit and functioned as indirectly resistance to our evaluators and the system itself.

Otto defended his cheating of the system by describing the unwritten code where "the students and I know to score low in the beginning (on baseline assessments) because growth will get me a higher score and get them to avoid summer school." Donald and Gary, although teaching in non-tested content areas, echoed the same types of indirect resistance, with Gary stating that "you'd be a fool not to do what you can to ensure that you score as high as possible on every area of the evaluation rubric." For both Gary and Donald, spouses and parents with mortgages and bills, deliberate instructional decisions (albeit counter-productive and considered by them at times useless) could determine whether or not they needed to take time away from their families to work part-time jobs. Gary supported this choice in his journal entry below.

> Because I have to say for me, the first year with the new principal, we had a new contract, was that the first year that we had the new contract, I knew that the possibility existed to move up two steps each year and I knew since we lost so many steps in the previous contract, I really needed to take advantage of this opportunity. I had a kid and I really felt like if I didn't get that extra step the first time around, I was gone. I needed the extra money for my family. It was a stress relief and I was happy to make that extra money, but then here comes this new administrator and I don't know how this guy was going to evaluate me going forward so I had to seriously consider what I was going to do next and do whatever he told me to do. He had this perception and he didn't come across very nicely and we were all worried about our well-being.

I also fell prey to system gaming in working with my own SGOs and administrative goals. For the staff and I, system gaming became more than indirect resistance—it became part of our daily culture. I established SGOs that I knew I could easily attain, and I set administrative goals and directed staff members under my purview to focus on those goals. To clarify, unlike

the teachers in this study, administrator evaluations were calculated in the following manner: 75% based on the scores from my formal observations, 15% based on the average of the SGOs of every staff member under my purview, and 10% based on my two administrative goals. Administrative goals were like teacher SGOs, whereby administrators took ownership of student and staff growth. For example, during the school year of the study, my administrative goals were based on improving the performance of Algebra I students deemed to be at risk on their initial formative assessments, as well as increasing the number of PLCs run by the staff. First and foremost, before choosing between students in Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry to represent my first administrative goal, I spoke to each teacher directly about the students in their classes. Based on their input, as well as my own knowledge of the teachers' abilities, I chose the Algebra I group because both the teachers and students gave me the best chance to score well on my evaluation rubric. Additionally, I set the stage for my second administrative goal regarding PLCs during the final evaluations of the previous school year. In summary, if teachers wanted to score *highly effective* on the leadership portion of their yearly evaluations, they needed to do more than just join a PLC—they needed to actively lead one. Yes, actively leading a PLC could only benefit the students since teachers would be working together to share their expertise; however, I knew it was also an easy "win" on this portion of my evaluation. This thinking in formulating SGOs and administrative goals became the norm for me within a system I felt no longer cared about my best interests.

During the PLC, we acknowledged making potentially unethical educational decisions involving our students. Although the system enticed us into unethical decision-making, there were still brief times where we pushed aside the lure of extrinsic rewards and unethical albeit financially rewarding decisions, by embracing what we felt had great value: the intrinsic reward

of inspiring students. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, although we gravitated closer to becoming what we despised in the vast majority of decisions we made, we did not sell our souls completely to new professionalism. For example, Donald still refused to redirect students who were acting appropriately just to pad his evaluation score. Otto still refused to change his instructional choices during a formal observation. Gina, although giving in to teaching to the curriculum during a formal observation, made sure to reconnect with those struggling students on the next "regular day." Ava, despite becoming jaded by the system, still tried new instructional strategies when the anxiety of computers not working during a formal observation was gone. Lastly, I actively participated in the PLCs I forced teachers to establish and also took an interest in the students of the Algebra I classes who were part of my other administrative goal—beyond just caring about the demonstrated growth needed to score high on this portion of the evaluation. However, our overall actions demonstrated that the damage was done and unethical options were on the table for us to choose.

Our unethical choices give insight into the shocking unintended consequence of adherence to this system of heightened accountability and one of its central tools, performance-based pay. That is, we fell in line with edicts of new professionalism and embraced becoming educational clerks, but at what cost? In the literature I reviewed in Chapter 2, I described how performance-based pay was intended to be used as an incentive to improve teacher performance and, in turn, student performance on standardized or district-created assessments. The neoliberal movement did accomplish having us, for the most part, follow curricular and instructional edicts that policy makers deemed necessary for student success, through the *hanging of low fruit* (performance-based pay). However, by the system forcing us into a mode of protecting our livelihoods, we did whatever necessary to obtain performance-based incentives. That meant, at

times, making decisions that did not benefit or actually hurt our students, as well as cheating

within, thereby making a mockery of systems meant to improve student performance through our

gaming of student growth objectives.

Disconnection from Our Evaluators

I evaluated staff before and during the high stakes evaluation systems in schools today.

Very early on in this transition from a less-codified and subjective evaluation system to an

objective and quantifiable structure, I noticed changes in the ways in which evaluators and those

whom they evaluated interacted. Prior to the implementation of high stakes evaluations, formal

observations were part of our yearly routine. However, as the new system began to take shape

throughout our school district, the evaluation system came to the forefront of our work. As we

became acclimated to this new world of measuring our work and sorting us accordingly, our

yearly evaluation scores began to weigh more heavily on us and play a major role in determining

our ability and/or willingness to remain in the profession. The lure of the performance-based pay

system was our ability to potentially earn money than previously under the traditional evaluation

system. The downside, as previously discussed, was that our yearly observation and evaluation

scores came to redefine who we were as educators, rather than being a small part of our yearly

body of work as it had been prior to this era. With these changes came fear, and this fear led us

to view the system, its tools, and our direct evaluators as the chief agents of what we felt was

wrong with education.

And this fear was validated as both administrators and teachers partook in conversations

and adhered to edicts whereby evaluators were directed to score individuals low on evaluation

rubrics. This directive was given primarily to keep down costs to the district by not awarding

additional money through performance-based pay incentives. Additionally, this directive was

based on the fact that the district could not justify having large numbers of highly effective

teachers while having low student scores on standardized tests and less than stellar high school

graduation rates.

For example, in one of our PLC sessions, I described how I was confronted by my direct

evaluators for the high number of teachers rated highly-effective in my previous school.

> Because let me tell you, I, last year, we had 28 out of 32 teachers were rated highly
>
> effective and my bosses were consistently making comments to me about how I am too
>
> easy a grader/scorer. We live in a district where you are penalized if you are doing well
>
> and I then let that get into my head when assigning scores on observations. And there are
>
> admins I work with, but not necessarily in this building, who believe that a first year
>
> teacher cannot be higher than Progressing 2 or Prof 1 on anything because it will make
>
> themselves look bad and or they will get called out for this. And so you have
>
> automatically eliminated their ability to move up two steps on the guide.

Not only was this push to keep down the number of highly-effective teachers known by

administrators, it was well-known to teaching staff. Warren, a long-time union representative at

the school and district level—who left the district at the end of the school year of the study—also

described this dynamic.

> Cause I know for a fact that admins have been told by central office you cannot make
>
> these people highly effective—you got to keep these highly effective numbers low.
>
> Again, I know for a fact, there are admins that know the score of teacher they are
>
> observing before they walk in the door. They know if they do this, this, and this, they are
>
> only going to score them that. They know the numbers going in. Year 1 the district was
>
> confused and they were pissed that all these people got highly effective. Year 2, when

you walked in, they knew your score before you did anything. I know [the former

principal] did. [The former principal] talked about knowing going into an observation and

he talked about numbers. And it's was their [backside] if their numbers are high.

The tedious nature of the evaluation system and all those responsible for implementing it made

us defensive and fearful of the motives of those with evaluative power. As Otto explained in a

journal entry, this system began to replace positive connections between us and our supervisors

with, what we felt, were forced attempts to communicate. Otto described this dynamic as

follows:

> Often, any time an opinion is asked it seems to merely be a formality, as if our
>
> professional opinion is only being solicited because it needs to be. In the future, I'd much
>
> rather not provide my opinion than be treated as a bother for offering it. It is a chronic
>
> ailment in schools though, school district administration very often feels as though they
>
> can lead without the support or opinion of their teachers, and this often seems to be the
>
> demise of the school, district, or administrator.

Our first reaction was to withdraw from evaluators, especially those whom we perceived as cold

and unforgiving in their evaluations of us. Nonetheless, our evaluators had their own stories and

worries just as we did. Like us, their work was scrutinized as never before, and they too were

feeling the pull of a changing system of evaluation.

For me, the changes, although different from what teachers experienced in the classroom,

were sudden and powerful. I was expected to devote time to manage and support the sorting

systems, which the district identified as the primary means to measure staff and student

performance. Unfortunately, out of my own need to survive and perform well within this system,

I too, at times, had to toe the company line and support what I felt was a flawed system. And this

system was, without question, further disconnecting me from my staff. As I describe below in one of my journal entries completed during the study, I was pressured to be an agent of the system and sort staff based on my evaluation of how well they met the established performance as codified in the rubric used.

> In [this district], when someone [administrator] has many highly effective teachers, that's looked at negatively. They think there should be a correlation between our student test performance and the observations of teachers when for starters there are so many variables at play. So forget about that piece, if we were observing you a period a day for 180 days, maybe there could be some type of correlation but if you are trying to compare 40 minutes of instruction to our school's standardized test scores it's not happening. How can we have highly effective teachers and be a failing district? Well that's you automatically thinking that these are the only two variables and that this is leading to this. In [this district], you are viewed as being easy and soft if you have high staff scores. You have to be tough. I know principals who said they will not give anything higher than Proficient I to any non-tenure. So that non tenure in years 1-4 has no chance of making performance based pay so you saved the district money for four years.

