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AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL CASE STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF THE “NO ZERO”  
HOMEWORK POLICY ON TEACHER CULTURE IN TWO CENTRAL FLORIDA MIDDLE  
SCHOOLS

by

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B.A. Oglethorpe University, 1991

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Anthropology  
in the College of Sciences  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

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## **ABSTRACT**

No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top are Federal educational policies that have evoked criticism from teachers and administrators. Both policies extended the federal government's reach into local education by tying federal funds to a school's student growth and teacher effectiveness. With an increasing emphasis on economic mechanisms such as choice and competition, teachers' effectiveness is now determined by standardized and quantifiable measurements. These policies have created a data driven and high stakes accountability culture within each school. Teachers are finding themselves in a new balancing act of recording quantifiable yearly progress for all students while trying to work against environmental factors that are out of their control. The rising trend to utilize a "no zero" homework policy under these new pressures merits investigation into its role within teacher culture and these current tensions.

The recent call for anthropology to re-enter the classroom as a cultural site allows the researcher to provide context to the fluid relationships that often lead to the reproduction of or resistance against dominant ideology. Using the case study method, this ethnography employs the critical theory framework to examine policy impact on teacher culture and gain an understanding for how and why trends such as the "no zero" homework become a part of school policy. By looking at a "school of choice" and a traditional "feeder middle school," this thesis gives context to how the local trends illuminate larger cultural shifts.

To Teachers

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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To the teachers and principals that volunteered their time and willingness to share their experiences I would like to thank you each for your courage, knowledge, and service. I truly believe that teaching our most precious treasures and future leaders is the noblest act that one can aspire to.

To my parents, I thank you for passing on your value of an education and intense curiosity for truth, knowledge, and wisdom that didn't end with a degree or age. Your continuous support and love speak so much to the character of who you are.

Finally, there are not enough ways to say thank you to my husband and children. Your love, sacrifice, laughter, wisdom and high standards have made me want to be a better person and this is that result. I will continue to thank you and be indebted to you always!

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

The impetus for my interest in educational policy has a very personal beginning. The details are probably more fitting for a religious testimony on “divine intervention” rather than in a master’s thesis. However, I believe that a brief explanation is necessary for grasping the context of my aim to understand educational culture.

In the summer of 2005, a 12 year old boy lost his father to an alcohol related death. Shortly after this tragedy I began tutoring him in his fifth grade classroom. He was considered a high risk for failure in school and his current situation could only add to this risk. I had originally met him three years before, and, at that time, he was full of energy and exuded an eagerness to fit in with his fellow students. When I met him this time, life had begun to show its cruel side. This seemed to be the year that the students began to notice life’s trajectory was not an even playing field and that the future may not hold the idealized promise for everyone like it seemed to in their earlier years. My own son was the same age as this boy and so this hit me very hard and my life’s journey took on new meaning. I began working with him in and out of the classroom and came to care deeply about him and his mother. My goal was to keep him in school until he reached the age that he could receive a Certificate of High School Equivalency, commonly known as a GED. I felt as though that promised a little brighter future than dropping out of school without one.<sup>1</sup> As I worked with him that year I began to see the school culture through a different lens. I began to see what I later learned to be ‘cultural capital’. Although I did not have the vocabulary or the definition for cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977) at the time, I

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<sup>1</sup> After failing seventh grade and overcoming other obstacles, he successfully graduated from high school in 2013 with a high school diploma and is now attending his first year at a Community College.

began to see how the hidden or unspoken rules of a school impacted those who did not have it. The informal school culture often made it difficult for those who didn't fit within certain definitions. Parents who did not contribute money or time to school parties or events were frequently viewed as apathetic or unfitting and were often whispered about and shunned by those who benefited from both. In some cases these perceptions may have held some truth, but I wondered whether often times these parents were working two or three jobs to make ends meet, so they had neither the time nor means to volunteer on campus. This trend appeared to trickle down to the students and their relationships with each other. It seemed to intensify in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade and the students who held cultural capital became more confident and bolder, while those who did not began to withdraw.

One such hidden rule was the path to “get the good teachers.” The published rule was that parents could not request teachers, but parents who were frequently on campus knew that they could write a letter asking for a certain teacher for their children. Oftentimes it went so deep that a band of parents could create 50% of the class or more by everyone asking for the same teacher thereby ensuring that their child remained with their friends throughout their entire elementary years and “destined” to get the “best teacher”.<sup>2</sup> And while I was not ready to sacrifice my own privilege for my children to risk getting the “bad” teachers with the “unruly” classrooms, I felt it necessary to look into ways that could even the playing field and help the high risk students, those who lacked cultural capital. I considered tutoring as a way to help change the trajectory for a few students, to help to “change a generation”. I also considered

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<sup>2</sup> This practice ended three years later in response to Race to the Top policies. Under this policy in Florida, a teacher's evaluation became very closely tied to her student's test scores and academic achievements. To make their evaluations more equitable, the administration stopped allowing letters and created more academically diversified classes.

teaching, but I knew that the teachers I interacted with were really good teachers and cared deeply about their students. I could not do any better than they were doing; they just lacked the resources to help children who needed extra attention. It appeared to be more of a systemic problem. How could I help teachers to teach? This chain of observations and study of the educational culture through the eyes of this boy and his family led to my interest in the impact that educational policies had on teachers and schools. It seemed that educational policies created structures that could help or hinder teachers to teach, but no one really discussed their wide reaching effects. Instead, most people I interacted with addressed certain teachers or a single issue that they were personally experiencing problems with; so began this research. I wanted to look at how educational policies affect a teacher's ability to teach all students.

Working with this 12 year old student highlighted how important it is to provide context to a situation when policies are implemented. Looking at policy and the educational culture within the anthropological framework of critical theory, allowed me to view how policy impacts the local within a historical context. I realized that education is impacted by more than just what happens in the classroom. Many educational policies proceed from a single viewpoint. They do not represent the overlap of socio-economic, political, biological, gender, and historical factors. Anthropology allowed me to research the impact of educational policy on teacher culture through these multiple lenses that provide context for how and why teachers respond to these policies.

### Laying the Groundwork

Because the push toward choice and charter schools has driven much of the emphasis on data and high stakes accountability it is necessary to give a brief history of their origin. The emphasis on market mechanisms in education began with the introduction of corporate influence in educational policy (Giroux 2002). One of the entry points has been the rise of charter schools and schools of choice. These programs tout choice and competition as the rallying cry to better the overall education system. When I began my research into them, they had already made the transition from an outlier alternative into institutional policy. They sounded like a great solution to everything that appeared wrong with public schools. They limited their class sizes and were not overly regulated. They had more freedom to be creative with their teaching and students. Their resemblance to private schools without the hefty price tag only added to their appeal. They provided hope to parents who wanted an alternative when they felt that their child was struggling in their home school for whatever reason. They were also reported to be making remarkable strides in learning gains<sup>3</sup>. I began to perceive them as the answer for the boy that I was tutoring, my own children, and any parent seeking a better education for her children. When I began researching charter schools, I discovered that many were financially backed by large hedge fund firms and billionaires. These financial backers often influenced policymakers to create paths toward privatizing public schools citing competition and market forces as the engines to excellence (Lipman 2011). This movement was being quietly implemented away from the

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<sup>3</sup> Public discussions centering on gains included high profile media outlets such Oprah Winfrey's coverage of *Waiting for Superman*, a documentary on four charter schools and MSNBC's "Education Nation".

public spotlight behind closed doors and in private meetings<sup>4</sup>. The discourse was centered on the premise that competition and choice created better schools. They argued that these schools were not constrained by zip codes and that federal and state dollars would follow the student and not the district. This change would create competition between schools for the student's money much in the same way products or businesses compete for customers. The student would not have to be stuck in his neighborhood school. This debate continues today, and although it has gained a strong growing opposition (Lipman 2011; Apple 2010; Boyd 2007), its influence on teacher policy continues today (Koppich 2012). The market based ideology shines a spotlight directly on schools and teachers and emphasizes "effectiveness". Advocates for choice and competition defend it for its ability to weed out the inefficient and lazy teachers through accountability, subsequently raising the standard of education overall.<sup>5</sup> This current debate on teacher accountability became my guiding structure for asking how and why teachers utilize the no zero homework policy within their schools.

### Preparing For Research

#### A Brief Discussion on Educational "Choice"

Today's "choice" rhetoric began with Milton Friedman in the 1950s.<sup>6</sup> His argument was that competition, choice, and free markets would be able to produce better schools for all. However, his ideas never gained traction and were often wrought with legal dead ends. This

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<sup>4</sup> Documents from a "States and Nation Policy Summit" held by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) obtained by *The Nation* revealed model state legislation pushing for the privatization of public schools. Several influential politicians belong to ALEC. See "ALEC Exposed" July 12.2011.

<sup>5</sup> Michelle Rhee, Bill Gates, Eli Broad all publicly advocate for this type of reform.

<sup>6</sup> Milton Friedman was an economics professor out of University of Chicago and is considered the architect for the current neo-liberal economic policies.

trend continued until 1983 when the commissioned report *A Nation at Risk* declared an educational crisis within the United States (Lipman 2011). The report provided a public platform with which to launch the call for school choice again and introduced vouchers as one such vehicle. This time it stuck and it has since given rise to many debates on school reform including vouchers and school choice. This debate corresponded with the rise of neoliberal economic policies that emphasize the individual. Within these policies, government services that once served the collective, such as public education, shift to private industry and become dependent on market forces based on individual choice (Mehta 2013). Under the heading of “school choice” came charter schools, magnet schools, schools of choice, and publicly funded scholarships granted to students to attend private schools. Charter schools and scholarships operate on a model that includes a mix of private governance and public funding. Schools of choice and magnet schools remain publicly funded and operated. They are unique in that they can cap their enrollment and set criteria for admittance such as grade point average, teacher recommendations, and test scores. They often center their schools on a certain theme such as college preparatory or “science and math”. Although vouchers themselves have run into many legal obstacles, the remaining types of school choice reform gained speed. The debate between improving the current traditional public school system and providing improvement through individual choice and competition continues to this day with academic scholarship in support of both sides of the argument. Proponents for choice argue that choice provides opportunity for urban and lower socio-economic populations to choose a better school in much the same way that those with the financial means are able to (Hoxby 2003). However, the literature produced by anthropological and educational scholars finds that many of these arguments overlook the

impact of structural barriers,<sup>7</sup> preventing urban and lower socio-economic populations the opportunity for individual choice (Lipman 2011; Hursh 2007; Bridges 2008 ; Carr 2012).

