Seeing is Achieving: Assessment Practice and Student Capital

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved July 2015 by the
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

August 2015

ABSTRACT

Assessment practices in U.S. schools have become a greatly debated topic since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. In response to these new guidelines, schools and teachers have made adjustments in the ways they implement assessment practice and utilize assessment data -- ultimately impacting the lives of students and their educational outcomes. Using elements of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice as a lens to consider both context and implications of assessment practices within this new legislative era, a case study is focused on the lives of teachers and students within a single U.S. middle school. This study synthesizes secondary data in the form of standardized test scores, teacher grades in math and reading, a student grit survey, along with student narratives and teacher observations to reveal the ways in which assessment practice structures the classroom field. Findings reveal the conflicting ways in which teachers and students navigate a system framed by bureaucratic legitimacy. For teachers, issues of assessment rules and time constraints lead to frustrations and bureaucratic slippage. Conversely, students implement strategies to resist and manage the routine assessment practices of teachers.

DEDICATION

I want to thank my family for all their ongoing concern and support of my personal and academic life. To my parents, Jack and Flo, words cannot express how much you both mean to me. For my brothers and sisters: Gil, Denise, Diane, Brian and Kevin; no one could ask for a better support group. Together we have contributed so much to the legacy of Arizona State University. To my nieces and nephews: Jimmy, Renee, Rachel, Jake and Elizabeth; I hope that some small aspect of my academic work challenges you as life-long learners.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work would not have been possible had it not been for the ongoing mentoring and support from my committee: Nancy Jurik, Gray Cavender, Anne Schneider and Donald Blumenfeld-Jones. You are role models for the academic community and I am hopeful that my ongoing work will be a testament to the dedication that you have shown me throughout these years. To Beth Swadener, you are an amazing mentor and advisor. Thank you for reviewing pieces of my work and always giving me critical ideas that led my work in amazing directions. To Nathan Martin, for his guidance in terms of Bourdieu's theory and quantitative statistics, your input helped refine my story. For the school district personnel, especially Jim, Jen and Sondra, who were always available to discuss my research and guide my analysis I offer eternal thanks.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As an elementary school teacher for the past seven years, I have come to associate one particular task with emotion and reflection: student assessment (e.g., testing and grading). There is the "uneasy feeling" that accompanies the task of grading assignments or providing feedback on report cards—a coming to terms with the reality that my subjective interpretation of achievement translates into an objective, metric reality: a grade. It may be the consciousness of the power I associate with assessment—the ability, to some extent, to control the emotional lives of students. There is also my ever-growing uncertainty as I watch the practice of assessment continue to entrench and expand its role in my pedagogical life and the lives of my students.

Over the past two years, federal and state legislation related to formalized teacher evaluation processes has elevated assessment practice to new dimensions and meaning within public education in general and in my classroom more specifically. For example, new learning goals and rating scales (0-*Beginning* to 4-*Advanced*) are used with each curriculum standard to communicate assessment expectations, allowing students to evaluate themselves during instruction, and to track and report their daily progress. New "watch lists" have been developed for students who fail to achieve mastery levels on assessments, along with processes and paperwork flows to label them "at risk" when they fail to respond to in-class instructional interventions (referred to as *instructional focus groups*). In addition to classroom assessments, new monthly and quarterly school improvement assessments are being enlisted to monitor progress based on previous years' standardized testing results. Following these assessments, "data chats" allow

administrators to review progress with teacher teams and develop action plans for student populations. All of these initiatives are carried out in support of the "finale" of assessment activities, which comes at the end of the school year when students take their state-mandated, high-stakes standardized achievement tests.

This personal analysis of assessment illustrates some important points. First, it acts as a form of reflexive analysis—a starting-point for "the sociology of the object that I am, the objectivation of my point of view" (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 94). I have participated actively in each of the above-mentioned activities—sometimes with trepidation, resistance, and passive acceptance. I have first-hand experience, from my vantage point as a teacher, with the effects that assessment activities have on students. To some, my point of view has been linked to the work of economic modernizers: typically referred to as neo-liberals, neo-conservatives, authoritarian-populists, and efficiency experts. As a group, these modernizers seek closer connections between schools and the globalizing economy—pushing educational and related social policy in conservative directions (Apple, 2004b, p. 174-177). These directions are commonly framed in terms of public sector competition, measurable outcomes/performance standards, cost effectiveness, and organizational communitarianism (Jurik, 2004, p. 4). However, the manipulation by these economic modernizers, while powerful, represents only one part of a complex landscape (Apple, 2004b). Making sense of the other part of this landscape—assessment practice within schools—is the focus of my empirical study.

Assessment practice within schools and classrooms have evolved significantly over the past 10 years as part of the school accountability movement. One way to explore this evolution is to look at assessment practice in terms of a process—a phenomena that

takes advantage of and constructs cultural resources carrying with it privilege and power. By using existing assessment data (standardized test scores and grades), one can explore the ways in which these metrics identify, support, and direct specific practices by school administrators and teachers, which in turn shape and frame the lives of students, and uncover the ways in which these practices benefit some students but not others. Furthermore, by observing the interactions between students and teachers, one may gain some understanding of any possible impacts of these metrics to student-teacher relationships.

With the increased focus of assessment in schools, combined with the persistent inability to bring about significant change in terms of student inequalities, now may be the time to view assessment differently—not in terms of student outcomes but as a hegemonic force. In this light, assessment involves the exploration of assessment practice as an organized assemblage of meanings and practices that are lived and understood on a different level than 'mere opinion' or 'manipulation' (Apple, 2004b, p. 4). In other words, assessment goes beyond the outcome of a score. Viewing assessment differently means shifting the lens to focus on assessment in terms of objective and subjective power relations and assessing the notion of schools as the primary institutional setting for the production, transmission and accumulation of various forms of culture capital (Swartz, 1997, p. 189). Doing so justifies a research agenda whereby one can understand the ways in which schools preserve and distribute this capital among student populations (Apple, 2004b, p. 2).

Topic and Purpose

Assessment practices—especially standardized testing—to assess aptitudes and achievement have played a predominant role in shaping thinking about American education for the past century (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). More recently, the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) legislation in January of 2002 has been seen as the impetus for the structural changes and achievement results we currently see within U.S. schools (Elmore, 2004; E. B. Johnson, 2004; Nichols & Berliner, 2007). A complete copy of the No Child Left Behind Act can be found at: http://www2.ed.gov/Policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html. Politically, this legislation is often times discussed in ideological terms of "opportunity," the code word for meritocracy. In a meritocratic culture, people are helped to compete fairly (if not equally), with enormous rewards offered to the "winners." Unfortunately, a meritocratic culture also means that we continue to both produce and ignore the "losers" (Purpel & McLaurin, 2004, p. 31).

The "game" of assessment practice. In considering the production of winners and losers within schools, I argue that assessment and its associated practice are in fact best thought of as a "game." In drawing upon this metaphor, the game of assessment practice considers all key players and their motivations. For example, federal and state policy makers have used standardized testing requirements to make significant inroads into school policy and operations—something historically considered "local" territory. In response to these new guidelines, schools and teachers have made adjustments in the ways they implement assessment practice and associated data. The combined efforts by public policy and school personnel impact the lives of students and their educational

outcomes. Scholars have attempted to explain the impact of this assessment "game" in terms of its impact on social inequality.

Scholars have placed profound importance upon questioning inequality in relation to access and the transmission of knowledge associated with classroom practice (Nash, 2004, p. 621). Researchers have attempted to bring this issue to light in two ways. First, they have sought to conceptualize the discourse that typically arises within assessment practice, an example of which is deficit thinking. Deficit thinking typically considers behavior in pathological or dysfunctional ways, referring to deficits, deficiencies, limitations, or shortcomings of individuals, families, and cultures (Valencia, 1997, p. 7). One can easily summon examples among the vocabulary used within schools, such as "at risk," "failing," or "lazy." This thinking of normative school practice bolsters and legitimizes the American emphasis on competition and individualism over cooperation and community good (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995; Wheelock, 1992, p. xiii).

In addition to analyzing theoretical concepts such as deficit thinking, numerous studies have sought to make sense of the unequal relationships between standardized testing scores and variables such as gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Their findings have been significant; however, they marginalize an important point: that assessment practices are heavily dependent upon the person being tested to recall and symbolically represent knowledge—ignoring issues of student ability (Gordon, 1999). Apple (2004b) has identified this blind spot as a basic problem for educators: to understand "how the kinds of cultural resources and symbols schools select and organize are dialectically related to the kinds of normative and conceptual consciousness 'required' by a stratified society" (p. 2). Still others see the necessity to interrogate "how

power works through dominant discourses and social relations, particularly as they affect young people who are marginalized economically, racially, and politically" (Giroux, 2003, p. 14).

Making sense of the "game". My research addressed these issues through an analysis of the educational practice of assessment in a local middle school within the context of educational policies and procedures that are a direct result of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) of 2002. I drew on school-level assessment data (test scores and teacher grades); observations and interviews with school administrators, teachers, and students about assessment; and policy directives regarding assessment from federal, state, and local district officials. With these data, I built upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu to look at assessment practices as a potent source of inequality. Education occupies a central place in Bourdieu's work to explore connections among class, culture, and power—indeed, to a great degree; education is an institution that controls the allocation of status and privilege in society (Swartz, 1997, p. 189). This focus fit well within my project's framework, methods, and data, which explore assessment as a cultural resource—tools for credentialing, selection mechanism, and cognitive classification. As a cultural resource, assessment works in concert with economic practices, becoming highly mediated by forms of human action—the activities, contradictions, and relationships among school personnel and students as they go about their day-to-day lives in an institution that organizes their actions (Apple, 2004b, p. 4). In many ways, education is a symbolic struggle for the production of common sense (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 135) —a necessity to legitimize practice. Once data (in this case, education) are defined as a cultural resource, how they are used by individuals and groups to perpetuate positions of

privilege and power becomes a pivotal issue (Swartz, 1997, p. 190), as does the ways in which the knowledge of outcome production guides the process. Schools and teachers use these data to group students. Students identified as "gifted" may, in fact, have their position within the classroom enhanced. Conversely, students who are seen as "at risk" may lose ground, ending up in intervention groups. Data such as grades and test scores have meaning and power. They are metrics that translate into unconscious categories of thought that shape a dominant view of the world—something Bourdieu refers to as cultural capital (Swartz, 1997, p. 189). One way to demonstrate the effects of this power is through an analysis of this capital exchange within assessment practice. As such, the research task becomes to challenge the underlying assumptions of these practices as they often provide an intellectual infrastructure that insulates them from change (Wheelock, 1992). My study compliments this research task, exploring the following research questions:

a) What are the relationships between standardized assessment and classroom grading, and how are both types of data used in assessment practice?

b) Under what conditions do student noncognitive variables (gender, ethnicity, or perceived perseverance) shape teaching methods/assessment practices, and what are the implications to student capital?

Implications and Contributions

In one of his early and often overlooked publications, *My Pedagogic Creed*, John Dewey (1897) argued that school assessments "are of use only so far as they test the child's fitness for social life and reveal the place which he can be of the most service and where he can receive the most help" (p. 9). Some would argue that Dewey's definition of

assessment is still alive in schools. It has been over a decade since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, the impetus for the structural changes and achievement results we currently see within U.S. schools (Elmore, 2004; E. B. Johnson, 2004; Nichols & Berliner, 2007), so an implementation history now exists to evaluate the effects in schools. Assessment and associated practices (i.e., standardized testing, use of appropriate instruments, ties to curriculum standards) are embedded throughout this legislation, and to say that it has changed the workings of schools or for teachers and students in classrooms may be an understatement, intensifying the need for this study. In answering the research questions within my study, I hope to contribute to the literature, provide evidence that can inform the practices associated with assessment for schools and teachers, and reframe the conversation (discourse) schools, teachers, and students use in their day-to-day interactions within the field.

Major findings from my study should contribute to the overall body of literature in terms of the sociology of education: more specifically, social justice and educational pedagogy. A primary focus was to understand the relationships between assessment and capital—especially for students. In a way, my study sought to answer the call from scholars such as Putnam (2003a; 2003b) to explore the ways in which capital is created and destroyed. Indeed, scholars such as Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam paved the way for an understanding of capital and its structural implications within schools. My study followed this lead by exploring the cultural and symbolic struggles that come with assessment practices between teachers and students—considering these relationships as fluid and subtle—what Bourdieu defined as their *habitus*. But it also goes further than much of the existing educational research that has sought to understand relationships

between standardized test scores and student outcomes by considering standardized testing data as a structural tool (i.e., official statistic) that are subsequently used by schools and teachers within their assessment practices. The research task was then one of interrogating how assessment data and practice act in powerful ways (through dominant discourses and social relations) to affect young people who are marginalized economically, racially, and politically (Giroux, 2003, p. 14).

Closely related to its contributions to the literature, my study expects to play a significant role in positively serving school and classroom practice. It is estimated that by the end of 2014, revenues for companies that provide school assessment resources will reach $4.5 billion dollars (Cavanagh, 2013). Schools are now resorting to private companies to provide more and more assessment resources. In some ways, this statistic substantiates concerns about the impacts of ongoing, neoliberal entrenchment into teaching and learning. To some degree, then, my study seeks to describe the impacts of assessment as it takes on business-like properties. Answering questions related to changes in the teacher-student classroom relationship within this new framework becomes critical. Additionally, my study questions how these new tools interface with traditional practices of grading student work. We must understand the ways in which these relationships buttress capital production. As mentioned earlier, standardized test scores are used not simply for student graduation requirements; they now act as a significant decision-making tool within schools and for teachers. What are the implications of this type of decision making on students? Do other variables (ethnicity, gender, or perseverance) play a role with standardized test scores or grades in this decision-making process?

Findings from these questions can serve as powerful feedback in terms of justice-related issues within the school-life of students.

The final point of contribution from my study invokes the notions of equity and individualism, which can be seen in the discourse and outcomes of schools and the powerful ways schools can label and classify students as groups and individually. My study framed these notions within the discourse of deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997). From personal experience, and from interactions with other colleagues, there is often a discussion about how conversations about education are always "negative." Many attribute this tone to the sheer amount of change that has infiltrated schools over the past decade—the school accountability movement. Worth considering in the wake of school reform is the renewal of harsh economic and social competition in which metaphors of organized sports and war are employed to glorify, extol, and legitimate an ideology of "opportunity" (Purpel & McLaurin, 2004).

The results from my study seek to reinvigorate the school and classroom field in order to reframe the discourse that is used when talking about students. This new discourse could be framed within the concept of capital. It would involve turning the lens away from the deficit thinking model to focus on ways of building off existing student capital. From this fresh angle, students can be seen as having the potential to succeed, and the goal is one of building capital in areas of need. To some, this proposal may sound like a simple restatement of deficits—the glass is half full rather than half empty. However, this type of thinking may engage some students in new and important ways within the classroom. It may provide hope and build trust in an institutional structure that is

typically thought of as reproducing the dominant social milieu (Apple, 2004b; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Giroux, 1997).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

To link the literature to my current study, I turn to my experiences within public education, interdisciplinary training within Justice Studies, and the School of Education. Much of the current literature related to assessment focuses on measurement and best practices. This trend looks at the use of official statistics to explain group differences (i.e., samples) at the expense of gaining knowledge of classroom dynamics or interactions within schools. As a consequence, educational research activities in the United States and other nations have moved away from class and structural analyses (Apple, 2004b, p. 180). Ignoring issues of class and structure within schools leaves the "game" of assessment practice unexplained. One need only look at some of the real-life student outcomes that have had a direct relationship to class and structure to appreciate the importance of this type of work. Nationally, around 25% of students will dropout, and in many urban high schools the percentage ranges from 60 to 70% (Fine, 1991, p. 21). Certain minority groups have shown little progress in terms of the achievement gap (Gabriel, 2010), and are overrepresented within special education classes (Harry & Klingner, 2006). Rather than turning our backs on three decades of sociological research related to social inequality that demonstrates a dismal shift in school goals related to equal opportunity for all (Hallinan, 1988, p. 251), we need a more thorough understanding of the dialectical relationship between intellect and practice (Elmore, 2004, p. 16).

Van Galen (2007) has argued that educators would be well served by gaining a deeper understanding of how social class shapes educational access, aspiration, and

achievement (p. 157). The study of class is important because the constitution of social class happens through "interpersonal interactions and organizational processes that sort and channel students in their schooling trajectories (Hall, 2001). Scholars such as Hallinan (1988) have called for researchers to analyze valuable resources such as curriculum and instruction in the hopes of revealing mechanisms through which schools act as agents of social change (p. 261). Finally, some scholars want the focus of educational research aimed toward the "importance of looking at the 'rules of the game' in addition to individual experiences in playing 'the game'" (Biddle, 2001, p. 78). Assessment practice is at the heart of these issues in today's educational paradigm. As such, this literature review is structured to explicate the historical and current-day realities of assessment practice in schools.

U.S. education has been greatly influenced by the ideal of equality of opportunity. In terms of its ideological impact, equality of opportunity can best be thought of as the compass that guides schools toward true north. However, teasing this ideal out within the literature reveals the ways in which good intentions have led to broken promises. Assessment practice has served as both an evaluation of progress and a tool of control for schools. Researchers have demonstrated the ways in which assessment practice has widened the achievement gap of specific student populations. However, in spite of this grim reality, assessment practice continues to act as a powerful tool to control student outcomes, a dynamic that can be seen clearly through the lens of such concepts as reproduction and hegemony. The realities associated with the equality of opportunity agenda within the educational paradigm have led to several reform movements. The most

recent of these movements began during the 1970s and is often characterized around the goal of standardizing curriculum.

The policy that has guided assessment practice in schools for the past decade surrounds a neoliberal agenda that seeks to control the content (standards and curriculum) and the achievement outcomes (accountability and high-stakes testing) of schools. Each of these factors has had a significant impact on assessment practice and the discourse of schools. The primary vehicle for this control is the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) of 2002. This large-scale policy implementation has been viewed by many as the impetus for the current outcomes we see in schools and for students. As the literature will explain, the goals of this policy have fallen short of expectations and have greatly influenced student outcomes, especially in terms of disadvantage.

The articulated policy discourse of the NCLBA and the historical realities of the equality of opportunity ideology represent the instrumental factors associated with assessment practice. Now a shift can be made to assessment practice perspectives that address classroom interactions, experience, and perceptions of students. Specifically, the literature has addressed the ways in which assessment practices intersect to create disadvantages for some students. In conceptualizing disadvantage, one can look at how discourse and practice interconnect to produce deficit thinking and stereotype threat. This discourse demonstrates the ways in which schools and teachers create powerful messages related to academic performance and, combined with teacher decisions in terms of classifying students or student groups, enact powerful practices that shape many of the current conceptual mechanisms that can be discussed as embedded disadvantage.

Current research has demonstrated that concepts such as the hidden curriculum, tracking, and student grouping practices have well-established roots in advantaging some students and disadvantaging others. Schools have used these mechanisms in overt and covert ways. In terms of assessment practice, test scores are used in response to policy directives and to place students on specific curriculum tracks. Within the classroom, assessment data are used in more subtle ways—developing curriculum that tends to match perceived student abilities. In these situations, the literature has exposed the ways in which powerful actions by schools and teachers become a substantial structural force that is often perceived as natural. In general, the ideology of our current research and policy movements sidelines the conditions that promote inequality, thus creating a simplistic viewpoint for policy makers, educators, and the general public.

Assessment Practice and Ideology

Educational opportunity and progressive education. One of the most important ideological themes throughout much of the history of public education has been the goal of equality of opportunity. According to Spring (1989), America's democratic ideology has sought a means of providing equal opportunity for everyone: all have an equal chance to compete for any place in society (p. 95). On one hand, the Founding Fathers' implicit political theory envisioned universal schooling framed around meritocratic goals. As such, schools would select those of ability to advance to higher levels of education. In this light, equality of opportunity meant that anyone could receive an education; however, schools were the unquestioned "selectors" of those who would proceed to higher education (Perkinson, 1968, p. 11). What was missing was a method by which schools could objectively administer these selection processes.