However, I tried to balance the need to meet performativity requirements with my own professional judgment. As time went on and we became more immersed in this system, it was important that I not take for granted teachers who worked in my school. I tried desperately to balance what I needed to do to meet the requirements of the system and my evaluators with the needs of my staff which, above all else, should have been my highest priority. For example, in the three years leading up to this study, Simon and I worked as hard as possible to build relationships with our staff through team-building activities, celebrations, one-on-one

conversations, and any outlet that would bring out the human element of our jobs. I feel we were successful, and the PLC that served as the site for this study is a testament to the effectiveness of this approach. My fellow participants characterized Simon and I as people they could trust, and as evaluators they respected based on our past experiences with them and our knowledge of their teaching. Warren summed up this claim as follows:

> Cause I knew [the former principals] couldn't teach, [another former supervisor] didn't care, so knowing that, you have to focus on the boxes if you are concerned about merit pay. You, [Simon], and [another supervisor], I am not concerned because I know you care, you can interpret what is going on, and I don't need to concern myself with that box. But there are other admins that can't interpret what is going on and want blood, and, if you don't do things verbatim, in 20 minutes, they are not checking that box for you.

At the time I began soliciting participation in the study, my staff already knew I was leaving the school for another position outside the district, but they still volunteered to support my work without feeling any pressure to do so. The eight participants had nothing to gain from working with me. In the end, I believe these individuals participated in this study because I never forgot to value them as individuals and professionals, all while trying to balance my own needs and the edicts of my evaluators.

I was worried with the level of disconnection between administrators and teachers, since I see this connection at the heart of our work with students. Nevertheless, I felt I could find a balance between ensuring my personal and professional success by adhering to the stringent requirements set forth by my evaluators and the system while also attending to the needs of my staff, I eventually decided to leave the district. When offered such an option, I took it. It is important to point out that my circumstances were not everyone else's circumstances, and not all

had the option to move to a position that allowed for the exercise of professional judgment on a daily basis, which I did. For many of our evaluators/administrators, who were also feeling pressure from their own evaluators, there were other factors influencing this disconnection. For example, the sheer number of evaluations to be completed (the management side), along with the everyday demands of working in an unpredictable job, limited the time they had to connect with us. That is, the demands of the system got in the way of human-to-human interactions, such as simple communication that could maintain a positive connection between and among us.

The damage done to our relationships with the district and, in turn, our relationship with evaluators served as a major talking point during PLC discussions and online journaling. We yearned for positive connections with our evaluators; however, the system made us feel insecure, powerless, and/or disengaged. These feelings, in turn, led us to directly and/or indirectly resist— and such resistance most often was directed at our evaluators. We knew we deserved and needed so much more, but the realities of the system did not allow for it. Roger described this dynamic in the journal entry shown below:

> A successful business, school, classroom, relationship: all successful means of self-growth are rooted in connections. To first understand one's personal beliefs and interpretations, ones' individual identity and value, to then feel the comfortability to express oneself, and lastly to be so willing to grow as to be open to true receptiveness and ultimately change based upon this. The notion that growth is best achieved by a strong "individual" seems to pale in comparison to the growth that can be achieved by a strong individual working within the environment of a comfortable group, each member who is willing to be their most honest, open, and reflective selves. It is here, in this most vulnerable state, that learning and awareness can best flourish.

We began to distrust those who held evaluative power over us as we struggled with feelings of uneasiness, felt the pushes and pulls of the system, and became progressively concerned about our personal well-being, as Roger described above. Hence, it became common practice for us to refrain from making the connections that a school/workplace needs to be in place in order to foster the success of its students/clients. Ava supported this claim by stating the following: "I don't foresee [the refraining from connections] changing the dynamic with Simon, but definitely expect a difference with [other evaluators]. We're often expected to make do with what we have and still meet the demands expected of us—with no room for the human element. I discuss the importance of administrator-teacher relationships/connections in greater detail in Chapter 5.

We withdrew from our relationships with many of our evaluators (but not those like Simon, whom we trusted) because we feared that our evaluators would use any weakness against us in our yearly evaluations, especially in a cash-strapped district where performance-based pay replaced moving up a salary guide via traditional means (for example, completing a year of service and/or obtaining an advanced degree). Gary sadly summarized his feelings, and that of the group, regarding this disconnect from our evaluators as follows: "With performance-pay potentially being given out by a school district in terrible financial straits and students performing below the average of their peers, [administrators] are not reaching across the aisle like they should." Gary, like all of us, described the feeling of disconnect. The tension of working within this system, coupled with the pressures that our evaluators undoubtedly were also faced with while leading in an underperforming district, led both sides to withdraw from attempting to connect with each other. Post-observation conferences became focused on check-boxes and sorting teachers rather than improving instruction and supporting teacher growth. Staff meetings and correspondence shifted away from the creative and personable side of the

profession and became singularly focused on a particular set of district-mandated discourses and outcomes. This was our perception of what was happening, and wrong or not it illustrated our feeling that we were disconnected from our evaluators, which in turn, led us to fear the evaluative power they wielded.

As the evaluation system further heightened the sense of *us versus them* within our district, relationships between us and our evaluators began to sour. These connections were based on how open and personable (or not) we were in our relationships with our evaluators within the system and in how much we trusted them to look out for our best interests. And, as Ava explained below, this trust dwindled throughout the implementation of the evaluation system and its tools.

> I feel like you also [have] been able to establish that trust. Where for me, I trust you guys (Simon and I) but there are times where [another superior] has observed me and I have asked "Hey, how can I have gotten a better score on this particular thing." And he would say "You know what, I will give you a 5 on this one, but I move this one down from 5 to 4." So I am like you are just flipping the numbers and don't care about me.

Hence, the slightest inkling that our evaluators were not interested in us as human beings, and were more interested instead in measuring and sorting us, pulled us away from any cohesion. Feeling a sense of connection with our evaluators meant, first and foremost, that we trusted these decision-makers. We had to place great faith in our evaluators as we operated within a system where they, our chief evaluators, had control over our formal evaluations and, in turn, our professional and personal livelihood. Additionally, with trust came openness to constructive feedback—or not. Since our evaluation scores were calculated by rated performance evaluations completed by our evaluators, it was vital that we were reflective in our practice and open to

critique and support—and this affected our openness to critique. Moreover, striving for more than a high score on our evaluation rubric (for example, being the best teacher that we could be) required improvements in our educational decision-making, which in turn required us to be connected to our evaluators. We had to be trusting enough to speak about our deficiencies with our evaluators. This was especially true during observation post-conferences, as these meetings became rigid and less focused on improving instruction; hence, the openness to feedback needed to foster connections was pushed aside by what we perceived as the weaponization of the evaluation rubric by our evaluators. As Warren described during one of our PLC sessions:

> These post conferences don't leave any wiggle room. You get the score and feedback you have seen already and you pretty much know your score going into it. It's really just all about the signature and the checkbox at this point."

We viewed the majority of our evaluators as perpetuating the cold and unrelenting elements of the evaluation system. However, it was clear that just as we had been reworked by this system, so too had our evaluators. I explained to the group how we (administrators) had been reworked, through administrative meetings and professional development sessions, to serve as agents of the district used to evaluate and sort staff. Additionally, we were obligated to support the discourses and outcomes the district mandated as part of our daily and evaluated work. Still, within this sea of disconnection, pockets of administrators who were able to maintain the balance I felt, which I described earlier in this section. Some were able to maintain a balance based on their own circumstances while others were able to foster positive relationships by adhering to their own experiences and schooling when leading their staff. Although the examples that follow may portray our evaluators mostly in a negative light, it is important to note that some of them tried their hardest to create positive connections by balancing district mandates, their own

evaluation scores, and the needs of their staff. Those of us, such as Simon and I, who believed in

stoking open and supportive interactions with our staff, were able to cultivate positive

connections. It should be noted that at the time of this analysis, Simon remains in his position as

principal, probably because this is the only school he has ever worked in as a teacher and

administrator; he feels obliged to support the staff and students at the school; and, financially, he

is too well-compensated to make a lateral move to another school district. Throughout the study,

participants regularly spoke about how Simon and I cultivated this sense of connection. For

example, Ava often spoke about how she was completely at ease during observations and post-

conferences with Simon and me because she felt we were just as interested in her and her work

as we were in meeting the requirements of the evaluation system. Moreover, Donald provided

countless examples of how Simon and I supported him as a non-tenure teacher who worried

about his job every year of his early career. And, lastly, Warren, who seemed to distrust

everyone in power, felt that Simon and I always had his back by our daily actions, as well as

during formal observations that decided his livelihood. Throughout the PLC and journaling,

when discussing those evaluators from whom they felt disconnected, Simon and I were more

often than not compared to these individuals and presented as how they wished their other

evaluators went about their work. To my fellow participants, I created positive connections, as I

described earlier in this section. In addition, I recognized the demands of teaching in a large,

urban school district that struggled to provide the basic necessities to its students and staff. And

this is not to say that other evaluators, whom I felt fostered mostly negative connections with our

group, did not understand these issues. Rather, I put the needs of my staff and students on the

same level as the mandates of the system and my own personal needs. Still, even for me, this

became a tedious process of trying to balance all three elements and after I while I found it too

tiring to persist. This led me to leave the district at the beginning of the study. Below is one of

my journal entries in between PLC sessions. It is clear that, at the time, I too was struggling with

this previously described balancing act:

> Delicate blends of support and challenge are important. I have often wondered why I
>
> have been successful engaging staff and students during my time as an educator—and
>
> this portion of [the Raider-Roth book] has started to make that really come to light.
>
> Holding people to firm standards and expecting their best seems to happen the most when
>
> supportive systems are in place. It becomes a family dynamic whereby the people closest
>
> to you can be your harshest critics because you know they have your best interest at
>
> heart.   And this support goes beyond simply bringing people to the table and
>
> acknowledging their viewpoints; rather, it is providing people with the opportunity to feel
>
> empowered—to feel that what they can do can evoke real change. In addition, a key
>
> element in supportive systems is providing teachers with ways to best strengthen their
>
> ideas rather than convincing them to believe as you do. Being "nice" (which I would
>
> prefer to call "being a human being") is only one element. As a teacher and administrator
>
> who was always considered "too nice" by many of my peers, it is interesting to begin to
>
> realize how they viewed my actions. Was being a "nice person" the problem or was it
>
> really that "being generous with opportunities to lead/challenge those in power " their
>
> true issue with my leadership/teaching style?