### Laying the Groundwork for No Zero

Although everyone seems to agree that school reform needs to be addressed, no one can agree on how that is best done. Currently, the most influential voices have their roots in corporate America. The corporate influenced market based reform has called for a large push toward student data intake and performance based output (Carr 2012). Output measurements rely heavily on quantifying a student's performance on standardized tests. Recent educational policy prescribes that a teacher's effectiveness is tied to these measurements.<sup>8</sup> As these data driven policies increase, teachers' voices decrease (Lipman 2011) and, not surprisingly, frustrations grow. Recent public teacher protests in Wisconsin and Chicago against local and state government practices highlight the tension between trending policies and the absence of teachers' voices in these policies.<sup>9</sup> On a smaller, more local level, teachers are finding themselves working everyday in the classroom having to respond to market-based policies while maintaining their identity as teachers.

One new practice that has recently and quietly emerged at the school level is called "no zero". Some schools and teachers have quit giving students a zero score for tests or homework that they have not completed; rather, they are only giving students grades for work that they have

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<sup>7</sup> Many times charter or choice schools do not address hidden costs such as transportation and school lunch that is provided in public schools, leaving those who do not have the time or money to attend charter schools behind in their existing and many times failing school. Also, charter schools can create their school's demographics by putting up student achievement barriers such as standardization scores or grades.

<sup>8</sup> These policies will be discussed further below.

<sup>9</sup> Chicago and Wisconsin Public Schools have recently held highly publicized protests against the city's movement to close public schools and expand charter schools.



actually completed. I began to wonder how this fit into the current educational culture and the teachers' struggles to maintain their identities as teachers. Where anthropologists once looked at the school site as a politicized construct that students continually negotiated through reproduction or resistance (Bourdieu 1990; Bourgois 2003), I wanted to now shift or enlarge this site to include a teacher's negotiated struggle for identity.

### "No Zero" Homework Policy

I was first introduced to the concept of a "no zero" homework policy by a teacher in the community three years ago. He and his colleagues were just starting to implement it at their school. Our children were friends and he was a middle school teacher. At the time I did not think too much about the program, but a year later my daughter came home with a "no zero" homework slip from the middle school she was attending. My interest increased when I learned it was a school wide policy with an infrastructure to support it, but it was not adopted at the district level. Upon further investigation, I discovered that this was a controversial and growing trend both here and in Canada. A teacher had been fired in Canada for not following the no zero policy at his school, prompting a media firestorm (Rodrigues 2012). When I looked for scholarly research, I could not find any literature on it. It appeared to be growing in use, but not in research. I also found that there were as many variations of no zero as there were philosophies behind it. Some schools subscribe to not giving any zeros at all. If a student fails a test or does not turn in his homework the lowest grade that he could get would be in the range of a 30 to 50, thereby mitigating the statistical weight of a zero. Another argument is that students in middle school are at a very precarious state and are naturally susceptible to irresponsibility and

disorganization (Grimes 2000). A school in Germany said that when they looked at why they had such a large dropout rate in the ninth grade they discovered that it was these two qualities that caused a student to fall so far back that they felt that they could not catch up and eventually led them to give up and drop out of school (Dunham 2008). Others argue that homework should not cause a student to fail a class. They should only be graded on work that they have completed, not on work that they have not turned in for a fair assessment (Brookhart 2011). It is this last argument that prompted me to research the use of the no zero homework policy. Now that data was increasingly tied to a teacher's performance evaluation and pay, the ability to define and control data could become a very important tool for the teachers and their schools. Since I did not find any research directed toward teachers and the no zero homework policy, I wanted to look at how it played out in the local and everyday life of a teacher. My research questions were:

- 1) Are the teachers aware of the relationship between the intentional shift toward privatization mechanisms within public education and new definitions of teacher "effectiveness"?
- 2) Could the no zero homework policy act as a tool to keep their students' grades artificially high in order to maintain their own "effectiveness" rating?
- 3) Did their behavior surrounding the no zero homework policy show a tendency to reproduce or resist the dominant ideology, even if it was against their own personal beliefs due to the pressures of high stakes accountability policies?

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Education as a Marketplace

Research points to the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, commissioned under President Ronald Reagan, for implicitly laying the foundation for the current high stakes accountability and data driven culture within education policy. Although there is some debate that surrounds the impetus for and accuracy of the commissioned report, most research (Boyd 2007; Bracey 2008; Carusi 2011; Rossides 2004) agrees that it dramatically shifted the landscape of educational policy and led to current education reform that includes the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) and *Race to the Top* (RTTT) policies. Prior to *A Nation at Risk*, the federal government's foray into local education centered on civil rights issues such as "Brown vs. Board of Education" and the enactment of The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (Hunter 2009). Emphasizing "excellence" and "quality", *A Nation at Risk* shifted the public's focus from civil rights and equity toward "standards," "competition," and "choice," thereby naturalizing neoliberal language and tying our nation's economic struggles to our "failing" educational systems (Boyd 2007; Clark and Astuto 1989; Hursh 2007). By linking a failing educational system to a nation's struggling economy, *A Nation at Risk* created a framework that implied that education is the panacea for the nation's economic ills and legitimized corporate influence on educational policy. Public discussion increasingly revolved around neoliberal ideals and language until "values [become] shaped by economic considerations". (Manteaw 2008:122).

In his research on the discourse used in educational policy since the issuance of *A Nation at Risk*, Tony Carusi (2011) borrows from rhetorical studies and traces the evolution of how these ideals and language gained naturalization in public discussion. While also drawing from

Michel Foucault's work on discourse and hegemony (1969) and building on Ernesto Laclau's discourse theory (1988), Carusi traces how the use of metaphor and synecdoche led to the current organic identification<sup>10</sup> that "public education is a market" (2011:63). He argues that by identifying two objects with one another through metaphor<sup>11</sup> and using synecdoche where a part represents the whole, neoliberal language is able to inject its presence, as it did in *A Nation at Risk*, and persist in educational policy as it has in RTTT to legitimize education's identity with neoliberal ideals. These ideals emphasize economic values such as competition, efficiency, accountability, entrepreneurship, and individual choice.

Shifting the focus of these ideals toward states and schools culminated in the *No Child Left Behind* Act of 2001 (DOE) created under the administration of President George W. Bush. Under NCLB, schools received federal funding based on their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Each state was required to set standard objectives and implement yearly testing to evaluate student proficiency. The largest share of the measurement was derived from student achievements or scores on end-of- year tests and schools were assigned a letter grade ranging from A to F based upon the results. If a school failed to meet its objectives two years in a row, corrective action would be set in motion; if it met or exceeded its objectives, a school would be eligible for financial awards (DOE 2002). If a school received an "F" two years in a row, the students in that school could choose to attend another school in that district rated a C or higher. RTTT greatly expanded accountability and competition and extended it beyond the school to individual teachers. Citing his hometown of Chicago as the "national model" and appointing

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<sup>10</sup> Organic identification is the idea that a particular idea or identity is perceived to be a natural state

<sup>11</sup> Education is a market

Arne Duncan as his Secretary of Education,<sup>12</sup> President Obama legitimized educational market based reform under RTTT. Although scholar Michael Apple (2011) points out some of RTTT's merits, such as lessening punitive measures, he also argues that RTTT maintained an ideological stronghold on "competition, corporate-style accountability procedures, the employment of divisive market mechanisms, the closing of schools, and an uncritical approach to what counts as important curricular knowledge" (Apple 2011:24).

Pauline Lipman's (2011) decade long research in the Chicago public schools provides insight into President Obama's national model and its impact on a teacher's identity at the local level. Building on her previous research, Lipmann (2011) points out that a teacher's identity has evolved as neoliberal policies and discourse has been naturalized and forced upon teachers through top down procedures. These top down-driven policies focused "centralized accountability and education markets [that] have produced deep changes in teacher[s'] work leading to them to transform how we think and what we do as teachers..." (Robertson 2007:3). Lipman also contends that teachers must take on a new emerging identity. The teacher's need to act as an entrepreneur is the result of "increased regulation and surveillance, narrowed curricula, competition through differentiated pay scales and performance-base pay" (Apple 2006; Gewirtz et al. 2009; Hursh 2007). By prioritizing input from business leaders from the boardrooms of powerful corporations over that of teachers in the classroom, teacher identity becomes entangled with the driving notion that the only things worth teaching are those that are measured or easily tested (Lipman 2011). A teacher's view of herself or himself as a professional, empowered by her or his own judgment, creativity, and skills to "create democratic learning environments"

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<sup>12</sup> Arne Duncan's title as the head of the Chicago Public Schools was CEO before joining the Obama administration.

(Hursh 2007:515) in the classroom is eroded and subjugated to “economic productivity” (2007:515).

### Resistance and Reproduction in Educational Anthropology

While policy is produced in the form of texts and discourse, it is the process of negotiating these texts within “opposing parties and interests” where meaning and identity are created (Levinson 2009:779). Recognizing that “schools are still terribly important sites for the production of knowledge and symbolic value”, Levinson (1999:595) has made a call for cultural anthropologists to re-enter into the classroom to understand the “complex set of inter-dependent sociocultural practices” in “situated locales and communities” (Levinson 2009:768). Two theories that have emerged within cultural anthropology and education over the last few decades include the act of resistance or the act of reproduction against dominant forces. Henry Giroux (1983) debates the merits of these theories and introduces a new theory of resistance that isn’t always working against dominant forces. He argues that resistance often occurs within the daily practice of fluid relationships and continuous structuring. Practices such as the no zero homework policy may not necessarily originate as an act against dominant forces. In his critical analysis of reproduction and resistance theories Giroux (1983) argues that reproduction models used in the study of culture and education, based on Karl Marx’s theory “that every social process of production is, at the same time, a process of reproduction...” (1969:531-532), left no space “for moments of self-creation, mediation, and resistance” (Giroux 1983:259). He also declared that theories of resistance were not without flaw. While crediting Bourdieu (1977) for providing a framework within resistance theory that demonstrated the “politicization” (Giroux

1983:270) of school culture, he also pointed out that Bourdieu limits his groups to only those who respond to power; and he offers no explanation for deconstruction of the complex and fluid relationships that happen every day. Giroux argues that knowledge, language, and identity within a culture “are both a structuring and transforming process” (1983:272). Pointing to Foucault’s work on power and the body, he also suggests that domination and resistance are grounded in more than just ideology. There is also a material aspect to it. Domination works on the body physically as well as symbolically, emphasizing the fact that “time is privation, not a possession” (1983:273). As high stakes policies demand more time from the teachers, they often find that time works against them and many times their bodies, due to stress and fatigue. Giroux argues that resistance theorists including Gramsci (1971) and Apple (1982) do not allow for “factors that produce a range of oppositional behaviors” (Giroux 1983:285). In light of these criticisms, Giroux builds on the strengths of these theorists. He argues that “resistance must be situated in a perspective that takes the notion of emancipation as its guiding interest” (1983:290) and understand that the school site is a cultural setting where “antagonistic relations” are continually processing “knowledge, values, and social relations” (1983:270) within dominant and subordinate relations. To examine this interplay the researcher must provide context and history to the culture being studied.

