THE PHENOMOLOGY AND DYNAMICS OF A SCHOOL THAT WORKS
TOWARD CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP
IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SETTING

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by
Candice Nicole Zulueta Bersola

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iii
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Abstract

of

THE PHENOMENOLOGY AND DYNAMICS OF A SCHOOL THAT WORKS TOWARD CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SETTING

by

Candice Nicole Zulueta Bersola

Statement of Problem - Due to the passage of the NCLB act, the phenomenology of the policy has caused teachers' instructional practices and educational values to change within the past ten years. As a result, the culture of a classroom and school has also changed. Teaching skills to prepare students for college and life has reverted into teaching skills to yield the best results on standardized tests. In addition, teachers are mandated to focus on those subjects emphasized and tested on the NCLB Act: English Language Arts and Mathematics. Teachers can no longer teach the knowledge, skills, and habits necessary to compete in college and life: Science, history, the performing arts, and etiquette. Therefore, there is a need for teachers to use culturally congruent, instructional pedagogy and curriculum to close the achievement gap among diverse, cultural, and ethnic populations.

Objective - The purpose of this study is to understand how the implementation of the NCLB Act can be altered to best suit the needs of students. Through the lens of
elementary teachers, (K-6th grade) current teaching practices and methods will be addressed. In addition, a reverse approach will be taken to identify those decisions that most affected teachers and their practices.

The views of current and retired teachers will help to understand the history of the NCLB Act prior to and during its enactment. There are three sets of primary participants in this study: 1) Teachers prior to the NCLB Act who have taught for at least ten years; 2) teachers who have taught five years prior to the NCLB Act and five years after its passage; and 3) teachers who have taught only after the NCLB Act was passed. The participants of the study were selected in order to present different views of the current situation. It is important to understand the effects that an educational policy can have on an individual teacher; they are the ones who are mandated to implement the policies.

Conclusions Reached – As a result of conducting this research and reflecting upon the content of the interviews, I have come to the point of realization that not only is change necessary, but it will happen when the teacher or researchers maintain the focus and develop a critical pedagogy that is contradictory to the existing dominant paradigm. The dominant paradigm is based on the theory and practice that results in teachers accepting the utilization of the NCLB Act as a criteria to evaluate academic achievement.
On the other hand, if they are focused on the utilization of a pedagogy described by Nieto and other researchers in Multicultural Education, then academic achievement can be accomplished. Not only can the educational process be changed, but ultimately the society as well.

Forrest Davis, Ph.D.

Date 5/21/15

_, Committee Chair
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the teachers, support staff, and administrators at Bransford Elementary School, Sullivan Middle School, and Armijo High School. Thank you for providing the framework and expectation for the way that teachers should teach and students should learn. To Mrs. Kay Ritchey who inspired me in third grade, and shared two hours of her life, to inspire me once more to write about my career as a teacher. Mrs. Ritchey inspired me to continue to instill high expectations for my students and myself.

This dedication is also to my family role models: my great grand-father, Apolinario Apilado, who provided the foundation and seed to our calling – education. To my grandmother, Gertrude Apilado-Bersola, who made a huge sacrifice of her own educational dreams to allow for her children to pursue their dreams in a new country. To my two aunties, Teejay Bersola-Isaguirre and Irene Bersola-Ngyuen, who have showed me how to be strong independent women, educators, mothers, daughters, and an auntie. Thank you for being there to provide advice and unconditional support.

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This thesis would not have been possible without the daily support of my immediate family members. Thank you to my fiancé, Christopher Vallejos, who
provides me with companionship, who supports my personal aspirations, and pushes me to become the best woman that I can be. In addition, thank you for being my best friend, my one and only love, and my drive to pursue a better life for us and our future.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication ........................................................................................................... viii
Acknowledgements .......................................................................................... x

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................... 1
   Statement of the Problem ........................................................................... 8
   Purpose of the Study ............................................................................... 9
   Delimitations of the Study ....................................................................... 11
   Definition of Terms .............................................................................. 12
   Organization of the Thesis ...................................................................... 21

2. LITERATURE REVIEW ................................................................................ 22
   Bankruptcy and the NCLB Act ................................................................ 28
   The Voices of Elementary Teachers and the NCLB Act ......................... 31
   Media Representation of Teachers and the NCLB Act ............................ 34

3. METHODOLOGY .......................................................................................... 38
   Statement of the Problem ....................................................................... 38
   Research Design and Population Sample ............................................. 38
   Context .................................................................................................. 40
   Collection and Transcription of Data ..................................................... 41

4. RESULTS .................................................................................................... 42
   Interview One with a Post-NCLB Teacher ............................................. 42
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The origins of this study derive from the researcher teaching for six years, two years in a distinguished charter school and four years in a public school. It was during the first five months of teaching in public school, that she realized that the schools were not the same. However, the researcher wanted to understand the reasons why and how the school district and its most distinguished state schools have deteriorated within the past ten years. A recent encounter with her third grade teacher, Mrs. R., became the reason for this particular study. During the encounter, the researcher began to unravel some of the answers to reasons why teachers and students have a different attitude towards the educational institution.

Most recently, the researcher has discovered the dynamics of various school districts and how they affect the population of children that they serve. This study will also highlight the limited role of students, teachers, family, and community advocates. One of the key components of this community to be studied will be poverty, which affects the role of students, families, the community, and teachers.

One of the most significant and drastic changes that have occurred within this school district community is that of socio-economic status. Currently, this particular community has undergone changes in poverty. According to the Safety Net Summit in 2011, there are 15% of children under the age of 18 and 21% of children age 0-5 living in poverty in the selected county. In total, approximately 36% of the population who have children live in poverty within this community. Although this statistic may be startling, it
must also be mentioned that some children and their families may not have access to documented information, according to the survey measures used by this particular county.

Payne (2003) stated that there are twelve key points for understanding poverty and economic diversity. These key points are important to this study because it provides a background of the community for these students and a key, contributing factor that affects their learning. Effective teachers gain knowledge of their students’ socio-economic issues to meet their basic needs, i.e. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs: food, shelter, etc. (1943). The following key points are directly derived from Payne’s (2003) study entitled Working with Students from Poverty: 1) poverty is relative; 2) poverty occurs in all races; and 3) generational and situational poverty are different.

Payne’s (2003) study assisted the researcher to understand the third key point addressed above: Generational and situational poverty. The researcher is concerned that the population that she serves as a teacher is undergoing generational poverty, as opposed to the type of poverty she experienced as a student: situational poverty. These two terms will be discussed more in depth in further chapters. The first two types of poverties (relative poverty and poverty that occurs in all races) are different in the sense that one occurs throughout two generations of families; the latter, situational poverty occurs based on events that have occurred recently within a family, causing experienced hardship.

The community of the researcher, both as a student and now a teaching professional, has evolved from serving students of situational poverty to serving a significant amount of students of generational poverty. This is an important aspect to
address in education. Effective teachers need different educational tools to teach students of both types of poverty and also to help them navigate through a middle-class institutional school system.

Not only do effective teachers need tools to help their students, but also the parents and community familial members. As a student in this community and product of the educational system, the researcher was able to thrive and become a successful teacher. Now as a teacher within this community, finding answers to closing the achievement gap is one of the researcher’s primary goals of this particular study.

In an effort to become an educational advocate, the researcher has realized not only how poverty affects the vocabulary of a child, but also how poverty also affects the vocabulary of a parent. Through my experience as a teacher sitting in school board meetings, it became apparent how difficult it is to understand the academic vocabulary used within a political arena. It is even more difficult for a parent experiencing poverty to understand the language used within the political, educational arena.

One of the events that became pivotal within the last four years in this particular district was the closing of schools that served a predominantly lower socioeconomic portion of the community. When important decisions were made at the board meetings, the board members listened to the concerns of parents and community members that could articulate their academic concerns through the language of a different class, not those of poverty. Those parents and children of poverty had a limited voice because they had a limited vocabulary bank to express their concerns. The school board decided to close schools located within the lower socioeconomic areas of the community as opposed
to the areas of a higher economic status. Poverty has drastically changed the community and its schools as well as the teachers that serve these students. Poverty has affected the researcher, not only directly as a member of the community, but indirectly as a teacher, and an advocate for those who do not have a voice in the decision making process. Thus, as a teacher, the researcher will take action to identify the most effective strategies needed to create a positive and educational change within the community.

For example, two schools (one elementary school and one middle school) that the researcher attended in this community have closed down. Although the researcher is not affected as a student, the researcher has seen the effects of the decisions made within the neighborhood and community. As an educator and advocate for social justice, the researcher has realized how students and their families, especially those of low-socioeconomic status and limited education, have been placed at the bottom of a priority list and disproportionately displaced. As a result, the schools that previously closed within the district have also been schools located within primarily low-income, low-socioeconomic status neighborhood communities. The question should be asked: Who did these educational decisions of closing schools benefit and who did not?

The voice of the researcher will be pertinent to this particular study because the perspective, from a student within a district, to a teacher within a district will be conveyed. One of the most important revelations that the researcher has come across is the communication gap between the school district and the population that it serves. The use of academic language in the educational political arena has caused a gap in relating important and vital information to the families and students that they serve. The majority
of the population that this particular district serves is not equipped with the knowledge and tools to advocate for their children. Those who are college-educated and have the ability to understand, comprehend, and reciprocate academic language within important meetings have been heard and those who cannot, have been put into isolation. The result is a school district that is serving one part of its population at the expense and detriment of a dominant other.

It is important to understand that the dynamics of this particular district are not only occurring within that community, but other districts locally and nationally. However, the researcher is particularly interested in the effects of this community; this is the same community where she received her K-12 academic instruction and now teaches. In this study, ten major themes will be addressed in order to propose solutions to the problem of the inadequacies and shortcomings of ineffective schools. These themes were listed and described in detail in Nieto’s (1992) *Affirming Diversity*, which represented theoretical perspectives, research methodology, and a format for collecting data based on the case study method of documentation.

The researcher began to understand that the dramatic effects of a current educational policy, the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) has been the source of failure in our schools. Mrs. K. helped the researcher to realize that the problem is worsening as she addressed issues such as teacher expectations, teaching practices, standardized testing, school culture, lack of accountability amongst all adults involved, and a lack of enriched curriculum. In the end, the encounter with Mrs. K, led the researcher to use action research. In an attempt and as a response to the issues at
hand, the NCLB Act will be analyzed. The analysis of this act will help to reveal its pitfalls and shortcomings in education within the past ten years. The research will provide the plan of action in order to mend the damages that have taken place.

Over ten years ago, a law was passed nationwide in order to ensure that all students in the United States would be proficient in Mathematics and English Language Arts. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education) was originally proposed by President George W. Bush.