For Simon and I, our statuses as tenured administrators, the positivity that trusting

relationships with colleagues brought about, and our embodiment of what it meant to be caring

educators helped us be more cavalier than our colleagues. Simon and I had a great principal/vice

principal relationship, as he and I were open with each other regarding what we struggled with or

areas in which we needed each other's support. Additionally, we had open and trusting conversations about the school, the system, and our staff that pushed each other's thinking. Along these same lines, although I had a direct superior whom I perceived as weaponizing the evaluation tool to go after me because we did not get along going back to when we were principal colleagues, I had my superior's evaluators in my corner. Yet, notwithstanding my frustration with this process, I eventually left the district where I knew I had some control/power and could go over my direct evaluator to his evaluators (and did so on many occasions) when I felt aggrieved, needed my voice to be heard, and longed for my daily contributions to the district to be valued.

At various times throughout the study, we discussed our frustration with the lack of connection with our evaluators. This lack of connection, which I outlined earlier in this section, contributed to the change in the relationships we had with our evaluators as it was difficult to trust and be receptive to feedback from those who had expanded evaluative power over us. As a reminder, although our evaluators always had evaluative power over us, the policies of this new era of evaluation gave our evaluators increased power over our evaluation scores, yearly compensation, and job statuses (for example, the revocation of tenure was no longer a tedious, drawn-out process). Donald summed up our overall view of what a positive connection with a superior looked like. Although potentially losing his job to a reduction in force (RIF) became the norm for Donald during his first four years in his teaching position, the open line of communication he had with Simon and me brought him a sense of calm. And this open line of communication allowed Donald, as well as other teacher participants in the study, to feel more connected to some evaluators.

Every time it [the RIF] has happened, you are hearing about it already. I knew already. I

knew I was getting RIF in January those years. Now I am not hearing anything because I

am hearing the district isn't cutting. And part of it is you and Simon. I know if you knew

something, you both would tell me, unlike other admins who don't want to have that

conversation.

We valued evaluators who, very simply, attempted to connect with us by letting us speak

our minds and by listening attentively to us. For Simon and I, keeping a nervous non-tenure

teacher updated on potentially losing his job was the norm because we saw this as the right thing

to do. Unfortunately, every participant stated that the vast majority of evaluators we worked for

would not have had such an open line of communication for such a sensitive and confidential

subject. What many would consider a simple gesture, like the one described by Donald, meant a

lot to our group. More than once throughout the study, each of us illustrated what positive

connections with evaluators looked like. Simply put, a positive connection was built first by

evaluators having an open door policy to let us speak and be heard. We valued the ability to

speak our minds, and having an outlet to vent about the happenings of the day meant a lot to our

group. Unfortunately, with the demands of the job intensified and the sheer volume of work

added to us by the evaluation and assessment processes, administrators had to scale back on the

amount of time to have a simple chat with staff and break down barriers. Even I, at times, found

myself lost in a sea of paperwork and mandates and too far removed from what was happening

with my staff on a daily basis. On a few occasions, I joked with the group that I felt like I was

writing about/logging my work more than I was doing any work.

Warren described his ideal administrator (especially within high-stakes accountability

systems), whom he equated to Simon and me, as someone with whom one felt free to "walk into

their office, shoot the breeze, whether it is about school or not, and the tension comes down in an

observation. Letting [us] vent goes a long way but the problem is we don't do that enough."

Moreover, Ava recounted her experiences with the different administrators who evaluated her

during the past two school years who did and did not have open lines of communication. She

thoroughly enjoyed post-conferences with me because I "always gave her an outlet to speak her

mind." Unfortunately, Ava also made it clear that she would not question the feedback of

specific evaluators for fear of repercussions and because she felt that her overtures would fall on

deaf ears. For Warren and Ava, the tension of the evaluation system and their fears of not

succeeding were alleviated by talking to a supportive superior, which typically increased their

sense of trust.

Along these same lines, Roger and Donald illustrated how their work ethic and self-

esteem could be improved by a superior being open to discussing observations (and teaching in

general). For example, Donald described how the open line of communication he experienced

with me allowed him to be more vulnerable, even during a scenario where I was unhappy with a

lesson he delivered to his class. The interaction below occurred after I expressed dissatisfaction

with what I perceived as the lack of rigor in one of his lessons:

> Nick comes into my room and I can tell he isn't happy about what I am doing. Sure
>
> enough, I have an email in my inbox about an hour after he came by and it's very pointed
>
> and, I have to say, I was angry. But what happened next, and I knew this would happen,
>
> was he allowed me to talk. I understood much of what he was saying and more
>
> importantly, I knew he had one purpose in giving me pointed feedback: to make me
>
> better. Other than Simon, I don't know anyone else in this building that could literally
>
> undress my instruction and not make me want to just give up or be scared.

Our administrator-teacher relationship was strong enough (even during this new system of cut and dry conversations about job performance) where a very good, growth-oriented discussion ensued in person, rather than a shouting match embedded in hostility and fear. This vulnerability was evident when Donald stated that my feedback "never had motives and always gave him something to think about moving forward." Roger further described the effect on his vulnerability that open and positive lines of communication had on his educational decisions by stating that "the best way to improve one's practice is to have a dialogue with an administrator who loves teaching." Moreover, Ava, Gina, Otto, and Roger all supported the notion that opportunities given to voice their opinions in post-conferences heightened the value of constructive criticism given by the specific observer and increased vulnerability. As an example of this newfound awareness, Ava described a post-observation conference with Simon as follows:

My post-conference included a discussion about the downside of 20 minute observations. I would have much rather been observed a full 40 minutes for categories that measured: lesson sequencing and pacing, establishing routine, directions and expectations, and prior knowledge and making connections. Missing the first 20 minutes of my lesson could have hindered my score in these categories but missing the last 20 minutes would have hindered categories related to my implementation of my demonstration of student learning at the end of the lesson. I feel my post observation allowed me to explain my lesson better and provide evidence to prove why/how it was effective. I agree with my administrator's evaluation and believe it is fair. I welcome and respect his feedback and appreciate his openness to my concerns.

Throughout the study, it resonated with us how significant supportive and open lines of communication were in building connections that increased our openness to feedback, which in turn, helped us improve as educators. At times in this district, I was fortunate to have evaluators who supported my work in this way, especially at the beginning of my administrative journey; unfortunately, I also had evaluators who, for the reasons I outlined above, did not/could not balance my needs with their own, as well as with the mandates of the system. Donald summed it up best when he stated that "good administrators guide us and focus on improvement for the betterment of our instruction—not to present and justify a score." These comments from Donald highlighted the importance of connections with our evaluators: these connections break down traditional power barriers between evaluators and those whom they evaluate and allow the focus to shift to improving our own work. Unfortunately, this level of supportive feedback (for the various reasons discussed above) was not typical for us during the study (and not typical since the implementation of the standardized formal system of evaluation). This lack of support led all of us, at times, to become defensive/reclusive and definitely was another example of the unintended, collateral damage inflicted by the performance-based evaluation system.

Summary

In this chapter, I described how the push and pull of new professionalism affected our educational decision-making. I also described how insecurity, powerlessness, and disengagement were by-products of this push and pull. Beyond this, I contended that when insecurity, powerlessness, and disengagement set in and we felt ourselves being remade as professionals, we resisted the system and its agents directly and indirectly. Lastly, we identified the *collateral damage* created by the new evaluation process: the pushing of ethical boundaries; and disconnection from the system and our evaluators. By breaking down traditional power

structures and dialoguing with each participant in person and virtually, we shared our overall experiences while teaching and leading within a performance and rewards culture.