With the burgeoning application of critical methodologies to educational policy and cultural anthropology’s foray into educational discourse, “examining and explicating the multidirectional negotiated interactions, iterations, and enactions through which policy is articulated” can provide context to situated locale (Koyama 2011:21). Additionally, situating the study of educational policy in the classroom allows for policy to be deconstructed, questioned,

and contextualized. The methodology of educational ethnographic research answers Giroux's call to contextualize the everyday processes of the school culture within its history. It is at this level where informal policy makers such as teachers, students, and administrators mediate between their specific locale and formal policy imposed upon them, possibly opening the door to the notion of emancipation by creating their own solutions under the burden of dominant policies.

Drawing on this premise, Jill Koyama (2011) examined how principals developed into "powerful policy actors" at the site of their own school while being subjected to federal domination. Under the NCLB policies, schools that received a failing label three years in a row were to supply "Supplemental Educational Services" (SES) to individual students for extra tutoring. The cost for these predominately privately owned services would be covered by transferring funds from each school's allocated Title I budgets<sup>13</sup>. However, in her study, Koyama found that principals negotiated their power with regard to this increased and centralized governance. The principals understood that SES providers were not held to the same high stakes accountability and therefore did not share the same risk for student achievement. They also believed that it would be a financial hardship for the school to shift Title 1 funds to cover the required SES cost so they controlled the direction of the SES resources. (2011:27). Knowing that low demand for SES would reduce this spending shift, some principals resisted the mandate by manufacturing low enrollments and limiting its availability to Saturdays, aware that enrollment would be lower on that day. Some used the SES to extend the school day and continued to work on problems that would be on standardized tests. Others maximized

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<sup>13</sup> Title I schools are part of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that creates budgets specifically to fund highly impoverished and disadvantaged schools



enrollment and then commanded that the services replicate how and what was taught during the day to increase the students test scores “often in direct violation of NCLB rules” (2011:28). The principals used the threat of contract non-renewal as a means to control SES provider behavior. Some of these acts of resistance by the school principals were ideological and others were material. If the school closed due to low test scores they could either lose their jobs or be transferred to another school. They would also see the impact of the school closing on their students. Teachers are now presented with the same complex negotiations under the pressure to produce high test scores in order to be graded as “effective”.

As outlined above, teachers are now threatened with the mandate of high stakes accountability and are increasingly being impacted by data driven policies under RTTT. While business leaders gained influence and traction in educational discourse under NCLB, current policies and federal mandates continue to normalize neoliberal ideology down to the level of teachers in the local schools. Teachers are losing influence in the classroom and a new, contested terrain has been created. As with any new terrain, there are many voices and actors striving to define it. Business leaders turned philanthropists, such as Bill Gates and Michael Bloomberg, dispense money and business “expertise” to maintain their strong foothold in education reform, using their corporate experiences as operational models. Their influence has allowed management, accountability, efficiency, output, and data collection to gain an acceptable place within education reform and policy. Principals in larger cities are now being referred to as “CEOs” of their institutions. A substantial amount of research demonstrates a shift in teaching styles as a reaction to this (Airasian 1988; Apple 2011; Brookhart 2011; Cole et al. 2009; Levitt 2008; Piro 2011). A predominant theme in the research findings is that there is a narrowing of

the curriculum within the schools and a teacher's time is being reallocated to "teaching to the test" (Koppich and Esch 2011). The results from this shift are politicized by various factions. Those who are in favor of quantitative data- based output point to higher test scores as proof of success. Others deconstruct the data and point to unnecessary teacher firings and the loss of a quality education because of teaching to the test, due to the heavy reliance of these types of measurements. This debate continues to be played out today; while quantitative studies can offer one type of result such as trends and measurements, ethnographies and case studies, such as Koyama's (2011), provide meaning and context to the human impact of these policies on local populations, which is not available from quantitative analyses (Adair 2011).

### Awkward Stages

Scholarly research directly related to the growing "no zero" homework practice is limited. Most discussion surrounding this practice is theoretical and opinion based. The majority of its advocates draw from measurement studies that argue against the statistical power of a "zero" grade (Grimes 2000), Other proponents draw from motivation studies within the field of psychology and point to the unique developmental and vulnerable qualities that center on middle school aged students. Opponents cite how this policy impacts lessons about responsibility and real life preparation.

Presently, teachers fall on both sides of the argument in rhetoric and in practice regarding the "no zero" policies (Grimes 2000). Although teachers unanimously agree that grades should reflect the mastery of a subject, some defend assigning a student a "zero" to account for "responsibility" and to maintain high standards. On the other side of the issue are teachers who

view the “no zero” policy as a positive move toward “standardized grading” citing the difficulty of “not knowing what the student knows if he does not complete the assignment” (Grimes 2010:213). Much of the argument surrounding responsibility centers upon who is held accountable, the student or the teacher? Guskey (2011) argues that it is part of the teachers’ and school’s job to create motivation for the student to complete her or his work. He proposes Saturday school sessions or after school programs to force the student to become accountable for completing the work. Other schools use school activities as motivators. If students have not completed their homework they may not be able to attend particularly desirable school activities (Bafile 2009). Others argue that it is the students who must be accountable for their behavior and extra steps should not be taken by teachers to ensure that their work is getting completed. Another argument for the “no zero” policy is a body of research that shows when a student drops out of high school the disengagement behavior typically began in middle school (Balfanz et al. 2007). Middle school students are presented with many new factors that were absent in elementary school: many students take on more caretaker responsibilities at the home during this time; there is more pressure from peers to participate in non-productive or harmful activities; and developmentally, middle school-aged students are rapidly changing physically, emotionally, and cognitively. All of these factors impact their ability to successfully navigate the school culture and to have success in the classroom. Balfanz et al. (2003) stress the importance of relationships between teachers, administrators, and students during this stage within the school culture. The emergence of “no zero” policies opens a new terrain for teachers to navigate, which may be studied and contextualized within the critical theory framework by examining the impact of federal policies on a local teacher culture.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

My research took place in two Florida public schools within one county during the spring of 2013. My methodology was a case study based upon data collected from semi-structured interviews, survey instruments, “evocative stimulus”<sup>14</sup> (Spindler 1987), and observations of students completing homework tasks. The qualitative data collected was analyzed for themes and patterns related to resistance, reproduction, and emancipation in regard to Henry Giroux’s theory of resistance. I will call the first school “Feeder Middle School”. It can be described as a traditional neighborhood or a feeder middle school. It pools from six neighboring elementary schools and feeds into the city’s public high school. I will call the second school “Choice Middle School”. It is a choice school that has an application and lottery admissions process. It is a Junior- Senior High School that caps each grade level at 150 students and all students must score at or above grade level on the FCAT and enter with a minimum 2.0 grade point average. Choice Middle School pulls a portion of its students from the feeder school in which I conducted research. In the 2012-2013 school year both schools recorded that 77% of its population was white. Both schools have seen an increase in their economically disadvantaged population over the last five years. In the 2007-2008 school year, Choice Middle School recorded 4.7% of its population as economically disadvantaged and that increased to 11% in the 2012-2013 school year. Feeder Middle School saw an increase from 23% in 2007-2008 to 34% in the 2012-2013 school year. I began conducting interviews and observations in January 2013 and completed them by the end of May 2013. The research participants at each school included the principal and

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<sup>14</sup> The use of evocative stimuli was introduced into educational anthropology by George and Louis Spindler. They often showed teachers videos to evoke discussions that would reveal any “unknown basic assumptions” they may have and would not be revealed in direct interviews.

three teachers. Both principals were over the age of forty. The teachers included two participants over 40 years old and four teachers between the ages of 23-40. The principals had equal amounts of experience in years within the educational field and both came through a traditional teaching program. The teachers varied in experience from 1 to 17 years--two have less than three years of teaching experience. Five graduated from a traditional educational program and one is currently obtaining her permanent teaching certificate through an alternate professional route that was implemented by the state of Florida after NCLB passed. Each of the individual interviews lasted about 60 minutes for both teachers and principals. The teachers' interviews took place in their classrooms and the principals' interviews took place in their offices. My observations for the no zero zones were conducted in the rooms where the students completed their unfinished work. My interviews and questionnaires as well as my decision to conduct a case study were based on my underlying questions of "why the no zero homework policy was practiced or not practiced within each school?" and "how did the teachers utilize and interpret the no zero homework policy?"

The case study methodology is well suited for researching a current real-life phenomenon situated within historical context (Spindler 1987; Yin and Davis 2007). To provide context to the current situation, a literature review must provide the necessary historical context for the no zero homework policy study. The unit of analysis is central for the validity of a case study. I focused on the no zero homework policy and the individual teachers as my units of analysis as they are bound together by the high stakes accountability culture in current educational policy (Stake 1995). My goal is to add to the scholarship that Wolcott describes as "helping educators better understand both the little traditions of schools and the big traditions of the larger society"

(1987:55). Although there are many studies on “best practices” within the classroom, there is a dearth of studies examining the teacher’s awareness of the larger cultural influences affecting them and their students.

### Research Context

#### Situating Myself

As I moved forward with my research I was a bit ambivalent about choosing the two schools where I conducted my research. I lived in the community where my research would take place and I had previously made connections with two of the teachers and the principal at Feeder Middle School through volunteer work and community events. These connections made my name recognizable and garnered a foundation for trust and rapport. I wanted to maintain the participants’ trust while also seeking to illuminate larger cultural events that they may have not been aware of themselves. To do this I had to keep my own personal biases on the subject to myself and allow them to tell their stories from their perspectives.