“The NCLB Act supports standards-based education reform which is based on the premise that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve individual outcomes in education. The Act requires states to develop assessments in basic skills to be given to all students in certain grades, if those states are to receive federal funding for schools. The Act does not assert a national achievement standard; standards are set by each individual state” (National Education Association, 2001).

The NCLB Act is a topic that has been discussed at all levels of education in the United States. The media has been the main venue through which educational policies have been exposed. A documentary from 2010, entitled Waiting for Superman depicted how charter schools in the United States are making advancements towards ensuring that all students are meeting high expectations. The documentary also depicts the struggles that many progressive educators experience. In the end, the NCLB Act has not proven to be successful to anyone, whether it is teachers or students.
Addressing the NCLB Act is important, as students are failing according to the new standards set by the very same act. An issue of an achievement gap between marginalized groups of people (such as African-Americans and Whites) has still progressed further and further apart (Bass & Gersti-Pepin, 2010). This impetus of this Act was to close the achievement gap and ensure an equitable education. However, the results remain ineffective.

Perhaps the issue at hand is the way that the act is being implemented. The NCLB Act is based on results of standardized tests that each state administers every year. The exams vary, but the content is consistently based on individual state’s expectations of what students should know in Mathematics and English Language Arts. As a result of our educational system consisting of various expectations and policies, the results of these tests can also reveal limited perspectives.

Therefore, society may have high hopes of achieving success in education, but teachers are the individuals who can see the dramatic effects on a daily basis. The NCLB Act has caused an educational frenzy, whereby educators have created dialogue amongst themselves on how to achieve the purpose of this particular act. The views of teachers will be highlighted in an attempt to address how the NCLB Act has affected students, schools, districts, and communities.

In addition, the issue of Multicultural Education will be addressed in regards to how this type of education lends itself to closing the achievement gap. Banks (1998) states the following regarding Multicultural Education:
Multicultural Education is at least three things: an idea or concept, an educational reform movement, and a process. Multicultural education incorporates the idea that all students – regardless of their gender and social class and their ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics – should have an equal opportunity to learn in school (p. 54).

According to Banks’ 1998 idea of Multicultural Education, every child should have equal opportunities to learn. However, the current statistics of the achievement gap which correlate directly to the NCLB achievement tests do not prove this. The researcher’s particular study will examine the legislation’s history, its effects upon students and teachers, and provide solutions to closing the achievement gap amongst diverse populations in the United States.

**Statement of the Problem:**

Due to the passage of the NCLB act, the phenomenology of the policy has caused teachers’ instructional practices and educational values to change within the past ten years. As a result, the culture of a classroom and school has also changed. Teaching skills to prepare students for college and life has reverted into teaching skills to yield the best results on standardized tests. In addition, teachers are mandated to focus on those subjects emphasized and tested on the NCLB Act: English Language Arts and Mathematics. Teachers can no longer teach the knowledge, skills, and habits necessary to compete in college and life: Science, History, the Performing Arts, and etiquette. Therefore, there is a need for teachers to use culturally congruent, instructional pedagogy,
and curriculum to close the achievement gap among diverse, cultural, and ethnic populations.

**Key Objective:**

The objective of this particular study is to conduct research on effective teaching pedagogy in the classroom, through pre-and-post NCLB teacher interviews, in order to identify the efficacious dimensions of their teaching strategies that result in positive learning outcomes.

**Purpose of the Study:**

The purpose of this study is to understand how the implementation of the NCLB Act can be altered to best suit the needs of students. Through the lens of elementary teachers, (K-6th grade) current teaching practices and methods will be addressed. In addition, a reverse approach will be taken to identify those decisions that most affected teachers and their practices.

The views of current and retired teachers will help to understand the history of the NCLB Act prior to and during its enactment. There are three sets of primary participants in this study: 1) Teachers prior to the NCLB Act who have taught for at least ten years; 2) teachers who have taught five years prior to the NCLB Act and five years after its passage; and 3) teachers who have taught only after the NCLB Act was passed. The participants of the study were selected in order to present different views of the current situation. It is important to understand the effects that an educational policy can have on an individual teacher; they are the ones who are mandated to implement the policies.
Their perspectives of the NCLB Act were extracted from interviews and their observations. Through qualitative research, the findings of this study will intend to find a medium through which teachers, policy makers, and students can be successful. This particular study will focus on teachers and their concerns towards how the profession has changed, improved, or deteriorated as a result of the NCLB Act. In addition, there will be many underlying themes covered including accountability, school choice, qualifications for teaching credential programs, and test scores.

Through interviews and observations, five questions will be addressed to provide possible explanations as to why the NCLB Act has not met its goal of proficiency for students in the United States. The following questions were constructed based on information found in research-based studies by researchers studying the same topic: the NCLB Act. These are the questions that were written to understand the NCLB Act effects:

1) How has the NCLB Act affected teacher practice in the classroom?

2) What types of mandated curriculum and instructional practices have been forced upon teachers in the educational field?

3) What knowledge and skills have been lost due to the enactment of the NCLB Act?

4) How has the NCLB Act created a divide amongst teachers in the elementary teaching field?

5) If the premises of the NCLB Act can be agreed upon as positive by teachers, what needs to be done to improve the implementation of the act?
Delimitations of the Study

A primary limitation of the study is the small sample size. On the other hand, the researcher used the longitudinal approach based on in-depth teacher interviews conducted, consisting primarily of qualitative data. The advantages of this method and data collection is that the researcher will be able to identify solutions based on the content derived from the interviews of teachers whose experience spans over a period of twenty years. Despite using the qualitative research approach, there are many limitations to this study. For example, the views of school district officials, administrators, parents and guardians, and students will not be directly addressed. With this being said, many of the active participants who are affected by the NCLB Act will not be interviewed.

While it is important to hear from those parties of individuals who are involved in education as well, teachers are those individuals who are responsible for the students and their performances on a daily basis. They are also the people who are held accountable for ensuring that they and their students are following mandated curriculum in the standardized –tested subjects. From my perspective, teachers feel the most pressure to yield the best results at the end of their school year.

Another delimitation of this study is that the findings may not be reflective of teachers serving higher socioeconomic populations. These teachers almost always have students that perform at or above grade level. These statistical results are usually the outliers, especially in this particular study. This dynamic is ignored when addressing issues on how to close the achievement gap in the United States.
Definition of Terms:

NCLB Act –

According to the U.S. Department of Education, the NCLB Act is an act passed by the 107th Congress that was supposed to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind (National Education Association, 2001). One of the main provisions of the act requires that "all government-run schools receiving federal funding to administer a state-wide standardized test annually to all students. This means that all students take the same test under the same conditions. The students' scores determine whether the school has taught the students "well."

Achievement Gap –

The term "achievement gap" is often defined as the differences between the test scores of minority and/or low-income students and the test scores of their White and Asian peers. Achievement gaps in test scores affect many different groups. Differences between the scores of students with different backgrounds (ethnic, racial, gender, disability, and income) are evident on large-scale standardized tests. Test score gaps often lead to longer-term gaps, including high school and college completion and the kinds of jobs students secure as adults. (National Education Association, 2001)

Student Groups Experiencing Achievement Gaps

- Racial and ethnic minorities
- English Language Learners
- Students with disabilities
- Boy/Girls
• Students from low-income families

*Indicators of Achievement Gaps*

• Performance on tests (statewide tests, SATs, etc.)

• Access to key opportunities (advanced mathematics, physics, higher education, etc.)

• Attainments (high school diploma, college degree, employment)

**Teacher Evaluation -**

NEA (National Education Association, 2001) believes that our students and teachers deserve high quality evaluation systems that provide the tools teachers need to continuously tailor instruction, enhance practice and advance student learning. Such systems must provide regular, comprehensive, meaningful and fair evaluations and be developed and implemented with teachers and their representatives, either through collective bargaining where available, or in partnership with the organization representing teachers at the state and local level. (National Education Association, 2001)

**Teacher Accountability –**

NEA (National Education Association) believes that teachers are accountable for high quality instruction that advances student learning. High quality teacher accountability systems, developed and implemented with teachers and their representatives either through collective bargaining where available, on in partnership with the organization representing teachers at the state and local level, should be based on principles. (National Education Association, 2001)

**School Culture –**
The term school culture generally refers to the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions, but the term also encompasses more concrete issues such as the physical and emotional safety of students, the orderliness of classrooms and public spaces, or the degree to which a school embraces and celebrates racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural diversity (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013).

Schools have evolved because of the ten themes that will be addressed in this study (Nieto, 1992): 1) tracking; 2) retention; 3) standardized testing; 4) curriculum; 5) pedagogy; 6) physical structure; 7) disciplinary policies; 8) limited role of students; 9) limited role of teachers; 10) and the limited role of family and community involvement.

**Tracking -**

The first of these themes is tracking which is “the placement of students into groups that are perceived to be of similar ability (homogeneous groups), within classes (e.g., reading groups in self-contained classes), or by subject areas (e.g., a low-level math group in seventh grade), or by specific programs of study at the high school level (e.g., academic or vocational)” (Nieto, 1992, p.93).

**Retention -**

The second theme is retention, “the practice of holding students back a grade, is another common practice in schools. Like tracking, retention is intertwined with other politics and practices that exacerbate inequality” (Nieto, 1992, p. 96).

**Standardized Testing -**
The third theme connected strongly to the NCLB Act is that of standardized testing. According to Nieto (1992), they are “intelligence tests that have frequently been used as a basis for segregating and sorting students, principally those whose cultures and languages differ from the mainstream” (p. 97).

**Curriculum -**

The fourth theme is curriculum, “the organized environment for learning” (Nieto, 1992, p. 102). Curriculum is representative of what society perceives as important for society to know. It often represents what the dominant culture deems substantive. In addition, curriculum is often constructed and demanded, to be implemented, by people who are indirectly involved in education.

These first four themes are all school-wide policies that can be developed and modified throughout the school year to fit the best needs of the students. The question is: are they changed? Do they adapt to benefit the children?

**Critical Pedagogy –**

Draws upon experiences of students through their cultural, linguistic, familial, academic, artistic, and other forms of knowledge. It also takes students beyond their own experiences and enables them to understand perspectives with which they disagree as well as to think critically about multiple viewpoints, leading to praxis, or reflection combined with action (Friere, 1970).

**Physical Structure –**

The physical structure of schools also gets in the way of educational equity. The lack of relevant and culturally appropriate pictures, posters, and other instructional
materials, as well as the lifeless and institutional colors of green and gray on the walls, and we are left with environments that are scarcely inviting centers of learning. The physical environment of schools can reflect the expectations that educators have of the capabilities of students (Nieto, 1992).