The language of production, economics, and bureaucratic skills came to dominate the reform movements, and the rationale for schools had made a shift—from moralism to functionalism (Vallance, 1973, p. 15). The democratic-liberal functionalist perspective saw schools as a vital institution within a modern capitalist society. Within this framework, meritocracy came to be seen as a goal guaranteeing fair competition for unequal rewards (Sadovnik, 2011). The specifics of this shift to functionalism can be described in terms of significant epistemological and organizational changes. The response by schools to urbanization, industrialization, and immigration was to begin "sorting" students based on their abilities, interests, and future occupations (J. Spring, 1989, p. 96). The need to impose homogeneity was replaced by the social needs of the individual. Thus, the goals of education, and its reform, began to be phrased in terms of individual development within the social context (Vallance, 1973, p. 18). The intelligence test (IQ) became "an objective measure that could be used to determine one's place in society" (J. Spring, 1989, p. 97). The IQ test came to provide scientific validation of the notion of equality: a democratic view that all people had an equal chance to reach a level in society that corresponded to his or her individual level of intelligence. Schools began the practice of dividing students into groups on the basis of their "mental capacities" (Tyack, 2003, p. 118). Imbued with social and economic value, assessments such as the IQ test portray a specific vision of "science" and the abstract individual [a student] (Apple, 2004b, p. 8). For schools, a rationale, or discourse, was necessary to legitimate the practice of dividing students. This thinking provided a legitimate method or "common sense" discourse whereby school personnel could justify winners and losers in terms of the mission of the equality of opportunity.

Hegemony. Gramsci considered the notion of "common sense" in terms of knowledge that is often times unquestioned, fluid, and apparently coherent; but in reality, knowledge is often contradictory, shaped by political, economic, and historical contexts (Crehan, 2002, p. 110). The educational institution as a primary ideological apparatus is at the heart of knowledge transmission. For Gramsci, the ways in which schools convey ideas is as important as the ideas themselves (Aronowitz, 2002). Schools gain control of knowledge and everyday life in a way that is projected as natural—a form of unquestioned consciousness. As institutions, schools maintain the ability to confer a specific cultural legitimacy or knowledge of specific groups. Apple (2004b) has referred to this phenomenon as "power and culture coming together to form a 'knowledge for all' – that is specifically tied to existing economic relations of society" (p. 61). Schools help create people who see distinct possibilities. These conceptualizations are critical to the ideology of equality of opportunity, and to the notion of hegemony.

Hegemony refers to organized meanings and practices—effective and dominant systems of meaning and values that are lived (Apple, 2004b) and mediated between institutions like schools and larger society and are in constant dialectical tension with each other and within the prevailing historical conditions (Giroux, 1997, p. 7). Culture and class structure play an integral role in explaining hegemony, which is important in terms of assessment practice, as scholars such as Darling-Hammond (1994) have critiqued current assessment methods as failing to address the individual strengths of students and notions of equity. Existing research related to hegemony and classrooms has constructed these issues in terms of the discourse used by teachers and the ways in which

the student's voice is minimized. Paulo Freire closely assessed the implications of a pedagogy that minimizes student voice.

Freire's viewpoint of hegemony is important because both radical and conservative ideologies generally fail to engage the politics of voice and representation (narrative and dialogue) around which students make sense of their lives and school (Giroux, 1997, p. 120). One way that Freire's (1995) work articulated an ideology of oppression is in terms of what he refers to as the "banking" concept of education—linking the relationship between the oppressor (teacher) and the oppressed (student). The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students' creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see if transformed. The oppressors use their "humanitarianism" to preserve a profitable situation. Thus they react almost instinctively against any experiment in education that stimulates critique and is not content with a partial view of reality but always seeks out the ties which link one point to another and one problem to another. This logic links to the notion of deficit thinking and Darling-Hammond's (1994) proposition for assessment reform. Current assessment practices that seek to dichotomize students into categories such as "at risk" or "failing" simply connect practice and achievement problems. As such, equity can only be envisioned within assessment practice that values the combined discourse of teacher and student.

Scholars have taken up this notion of a combined discourse in terms of a "third space." In their classroom observational work, Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson (1995) have argued for the construction of the classroom as a dynamic system that mirrors larger societal structures and power relationships. During their year-long observations in four

Los Angeles school districts, Gutierrez et al. (1995) discovered that students and teachers carried out parallel scripts (narratives) that led to unproductive ends and rendering a resistance to classroom change. The hegemonic force of teacher scripts dominated the classroom and pedagogical practice—marginalizing student scripts and any potential for resistance. As a point of possible change, these scholars argued for consideration of a "third space," or what Bourdieu (1991) referred to as a "space of regulated confrontation." Within this space, contested narratives associated with text and practice redefine what is considered knowledge (p. 467). Because a number of assessment practices have been linked to deficit thinking and grouping of students, the consideration of a "third space" may lead to more equitable relationships or student outcomes. My study seeks to understand the nature of classroom interactions in relationship to institutional credentials that precede students into the classroom (i.e., standardized test scores). If test scores do in fact act as a significant source of culture capital—impacting teacher/student dialogue or relationships, the proposition of a "third space" may be greatly impeded.

Reproduction. The notion of hegemony focuses on the ways in which pedagogy (practices and knowledge transmission) represent and support the dominant culture. The effects of a hegemonic pedagogy can be seen in the structural and symbolic relationships between social classes—commonly termed *reproduction*. In terms of schools, Apple (2004b) has defined reproduction as the interplay between that which is taught—the legitimate culture—and the social relations of classroom life represented as practice (p. 38). Other scholars have referred to this structure in terms of a growing concern with what has been called the *reproductive theory of schooling*. As part of the reproductive

thesis, schools are not valued within a traditional sense of democracy; instead, they are viewed in instrumental terms and should be measured against the need to reproduce the value, practices, and skills required by the dominant corporate order (Giroux, 1997, p. 119). Since the 1980s, the theoretical work of Pierre Bourdieu has been used as the impetus driving the line of inquiry related to reproduction and schools (Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997).

Bourdieu argued that the education system performs three central functions. First, it provides for the transmission of technical knowledge and skills but most importantly socialization into a particular cultural tradition. Second, it delivers a traditional pedagogy that reproduces social-class relations. Lastly, it legitimizes the cultural heritage it transmits, deflecting attention from and contributing to the misrecognition of its social reproduction function (Swartz, 1997, p. 190-191). Each of these functions is interwoven into the day-to-day practices of schooling. In terms of assessment practice, these functions are prevalent in the more specific practice of grading (i.e., credentialing). Bourdieu linked school practices such as grading along with his concept of reproduction to notions of capital. More specifically, his explanations rested on the notion of cultural capital.

For Bourdieu, capital represented the currency used within a field by participants to accrue status or power or exert control (Grenfell, 2009). Bourdieu’s research emphasized the role that cultural and social capital played within the educational institution or field (Swartz, 1997), relying upon cultural capital as an explanation for educational inequality. Bourdieu’s theory of culture capital specifically links the relationship between family (class) and the logic of the school institution, thus revealing

the reproductive aspects of the structure (Bourdieu, 1998b). By linking the influence of linguistic capital (a specific type of cultural capital), Bourdieu argued that language becomes the major point of leverage for teachers' assessment and that "style" is then always taken into account (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 73). In this case, "style" linked specifically to class, rendering working-class students most susceptible to what Bourdieu described as part of the educational mortality rate (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 73).

Researchers have explored Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital and theory of social reproduction in two ways. First, they have undertaken qualitative research in terms of teacher-student classroom interactions. Secondly, they have considered the role that individual culture capital plays within school outcomes. Each of these approaches sheds light on possibilities and difficulties in understanding the impact of social reproduction by schools. Making sense of the interactions between teachers and students would address what some have seen as two critical problems within our current educational research: the ability to address social inequality and, more narrowly, uniting notions of structure and agency (Weis, Jenkins, & Stich, 2009). The control and reactions to language in the classroom are one way to consider the reproduction of legitimate culture—that is, social reproduction. Bourdieu offered a potential answer to this empirical task in his conceptual tool referred to as *habitus*. My study utilized this conceptual tool to understand the ways in which teacher-student discourse impacts current assessment practices. The goal was to use this discourse to understand and describe in more depth the ways in which assessment practice may in fact be reproductive in nature. Such a task was certain to have some pitfalls due to the ever-changing nature of classrooms.

Some of the extant literature has the potential to reveal the complexities associated with the relationship to classroom practice and social reproduction. For example, in their analysis of four science teachers within an urban elementary school, King, Shumow, and Lietz (2001) discovered that although these teachers framed their pedagogical work using "buzz words" (i.e., teaching science using inquiry-based methods), none of the teachers actually carried these concepts through to classroom practices. In terms of addressing knowledge-based claims, "Not one of the teachers could describe their students' scientific knowledge or understanding" (p. 107). Researchers found this finding "alarming" because identification of student knowledge is of critical pedagogical importance. This study exemplifies one of the challenges of conceptualizing social reproduction. As illustrated above, the teachers' lack of preparation in many ways shapes the educational environment or achievement possibilities. Reproduction must then be framed in terms of teacher quality, and an aspect of reproduction would be considered in these terms as well. This discussion is not uncommon within the educational paradigm as issues of teacher quality have been linked to low-income or low-performing schools. This lack of preparation may also be a driving force behind the use of scripted or standardized curriculum, which leads to what Anyon has described as "an enacted curriculum of basic skills, rule recognition and compliance" (Luke, 2010).

For my study, describing aspects of reproduction involved understanding the nuanced communication related to assessment practices—conversations between teachers and students. The study of reproduction, especially in light of Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, even though at times acknowledged in the research literature, remains highly contested. An excellent example of this comes from Weis and Fine (2004). Although they

acknowledged that their research, along with that of other critical scholars, had in fact demonstrated evidence of reproduction in school, they acknowledged that the theory may be “too glib” and overlook moments of interruption (materially and discursively) by students (p. 149). When looking at assessment practice, the relationships between teacher and student must be considered within multiple perspectives: teacher experience or quality, and student demographics that may structure the classroom. My study considered this point in terms of the teacher-student relationship and the ways in which noncognitive variables structured assessment practice in classrooms.

The study of reproduction in schools, especially in terms of assessment practice, cannot be accomplished without some understanding of the “rules of the game.” Many of these rules come from public policy. Over the past decade, the federal government’s role in the control of schools has increased dramatically (Elmore, 2004; E. B. Johnson, 2004; Nichols & Berliner, 2007) as evidenced in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) of 2002. Much of this control has been exerted in new teaching standards and accountability measures aimed at increasing student achievement. The next section of this literature review considers the juxtaposition of neoliberalism and public policy. This type of review is valuable because scholars see the study of institutional standards and their relations to individual action as necessary to uncovering the effects of social inequality (Biddle, 2001, p. 79).

Assessment Practice and Public Policy

Neoliberalism. Over the past two decades the educational paradigm has seen a significant ideological shift towards neoliberal, marketplace ideals. This movement in education mirrors a corporate model of business whose three commandments are grow,

compete, and pursue measurable targets (E. B. Johnson, 2004). Popular media has conveyed that students were increasingly failing to achieve what many view as a "basic" education, therefore, policy makers called for increased accountability and school choice options.

The new economic modernizers desired closer connections between schools and the globalizing economy (Apple, 2004a, p. 177). Some see these connections as necessary for growth within the American educational system. Critics envisioned this as a maneuver to frame ideological issues as business problems to be solved; that is, removing political decisions from public discourse by reducing these decisions to technical problems answerable to technical solutions (Giroux, 1997). These technical solutions are commonly framed in terms of public sector competition, measurable outcomes/performance standards, cost effectiveness, and organizational communitarianism (Jurik, 2004, p. 4). Within the U.S. educational paradigm, we can see the realization of Jurik's (2004) four key components. The charter school movement has dominated public sector competition within schools. Charter school programs have been adopted in 39 states and the District of Columbia, and as of Fall 2002, 2,699 charter schools were in operation, serving approximately 575,000 students nationwide—representing one of the fastest growing forms of school choice within the past decade (Bifulco & Ladd, 2004). Performance-based metrics have become the overall requirement for accepted educational research and the primary evaluative source of teacher quality and student outcomes. These notions of choice and accountability are framed in terms of what Richardson (2005) has referred to as a neoliberal definition of equality of resources and recognition that assumes that "equality" requires "sameness" (p. 519). This

assumption can be seen in the early endeavors by policy makers to implement consistent curriculum standards and accountability measures.

Standards and accountability movement. The publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 ushered in a call to state and localities to increase academic standards, improve the quality of teachers, and reform curriculum, bringing the issue of schooling to the national political agenda and linking it to national trade problems (J. H. Spring, 1986, p. 333). By 1990, poor student achievement results provided another opportunity for many to locate blame in the lack of a unified vision of what students should be taught. Policy makers, under the auspice of market-based reform, responded with the widespread implementation of teaching standards and objectives, based on earlier reform work (Tyler, 1970).

By the beginning of the new millennium, student achievement rates remained flat (or, in some cases, fell), and market-based reformers called upon policy makers to increase the accountability of schools (and teachers) and maintain some form of control to ensure that student progress became a reality (Ravitch, 2010). In 2001, under the direction of then President George W. Bush, wide-sweeping legislation was introduced aimed at solving what was considered a “crisis” within the U.S. educational system. The result was the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Most point to the passage of the NCLBA legislation in January of 2002 as the impetus for the structural changes and achievement results we currently see within U.S. schools (Elmore, 2004; E. B. Johnson, 2004; Nichols & Berliner, 2007). This legislation enacted powerful accountability measures for students, teachers, and schools. The original purpose of the NCLBA legislation had lofty goals of ensuring that ALL students

achieve specific proficiency levels in math and reading. The strong-handed language of accountability combined with this single, metric methodology spoke clearly to the neoliberal agenda and was celebrated by many policy makers and educational reformers. Now, after 10 years of implementation history, the effects of this wide-sweeping legislation are well entrenched in schools and open for evaluation.

Many celebrated the establishment of the student proficiency mandate within NCLBA. However, with a proficiency deadline of 2014 and strong penalties for schools and teachers that failed to demonstrate progress, many hoped that the United States would no longer "leave behind" those who had been previously disadvantaged. Unfortunately, policy makers chose to rely on a single metric—standardized test scores—to evaluate the overall effectiveness of such wide-sweeping legislation.

High stakes testing. As I will discuss further in a bit, standardized testing for assessing aptitudes and achievement has played a principal role in shaping the thought of American education for the past century (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). With an established mandate and a 2014 deadline for student proficiency, NCLBA required states to develop and administer annual student testing often referred to as "high stakes" testing. This single metric immediately became the focus for policy makers and researchers. With a single variable of analysis, researchers began to assess outcomes based on ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. Additionally, states were required to publish information to the general public related to the number of students who achieved—or failed to achieve—the established proficiency standards in reading, writing, and math. As such, the normative dimensions that structured decisions and experiences of the classroom were dismissed—replaced by a rationalized view of theory and knowledge as

objective “facts.” This framework, silent about its own ideology, supplants hermeneutic (i.e., dialogic) principles of analysis, focusing instead on explanation, prediction, and technical control. In other words, the standardized test score became a single source of analysis, dismissive of any other explanation.

These test scores have become much more than a guiding force for classroom assessment and instruction. Instead, they have become official statistics that determine such things as student retention, graduation, and placement in specific educational settings. In short, the new “game” in education involves high-stakes testing and the scores produced by these tests. In his book *Savage Inequalities*, Jonathan Kozol (1991) has provided a powerful explanation of what happens to students within an educational system that places a predominant emphasis on test scores:

> Test scores in math and reading in America are graded not against an absolute standard but against a “norm” “or “average.” For some to be above the norm, others *have* to be below it. Preeminence, by definition, is a zero-sum matter. There is not an ever-expanding pie of “better-than-average” academic excellence. There can’t be. Two thirds of American children can never score above average. (p. 200)

As official statistics, test scores act as social facts *par excellence,* which activate processes of social control (Kitsuse & Cicourel, 1963, p. 139). One example would be the assignment of school performance labels based on test scores. Each year, student test scores are assembled and reported at the national, state, and local level. Once summarized, these scores are translated into school performance labels—a system of threats and incentives tied to test performance aimed at energizing teachers and their

students to work harder and more effectively (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 8). As an accountability mechanism, this system creates powerful, negative incentives for schools—not based on a knowledge of process—creating a degenerative policy-making system whereby social constructions separate the "deserving" from the "undeserving" to be used to legitimate political practices and influence power relationships (A. L. Schneider & Ingram, 1997, p. 102). Once published, the results become part of a shaming ritual that leads to school closings, public scolding (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 8), and the creation of other structural issues for schools.

In her work with 96 preservice teachers, Ladd (2008) observed the negative effects associated with school labels. Showing participants a 15-minute school video including school performance labels (A, F, typical), her ANOVA analysis revealed that school personnel focused on interpreting and remembering the negative behaviors associated with "F" labels (p. 238). In other words, being branded a failing school left lasting impressions with these soon-to-be teachers. Such outcomes are unfortunate because a significant reform effort associated with NCLBA was to attract experienced teachers to low-performing schools. The reality is that novice or newly certified teachers are replacing the experienced teachers within these low-performing schools—imposing further hardship on administrators, parents, and students (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Diaz, 2004, p. 269).

Murillo and Flores's (2002) four-year study of 20 schools in North Carolina demonstrated similar results. Using a combination of interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis, schools that were labeled "low performing" left their teachers feeling a stigma associated with the performance label. Additionally, they

reported feeling disabled in their ability to use the state's accountability program to grow and offer improvements. Even with a belief that the program would help them become better teachers, they had a fear that students may perform better on standardized test measures, which in turn would constrict their abilities to use curriculum and methods of teaching that supported a wide range of children (p. 107).

The stigma and shame attached to a school label should not be downplayed; however, the process is one that is public and intended to provide information to policy makers, administrators, and parents. Not all researchers have agreed with the conclusions about school labeling—some data demonstrate that schools and teachers do in fact respond to accountability system incentives. In other words, when schools focus attention on specific students, their achievement can be affected positively. However, as Reback (2008) has acknowledged, there is a dichotomy: "It may be a rising tide that lifts all boats (and lifting some more than others), or it may be a falling tide sinking all boats (and sinking some less than others)" (p. 1413). This apparatus of assessment has a potentially profound impact on notions of equality, and is evident in the way that schools organize knowledge, label, and group students.

Groups and social constructions. Group identity (i.e., race, gender, immigration status, and social class) is a common theme throughout much of the literature related to educational opportunity (i.e., ideology) and the accompanying public policy. Schools have historically used a variety of grouping strategies in response to the needs of the public and public policy. For example, as early as the 19th century, schools responded to issues of urbanization, industrialization, and immigration by "sorting" students based on their abilities, interests and future occupations (J. Spring, 1989, p. 96). Following World

War II, the social, political, and economic changes stimulated a curriculum movement related to cultural and ethnic diversity that became known as “intergroup education,” with the hope of reducing racial prejudice and misunderstandings (Banks, 2001, p. 23-24). Today, policies such as the NCLBA rely on group identity to report academic achievement. Conspicuously, these group definitions produce an individual’s sense of connectedness within a particular cultural group that often manifests as “us” and “them” feelings, perceptions, and behaviors (Banks, 2001, p. 129). As Schneider and Ingram (1997) pointed out, the “process of socially constructing reality produces ‘social constructions’ that refer to values and meanings associated with events, persons, groups, regions, countries, or any other objective or subjective situation” (p. 106). These social constructions have important links to the development of governmental policy.

Conceptually, “social construction” refers to the normative and evaluative images individuals hold concerning definable groups, such as the poor, the elderly, and racial minorities whose behavior and well-being are affected by public policy (Link & Oldendick, 1996). These images include the stereotypes about groups of people that have been created by politics, culture, history, and the media (A. L. Schneider & Ingram, 1997); further, public policy is the primary tool through which government acts to exploit, inscribe, entrench, institutionalize, perpetuate, or change social constructions (A. L. Schneider & Ingram, 2005, p. 5). Social constructions encompass a wide variety of circumstances and legitimate any number of actions by teachers or school administrators. Once legitimated, groups can be defined in terms of their deservedness and thereby receive the positive effects of a particular policy. Some groups can be defined in a negative light, thereby receiving the burden of punishment associated with a particular

policy even when it is illogical (A. L. Schneider & Ingram, 1997). The outcome of social constructions and target populations is the result of policy design. Fueled by pressures to act, public officials create beneficial policy to powerful, positively constructed target populations and devise punitive, punishment-oriented policy for negatively constructed groups, with the goal of linking behavior to the achievement of desired ends (A. L. Schneider & Ingram, 1997).