If I were keeping score as one would at a sporting event, I would say that, at the end of this study, the neoliberal movement was winning in its attempts to recreate us as educational clerks; however, small pockets of positive experiences and resistance were evident as well. These positive experiences and forms of resistance offer a glimpse into how administrators and teachers can work together to co-navigate through this type of system moving forward. While it was clear that we were slowly being reworked into new professionals, there was a chance to reverse the insecurity, powerlessness, and disengagement we garnered while working under the pressures of our setting and potentially repair some of the collateral damage inflicted. The evaluation system and observation rubric are not going away anytime soon (although performance-based pay was eliminated in the school district that served as the site of this study for reasons I will discuss in Chapter 5); nevertheless, we have a chance to promote the success of every stakeholder and potentially end this cycle of suffering and collateral damage through a different vantage point. In Chapter 5, I explore my findings through the lens of the literature and RCT, my theoretical framework. In addition, I present the implications that my research has on a multitude of areas.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this PAR study was to document how educators embedded in systems of heightened accountability and rewards cultures struggle to maintain professional judgment. I also sought to systematically examine if and how the relationships between teachers and administrators were influenced under these circumstances given my impression that they were. From anecdotal research and tacit knowledge—gathered formally and informally in my role as a principal evaluating educators before and during this era of heightened accountability—I had noticed changes in the educational decisions teachers and administrators made, and that the relationships they had with each other shifted. While my initial hunch that we had changed during this era of heightened accountability was supported by my study findings what I had not anticipated prior to engaging in this study was the unintended consequences of the system. These included a negative influence on participants' ethics, a lack of knowledge on the part of teachers in the study that administrators were having similar struggles, and the extent to which the majority of connections with evaluators were damaged. My data suggests that high stakes evaluation systems, when coupled with monetary rewards, are likely to substantially damage our profession through the recreation of educators into new professionals. Through a RCT lens, new professionalism's way of recreating educators is antithetical to how organizations and people grow and prosper. Evaluators and those evaluated are cast into adversarial positions rather than working together to foster the growth of students, teachers, and the school's culture. In this scenario, our students benefit less and teachers' professional growth stalls and/or suffers.

I designed a PAR study composed of seven teachers from the school where I previously served as principal for three years, and myself. In addition, the school's new principal (who previously served as vice principal at the school) joined the group for our last PLC session. I

wanted to create a space where we could talk together about being educators within systems of heightened accountability coupled with monetary rewards. Additionally, I also hoped that together we could gain insight and offer recommendations on how administrators might support teachers during these times. PAR operates in an ongoing cycle of data gathering and action. In this study, I started with an action, that is, creating a space to talk together about decision making and functioning within systems of heightened accountability tied to monetary rewards. While we each functioned daily within these systems, we did not have opportunities to make meaning of these changes across teacher and administrator lines. Talking together in a safe space was a first step in analyzing how these changes affected each of us and how administrator and teacher relationships might be reimagined. In addition, we read a book together that utilized RCT to inform professional development. This book, *Professional Development in Relational Learning Communities: Teachers in Connection* (Raider-Roth, 2017), presented how trust-worthy relationships between teachers and administrators can create nurturing school environments focused on the best interest of students. By creating processes to support nurturing school environments, these learning communities assist educators in establishing and sustaining active learning (Raider-Roth, 2017).

To minimize the risk of talking together across teacher/administrator relationships, no teacher participant in the study was observed and evaluated by Simon—the new principal after I left the position—or me during the study. While teachers had volunteered while I was still principal, I was no longer in a position of authority over them. I originally anticipated that, as the school's principal, I would take action based on the group's discussion; however, this was no longer my role since I changed jobs. Therefore, for the study, I was primarily a participant and a researcher. In keeping with PAR, I consistently analyzed data following each PLC meeting and

brought my emerging understandings back to the group for member checking and to inform the discussion. Additionally, Simon only joined the study for the last session, which occurred after summative evaluations for the school year had been completed. Fortunately, we were able as a group to debrief with Simon during the last session. Lastly, in keeping with the basic tenets of PAR, I consistently analyzed data, member checked it with my fellow participants, and reanalyzed the data based on this member checking. The findings presented in this dissertation are the result of this collective work.

In this chapter, I discuss my findings and present future research possibilities to help answer the following questions:

1. When given a supportive space for ongoing dialogue in an era of new professionalism and neoliberalism, how do we as teachers and administrators describe our educational decisions while functioning in evaluation systems?

2. What kinds of actions might teachers recommend or consider taking regarding how administrators can best support their instructional decision-making during this era of heightened accountability?

To answer my research questions, I collected and analyzed data from our PLC sessions, as well as participants' online, individual journaling. Individual journals focused on our everyday experiences and critical incidents while operating within our district's performance and rewards cultures. In addition, we wrote about our reactions to PLC discussions and the aforementioned book on RCT that we read.

In Chapter Four, I presented my findings from my PAR study. To summarize, I found that our educational decisions were influenced by the policies, procedures, and systems enacted at the study site. In turn, the regimented nature of the accountability systems heightened our

feelings of insecurity, powerlessness, and disengagement when making decisions. Additionally, I found that some of our decisions served the dual role of resistance to systems and evaluators. Moreover, I also found that, at times, we put our needs over the needs of our students when making everyday decisions. Further, I established that, when making decisions, we factored the evaluation system and observation rubrics into our decisions more than we did in the past. Additionally, when examining the action of administrators at our study site, I found that administrators could best support their teachers by being empathetic to their plight, open to their concerns and attentive to their needs. Furthermore, a positive outlook, a willingness to break down traditional power barriers between administrators and teachers, and being as clear and concise as possible were major characteristics teacher study participants looked for in their evaluators.

I presented my findings via four major themes. The first theme was *the push and pull of new professionalism*. Here I shared how, during our everyday work, we were faced with the pushes and pulls of new professionalism such as standardized curriculum (push) and performance-based incentives (pull). In my second theme, *the onset of disengagement, powerlessness, and insecurity,* I postulated that the pushes and pulls of new professionalism and the heightened sense of scrutiny created these newfound feelings which played a part in our decision-making. Next, in my third theme, *direct and indirect acts of resistance,* I explored how, in response to the pushes and pulls and our newfound, aforementioned feelings, we directly (for example, blatantly calling out our evaluators for perceived unfair treatment) and indirectly (for example, withholding our time afterhours) pushed back against the system and our evaluators. Lastly, in my fourth theme, I presented the *collateral damage inflicted*. Here, I described how we became disconnected from our relationships with our evaluators and our students and how we

began to make unethical decisions (for example, system gaming) that negatively affected our students. In short, the documented veiled attempts to recreate study participants through the use of a compliance-driven observation rubrics and evaluation systems tied to monetary rewards, resulted in negative outcomes that I did not anticipate. My findings indicate that the high stakes accountability and rewards systems had a substantially negative impact on both the study site and is likely to also negatively influence the teaching profession as a whole.

This final chapter includes a discussion of my findings relative to the literature and my theoretical framework, RCT, followed by recommendations and implications. First, I revisit the literature on growth-producing relationships; contextualized teaching and teachers as professionals; and, performance-based pay incentives. Within this first section, I discuss and summarize what I have learned and how it connects or adds values to existing research. Next, I present recommendations and implications for the following groups: teachers; district and school administrators; and, policy-makers. Third, I describe implications for the study site. Fourth, I discuss future research recommendations. I close with a discussion of the limitations of the study, as well as a brief synopsis.

Analysis and Discussion of the Findings

In this section, I revisit the literature on growth-producing relationships, contextualized teaching and teachers as professionals, and performance-based pay incentives, through an RCT lens. In addition, I discuss and summarize what I have learned and how it connects or adds values to existing research.

The overall principle of RCT is to cultivate growth producing relationships amongst ourselves and our students. For all intents and purposes, RCT is antithetical to the current state of education, as it stands in direct contrast to new professionalism and neoliberalism, which

transforms educators into purveyors of *one-size fits all* content, and decontextualizes our practices and relationships. As my research suggests, the observation rubric and their own preoccupation with summative evaluation scores were conditioning teachers to perform differently, push aside and sometimes rule against their professional judgment, and perform in prescribed ways. Additionally, my research puts forward the idea that evaluators and evaluatees were pitted against each other due to the competing demands of their positions within the evaluation system. Therefore, two groups of individuals whose cooperation is vital to the success of our students were at odds with each other within this school environment. In this section, I discuss how the tenets of RCT—a theoretical framework based mainly in mental health professions—fit into education and help to tell the story of what happened at the study site, especially in the areas of growth-producing relationships, contextualized teaching and teachers as professionals, and performance-based pay incentives.

As a reminder, RCT is comprised of six major tenets, all of which were in direct contrast to what I saw taking place our school, whereby the observation rubric and cold feedback made warm and nurturing relationships less possible. RCT espousess growth in connection which guides environments that help cultivate this. However, as my research suggests, our current school environment worked against this dynamic as evidenced by interactions between evaluators and those whom they evaluated, as well as the decisions made by participants during the study. Without the strong relationship of trust and mutuality between evaluators and those whom they evaluated that Jordan (2010) postulated, the systems and its accompanying rubric created an environment that negatively impacted the practices of teachers. Consequently, teachers were recreated as purveyors of content who placed their own judgment and expertise on the backburner.

In addition, RCT postulates that individuals will struggle to be successful in their fields without adhering to the *five good things* (Jordan, 2008) previously described in the literature review. From my study findings, all *five good* things were under attack at our work site; therefore, educators and those who evaluated them became adversaries. A sense of zest (1) and the capacity to be creative and productive (4) were lost on participants when their teaching arsenal was no longer available due to their evaluators' focus on compliance measures. Moreover, clarity about oneself (2) and a sense of personal worth (3) were skewed when, more than ever, our value was judged solely on our summative evaluation scores from year to year. And, lastly, the desire for connection (5) was brought to a halt when evaluators proceeded to—out of necessity—enforce the narrow standards of observation rubrics and educators focused solely on surviving personally and financially.