**Disciplinary Policies –**

Disciplinary policies, especially, in middle and secondary schools, may be at odds with the developmental level of students and, as a result, can aggravate the sense of alienation felt by some students. Research that supports this hypothesis is compelling. Poor students and students of color are also more likely to be suspended and to be victims of corporal punishment. This inequity is frequently related to poor communication among administrators, teachers, and students. Discipline can be an issue even among more economically privileged students who are culturally different from the mainstream. A lack of awareness of cultural and social factors on the part of teachers and schools can lead to misinterpretations and faulty conclusions. All students who differ from the cultural mainstream are jeopardized (Nieto, 1992).

**Limited Role of Students –**

Rather than being designed to prepare students for democratic life, most schools are more like benign dictatorships in which all decisions are made for them, albeit in what schools may perceive to be in students’ best interests. They are more often organized around issues of control than of collaboration and consultation. Students want the following: a) classrooms that were caring communities where they could feel safe and respected; b) active rather than passive learning environments; c) a reliance on teachers
rather than textbooks for learning; d) the ability to work in small groups; and e) an environment where differences were valued rather than feared (Nieto, 1992).

**Limited Role of Teachers –**

Teachers are traditionally discouraged from becoming involved in decision-making processes in the schools. Teachers have become more alienated in the current climate of reform because more decisions about curriculum and instruction are being made by others as accountability is being more and more determined by high-stakes tests and imposed standards. Structural changes to broaden the roles, responsibilities, and status of teachers need to be accompanied by changes in a) the general public’s attitudes about teachers’ professionalism, b) teachers’ beliefs about their own capabilities, and c) the dynamic possibilities for learning that students’ diversity creates (Nieto, 1992).

**Limited Role of Family and Community Involvement –**

Students in schools that maintain frequent contact with their communities outperform students in other schools. These positive effects persist well beyond the short term. Families of linguistically and culturally diverse communities and from working-class neighborhoods frequently have a hard time with the kind of parent involvement expected by the school, such as homework assistance and family excursions. When families become involved, it also means that their language and culture and the expectations they have for their children can become a part of the dialogue, and it is through dialogue that true change can begin to happen (Nieto, 1992).
Multicultural Education –

Refers to any form of education or teaching that incorporates the histories, texts, values, beliefs, and perspectives of people from different cultural backgrounds. Multicultural education is predicated on the principle of educational equity for all students, regardless of culture, and it strives to remove barriers to educational opportunities and success for students from different cultural backgrounds. Multicultural education also assumes that the ways in which students learn and think are deeply influenced by their cultural identity and heritage and that to teach culturally diverse students effectively requires educational approaches that value and recognize their cultural backgrounds. In this way, multicultural education aims to improve the learning and success of all students, particularly students from cultural groups that have been historically underrepresented or that suffer from lower educational achievement and attainment. (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013)

Multicultural Education Reform –

The Contributions Approach: This approach reflects the least amount of involvement in multicultural education approaches. This is incorporated by selecting books and activities that celebrate holidays, heroes, and special events from various cultures (Banks, 1998).

The Additive Approach: In this approach content, concepts, themes, and perspectives are added to the curriculum without changing its basic structure. This involves incorporating literature by and about people from diverse cultures into the
mainstream curriculum without changing the curriculum. However, this approach does not necessarily transform thinking (Banks, 1998).

*The Transformation Approach:* This approach actually changes the structure of the curriculum and encourages students to view concepts, issues, themes, and problems from several ethnic perspectives and points of view. This type of instruction involves critical thinking and involves a consideration of diversity as a basic premise (Banks, 1999).

*The Social Action Approach:* This approach combines the transformation approach with activities to strive for social change. Students are not only instructed to understand and question social issues, but to also do something important about it (Banks, 1998).

**Critical Pedagogy**

Critical pedagogy is a philosophy of education and social movement that combines education with critical theory. First described by Paulo Freire, it has since been developed by Henry Giroux and others as a praxis-oriented “educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action” (Friere, 1970).

**Problem-Posing Education and Banking Education**

The problem-posing educator constantly reforms his reflections in the reflection of the students. The students – no longer docile listeners – are now – critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the
student for their consideration, and reconsiders his earlier considerations as the students express their own. The role of the problem-posing educator is to create, together with the students, the conditions under which knowledge at the level of the doxa is superseded by true knowledge at the level of the logos. Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the submersion of consciousness; the latter strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality (Freire, 1970).

**Assimilation** –

In anthropology and sociology, the process whereby individuals or groups of differing ethnic heritage are absorbed into the dominant culture of a society. The process of assimilating involves taking on the traits of the dominant culture to such a degree that the assimilating group becomes socially indistinguishable from other members of the society (Britannica Encyclopedia, 2010)

**Oppression** –

Examining how the balance of power between the colonizer and the colonized remains relatively stable, Freire admits that the powerless in society can be frightened of freedom. He writes, “Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensible condition for the quest for human completion (p. 47). According to Freire, freedom will be the result of praxis – informed action – when a balance between theory and practice is achieved (Freire, 1970).
Organization of the Thesis

The remainder of this thesis is organized such that research studies of the "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001" will be presented. Academic language within the educational arena will be defined, in order for a student, a parent, an educator, but most importantly, an advocate, to understand the dialogue needed to engage in creating social change and take action. The ten major themes of Sonia Nieto's (1992) *Affirming Diversity*, will serve as an outline by which questions will be posed to teachers in the interviews that took place in this research. Through responses from interviews, teachers will explain in their own words why the achievement gap at the elementary school level, has either widened, or closed as a result of an enacted educational policy. Finally, the researcher will reflect on her own educational experiences, her own teaching experiences, and realize what role she will play within the future of her career as an educator: the oppressor or the oppressed? Ultimately, the researcher will unveil the answer to the phenomenology and dynamics of a school that work toward closing the achievement gap at the elementary school level – she concludes that: reflection, change, and action must first start with her, then dialogue as part of social praxis can occur with others.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research study is inclusive of the examinations of community dynamics and its impact on the educational process. The research is based on Nieto’s (1992), *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education*, which emphasized the need for community involvement as one of the solutions in her analysis. Nieto’s (1992) work is selected as the theoretical background, methodology, and data analysis based on information obtained from case studies. As a result, the researcher utilized the themes introduced by Nieto (1992) as a method of replicating the methodology used in her publication, *Affirming Diversity*, which is the primary resource for this particular study. The contents of Nieto’s research proved to be efficacious in identifying reasons related to academic success and failure among diverse, cultural, and ethnic groups.

The ten themes addressed in the study are as follows: 1) tracking, 2) retention, 3) standardized testing, 4) curriculum, 5) pedagogy, 6) physical structure, 7) disciplinary policies, 8) limited role of students, 9) limited role of teachers, and 10) limited family and community involvement. These themes will be the umbrella in which the researcher will attempt to reveal the problems and propose solutions. The NCLB Act will be one of the political and educational legislations that will drive the research and the purpose of this particular study.

The literature consists of theoretical constructs and research strategies that are categorized in various areas. The first area is the theoretical perspective in multicultural education that is derived from research and publications of various authors. The second
area is methodology based upon a review of literature on methodologies used in previous studies and data analysis. The format for data analysis is based upon the contents of *The influence of No Child Left Behind and The Wyoming Comprehensive Assessment System on curriculum and instruction: Perceptions of Wyoming’s elementary teachers* (James, 2007).

The primary text used as a literary source can be found in Banks’ (1998) *An Introduction to Multicultural Education* book. The contents are comprehensive and contain chapters on the history of the discipline, as well as extensive data analysis from contributions in the publication. Banks emphasized the need for effective teachers to close the achievement gap through their pedagogical practices.

Effective teachers that close the achievement gap should practice the pedagogical practices based on the theories of Banks (1998). One of his theories is based on the “Curriculum of the Mainstream,” stating that the curriculum used within the United States is “Eurocentric and male-centric.” According to Banks (1998), it:

> Reinforces their false sense of superiority, gives them a misleading conception of their relationship with other racial and ethnic groups, and denies them the opportunity to benefit from the knowledge, perspectives, and frames of reference that can be gained from studying and experiencing other cultures and groups” (p. 54).

Effective teachers recognize the cultures and groups of their students, utilizing this knowledge to drive their curricular priorities. Schools that embrace their
multicultural populations through curriculum are able to effectively close the
achievement gap and their students exceed the high expectations set before them.

In addition to curriculum, Banks (1998) also states how Euro-centric curriculum
will also “alienate students who already struggle to survive in a school culture that differs
so greatly from their home cultures” (p. 81). In theory, if a school setting were to adapt
to their students, their students would be more successful. However, if the opposite were
to occur, and no changes were to be made within the institution of schools, then students
will unintentionally fail. As a researcher teaching in the community where she also
attended school, the district has unintentionally failed the students it predominantly
serves: The impoverished and minority by continuing to use curriculum that is Euro-
centric and male-centric in ideology.

Campbell’s (2004) publication Choosing Democracy emphasized the need for
multicultural education in the curriculum and in the instructional pedagogy of teachers.
However, Campbell (2004) identifies the need for the macro-analysis among educators
because it derives from various sources to support his position. The author uses tables
and statistical data and a chronology of political events as part of his macro-analysis from
a national and international perspective.

In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Friere (1970) introduced his concept of
“liberation theology” and applied it to the study of multicultural education. He identified
that dialogue was important and vital as the primary component toward initiating a
multicultural movement. He stated:
While no one liberates himself by his own efforts alone, neither is he liberated by others. Liberation, a human phenomenon, cannot be achieved by semi-humans. Any attempt to treat people as semi-humans only dehumanizes them. It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis (p. 44).

Sadker and Sadker’s (1995) book, *Failing at Fairness*, emphasized the microethnographic approach. Their work was based upon classroom observations conducted over twenty years and their general findings were inclusive of a pedagogical pattern and gender bias that negatively impacted on the learning potentials of girls. The Sadkers identified gender blindness discrimination in their statement:

Girls are systematically denied opportunities in areas where boys are encouraged to excel, often by well-meaning teachers who are unaware that they are transmitting sexist values. Girls are taught to speak quietly, to defer to boys, to avoid math and science, and to value neatness over innovation, appearance over intelligence. In the early grades girls, brimming with intelligence and potential, routinely outperform boys on achievement tests, but by the time they graduate from high school they lag far behind boys - a process of degeneration that continues into adulthood (p. 15).
Ladson-Billings' (2004) *New Directions in Multicultural Education* focused on an analysis of race. She oriented her study on the power dynamics related to race and generated the term "critical race theory." A critical analysis of race based on a history of social movements of members of various subordinate and ethnic populations, the author emphasizes the need for content from these diverse perspectives in order to move these populations towards an ideology of social transformation. This objective can be accomplished in the educational process by infusing information into the curriculum in order to counteract the domination of the mainstream and through a teaching pedagogy of marginalizing knowledge.