The social construction of a target population refers to (a) the shared characteristics that distinguish a target population as socially meaningful, and (b) the attribution of specific values, symbols, and images to the shared characteristics (A. Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p. 335). The NCLBA perfectly illustrates this process. NCLBA represents the single most important piece of legislation for schools since the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and is viewed as the primary vehicle that drives school operations. Significant in terms of its strong federal control, NCLBA NCLBA—in many ways—appears to positively frame (i.e., provides for funding) a variety of groups (at-risk students, drop outs, and prevention programs). The complex and vague structure of the policy often makes it difficult to determine which groups may be burdened or advantaged, thereby increasing the discretion and responsibility of school administrators once the policy is in place. In such cases, the content of the NCLBA policy simply enables the construction. Context from school staff (teachers and administrators) becomes critical for explanation of the social construction of target populations, and can be ascertained through knowledge of language, discourse, and personal experience with the policy (A. L. Schneider & Ingram, 1997, p. 3).

The theory surrounding the social construction of target populations is important because it helps explain why some groups are advantaged more than others regardless of traditional notions of political power. These initial explanations can then be extended to describe the ways that policy is designed to reinforce or alter advantages (A. Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p. 334). In essence, it bridges public policy and political behavior to allow for the exploration of hypotheses related to the ways in which public policy influences individual attitude and behaviors (Campbell, 2012). For example, much of the NCLBA legislation provides funding to schools to implement normatively structured programs. Many of these programs embed the goal of improving student achievement outcomes. Because policy designs contain specific observable elements such as target populations, goals, rules, rationales, and assumptions (A. L. Schneider & Ingram, 1997, p. 2). Key questions surround the explanation of the ways in which the NCLBA policy constructs students to "fit" within the policy, the role that school administrators play in the construction process, and the extent to which these constructions impact student behaviors. The explanatory nature behind the theory of the social construction of target populations provides a framework to respond to these questions, and helps shape or conceptualize a landscape of disadvantage.

Assessment Practice – Conceptualizing Disadvantage

The previous section of this literature review articulated the instrumental ways in which school provide meaning surrounding assessment practice. In many ways, this meaning is not neutral and impacts student populations differently. In conceptualizing this meaning as disadvantage, the literature can be called on again—this time to look at existential factors that play off the meanings provided by schools. Assessment practice is

at the root of many existential factors that take shape in discourse and classification schemes that serve decision-making processes and exacerbate student inequities. However, prior to consulting this literature, an important point regarding issues of race, gender, and class warrants addressing.

A significant challenge to addressing the topic of disadvantage within the educational literature arises when race, gender, and/or class are brought into the equation. Each of these issues has its own place within the history of U.S. education. The literature is sizeable and much of this research includes the ways in which educational practice creates or exacerbates inequalities in terms of race, gender, and class. Tyack (2003) has described this interrelationship in terms of a social diversity. As such, it creates two contrasting points of view on sameness and difference:

> One assumes that civic unity is possible because people are basically alike, no matter what groups they may belong to (a variant of this approach holds that people may be initially quite different but are capable of becoming the same if properly instructed). The other stresses basic differences between groups. Each perspective on sameness and difference contains germs of truth, but each also reveals serious flaws both in describing social reality and in prescribing social policy. (p. 94-95)

Tyack's description does an excellent job of pointing out the nuances that must be considered in describing the impact of race, gender, and class as factors of inequality. One must consider the numerous studies that have been conducted over the past 25 years documenting gender bias against girls in coeducational classrooms (Datnow & Hubbard, 2005, p. 196). In terms of race, researchers have determined that attachment to school is

the most important predictor of delinquency (Crutchfield, 2014, p. 99). With this factor in mind, it is not surprising that a significant difference exists in terms of school outcomes (i.e., graduation rates and tests scores) for Blacks and Hispanics (Chubb & Loveless, 2002, p. 1-2). Socioeconomic factors have also played a role in school outcomes. Data show that students from wealthier families used to be six times more likely to finish college than poor students—now they are 14 times more likely (Petrovich, 2005, p. 10). In other words, the importance of issues of race, gender, and class must not be minimized. With this in mind, the following section of this literature review seeks to address instances in which race, gender, and class have specific connections to assessment practice. However, more in-depth analysis and connections to the important concepts of race, gender, and class are considered in the forthcoming data analysis chapters.

Classification. Bourdieu (1990) argued that the educational system survives based on obtaining recognition of the legitimacy of its sanctions and social effects, and one way of achieving this legitimacy is through the practice of credentialing (p. 210). Assessment practice acts as the objective measure that leads to credentialing. Tools such as grading and standardized testing provide the means to a credentialing end. However, there is a subjective nature to assessment practice. In other words, assessment practice is not necessarily a singular, objective process. Within schools, teachers use any number of subjective decision-making processes in terms of assessment. Indeed, assessment is circular in nature, and practice tends to build upon previous experience. Seldom is one assessment measure used as a final credential. A number of discourses and subjective processes are at play, which is why assessment practice should be thought of as structural

in nature. Data are shared in a number of ways—exchanged in conversation or influenced by a particular party or discourse. One way to consider the powerful nature of this process or practice is through the lens of classification.

Embedded within the structures of schools are powerful technologies—one being that of classification (Bowker & Star, 1999, p. 319). Classification processes are driven in several important ways. First, schools use official statistics and formalized processes that place students into groupings. The goal of this type of classification is often framed within psycho-educational, deficit-based discourse—a student is in need of remediation (Valencia, 1997). Efforts such as special education programs that seek to classify students according to a formalized disability (based on IQ testing) or gifted programs (based on results from advanced cognitive testing) are excellent examples. In terms of classroom-based classification mechanisms, teachers use official statistics and assessment data in more subtle ways. Assessment data are used to group students for a specific curriculum intervention (i.e., reteaching a simple reading or math concept). However, significant assumptions often follow these groupings. For example, teachers may have little time to plan for these groups, so students are placed hastily or for behavioral reasons (i.e., causing classroom disruptions for a particular teacher). Moreover, as these classification systems become more deeply engrained into working practices or infrastructures, they risk of becoming "black boxed," thus more potent and invisible (Bowker & Star, 1999, p. 325). Scholars such a Bourdieu and Foucault offered insights into the relational implications of the classifications systems incorporated into school practice.

Bourdieu focused attention on the issue of group classification in terms of its impact and structure of a field of power often referred to as "social space" (Bourdieu,

1990). One way Bourdieu attempted to understand group classifications in schools was by utilizing the concept of symbolic capital. Examples of symbolic capital in schools can be diplomas or other credentials (Swartz, 1997). In conferring these forms of symbolic capital, the institution provides an official point of view expressed as official discourse. This discourse performs an act of cognition that enforces recognition and defines what agents have to do and what agents have done. It other words, this discourse legitimizes the institution's actions— "a power of conserving or transforming present classifications when it comes to gender, nation, region, age and social status, a power mediated by the words that are used to designate or to describe individuals, groups or institutions" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 137). An example of this power can be seen within the current school accountability movement, wherein the state confers specific school performance labels (letter grades) based on student standardized testing performance. Through the exploration of student group classification in terms of standardized testing scores and classroom assessment practice, my study intends to reveal a more personalized (also localized) view of this type of classification system and its impacts on symbolic capital.

Foucault also explored the issue of classification in terms of disciplinary techniques that seek to monitor, classify, and control students. Like Bourdieu, Foucault focused on school examinations as a tool for gathering specific information that forces individuals to prove they possess official, safe, or useful knowledge (Jardine, 2005, p. 62). For Foucault the examination was best represented through a notion he referred to as a "dividing practice." Researchers have theoretically connected this notion to schools and their practices of examination, testing, profiling, and tracking that develop power-related relationships whereby the subject (i.e., student) is objectified as inside himself or divided

from others (Meadmore, 1993, p. 60). These practices also allow for the ranking of individual performance in normative terms: good versus bad, most to least successful, or highest to lowest in terms of achievement. The practice of ranking has been used to coordinate and use everyone's abilities most efficiently, and to marginalize, devalue, or eliminate abilities that do not fit into society's predominant knowledge and power structure (Jardine, 2005, p. 68). The powerful nature of classification, in many ways, is carried forward within schools through a particular discourse. This discourse has been considered within the literature in terms of the negative ways in which teachers discuss students: deficit thinking.

Deficit thinking. The scientific vision of assessment has become dominated by critics of standardized test scores and research related to the relationship to student outcomes and social inequalities (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). One theoretical frame used to describe these inequalities relates to the ways that schools and teachers talk about students—in terms of their deficits. This discourse discloses the subtle ways in which the biases of teacher classification of students and student noncognitive behaviors seep into assessment practice.

Researchers have attempted to address the issue of teacher bias in terms of deficit thinking. In this light, deficit thinking offers a description of behavior in pathological or dysfunctional ways—referring to deficits, deficiencies, limitations, or shortcomings of individuals, families, and cultures (Valencia, 1997, p. 7). Teachers then take up this deficit thinking discourse within their practice to create or support a specific categorization of students. These categories serve as a source of bias embodied in specific student outcomes with ready examples in the pejorative language used within schools: "at

risk," "failing," "lazy," and the like. Within schools, such deficit discourse is extremely powerful in terms of the dichotomies it creates: at risk/gifted, failing/excelling, or lazy/motivated. Bourdieu (1984) has designated these dichotomies as a perceptual scheme—the building blocks of everyday classifications of social life that reveal the "deep structure" of domination and subordination (Bourdieu, 1984; Swartz, 1997, pp. 84-85). Ford and Grantham's (2003) research in terms of diversity issues within gifted education in the United States touched on this dichotomous relationship. They pointed out that more than 90% of school districts within the United States used test scores for gifted placement decisions, which in turn keep the demographics of gifted programs resolutely White and middle class (p. 219). Their conclusions were that educators have three explanations for poor performance of Non-White student populations. One places fault with (or within) the student as cognitively inferior or culturally deprived (p. 219) — or victim-blaming. The notion of victim-blaming is central to the discourse of deficit thinking. It supports the assertion that deficit thinking, when carried out in terms of normative school practice, bolsters and legitimizes the American emphasis on competition and individualism over cooperation and community good (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995; Wheelock, 1992, p. xiii).

Closely related to the issue of deficit thinking and teacher bias are the ways in which teachers construct student noncognitive behaviors within assessment practice. Assessment practices are heavily dependent upon the ability of the person being tested to recall and symbolically represent knowledge—thereby ignoring issues of student ability (Gordon, 1999). Apple (2004b) has seen this pattern as a basic problem for educators: to understand "how the kinds of cultural resources and symbols schools select and organize

are dialectically related to the kinds of normative and conceptual consciousness 'required' by a stratified society" (p. 2). Still others see the necessity to interrogate "how power works through dominant discourses and social relations, particularly as they affect young people who are marginalized economically, racially, and politically" (Giroux, 2003, p. 14). The type of assessments selected by teachers and the way the assessments are then evaluated has been taken up in the literature in connection with student noncognitive behaviors. Focusing on gender differences, researchers such as Sadker, Sadker, and Zittleman (2009) evaluated the experiences of boys and girls in the classroom. Their work uncovered the various "crises"—such as the "fourth grade slide" —that are often referred to within the educational paradigm. One of their findings was that boys often scored higher on high-stakes tests but received lower grades due to class behavior. The work of Cornwell, Mustard, and Van Parys (2013) supported this finding in their study of a cohort of kindergarten through fifth graders. Using data from the 1998–1999 Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, results demonstrated that the grades awarded by teachers were not aligned with test scores and uniformly favored girls. Additionally, boys within all racial and subject area categories were not represented in grade distributions where their test scores would predict. In both cases, noncognitive development was seen as the primary reason for the misalignment of grades and test scores to differences between boys and girls (p. 263). These findings support the need for further understanding of the role that noncognitive behaviors may play in pedagogical process, relationships with teachers, and how students are evaluated.

The discourse of deficit thinking and realities of the ways in which students assimilate and interact with curriculum and assessments plays a significant role in school

structural realities. It is interesting that this concept and its research have not become a more prominent part of discussions within schools especially with the recent focus on issues of student equity. One part of the literature has touched on the ways in which particular groups of students have been impacted by deficit thinking. This literature considers the complex connections between the classroom and student perception.

Stereotype threat. The notion of stereotype threat is one way the literature considers the ramifications of deficit thinking within the classroom environment and teacher-student interaction. Stereotype threat addresses the way in which deficit thinking can stray into student self-concept and identity thereby translating to student achievement outcomes. Framed in terms of cultural accommodations, stereotype threat explains the ways in which students are placed at-risk depending upon group membership (Portes, 2005, p. 33). These group images work to affect youth in the ways they gauge future orientations and conceptions of success (Kao, 2000, p. 409). Additionally, the way that students are seen and judged by others (i.e., teachers) has a predominant place in the evidence that explains stereotype threat and academic success (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009, p. 113).

Extant empirical evidence evinces the variety of ways in which students assimilate stereotype threats as well as how teacher-student interactions contribute to these threats. Educators are taught about student differences and learning styles (i.e., multicultural education) in order to make sense of ethnic stereotypes; however, often the practices implemented by educators in fact validate or reinforce circumstances or stereotypes (Portes, 2005, p. 58). Steele and Aronson (1995) explored this assertion in their evaluation of stereotype threat among African American students. Their work

demonstrated that when the stereotype within schools demeaned intellectual ability then the threat can be disruptive enough to impair intellectual performance (p. 808). Inequalities associated with stereotype threat tend to be concentrated most in groups that have historically endured it, been conditioned by it, and been subject to systems in which certain expectations are fulfilled (Portes, 2005, p. 58). Most surprising is the evidence that suggests how easily schools (and teachers) create stereotypes and stereotype threats (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009, p. 114).

By connecting the concepts of stereotype threat, deficit thinking, and classification with assessment practice, one may more easily see how entrenched processes within the school structure can increase gaps in student achievement. In the case of stereotype threat, evidence suggests that standardized testing scores over the long term have the effect of pressuring students to protectively dis-identify with school. Additionally, this pressure redefines a student's self-concept such that school achievement is no longer a basis of self-evaluation or personal identity (Steele & Aronson, 1995). These results were akin to those reported by Albert Cohen in his classic study of delinquent youth. Cohen (1955) found that the failures in the classroom were disproportionately from lower class youth that could not compete with other students in terms of "conduct" or "academic achievement" (p. 115). His work also made an important point with regard to the notion of legitimacy, middle class values, and schools. In carrying out their work, schools are very successful and do good but don't seem to reach the children who need them most—instead rewarding one kind of behavior and, by implication, punishing its opposite (pp. 116-117). The notion of legitimization can be extended to specific school practices such as assessment, thus uncovering the ways in

which legitimacy and practice create mechanisms of disadvantage. The following section looks at three of these common mechanisms: the hidden curriculum, tracking, and ability grouping.

Assessment Practice – Mechanisms of Embedded Disadvantage

Researchers have sought to connect the ways in which texts and social practices (i.e., the messages) of schools function primarily to legitimate the interests of the dominant social order (Giroux, 1997, p. 87). To do so, researchers have looked at the connections or interrelatedness among structure, agency, and culture in schools as a source of ongoing, class-based inequality. In this case, the research agenda sought to explain the realities of an educational structure that values some and disadvantages others. When combined with assessment practice, the literature considers this embedded disadvantage in concepts such as the hidden curriculum, tracking, and ability grouping.

Hidden curriculum. A closely tied concept to hegemony, and equally important as a consideration to the ideological control of knowledge in schools, is the aspect of the "hidden curriculum." The hidden curriculum is best thought of as the "norms and values that are implicitly, but effectively, taught in schools and that are not usually talked about in teachers' statements of end or goals" (Apple, 2004b, p. 29). Within hidden curriculum, different educational experiences and curriculum knowledge are made available to students based on social class distinctions. Some see structure as wedded to positivist rationality, a discourse of administration, management, and efficiency that fails to acknowledge that the hidden curriculum carries strong ideological messages that serve a select group (Giroux, 1997).

Anyon (2005) provided one of the initial and pivotal pieces of research related to the hidden curriculum and schools. Her analysis of various fifth-grade classrooms and the work conducted by teachers revealed that:

> Differing curricular, pedagogical, and pupil evaluation practices emphasize different cognitive and behavioral skills in each social setting and thus contribute to the development in the children of certain potential relationships to physical and symbolic capital, to authority, and to the process of work. School experience, in the sample of schools discussed here, differed qualitatively by social class. (p. 90)

In terms of assessment, social class has been linked to measurement and pedagogical practice (Darling-Hammond, 1994). Scholars have connected much of this hidden curriculum to the advent of new accountability mechanisms that rely upon assessment practice related to standardized testing.

Public policy designs represent discourse that is dynamic and purposefully arranged to serve particular values and interests. For schools, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 represents one of the most significant public policy designs in terms of accountability mandates. By mandating standardized testing and the assignment of specific performance labels to students, teachers, schools, and districts, this policy created new official statistics enacting a degenerative policy-making system (A. L. Schneider & Ingram, 1997, p. 102). All school participants became the target of social constructions aimed at separating the "deserving" from the "undeserving," creating an institutional culture that legitimized an even more in-depth credentialing system. Part of

the hidden curriculum that has become a reality within schools relates to the ways in which standardized testing has changed epistemological and pedagogical practice.

For critical scholars such as Giroux (1997), this new focus based on standardized testing is part of a "culture of positivism." As such, the normative dimensions that structure decisions and experiences of the classroom are dismissed and replaced with a rationalized view of theory and knowledge as objective "facts." This framework—silent about its own ideology—supplants hermeneutic (i.e., dialogic) principles of analysis, focusing instead on explanation, prediction, and technical control. In other words, the standardized test score becomes a single source of analysis, dismissive of many cultural explanations. A significant aspect of standardized testing and its relationship to the hidden curriculum can be seen in the way that labeling translates to various perspectives and practice within the classroom.

My study hopes to provide a richer description associated with the effect of social constructions of particular groups and the ways in which standardized testing labels impact assessment practice in schools and classrooms. Building on Anyon's assertion that classroom processes translate to student capital, a quantitative analysis of standardized test scores to student noncognitive aspects such as gender or group labels would offer rich description in terms of what follows students into the classroom. It would acknowledge that test scores have a form of utility as a cultural resource. In terms of qualitative research, the "voices" of students themselves (often absent from NCLBA-related research) could uncover aspects of the hidden curriculum within assessment practice and allow for potential redress of any source of inequality. Researchers have only begun to understand the connections between standardized test scores and teacher

grades as a source of the hidden curriculum. Over the past five years, significant efforts have been made to differentiate student curriculum and learning experiences based on assessment data. Making sense of the realities associated with this process is a key aspect of my study.

Tracking. Notions of the hidden curriculum can be thought of as more covert forms of control within schools; however, some aspects of school practice have been linked to overt activities. A possible point of evidence exists in schools efforts to "track" students toward specific courses that, in turn, predestine vocational or postsecondary educational opportunities (Perkinson, 1968). According to researchers, the concept of tracking is considered one of the most prominent structural aspects of schools (Carbonaro, 2005, p. 27). As discussed previously, theories of classification and group differentiating associated with tracking have direct relationships to the reproductive sorting function of schools (Hallinan, 1988). Bourdieu's seminal works never described tracking specifically; instead, he alluded to the sorting operation of schools as a series of selection operations that separates the holders of inherited cultural capital from those who lack it (Bourdieu, 1998b, p. 20).

Tracking as an educational practice whereby assessment data are used to group or classify students (Darling-Hammond, p. 8), and has a predominant place within the history of education and educational literature (Perkinson, 1968; J. Spring, 1989; Tyack, 2003). The general conclusion garnered from sociological research indicates that tracking has negative, economic effects on the achievement of lower track students, a negligible effect on student in the middle groups, and a weak-to-modest positive effect on high - rack students (Hallinan, 1988). The imbalance created by tracking provides

disproportionately advantageous experiences to students already favored by race and class (Wheelock, 1992, p. 9). This construction of students in terms of noncognitive behaviors exacerbates existing inequalities created by the hidden curriculum. Assessment practices are inherent in the process of tracking as these data are used to "place" students. Also inherent in this process is the deficit discourse that accompanies the construction of student categories. In this light, positive labels frame students as conscientious, attentive, industrious, careful, and receptive—behaviors that are often seen within programs that track students in advanced placement coursework. Conversely, weaker students struggle to achieve these same labels as they attempt to be creative, interactive, or to make their own mark (Bernstein, 1996, pp. 27-28).

Existing research has demonstrated the pervasive nature of tracking in schools, and its ability to differentiate student educational experiences. In a 1990 survey of middle school principals, approximately two-thirds reported the use of whole-class grouping by ability (Wheelock, 1992, p. 8). A number of studies have provided powerful evidence that sex and race do, indeed, operate as status characteristics that impact school participation (Hallinan, 1988, p. 261). This point is important because race and gender have strong correlations to existing research related to the achievement gap. This focus on noncognitive aspects and tracking within schools has not been limited to race and gender. More recently, Carbonaro (2005) conducted a study investigating the effect that effort plays in tracking practices and achievement outcomes. His results demonstrated that when comparable students in lower-track classes try as hard as students in higher-track classes, they still learn less than they would in the higher track. He acknowledged

that higher-track placements and more effort are not guaranteed paths to higher achievement (p. 44).