In the section to follow, I explore how important elements of our learning environment are negatively affected when RCT's major tenets are restricted and its *five good things* are missing from our daily work.

Growth-Producing Relationships

In my study, I set out to explore what administrators could do to support teachers within accountability systems. Virtually all recommendations seemingly came back to the lack of growth-producing relationships due to the system. Therefore, it was important to review the status of connections and relationships between evaluators and those whom they evaluate through an RCT lens.

It was apparent throughout the literature and the study that as educators were held to narrow standards and important school-level decisions were based on data from formal observations and yearly summative evaluations (which only made up a small percentage of their

overall body of work in the classroom), both teachers and administrators began to withdraw from their relationships with their evaluators (Ball, 2003, 2016; Evetts, 2011; Jordan, 2000a; Kallio & Kallio, 2012; Lewis & Olshansky, 2017; Raider-Roth, 2017; Zeichner, 2010). All participants, as the evaluation system and the scores assigned to us began to take precedence over our everyday work, became fearful of the tools used to quantify and sort us. That fear extended to those who were entrusted by district decision-makers to evaluate us with new tools; hence, evaluators and evaluatees were placed in adversarial roles where our success was in direct contrast to the marching orders of our evaluators. This included not just the relationships between teachers and administrators but also any relationship between those who had to be evaluated and those with evaluative power. All of these relationships were severely damaged by this system.

As Freedberg (2007) reminds us, RCT advances the idea that relationships and connections play a major role in social contexts, as the basic tenets of this theory inspire growth-fostering practices and supports. It was evident during the study that everyday interactions between staff and administrators affected the morale and instructional decisions of teachers—and these effects were mostly negative (Cohen, 2014; Freedberg, 2007; Jordan, 2000a). Opportunities presented by some evaluators for administrators and teachers to dialogue in non-evaluative and inclusive settings fostered a sense of vulnerability in participants. In turn, this vulnerability—an openness to being critiqued—that RCT mentions as vital to growth, heightened the level of feedback given by evaluators to evaluatees and how that feedback was implemented (Freedberg, 2007; Miller, 2010a). Leaders who were effective in nurturing a positive working and learning environment enhanced the professional environment for all as much as possible, although, at times, they too fell into their roles as agents of the system. Although we valued the authentic attempts by some evaluators to step out of the traditional power structure and build

positive relationships with staff, which are vital to the success of all stakeholders, the lack of empathy and flexibility of administrators generally in dealing with teachers impacted the quality of our effort and our instructional choices (Cohen, 2014; Freedberg, 2007; Jordan, 2000a). Examples were abundant in the study pertaining to administrators who struggled to gain our respect, support, and trust because they led out of fear. Unfortunately, maintaining power by means of establishing barriers to prevent change (for example, evaluators withdrawing from connections with evaluatees), became the default position for most administrators tasked with fostering compliance and—whether they were aware of it or not—recreating us.

This removal from growth-fostering relationships along with a heightened focus on compliance, were key components in recreating us as educators. According to the RCT framework, it is imperative for teachers and administrators to focus on respectful relationships and attempt to create systems that enhance and support this way of being, as these connections will lay the foundation for how students are taught. Unfortunately, new professionalism's attempts to recreate us as educators put evaluators and evaluatees at odds with each other—rather than working together for the common good of student growth. Since it is clear from the findings that we had started to become the educational clerks that neoliberals have strived for, albeit with some attempts to offer everyday resistance, there is more reason for administrators and teachers to find a balance between personal/professional convictions and decisions when trying to bring the ultimate focus back to students via instructional decisions (Cochran-Smith, 2001; Cohen, 2014; Lewis & Olshansky, 2017; Raider-Roth, 2017). Unfortunately, this is not an easy task and needs to be further examined. Building on the work of Miller (2010b), those in power (administrators) need to understand that providing teachers with more power through connections does not diminish their own power—it only heightens their potential effectiveness in

their roles. Regrettably, because administrators are cogs in the high stakes evaluation wheel, their

adherence to compliance measures will still trump their ability to foster growth-focused

relationships, as they too must answer to the ultimate power brokers: those reworking education

behind school doors. In the end, we are all suffering, even when pockets of positive interactions

advanced by RCT are in place in our schools. We need to do what we can to promote these small

pockets of RCT-inspired environments and create ripple effects in as many classrooms, schools,

districts as possible.

In addition to a lack of growth-producing relationships with our evaluators, the study's

findings offer a window into how the pressures and scrutiny of the evaluation system used at the

study site led to damaged relationships with our students. For example, teachers and

administrators regularly made decisions that did not help our students and, at times, even hurt

them. Although current empirical research highlights the effectiveness of accountability systems

and performance-based pay on student outcomes (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013; Firestone, 2014;

Harvey, 2014), these studies tend to ignore the unintended consequences for teachers, which, in

turn, affects students (for example, teachers gaming the system; Jabbar, 2013). Our professional

and financial well-being were at stake and, in the face of complex and competing relationship

demands, we did all we could to maintain our integrity and personal/professional well-being, as

well as resist performance and rewards cultures.

When policies and systems thrusted upon educators create the expectation that the

purpose of the U.S. public school system is to create human capital out of students, both

educators' and students' growth is stunted. (Cohen, 2014; Freedberg, 2007; Miller, 2010a). In

these circumstances, educators will place more of an emphasis on maintaining their own

livelihoods than building relationships with students (Cohen, 2014; Freedberg, 2007; Miller,

2010a). In the study, we see both teachers and administrators, when pushed to this edge, making decisions no longer based on students' well-being but on their own professional statuses and financial well-being. The bottom line, our students—lower income, minority students in a poverty-stricken school district—suffered in our attempts to fight back against a system that took away our professional judgment and downplayed our expertise.

To summarize, high stakes accountability systems have done more harm than good to relationships (Evetts, 2009; Jabbar, 2013). This pattern was clearly evident in the school district that served as site of the study, where relationships between administrators, teachers, and students were severely damaged to the point where they may not ever recover due to the levels of fear and pressure faced on a daily basis. Consequently, our students, rather than being the clients we are called upon to serve, became the means to an end. More often than not, we chose instructional strategies to meet indicators on a rubric—not to benefit our students. Lastly, when feeling frustrated by how our evaluators treated us as they implemented an unforgiving system, we scaled back our efforts in the classroom and did not give our all. In the end, growth-producing relationships in a nurturing learning environment are becoming harder to create and sustain under current circumstances.

Contextualized Teaching and Teachers as Professionals

As my findings put forward, the reforms of the new professionalism movement are in direct opposition to the notion of teachers as professionals and contextualized teaching and learning. First and foremost, I recognize that both proponents and opponents of neoliberalism and new professionalism agree that educators need to close the achievement gap (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015). To researchers such as Talbot and McLaughlin (2002) and Schoenfeld (1998), in order to close the achievement gap for our students, significant attention needed to be given to

the effects of the policies on contexts of practice, as well as the evolution of teachers as

professionals—not on outcomes or additional motivation. Unfortunately, as Florio stated in

2002, the sense of urgency to close the achievement gap limited rather than opened our teaching

repertoire. Consequently, the great strides of the 1970s and 1980s to close the achievement gap

by shifting teaching from a behaviorist model of transmission to a constructivist model of active

and meaningful learning were stymied at this study site by the policies and procedures which

focused on inputs over processes (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015). As my research indicates,

these efforts to recreate us disregarded the prior knowledge learners brought to the classroom and

the efforts made by teachers to adapt to this knowledge base in favor of regimentation of practice

(Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015). In turn, as Florio (2002) postulated and my research

suggests, we fell prey to research and policies that had limited understanding of the complexities

of teaching and learning.

The idea of teaching being a contextualized practice has gotten lost with neoliberalism

and new professionalism. Instead of following the ideas of Darling-Hammond and Snyder (1999)

who pushed for flexibility in teachers' instructional decisions and an appreciation of diverse

contexts, my study suggests that we became further entrenched in the mandates and policies of

the system. Rather than supporting the coming together of policy-makers and educators to build

capacity and potentially end the achievement gap (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 1999), we

followed and enforced routines instead of focusing on sophisticated classroom strategies

Neoliberalism and new professionalism flatten the task of teaching and try to standardize

practices no matter the context. These efforts are not only in direct contrast to the literature on

contextualized teaching but they are also counter to RCT's *five good things*, as zest for our work,

our feelings of personal worth, and our ability to be creative are squashed by attempts to create a

one size fits all model.

This disconnection from contextualized teaching, in turn, led us to feeling that our

professional judgment and expertise was no longer valued; hence, we were less professionals and

more purveyors of content and skills. As Ingersoll and Collins (2018) put forward, schools lack

the true characteristics of a professional workplace because we have been afforded less self-

governance over our work. As my study suggests, we felt disengaged, insecure, and powerless

against the onslaught of new professionalism; therefore, we exercised our professional judgment

less and began to follow rote methods more. Unfortunately, policies and procedures and a focus

on adherence to a behaviorist-inspired observation rubric stopped teachers and administrators at

the study site from focusing on the deepening, refining, and extending of our subject matter and

practices over time that Feiman-Nemser (2001) considered critical for success. And since, as

Ingersoll and Collins (2018) and the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future

(NCTAF;1996) proposed, the strongest positive effects in education are tied to teachers'

authority, autonomy, and decision-making influence, it is not at all surprising that the

environment diminished these characteristics.