Upon entering the teaching field, the researcher was unaware of the names of the issues that were occurring in education. For example, the researcher could not name the types of oppression that was occurring on a daily basis in the classroom, within the school, the community, and within the educational institution itself. In Bass and Gerstip-Pepin’s (2010) article, *Declaring Bankruptcy on Educational Inequity*, they outline the very issues that are negatively impacting on the educational processes in society.

Kozol (1991) conducted research on the academic performance of minority and middle class white students and attributed academic failure to inadequate and underfunded schools. He identified these failures as the cause of the achievement gap. The researcher advocates for social integration as a remedy for the social disposition in the educational institution.

Social integration is needed because a current tracking system is being utilized in today’s educational system. Jeanie Oakes (1995) conducted research on tracking as a
cause of underachievement among ethnic minorities because teachers maintain negative perceptions of students based on criteria that is not related to their learning abilities. This pedagogy negatively impacts the self-esteem of the students and their learning abilities.

Not only does a teaching pedagogy affect a student’s learning, but poverty is an issue that affects a child’s learning as well. According to Ruby Payne’s *Understanding and Working With Student and Adults From Poverty* (2003) study, there is a drastic difference in knowledge based on the exposure to vocabulary. The following are statistics derived from her Ruby Payne’s 2003 study:

Over a three-year period of time, children will hear...in welfare (13 million words), in the working class (26 million words), and in the professional class (45 million words). In addition, a three-year-old in a professional household has more vocabulary than an adult in a welfare household.

Based on earlier statistics stated in this study, there are approximately 36% of children and families living in poverty within this Northern California community. Therefore, 36% of families have good intentions to help their children through their educational lives, but do not have the adequate tools and vocabulary knowledge to help them close their achievement gaps by the time they enter Kindergarten or elementary school or Kindergarten.

As a result, this study seeks to understand how to expose students of poverty to increase academic language and vocabulary to narrow the achievement gap between students and their peers. It becomes more apparent that the school institutions within this
community need to contribute more to helping to close the achievement gap because there are fewer resources for children to seek outside of their educational environments. In numerical perspectives, many of the researcher’s students are in very impoverished families. Many come from single-parent households or belong to families who have a household income below that of the federal government’s definition of poverty (23,050 dollars for a family of four) (Payne, 2003). Another concern is that a family experiencing poverty adds approximately $4,000 more dollars for each additional child. Therefore, there is a limited role that a family can serve for a student, their child, within the institution of education especially if the poverty has occurred through several generations of their families.

Bankruptcy and the NCLB Act

In Banks’ (1998) article, he frames the way the achievement gap is viewed and presents a metaphor of “bankruptcy” as a way to describe the educational debt that American schools have acquired. In addition, they point out the various educational inequities that have occurred as a result of the debt. This article answers some of the researcher’s primary questions of concern: How has the NCLB Act perpetuated the amount of debt that America has acquired? How have the pedagogical practices of teachers either contributed to the debt or lessened the debt based on this act? What do those individuals who were teachers prior to the NCLB Act, think now about the debt that is present? These are the questions that the researcher has because it is a problem that American schools are experiencing so much debt. We have to ask the questions, “How did we get here?” and “Is the debt the same for everyone?”
The article “Declaring Bankruptcy on Educational Inequity”, (Bass & Gersti-Pepsin, 2010) use Ladson-Billings (2004) study to frame the support for their idea of “bankruptcy.” They state that there are four primary disciplinary lenses – history, economics, sociopolitics, and ethics – through which to examine the educational debt. Each of the lenses helps readers to understand how we have come to experience bankruptcy as a nation. For example, through looking through the ethical lens, these authors highlight how there is a huge responsibility and debt owed to children. They, Bass and Gersti-Pepsin summarize how the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act has perpetuated the inequities and debt of children. An example would be how children are forced to be “proficient” according to specific standards, but how there is no support if their results inevitably show “failure.” In addition, these authors emphasize how there is no accountability for the actions being taken, therefore, no accountability for the losses in debt. One of the key arguments made in this article has to deal with how the NCLB Act has focused on the test scores, rather than the long-term effects of standardized testing.

Some of the key theories that are highlighted in this article “Declaring Bankruptcy on Educational Inequity” (2010) are that of “banking education” versus “problem-posing education,” “oppression,” “educational inequities,” and “pedagogy.” Two of the main theorists that the authors focus on are Ladson-Billings (2004) and Schon (1974). For example, the authors use Schon (1974) to show how the conceptualization of building a more complex understanding of all policy issues can lead to the understanding of the problem itself: NCLB Act. This act has become a part of a larger problem of how we view education in the United States.
The article "Declaring Bankruptcy on Educational Inequity" (Bass and Gerst-Pepin, 2010) is designed with a theoretical framework that highlights primarily two theorists. The authors seek to connect their personal experiences to that of the theories. Next, the authors use the "bankruptcy" metaphor as a way to integrate the notion of "debt" and "achievement gap" simultaneously. Finally, the article concludes with suggestions of how schools could be "bailed out" and how society can place a higher value on children rather than standardized tests and their results.

Within this study, there were no apparent subjects or participants; rather the students residing in the United States became the focus of the article. The authors of this article took the results of students after the NCLB Act was passed and examined how these results have contributed and not helped fix the "educational debt." In addition, the authors wrote about their K-12 educational experience and how the NCLB Act has not fixed the problems that already exist.

In the end, the authors concluded that there is an increasing debt because the political society and others are continuing to ignore the poverty in America. In addition, the authors point out how "competition" is a primary factor in the "bankrupt" state of our nation. Bass and Gerst-Pepsin (2010) state the following:

During early years of reform, educators and policy makers saw poverty as a function of low educational attainment. They believed that if students received equality in education, they would be able to rise above the crippling effects of poverty. Then with poverty eliminated, citizens would become more productive and require less governmental support, paving the way for a more progressive
society...education was regarded by prominent philosophers of education such as Dewey (1916) and Du Bois (1935) as an investment opportunity or the start of social capital theory (p. 918).

The NCLB Act was and can be considered a bad investment on behalf of our policy makers and reformers. Bass and Gerst-Pepsin (2010) quoted several key theorists that have successfully contributed to the field of education and this particular study. For example, the authors and theorists explain how there has been and still exists, an apparent oppression through societal structures in place. The achievement gap is seen through a different lens in this article whereby a debt has occurred over the course of almost twelve years since the NCLB Act was enacted. Through data and qualitative research, the authors were able to point out how the achievement gap is not a result of teachers and students, but a result of standardized tests and policy reforms. This in turn, leads to a major problem, the statement of the problem at hand.

The measurement through which we are examining teacher’s instructional practices, student performance, and educational institutions is not holistic, according to the researcher. In fact, the NCLB Act has not paid any benefits to date. In our nation, we have to start all over again. As educators, we have to devise a different plan to attack the educational inequities that plague our society.

**The Voices of Elementary Teachers and the NCLB Act**

The No Child Left Behind Act has been the center of attention for the past decade in Education. In fact, it has been driving the educational system and policies being enacted. Moreover, university educational systems are changing their teaching methods
to adjust to the standardized testing culture. For the past decade, we have seen our schools and the mentality of educators change, not by choice, but by force.

Dever and Carlston (2009) research applies to this study, as it analyzes the lived experiences of K-3 teachers in seven school districts. Their opinions through open-ended surveys are highlighted as the groundwork for reasons why this policy is not achieving its goal. These teachers felt that accountability was important, but they felt a “restricted control over their actions in their own classrooms” (Dever & Carlston, 2009). Teachers are restricted in their creative thinking and are at the will of a document that was essentially supposed to close the “achievement gap.”

Dever and Carlston (2009) article was written to voice the concerns of teachers who teach young children as a cornerstone for why standardized tests have not been successful in their classrooms. The problem in this article is that there are many supporters who see the law, NCLB Act, as an evolutionary change in educational policy. On the other hand, critics state that the law has become an “incursion upon states’ domain where historically they have formed their own school policies” (Dever & Carlston, 2009).

Another central problem that has arisen from NCLB is the fact that teachers have changed. A top-down agenda for education has over taken teachers and thus they have been marginalized. In the book “Pedagogy of the Oppressed,” Friere (1970) accounts for these marginalized groups and how they must find a way to “liberate themselves” through dialogue. This book can be seen as a method through which K-3 teachers are trying to create a discussion board for the restraints in the field of education.
In addition, other topics that are discussed in this article have to deal with how teachers feel an excessive amount of pressure to teach mandated programs to achieve high test scores. Again, the NCLB Act has been seen as a driving force for this “scripted curriculum.” The literature in this article states that the NCLB Act has successfully “led schools to focus on student achievement” (Dever & Carlston, 2009). However, the literature also points out that some of the neediest schools are struggling to meet this state accountability reports and national accountability reports. Dever and Carlston (2009) use the research findings of Valli and Buese (2009) to emphasize the impact of policy implementation upon the roles of elementary teachers.

The methodology and design of the research findings are made through interviews and observations with teachers over a four-year period. They found that teachers supported the “premises of the NCLB, but not the implementation of it” (Dever & Carlston, 2009). Overwhelmingly, the studies and research found stated that there was a negative response from teachers towards the NCLB Act.

Not only did Dever and Carlston (2009) find information through interviews and observations as well as past research, but they also conducted a method entitled “phenomenology,” where researchers attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions for people in particular circumstances. From these findings, teachers felt that all teachers should be held accountable for providing the best learning environments for their students. However, they outlined three themes that were pertinent to the negative connotations of the act: 1) consideration for children; 2) feeling disenfranchised; and 3) focus on tests. Overall, the results could be summarized in one quote from Dever and
Carlston (2009): "High-stakes testing may lead to instructional practice that is not aligned with teachers’ beliefs and practice."

Dever and Carlston provide many theories and ideology behind the reasons why the attitudes and instructional practices of teachers have changed over the past ten years. The article names the oppression that teachers have been facing: marginalization and disenfranchised. Teachers feel they are acting like robots, forced to think as the "implementers of particular policies" (Dever & Carlston, 2009).

Dever and Carlston (2009) article strengths can be seen through the way that the research study was designed: Giving voice to those individuals within the classrooms battling the pressures of a policy. This study could be conducted in many states and school districts' across the nation, and it would probably yield the same results. Teachers will always want to use their creative thinking skills, their vision of molding a child into the best person they can be, and their compassion to be an educator. However, when they are stripped of everything they have worked hard to be, their attitudes will inevitably change.