Ability grouping. Closely tied to tracking is grouping students by ability. Ability grouping refers to the practice of clustering school children for instruction, based mostly on demonstrated or expected performance, but also on factors such as motivation, work habits, and behavior (Ferguson, 2007, p. 84). The general conclusion garnered from sociological research has indicated that tracking and ability grouping have negative effects on the achievement of lower track/ability group students, a negligible effect on student in the middle groups, and a weak-to-modest positive effect on high track/ability group students (Hallinan, 1988). However, when these same groups (low, middle, and high) are evaluated in terms of their performance on standardized tests, a different picture emerges. For example, in fourth-grade reading scores, the average score of students in the lowest 10% was 174 out of 500 in 2011, an increase of 15 points from 2000. The scores of students in the top 10% were 264, statistically unchanged since 2000 (Banchero, 2011). Some educational policy makers may celebrate this type of change as evidence that schools are finally addressing achievement gaps. However, most reformers regard the results of ability grouping/tracking as puzzling. They acknowledge that "the structures we use to limit students' access to certain kinds of subject matter must have some relationship to what students are taught, how they are taught, and therefore, what they learn (Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthey, 1996, p. 10). What we do know is that in 1992, approximately 1.4 million students were receiving gifted services. Within this student population, 72.4% of the students were White—the remaining students represented minority populations (Ford, 1998). There is a continuing problem: students of

lower socioeconomic status represent a small minority in accelerated and gifted groups (Sayler & Brookshire, 1993, p. 154). Some perceive that increased attention on tracking and ability grouping practices have led schools to rely on cooperative learning strategies, which will not bring the typical student up to the level of the smartest student; rather it will decrease the amount of knowledge gained by all (Gross, 1999, p. 204). Ability grouping and tracking are built upon assessment practice and data and based on concerns by scholars that constant attention must be given to the classroom as a potential source for this discrimination.

Conceptual Framework - Bourdieu's "Thinking Tools"

The literature related to assessment practice, as a mechanism that serves some and disadvantages others, has offered justification for the calls by some scholars to question inequalities, especially in terms of social class (Nash, 2004, p. 621). Some scholars have seen this problem as a call for research that interrogates "how power works through dominant discourses and social relations, particularly as they affect young people who are marginalized economically, racially, and politically" (Giroux, 2003, p. 14)—a point that is keenly evident in the deficit discourse so prevalent in school and teacher discussions about students. At a macro level, these issues call for a reexamination of schools and classrooms in democratic terms—a struggle over values, practices, social relations, and subject positions (Giroux, 1997, p. 227), and the analysis of schools through concepts of hegemony, ideology, and selective tradition (Apple, 2004b, pp. 5–6). Bourdieu's experience within the educational system, especially in terms of his critique and analysis of credentialing and his theoretical "thinking tools," established a theoretical framework

with which to consider these assertions by researchers and assessment practice in schools today.

The fundamental aim of Bourdieu's work was to disclose the structure of principles from which agents produce regulated practices with the goal of uncovering the objective characteristic of culture itself (Nash, 2003a, p. 191). Bourdieu's seminal research work, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, focused on the study of the Kabyle house and how its design and the placement of objects reproduced fundamental cultural oppositions (i.e., male and female, light and dark) and thereby patterned activities conducted in the house in terms of such oppositions (Sewell, 1992, p. 14). For Bourdieu (1977), this work served as an explanation for dialectical relationships of the objective and subjective and the complex interrelationships among structure, agency, and culture. It elucidated the need to analyze the specific practices of social groups, particularly classes, which in turn pointed to the need for historically informed ethnographic studies that explored these origins (Nash, 1999, p. 179). As a critical scholar, Bourdieu (1984) envisioned the goal of science as an exploration of the objective relationship between an object, defined by the possibilities and impossibilities it offers, revealed only in the world of social uses through the dispositions of an agent/class of agents and their schemes of perception, appreciation, and action that constituted its objective utility in a practical usage (p. 100). One way to consider the relationship among object, social usage, and schools is to consider the work that Bourdieu undertook in terms of educational credentialing.

Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction posited that educational credentials help to reproduce and legitimate class inequalities; as such, competition for educational

credentials is seen as meritocratic and therefore legitimate. Widely cited, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, represented what Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) saw as the critical need to link the objective and subjective aspects of schooling. Bourdieu saw the study of the standards of the institution and their relations to individual action as necessary to uncovering the effects of social inequality (Biddle, 2001, p. 79). Taking this notion a step further, one can consider educational credentialing within the current operations of schools in two ways. First, at a policy and institutional level, one can consider the ways in which assessment practice—especially in terms of standardized test scores. Such analysis would consider the ways in which the expansive nature of federal policy (i.e., the No Child Left Behind Act) has impacted how these test scores are used throughout the educational paradigm. Bourdieu devoted particular attention to these phenomena in terms of capital and the dynamics of reproduction. Referring to this as a "reconversion strategy," Bourdieu argued that groups restructure their capital holdings by exchanging one type of capital for another in order to maintain or improve their relative positions in the class structure (Swartz, 1997, p. 181). Such analysis requires the use of three of Bourdieu's theoretical concepts (or "thinking tools"): field, *habitus,* and capital. Each of these concepts has theoretical and methodological implications to my study. Therefore, I review each of these concepts in terms of theoretical tenants and methodological practicalities. After discussing these three concepts, I provide a short review of past research that has had a direct impact on schools and some relationship to assessment practice. Finally, I offer an alternative proposition to describe and explore student achievement in terms of assessment practice. This proposition builds off

Bourdieu's concepts, but focuses description and explanation in terms of Bourdieu's notion of practice.

Field. Bourdieu's concept of field presents a useful metaphor for describing both the totality of actors and organizations involved in an arena of social or cultural production and the dynamic relationships among them (DiMaggio, 1979, p. 1463). The field is a place where individuals and groups interact, work, and struggle over power—based on a shared set of understandings, beliefs, values, and norms that form the "rules of the game" (Bourdieu, 1985). Fields are organized around specific types or combinations of capital; therefore, one's spatial position within a particular field is determined by the unequal distribution of his or her capital rather than his or her personal attributes (Swartz, 1997, p. 117-123).

The field (i.e., school or classroom) is not simply a description of objective relations. According to Bourdieu (1993), this definition is that of a network of objective relations between positions. These positions orient strategies that occupants of different positions implement to defend or improve their positions. The field is therefore comprised of force and struggle. Occupants within a position—defined by a determinate quantity of capital—negotiate the recognition and distribution of capital (p. 30). An analogous description to Bourdieu's (and probably more realistic to schools) can be seen in Burt's (1995) work. He described the field as an arena wherein a player's network and the location of contacts within the structure provides competitive advantage in the realization of capital. For the purposes of my study, field analysis is critical to describing the functional and structural homologies of school and classroom as constituting a unified social system (Swartz, 1997, pp. 134-135).

It is possible to empirically define fields as composed of dominant organizations, professionals, ideologies, and professional codes of ethics; however, fields are also meant to be interactive, flexible, and omnipresent (Biddle, 2001). Bourdieu described the educational field as a place where pedagogic communication (language) can cause students to be "objectively condemned to enter the game of fictitious communication, even if this entails adherence to the academic world-view which casts them into unworthiness" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 112). Due to the growing pedagogical and political reach of assessment and its practices, Bourdieu's concept of field holds the promise of enlightening the literature and school personnel in terms of impacts of assessments on specific student populations (i.e., groups), an example of which appears in the literature related to deficit thinking. This model links student failure to intellectual abilities, internal deficits, lack of motivation, or inappropriate behavior and has been a predominant concept in shaping public policy and school practice for the last century (Valencia, 1997). My study addressed this by describing what Bourdieu referred to as a field's *doxa,* or the common grounding of orthodox and heterodox views of schools and classrooms. For Bourdieu, *doxa* represented the fundamental assumptions and categories that shape intellectual thought in a particular time or place (Swartz, 1997, p. 232). This is where the existing body of educational and social justice literature can be used to link notions of equity and individualism to current assessment practices in schools. Once articulated, this field analysis is used to make sense of the individuals most impacted by assessment practice: teachers and students. Bourdieu referred to this as an exploration of *habitus*.

Habitus. *Habitus* can be considered a system of dispositions, manners of being, seeing, acting and thinking—long lasting (rather than permanent) schemes or schemata (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 43). As such, one's *habitus* can be considered a "soft" boundary inside a person. "Hard" boundaries are actual social structures and physical elements of the world in which a person lives his or her life, which is why *habitus* allows for individual agency but also predisposes individuals toward certain ways of behaving (Reay, 2004, p. 433). Unlike cause and effect relationships, *habitus* are brought into question when a mistake is made, thus making the structures visible and open to question. At this point, the "system" must find a way to reestablish balance, which is important because not all practices have equal value; however, they are always conspicuous and visible regardless of whether they were performed to be seen (Bourdieu, 1985). Schools exemplify this point, especially within the task and practices of assessment, because the power to "add value" depends upon their ability to use pedagogic action to increase the aspirations, self-concepts, and associated habits of students (Nash, 2003b). A specific example of this point may occur when schools (or teachers) group students based on assessment outcomes, as such groupings rely upon data that may not jibe with a student's disposition in terms of a particular subject. In other words, a conflict exists between the *habitus* of teacher and student, thus being revealed in some unique way within future classroom interactions: pedagogic action or language.

Bourdieu saw schools as playing a decisive role in imposing recognition of the legitimate language, dominated by the relations of power between classes (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991). When viewed in terms of the concept of *habitus*, language is an exemplar of an objectifiable structured structure which is also structuring in practice

(Grenfell, 1998, p. 72). Classroom exchanges are judged as competent (or not) by an authorized person (e.g., the teacher). *Habitus* is the operational site that mediates between objective structures and practices (Grenfell & James, 1998), and therefore becomes a critical link in explaining inequality. However, *habitus* is not to be considered in isolation—it is considered in relation to the concept of field (Bourdieu, 2005), and it is integrally tied to Bourdieu's concept of culture capital. Assessment practices become a site of struggle within the field, with agents acting according to their *habitus*. Mingled within this struggle and part of the classroom cultural exchange is the concept of culture capital.

Capital. For Bourdieu, capital represents the currency used within the field by participants to accrue status or power or to exert control over it (Grenfell, 2009). Although there are various forms of capital, culture capital has been closely associated with the school field because it has been institutionalized as legitimate (i.e., built through the process of credentialing) and because of its societal value (Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997). Bourdieu's research emphasized the role that cultural capital played within the educational institution (Swartz, 1997), referring to it as the best-hidden effect of the educational system. As Bourdieu (1984) pointed out:

> The official differences produced by academic classifications tend to produce (or reinforce) real differences by inducing in the classified individuals a collectivity recognized and supported belief in the differences, thus producing behaviours that are intended to bring real being into line with official being. (p. 23)

In other words, there is tremendous value in the school's ability to legitimize specific credentials as a form of culture capital to its participants (i.e., students), which explains

why schools place such significant emphasis on “gifted” or “advanced placement” classes. It also explains why these programs—and the culture capital they produce—become systematically encoded and tend to funnel individuals into social class positions similar to those of their parents (Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997).

Bourdieu attempted to provide context for the conceptual framework associated with cultural capital. He identified three states within which cultural capital is realized. These states are: (a) an *embodied state,* which begins in early childhood and surrounds the investment of time by parents, family members, or professionals that sensitize a child to cultural distinctions; (b) an *objective state* includes things such as books, machines, and instruments possessed by individuals; and (c) an *institutional state,* which includes individual credentials or possessed certificates (Grenfell, 2009; Swartz, 1997). Each of these forms has applicability to my study; however, the emphasis on embodied and institutional forms of culture capital has the strongest tie to assessment practice. Making sense of the ways in which grades and standardized testing scores tie to specific student populations becomes a critical question (Apple, 2004b; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu, 1998b). Adding the discourse of student and teachers in terms of *habitus* would further this analysis of capital.

An unfortunate reality is that much of Bourdieu’s conceptual work with capital is metaphorical, which makes operationalization of his concepts difficult (Schuller, Baron, & Field, 2000, p. 5). Although Bourdieu’s research has been criticized, some researchers have carried forward his work by evaluating the relationships between families and schools and Bourdieu’s different capital constructs (Lareau, 2001). Their analysis and explanations have relied heavily upon the concept of culture capital, which makes sense

because Bourdieu’s theory of culture capital specifically links the relationship between family strategies and the logic of the school institution, thus revealing the reproductive aspects of the structure (Hallinan, 1988). Studies that have used Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital have concentrated on the relationship among social background, cultural participation, and educational attainment. One way that researchers have classified these studies is by grouping them into studies that assess the effect of parental cultural resources and cultural habits on educational attainment or that focus on the cultural practices and preferences of the students themselves (Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997, p. 574).

“Thinking tools” as practice. Few bodies of work are as systematic, comprehensive, creative, and fertile as Bourdieu’s (DiMaggio, 1979). Bourdieu’s “thinking tools” highlight the way that practices are infused (unequally) with social legitimation (Lareau, 2001, p. 77). The extant literature has demonstrated this assertion in the ways in which schools group students, links the potential of Bourdieu’s concepts within empirical as reflected through student groupings, legitimizing practice and understanding the ways in which student noncognitive variables impact capital. The exploration of these practices, especially between teacher/student and student/student, has the potential to reveal their present and past experience, and the schemes of thought (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 84).

In her work in a primary classroom, Reay (1995) analyzed children's peer group practices through the lens of *habitus*. She found that student interaction was not only class-based but also, in some cases, powered by complex motivations and desires that exceeded the control mechanisms of the teacher. In this case, student *habitus* took over,

controlling peer interactions outside of the teacher domain. Her results demonstrated that *habitus*—with its emphasis on domination in everyday practices and subjective vocations—can provide valuable insights into the power dynamics of gender, class, and race relations in terms of peer classrooms relations.

Like that of students, teacher *habitus* can explain specific patterns used to legitimate classroom practice. As pointed out earlier, a significant aspect of deficit thinking and discrimination can be found in the labeling of students and particular student groups. In his 12-month study of teachers in various reading classes, Nespor (1987) found that teacher *habitus* revealed the ways in which labels were used to legitimate specific student reading and writing skills. Nespor (1987) discovered that school curriculum played an insignificant role in relationship to culture capital and social class. Instead, by labeling students "competent" or "incompetent," teachers developed authoritative measures that formed a symbolic relationship legitimating certain skills that favor some but not others. Consequently, these labels followed students into their everyday life and economic opportunities as adults, thus masking cultural, social, and economic inequalities (p. 51).

Looking at *habitus* and practice also reveals the ways in which capital is used to maintain and enhance one's position within the social order (Swartz, 1997, p. 73). Within the context of schools, the literature focuses attention on culture and social capital. Annette Lareau (1987) is most notably cited for her work in relationship to culture capital and parental relationships with schools. She has acknowledged, "Culture capital has the potential to show how individual biography intersects with social structure" (p. 179). In general, her findings demonstrated to schools, administrators, and teachers the important

role that social class plays in the influence of social networks. She pushed for future research, calling on researchers to "expand the focus to include the standards for advancement in an institution and the way in which individuals activate cultural capital to gain social profits (p. 180). This effort could be accomplished through the study of the ways in which standardized test scores or grades develop student capital.

Gender has also been found to be an integral point in the analysis of culture capital. In her analysis of gender and school success, Dumais (2002) looked at approximately 25,000 eighth graders. Her results demonstrated that culture capital had greater impact on student grades for girls than boys. Her analysis of *habitus* revealed that "boys are expected to behave one way and girls another" (p. 62). Dumais's (2002) findings demonstrated an important point: student noncognitive variables have some relationship within the understanding of classroom *habitus* and capital. Turning again to the previously discussed research related to deficit thinking, educators used student noncognitive behaviors or definitions in ways that biased some groups. This type of relationship has also been found in marginalized youth populations when looking at aspects of social capital.

In the hopes of understanding marginalized youth transitions (adolescence to adulthood), Raffo and Reeves (2000) carried out semistructured interviews with 31 youth in Manchester, United Kingdom. The authors developed a theoretical approach they referred to as an *individualized system of social capital:* "A dynamic, social, spatially, culturally, temporally and economically embedded group, network or constellation of social relations, which has the young person at the core of the constellation…for everyday learning" (p. 148). This definition built on Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*. The

results of this research demonstrated that social capital enhancement was limited for disadvantaged young people, "that networks tended to emphasize survival issues, and in order to upgrade their social capital (in terms of quality and quantity) youth needed access to appropriate culturally embedded material and symbolic resources" (p. 165). Any important aim for future research should be to explain and reify the fragile nature of social capital in terms of marginalized youth. Social capital as an aggregate concept based in individual behavior, attitudes, and predispositions (Brehm & Rahn, 2003) has tremendous potential in achieving its goal of linking individual and social relationships, such as those in schools (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995, p. 581). The educational paradigm is mired in debates about curriculum and governance and the effects of social capital on students may go unnoticed—especially in terms of issues of noncognitive behaviors (i.e., classroom disruptions).

Due to the limited embrace of Bourdieu's concepts by researchers, unsurprisingly some critics have argued that concepts such as *habitus* have little place in educational research (Nash, 1999). Still others have cautioned that the cultural practices of schools not be passed off as simply dominant norms to be dismissed or classified as illegitimate. They argued that even if these cultural practices were linked to class, this dynamic fails to acknowledge that some of these practices benefit everyone in school (Kingston, 2001). The significant critique of Bourdieu's work within the United States is plausible as much of our current policy and research efforts focus so heavily on aspects of scientific realism. However, these critiques cannot dismiss the fact that Bourdieu's framework effectively lends itself to classroom-based language analysis—unlike our current educational policy and research and its strong propensity to play out neoliberal dynamics that surround the

current globalization in education (Apple, 2001). Some would have the United States believe that this market-driven strategy will lead to new reforms that better support notions of equality. At this time of economic rationalism and imperial neo-conservatism, scholars should be prepared to critically analyze the production and circulation of discourses and their effect on the lives of so many (Apple, 2001; Bourdieu, 1999, p. 29). For this reason, Bourdieu's concepts provide depth and texture to any empirical analysis—especially in schools; however, even with the extensive reach of Bourdieu's work in terms of the literature and applicability to the school environment, some believe that his concepts require ongoing reexamination.

An alternative noncognitive variable: grit. As DiMaggio (1979) has pointed out, the theory of culture capital calls attention to the importance of studying the role that noncognitive variables play within school experience (p. 1471). This call for additional research has been fueled in part by the work of Bowles and Gintis (2002) and their important contribution to the relationship between student noncognitive variables and later-in-life economic success. This research brought to the forefront an important point: cognitive abilities only go so far in describing which students thrived as adults. However, not all researchers have shared the same level of confidence in the explanatory power of culture capital in terms of inequalities.

As Sullivan (2002) pointed out, "Research has found that cultural capital (defined in various ways) has some impact on educational attainment, but does not explain all or even most of the social class effect" (p. 163). As with many of Bourdieu's concepts, capital, and more specifically culture capital, is heavily influenced by cultural context. This concept is especially relevant to schools where so many differing aspects of culture

come into play within any student population. One example can be seen in the work of Prudence Carter (2003) and her research with a sample of 44 low-income African American youth. Her grounded theory analysis of the narratives of these students in terms of school activities demonstrated the changing nature of culture capital. More specifically she argued:

> Cultural capital is multi-dimensional, producing status shifts not only within the social hierarchy but also within the social spaces of subordinated groups. In addition, cultural capital is context specific; the value of different cultural attributes changes depending upon either the situation or the reference group. (p. 149-150)

Other researchers have offered similar points about the changing nature and definition of culture capital.

In their study of cultural capital and school-aged youth, Aschaffenburg and Maas (1997) confirmed Bourdieu's assertion that cultural capital matters in terms of educational attainment; however, an interesting aspect of their study is located in their discussion regarding the changing nature associated with the relationship between culture capital and reproduction. In their words, the process of distinction is undergoing a shift—children from less privileged positions are now gaining access to more privileged positions (p. 586). Over the past decade, schools have paid significant attention to the achievement gap, an outcome of a decade-long public policy focused on at-risk youth. Although schools were forced into compliance, the result could be that students previously subject to the reproductive effects of schooling may in fact be reaping some benefits. One way to consider this proposition is to explore a concept that considers the

ways in which students perceive their personal achievement in schools. One concept that has been given signification attention within educational circles is the concept of *grit*.