Performance-Based Pay Incentives

As I outlined in Chapter Two, school districts throughout the country have made attempts

to implement performance-based systems throughout the 20th Century (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013;

Firestone, 2014; Goldhaber, et al., 2008; Johnson & Papay, 2009; Lavy, 2007; Springer, 2009;

Stedman & McCallion, 2001). In addition, the vast majority of school districts adopting

performance-based pay incentive systems are low-income, urban school districts like the one that

served as the study site (Atterby & Mangan, 2020; Firestone, 2014; Goldhaber, 2008; Ingersoll,

2007; Murnane & Steele, 2007). To reiterate, prior to the advent of NCLB in 2001, these incentive systems either failed or were unsustainable for a variety of reasons, most notably firm opposition from teachers' unions, issues with procedures and implementation, lack of money, and the lack of objective and consistent evaluation systems (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013; Firestone, 2014; Goldhaber, et al., 2008; Johnson & Papay, 2009; Lavy, 2007; Springer, 2009; Stedman & McCallion, 2001). In the two decades since the authorization of NCLB, performance-based pay has been reborn in a prominent way, with the aim to improve teacher quality (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013; Firestone, 2014; Harvey, 2014; Heneman, et al., 2013; Ingersoll, 2007; Lavy, 2007; Weiss & McGuinn, 2016; Stedman & McCallion, 2001). In addition, since the dawn of RTTP in 2009, performance-based pay, for the first time, has been tied to more formal and robust teacher evaluation systems and VAM (Firestone, 2014; Goldhaber, et al., 2008; Ingersoll, 2007; Murnane & Steele, 2007). It should be noted that even economic literature on which educational policy has been based, acknowledges that performance-based pay is highly problematic to implement in "knowledge-intensive areas" such as education, mainly due to lack of control of relevant variables, including student's home-life, the imperfections and/or cultural bias inherent in standardized tests, and the overall inability of schools to choose their client (the student; Kallio & Kallio, 2012). Additionally, there is an embedded inequity in their implementation, as these systems are very rarely—if ever—put in place in suburban or affluent school systems (Atterby & Mangan, 2020; Firestone, 2014; Goldhaber, 2008; Ingersoll, 2007; Murnane & Steele, 2007). Therefore, the notion that teachers need extra incentives to work in or work harder at low-income, urban school districts is appalling. Those of us who participated in this study cared about our students and did not need additional compensation to make us work any harder.

As my study shows, although performance-based pay offered educators opportunities to earn additional compensation on a yearly basis, the unintended outcomes outweighed its benefits. First and foremost, to secure performance-based pay study participants had to perform in ways that contradicted their professional judgment, and relationships were undermined. In a profession where most educators claim to have a calling to do well by their students, it is disheartening to push aside teachers' professional judgment and autonomy over instructional decisions, in favor of dictated curriculum and instructional strategies made by someone in a faraway locale. Second, power shifted in favor of administrators who had complete authority over pay. As this happened, we became guarded with what we shared with our evaluators, especially those we felt may not have had our best interest in mind. Consequently, as RCT postulates, lack of trust and vulnerability with evaluators hurts the school's ability to change and/or be successful.

Moreover, administrators were seen as agents of a system that educators in the study began to despise. My findings are aligned with the work of others, particularly opponents of performance-based pay such as Lavy (2007), as well as Stedman and McCallion (2001), who suggested that the use of extrinsic rewards in education would most likely be counterproductive, as we shifted from focusing on the needs of our students to concentrating on our own needs. Simply put, performance-based pay, when tied to high stakes accountability systems, damages educators and their students by placing the focus of attention adhering to narrow standards and observation rubric indicators.

Ironically, at the completion of this study, the school district serving as the site for my research eliminated performance-based pay. Unlike past failures of performance-based pay systems, the lack of formal evaluation systems or issues with processes and procedures were not cited for its nullification; rather, the lack of money and firm opposition from the teachers' union

were the reasons given by both the superintendent of schools and the aforementioned teachers'
union. As we suggested in the study, the number of highly-effective teachers increased on a
yearly basis given our familiarity with the teacher evaluation rubric—and adherence to it—and
the evaluative approach of administrators. As a result, the district had to pay out significantly
more money on a yearly basis than they budgeted. And, in an impoverished, urban school district
where budget cuts are a major talking point every year, further payouts of performance-based
pay could potentially cost teachers (union members) their jobs when the district is faced with a
budget shortfall. Unfortunately, the announcement of the end of performance-based pay in the
school district eliminated any opportunities to obtain additional pay, as traditional outlets for
enhanced salary guide movement, such as obtaining a master's degree, had been eliminated in
the previous labor contract and did not return when performance-based pay ceased. Therefore,
the onslaught on the professionalism of teachers continued.

The reaction of participants to the elimination of performance-based pay is very complex
to unpack. Both teachers and administrators in this study loathed the oppressive culture of the
performance-based pay incentives because it forced them to change the way they made
educational decisions—especially when we put our own well-being in play with the needs of our
students. However, participants were also enraged by the elimination of performance-based
incentives because it was the only outlet they had to attain additional pay, as the pay increases
for attaining an advanced degree which were eliminated with the advent of performance-based
pay were not returned. Therefore, at play was the further erosion of teachers as professionals and
the continuation of the push by neoliberal advocates to turn educators into nothing more than
transmitters of content with less opportunities for the fair pay of which they were entitled.

The study suggests that performance-based pay did ultimately succeed in reworking educators as per the neoliberal agenda. The district, in its attempts to improve standardized test scores, change its image, and lure quality educators to its schools, implemented a monetary rewards system. However, the dangling of the low-hanging fruit coupled with what study participants labeled systematic poor treatment of teachers, led us to seek the rewards, but at a cost. To ensure compliance with district-sponsored curricula and instructional strategies, monetary rewards were tied to evaluation scores. In addition, most district evaluators completed formal observations with a laser-like focus on observation rubric indicators. Consequently, in order to meet performance-based pay requirements, and because they were irritated that fair professional pay was not available and other hoops had to be jumped to gain additional monetary rewards, teachers in the district played the game and allowed themselves to be reworked. These decisions to play the game changed them as educators and negatively affected students who became pawns in the system.

As I stated in Chapter Two, most of the research on performance-based-pay focuses on: 1) how students perform on standardized tests when their teachers are given the opportunity to obtain monetary rewards; and, 2) teacher recruitment and retention rates. My findings, however, highlight unintended consequences of performance-based pay that need to be taken into account when schools consider implementing it as a cornerstone of their evaluation systems. To most, the ability to obtain additional pay for highly effective work seems like a reasonable and positive way to boost school morale and increase productivity. However, my findings suggest that this line of thinking is faulty. First, as Ball and Olmedo (2013) have previously argued, it demeans teachers by forcing them to meet, at times, highly unattainable goals and assumes that they alone are the ultimate reason for the success or failure of their students. Beyond this, as my study

shows, it places students in harm's way because when educators feel underappreciated and over scrutinized, they will do all they can to meet the necessary professional objectives to obtain monetary rewards, even when this involves making unethical decisions not in the best interests of students. Additionally, it changes the relationships between administrators and teachers since growth-fostering connections are replaced by relationships built around inspection, quantifying, and sorting. In brief, performance-based pay theorists and researchers need to attend not only to teacher retention/recruitment and student performance on standardized tests but also to the unintended consequences of enacting these systems.

Recommendations and Implications for Practice and Theory

In this section of Chapter Five, I present recommendations, as well as implications for future research. Although small pockets of positive stories and efforts to avoid being recreated as educators were evident in the study, my overall findings highlight the significant number of negative effects that high stakes accountability systems had on participants. I discuss recommendations aimed at teachers, district and school administrators, and policy makers. Lastly, I present and implications for the study site and recommendations for future research.

Recommendations for Teachers

Reclaim the profession. Teachers have lost the ability to exercise their professional judgment at the level they have in the past. Second, they have been forced to implement curriculum and instructional strategies that do not take into account the need for contextualized learning. Third, they have been asked to work harder for additional money with less available resources and a more adversarial relationship with their evaluators. Lastly, they have been forced into pushing aside the best interests of their students—impoverished minority students at the study site—in their attempts to maintain their jobs and potentially attain performance-based pay

incentives. Therefore, it is seemingly a difficult task to reclaim their profession, especially when evaluators hold power over their livelihoods. However, at least outside of the formal observation process, teachers still have the ability to exercise their professional judgment and bring meaning-making into their lessons. Teachers must adhere to compliance measures and rubrics when they are formally observed and evaluated; however, outside of formal observations, teachers have the opportunity to push the envelope and be more creative than they can be within the walls of pressurized accountability proceedings. These attempts to reclaim the profession can be the confidence-boosts teachers need to take creative control back in their classrooms and potentially attempt to implement during formal observations. The (re)gaining of confidence in their professional judgment could be the springboard to conversations with their evaluators about what (potentially) works better in their context during and outside of formal observations.

Do not forget that students matter. Although the opportunities to have summers off and having earlier than normal work hours may have driven some into the profession, it is safe to say that the vast majority of us educators went down this career path to positively affect the lives of children. Unfortunately, the push and pull of new professionalism has put teachers in the most tenuous of circumstances (for example, easier outlets to remove tenure and less guaranteed income) that the profession has ever seen. As my study presented, it is easy for teachers to fall into the trap of worrying about their personal and professional well-being and pushing aside the needs of our students to insure acceptable yearly performance on yearly summative evaluations. However, although it may be difficult in the sea of heightened accountability and job/financial security to veer away from strictly following rubric requirements, teachers need to continue to fight for those that have the smallest say in their education: their students. If teachers on-the-

ground do not first and foremost stand up for what is right for their students in their classrooms, who else will?