Some of my biases were based on the fact that my own children were currently enrolled in choice schools and had never matriculated in the feeder school where I conducted my research. My decision on where to send our children was based on the academic reputation and culture of a school. I wanted my children to attend schools where their peers and the culture were more focused on academics. I felt as though I was making the right decision based on my children’s personalities and what I wanted for their future. However, I also felt that my choice implied that Feeder Middle School was a sub-par school, and in doing this I was rejecting a large portion of the community that my children had been part of during their primary years. As I got

further into my research, my ambivalence grew. I understood that when the teachers at Feeder Middle School were discussing the negative impacts of “schools of choice” on their populations, I was one of the people that helped create some of these impacts. However, I also began to see the larger cultural trends that transferred parental responsibilities to the teachers. So, although I recognized some of the fallout for sending my children to a choice school, I also saw some of the benefits that they were receiving. I felt that they were getting a very good education without all the distractions and social pressures that I saw in the lives of my friends’ children who attended the local feeder schools. Although stratification may happen, it also offers hope to those students who may not fit into the culture of their particular feeder school. I acknowledge my own privilege of being able to choose where I would send my children; the Choice Schools were the best fit for them. I do not believe that this created a bias in my research process.

School sites are complex and deeply connected to their community’s dynamics. The choices that are made by teachers and parents are often personal and influenced by the local community. In the current culture, schools sites have become even more complex because they are a new ground for neoliberal ideals to be tested. There has been a lot of financial gain for the privileged, and potentially more so if the school systems are completely opened up to market mechanisms. There are also many students, teachers, and parents who stand to lose a lot if they are left behind during the movement toward neoliberal ideals in education as demonstrated by the responses of the teachers at Feeder Middle School. I went forward with this information to understand the complex relationships that have grown from this dynamic while attempting to keep my own children from becoming victims during what I perceive to be a dangerous time in education. Because school sites are caught in the middle of so many of these complex

relationships that range from the local to the larger national trends, it is very difficult to generalize findings. However, ethnographic studies, such as mine, that include data about teacher culture and connections to broader cultural trends may provide important context and illuminate larger cultural issues that could empower those impacted by dominant ideologies such as neoliberalism.

### Obtaining Participants

Utilizing the snowballing or network sampling technique (Glesne 1999:35), I attempted to reconnect with the teacher who first introduced me to the no zero homework policy and his principal in September of 2012. I sent an email presenting my research proposal to determine whether it was a viable option to conduct the research in their school. Initially the teacher was hesitant about participating in my research and I did not receive a reply from the principal. Since I had a personal connection to another middle school, I proceeded to contact that principal to explain my research proposal; I was aware that this school also utilized the no zero homework policy. He responded within hours and promptly set up an appointment to discuss my research proposal. He was interested but could not promise anything, and he directed me to the school board to obtain formal permission from the appropriate department. I received UCF IRB approval for the project on March 13, 2013 and school board approval on March 14, 2013. I once again met with the principal to begin the research. He provided me the name of the teacher/proctor in charge of the no zero homework policy and informed the teacher that I had his permission to observe. Upon my first meeting with the proctor, he provided me with a few teachers' names who participated in the no zero homework policy. I emailed each of them, but



received a reply from only one of them. This prompted me to contact a teacher that I personally knew at the school who also utilized the no zero policy. She happily agreed to participate.

Once I secured participation from the principal and teachers at this school, I followed up with the first school to inform them that another school was participating in my research study, hoping that this would allay any fears they may have had regarding participation. This did seem to open the door to the other school as the principal responded affirmatively shortly thereafter. Working with the principal and my initial contact at this same school, we identified three teachers who agreed to participate.

### Locale

My research took place at each of the schools. I met with the teachers in their classrooms and with the principals in their offices for the interviews; if needed, I followed up with emails. I created an anonymous survey on an internet website so that they could easily access it at their convenience. When designing and conducting my research, I was very sensitive to their time constraints. I attempted to provide a time frame and interview format that would allow me to collect the most information from them in a minimum amount of time. I also made observations in the rooms where the no zero homework policies were implemented. To maintain anonymity for the schools and participants I labeled the choice school “Choice Middle School” and the feeder school “Feeder Middle School”. Because each school utilized the no zero homework policy differently, I observed the no zero homework policy in Choice Middle School twice a week and observed in Feeder Middle School once a week. In Feeder Middle School the teachers had to create their own infrastructure for the program because it was not a school-wide policy

and it was only available to me once a week for observations. Although other variations of the no zero homework policies occurred during the week, the proctors for those programs did not participate in my research study so I was not able to observe those programs. In Choice Middle School the no zero homework policy was a principal-mandated program for the middle school classes and optional at the high school level. Because it was mandated, there was a classroom designated for the program and it was implemented daily during a student's lunch period, allowing me to observe more than once a week. I spread my observations across different days to gain a broader perspective. My personal observations and interviews were audio recorded and I took notes to maintain efficiency and accuracy for later analysis. Per the instruction from the UCF IRB, there was no need for signed consent forms; my participants only needed to give verbal permission after reading and understanding the approved research protocol. I maintained anonymity for each participant by assigning pseudonyms for each school and individual participant. This seemed to increase the participants' willingness to speak candidly to me.

I transcribed all of the audio taped interviews into Microsoft Word. I coded and analyzed persisting patterns as they related to: identity; knowledge; standardization,; purpose for an education; accountability; homework; no zero policy; reproduction; and resistance to current policies. Each category was chosen with the intention of gaining an understanding of how the no zero homework policy was being utilized by the teachers under the high stakes accountability environment. High stakes accountability measurements and standardizations of curricula are changing the roles and identities of teachers as previously stated. A teacher's knowledge or awareness of as well as experience with shifting policies could affect her of his identity as a teacher. How she or he defines herself or himself could determine the role of no zero in every

day practices. Coding the data for how teachers view the purpose of an education will indicate an acceptance or repudiation of the premise that “education is a marketplace”. Looking for patterns within their answers will be evidence for the role that the no zero homework policy plays in their negotiations to resist or reproduce their definition of an “effective” teacher.

### Limitations of the Study

Because school personnel are often laden with political and time constraints, it is very difficult to obtain a large sample of research participants or to obtain sufficient data to write a thick ethnographic description (Geertz 1973) within a four month period. My research is intended to introduce information about an important new school program and answer how and why two different schools are utilizing the no zero homework policy and teacher’s attitudes in the current educational culture. It would require much more time, resources, and a larger sample of schools to develop generalizable data.

Many of the current federal educational policies are targeted to aid failing schools and lower performing students. The two schools that I studied are not part of that target demographic. However, this case study can shed some initial light on an understudied phenomenon occurring within the current high stakes school culture. It can also show how a top down approach can have some unintended effects on a school’s teacher culture that do not fall into either of the categories mentioned above.

## CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

As previously stated, my thesis began as an inquiry to identify what the no homework zero policy reveals about a teacher's identity in today's high stakes data driven school culture. Additionally, my research examined why the no zero is being utilized in the two schools participating in my study and how it is being used. For analysis, I referred to my research questions as a guideline to create a framework for this chapter. These questions focus on privatization and the naturalization of market-based language; teacher identity as it relates to student output under high stakes accountability; and how the no zero homework policy is being utilized in the current educational culture.

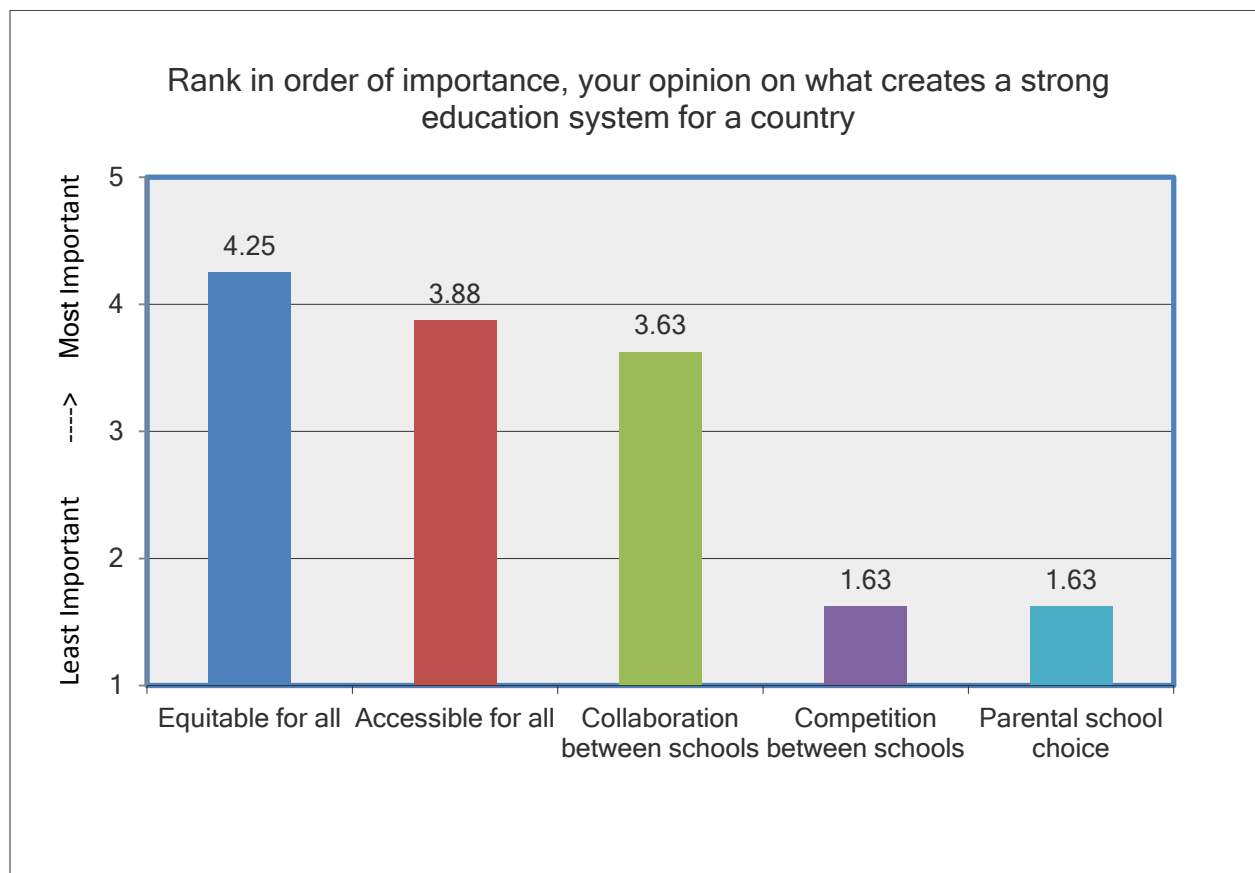
### Privatization

"I am not really familiar with what is happening with charter schools. I don't think it is very good though. They are not held to [the same} standards [that we are]. They can do pretty much whatever they want. I think it is a way to privatize them and I think that is a bad idea. They are trying to make schools like a business and schools shouldn't be run like a business"