Over the past several years, educators have latched on to the notion that explanations other than IQ have merit in understanding student achievement. One of the most popular explanations has been posited by Duckworth (2007) and focuses attention on a specific noncognitive trait: grit. Grit is synonymous with traits such as perseverance and tenacity. Based on the results of six studies, Duckworth concluded that individual differences in grit accounted for significant variance in success outcomes over and beyond what could be explained by IQ (p. 1098). In terms of assessment, Duckworth (2009) found that "both grades and achievement test scores were highly correlated with such aspects as self-control and, to a lesser extent, IQ" (p. 280). Duckworth's (2007) findings related to the strong, positive correlation between grit and school achievement are intriguing. Extending these findings with qualitative data on teacher-student relationships within a single school may offer even more insight into the relationship between deficit thinking and ways to increase student achievement. The notion of deficit thinking is strongly associated with notions of individualism (Valencia, 1997) and an interesting question would be the ways in which gender intersects with noncognitive traits such as grit. Explicating the relationships among gender, grit, and teacher grading may unveil new sources of bias or provide further insight into notions of deficit thinking. Building off previous literature, my study sought to describe quantitatively and qualitatively the degree to which deficit thinking envelops assessment practice, and its potential ramifications for student and teacher relationships.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The primary focus of my two research questions involves the understanding of assessment practice and the ways in which these practices structure student capital. More specifically, these questions seek to understand: (a) the relationship between standardized test scores and teacher grades, and how these data are used in assessment practice, and (b) the role in which student noncognitive descriptions (i.e., gender, ethnicity, etc.) affect assessment practice and the possible implications for student capital. The focus on student capital is an essential question as it aligns with the central focus of Bourdieu's sociology: to study how and under what conditions individuals and groups employ strategies to accumulate, invest, and convert various forms of capital in order to maintain or enhance their positions in the social order (Swartz, 1997, p. 75).

Research Design

Research setting. As a case study, I selected a single middle school for my research. Opportunity Middle School was located in the western United States. The names of the school and individuals are pseudonyms in order to protect the confidentiality and identity of the research setting and subjects. Opportunity Middle School was a public school that served 984 sixth- through eighth-grade students. It provided free and reduced lunch services to approximately 33% of its students, a level that did not qualify the school for federal Title I services. The school was ethnically diverse. White students represented only 56% of the student body, which was significantly lower than the county-level population. Conversely, Asian students made up a higher percentage (approximately 7%) than the county-level population. Several large

technology firms were located within the local community, which could explain this variation. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics related to the student population in terms of gender.

Table 1

Student Population by Gender

Grade	Female	Male	Total
6	162	165	327
7	155	190	345
8	147	165	312

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics related to the student population in terms of ethnicity.

Table 2

Student Population by Ethnicity

Grade	White	Asian	Hispanic	Non-White Minorities	Total
6	176	36	72	43	327
7	197	34	70	44	345
8	180	35	55	42	312

Note. Some students have been classified as being part of two or more ethnicities, and therefore were unidentifiable based on single ethnicity descriptors.

In terms of school outcomes (i.e., academic achievement), the school's label according to state reporting guidelines under the No Child Left Behind Act was at the highest level. The school had been recognized for other academic achievements, and parents were typically vocal about academic achievement in terms of the quality of education their child(ren) receive(s). The school offered traditional middle school curriculum and electives to students.

Site access. Before beginning my study, I obtained approval (see Appendix A) from the ASU Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct my study at Opportunity Middle School. In conjunction with this approval, I met and received approval from the curriculum and learning director, who was responsible for coordinating

research projects with the district. My selection of Opportunity Middle School was based on several factors. First, I had previously worked for the principal at this site and this rapport provided me the opportunity to have open and honest conversations about the school (students and staff). Second, the demographics of the school's student population best represented the ethnicity percentages of the county in which the school was located. Other middle schools within this district had higher percentages of a particular ethnic makeup. Lastly, I had previously participated in a number of professional development efforts and classroom data collection efforts with one of the teachers and felt that her candor and support would afford me the greatest opportunity to understand the various assessment practices used within the classroom and school.

Data collection. After receiving permission to begin the study, I obtained secondary data from the principal in accordance with district and IRB procedures. These data represent two distinct data collection efforts, which are best considered a mixed-method, exploratory sequential design. The first data collection effort involved a small, purposeful student sample. Student participants were involved in a project I conducted in 2011 as part of my then-current teaching assignment within the school district. With the permission of the district assistant superintendent, I worked with one of the Opportunity Middle School teachers to collect data from a nonprobability, convenience sample of 28 students (a single science class). Table 3 shows demographic data related to this student sample.

Table 3

Student Sample Demographics by Gender and Ethnicity

Gender	White	Asian	Hispanic	Non-White Minorities	Total
Female	8	3	4	2	17
Male	5	1	2	2	10

I met with this student group on three different occasions, and students were given the opportunity to write about their experiences based on questions within three categories: (a) Perceptions of schools and teachers, (b) Reference groups/ability groups, and (c) Perspectives of the future. I asked students to write to me when answering questions, for several reasons. First, I want to limit the propensity of students to provide "socially acceptable" answers—a common student-teacher relationship issue. Secondarily, as a teacher within this district, I felt that my position may influence student consent; I therefore gave them the option to write without the interview interaction to provide more flexibility in choosing what they wished to answer and to what extent. In addition to the written responses, I included a structured survey with Likert-type questions related to the first two interview periods. The overall purpose of this data collection effort was to garner an understanding of the then-current perspectives of students in relationship to classroom practices. Data from this effort were used to develop specific themes associated with the three categories listed above. What emerged was a predominant theme related to assessment and grading. Feedback and consultation with teachers and school administration, along with the current policy focus on standardized testing, in many ways guided the next phase of the project, which was to understand connections between issues of grading and assessment in a larger context.

The second data collection phase occurred in 2014. Again, secondary data was obtained from the Opportunity School principal. These data consisted of standardized reading and math scores along with data from an online grit survey. This eight-item survey by Duckworth and Quinn (2009) was developed to measure perseverance in terms of long-term goals and was specifically validated with middle school students. The collection of these data was intended to describe and extend existing research related to grit and student achievement—especially as they related to student grades and standardized test scores. A convenience sample of 243 students was selected. Table 4 shows the breakdown of this sample in terms of gender and ethnicity. Additionally, students who participated in the 2011 qualitative classroom data analysis were purposively included in this sample.

Table 4

School Student Sample Demographics by Gender and Ethnicity

Gender	White	Asian	Hispanic	Non-White-Minorities	Total
Female	63	17	14	13	107
Male	84	17	21	14	136

Note. One student who was part of the 2011 data collection project was no longer at this school.

As part of this convenience sampling strategy, it should be noted that the percentages of students in each ethnic category closely aligned with school population statistics.

Data analysis strategy. Bourdieu argued against strict positivist research methods, advocating instead for the collection of data first, and then the development of theoretical statements to explain relationships (Swartz, 1997). This being said, Bourdieu did not dismiss all quantitative methods. For example, in his widely cited work *Distinction*, Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1984) used descriptive statistics and multiple

correspondence analyses to make sense of patterns of behavior. For Bourdieu, empirical research involving his “thinking tools” was best carried out in three steps: (a) Analyze the position of the field as a field of power; (b) Map out the objective structure of relations between the positions occupied by agents who compete for the legitimate forms specific authority within the field; and (c) Analyze the *habitus* of agents; the systems of dispositions they have acquired as they compete for legitimate for pedagogic products or resources within the field (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 168-169).

Defining the school field. Bourdieu posited several important points in relationship to the methodological principles of field analysis. These points stressed the importance of fields as autonomous and the acknowledgement and identification of *interfield* contradictions (Swartz, 1997, p. 128). He argued that external sources of influence are always mediated through the structure and dynamics of fields. In other words, external factors from one field can guide the internal logic of another field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 105). To address this methodological challenge, I had to consider external factors and their relationship to Opportunity Middle School. Additionally, I needed to articulate and implement an analytical strategy that would identify and describe these *interfield* contradictions and fit into my overall research related to assessment practice. In the case of the school field, I looked to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) of 2002 as a source of data that structured the external aspects of the school field. This configuration is justifiable, as the NCLBA public policy has played a significant role within the sociology of education as it relates to accountability and achievement outcomes since 2001 (Apple, 2004b; Giroux, 1997; Nichols & Berliner, 2007). In terms of analyzing the impacts of this policy or the ways in which the NCLBA

policy established cultural characterizations (popular images) of students and groups whose behavior and well-being have been affected by the policy, I turn to a public policy analysis methodology developed by Schneider and Ingram (1997; 1993; 2005) referred to as the "social construction of target populations."

Using the social construction of target populations as a framework, I utilized media accounts (i.e., headlines) and narrative policy analysis to shed light on the ways in which the NCLBA policy unveiled specific characteristics of target populations, offering a description of the ways in which this policy design and rationale differ for specific student groups. This policy can be a source of deductive category assignment based on the theoretical concepts of deficit thinking and discrimination (Mayring, 2000). For example, terms such as "at risk" have specific meaning and translate into specific school actions (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995). Policy that creates mandates requires action by school personnel within the field, an example of which would be the mandatory reporting of school and student standardized testing data for accountability purposes. The spirit of this mandate is often framed in terms of its ability to ensure that schools are meeting the requirements of low-achieving students.

Research has demonstrated that the mass media plays a role in the ongoing discourse and accompanying policy rationales (DiAlto, 2005, p. 84). As a precursor to narrative policy analysis, I begin with an analysis of media (i.e., newspaper) coverage over the history of the NCLBA. This analysis is important because media coverage often offers critiques of certain social constructions, having at heart their own hidden agendas or self-interest (A. L. Schneider & Ingram, 1997, p. 197). Using a database of national media publications, a headline search was performed on the term "No Child Left Behind

Act." This type of search limited the sheer number of articles that could be considered and also narrowed the analysis to articles specifically written with the NCLBA as their focus. Once I obtained these articles, I performed discourse analysis for the policy-making timeframe: 1999 to February 2001 (one month after the final passage of the legislation). Additional headline statistics were reported for the period from 2001 to 2014 to demonstrate the ways in which the media continued to report on the policy; however, no detailed, discourse analysis was carried out. The next point of analysis focused on understanding the dynamics associated with specific legislation action and the NCLBA. The goal was to understand the ways in which legislative committee action contributed to a specific discourse that can then be translated within the concept of the social construction of target populations. At this point, I turn to the analytical method of narrative policy analysis.

Narrative policy analysis has two objectives: To underscore the important and necessary role that policy narratives have in public policy everywhere, and to establish the usefulness of narrative analysis to reformulate policy problems in ways that make them more amenable to conventional policy analysis (Roe, 1994, p. 1). Juxtaposing this analysis methodology with the theory surrounding the social construction of target populations was important because it helped explain why some groups are more advantaged than others regardless of traditional notions of political power. These initial explanations can then be extended to describe the ways in policy is designed to reinforce or alter advantages (A. Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p. 334). In essence, it bridged public policy and political behavior to allow for the exploration of hypotheses related to the ways in which public policy influence individual attitude and behaviors (Campbell,

2012). For example, much of the NCLBA legislation provides funding to schools to implement normatively structured programs (safe schools or dropout prevention programs). These programs intended to improve student achievement outcomes. Because policy designs contain specific observable elements such as target populations, goals, rules, rationales, and assumptions (A. L. Schneider & Ingram, 1997, p. 2), key questions surround explanations of the ways that NCLBA constructs students to "fit" within the policy, the role that schools and teachers play in the construction process, and the extent to which these constructions impact student behaviors.

In carrying out a narrative policy analysis of the NCLBA policy, I utilized a process that compared and contrasted dominant scenarios, arguments, and counter-narratives within NCLBA (Roe, 1994, p. 155-156), and then recast this work through the theory of the social construction of target populations. Similar to other policy analysis, it requires the examination of hearing transcripts, reports, debates, and bill amendments (Jenness & Grattet, 2001, p. 45). Newton (2005) carried out a similar analysis methodology in her consideration of federal immigration policy by using text-based discourse analysis of Congressional hearings and testimony conducted prior to passage of significant legislation (p. 148). My analysis methodology emulated Newton's (2005) in its examination of the NCLBA policy. I relied upon the ProQuest online reference database to access an extensive collection of congressional records. The ProQuest database provided extensive links to all forms of legislative activity, and for this reason I considered legislative activity broadly. In developing target group definitions, I assessed political power in terms of the particular groups' political resources (i.e., wealth and propensity to mobilize action); as an example, gifted programs mobilize different action

than dropout prevention efforts (Schroedel & Jordan, 1998, p. 112-113). Once completed, analysis related to the social construction of target populations could be compared to existing student test score data to offer additional descriptions of the school field.

Using standardized test scores for the Opportunity students, I analyzed and described cultural capital in an "institutional state," or in terms of educational credentials (Grenfell, 2009; Swartz, 1997). Variables such as state standardized test scores and teacher grades are representative of this form of cultural capital and can be compared to student noncognitive variables (e.g., gender, ethnicity, and performance levels) using descriptive statistical methods to explain and explore relationships between specific categories of data (i.e., standardized test scores) in relation to other categories (i.e., grades or student noncognitive variables). The results from this analysis were therefore descriptive and inferential in nature. They sought to frame student groups in very specific ways. First, it categorized students in terms of standardized testing discourse (i.e., proficiency levels) that have often been used by educators in carrying out their assessment practice. Secondly, it offered input into the ways in which assessment practice may be legitimized and to describe positions of particular agents (i.e., students) within the field of the classroom.

The categories generated from federal policy, along with descriptive data related to standardized test scores, translate into a rich description or landscape of the school field. Categorical policy data provide a backdrop or *doxa* describing the rules of the game— the ways in which external sources influence the structure and dynamics of the school field. These external influences are then taken up and mediated through the structure and are retranslated into the logic of other fields such as the classroom field

(Swartz, 1997, p. 128). The combination of the rules of the game and an understanding of a student's culture capital allows for a "mapping" of the classroom field.

As discussed previously, Bourdieu defined a field broadly in terms of its function and the types of capital that can be exchanged or negotiated within it. Assessment practices, such as grading, are typically hierarchical in nature, whereby the teacher defines the boundaries of acceptable performance and controls the final outcome (i.e., assignment of a grade). Even in terms of standardized testing, students have relatively little control over the administration and assignment of scores. Therefore, to understand the school field, one must look to similar patterns within this hierarchy in terms of the positions and strategies used by students—or agents, in this case (Swartz, 1997, p. 132-133).

Mapping the classroom field-assessment practice. Mapping the classroom field involves describing a structured space of dominant and subordinate positions based on the types and amount of capital (Swartz, 1997). Bourdieu utilized a multiple correspondence analysis statistical technique to accomplish this task; however, this statistical technique was not applicable due to the size of my classroom sample. Therefore, I built off my field analysis mapping by providing rich descriptions of my smaller classroom sample. My goal was to demonstrate the ways in which standardized testing data precedes students as they enter the field.

School districts and schools also have tremendous control over the interpretation and implementation of federal policy. To take this into consideration, I used field notes from a district-level committee chartered with ongoing evaluation of school grading policies. This committee had broad power to make changes to the practices used by

teachers in terms of student grading. A content analysis of these field notes and any associated documents received from school district personnel validated or extended the categories developed from my analysis of the NCLBA legislation. Together, the descriptive categories that were an outcome of this analysis served to guide and describe my quantitative analysis of state-level standardized testing results.

After mapping my classroom sample, I sought to understand and describe the struggles between teachers and students. At this point, I considered Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*. As mentioned previously, *habitus* privileges the basic idea that action is governed by a "practical sense" of how to move in the social world (Swartz, 1997, p. 115). Bourdieu's himself was silent in advocating a particular methodology to carry out empirical work. Therefore, in seeking to understand the lived experiences of teachers and students (i.e., their *habitus*) as they went about the business of assessment, I called upon the work of Dorothy Smith and the institutional ethnography method of inquiry. This ethnographic method was well suited to the work of schools and the classroom considering the discourse of individuals. It places priority on the actualities of those involved in the institutional process and focuses on how these actualities are embedded in social relations (Smith, 2005, p. 31).

Smith's (2005) work provided a variety of notions that frame the institutional ethnography method of inquiry. I called upon the notion of "disjuncture" as I considered the teacher-student relationships and *habitus*. According to Smith (2005), disjunctures represent the artificial realities of institutions and the actualities with which people live (Smith, 2005, p. 187). For Bourdieu, the *habitus* is best understood in terms of individual dispositions that are carried out through practice. Juxtaposing the notion of disjuncture

and *habitus* requires a bridge between what has been identified as a practice within the field (school or teacher policy) and the real-world experience of this policy being carried out by teachers and students in the classroom. Scholars have used institutional ethnography to evaluate the ways in which categories assigned by institutions create serious disjunctures in the lived experiences of individuals (Smith, 2005, p. 188). Other educational scholars have considered similar analysis frameworks that reflect similarly to Smith's (2005) notion of disjuncture. For example, Weis and Fine (2004) described their method as a first fracturing analysis—a study that produced an interior analysis of the institution/community through lines of difference and power, destabilizing the representation of institutional coherence, integrity, and stability (p. xx), translating this experience into the everyday practices of individuals (p. xxii).

Bourdieu himself focused particular attention on the distinction between notions of *aspirations* and *expectations* when evaluating and articulating teacher/student *habitus* (Swartz, 1997, p. 111). Of key concern was whether student *habitus* described assessment practice under which aspirations fail to synchronize with expectations, and expectations with opportunities. In terms of my study, I considered the ways in which student aspirations created a disjuncture between expectations. In considering this proposition, I looked at student interview data that described key aspects of classroom life, and then juxtaposed these with institutional data (i.e., standardized test scores and grades). In this light, a disjuncture would be present in situations where students described particular aspirations (e.g., thoughts associated with grades), which were in turn shadowed by institutional data or discourse, creating a competitive struggle leading to what Bourdieu referred to as "frustrated expectations"—a form of social reproduction. Within

assessment practices, aspirations may be similar for teachers and students—high grades. However, the expectations and opportunities to achieve a particular grade may not be an objective reality.

Practice and grit. As a final point of analysis, I considered the ways in which assessment practice could be impacted in terms of a relationship to a noncognitive student variable: grit. As a student noncognitive variable, grit has demonstrated a strong, positive correlation to school achievement (Duckworth et al., 2007), something that has been strongly associated with certain student populations. Duckworth's grit measure was specifically designed for elementary and middle school students using a series of eight Likert-type questions. The measure produced an overall score that translated to a person's grittiness. This measure was administered to the school sample (n = 243), which was used in the overall field analysis. There were really two goals associated with this endeavor. First, these data were used to explore relationships in terms of standardized test scores and teacher grading. Schools have only recently begun to consider grit a potential source of explanation in terms of student achievement, therefore any descriptive utility that could be garnered would add to current debates related to the connection between personality and school performance. Secondarily, this analysis considered the ways in which grit may serve as another form of reproduction. Since the onset of the school accountability movement, it has often seemed that the educational paradigm would quickly grasp any research that appeared to offer some hope of minimizing the current achievement gap among certain student populations. In other words, grit may be a tool that simply reflected the existing structural nature of education, and therefore could be used to substantiate existing school practices. Using my student sample data, I analyze

and offered descriptions in terms of gender and ethnic impacts that would add to the small base of extant literature.

Limitations

DiMaggio (1979) made two important observations related to Bourdieu's theoretical propositions: (a) that there is a serious lack of systematic study of classroom interaction necessary to refine Bourdieu's theory of *habitus*, and (b) that much of Bourdieu's theory would be "transformed" upon entry into American sociology—used for hypothesis building or orienting propositions (pp. 1471–1472). These observations had direct relevance to this current study. While adhering to Bourdieu's recommended research methodology, my study focused on a single middle school and a small sample size (a single classroom of 26 students). This limitation may in fact have left other social structural issues unaddressed.

It also has to be acknowledged that the depth and breadth of observational work was limited in terms of time and scope. This fact was evident in the physical ability of one researcher to observe, record, and analyze the classroom interactions of multiple teachers and students. Even with attempts to include a variety of classrooms and different instructional subjects, the sheer nuances that occur between a teacher and 25–35 students makes capturing every incident problematic. It also has to be acknowledged that even with my attempts to consistently validate and recenter my personal bias as a teacher (a form of personal reflexivity), I could not be sure that some interaction escaped my gaze. Classrooms can be tumultuous at times, and it is easy to focus on something for which one has experience—a classroom disruption, and so forth. In this case, something else may have been left unnoticed.