Unify in numbers. Teachers need to realize that they are not alone and that there is power in numbers. By working together with union leadership, like the teachers at the study site did in pushing for the abolishment of performance-based pay incentives, teachers have the ability to affect positive change by, for example, fighting for fair pay. Teachers will, regardless of what their evaluators and policy-makers say, have the most in-depth knowledge of what is happening in classrooms and what needs to be done to benefit their students; therefore, it is up to them to work together collectively and push for change when anything egregious is taking place in their schools. Pushing for fair pay, fair evaluations of their work, respect for their professionalism, and respect for the specific needs of their individual contexts will be more effective in larger, organized numbers than via individual pockets of resistance.

Recommendations for District and School Administrators

Push back against the status quo for the sake of the profession. My findings suggest that the field of education is at a critical point. The onerous high stakes accountability systems that prevails today in school districts throughout the U.S. operate on the faulty reasoning that streamlining educational practices and eliminating professional judgment is for the betterment of both educators and students. Therefore, district and school administrators need to join with the teachers whom they supervise and evaluate and push back against the systems that unfairly evaluate and sort evaluatees. I hope that school leaders, especially those with evaluative power, will heed the words of the study participants—as well as the staff they supervise and evaluate— and fight back against the cold and unforgiving systems that are gradually reworking educators.

Below, I recommend two ways district and school leaders can push back on these high stakes systems.

Systems of compliance need to be reconsidered. First, it is extremely important that administrators, when working with and evaluating educators, not let compliance factors get in the way of creating growth-fostering relationships with staff members. In reviewing the small pockets of successful administrator-teacher connections, the most noticeable element was conversations/relationships that addressed the issue of compliance but held firm to the notion that good teaching, as well as authentic interactions and feedback, were of the utmost importance. Rather than having compliance dictate the interactions between administrators and teachers, authentic and open dialogue that promotes teachers' usage of their professional judgment should be at the forefront of these interactions. And in the face of the heightened workload administrators now have (for example, detailed requirements for maintaining building safety and security; and, stringent time frames and reporting requirements for allegations of harassment, intimidation, and bullying) this is not an easy task. However, by implementing a high level of organization and never wavering from the sanctity of instructional feedback, administrators can take small steps to ensure that teachers receive undivided attention and poignant feedback in writing and in person. It is the duty of district and school leaders, who are tasked with observing and evaluating the teachers on the ground, to get systems of compliance reconsidered before they further erode the profession and further remove the small pockets of time available to build deep connections with staff whose livelihoods they control. Just as teachers have begun to speak up and resist their direct evaluators, so too must district and school leaders speak about these concerns and resist when interacting with their own evaluators—even in the face of pushback.

Professional judgment and expertise should be embraced—not shunned. Next, although it sounds very basic, the professional judgment and expertise of educators should be encouraged in schools and should drive instructional decisions. For far too long, educators have had their instructional and curricular decisions dictated to them by individuals in distant locales who may never have taught the subject area or grade level in question. Therefore, it is paramount that educators be given back creative control and the ability to shape their curriculum and units of instruction based on their knowledge, know-how, and expertise. District and school leaders need to support these efforts not only because educational decisions should be driven more by individuals who know the context, content, grade levels, and students they are teaching, but also because of the energy and enthusiasm that autonomy and creative control brings back to individuals who have craved and yearned it for so long. A simple first step for district and school leaders is to shift the focus away from compliance and indicators and allow teachers to be creative and have fun with the material. At this point, if a teacher needs to improve, the feedback from the administrator comes from a place of support and growth rather than inspection and quantifying.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

After nearly a decade operating under pressurized and objective evaluations systems, it is time to rethink the usage of accountability systems which dehumanize and deprofessionalize educators. Below, I present recommendations for policy makers to: stop reworking educators into clerks; eliminate student performance from teacher evaluations; and replace rewards systems with systems that respect educators.

Respect teachers as able professionals. Alternatively, my study suggests growing evidence that high stakes accountability systems have been destructive to education. Neoliberal

attempts to rework educators into clerks who follow the scripts of faraway policy-makers, have

significantly hurt our ability to educate students (Evetts, 2009; Jabbar, 2013; Raider-Roth, 2017;

Zeichner, 2010). As I previously discussed, participants in my study became singularly

concerned with meeting compliance requirements to ensure our own professional and personal

livelihood—and that is not why the vast majority of educators entered into this profession. What

has been lost within high stakes systems of accountability is the everyday work of educators. As

a reminder, this study took place in New Jersey and, at the time of the publication of this

dissertation, 85% of yearly summative evaluations of teachers in non-SGP schools are based on

between one and three observations depending on tenure status or classification (teacher,

administrator, or educational specialist). These observations range from 20 to 40 minutes each.

Thus, yearly evaluations—and the livelihood of those evaluated—are based on anywhere from

20 to 120 minutes of an entire school year. For those of us doing the math, if you consider that a

teacher teaches 200 minutes per day (five periods of 40 minutes each) and multiply that by 180

school days, you would end up with 36,000 minutes per year. Hence, under the current

evaluation system, 0.05% to 0.33% of a teacher's performance throughout the entire school year

determines their yearly evaluation score. As we move forward operating within this system,

policy makers at the local, state, and national levels need to keep in mind these numbers and

implement ways for educators to have their evaluations consist of more than just the glimpses in

time that formal observations provide. Many observation systems such as Stronge allow teachers

to submit additional evidence beyond what is happening during the formal observation.

Nevertheless, it is important that policy makers take a step back and see that quantifiable scores

from formal observations are based on such a small percentage of teachers' actual work years

that is virtually impossible (and unfair) to, under current circumstances, to make high stakes decisions based on these small segments of instruction.

Eliminate student performance from teacher evaluations. Teachers play an important role in the success—or lack thereof—of their students. However, it is absurd to directly tie the progress/growth of students to the summative evaluations of teachers when there are so many additional factors such as economic statuses and family situations which play critical parts in a child's education. For example, an important finding during this study was the system gaming that took place when utilizing SGOs, which currently account for 15% of teachers' summative evaluations. To recap, SGOs are created by teachers grading either teacher-created or district-created pre-assessments, developing attainable goals in conjunction with their principal or his/her designee, administering a post-assessment, and comparing the results of the post-assessment to the pre-assessment. Throughout the process, as I outlined in Chapter Four, the opportunity for system gaming takes place whereby both teachers and students (and, in some cases, administrators) work together to ensure that everyone is successful. And, to reiterate, these SGO scores make up 15% of the summative evaluations that are used to both rate educators and make high stakes decisions. Moreover, although this study focused on high school teachers who did not receive an SGP like their grades 3-8 teaching counterparts, we cannot overlook the inequity of those teachers having student growth—or lack thereof—on standardized tests factored into high stakes decisions affecting their livelihoods. Based on the role that multiple elements at play in a child's schooling, the absurdity of using standardized tests given over 1-3 days in a yearly evaluation, and the lack of validity of SGOs described previously, policy makers need to reconsider the inclusion of student performance in future summative evaluation scoring.

For a school district with poor standardized test scores, we should assume that locally-created tests would be welcomed with open arms by all stakeholders and expect highly effective teachers to have students perform well on tests they construct (Darling-Hammond, et. al., 2012). Unfortunately, the system gaming involved in the pre and post test process was flawed and skewed by the high stakes nature of the system, whereby students, teachers, and administrators worked together to succeed, thus tainting the results. Therefore, the initial intent of implementing VAM-like measures into composite evaluation scores and the expectation that great teachers will undoubtedly improve student performance was tarnished at the study site.

Replace rewards systems with systems that respect educators. Performance-based pay was implemented in the teacher evaluation system of the school which served as the study site from 2013-2018. As a struggling, urban school district, the point of its implementation was to increase teachers' incentives to perform better in the classroom which, in turn, would hopefully improve students' performance on standardized tests. In addition, it was believed that improvement on standardized test scores would assist the school district in regaining local control. At the conclusion of the 2017-2018 school year, the district had paid out approximately $750,000 in additional salary due to individuals attaining highly-effective statuses; however, the standardized test results remained much the same, with slight increases. The main reason for the elimination of performance-based pay was the financial cliff that the district continued to face— and the paying out of additional pay for teachers being rated highly effective did not help. However, the findings of the study highlight that this monetary rewards system was doomed to fail from the start. Whether it was teachers teaching directly to the observation rubric to obtain a highly-effective rating, not going above and beyond the call of duty after the formal observations for the year were completed, or discussing one's performance in the classroom in relation to

indicators on a rubric rather than in the interest of growth in the profession, performance-based opportunities did more harm than good.

To recap, my research suggests the absurdity of the decision to implement a monetary rewards system. As a reminder, the district that serves as the study site is a struggling school district under nearly three decades of state control. This district has poor standardized test scores, dilapidated buildings, limited funding for instructional resources, a transient population of staff members, and a poor reputation to anyone on the outside. To improve student performance and the district as a whole, the district decided to have its educators work harder—not smarter—to meet narrow goals in a tedious accountability system. And, by doing this, teachers could potentially obtain monetary rewards by making compliance-driven decisions, no longer in the best interests of students. In addition, to attract other individuals to come work in the district, rather than a promotional campaign to improve its image or utilizing available funds to rectify the above-mentioned struggles, it lures candidates to its schools via extrinsic rewards. It is safe to say that performance-based pay was a debacle in this school district and, even after its elimination, still affects the district via the collateral damage it inflicted. Therefore, I recommend that, rather than school districts providing monetary rewards, they should support professional labor and fair pay. Pay teachers a fair salary, provide them with what they need to be successful, and stop micromanaging their every move. The only place where monetary rewards should ever be available in education is for the completion of additional duties, such as rewriting a curriculum for a particular grade level—and not in high stakes accountability decisions and summative evaluations.