**Media Representation of Teachers and the NCLB Act**

Goldstein’s (2010) article, *Imaging the Frame: Media Representation of Teachers, Their Unions, NCLB, and Education Reform* focuses on the educational policy of the NCLB Act and how it directly affects teachers and their unions. Within this article, Goldstein argues that the media is portrayed as perpetuating the public perception of education. The topics discussed in this article are appealing because they are evident of what is currently happening in education. Researchers have found that the media is
using information that cannot always be trustworthy to use. Therefore, the article points out how the institution of media can drive the discussion of another prominent socializing institution: school.

One of the problems that are addressed in Goldstein’s (2010) research is the way that teachers are portrayed. Essentially, teachers are being held accountable for the results of their students, especially when they fail. This is where the public opinion can often sway his or her feelings about education – when the media portrays someone as the person to blame.

It is important to consider the connections between the media and those who have the power to shape public opinion...Media outlets are businesses. Because they are subject to owner control, the market, and profit margins, media outlets do more than report the news; they are in the business of producing news” (Goldstein, 2010, p. 548). Teachers are being blamed for a system that is failing them too, and the media is using this information to gather the public’s attention.

Goldstein’s (2010) solution is that teachers and the literature discourse surrounding education need to triumph over the current media visuals. As a whole, society is watching and listening more than reading. The dialogue has been centered more on opinions than valid evidence and factual information.

Within Goldstein’s (2010) study, framing and discourse was used as a method through which the researcher tried to understand the phenomenon between the NCLB Act and how individuals in the educational field are being portrayed. “Framing is a contested process in which people make sense of the information to which they are exposed...the
process of framing, therefore, is deeply personal while still socially and culturally shaped” (Goldstein, 2010, p. 549). This information would prove to a reader how easily it is for an individual to start formulating ideas around education, even if they are not involved in any way. For example, it is hard for parents and guardians to understand the significance of an act such as the NCLB Act when they do not understand all the layers of a situation. This can be viewed using the analogy of a parent who walks into a messy kitchen – they do not know who made the mess, but they will assume the fault of those people who are present at the time.

The participants in this study were educators and they were asked two simple questions posed by Goldstein: 1) What images and discourses are utilized in the media connected to NCLB? and 2) How do the images and discourses surrounding teachers, teaching, and teachers’ unions resonate with the public and motivate them to further support NCLB? These were two important questions that were asked, but with open-ended responses. The results yielded a variety of responses; one included disgust among “bad teachers” that are currently in practice.

When Goldstein examined the portrayal of teachers through media, she also discovered that again, individuals became disgusted with the lack of change that is not occurring within their schools. In some cases, people were angered because their tax dollars are funding their local schools that are not performing. In most cases, individuals were upset because their children’s schools are in need, and no one is helping them.

This article is important because it exemplifies how the media can depict one perspective that parents and guardians, and those outside of the education field, can see.
In many cases, parents and guardians complain about their child’s needs, citing the NCLB Act as a means through which they are supporting their arguments. Although there should be more advocates for a child’s education, the media is “driving the bus.” Parents and guardians do not understand how the NCLB Act has created an oppression state of knowledge for their children. They do not understand how a “top-down agenda and policy” has created an allocation of money to dwindle, classes to vanish, and class size to increase. The NCLB Act has created a divide amongst populations that should be united in one cause: the education of a child.

This article was significant because it analyzed the portrayal of teachers, but would be more effective if the student’s portrayal can be examined (i.e., their success, their failures, drop-out rates, criminal rates, etc.). Within our world of capitalism, efficiency, and business, we are bound to have some form of loss. In the educational field, we can consider the loss to be our students. Each day, our students are losing more and more daily opportunities of creating a better life for themselves. The research would be useful to creating a dialogue around creating a better business for its consumers.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Statement of the Problem

Due to the passage of the NCLB Act, the phenomenology of the policy has caused teacher’s instructional practices and educational values to change within the past ten years. As a result, the culture of a classroom and school has changed as well. For example, teaching skills to prepare students for college and life has changed to teaching skills to yield the best results on standardized tests. In addition, teachers are mandated to focus on those subjects emphasized and tested on the NCLB Act: English Language Arts and Mathematics. With this being said, teachers can no longer teach the knowledge, skills, and habits necessary to compete in college and life: Science, History, the Performing Arts, and most important Etiquette.

Research Design and Population Sample

The researcher replicated the research methodology that was used by Sonia Nieto (1992) in a previous study because it represented a data collection format that was designed to measure the effectiveness of teachers. This study provided quantitative and qualitative data. However, in this study, the researcher will primarily focus on qualitative data based on teacher interviews.

This particular study is primarily qualitative derived from interviews used to identify those improvements that need to be made in education – in particular the implementation of the NCLB Act. Interviews with the following groups of people were conducted: 1) Teachers prior to the NCLB Act who have taught for at least ten years; 2)
Teachers who have taught five years prior to the NCLB Act and five years after its' passage; and 3) Teachers who have taught only after the NCLB Act was passed. Some of the questions surrounding the interviews pertain to how teachers' pedagogical practices have changed over time due to the NCLB Act. In addition, interviews would seek to answer whether or not a “testing culture” and “results oriented society” has either contributed, perpetuated, or decreased the competitive notion of our world.

In addition to interviews, observations from teachers prior to and after the NCLB Act, was enforced. Five overarching questions were asked to yield a variety of responses to the enactment of the NCLB Act:

1) How has the NCLB Act affected teacher practice in the classroom?
2) What types of mandated curriculum and instructional practices have been forced upon teachers in the educational field?
3) What knowledge and skills have been lost due to the enactment of the NCLB Act?
4) How has the NCLB Act created a divide amongst teachers in the elementary teaching field?
5) If the premises of the NCLB Act can be agreed upon as positive by teachers, what needs to be done to improve the implementation of the act?

These open-ended observations allowed for different perspectives and views to be recognized and heard. A teacher-focused research paper was written because a teacher is at the battlefield of everyone. The following is a metaphor that the researcher has
constructed to paint an image of what has occurred in this study and how it should be fixed:

Teachers are like parents who struggle to provide food for their children. This would be the food of knowledge. However, a parent may go to the grocery store and be pressured to only buy those foods that they can afford i.e. teachers can only go to policy makers and receive little change in reforms. In the end, a child is fed the wrong food and in essence, grows up to become an unhealthy human being. For a school situation, a teacher is forced to feed a student with information, only for them to “throw it all up” on a test, and still not be satisfied with the education that they have received.

The NCLB Act has forced teachers to become robots of information givers in a capitalist and efficient-oriented society. No one is saving the children, they are slowly dying of starvation: The food of knowledge.

Context

The context of this study was conducted through local school district teachers and the researcher. The information was obtained from current and retired teachers over a 20-year period. Through formal interviews taking place in both educational settings and non-educational settings, the researcher was able to obtain information that proved to be significant to the study of the NCLB Act. All teachers, their interviews, and observations were in Northern California. Each individual was selected to participate in this study in order to contribute to the understanding of the shortcomings and successes of the NCLB
Act. In this study, all educators were elementary teachers who were fully qualified and credentialed teachers in the state of California.

**Collection and Transcription of Data**

The collection of the data, interviews and teacher observations, were collected over a two-year period. However, there is a variance in responses to the questions asked because some participants of the study are retired teachers. In addition, observations of the study were conducted based on current elementary school teachers.

The following information represents my analysis of the contents of the transcriptions. The most significant findings were based on the responses of all subcategories of teachers: Pre-NCLB Act, Pre-Post NCLB, and Post NCLB. They all indicated that the lack of funding negatively impacted their teaching performance and results of their students’ standardized tests. In addition, many other key factors such as: administrative support, familial support, and support of professional development and district resources were mentioned as key contributors to the closing and widening of the achievement gap.
Chapter 4
RESULTS

Transcription of Interviews –

The interviews were organized in the following matter, starting with questions by the researcher, and followed by the responses of the teachers. Some interviews allowed for all questions to be administered and responses to be given. However, time constraints did not allow for all interviewees’ ample time to respond to all the questions within the study. Therefore, information from the interviews and observations were used to gather support for Sonia Nieto’s research regarding the effective teaching pedagogical practices at the elementary school level: tracking, retention, standardized testing, curriculum, pedagogy, physical structure, disciplinary policies, limited role of students, limited role of teachers, and limited family and community involvement.

Interview One with a Post-NCLB Teacher

Teacher Background

This particular teacher currently works at a newer school that is approximately twelve years old in a predominately lower-income school district. It was a school that was opened with the purpose of expanding to more grade levels, however due to the economic crisis was forced to serve only 4th and 5th grade students. In an effort to redistribute and allocate school funds, this particular school is divided into two separate school sites: one serving K-3 grades and the other 4th and 5th grades. Ironically, the funds are given to the school under “one school code,” or in essence, one school name versus
two separate entities. This teacher currently teaches 4th grade and began teaching in 2006.

**Interview – R: Researcher T: Teacher**

R: Question 1: Why did you enter the profession of teaching?

T: I wanted to make a difference in some of those kids. I wanted to offer what I wasn’t offered when I was a kid.

R: Question 2: What obstacles do you encounter in teaching?

T: I think right now, in terms of money, very selective on how to use our available funds. We have to be very selective. You have to keep in mind, from an economical perspective, that it’s also affecting parents and where they live, and how they eat, and how they get their students ready and that’s some of the demographics that I serve in my district. I would say because of No Child Left Behind, unfortunately, we do not want to teach to the test, but I have to because that’s what they are going to see and if unfortunately parents and the community associate “good teaching” with “good results” then it could be one of the most amazing teachers because maybe your students did really good things or your students did really bad. I have had both experiences before, and I have taught the students the same way. I have done the same type of work, and it has been super amazing where students have been “far below basic to advanced” in one year and I did not even know how it happened, but it happened and it’s possible, so I think that’s an obstacle. I think an obstacle right now is “culture, language, and politics.” In my community, living in a two-way immersion program, has kind of given an indirect message to some parents that your primary language is not important and that you have to do only English and that your students have to transition to that ASAP because we are not doing good.

R: Question 3: What do you believe are the effects of the NCLB Act?

T: Well, in theory, it’s the accountability of schools, but at the cost of many other things like funds, and how things get prioritized and labeled. The effects specifically on me as a teacher is how I need to follow specific curriculum that was adopted to apply, learn, and assess in order for my students to be ready for what’s expected of them.

R: Question 4: What types of pedagogical practices are used in the classroom?

T: Parent Communication...Student-Teacher Goaled setting – where students are guided to self-create goals that they are able to attain and reach, so that they will
go higher. High expectations...Making parents accountable as well and getting them involved as well. Setting Expectations

R: Question 5: What is the culture of your school? Discipline? Curriculum, Etc.?