In the end, this research sought to explicate what Bourdieu (1984) referred to as the best-hidden effect of the educational system: "Whereas the holders of educationally uncertified cultural capital can always be required to prove themselves…because all their practices derive their value from their authors" (p. 23). In schools, an analysis of capital holds the prospect of recording a *trajectory* through social space and providing invaluable clues as to a student's *habitus* by revealing the manner and path through which they reached the position they presently occupy (Stones, 1998, p. 221). However, data such as standardized test scores represent one single event in a student's educational history. Looking at a single school and a small classroom sample cannot explain the depth of daily interactions of students with peers, their parents, or other teachers.

CHAPTER 4

SCHOOLS AND FIELDS OF POWER

Often times Bourdieu (1984) describes culture as a game. In the case of the U.S. education system, the "game" is setup through a unique mixture of public policy and political climate. However, as King (2000) points out, social life is not representative of a synchronic map or system that imposes itself on an individual; instead it is comprised of practical and negotiated interactions by individuals (p. 422). Therefore, to understand the impact on students one must carefully assemble the pieces that comprise school practice. In Bourdieu's words the only chance of objectifying the true nature of the game was to objectify the very operations which one is obliged to use in order to achieve that objectification (p. 12). In other words, one must analyze what Bourdieu refers to as the field. Field analysis in schools seeks to describe a point of view that speaks about schools but stops short of constructing the game as a whole (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 12).

As discussed earlier, for Bourdieu the field is contextualized in two important ways. First in terms of its *doxa* or the fundamental assumptions and categories that shape the intellectual thought behind the ways schools operate. This intellectual thought guides the second important point – consideration and contextualization of the ways in which actors utilize operational definitions in the struggle for power. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) of 2002 has had the most significant impact on school and classroom operations, and therefore is the primary consideration for framing the school field. In terms of *doxa*, this legislation ushered in greatest level of federal control of schools – mandating a number of operational controls and reporting structures. With these mandates came new notions of school accountability that shifted ideological

perspectives based on equity to one of excellence. Table 5 illustrates this shift, pointing out several important ideological perspectives and discourse between the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002.

Table 5

Shift from Equity to Excellence

	Overall Policy Framework	**Equality of Opportunity**	**School Assessment Practices**
Elementary and Secondary Education Act-1961	War on Poverty	Redistribution of programs and resources – acknowledges difference	Provide feedback – focused on long-term student outcomes
Discourse	Prevention	Focus on groups and communities	Remediation
No Child Left Behind Act-2002	Accountability	Local control for cost-control of programs – seeks "sameness" in programs and opportunities	Constant surveillance – focused on short-term results
Discourse	Punitive	Focus on individuals	Intervention (medical model)

Major educational programs (i.e. Title I) targeted by federal and state resources, part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, focused attention towards disadvantaged students. During the 1980's and 1990's weak and inconsistent empirical evidence fostered a viewpoint that school systems could not turn additional resources into better educational outcomes (Flanagan & Grissmer, 2002, p. 200). The outcome of these findings fueled an already existing critique by White working-class and wealthy Americans regarding federal and state spending aimed at increasing equality (Wells, Scott, Lopez, & Holme, 2005, p. 225).

These sentiments flowed over into the educational paradigm with calls for increased standardization of curriculum and programs to support ALL students, and accountability for federal monies being allocated to specific student groups. An example of this was seen within bilingual education programs. Schools typically provided bilingual education outside of the regular classroom environment. Students who were considered to be deficient in English received pull-out services for extended periods of time in order to develop language proficiency. As part of the shift to excellence, along with accountability, schools replaced bilingual education programs with in-classroom services whereby regular education teachers were given training in differentiating curriculum rather than offering separate services.

In terms of assessment practice, school practice shifted a feedback methodology to a new model that sought more immediate, individual intervention when gaps in academic ability were discovered. This type of intervention model mirrors what some see as a medical model whereby student achievement gaps are seen in pathological terms that call for targeted remedies. The focus on student achievement shifted from progress over a typical school year to four-to-five week curriculum programs aimed at intervention in some discrete academic skill.

The historical context that surrounds the shift from equity to excellence is important in terms of the policy that now frames the school field. Opportunity Middle School represents a single microcosm within the school field, built by external factors that help frame its operations and practices. According to Bourdieu, these external factors play a significant role in structuring the internal operations of the school field and teacher-student *habitus* (Swartz, 1997). Over the past decade schools have carried out

their business in concert with what many view as one of the largest intrusions of federal education policy: the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. Built off the political climate of the school accountability movement of the 1990's, this policy shifted significant real and symbolic power to federal government. The federal government now possessed the power to establish guidelines for standardized testing performance -- labeling schools and school districts based on their performance. States that failed to comply with these new regulations risked the loss of federal funding.

This chapter focuses attention of the ways in which NCLBA served as an external force that translated into structural realities within schools and classrooms. In consideration of this argument a first step is to analyze the NCLBA policy through the lens of public policy theory: the social construction of target populations. This lens considers the ways in which policy is directed toward target groups with specific, often behavior-focused goals. The outcome of this analysis provides a framework to consider the ways in which policy categories and target populations are used within school operations.

Much of the literature discussed earlier identifies the ways in which the NCLBA has had a significant effect on school operations especially in terms of specific student subgroups. A primary goal of NCLBA was to ensure that 100% of students be proficient in reading and math by 2014. Using standardized testing results (a result of NCLBA policy directives), the school field will be described in terms of impacts of specific student subgroups. These subgroupings consider ethnicity and other noncognitive variables in order to establish a framework that can be used later in the evaluation of school discourse in terms of assessment practice.

No Child Left Behind – External Factors to Internal Structures

Since 2001, schools have imbued, through the No Child Left Behind (NCLBA) public policy, significant power to intervene in the lives of students (Apple, 2004a). This act ushered in the revision of the last significant education policy, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The primary focus of the ESEA legislation was part of what President Johnson defined as the "war on poverty" (J. Spring, 1989). This fact is important to point out the shift in the ways in which public policy has changed. Under ESEA many states used federal funding to develop compensatory education programs that supported the neediest students and bilingual education services; and with assistance from courts special education and Title IX programs (Wells et al., 2005, p. 224). The passage of NCLBA saw a shift in the focus of educational policy from equity to excellence (Wells et al., 2005). The past focus on different studies for different students changed to all students achieving proficiency in the same academic fields (Tyack, 2003). Within this light, the NCLBA linked federal funding to what it referred to as accountability requiring schools to use standardized testing as a means to demonstrate group-level progress. As such accountability takes place through behavioral analysis of students and systems management – what some see as hegemonic and ideological representations (Apple, 2004b, p. 7).

To explore the ways in which the NCLBA, and the notion of accountability, have impacted schools (teachers and especially students) one must consider the way in which the policy provides benefits and burdens to specific groups. This can be accomplished by analyzing the NCLBA policy within the theoretical frame of the social construction of target populations.

Social construction of target populations. In terms of schools, constructions are often used in the process of providing focused programs and resources: gifted, English-language and special education. These constructions are evident within the NCLBA legislation. Title I programs are an excellent example. Social constructions are not static representations and can fluctuate over time (A. L. Schneider & Ingram, 2005). The historical and current day constructions within the NCLBA policy can be analyzed through two sources: popular media and the *Congressional Record*.

Social constructions of group identity based on legal mandates (i.e. legislation) are not sufficiently powerful on their own. Instead, these mandates require ongoing discourse and accompanying policy rationales that are supported by another powerful source – the mass media (DiAlto, 2005, p. 84). Examples of this relationship have been seen within a variety of social issues: welfare reform (Naples, 1997), AIDS legislation (Schroedel & Jordan, 1998), hate crimes (Jenness & Grattet, 2001), and such educational issues such as standardized testing (Popham, 1999). What makes this relationship so important is the fact that the discourse of media messages within public policy help to shape the public's values, ideologies, and beliefs, but can be problematic since these messages are not neutral in terms of power relationships and point of view (DiAlto, 2005, p. 84). In this situation, the public could receive biased points of view or insufficient information which can "hide" underlying issues related to democratic representation or participation. This makes the analysis of media messages in relationship to the NCLBA legislation and social constructions of particular groups an important topic.

Table 6 illustrates the number of news articles that were published between 1999 and 2014 in relation to the NCLBA legislation. [1] One of the most striking findings associated with these data are the limited number of articles that were published prior to the passage of NCLBA. Of the total articles (9,485) published during this time period only 11 (less than 1%) articles possessed the potential to influence the social construction of particular groups prior to the passage of the final legislation [2].

Table 6

National News-NCLBA by Year (1999 to 2014)

Year	# of Articles Published in U.S. News
2001	16
2002	217
2003	918
2004	1,392
2005	1,103
2006	741
2007	1,223
2008	686
2009	207
2010	370
2011	1,151
2012	962
2013	374
2014	125

A majority of these articles focused attention on the passage of the legislation and the future promises for educational change:

> HR 1 focuses federal education spending on helping students in America's disadvantaged urban and rural communities. In return for the increased resources and flexibility, it asks states to measure student performance annually in reading and math in grades 3-8. HR 1 dramatically increases flexibility for local schools,

[1] Articles were selected based on a headline that included “No Child Left Behind” from the Access World News database.
[2] Appendix B provides the dates and headlines of 11 articles that were analyzed.

> allowing them to spend up to 50 percent of their federal education dollars where they need them, provided they demonstrate results (Douglas Dispatch, 2001)

Similar articles referenced potential, positive change to disadvantaged students along with the overall benefits of President Bush's plan to shift accountability of schools – testing students regularly and weeding out failing schools:

> His plan would require states to test children every year in reading and math, hold school districts and schools accountable for pupils' performance on the tests, provide financial help for failing schools and give parents options for their children if they are in failing schools (Mercer, 2001).

Once implemented, this plan put into motion the shift from equity to excellence. In his article entitled, *The Politics of No Child Left Behind*, Rudalevige (2003) studied the legislative process and issues surrounding to the NCLBA. He concluded that several important factors led to the legislations passage: 1) the alliances between New Democrats and much of the Republican caucus, and 2) newly elected President Bush's willingness to embrace Democratic positions and fulfill his campaign promises. However, in the end, the common language of "accountability" brought cooperation among most participants (p. 68). The lack of significant media coverage and detail prior to the passage of this legislation could be construed as a limitation within this analysis. However, one possible explanation of this sparse coverage may lie in the overall control and focus of the discourse surrounding the legislation. This type of scenario has been described by Naples (1997) in her work related to congressional welfare reform. Naples discovered that while legislative players may in fact desire to seek specific change, discursive strategies limit or prohibit the content or context that can be delivered. In this case, certain actors wield

more power and therefore control the discourse that is to be accepted into the policy-making process. The relations of ruling evidenced in Naples final analysis revealed the ways in which stories and lives of the poor were disqualified paving the way for a state constructed welfare policy that avoided the contradictions inherent in the social construction of class, gender and racial inequality (p. 938). In the case of the NCLBA, the process was one where legislative compromises avoided both extremes (far Left and far Right) of the political spectrum (Rudalevige, 2003, p. 68), offering a platform for newly elected President Bush to claim victory over an important campaign promise. As one media report indicated:

> Bush waited three weeks to sign the bill and, seeking maximum exposure on an issue of rare agreement between Republicans and Democrats, was taking his roadshow to the states of lawmakers who led the yearlong negotiations on the bill ('No child left behind'.2002).

Along with President Bush, NCLBA legislative supporters were also quoted in media accounts related to the historic passage of the legislation. Then chairman of the House Education Committee Representative John Boehner was quoted as stating that, "This is the beginning of the process of reforming American education" (Kiely & Henry, 2001). U.S. Representative Jim DeMint, R-S.C., saw the NCLBA as a pathway for greater choice for parents: "No matter how bad a school gets, there has been no out for the child. This is a precedent-setting bill in that it allows the money to follow the student" (Maultsby, 2001). Each of these accounts demonstrates the strong conviction to the concept of accountability. At the time, the concept of accountability was an unproven reform tool. However, without conclusive evidence that it would not work, policy

makers accepted it in faith (Rudalevige, 2003). It is unfortunate that key stakeholders and concerns from critics were not more widely addressed by the media until after the passage of the legislation.

While Bush and others touted the passage of the legislation, there were some critics and skeptics. States like California began to decry some of the realities that faced local schools. As part of the accountability mechanisms that were an integral part of the legislation, teachers would now be required to be “highly qualified” to teach in schools. In California’s case, this meant that more than 42,000 teachers were not qualified to teach. The president of the California Teachers Association was quoted as saying: "Either they're playing games with the public, or they're so far out of touch with reality that it's ludicrous". The year prior to the passage of the NCLBA, 14 percent of the California’s 301,000 public school teachers did not have a preliminary teaching credential, and this was expected to grow to 21 percent by 2009 (Bell, 2001). Others pointed out the failure of the 1994 Senate “Goals 2000” education bill. The bill contained two quantifiable goals: 1) America's high-school graduation rate would be at least 90 percent, and 2) students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement. Both goals failed to be achieved. In 2000 the graduation rate was about 75 percent and American students ranked 19th among 38 surveyed nations in mathematics and 18th in science (No child left behind? - Education's real problem is elsewhere.2002).

In terms of its impact on schools, the NCLBA represented a significant change. However, as a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 the legislative process may not have garnered the attention of the media. Well known reports such as *A Nation at Risk* along with ongoing policy work implemented by

previous presidential administrations had set in place school change in terms of academic standards and state testing (Rudalevige, 2003). Additionally, Title I programs had been providing targeted federal funds to specific school populations for some time. In other words, the newsworthiness of the legislation was not a significant enough story for the media. In terms of the relationship between the media and social constructions it failed to represent what scholars refer to as a "critical moment" whereby media messages make constructions of particular groups more effective (DiAlto, 2005, p. 85). The lack of a critical moment during the initial crafting of the NCLBA legislation did not diminish the construction of particular target groups. Instead, it simply placed these constructions in the hands of some congressional officials and presidential politics (Rudalevige, 2003).

As Table 6 demonstrates there were other times during the legislative history of NCLBA where the media played an important role in supporting the policy rationales related to particular target groups. These rationales are important since they served to legitimate policy design (A. L. Schneider & Ingram, 1997, p. 134), and in the case of NCLBA became key points of contention by educators that were picked up by the media. Additionally, this media discourse in terms of policy rationales fits well into the equity to excellence framework. In essence, the code words and phrases that related to such aspects of the NCLBA such as *100% student proficiency* and *at-risk* fit into what Bourdieu describes as the *doxa* within a field. It provided the categories with which to describe change or progress. As the NCLBA policy began to be questioned by schools, the media used these categories with which to connect past promises with current problems.

Unlike the media, congressional officials played a significant role in redefining the construction of particular target groups within the initial NCLBA policy. The changing landscape that preceded the NCLBA legislative process was one of a school system reimagined by new academic standards, rigorous curriculum and a focus on the demands of a new economy (Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003). These issues were significant topics within local, state and federal politics. At the same time issues of immigration and youth crime dominated the political landscape. Previous presidential legacies promising a "war on crime" (especially related to juvenile crime) and the ongoing failure of schools to make progress in terms of the achievement gap created the opportunity for new and revised social constructions (A. L. Schneider & Ingram, 2005). One method to consider the discourse associated with this reauthorization one can turn to the *Congressional Record*.

The *Congressional Record* is an important source of data analysis in terms of which constructions are employed to achieve certain outcomes with the NCLBA policy. It provides a text-based source of information (i.e. discourse) that includes hearings, debates and voting activities that are important to its creators as an official historical record of the body's proceedings (Newton, 2005, pp. 148-149). Like other large-scale sources of information, the *Congressional Record* has been made accessible in electronic format. Providers now offer various views and summarization features that offer benefits when selecting and analyzing the *Congressional Record* in terms of a specific discourse framework. Some highlights associated with the NCLBA legislation include its impact on other existing federal legislation. 38 existing statutes were amended associated with the final passage of NCLBA. Included in this were past large-scale pieces of legislation

including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, National Child Protection Act of 1993, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Workforce Investment Act of 1998.

One way to consider the discourse that led to the social constructions of specific populations is to look at bills that were part of the NCLBA legislative cycle. Appendix A illustrates 21 (44%) of the 48 bills that we brought before the House or Senate floor from 1997 until the final version passed on June 14, 2001. Each bill is shown with its applicable legislative title and a summary of the overall focus of the legislation. This summarization is provided in order to better describe the content of each bill which could be distorted by the title. Additionally, it lists the specific student populations that were emphasized within the details of the legislation.

In considering the bills that were part of the NCLBA process two groups emerge as a primary focus of legislative change. These groups are defined in terms of ethnic and gender based identities. These group definitions are common within the social constructions of target populations since divisions by ethnicity or gender create power to those able to capitalize on it (A. L. Schneider & Ingram, 1997, p. 192). As the analysis of these groups will reveal, specific policy discourse helps shape the definitions of these groups and provides evidence in terms of the shift in equity to excellence.

One pattern of the NCLBA legislative process revealed a specific order in which groups were considered. In terms of ethnicity, these included non-English speaking students. House Resolution 3680 began the process of establishing specific categories for non-English speaking students. This resolution offered two definitions for non-English speaking students: the English language learner and Immigrant children and youth. The

following definitions from this legislation point out the ways in which this early bill sought to create difference – especially in terms of democratic participation.

> ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER.—The term 'English language learner', when used with reference to an individual, means an individual— (A) who (i) was not born in the United States; or comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant and whose native language is a language other than English; and (B) who has sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language that the difficulty may deny the individual the opportunity (i) to learn successfully in a classroom where the language of instruction is English; or (ii) to participate fully in society.
>
> IMMIGRANT CHILDREN AND YOUTH.—The term 'immigrant children and youth' means individuals who (A) are aged 3 through 21; (B) were not born in any State; and (C) have not attended school in any State for more than three full academic years.

The creation of this difference could have easily been overlooked since these terms are typically used synonymously when referring to the programs or services to be offered. An example of this can be seen within Part A - Section 3102 which establishes the overall purpose of the English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act (ELA):

> to help ensure that children who are limited English proficient, including immigrant children and youth, attain English proficiency, develop high levels of academic attainment in English, and meet the same challenging State academic

content and student academic achievement standards as all children are expected to meet

In terms of this policy discourse, both limited English proficient and immigrant children and youth could be constructing as deserving. However, a different picture emerges when these constructions are considered in terms of funding levels detailed within this same part of the legislation.

Part A – Subpart 1 details the funding mechanisms with which state agencies can distribute funds as a part of the ELA act. As mentioned earlier, one of the main objectives of the NCLBA legislation was to provide flexibility to states and local school districts in how they use federal funds. In terms of funding for ELA populations, Congress made a clear distinction between limited English proficient and immigrant children in terms of available funding – differentiating the percentage of funding available for the two groups:

> (i) an amount that bears the same relationship to 80 percent of the remainder as the number of limited English proficient children in the State bears to the number of such children in all States; and (ii) an amount that bears the same relationship to 20 percent of the remainder as the number of immigrant children and youth in the State bears to the number of such children and youth in all States.

The combination of the statutory definitions of these groups (described above) along with the percentage designations, 80% for limited English proficient children versus 20% for immigrant children and youth, clearly delineate different social constructions. The construction of Limited English proficient children can be construed as long term residents within the United States who must be prepared for a place within US society.

Conversely, immigrant children are constructed as uneducated (having not attended school for three years) and therefore are less worthy of differing education services. Additionally, the reliance on statistical data (the US Census) in terms of state distribution of funds contributes to the overall problematic nature of this funding mechanism since it is doubtful that immigrant populations participate in formal governmental processes in the same manner.

The differing construction for these two groups demonstrates the impact of school policy in terms of equity, which calls into the question the assertion that top-down legislation like NCLBA can have a greater impact on equity-related issues (Welner & Oakes, 2005, p. 89). In developing a differential funding mechanism it appears that policy makers did indeed see the educational goals of these two groups as different. As section 3 within the purpose section describes the goal for schools that serve these populations is: to develop high-quality language instruction educational programs designed to assist State educational agencies, local educational agencies, and schools in teaching limited English proficient children and serving immigrant children and youth. Within this context, the expectation is to provide school-based instruction to limited English proficient children; whereas, immigrant children and youth are provided services (i.e. medical services, etc.). In this case, school-based instructional programs such as bilingual education or interventions that require mandatory instructional minutes are exclusive for one student group. Additionally, the question of teaching versus serving becomes another source of construction left up to state and local educational officials, however, equity issues at the local level rarely emerge as primary concerns for the political majority (Welner & Oakes, 2005, p. 89). This has become a significant point of

discussion in states like Arizona and Colorado that have implemented strict legislative policies aimed at minimizing services to certain immigrant (i.e. illegal aliens) groups.