---Teacher at Feeder Middle School

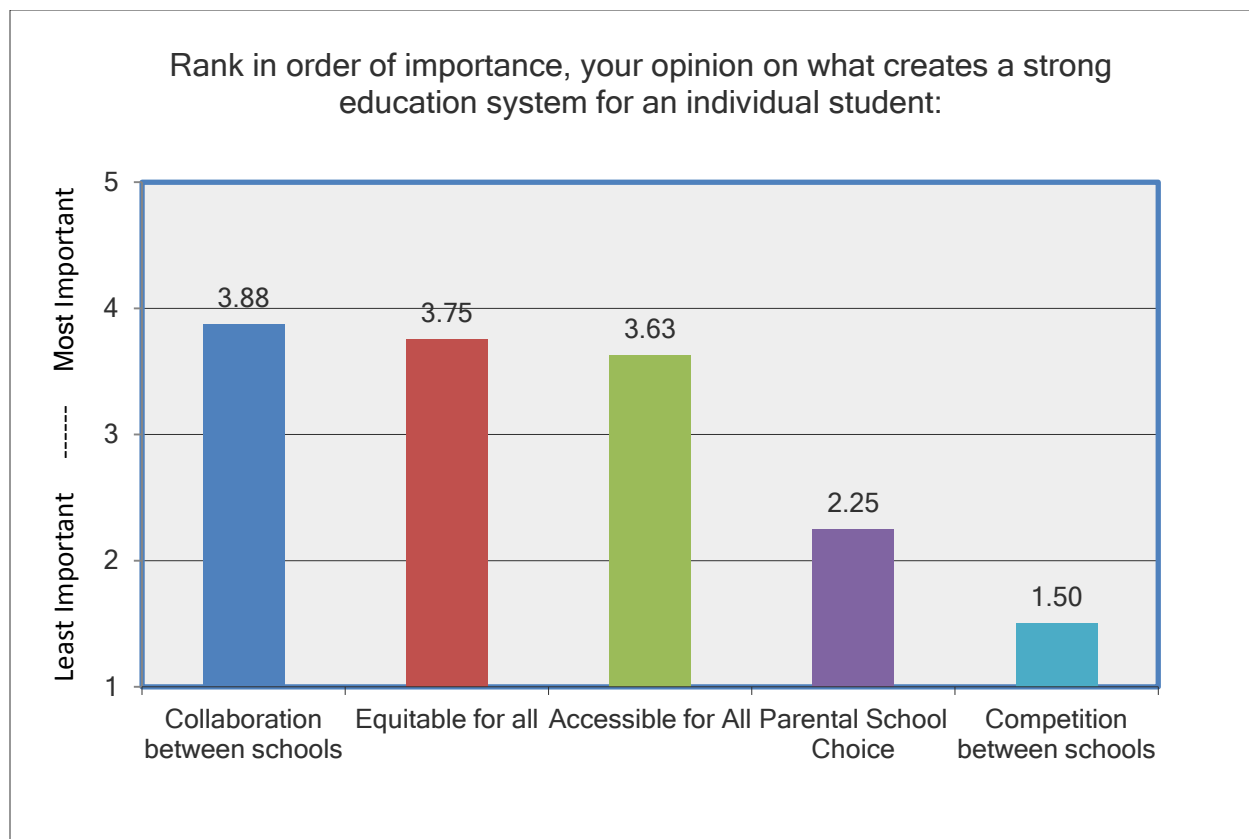
To explore the naturalization of neoliberal discourse at the local level, I conducted a survey that provided the teachers and principals in both schools with an opportunity to weigh market-based discourse against traditional civil rights discourse as it relates to the collective and the individual. Both schools had very similar responses. I asked all of the participants in each school to rank in order of importance the purpose of what an education means for the individual student as well as what an educational system means for a country. The survey results indicated

that participants in both schools rated equity and accessibility for all students higher for both the individual and the country. These responses for two of the survey questions are displayed in the following graphs.



**Figure 1: Data Compilation for ranking word choice associated with Educational System.**

Choice rated only slightly higher in importance for the individual, but still not higher than collaboration. Competition rated the least important at both levels.



**Figure 2: Data Compilation for ranking word choice associated with “individual student”.**

In another survey question not shown here, all of the teachers and principals in both schools responded that the purpose of a nation’s educational system is a balance between economics and competent adults. One teacher from each school responded with economic terms that I would associate with naturalization toward neoliberal language. The teacher from Feeder Middle School responded that “it has a direct impact on the socioeconomic status of your country” and “how to go out and work and make money and be successful in a free market society”. Overall, the survey strongly indicated that language within both schools has not evolved or naturalized into market-based language. See Appendix B for a complete list of the survey questions.

## Choice Expands

Under NCLB and RTTT, a state's plan to expand school choice for parents in their child's education became a significant criterion in the decision to award federal grant money to that state's education department (DOE 2000, 2008). One type of 'choice' school that was not included in my research is the charter school. Charter schools impact feeder public schools and expand neoliberal policies. Their literature and brochures are often infused with economic terminology such as "efficiency" and "positive customer experience"<sup>15</sup>. Charter schools behave like private entities, but use public money. They can either be non-profit or for-profit. Anyone can apply to set up a charter school (FLDOE), although the majority of them are part of a Charter Management Operation (CMO) with investors financially backing them. They work through a contract or a "charter" that is granted by the local school board or directly with the state for a certain amount of time, typically between two and five years. Their accountability is maintained through contract renewal (FDLOE). If they prove to be unsuccessful through low test scores and low enrollment then their charter can be revoked; if successful, they renew the contract.

"Schools of choice," are different from charter schools in that they are publicly funded and regulated like traditional public schools. They usually offer some special thematic program such "science", "International Baccalaureate" or "college preparatory". The schools of choice in the county where I conducted my research all have caps for enrollment. They also have minimum standards for academic performance and behavior. The applications to get into these schools outnumber the spots available so a lottery or applicant review is held each year. These schools often attract students who may be looking for a more rigorous curriculum within an

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<sup>15</sup> This is a direct quote from someone at a public school board meeting that I attended when discussing the opening of a new charter school. I am not including the source so as not to reveal the county.

academically focused school. Although teachers at both schools agree that choice and charter schools negatively impact traditional feeder schools when the students leave to attend those schools, it is the teachers at Feeder Middle School that actually feel the material impact of this loss. The teachers at Feeder Middle School can point to specific examples of the effects, such as academic separation and depleted resources. They specifically point to the loss of enrichment programs, high achieving students, as well as parental and financial support. All of the teachers at Feeder Middle School expressed this frustration. They see the opportunities taken away from their school and students only to be transferred to the schools of choice. One teacher at Feeder Middle School was recently surprised by an unusual turn of events because of county budget cuts. Her frustrations with the current system is demonstrated in her expression of appreciation for the recent unexpected elimination of county-wide corridor bussing,<sup>16</sup>

I was glad that they made cuts for the busing because it meant that the school my children go to is going to be able to keep some of their programs. I have a huge problem with my kid missing out on something so that we can keep these special schools working and I am still not convinced that they are getting a better education...we are putting money into their schools so we can take away some of the control for them rather than putting money into their regular public schools and do the same thing. If that flexibility is so great for charter schools why aren't we allowing our public schools to be flexible in how we handle our student learning as well?

---Teacher from Feeder Middle School

The one teacher that did not acknowledge any kind of detriment to choice and its impact had just graduated from college that year. She was under 23 years old and was teaching in Choice Middle School. She graduated from high school at a choice school. She was one of the

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<sup>16</sup> Corridor bussing was set up when each choice or magnet school was created to allow for students outside of that school area attend that school.



first students who attended her choice high school when it first opened. She had a positive view of school choice within the county,

[It] is good because the parents know their students and they know where they need to be and I think a lot of times it is up to the parents to put that student in the right school. Like for me, this is where I needed to be, but my brother was less academic and more sports focused so when my mom realized that, she moved him where he needed to be because without the ability for him to play baseball, he wasn't really interested in school and he needed that boost of 'this is why you have to do well in school'. I do like having those options there because it does open it up for the students and the parents to figure out where they need to be and what works best.

Philosophically, the principals in both schools supported school choice within the public school system. However, the principal from Feeder Middle School was opposed to the idea of vouchers that take money away from public school funds and give it to private schools. Her biggest concern with charter schools was their high failure rate.<sup>17</sup> Her experience as a charter school review committee member led her to believe that some charter schools do an excellent job of teaching their students while others have done a very poor job. Both principals, however, were open to students getting a good education by any means possible.

Choice Middle Schools' ability to provide an excellent education comes into question by the teachers at Feeder Middle School. They believe that these schools draw the motivated students and that is what raises their scores. One teacher at Feeder Middle School defends their FCAT scores against Choice Middle School and says that they are on par with them,

[C]harter schools and schools of choice can pick and choose [the students] to make their scores look good. They won't take any students that have four and five pages of IEPs [or students with conditions that affect learning such as autism].<sup>18</sup> We have the students that the choice school won't take and we are still doing well.

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<sup>17</sup> Research shows that charter schools are comparable to public schools for their success rate (Apple 2011)

<sup>18</sup> Individual Education Program

The three teachers interviewed at Feeder Middle School declared that separating students by certain criteria allows schools of choice to claim a false success rate and leaves a void of student leaders in the feeder school's classrooms. It also skews the perception of the feeder school that they left. As one teacher from Feeder Middle School stated,

It begins to put a stigma on the schools that are not schools of choice. For example, people will say 'where do you teach?' I will say school "Feeder Middle School" and they will respond with an inflection that indicates that I teach at the "bad" school. It is not [a bad school]... [We do as well as the choice school], but there is a stigma and that puts a stigma on the students that go here.... It affects perception.