T: In terms of the curriculum, I think we know what to do and how to do it. Every Wednesday, we have professional development time where we sit down for thirty minutes and then sometimes we have grade level meetings right after that which is very beneficial because as a team because we get to share what works, what doesn’t work and how we can improve such as field curriculum and shared experiences. I am the youngest one on our team, and everyone has a teaching experience of 15 years or more, but I am the baby because I have been teaching for 7 years. So I think that that for me has been very beneficial.

T: In terms of discipline, I think it has been going up and down. With the years, we are encountering new discipline issues such as the technology issue where before they did not have cell phones, now they have cell phones, and bullying through cell phones. We had a change of administration and they made it very explicit to not tolerate any type of “breaking of the rules,” such as no “put downs” and anything that puts a student down.

R: Question 6: What is the role of students, teachers, community, etc.?

T: I don’t think that there is such a thing as a role. I think that there is such a thing as “a role” then it is a role for everyone combined as one because your school doesn’t work by itself. We’re teachers who serve our students. We have to serve their needs and if we know their needs are to be exposed to the community then use what the community offers and we need to offer them that. For example, we knew that we wanted to do more Science, and we knew that the town was next to the creek, so within a few weeks, we are going to take our students to the creek and do a lot of raising native plants in our classroom, observe them. We are going to talk about Earth Science, Life Science, making it “alive” and “being there.”

T: As I think as parents, be as supportive as possible. I know that “supportive” doesn’t mean being physical there, because I know that some parents that cannot make it whatsoever, but I want to give them the chance to participate as much as possible. So I try to have them help on their students’ projects or reports that need to be done. I always have some type of “Parent/Student Contract” where parents in one sentence on the document it says “I will help my child as much as possible” and a date and signature, so if something does not get turned in, then I go back to the parent reminding them that they signed a paper and they might say “oh I did,” then it goes to the student now “did your mom help you?,” “yes”. So now the students can get away from it or lose that responsibility. Talk with
parents as much as possible and inform them in the classroom through the bulletin or something else that you send home once in a while and tell them “this is what we’re doing.” I started doing that this year because I have an extremely forgetful group of students this year, and so I have told them that reading logs, science project, social studies reports are due, today it was due, and three students did not turn it in. Two students were absent and I forgot, so I think that this is the best thing as it happened because I always have 5-10 who always say “oh, I didn’t have time to do it,” and the teacher responds “oh, really, you had a month and you didn’t do it…”

R: (Reference to Question #2) What obstacles do you encounter in teaching?

T: I think right now, we have to be very selective, in terms of money, how we use our available funds. You have to keep in mind also, from an economically perspective, that it’s also affecting parents, where they live, and how they live, and how they get their students ready, at least in reference to the students I serve in my district. I would say because of No Child Left Behind, unfortunately, you do not want to teach to the test, but you kind of have to, because that is what they are going to see. And sometimes, the principals associate good teaching with good results. You could be one of the most amazing teachers, but your students didn’t have a really good day, so they didn’t score very good. So I have had both experiences happen to me before, where I have done so many things, and it didn’t work for any students and where I have done the same type of work and it has been super freakin’ amazing where students have gone from “far below basic” to “advanced” in one year, and I don’t even know how it happened, but it happened and it’s possible. So, I think that’s an obstacle. An obstacle right now is culture, language, and politics at the same time. At least living in my community and having a two-way immersion program, it has given an indirect message to some parents that your primary language is not important, we have to do only English and we have to do that asap because we’re not doing good. Politics in terms of immigration, with the deportation and the scare of “la migra.” Kids joke around, they go “la migra” then they hide because they think it’s funny, but when they take it seriously, they say “no my aunt is all by herself with three kids,” or “we share an apartment because we can’t share rent,” and that it affects their school in some way. So there are many obstacles.

Interview Two with a Pre-NCLB and Post-NCLB Retired Teacher

Teacher Background

This particular teacher is a retired teacher in the district in which the researcher was a student and is now a teacher. The retired teacher taught for thirteen and a half
years in this district. This district is important to this retired teacher because her four sons were students in the district, and prior to her becoming a teacher, she was a very active member in her sons’ schools as the Parent Teacher Organization President. In addition, she too, was a student of this district, her parents were teachers within this district, and now she too was a teacher within the district. Her inspiration to teach came from being active in her sons’ education, and also her love for children. However, her decision to retire at the age of fifty-five was due to the politics involved in education, particularly within this district. Despite this, she taught within a low socioeconomic, diverse elementary school where the majority of the students were on free-and-reduced lunch, and where families were of single-parent households. She is still active within the teaching field, and will often substitute teach at the school in which she taught. With this being said, she does not choose to entertain the daily politics and decisions that directly impact the students, and in many cases, those which she deems as unfair to the low-socioeconomic and diverse cultures within this community.

Interview – R: Researcher T: Teacher

R: Question #2: What educational policies have affected the educational field?

T: I don’t know specific names of policies, but a lot of it has to do with funding and the funding of assistants for afterschool programs and the lack of. For example, in our district, we didn’t have PE, Music, or Art anymore, so there wasn’t a prep time for the elementary school teachers – things like that. Funding special needs programs afterschool interventions, anything like that, I don’t know what the policies may or may not have been called, but it’s all about money and finances that really made it a struggle to get the things that we needed, or the supplies to support making a difference for the kids, because I know that in a lot of districts, people that I know would say, “oh, how about your teacher’s aide…” and I would say “I don’t have a teacher’s aide…” “oh, my teacher’s school has one.” So, our particular district didn’t have the money, so I think it’s a California thing – you just sort of ran out of money for the extra help that we really could
have used. I could do sports and my mom's a music teacher, so I would do stuff like that with them too, but mostly the money and I know that will probably come up in another question.

R: Question #3: How do your students master the content standards?

T: They didn't all master them, unfortunately because they were children left behind. For example, I would have 4 to 5 students with IEPs, who would go to Special Education during the day, then they were not able to, or didn't grasp the standards, those children didn't grasp the content level standards and I was kind of a task master, I put the standard up and I said "this is what were doing" and I would reteach, reteach, and reteach, and send a lot of things home, and I had a lot of communication with the parents. Mastery is like perfect, or like 95%. Reteaching, lots of variety of re-teaching, hands-on, visual, all the different learning styles, I would bring in the class, technology, a smartboard, that was a savior. As soon as we got the smartboards about five years ago, it was nice because it gave the kids a type of hands-on, once they were getting up and answering things on the smartboard, they started paying attention too.

R: Question #4: Describe the organization of your school and the factors that affect it?

T: My school was Kindergarten through Fifth grade, and we probably had, in my years there, in between 800 to about 650 students. When I first started, we had year-round, so we were on tracks, and that was a little harder, but somehow, we had more, we had a lot of teamwork, so we had six teachers at one grade level – we had a lot of kids. We really became really good friends, we spent a lot of time planning together. Now it's only about 2-3 teachers at each grade level because the classes are bigger, that's why and it's laid out where the younger kids are in one area. The grade levels are definitely grouped together, so that you don't have the Kindergartners going to the bathroom with the fifth graders – it's nice like that. We had an Assistant Principal for many years, probably my first 7-8 years before the funding took that away because that helped because the assistant principal did all the discipline. So now the principal is trying to do discipline and run the school, and do the curriculum, and the school plans and everything, so not having an assistant principal has made a big difference. Now, we have someone called "Principal in Charge," so if the principal is not there – that would be the person they would call, but it's a teacher in a classroom, so they would still have to take care of discipline at lunch time, or something because they don't fund a substitute principal anymore – unfortunately.

R: Question #5: What is the role of students, teachers, and family, community, etc.?
T: So the role of the students is, I’ve always told them, “This is your job, you come to school everyday, and your job is to master the standards, that’s your job, if you got paid, if I could pay you a million dollars, this is your job, you need to come to school, just like your parents go to work, this is your work, you come to school, you do your job - you learn your standards and have some fun.” I was always the teacher who wanted to make it fun, so you have to enjoy teaching the standards, and stated to the students, “you have to enjoy your time on the playground, you have to be responsible and respectful.” And the teacher’s job is to teach the standards, make sure the students are learning them, and communicate with everyone involved, including the parents and the community – making sure everyone’s involved and making sure they’re safe and making sure that they feel safe, and their families’ job is to support them, the students and their learning, and to support the teachers, and their intent to teach the students and help them learn because a lot of the problems were families not encouraging homework. One of the issues as a family person, is I made sure my children did their work and brought their completed work and knew they were supposed to learn and attended all the functions. But, a lot of parents don’t see school as their student’s job, they just see it as a place they take them everyday, and they really have no idea of what goes on, and when they come to conferences, they have no idea how committed teachers are, and I’m sure you have learned that (in referring to the researcher), “you will take it so seriously, and as a teacher, we’re so committed to every fiber of our being to make those kids learn, but a lot of parents don’t see that everyday.” They just see that they’re functioning to put food on the table for their family, so they don’t understand how passionate their teachers are about their jobs. So I would just want parents to see that, and there are some families who are passionate about school and are really supportive, but they are a lot that really don’t support enough.

What is the community’s role?

T: I think it’s the community’s role to be involved in and supportive of their schools and I think that for fundraising or even just for promoting the local schools and putting up pictures, or banners...I just think that if the community gets involved and they donate money, or time, or resources to the schools, it just makes it feel good. I think it happens a little bit where we are, but I think when you look at college towns, and they entire town loves every one of their schools and they support all of them, and I just think that this is my one sad story, eye opener...my sister lived in Oregon for thirty years and she came back to one of my son’s high school graduations and we were walking out to the field at ‘A’ and she said, “oh my gosh,” (she went to Armijo) “what happened to this school, why aren’t your community people, painting, relanscaping?” And I said “well nobody does it around here,” and she stated “we see it in Oregon, our schools get everything, every campus is beautiful, every campus is supported by a local business and none of our campuses look like this, it doesn’t matter how old they
are.” And it made me so sad, that was fifteen years ago when she said that and I thought “oh my gosh, you’re right, they need to be involved...why can’t this company come and paint these buildings, why can’t they be more supportive?” We need signs that say “A High School, R High School, and MG School” and I really think that communities make a difference in their schools, they need the funding and the sponsorships and they need all the donations. And they just need to have kids who would love to walk into McDonald’s and see their school pictures on it. And we’ve done this in our little area and all those little places in “S town” and we always send giant posters of those businesses that are supportive and they leave them on the walls forever so that our kids can see them. So it is a community that teaches the kids, they learn a lot about it.