Gender-related differences represent a second source of group identification within the NCLBA. As Tyack (2003) points out, the social construction of women by schools has historical significance:

> The ideal of color-blind and sex-neutral schools now makes little sense to people who believe that such neutrality is impossible—that in fact such a school would simply express the dominant outlooks of white males. A belief in the basic similarity of boys and girls as learners undergirded coeducation, but a notion of crucial gender differences is now used to argue for all-girl schools or for a new, "gender-sensitive" form of coeducation (p. 94).

Tyack's assertion related to a new "gender-sensitive" form of coeducation can be seen within the NCLBA in its attempts to address a gender imbalance in post-secondary fields of math and science: Subpart 21 of NCLBA defines the Women's Educational Equity Act. As the legislation points out within its findings, teaching and learning practices are often inequitable for females. These inequities range from allegations of sexual harassment which results in safety concerns, curriculum that fails to reflect the historical accomplishments or significance of women – especially women of color, the needs of pregnant and parenting teens, and the lack of female representation within the fields of mathematics and science. The NCLBA legislation attempts to remediate existing inequalities through funding related to targeted programs and resources. Interestingly, there are no specific hearings or reports in relation to Senate Bill 1264 or House Resolution 2387. This renders any assertions related to the motivations of this policy as

inferential. For example, this legislation could be an outgrowth of the Gender Equity in Education Act of 1994 whereby girls were categorized as an under-served population and millions of dollars were awarded to study these phenomena (Sommers, 2000, p. 23).

For males, the NCLBA policy is silent in terms of specific gendered-discourse. Instead, the new Title IV – Safe and Drug Free School policy targets groups that are predominantly represented by males – constructions such as delinquent. Some see this framing as part of an understandable dialectic: the more girls are portrayed as diminished, the more boys are reduced in importance (Sommers, 2000, pp. 23-24). In other words, existing evidence of school-related issues for boys such as lower grades, higher rates in special education classes, suspensions, and involvement in crime, alcohol and drugs guide the construction process. Therefore, boys are constructed as in need of intervention – labeled as behavior problems or the cause of school violence. Evidence of this can be seen in an April 28, 1998 hearing entitled *Understanding Violent Children* (Understanding violent children: 1998). Boys are mentioned surreptitiously in one part of the testimony related to past empirical research of anti-social children. Within this part of the testimony one of the participant's mentions that a past successful intervention has been one in which parents received training in order to deal with problem boys.

> Parent training or parenting is not an instinct, and the ideas and the skills are being lost in our society for a lot of different reasons. So when you set these group training sessions up, we were surprised to find that up to 80 percent of the families invited, you know, actually came.

This type of discourse is part of a larger, overall phenomena that has to deal with gender and schools. For some, the issue is connected with masculinity – a culture of

subordination of women and messages that boys must suppress the parts that are most like their mothers (Sommers, 2000). Parents, especially fathers, are seen as critical resources to school success and to remediate other "boy-related" problems such as delinquency. In the wake of this discourse, schools have responded by experimenting with single-gender classrooms. One such program in California focused on providing student options with the goal of stimulating competition and opportunity, however, the program lasted only two years (Datnow & Hubbard, 2005). The results of much of the discourse surrounding equity in terms of gender fail to address several key issues. First, it ignores the realities of school practices that are gender biased (Datnow & Hubbard, 2005) which includes acknowledging the role that teachers play in the framing of boys as "behavior problems" or in terms of their deficits (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995). Secondarily, the focus on cultural ideology and psychological rhetoric draw attention from the larger structural issues related to family (Sommers, 2000) and community breakdowns (Clear, 2007).

Target populations. Social construction processes were in play in relation to issues of gender and ethnicity for particular groups within the NCLBA. Other groups such as teachers, families and particular types of schools (i.e. public versus charter) were not immune within the NLCBA policy. However, the construction of these groups was not necessarily part of the *Congressional Record* or carried out within specific media accounts during the formation of the NCLBA. Much of the construction process came from years of school reform "tinkering". Those who study school reform often place the beginnings of such school reform efforts (i.e. curriculum standards and standardized testing) to the Reagan years and the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (J. Spring, 1989;

Tyack, 2003). Therefore the construction of these groups has been culled from existing academic literature and the final version of the NCLBA (outlined in Appendix C).

The social construction of target populations seeks to understand four types of target populations: advantaged, contenders, dependents and deviants (A. Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Table 7 illustrates these four categories or groups and is conceptualized within a grid structure. Each of these categories is greatly influenced by social constructions (deserving or underserving) and the relative political power (strong or weak) possessed by a particular group (A. L. Schneider & Ingram, 1997; A. Schneider & Ingram, 1993; A. L. Schneider & Ingram, 2005).

Target groups such as advanced placement students have strong political power and are advantaged by positive social constructions. In 1992 there were approximately 1.4 million students receiving gifted services of which 72.4% of these students were white. Title I – Part G now specifically recognizes advanced placement students in terms of gifted education program requirements. Not surprisingly, most selective colleges and universities have found ways of using advanced university admission policies have found ways to give specific consideration for advanced placement or honors coursework in their admission policies (Geiser & Santelices, 2004). Qualified teachers and private and charter schools are also included in this group. In response to what President George W. Bush frequently called "the soft bigotry of low expectations" (Rudalevige, 2003, p. 65), new teacher certification requirements were enacted that required annual certification and publication of a teachers highly qualified status. Additionally, the overall theme of school choice placed charter and private schools as highly valued alternatives to public schools which are constructed as contenders: constructed negatively while maintaining

strong political power. This political power is maintained due to the ongoing ideological battle related to local control of schools (Tyack, 2003).

Table 7

NCLBA and the Social Construction of Target Populations

Target Population:	Advantaged	Target Population:	Contenders
Model's Prediction:	Benefits over-subscribed, burdens undersubscribed	Model's Prediction:	Benefits sub rosa, burdens symbolic and overt
Groups:	Advanced placement students, parents, highly qualified teachers, girls, private schools, public charter schools, school resource officers	Groups:	Public schools
Target Population:	Dependents	Target Population:	Deviants
Model's Prediction:	Benefits under-subscribed, burdens oversubscribed	Model's Prediction:	Benefits very under-subscribed, burdens very oversubscribed
Groups:	Poor students, poor families, low-income students, disadvantaged children, minorities, limited English proficient children, dropouts, neglected children, pregnant and parenting teenagers	Groups:	Uncertified teachers, para-professionals, high poverty schools, immigrant children and youth, truant students, boys, delinquents, drug or alcohol user

Conversely, groups such as delinquent boys or student who are truant are socially constructed as deviants with weak political power. Title IV – Part A – Safe & Drug Free

Schools was enacted to support "appropriate and effective school discipline policies that prohibit disorderly conduct [and] that foster a safe and drug-free environment that supports academic achievement". The normative message from this policy statement is clear: behave and learn, or fall within the purview of some disciplinary action. For this to take place some negative social construction must be made.

Poor families and some minority groups are seen as dependent with weak political power and undersubscribed benefits. As mentioned earlier, minority groups are not given the same construction with the NCLBA. This is true of families as well. Those families who can support private tutors or have the means to fulfill the requirements of gifted or advanced placement courses have the benefit of certain school programs and the political clout that comes with them. Poor families receive their services under Title I such as the free and reduced lunch program.

In some cases social constructions are accepted as a natural order of things and seldom change (A. L. Schneider & Ingram, 2005). We see this point carried out within the next section when the initial years of the NCLBA bring to light a significant fallacy that was part of the initial legislation: the notion that "sameness" in terms of a focus on excellence provides equity for all. In considering this point I look to 2004 as a year where the most significant media attention was given to the NCLBA. Fueled by Congressional budget cuts in 2003, the media provided a backdrop to describe the results of the initial, three years of the NCLBA within schools. This backdrop offers evidence in terms of the ongoing failures to address the needs of minority groups, and sets the stage for a more current discussion in terms of one of the signature aspects of NCLBA – accountability through standardized testing.

Policy Meets Practice – External Factors Meet Internal Realities

By 2004, the NCLBA had been implemented within schools for a little less than three years. In many ways, the focus on 9-11 and domestic terrorism absorbed much of the attention of policy makers and the general public. For schools, Congressional federal tax cuts limited the federal government's options in terms of increasing funding for the NCLBA (Petrovich, 2005, p. 9). States and local schools were left to recover the difference in funding in order to achieve federal mandates. Many were still hopeful that the signature aspect of the legislation – accountability through standardized testing would yield the 100% student proficiency in math and reading promised as part of the initial legislative mandate. However, the media's attention with regards to this matter offered two divergent perspectives: policy makers and schools.

In 2002, Ron Paige, then acting Secretary of Education, hailed the passing of the NCLBA as "a giant leap forward -- it is actually a cultural shift, a different way of doing business". By 2004, his sentiment was one of defending the Act: "No. 1, we must continue the reforms of the No Child Left Behind Act. The law is clearly working. In states all across the country, test scores are rising, students are learning and the stubborn racial 'achievement gap' is beginning to close" (Paige, 2004). The federal government was now in a position of defending the Act. Having been strapped with the expensive implementation aspects of the NCLBA, a number of states and localities began to revolt. Some these included:

- Several districts in Vermont and Connecticut refused federal funds rather than comply with all NCLBA mandates.
- A district in Pennsylvania sued the state over what it sees as inequities in the law.

- At least seven states passed resolutions criticizing the law or asking for federal waivers on some requirements.
- Maine considered a bill - similar to one in Vermont - to prevent state funding of reforms.
- In Utah, a bill to opt out of NCLBA entirely (and so forgo many federal funds) passed the house education committee (Paulson, 2004).

A task force of the National Conference of State Legislatures summed up this contention best: the "[the] Act creates too many ways for schools to fail because it holds all schools to the same standards" (Abrahms, 2005). This fact highlights one of the fallacies in the shift from equity to excellence – equal is not always fair and fair is not always equal. Gary Orfield, a Harvard education professor, states this even more succinctly in terms of the NCBLA: "Wealthy districts don't have to do much at all under this law. Other districts face demands that are somewhere between difficult and absurd. It's putting maximum pressure on the most vulnerable districts" (Paulson, 2004). In other words, they focus attention on failing schools. A primary point of the NCLBA legislation was that "sameness" and standardization had the potential to uplift student proficiency levels in math and reading. But as Omi & Winant (2014) argue, color blind legislation that ignores race and class issues, and then doing "sameness", does not produce equity. This type of rationale was a pivotal part of the NCLBA.

By 2011 and 2012 states began to realize that the 100% reading and math proficiency requirement of NCLBA was not a realistic reality by 2014. In response to growing test score concerns, states began to request waivers from the US Department of Education in order to continue to receive federal funds without reaching the 100%

reading and math proficiency level. The waiver process and the potential failure of states to meet the NCLBA proficiency requirements represented a significant story for the media. This is evident in the 962 articles published in 2012, 380 (40%) of which related to NCLBA waivers. Justification for the media attention to the waiver process can also be seen in data from Opportunity Middle School. While focused on a single middle school, these data demonstrate the trends that faced districts and schools as they attempted to achieve the NCLBA proficiency mandate.

As part of the NCLBA legislation states were required to provide annual standardized test score statistics for specific subgroups of students. As Table 8 illustrates, these subgroups can often times be linked to the overall definition of the Title I program within NCLBA: targeted support for low-income families. Many of these subgroups were discussed in the earlier section of this chapter. Within the Social Construction of Target Populations framework, many of these subgroups were considered as “dependents”. An unfortunate reality is that these subgroups have a long history of underachievement within schools, and therefore the social construction of these groups has become accepted as a natural order with little change over time (A. L. Schneider & Ingram, 2005).

One of the most striking features of the summarized data in Table 8 is the vast divide between proficiency among subgroups and White students. In both math and reading the most at risk are students who receive special education services. While their overall proficiency rate was 32.8% in math and 50.3% in reading, they were significantly behind White students (-51.6% for math and -44.4% for reading). Followed closely behind the special education students were those who are classified as English Language

Learners (ELL). ELL students had an overall proficiency rate of 38% in math and 51.1% in reading, a difference from White students of -46.4% in math and -43.6% in reading.

One of the disturbing realities associated with these data and especially these two subgroups is that each of them receives significant funding from sources other the NCLBA. In the case of special education students, additional funding is provided under the Individuals for Disability Education Act (IDEA), and between 1996 and 2005 an estimated 40% of all new education funding went to special education services (Levenson, 2012).

In the case of ELL students, the funding and provision for services has been more controversial. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, public policy related to immigration has juxtaposed with educational services and funding to create an environment where oftentimes services are part of unfunded mandates. An example of this can be found in Arizona where schools are required to provide four hours of language instruction to ELL students. The policy has been interpreted differently among districts and schools which have led to different implementation practices. In some schools ELL students are provided instruction in pull-out classrooms with ELL peers. In other districts, ELL students remain with non-ELL peers and teachers simply differentiate instruction to provide additional support. A paperwork process, required by state education officials, is used to document compliance. In terms of the data presented, it is questionable that the existing structural measures are in fact benefiting a large number of students.

Table 8

Standardized Math and Reading by NCLBA Subgroups (2009-2012)

	Math			Reading			
Subgroup	% Passing	% Difference All Students Passing -78.20%	% Difference White Passing -84.40%	% Passing	% Difference All Students Passing -90.40%	% Difference White Passing -94.70%	Avg. Student Population % Change (Number Tested)
African American	62.6	-15.6	-21.8	84.1	-6.3	-10.6	5
Native American	48	-30.2	-36.4	70.3	-20.1	-24.4	-2.5
Hispanic	66.9	-11.3	-17.5	84.3	-6.1	-10.4	4.6
Asian / Pacific Islander	87.9	9.7	3.5	92.7	2.3	-2	0.06
Economically Disadvantaged	61	-17.2	-23.4	80.9	-9.5	-13.8	17.2
English Language Learners	38	-40.2	-46.4	51.1	-39.3	-43.6	10.4
Special Education	32.8	-45.2	-51.6	50.3	-40.1	-44.4	-7.6

Notes. Data are represented in averages in order to ensure the confidentiality of school site.

In terms of the proficiency levels of the NCLBA subgroups there is one final point that requires consideration – the ongoing achievement gap in terms of race. Much of this chapter has focused on the ways in which NCLBA structures certain student populations into classifications in hopes of providing information that will result in student achievement accountability. Within much of the NCLBA issues of ethnicity are rarely acknowledged with one exception: Native Americans. Title VII of the NCLBA specifically addresses the educational needs of Indian children. Within the introduction NCLBA identifies the need to address the "unique and continuing trust relationship with and responsibility to the Indian people for the education of Indian children". The details of this title outline the relationship with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and specific funding mechanisms and programming activities associated with Native American, Hawaiian and Alaskan student groups and their families. The history associated with this aspect of legislation and education is longstanding and too extensive to be addressed within my study. However, it should be pointed out that like other subgroups the Native American students show a significant difference in proficiency from their White peers. In the case of Opportunity Middle School, Native American student proficiency for math was 48% and for reading 70.3%. These percentages, especially in terms of reading proficiency, were significantly better than the special education and ELL subgroups. However, there was still a wide divide between White peers (-36.4% in math and -24.4%).

The analysis of these three subgroups (special education, ELL and Native American students) provides a context as to "why" state and local officials were eager to seek waivers in terms of NCLBA proficiency requirements. By 2012, the political

environment focused on shifting attention from the NCLBA proficiency requirement to a new focus on the development of national education standards – commonly referred to as the Common Core State Standards movement. The new Common Core State Standards focused on college and career readiness:

> Under the deal, the states must show they will prepare children for college and careers, set new targets for improving achievement among all students, reward the best performing schools and focus help on the ones doing the worst (Turner, 2012).

The shift between the President Bush's NCLBA and President Obama's Common Core standards could be considered a bait-and-switch – replacing one failed program with the promise of new progress. Supporters of the Common Core State Standard point out that much of the problem with NCLBA lies in its inability to address the differences in state standards and the huge diversity in student populations (L. King, 2007). Critics of the Common Core point to the ongoing entrenchment of the federal government into what has historically been a "local" issue. This has prompted many states to either pass legislation banning Common Core or to withdraw from federal funding systems that are tied to Common Core mandates.   In some ways the public policy actions behind the NCLBA and the Common Core could be conceptualized as a type of punctuated equilibrium, whereby periods of time related to policy stability are interrupted by short bursts of innovation followed by another long lasting, stable period (A. L. Schneider & Ingram, 2005, p. 7).   In this light, the ongoing shifts in policy and testing represent what many envision as small steps in solving a complicated problem.

The Myth of Metrics – Field Distortions

The entirety of the NCLBA social construction of target populations and standardized test score analysis are intended to offer important perspectives in terms of the school field – especially in terms of the shift from equity to excellence. In the attempts to control federal and state spending, minority student populations are declining in terms of academic achievement – something contrary to the mission of the NCLBA. In many ways, this implies a perverse effect whereby performance for certain groups is maintained because of the prohibitive cost for the elimination or neutralization of the phenomena (Boudon, 1982). It could be that the standardized testing results for certain minority groups will fall victim to similar large scale social issues such as incarceration or welfare reform -- illuminating the ways in which public policy are structured to appear valuable (in order to receive wide public support) but in fact address little in terms of root problems.

Another significant aspect of this shift in terms of standardized test scores surrounds the ideology of merit. Young (1990) describes this ideology as one that seeks to depoliticize the establishment of criteria and standards that allocates position and awards benefits (p. 211). The overall agenda, tools and rationales that are part of the NCLBA impart important messages that inform individuals (or groups) of their status as citizens – including students. Standardized test scores reward certain personal and cultural styles: competitiveness, one who can work alone and quickly, and favor abstraction (Young, 1990, p. 209). For this reason, it should not be surprising that the data from this chapter shows little progress in terms of supporting particular groups that have historically been "left behind".

It has long been espoused that standardized tests "would provide the normatively and culturally neutral, objective measures of individual technical or cognitive competence" (Young, 1990, pp. 207-208). The data presented within this chapter presents a different picture. It supports the proposition made by Hochschild (1995) that schools may in fact create an ideology of deception. The deception exists when schools focus on people's behavior rather than on economic processes, environmental constraints or political structures as the causal explanation for social orderings. Acknowledging this ideology would be in conflict with the long-standing mission of schools, the equality of opportunity, something political leaders ignore because acknowledging it would require massive shifts in expenditure (A. L. Schneider & Ingram, 1997, p. 134). The original mission of the NCLBA was to provide and track academic proficiency for all. However, once schools realized that the goal of 100% proficiency was unreachable waivers were sought.

Education is often understood in terms of a means of providing equal opportunity for all groups. However, there is little evidence that education in fact equalizes (Young, 1990). The data presented in this section as it relates to standardized test scores and particular school groupings supports this assertion. Therefore, it may be time to consider standardized test scores within a cultural framework – a form of cultural capital. Building off the work of Bourdieu, I consider the ways in which test scores impact curriculum content and style (i.e. assessment practice). Within the next chapter I move my analysis to the classroom field. Using Bourdieu's conceptual framework of *habitus*, I explore the ways in which test scores (and grading) serve to legitimize the practices within a classroom. I build off the evidence from this chapter to argue that standardized

test scores act as some sort of “cultural tool” that students carry into the classroom field. As such standardized testing scores (and grades) become an important source of stratification – providing resources to some and not others (Swartz, 1997, p. 181).

CHAPTER 5

THE "WEAR AND TEAR" OF CLASSROOMS

In the previous chapter the issues of public policy and standardized testing scores were explored in terms of their ability to define the school field. Thought of best in terms of factors external to the school, policy and associated accountability measures (i.e. standardized testing) present their own unique challenges to the educational field. In many situations these challenges are administrative in nature. Curriculum adoptions and budgetary controls are commonly used within educational policy to enforce specific ideologies (Apple, 2004b). An example of this was the Reading First program that was made a requirement under the NCLBA (Allington, 2002) – often times for schools considered to be low performing or failing. This program heavily structured the reading process within classroom instruction including daily phonics routines and scripted lessons. These adopted and mandated programs by federal, state and local districts have ways of structuring the internal logic of the classroom field, but more importantly they impact the ways in which teachers approach the task or practice of assessment (Jones et al., 2003). It is the goal of this chapter to offer insights into how teacher and students undertake and articulate assessment practice within the classroom field.