Another teacher at Feeder Middle School used the military as an example when discussing successful charter and choice schools. He pointed out that if you separate groups through voluntary means, such as the military does, you gain much more control and can do more things. When you have an involuntary group, it makes your work a lot harder and more complex. Another teacher from Feeder Middle School pointed out that in her experience it is the more motivated students with involved parents who usually transfer to the schools of choice. When these parents leave, they leave programs that were able to succeed because of parental support, including time and financial resources. Now the choice school has gained institutional and parental financial support, doubling their resources. When this happens, she says that she loses positive academic leaders within her classes and the opportunity for peer mentoring diminishes as well.

In Choice Middle School, the teachers recognize these material impacts, but discuss them theoretically,

[T]hose teachers that work in impoverished schools work ten times as much as teachers in a school like this. This is easy and everyone that works here knows that it is easy and

unfortunately, I think that because it is easy for us, it keeps us from stepping outside of the box and do different things because most of the kids here can learn from standard type methods whereas, in an area like that you are going to have to try different strategies to get them more engaged to get them to learn because their backgrounds, they might have other issues that you would have to work against.

Academic separation and diminishing resources are often felt by the teachers, but ignored in the choice and competition rhetoric. When students show learning losses or gains, the results are usually credited with the quality, or lack thereof, of the school and teacher. This relationship shows up in a teachers' identity or definition of herself or himself as a teacher. As choice and competition increase their presence in educational discourse, so does the discussion on what makes a good teacher.

### Good Teachers = High Student Performance

Underneath high stakes accountability policies lies the assumption that a teacher demonstrates her or his effectiveness through student performance output. Choice, merit, testing, and data collection all behave as mechanisms for measurement. Although all of the teachers and principals in both schools agreed that standards and accountability were necessary and good to provide structure and guidance in the classroom, they all also agreed that the present weighting they carry in regard to the judgments of school quality has become destructive to the teacher and student. The amount of data that is collected and student testing has become burdensome to teachers and is taking away teaching time as well as fundamental resources such as computer and library access. The teachers' identities as trusted professionals are being called into question under the weighting of these measurements.

Over the course of this research the roles and assignments given to the teachers in the name of accountability and standardization often appeared contradictory in nature, creating a tension between the proclaimed “innovative” teacher and the “effective” teacher. This was a consistent pattern in both schools.

I interviewed a science teacher in each of the schools and both of these teachers are required to cover an assigned text book in a particular order that is mandated by the county, and that order isn’t chronological. Neither of them agrees with the order that the county has mandated. They both say that it skips around too much. They both argue that in some instances topics are introduced too soon or without context or a foundation. They are not free to use their own judgment on how to cover the text book. They are told exactly what chapter to cover from week to week. They are also directed to communicate and collaborate with the other teachers within their department so as to stay at the same pace and give tests on the same topics on the same days. It is also required by the county to collaborate within their department to assess students and generate ideas and solutions to best reach students and raise their level of teaching. However, they often find themselves using their collaborative “creative” time to coordinate lesson plans and test dates to make sure that they are literally on the same page. Both teachers express frustration about this. They want to be creative and collaborate more, but are discouraged by the hurdles they have to overcome.

This impacts all teachers at both schools. At Feeder Middle School, a whole department sadly decided to eliminate a museum project that they had been doing for a few years. It was centered on a specific significant historical event. The project developed students’ independent research and presentation skills while learning about the major event. It was a project that

children in the lower grades had often heard about and looked forward to as part of the eighth grade tradition. However, the department sadly decided to discontinue doing the project because these particular lessons do not improve test scores<sup>19</sup>. Instead, students will read material about the event and research steps. So while these teachers' student's test scores may improve, they worry that the current process does not teach students how to do independent research and draw their own conclusions. It was a hard decision for the team, but they had to prioritize time, resources, and test scores, which resulted in teaching to the test.

This same trend is showing up in faculty training. As part of the data collection process, I employed an 'evocative stimulus' technique. I showed the teachers a video of Pedro Noguera, an education reformer criticizing current education policy. He states that policy makers focus on "the symptoms of failure within schools and not on underlying causes"<sup>20</sup>. He presents a much broader view of education that includes the relationship between the community and cultural trends that affect the school site. Showing the video was designed to present an opposing view to the current neoliberal ideology and to evoke a conversation that expanded beyond market-based mechanisms. In a group discussion centering on the video shown, the teachers at Feeder Middle School expressed enthusiasm for some of the concepts that he discussed. This turned the conversation toward the training that they receive at the district level. They all agreed that the district training provided high quality and innovative ideas. However, they all also agreed that when they get back to the classroom, the reality of time privation and testing pressures hit and they begin evaluating whether they have time to implement new approaches and whether the new

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<sup>19</sup> Also because testing takes away resources, there are more hurdles to overcome. Teachers expressed frustration over not having access to computers in the library or computer lab because they are always being utilized for testing.

<sup>20</sup> See appendix B for the full length video. He is addressing a group of future teachers at the University of Virginia.

ideas will increase their students' scores. They all confessed that they don't want to teach this way, but it has become necessary because of the weighting of the test scores for their own performance evaluations. A consensus of their frustration is expressed through the statement of one of the teachers when she says,

Everybody knows what the students need, but when reading scores go down it is the teachers [who are held responsible] and not those who dictated what was supposed to get done. And no one is saying 'hey, what do your student's need?' Everyone is saying 'hey look here is what we are doing.'

This dynamic is what keeps her continually focused on the tests. She says that she does complain often about the policies that she feels that she may have some control over such as assessments, but at the end of the day she is a "hoop jumper". This personality trait leads her to try and fill in all the blanks associated with student data collection, recognizing that it is sometimes at the student's expense. This tension between teaching the way they want to teach and teaching to the test manifests itself more often in Feeder Middle School than in Choice Middle School, perhaps because Choice Middle School's population creates a safety net for the teachers. However, all teachers, except the youngest teachers at Choice Middle School, mourn the lost creative freedom and respect for their judgment that once defined them as "experts" in their profession. Their expert judgment has succumbed to test scores and "effectiveness" measures, leaving their identity as a trusted professional in question.

Teachers expressing some relation between their students' test scores and their own effectiveness showed up in the responses from one teacher at each school. The teacher at Choice Middle School that expressed her belief that her own school's population could present an inaccurate portrayal of a school's quality also second guessed her own ability due to some recent student test scores. This is her second year of teaching after a long hiatus, staying at home to

raise her own children. At the beginning of this year she had to administer an assessment test to create a baseline for her students' knowledge. At the end of the year she re-tested them to measure their learning. On the first test the average score was a 50-60, which is what would be expected since some of the test material was review and some of it was new. However, at the end of the year the average score was a 72 for the same exact test. This prompted her to question her own effectiveness. She said that for a few days she wondered if she "was a good teacher." However, when the FCAT scores came out for that same year, her students scored well in her subject, so she gained some of that confidence back. Her struggle between trusting her own judgment and the fear of not being "effective" keeps her tied to the teaching manual word for word:

You want to gear [your teaching] towards getting the kids excited and doing things that will engage them, but you fear if you deviate too much from what's in th[e] book and you miss something that is in th[e] book that is on that list of what they are supposed to learn ...you are not doing your job.

She is hoping that time and experience will grant her the confidence to "go off script" and trust her own judgment, but for now part of her identity as "a good teacher" is tied to her students' test scores.

Another teacher with 20 years of experience at Feeder Middle School expressed similar sentiments. She said that she tries not to focus on the test, but she feels that if she does not prepare them for how to take the test or what is on the test then she has not "done her job". The emphases on students' test scores are creating a movement toward a questionable connection between the student's scores and teacher's professional identity as "a good teacher".

### Teacher as Entrepreneur

The implementation of the no zero homework policy can be attributed to the relationship between data driven policies and shifting responsibilities. The “effective teacher” criteria and the weight of the everyday shifting responsibilities have created time and resource privation for teachers. The no zero homework policy has proven to be useful in alleviating some of this burden.

At the commencement of my research, I questioned whether the teachers were using the no zero homework policy as a tool to circumvent the neoliberal market-based reforms; an entrepreneurial tool to increase their perceived effectiveness. I wanted to explore the questions: “how” and “why” was the no zero homework policy being used. During my first few interviews, I quickly became aware that homework was not at the center of the policy. When I asked about the purpose of the no zero homework practice, the principals at both schools each brought up how school sites have become more than just a place for teaching,

[They] are asked to be doing more and more outside the basic elements of education. Whether it is health related....it could be food, it could be dental, sight....everything...including counseling, psychological and sociological services. Public schools in particular, are expected to do more things that in years past families were expected to do, including physical well being as well as disciplining.

--Principal from Choice Middle School

The no zero homework policy has located itself at the intersection between this under discussed shift in responsibilities and the policy demands for increased student performance output. The way a teacher views his or her role in this shift determines his or her use of this policy. Ironically, all of the participants responded unanimously that “responsibility” is their reason for either utilizing the no zero or refusing to use it. The teachers citing that “it helps them



[students] to transition and learn responsibility” embraced the practice. Those that did not utilize it cited that “it does not teach responsibility”.

When looking at the no zero homework policy in Choice Middle School, the principal said that he instituted it in the school based upon “research studies that had been done out there in education regarding the no zero policy”.<sup>21</sup> He also recalled that at the time that he instituted it “there was also research that showed that “7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students are particularly two things. They are irresponsible and disorganized”. All participants in both schools agreed that these were issues. The youngest teacher who was in her first year of teaching at Choice Middle School noticed that “a lot of them are having a hard time adjusting to the new schools, the new schedule, switching classroom all the time, staying organized just like kind of getting themselves together”. The no zero homework policy program facilitator at Choice Middle School echoed this same sentiment, “I absolutely think that middle school students are going through a period that is unique to them”. He connects the no zero homework policy to a parenting technique:

You are giving them a chance. That is the nice side and the fact that you have to actually... come in here that you don’t have a choice. It’s kind of like your parents telling you ‘eat your broccoli’. It’s good for you. You can’t leave the table until you eat your vegetables. It helps both the students and the teachers.

When the principal introduced the no zero homework policy to Choice Middle School, he also created an infrastructure to support it. He has made it mandatory at the middle school and optional for the high school level. The No Zero Homework policy program is set up differently at Feeder Middle School. Teachers must accept late work, but how they handle the grade for it is

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<sup>21</sup> He did not refer to specific research studies and I didn’t know of any directly related to the no zero practice.

up to them. Below is a description of how the no zero homework policy is implemented in each school.