Implications for the Study Site

Future PAR studies may provide additional spaces for authentic conversations to examine the everyday work of teachers and administrators within similar evaluation. These conversations, in turn, can lead to concrete action steps to potentially change how we support and evaluate teachers and administrators. My dissertation suggests that there is much work to be done to push back against the reworking of educators into clerks—and this is truly site-dependent. In some instances, PAR studies conducted in school districts may be the final push to make substantial change in a particular context or system. However, in other cases, such as the site in which my study was conducted, PAR can serve as a springboard to begin the process of changing how we support and evaluate teachers and administrators. In the case of my former school, which served as the site of the study, it was and continues to be an anomaly in the school district; therefore, although our unique efforts were gradually recognized during and after my leadership as school principal, these attempts are still nowhere near the norm in the school district. It was my hope, and it remains the hope of Simon, the current principal, that our efforts at the study site will inspire other schools to take similar small steps to fight back against a cold and unrelenting system looking to forever change the profession. Since change has to start somewhere, PAR studies such as this one serve as an example of how on-the-ground efforts to engage in conversations in a non-evaluative setting are one small step for schools, especially those thoroughly embedded into the compliance-driven nature of high stakes evaluation systems.

Recommendations for Future Research

In addition, this study suggests that administrators, like teachers, feel the pull of heightened accountability measures and are forced to weigh personal/ professional convictions, as well as numerous relationships, when making daily decisions. Therefore, the field of

education can benefit from an exploration of the on-the-ground efforts of administrators who play dual observation roles (evaluator/evaluatee) in these systems of heightened accountability, as our voices deserve to be heard.

Lastly, this study suggests implications for new professionalism. New professionalism is ingrained in federal, state, and local educational systems with no end to its reign over our educational decisions in sight. Old professionalism was not perfect and was never free of oversight from evaluators through formal observations and evaluations; however, the change is how the larger community views this supervision and its effect on the professionals themselves as there is now an expectation of a direct correlation between teacher performance and student performance on standardized tests (Weiner, 2020). Currently, this oversight is embedded in the neoliberal position of inspection and assessment (Weiner, 2020). Recently, Weiner (2020) postulated that educators would benefit from moving away from an "either/or" mentality towards professionalism and embracing the idea of a "nuanced professionalism"—one where the elements of old and new professionalism are woven together. Although Weiner (2020) suggested that the work of educators has shifted to that of educational clerks/new professionals, the true impact of this shift is how educators now internalized their roles and how this new internalization affects their daily decisions (Torres & Weiner, 2018), which, most notably, puts administrators and teachers at odds with each other. Current research presents mixed results for new professionalism's potential effects on student outcomes (Weiner, 2020). Additionally, the majority of scholars in the field agree that competition, market forces, standardization, and accountability have embedded themselves in the profession (Zeichner, 2010); however, school districts may be mistakenly identifying the wrong teachers for removal and/or rewards (Atteberry & Mangan, 2020; Paige & Amrein-Beardsley, 2020). Paige and Amrein-Beardsley (2020) also

postulate that evaluations are becoming linchpins and obstacles in the evaluation processes, rather than an important ingredient in teacher quality analyses and local instructional planning decisions.

Conversely, since research in this area is so new, pockets of complicated success stories need to be taken into account. Stone-Johnson (2014) claimed that younger educators have accepted this new professionalism, most likely because it is the only system they have ever known, and potentially because of the concrete nature of expectations. Additionally, Weiner and Torres (2016, 2018), as well as Moore and Clark (2016), have postulated that at least some educators embrace inspection and accountability as a means to allow them to meet professional standards swiftly and efficiently given they provide what is deemed to be clear guidelines for successful performance during formal observations. Still, it is worth noting that scholars such as Hall and McGinty (2015) posit that educators who have accepted and embraced the restrictive elements of performance and rewards cultures have done so mostly out of fear and loss of autonomy over instructional decision-making.

The current literature on performance and rewards cultures within education focuses on the effects of teachers on student outcomes—and even that literature is a small sampling at this time. Despite these early attempts, larger efforts need to be made to move from an examination of theory to an in-depth examination of how those theories work out in practice, especially within performance-based settings. Deeper stories of the work and the decisions that educators make on a daily basis in the wake of the shift from old to new professionalism are very much needed to assess the potential, lasting impact of this movement. Furthermore, while administrators are engulfed in this system, minimal research has been conducted to examine and assess their efforts within performance and rewards cultures. This is a vital component of future

research since, as Ball (2003) hypothesized, administrators are being labeled as the technicians

of this larger transformation. It is therefore imperative for research to detail the specific ways in

which administrators, not just teachers, are also caught in the ongoing cycle of inspection,

sorting, and ratings—and are not just enforcers of the system's edicts. It is paramount to capture

the nature and role of all educators within the system in order to help us meet the changing and

varied needs of all stakeholders (Weiner, 2020). As Atteberry and Mangan (2020) argued,

studies that carefully consider the implications of relying on quantitative data to characterize the

yearly work of teachers and administrators are needed.

Limitations of the Study

PAR is a value laden form of qualitative research, particularly because it is a catalyst for

changes to broader societal concerns and challenges in possibly non-responsive institutions, such

as education (Herr & Anderson, 2015). As such, my aim as a researcher was to break down the

barriers of traditional researcher-subject power relationships and create a setting where

participants wanted to come together for the common good of the location and profession (Herr

& Anderson, 2015). As a result of this fostering of empowering relationships, I aimed for all

stakeholders to develop the knowledge and consciousness necessary to reflect upon and operate

within the technical and social dimensions of their daily instructional practice (Tripp, 1990).

The findings represent an analysis of the dialogue (written and verbal) between seven

teachers and two administrators serving in a Northern New Jersey high school. Therefore, my

study gives a glimpse into the everyday interactions between administrators and teachers, both of

whom were evaluated within systems of accountability and had the opportunity to obtain

performance-based pay incentives. Additionally, for these teachers and administrators, being

provided with an opportunity to dialogue in a non-evaluative setting, such as a PLC, had actually

been the norm for nearly three years. Therefore, despite the aforementioned limitations, the

findings from this study site have the potential to be the springboard to change for a non-

responsive institution as the district it is located in, contribute to our understanding of how

teachers make educational decisions on a daily basis while operating within performance and

rewards cultures, and to help us identify the ways in which administrators can better support

teachers not just during formal observations, but within their daily work.

Conclusion

During this PAR study, I attempted to analyze and comprehend the everyday decisions of

educators teaching and leading within systems of heightened accountability and rewards culture.

My study involved seven members of the school where I previously served as principal, along

with myself and the school's principal, who had previously served as vice principal. All

participants were members of the teaching staff who had previously participated in and/or led

PLC sessions similar to the sessions that served as the basis for my data collection. These

participants chose to participate in order to engage in an authentic conversation about our current

conditions. Participants relished the opportunity to describe the efforts of evaluators, whom they

perceived to embrace top-down management styles that reinforced efforts to recreate us into

educational clerks. To boot, they also chose to participate in this study because of the mutually

empowering relationship that we developed during my time as the school's principal.

Overall, the data points to the idea that educators are being pushed and pulled into

becoming educational clerks (Raider-Roth, 2017) by the policies and tools established and

implemented by neoliberal decision-makers. This push and pull, in turn, affected our overall

psyche and decision-making, led us to resist in the best ways we could, and caused much

collateral damage—particularly to the relationships between educators and evaluators, and to the

well-being of our students. Simply put, educators and the profession are being eroded by systems currently in place. The insight I gained from my fellow study participants and my own introspection offers a fascinating look into the decision-making processes of human beings, who are facing an all-out attack on their profession while trying to: do their jobs well, ensure their own professional and financial security, and do right by the students for whom they are responsible.

In closing, this study had a major impact on me. Going into the investigation, I was naive in thinking that teachers working in the school where I previously served as principal knew my own plight while operating in this system of heightened accountability and rewards culture. As a participant-researcher it was exciting (and upsetting at times) to share my stories as both the evaluator and evaluated. It was also invigorating to know that fellow study participants, after I shared my experiences as an evaluatee with them, now observed that their evaluators faced similar struggles. Moreover, it was illuminating to talk out at length the plight of the negatively perceived evaluators described in the study, as well as the complexity of our own educational decision-making. In addition, I am proud—and upset—that my prior angle and opinion of the effects of systems of heightened accountability, surveillance culture, and rewards culture were supported by my research. I also am honored that my fellow study participants valued my work as their school principal enough to give up a Friday afternoon prep period (after I was no longer their direct evaluator) to meet with me over the course of four months for this study. Lastly, and most important, I look fondly upon my efforts to break down traditional power structures and empower fellow study participants to speak their minds about the current system of performance and rewards cultures—in the hope of curtailing our seemingly inevitable transformation into

educational clerks and complete erosion of our profession. If we do not fight for ourselves and

push back against systems that we know are meant to forever change the profession, who will?

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