The police is good to have them involved in the community because on-campus officers, or people who do walk-throughs, it’s really important that they come for your safety, and respect for authority, so I really like that we’ve actually had at our school, the fire department, police department, come and do little assemblies, where there’s not a lot of problems. One of our families, one of the dad’s, flies a military helicopter, and they had a security clearance and he was able to land it on our playground. It was the best assembly ever, so the kids got to ask him all the questions and they were so excited about the military and not afraid of him and not they were not afraid to talk about their jobs (the military men) and how they rescued people. I just think that it’s great for safety and security and also the kids knowing who they can trust and that part of the community is good.

R: Question #6: What are the priorities of education at your school?

T: Priorities...teaching the state mandated standards, state or district mandated standards, making sure that everyone is at grade level or proficient, in every area that they’re supposed to be proficient. Well and or, meeting IEP goals because that is, that was a priority also, even though their IEP goals weren’t always aligned and proficient with the standards, for a lot of kids, but education is the priority, that was the reason we had a school, and so, we spent all the time collaborating with our colleagues, and our principal, and even our parents, just trying to see what we could do to make sure that the students were learning. As a teacher, that’s what you’re there for, you just want these kids to learn, you just want them to have a great future. My job as a 5th grade teacher, was to make sure that they had their standards mastered or at least were proficient, so that they could go to the next level because they were off to middle school and that was what I would say to them for the second half of the school year, daily, was that “you need to be ready for middle school...this is what they do in middle school...so you need to be ready...this is your next step.” So mostly in the future, we had the foundation, elementary school is the foundation of everything that they will learn in middle school and high school, so our job is to make sure that they have that foundation down pat, and that they could be successful in middle
school and then high school and college. And we did talk about college, it was a college, the last few years, it was a “College Now” school, and we had that whole “No Excuses University,” we were just either still working toward it. I went to the conference last year and “No Excuses University” and I had the sticker on my wall and it was kind of fun because it gets the students excited and thinking about college, even if some of my students who come from the poorest of families would have a poster that stated “UC Davis” or even if it was their favorite college baseball team, or football team, they had the thought that they could go to college, and that’s what I said to them. “You can go to college, you can go to college...when you get ready for that, I will help you fill out that application and we’ll get you funding and we’ll make sure that you go.” Unfortunately, they all won’t go, but the priority that they are educated, so that they can go to college and be contributors to society.

R: Question #7: What do you believe contributes to the widening or the closing of the achievement gap?

T: I think that the widening of the achievement gap is to the fault of a couple of things: funding. A lot of it is about money for programs that are essential to help, get help for the students, especially class size reduction, I think that’s huge. I just can’t imagine, my best friend teaches Kindergarten and has thirty-two students, and she has one hour of help from the other Kindergarten teachers, so she needs twenty students and help. Funding, and lack of parental support, and sometimes poor leadership at school leads to the widening of the achievement gap as well. Poor leadership and teachers who lose their passion for high expectations, teachers who just don’t have, or don’t believe in the kids enough, I think that makes the achievement gap bigger and bigger. I think a lot of it is in the community, as far as parents not having jobs, not having food on the table. I do believe that I have compassion for parents and families’ whose priority might not be school because they are on survival mode, and they really don’t have motivation to work, they don’t have enough energy to take their kids to school, so all these things can lead to the widening of the achievement gap. Lack of the ability to do testing for Special Ed, or other tests, also affects the achievement gap.

To close the achievement gap, the bottom line is that it’s all about teachers. Teaching and making sure that the students are mastering the standards. I don’t know the real answers to closing the achievement gap. I think that it starts with preschool, and families, communities, and teachers, everyone is working together for the kids. The bottom line is money for everything, and I keep saying this, but there would be smaller gaps if we had smaller classes. There are some students who come to Kindergarten knowing everything, but then there are some students that do not know their full name, instead of saying their full name, they may say a nickname, “well my mom calls me Kiki.” There should be students that come to
Kindergarten knowing how to spell, they should know that by Kindergarten. To really close the achievement gap, we need to start at three and four years old, or having kids go to preschool and/or getting the parents to buy in, so that they can teach the alphabet at home, how to hold a pencil, how to draw with crayons, or how what's important to know. That's the only way we're going to get it, starting at the young ages. I think that closing the achievement gap, really is never going to happen, but it should get smaller.

R: Question #8: What teaching strategies, pedagogical practices, etc. are effective in the classroom, school, district. Etc?

T: In the classroom, working in groups, partners, having peer tutoring, discussions and things like that, and having multiple strategies such as using visuals, books, videos, electronics. I think that we are in an electronic age, where you could really use the smartboard. It's huge to have a smartboard, and the practice of communication with families and the kids, and having my expectations and not settling for sub-par work. I always make my students re-do things, I would re-teach things and re-learn it. As a school, as a community, should have the same expectations for Kindergarten through 6th grade. At our staff meetings, not all teachers were on board as far as what we needed to be teaching. The teachers, the staff, and the school need to be on the same page, as to how we will do this, everyone has to have the same rule and expectations, and this is tough. I think there needs to be continuity and consistency among the grade levels. As far as a school, it's easy to keep the practices the same. However, as a district it's harder because it's harder to do district-wide practices. However, I do hope that with common core, it brings the district together to use the same practices. Even though I didn't like the formative assessments, I did like that it made me think of the specific standards and having them there for me to refer to.

R: Question #9: Why did you decide to enter the field of teaching? Why did you decide to leave?

T: Well, I decided to enter teaching because I love kids and I believe in and I think I was just a natural teacher because I came from a family of teachers because my dad was a teacher, my parents were teachers, and so were my grandparents — and it was sort of natural — I think there's people who try to be teachers, but it doesn't come naturally for them, and I think it was naturally part of my being. I also spent a lot of time at my kids' elementary school, doing PTA, volunteering, and finally I said "I should be paid for being here" so I finally decided to go back to school and I really liked teaching. I decided to leave because I started to feel stressed. I didn't enjoy it as much, I didn't enjoy the pressure and politics, and all the things that were out of my touch, which was a lot. Inside my classroom, and doing my thing, I enjoyed quite a bit. And if they didn't keep changing the programs every five years, like Common Core, I had
five or six things that were an uproar, I had to go to trainings and have different books, if they would just let us teach, and trust that people know what they were doing, but of course you need parameters, but if they would have just left us alone, then I think I would be a better teacher, then I probably would have stayed longer because I think that I did a really good job, and that I was a good teacher, but there were things outside of my control that made me just not want to go to school anymore, it wasn’t the kids, or the colleagues, it’s just too stressful. It was just the stress. I wanted to enjoy my own family, and not be stressed everyday.

R: Question #10: Can teachers identify the weaknesses/strengths of their students through standardized tests?

T: I think for some students, yes, but for many students, no, and this is why, as a parent and a teacher, when I started teaching, I asked my sons what they thought of standardized testing, and both my oldest son and my youngest son said, “oh yea, I answered all the questions” and my two middle sons said that they just bubbled in all the answers because they didn’t want to be there. So, one of my sons receive resource, but was getting A’s in class, but did poorly on the test, and I asked myself how could this be. And there are kids that don’t give a hoot about testing, but as teachers if we can instill the idea that this is an important reflection of what you are doing, then the tests will show me that you have mastered what was taught in 5th grade and show that you are ready for 6th grade, but I just can’t put all my eggs in one basket. I think it’s one of many ways to identify them, but I don’t think it’s the best, I think just knowing your students, and knowing the weekly assessments and observations sometimes are the best assessments, but white boards and everyone holding them up at the same time, is such a great way to knowing who does and doesn’t know. All learners are different, I think it works for some.

Interview Three with a Pre-NCLB and Post-NCLB Teacher

Teacher Background

This particular teacher currently teaches in a low-socioeconomic community within Northern California. She has taught for over twenty years from Kindergarten to graduate students and taught prior to the implementation of the NCLB Act and after its’ implementation. Currently, she is the president of a school board at an urban charter school that is dual immersion for English and Spanish speaking students. In addition, she also teaches literature courses at this elementary school. Moreover, she was a student in
the district where the researcher attended school and is conducting research, but this particular teacher moved to another school district where her parents lived. She has stayed within this school district since, and has taught primarily low-income, but also bilingual students of multicultural diversities.

**Interview – R: Researcher T: Teacher**

R: Question #1: How have your teaching pedagogical practices changed as a result of the NCLB Act?

T: Interesting. I think for me, I’ve become more aware of the standards required for grade levels and I’m sure a huge part of it is because of the change from a norm-referenced test to a standardized test, so I think it’s become helpful in this way. However, it’s become difficult because it’s hard to live in this “program improvement” world where schools are ranked through test scores. But I’m looking towards the Common Core Assessments because I think it’s more indicative of what students are actually learning and it’s less emphasis on looking at schools based on ranking.

R: Question #2: What educational policies have affected the teaching field?

T: So during our time, Proposition 227 was that whole English-only, in 2002, so the English-only world is not healthy or conducive, and probably the CAHSEE, everyone is required to pass something. So there needs to be an assessment for high school. Policies of ELD requirements, so students need specific amount of minutes for English, so it causes teachers to separate students and group them.

R: Question #3: How do you students master the content-level standards?

T: Benchmark testing helps because it gives students an overview of what they need to know, what students need to know and it helps teachers to know what students should know at the beginning of the year. Through benchmark, you find out what students need to learn, and to assess their competence, and also find what they need to know for their content final.

R: Question #4: Describe the organization of your school and the factors that affect it?

T: 90-10 model for immersion. We just have one principal, we have a small school, so the principal has no support, they are running on their own. A major factor is the size of the school, which affects the organization, or the allotted
leadership based on the number of students in a school. It affects students a lot because the principal is running multiple programs with multiple problems that they have to address. Administration is limited. We have a lot of parent involvement, so it helps a lot as far as filling the gaps to support the kids.

R: Question #5: What is the role of students, teachers, family, community, etc.?

T: We have a really strong parent involvement. There was actually a study, where it doesn’t matter whether a school is public or charter, but it is parent involvement that plays a factor in whether a child is successful. I’d have to say that in many ways that is true because without parent involvement, then students are able to experience further learning that is academically aligned. Parents can be supportive in many ways that are also not specific to academic ways, the necessities such as coming to school everyday or being fed, but as far as reading and math skills, parents may not have the background to do this.

R: Question #6: What are the priorities of education at your school?

T: Common core is the top priority for us. Specific to students and what we want them to learn is writing.

R: Question #7: What factors contribute to the widening or closing of the achievement gap?

T: Teacher qualification, teacher knowledge, I think it’s hard for us to teach something that we do not know. I think that I’m a good writer, but I’m not an excellent writer. I think I’m an okay-mathematician, but I’m not an expert. For example, a lack of experience as a teacher will affect me. I can’t expect myself to be good at something if I don’t practice.