### Choice Middle School

The no zero homework policy program takes place in Mr. N's classroom. He is the facilitator and oversees the program. This responsibility replaces teaching another math class. Students who receive a no zero homework slip from their teacher the day before have to spend their lunch hour in Mr. N's classroom. They must bring their own lunch from home. If they forget their lunch then they forgo eating. He is generally firm about lunch, but if there is a big problem such as student expressing severe hunger he will work with the student. If students are on reduced or free lunch they may pick up their lunch before reporting to his classroom. My impression while observing the no zero homework policy program was that it served as a consequence for missing homework. The atmosphere in the room was punitive with very clear rules for student behavior while in the room. The rules are posted on the board stating that there is no talking allowed the entire time they are there. There is a system in place to ensure either completion or consequence. If students do not show up to the no zero classroom or if they receive three or more no zeros slips for missed homework assignments in one class during a semester they are given a referral to see the dean. The consequences escalate from there, usually ending in a phone call to the parents. Based upon my interviews and observational data, there is not a high repeat offense pattern; it is usually students who just forget their homework from time to time.

### Feeder Middle School

The no zero homework policy program that I observed at Feeder Middle School occurs before school and is integrated with a program that provides extra help and support for struggling students. The teacher is paid extra money to come in early for this program from a grant that the principal applied for and received. In contrast to the choice school, the facilitator/teacher provides some breakfast snacks and drinks to “encourage” the students to come in for help. Participation is encouraged, but is not mandatory. The facilitator is part of a “tribe”<sup>22</sup> of teachers who have created an infrastructure amongst themselves for this program. This tribe was the first to implement the no zero homework policy at the school. Their efforts were a response to increased student failure rates at the school. This particular tribe provides a no zero homework zone each day of the week either before or after school along with extra help. Each day is assigned to a different subject. The current system is a result of trial and error. The team originally “chased” down the kids in their electives and sent them into the library to complete their homework. This failed because there was not a designated facilitator to watch over the students and the librarian was not always available to help or discipline the students. It also became apparent that students started to manipulate the program to get out of “running” days in Physical Education or an elective class that they did not want to attend. The teacher said that he was willing to continue to try anything that will help keep students from failing and this version is proving to work. He also said that he originally fought the idea, but his tribe basically forced him into it and now he said he would not change it. He sees a lot of positive results coming from it. He has witnessed the student failure rate drop from 8% to 1%-2%. When I ask him about

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<sup>22</sup> A tribe consists of four teachers who each teach one of the core subjects and share all the same students.

students' with repeat appearances he says that most are either "lazy, but don't want to fail" or they are "motivated but do not have support at home". He mentions that over time he has noticed that parents are working longer hours, and sees an increase in grandparents raising their grandchildren. He attributes increased student participation in the no zero homework policy to both of these realities.

My observations at Feeder Middle School revealed a very friendly and relaxed atmosphere. The students were free to ask for help, use a computer if needed, and roam around to get food or talk to a friend. Students trickled into the classroom for the duration of the time and left once they completed their task. The average attendance was about 15 students. A few times when I arrived I learned that the program was cancelled for that day due to a school-wide or parent meeting.

### Comparative Perspectives

The apparent contrast between the two schools is that Choice Middle School takes a more disciplined approach, while Feeder Middle School takes a more nurturing approach. The philosophy behind each program is a little different. The Choice Middle School cites the no zero homework policy as providing second chances for a population that is in the midst of an awkward developmental stage that includes disorganization and irresponsibility. Feeder Middle School's stated belief is that no student should fail because of homework and it wants to emphasize learning. The principal stresses that learning doesn't occur unless you do the work. However, both philosophies allude to teaching the student responsibility as the engine. Amidst the current high stakes accountability policies the task to teach this now lies directly on the

teacher. The principal from Feeder Middle School illuminated this notion when she was explaining how she had to talk the older teachers into utilizing the no zero homework policy:

Twenty years ago we paddled, we failed you. It was all your responsibility. Back then, my job was to teach, your job is to learn and there was no connection between the two. My job had to do with what I was doing behind my desk and your job had to do with what you were doing behind your desk. Now, the real definition of teaching is what you have learned, so if you haven't learned, I haven't done my job. That is the biggest change....what the definition of what teaching is....

When given the opportunity to create their own way of handling late work that may or may not include utilizing a no zero homework policy at Feeder Middle School, the older teachers adhered to the old definition of teaching; they did not believe that it is their responsibility to take on parental roles for their students, but the younger teachers who have come into the field recently are more willing to accept the parental and community duties that have subtly been imposed upon them incrementally. The same principal explains:

[They] really feel as though they are put upon to teach a lot of skills that they probably shouldn't feel responsible for...there are parenting skills that have fallen to the teachers...younger teachers are introduced to this program in their teacher education....and they have more empathy for the kids and where the kids are coming from....

As teachers are being required to take on more and more of the "parental" responsibilities, they are also confronted with top down policies that legitimize these encroachments and punish the teachers if their student's test scores don't indicate that the teacher cannot overcome these additional burdens. This is where the principal at Feeder Middle School found "buy in" from the older teachers for the no zero homework policy.

We are supposed to have them ready to have their work on time and be a good high school student. When I got here, the teachers did not accept any late work. The kids can just not do it. [talking to the teachers] I am not asking you to give them partial credit for

the work. I am just asking you to accept it and that got buy in from the old school [teachers]. I did have some say that is not right. It is not teaching them responsibility. We actually had a really good conversation about what it is that we want. Am I here to teach you Algebra? Or am I here to teach responsibility? Or am I here to teach you both? If I am here to teach you both, how much of which? There are a whole lot of skills that I am teaching you, but I am GRADING your algebra and that helped some of the teachers buy into it.

After introducing the no zero homework policy to her school she charged each tribe to create its own version of it. Each tribe could set it up differently, but each teacher within a tribe had to do it the same way to keep the rules consistent to ensure students' understanding what the expectations were. The only rule she mandated was that they had to accept late work and do something with it. She guessed that there are probably 16 versions of the policy in the school based on the amount of tribes that were in the school. She denied that any of the teachers' no zero versions could be used as a tool to control their data under the pressures of accountability. She explained that teachers could adjust the weight of the homework grade within the student's overall grade if that was the goal. However, this principal as well as the no zero facilitator from Choice Middle School agreed that it is the data driven policies that have created the buy in for the program from teachers. The facilitator at Choice Middle School agreed that it could be used as a navigational tool to help teachers and schools mediate the intersection between encroaching parenting roles and the data driven culture. This mediation plays out differently at each school.

With the infrastructure in place at Choice Middle School, the no zero homework policy acts as a relief valve for the teachers. It is one less worry for them and it helps to catch student patterns related to responsibility or learning problems quickly. The infrastructure creates a built-in communication system between the teachers, the facilitator, the administrators, and the

parents, which helps to create a quick- response team. The youngest and least experienced teacher in the group gave one such example:

Because here I think that so many standards have to be met like a certain grade point average....I think that there is so much data going on that I think that that is way for a teacher like me to show that a student isn't turning in homework so I am making sure that they do. With two students I had to arrange tutoring on Wednesdays after school and it wasn't necessarily academics. It was more he just wants to get an answer down on paper. He was one of my repeat offenders for no zero. I had a few meetings with his mom and we decided that he would come in Wednesdays and we would go over it for the week because a lot of what he was doing was just putting some things down and turn it in so he wouldn't have to go to no zero. Most of his problems were of an organizational nature so I had to come up with other ways. For bell work we would get to Friday and he would have lost Monday-Thursday's work. We got him a spiral notebook...he did the work and would give it right back to me. I kept the notebook at my desk. That is way for me to control his data...he was digging himself into a hole with really no way out. In a different school culture I would have told him four times and if he still didn't turn it in it was on him. However, with this student I can see it's a real problem versus laziness.

Parents have voluntarily placed their children in this school and agree to meet certain criteria. If the students do not meet these criteria then they can be sent back to their feeder school; this creates a kind of "skin in the game" effect and can force the parent to become a partner in responsibility sharing.

Feeder Middle School does not share the benefits of demanding partnership from parents and the no zero homework policy can become one more burden for the teachers. In addition, the teachers can also no longer say "the burden is on you" to the students under the high stakes accountability. The high stakes accountability plants the burden of high student performance outcome squarely on the teacher since his or her evaluations are now directly tied their test scores. Since there is no built in infrastructure within the school, this burden plays out differently with each teacher. How each teacher views his or her role in teaching responsibility is how he or she handles the no zero homework policies.

The two teachers that I spoke with in Feeder Middle School who do not practice a no zero zone homework policy cite philosophy and convenience as reasons for not using it. They have both tried to utilize it, but do not like it. One teacher explains her experience with it:

I used to let kids make up stuff all year long. They had until the end of the grading period. If you have students that actually do it, you end up with all this paper to grade at the very last minute. I also found that kids don't do it anyway. You give them a chance and they don't do it anyway. A couple of times this year I had a couple of kids ask if they could make up a quiz. I had five kids ask and only one came and did it. If they ask and then don't do it, I am like OK. I also feel that they need to learn responsibility. If we're not teaching them what it is like in the real world...When they go out in the real world they are going to be shocked. When they go to work and they get fired their job they are going [to be shocked] It's just....I feel like they need to learn responsibility. I feel like we give them all these chances and there are no consequences and they don't learn from that. They have to learn to live in the real world.

The other teacher in the same tribe also believes in maintaining the burden of responsibility on the student:

[I tried it here]...but I didn't like it because the work to make it happen was put on the teacher not on the student and students were able to manipulate it a great deal....students were mainly just using it as a way to get out of class, and if they did do it, they didn't do it well. It also seemed like a check in the box [for the school]...here is something else we are doing. I give very little in the way of homework. If I assign an essay, they know that they will have homework if they don't finish it in class. I usually give them 2 days at least to work on it so if they are struggling they can come talk to me and I will give them some time. I tell them no late work, but I usually take late work. Especially with my struggling student, but as the year goes on, I do start to get a little stricter on that...

These two teachers maintain the view that it is the student's responsibility to learn and perform. They appear to resist the legitimacy of shifting the burden of parental responsibilities to the teachers. They are aware of the shift and they reject its premise by complaining about it. They will give students an opportunity to make up work or a grade, but they leave it to the



student to take the initiative. However, the material aspect that accompanies this shift plays out in the classroom through exhaustion, a sense of defeat, and time privation.

Although teachers at both schools feel the pressure of federal high stakes accountability policies and shifting meanings for what defines an effective teacher at each school, there are differences that are revealed through this research. In Choice Middle School, the no zero homework policy behaves much like a relief valve for the teachers, but permits no room for identity struggle. Because the principal at Choice Middle School has created the infrastructure and mandated that the middle school teachers utilize it, they have very limited, if any, agency to address students who do not do their homework. There is no room to act on their own values as the teacher at Feeder Middle School does when she stated, “my grades need to mean something”. Feeder Middle School’s policy allows teachers to behave according to their values, but can create material struggles such as time privation and increased paper work on a daily basis.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

The no zero homework policies have been implemented within an environment of changing definitions of teaching, high stakes accountability, and teachers struggling to maintain their identity and ideals. This case study revealed that: 1) the teachers in both schools were aware of movements toward privatizing education through the rise of charter schools, but did not associate market-based rhetoric or mechanisms such as “choice” and “accountability” with this shift. They are not aware of deliberate neoliberal ideology that would dictate specific policies that would include market-based mechanisms. They expressed that policy makers don’t really know what is happening in the classroom, and that the policy makers are basing their decisions on what campaign donors tell them. They feel as though they are the victims of out of touch policy makers; 2) the no zero homework policy did not appear to act as a tool to keep their students grades artificially high. Instead, it appeared to be an enabling bridge between the increasing role of teacher as “parent” and “producer”. Adopting the no zero policy initiated the role of the teacher acting as the parent to teach responsibility to the student, but the policy proved to be helpful in satisfying the teacher’s need to make sure that each student was “earning” her or his grade when recording a student’s high output performance; and 3) each teacher’s behavior surrounding her or his own beliefs and the no zero homework policy did not demonstrate a consistent or clear resistance or reproduction against the dominant high stakes accountability ideology.

The teachers’ and principals’ voices gave context to the complex relationships that often occur at a cultural site. My findings supported Giroux’s statement that these relationships are not always reproducing or resisting dominant ideology (1983:272), but often the negotiation of how

people “work against and within dominant relations, where antagonistic relations [continually process] knowledge, values, and social relations within dominant and subordinate relations” (1983:272). My research revealed that teachers are negotiating their identities within the new economic policy framework, but they are also responding to two different cultural shifts that have occurred in education. As stated earlier by the principal at Feeder Middle School, the definition of teaching has changed over the last twenty years. Now a teacher must take a more active role in the transmission of knowledge to her students. Her responsibilities have increased while the students’ responsibilities have decreased. The teacher has also been required to take on more parental roles. This includes responsibility for his or her student’s physical, emotional, and developmental well-being. He or she must now aid her students in the transition for each of these categories from elementary school to high school all while keeping their performance output at high levels in order to be labeled as an “effective” teacher.

### No Zero, Identity, and Choice

Working within a choice school and a traditional feeder school showed how data driven and high stakes accountability policies under neoliberal influence create tension between teacher identity and the everyday material impact of these policies. The survey and interview responses indicated that five out the six teachers work against their cognitive beliefs. While they cited collaboration and accessibility as the ideal foundational components for a strong educational system, their everyday practices continued to reproduce market-based mechanisms relating to data output, choice and competition. The data-driven policies require them to behave in this way in order to maintain their position as teachers.

The dominant forces acting upon the teachers in the name of choice and competition lead to stratification between these two schools and their students. The standards created as an entry point for acceptance into Choice Middle School set the tone and expectations at the school. By eliminating students who fall out of the range of what the no zero homework policy proctor at Feeder Middle School describes as either “lazy, but doesn’t want to fail” or “no support at home,” they are able to create an enforceable structure that allows the no zero homework zone to behave as a relief valve on a teacher’s time. Centralizing, collectively sharing, and quantifying the no zero homework zone program created a system that triggers the threat of sending the student back to their home school. These measures have created a buffer against the current parental shifting that the principals spoke about when discussing the no zero homework policy. This leverage keeps the parents as stakeholders in teaching their own children responsibility. However, by the mere act of responding to this pressure and creating a school wide infrastructure, this relief valve also supports the legitimacy of the shift as well as the role of the teacher to produce strong student performance output. Feeder Middle School also legitimizes this shift in responsibility at its schools. However, because of the effects of stratification, the teachers are additionally burdened with creating their own system to legitimize it and the mandate to accept late homework and to formulate a system for how to “handle” it.

This case study indicated that the acceptance standards to enter Choice Middle School leave behind students who may be lacking parental support or have learning disabilities. This consequence creates an unequal playing field for the teachers at Feeder Middle School; they have more challenges to overcome in order to be considered “effective” teachers. They do not have the built-in benefit of leveraging the parent into a partnership. The teachers that did create their

own no zero practice at Feeder Middle School; increased their work load before and after school, and they also assumed responsibilities historically assigned to parents. The teachers who chose not to implement a formal no zero homework policy worked within the tension between “holding the students responsible” and their perceived “effectiveness” based on the student’s performance output. They complain about the added parental responsibilities and teaching responsibilities while they continue to reproduce it.

### A “Good Teacher” and the No Zero Homework Policy

When discussing what makes a good teacher, all the teachers in both schools included some version of knowing her students well and her or his ability to teach to every learning style. These responses have changed from the definition of a “good teacher” twenty years ago. The idea that a teacher is responsible for students learning has become an accepted and agreed upon identity. However, this response is not necessarily a reproduction or an act of resistance against the dominant neoliberal ideology. The material impact of a teacher being forced to continuously focus on and produce ways to improve a student’s academic performance demands that she take on a more active role in transmitting what her student needs to learn rather than transmitting the knowledge and the student having the responsibility of actively pursuing how best to integrate the information. As a teacher from Feeder Middle School proclaimed, “My grades need to mean something, they can’t just go to no zero and put something down to check a box that they did it”. The young teacher from Choice Middle School pointed out that she found one of her students just writing something down for his homework assignments so he wouldn’t have to go to the no zero homework policy classroom. She sought to find out what was happening with the student

and, after speaking with the student's parent, created an after school tutoring plan. She also created a plan to keep all of the student's work within the classroom to counter the student's "organizational problems". For the most part, choosing to utilize or not to utilize the no zero homework policy, did not serve as an act of resistance toward a dominant force. Concern about their ability to make sure that the student learned the material impacted their decision of how or whether they utilized it. This particular pattern does not point to struggling against a dominant ideology. It points more to responding to their own "social values and knowledge" (Giroux 1983:273). This is echoed by one teacher's sentiment regarding policymakers' attempts to make schools like a business and expressing her opinion that schools should not be run like a business. This teacher's own experience and knowledge have shaped her definition of teaching and does not necessarily represent a reaction against dominant ideology. It points more toward her negotiating the tension between the two.

Although teachers are aware of the material impact of the current high stakes accountability federal policies, they are not necessarily aware of the dominant, neoliberal ideology that is influencing the market-based mechanisms supporting these policies. Their particular place between this dominant ideology and shifts in school culture leads them to continually process and construct their identities as teachers. As no zero homework policies continue to evolve, this case study has provided a context and benchmark data for how the no zero homework policy is currently being utilized within two different school cultures in Central Florida.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

1) Expand the sample size, length of the study and types of schools to encompass charter, choice, and traditional public schools that implement the no zero policies. This would establish a greater understanding for the role of this policy within a high stakes accountability environment. Future studies could expand beyond teachers and look at how no zero homework policy affect students and how they affect students' grades.

2) Explore how teachers' and students' identities have been affected by data-driven school policies. As data-driven policies continue to emphasize quantitative measurements as the standard for achievement, the opportunity for conflation between data and identity increase.

3) Examine how mandated collaboration and pacing in each discipline affects teacher identity and student learning.

4) Compare the variables of teaching experience and age within the new neoliberal policies to discover what differences, if any, occur regarding identity based on those variables.

5) Examine how parents are interpreting and reacting to this policy and its effect on their children,

## **APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER**





University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

### Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: Mary Samantha Bolger

Date: March 13, 2013

Dear Researcher:

On 3/13/2013, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination  
Project Title: Zero Sum Gain? A Middle School Case Study on the No Zero Homework Policy in the current high stakes accountability and standardization culture.  
Investigator: Mary Samantha Bolger  
IRB Number: SBE-13-09209  
Funding Agency:  
Grant Title:  
Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

Be sure to obtain written permission from the school principals before you conduct research in their schools.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 03/13/2013 03:15:11 PM EST

IRB Coordinator

## **APPENDIX B: RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

### Teacher Interview Questions

What is your opinion on the "no zero" homework policy?

Why do you give homework?

In your opinion, what makes a good teacher?

In your opinion, how does an education system serve a country? A student? (I can/will help explain question if necessary.....i.e. good citizens, pass down cultural practices, provide people for the job market/economy)

In your opinion, what is a government's role in an education system?

If you could change one thing in education right now what would it be?

What is the purpose of the no zero policy in your school?

In your opinion, what is the purpose of homework and what does completed or incomplete homework represent?

Do you think that homework is a necessary part of student learning? Why or Why not?

In your opinion, what does a strong education system look like?

### Administrator Interview Questions

What is the purpose of the no zero policy in your school?

In your opinion, what is the purpose of homework and what does completed or incomplete homework represent?

Do you think that homework is a necessary part of student learning? Why or Why not?

In your opinion, what makes a good teacher?

In your opinion, how does an education system serve a country? A student?

In your opinion, what does a strong education system look like?

### Survey Questionnaire

Please rank in order of importance, your opinion on what creates a strong education system for a country: For the individual Student:

- a) Parental School Choice
- b) Equitable for all
- c) Collaboration to create excellence between all schools
- d) Competition to create excellence between all schools
- e) Accessible for all

### Likert scale

1. Grades should represent the whole child... (Responsibility, character and academic performance):

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

2. Grades should only represent academic performance

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

3. Completing academic work in a timely manner should be reflected within a student's grade:

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

4. The level of responsible behavior should sway a borderline grade:

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

5. Education's greatest contribution to a country is for its economy:

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

6. Education's greatest contribution to a country is to create good citizens:

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

7. Education's greatest contribution to a country is to pass along its cultural values to maintain its identity:

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

8. Choice and in schools for parents creates a stronger educational system

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

9. Choice and competition between schools creates a better education for a child

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

10. Collaboration between schools creates a better education for a child.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

11. Collaboration between schools creates a better education for a country

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Video for Evocative Stimuli Response

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v:SxRL-aOoevE>

Education Reformer Pedro Noguera Delivers UVA.'s 2011 Ridley Lecture: "A Broader, Bolder Approach to Education," mirroring the name of a public policy group he helped to form.

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