R: Question #8: What teaching practices, strategies, pedagogical practices are effective in the classroom, school, district, etc?

T: I think that the curriculum has to be critical thinking and content that reflects the make-up of the class, and it has to be information that they can relate to, relevant curriculum, multicultural global topics should be the topics in the classroom, school, and districts. If you let students use the internet as a research, then kids will answer problems that we didn’t even think were problems. So I really think that students need access to technology. So with Common Core, they said that ideally, students should be writing or typing daily as early as Kindergarten, at least one sentence a day because by third grade they are expected to explain the “why” behind concepts. Critical thinking, technology, and relevant curriculum, and having the patience to write and read, the traditional skills need to be there, and also research on the internet are important for academics.
R: Question #9: Why did you decide to enter the field of teaching? Why did you decide to leave?

T: Because I wanted to change the world. I really believe that I can do this through teaching.

R: Question #10: Can teachers identify the weaknesses/ strengths of their students through standardized tests?

T: Yes, as much as people say that there should not be standardized tests, our CMA kids are so on top of it. Identification is key. We need to identify the test that is best for students and what works for them. And because it's standardized tests, it's based on standards, not the norm, it's not based on the bell curve, so it's a standard based criterion test, so it's either you know it or you don't. As much as teachers don't like it, it's very consistent with your student's work and performance. If students are doing well on classroom assignments, then most likely they will do well on standardized tests. You hardly see a student that does not do well on everyday tasks, then do better on standardized tests. I think that standardized tests show what kids are able to do with basic skills and what kids are not able to do. Everyone should do well on CST's, but with Common Core, students will have to explain themselves and their thinking and be teachers themselves.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of conducting this research and reflecting upon the content of the interviews, I have come to the point of realization that not only is change necessary, but it will happen when the teacher and researchers maintain the focus and develop a critical pedagogy that is contradictory to the existing dominant paradigm. The dominant paradigm is based on the theory and practice that results in teachers accepting the utilization of the NCLB Act as criteria to evaluate academic achievement. On the other hand, if they are focused on the utilization of a pedagogy described by Nieto and other researchers in Multicultural Education, then academic achievement can be accomplished. Not only can the educational process be changed, but ultimately the society as well.

In a study conducted by Linda Darling-Hammond (2010) it is stated that the assessments are currently being changed and implemented differently to meet the needs of the students. She says “If performance-based assessments that are currently being developed point at more challenging learning goals for all students, they may ameliorate some of the current test-induced sources of inequality (Darling-Hammond, 2010). However, this will be actualized only to the extent that teachers are able to teach in the ways beyond what is demanded by these assessments.

Therefore, the instructional strategy should consist of ways that support the development of higher-order thinking and performance skills and in ways that diagnose and build upon individual learners’ strengths and needs. Equalization of educational opportunities can be achieved by improving the pedagogy style and content of teaching.
This is imperative in the instruction delivery process that is designed for low-income and minority students. This situation also applies to the need to change the testing instruments and other technology-based assessments, which teachers and students are currently being subjected to.

One of the major response themes to the interviews conducted was that of the need for “critical thinking.” When teachers were asked about the upcoming change in state standards from California Standards to the “Common Core Standards,” many of them were excited and are anticipating how positive the effects will be of this new change in teaching, learning, and assessing. The participants of this particular study also stated that it would allow students to globally compete with others in their futures because they would be building “critical thinking and analyzing skills” through the new standards and assessments. In addition, the students are expected to “explain an answer” versus using the “process of elimination” on a standardized, multiple-choice test. The writing component of the new types of assessment would allow for students to obtain new knowledge and analyze how this new knowledge could be applied to real-life scenarios.

All in all, teachers were supportive of the NCLB Act and standardized tests used as a tool for teaching and re-teaching standards, along with holding educational professionals accountable for their duties, but came to the consensus that the NCLB Act should not be used for other purposes, especially that of measuring a student’s knowledge or capabilities. Therefore, effective teachers within this study used the data collected from the standardized tests to help students with their areas of weaknesses and build upon
their prior knowledge to be more successful. Effective teachers also used the results of the standardized tests to analyze their own teaching pedagogical practices and how these instructional practices were either yielding positive or negative results for their students. One important thing that all the effective teachers realized is that they needed to change their teaching in order to meet the needs of their students each school year.

In conducting this study, the researcher also realized how the lack of resources affects low-income, minority students. As a teacher, the researcher has had to supplement the core curriculum with various other resources in order for her teaching to be culturally relevant and to practice good teaching habits. With this being said, many effective teachers use their own monetary assets to help students be successful and to help close the achievement gap of those students attending under-resourced and under-funded schools. However, it was found that many of the effective teachers interviewed, were few, among many in an urban school setting.

Linda Darling-Hammond (2010) states it best when she describes the way in which effective teachers are distributed within a school district and what happens as a result of this. She says “Minority and low-income students in urban settings are most likely to find themselves in classrooms staffed by inadequately prepared, inexperienced, and ill-qualified teachers because funding inequities, distributions of local power, and labor market conditions conspire to produce teacher shortages of which they bear the brunt. The data confirm that these difficulties continue to be structural conditions of urban schooling.
In response to the previously cited articulation by Linda Darling-Hammond, I have decided to insert the poem where she used the terminology “What Happens to a Dream Deferred?” that was a poem written by Langston Hughes.

Does it dry up

like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore—

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over—

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

When I reflect upon the city in which I grew up, went to school, and now teach in; it is inevitable that change has occurred – both physically and emotionally. Like a raisin, it has dried up. The elementary school and the middle school are no longer buildings that exist to serve the purpose for which they were built – to educate students; they are now buildings which house alternative purposes of education. With this being said, emotionally I experience a burden as a teacher, knowing that a significant part of my childhood is now non-existent for another child with similar backgrounds such as myself. Thus, where do I move forward as a teacher, knowing that there are more challenges
before me now as an adult, an educator, than a child? In this sense, the achievement gap that existed in my circumstances as a student, has just widened for a student in today's society because of environmental shifts, cultural shifts, and educational shifts that have taken precedence over the most important change of them all – change for the better of the community and it's children.

In reflecting upon this research study, change has affected the achievement gap within this community, but the institution of education has not changed simultaneously to meet the current demands and needs of its' students. Therefore, the students have undergone double the amount of change that I experienced as a student. In addition, the change in the community's violence has in turn, forced the district to build more fences and enclose windows to walls, mimicking an institution which we do not want our students to ultimately end in, but unintentionally go – prison.

As a researcher, I would question how a school and a community reaches this point of end and for what purpose does this new motive serve – the students or the adults? In any case, as a researcher and former student of this community, and now a teacher – the odds of closing the achievement gap has just widened as a result of the "dream deferred" as Langston-Hughes would quote. Loss of opportunity by the closing of significant schools and school programs has created a cultural and educational deficit that students of lower socioeconomic background may or may not be able to regain.

The research conducted from teacher perspectives, lend itself to three primary subgroups taking full responsibility for a child's education: the family, the school, and the community. Alongside these vital social institutions are also key effective
pedagogical practices that need to be implemented on a daily basis to close the achievement gap, all of which are stated by Sonia Nieto. If these educational practices are not utilized within these institutions of learning, then it is inevitable that those students from socioeconomically disadvantaged subgroups will continue to fall behind and be the victims of political and educational reform that serves the oppressor subgroups.

Paulo Friere, a distinguished researcher and social advocate, would then ask me as a teacher now within the community, “whom will you become – the oppressor or the oppressed?” To which I would reply, “As a researcher, educator, and still a product of this community; I am simply undergoing the reflective process, unveiling process, and creating dialogue, which in turn, I hope will create a movement within the community to perpetuate the positive cycle which I have undergone...to become a teacher and empower other children to open their eyes and see the opportunities that await them in this world.” As a researcher, teacher, but most of all student – if I am going to truly epitomize Gandhi’s quote, “Be the change you wish to see in the world” and Friere’s theory of action research, then the change must happen within myself first, then it can happen with others.

**Future Plans for Research**

At this point of the study, additional literature reviews and data (i.e., interviews, surveys, and observations) need to take place. An advisor who can identify terms, such as “oppression”, “phenomenology”, and “educational policies” would be helpful in aiding the future process of this research proposal. This particular study would also benefit
from an advisor who taught prior to the NCLB Act in the elementary field. In addition, an advisor’s insights from a postsecondary teaching field looking into training elementary teachers would be even more prominent and significant to this study. In conclusion, the NCLB Act will be viewed from the teaching profession and how it has changed over a decade. For the researcher, this study is important to understand how the NCLB Act has affected her own state of oppression – the beginning stages of a teacher’s career in the 21st century.
Appendix

Interview Questions

Pre-NCLB Teachers

1. What educational policies existed prior to the NCLB Act that measured if students met the content-level standards at their grade level?

2. Can teachers identify the weaknesses/strengths of their students through standardized tests?

3. How do your students master the content-level standards? How did you master the standards to teach them to your students?

4. Why did you decide to enter the field of teaching? Why did you decide to leave?

5. What types of schools did you teach at? Were there any services provided?

6. Was there any parent support connected to your school?

7. What teaching practices, strategies, pedagogical practices are effective in the classroom, school, district, etc?

8. What factors contribute to the widening or closing of the achievement gap?

9. What were the priorities of education at your school?

10. What was the role of students, teachers, family, and community during your teaching years and how did this affect the achievement gap?

Pre/Post NCLB Teachers

1. How have your teaching pedagogical practices changed as a result of the NCLB Act?

2. What educational policies have affected the teaching field?
3. How do you students master the content-level standards?

4. Describe the organization of your school and the factors that affect it?

5. What is the role of students, teachers, family, community, etc.?

6. What are the priorities of education at your school?

7. What factors contribute to the widening or closing of the achievement gap?

8. What teaching practices, strategies, pedagogical practices are effective in the classroom, school, district, etc.?

9. Why did you decide to enter the field of teaching? Why did you decide to leave?

10. Can teachers identify the weaknesses/strengths of their students through standardized tests?

**NCLB Teachers Only**

1. Why did you enter the profession of teaching?

2. What obstacles do you encounter in teaching?

3. What do you believe are the effects of the NCLB Act?

4. What types of pedagogical practices are used in the classroom?

5. What is the culture of your school? Discipline? Curriculum, Etc.?

6. What is the role of students, teachers, community, etc.?

7. What factors contribute to the widening or closing of the achievement gap?

8. Can you identify the values or vision of your school?

9. How do you master the content standards to teach to your students?

10. How does the leadership of your school or district affect the achievement gap?
References


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