A significant aspect of Bourdieu's work has included field analyses involving teachers, where differences in styles and ideas are viewed as strategies in the struggle for intellectual recognition (Swartz, 1997, p. 123). To make sense of the field Bourdieu (1993), envisions the job of the social scientist as one to describe a state (long-lasting or temporary) related to the struggles held by competing agents and the conflicts between rival principles of legitimacy (pp. 42-43). These struggles are worked out within fields

of power. Fields act as the source or arena of struggle for legitimation -- a place where actors struggle over the very definitions of what are to be considered the most valued resources within the field (Swartz, 1997, p. 123). For this study, the classroom field is the place where teachers and students interact with each other in order to deal with the realities associated with the bureaucratic details of assessment practice: a product of the external realities of policy and administrative mechanisms discussed in the previous chapter.

One way that Bourdieu conceptualized fields is to consider positions of dominance and subordination (Swartz, 1997, p. 129). Figure 1 illustrates the classroom field using student labels discussed within the literature and from Opportunity teachers in the course of their assessment practice (i.e. grading) work. In this space, those who are richest in a specific capital (i.e. credentials/grades), and are most aligned with the dominant principles of the school hierarchy, achieve a specific legitimacy (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p. 41). It acknowledges these already prominent within the field among higher social classes. An important point to consider from this illustration is that it supports the concerns from researchers that grades simply reward and certify displays of middle-class self-discipline (Collins, 1979, p. 21). This underscores the importance of understanding the ways in which implement assessment practice in classrooms.

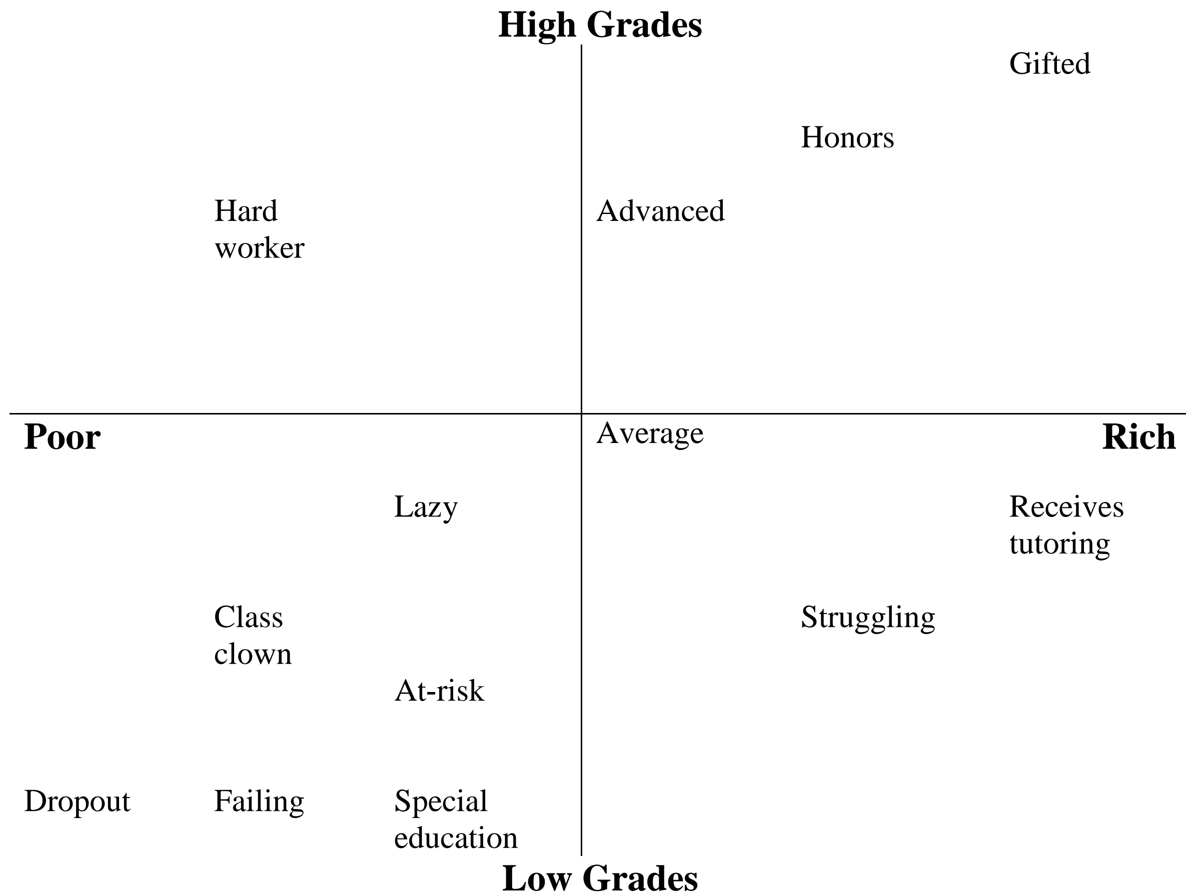

Figure 1. Classroom field of power and grading descriptions.

This chapter focuses attention on the ways in which bureaucratic rules and processes from policies such as the NCLBA are carried out within the day-to-day actions of the classroom. To makes sense of these actions, the chapter begins by laying out details and context in terms of assessment practices. The NCLBA provides specific rules and policies related to standardize testing and school improvement; however, district and school administrators carry these mandates forward into other bureaucratic assessment practices -- what the educational paradigm describes as "best practices". While these best practices are commonly referred to within the literature, they take on a very different look and vary significantly in terms of implementation between districts and schools. The goal of these practices is to track student progress in terms of academic achievement

“risk”. Within the Opportunity district, I focus on two specific practices. The first involves a focus on standards and mastery-based grading. The second involves the use of a school improvement assessment model whereby teachers are asked to regularly assess all students using a common assessment in order to work within a team-based structure to assess student academic risk and report results to administrative officials.

After providing the context of assessment practice, I focus on descriptions related to the classroom setting within Opportunity Middle School. As a case study, I focus attention on a district-level grading and evaluation committee, and the teachers and students within Opportunity Middle School. Descriptive statistics are provided related to the teachers and students that I included in my qualitative analysis. In the end, a picture unfolds in relation to those involved in the day-to-day classroom interactions which then transcends to the analysis of their stories -- stakeholders who are directly impacted by assessment practice rituals and management.

Arguably, the most revealing aspect of assessment practice comes from the descriptions of stakeholders. Teachers, chartered with carrying out the bureaucratic mandates and administrative directives, were a primary focus in terms of interview and observations. They represent the individuals with the greatest power to influence both process (i.e. building assessments) and outcome (i.e. grading student work). Students, on the other hand, are the ones who complete the tasks associated with assessment practice and ultimately are evaluated and graded. Each of these stakeholders has been directly involved and impacted by assessment practice. Their narratives, combined with my classroom observations, offer connections between the bureaucratic mandates, rituals and management and the implementation realities of assessment practice within the classroom

environment. After articulating the teacher and student stakeholder stories I move to a broader view of assessment practice. Using a larger sample of Opportunity student test scores and grades, along with classroom observation data, I build off what I learned from stakeholder stories. More specifically, I explain some of the more nuanced assessment practices that I observed in different classrooms. As uncovered in stakeholder stories, certain rituals and routines explain the ways that teachers deal with issues of time and management. Additionally, I point out several patterns that exist between standardized test scores and grades and the ways in which these patterns impact particular student groups (i.e. gender and ethnicity).

As a final point of analysis, I consider a more recent development in terms of understanding student achievement: a social-behavioral perspective – grit. The concept of grit focuses on the evaluation and understanding of a student's perseverance and passion for long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007, p. 1087). The focus on grit has become a significant point of discussion within the educational paradigm in response to the ongoing lack of progress in terms of the achievement gap. Using grit survey data from a sample of Opportunity students, I explore and describe the ways in which this measure juxtaposes with particular Opportunity student groups, and the potential implications for the use of this measure within schools.

Assessment Practice in Context

In many cases, assessment practices involve specific rules and procedures. Some of these rules are derived from state educational agencies. An example of this would be the requirement to assess any student where English is not their primary language. These assessments are standardized and required as a part of state and many times federal law.

Students are typically given these assessments annually until they reach a level of English proficiency. Failure to comply with specific procedures and rules has strict consequences: state and federal funding and impacts to the school's performance label. These assessments, and the rules and guidelines that accompany them, are monitored by district-level personnel along with school administration. The ability for teachers to influence any outcomes or the process is very limited. However, these types of assessments make up the smallest aspect of the assessment work done between teachers and students. Unfortunately, these standardized tests have drawn the most attention by policy makers and researchers. The vast majority of assessment practice falls into the formal and informal practice within classrooms. It is here that teachers evaluate the work of students and present them with grades.

The term "best practice" is often used within the educational paradigm. In terms of a definition, a best practice involves a set of procedures that when carried out yields a productive or positive result. The term is subjective in nature and can lead to contentious discussion. In terms of assessment, two specific practices are often considered within this definition of best practice and are widely used within Opportunity Middle School. The first, a more recent practice, involves the use of standards and mastery-based grading. The second, a more established practice, is the use of formative assessment as a tool to evaluate individual student progress.

Standards and mastery-based grading is an outgrowth of the curriculum standards movement from the late 1990's, and is a process which involves measuring students' proficiency on well-defined course objectives – or learning goals and scales (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). The outgrowth of this movement has been fueled by concerns

throughout the United States that existing grading methods contribute to ongoing student inequalities. The combination of standards-based and mastery grading processes are intended to enhance traditional letter grading. Student progress is measured against a standard, and no longer are students required to pass an assessment at a particular point in time. Instead, mastery-based grading assumes that students may need more than one opportunity to demonstrate a mastery of the skill. Mastery involves the presentation of work products (i.e. quizzes or written work) that demonstrate complete understanding of a particular standard. In many ways it is a trial-and-error process. Figure 2 illustrates the way in which mastery-based grading is implemented within the classroom.

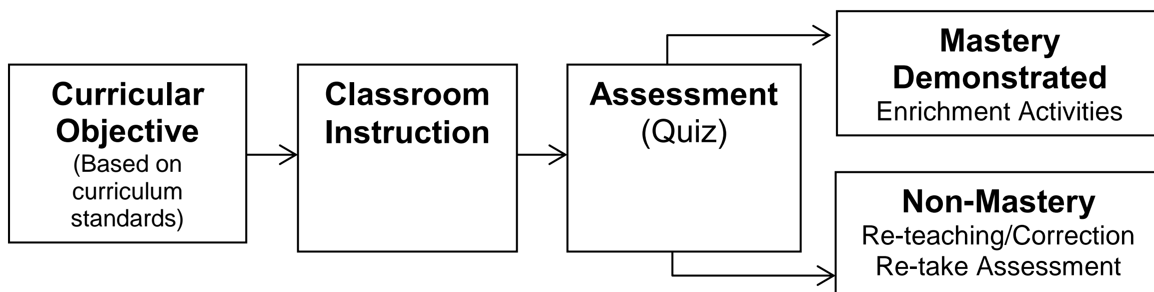

Figure 2. Mastery-based assessment process flowchart.

The goal is to differentiate the learning opportunities to match particular student's learning style. It is assumed that within this differentiation process the student will acquire the basic skills necessary and therefore be able to demonstrate mastery on some formalized assessment process. Standards and mastery-based grading processes represent one aspect of assessment practice. A closely-knit, second process is that of formative assessment.

Over the past decade, the concept of formative assessment has become one of the most widely used classroom practices (Marzano, Pickering, & McTighe, 1993).

Formative assessment is concerned with how a teacher's judgements in terms of the quality of student work can be used to develop and improve student achievement (Sadler, 1989). This practice impacts the development, implementation and evaluation of assessment data and how these data are then used within classrooms and schools. For example, formative assessment is now seen as the required practice to evaluate student progress within a particular unit of instruction. The goal is to evaluate student progress on some aspect of an overall curricular objective. Students who fail to achieve the stated performance standard are expected to receive some form of re-teaching or remediation (Marzano et al., 1993). At Opportunity Middle School, the practice of formative assessment is an expectation by school administration – especially in terms of their school improvement plan.

School improvement planning involves specific tasks that enhance student outcomes and strengthens a schools capacity for management change (Hopkins, Ainscow, & West, 1994). In the case of Opportunity Middle School, the school improvement plan involves each teacher administering a common assessment (by content area) to assess student achievement. The expectation is that teachers within content areas have an agreed upon learning standard and student proficiency scale with which to evaluate results. Figure 3 illustrates a learning goal and student proficiency scale used by one group of the Opportunity teachers.

Learning Goal

Students will be able to cite/provide textual evidence to support the determination of the central/main idea of a text in writing.

Scale

4	In addition to a 3.0, students use reasoning to connect supporting evidence to the central/main idea in an exceptionally sound/well written manner.
3	Students will be able to cite/provide textual evidence to support the determination of the central/main idea of a text in writing. • Student clearly identifies the central/main idea in the topic sentence. Student supports the central/main idea with evidence (reason, details, facts) and explanation to support the evidence. In addition, the student is able to finalize the central/main idea.
2	Student is able to determine the central/main idea and attempts to provide supporting evidence, however evidence is limited and/or may use personal opinions/judgments.
1	Student is able to determine the central/main idea but cannot provide supporting evidence.
0	Student does not show demonstrate the ability to correctly identify the central/main idea.

Figure 3. School improvement learning goal and scale.

As a part of my work with Opportunity administrators, teachers and students I was able to observe the school improvement process in action. The process begins with each grade-level content team defining their learning goal and scale, selecting assessment materials and evaluating student work. Figure 3 (shown above) represents the learning goal and scale selected by one of the content teams. Assessment materials took the form of a short passage (see Appendix D) related to the life of Ernesto Miranda, his Supreme Court case and the 5th and 6th Amendments of the U.S. Constitution. Students were asked to read this passage and then write a short response essay outlining the main idea of the reading passage and supporting evidence. Student work was then used in conjunction with a series of meetings with administrators and teachers in order to evaluate student academic achievement.

These two major assessment practices are part of the shared expectations between Opportunity administrators and teachers, and represent the most significant link to the external policies of the NCLBA: tracking student achievement. However, these two practices are not the sole forms of assessment that take place at Opportunity. There are numerous times during the school day that students are assessed by teachers. Much of this assessment is referred to as “informal” assessment. During my observations of

classrooms I observed and kept track of these practices. This work is included in the stakeholder descriptions that follow later in this chapter. While this work is "informal" it carries with it powerful messages that impact students. It is the work of the classroom – a setting that carries its own power-related struggles.

The Setting - Opportunity Classrooms

Most of my time at Opportunity was spent in a single classroom. The teacher, a female, has taught for over ten years. I shared her classroom with 27 students. The students saw this teacher twice a day for math and science. The classroom itself was laid out with single desks in rows. The data I collected came in the form of short narratives (authored by students), a survey used to triangulate student narratives, and short discussions that I participated in with the class as a whole. It was their input that generated my interest in assessment practices and test scores.

I first visited this group of students as a part of a pilot research effort to understand student perspectives with regards to grouping strategies for instruction. At that time the Opportunity district had begun a focused effort to group students by skill levels in order to offer additional support or an enrichment experience. This was the initial work being done under the auspice of the mastery-based grading initiative. Students were asked to respond to a series of questions related to classroom community and self-concept (see Methodology section for the specifics of these questions). Their narratives were captured, and I was able to talk with them as a whole group to ask follow-up questions. Two years later I returned to Opportunity to revisit this group of students. During this time I observed them in classrooms, talked with their new teachers, and was

able to “sit in” during one of their school improvement assessments. The culmination of these experiences and data resulted in rich stories from each of these stakeholders.

Stakeholder Stories

One of the most striking aspects of my work at Opportunity came after my first classroom meeting. During my initial textual analysis of student narratives I was struck by the level of importance that respondents placed on grades and grading. It dominated their stories about schools and conversations with teachers and parents. 15 of the 27 students (55.5%) discussed conversations with parents about grades or tests. In some cases, parents like Bree’s linked school failure to later life.

> They also said if I get great grades in school I would get a good job and if I fail in grades I wouldnt [*sic*] get a job or a house or nothing. Thats [*sic*] why my parents always say school is very important.

In the case of Nikki’s parents, the focus was on the actual grades: “They will always ask me if I have a B or an A in every subject.” In cases like Crystal the topic of grades became linked to a request to participate in after-school sports.’

> When I talked to my mom about track and field she told me that my grades better stay the same, because I had all A’s.

Each of these cases provides a different context and illustrates the ways in which grades have become an important conversation point between students and parents. It also offers evidence that the topic of grades may well have become part of the *habitus* of students and parents. As such, I became interested in understanding “why” so much conversation surrounded the topic of grading.

Several years later I returned to observe these students and to collect standardized testing data to see progress over the two year period. I had the opportunity to observe these students again within different classrooms. I spent time with their current teachers and was able to evaluate assessment work they submitted. At the same time I participated in a district-level "best practices" in grading committee that focused on the topic of mastery-based grading (a current hot topic within the U.S. education system). The stories from these teachers and students are compelling – providing significant findings in terms of assessment practices. My field notes and observational data provided rich details of classroom life – especially the lives of two key stakeholders: teachers and students.

At Opportunity, the teachers are a mixture of seasoned professionals who have taught for 15 or more years along with new staff members who have taught for less than 5 years. Experience played a significant role in how the Opportunity teachers defined and carried out their work. For example, more experienced teachers at Opportunity spent less time planning their assessment practice. They had "learned the ropes" of assessment and used structured multiple choice tests in many situations. They envisioned the need for a number of grades in the online gradebook – especially to appease parents. This same group of teachers did not hesitate to confront school administrators with concerns about changes to assessment practices or processes. Conversely, the newer teachers sat back and listened as the more experienced teachers raised concerns. As new teachers they were more versed in recent debates and practices within the educational field. In other words, their preservice instruction was embedded within the accountability movement of the NCLBA, and they had been taught various methods to deal with topics such as

differentiated learning and more recent assessment practices. Britzman (1986), and her work with new classroom teachers, relates the development of a new teacher in terms of a state of disequilibrium.

> This is the difficult process of making sense of, and acting within, self-doubt, uncertainty, and the unexpected, while assuming a role which requires confidence, certainty, and stability. It is a painful experience, often carried out in a state of disequilibrium (p. 452).

As with Britzman's work, Opportunity teachers experienced this state of disequilibrium: a collision of teacher values, along with expectations of compliance with bureaucratic mandates, obscured by a messy process of living these expectations (p. 453). In a number of cases, disequilibrium was created by a lack of time to complete tasks. My observations and interviews revealed that time was a constant topic of conversation. Issues of time impacted the work that had to be done, but the unexpected interruptions by administrators and parents. Last minute decisions making appeared to be a necessity among the Opportunity teachers.

My work with Opportunity teachers focused on their stories in terms of carrying out assessment practices that were part of the overall school improvement process. These included their feelings of students and comments they had received from parents. Closely knit to the Opportunity teacher stories were those of the students. Opportunity students were the direct recipients of the credentialing (i.e. grades) associated with the school improvement process.

Opportunity students were a predominant focus and stakeholder in my work. Their voices, in terms of their narratives, are often silence in much of the existing

literature. In terms of understanding student perspectives and relationships to assessment practices, the literature often uses quantitative measures such as test scores and grades as a form of student voice. These findings are important, and have exposed a number of structural relationships that contribute to inequalities within certain student groups. However, school improvement research suggests that involving students in decision making processes improves school outcomes. Conversely, the failure to include students in change processes often increases negative feelings about school and provides barriers to change (Hopkins et al., 1994, p. 126). At Opportunity, school administration sought to be more inclusive of student voice, however, the process was one that was greeted with uncertainty by teachers. These students were also used to share stories from their parents since it was not practical to expand my work outside of teachers and students.

Within the remainder of this chapter I build off the Opportunity teacher and student stories as key stakeholders. I use their words to describe the process and procedures associated with the school improvement assessment practice. Their stories uncover factors that lead to their struggles, along with decision making processes, used to carry out the school improvement assessment practice.

Opportunity teachers. Teachers have tremendous control over the frequency and types of assessments along with accompanying grades. Even in schools where highly scripted curriculum programs are utilized, teachers still have ways of carrying out their desired goals. The era of accountability brought with it more supervision by administrators, but even with new teacher evaluation programs and additional oversight, a teacher is still the sole person with students throughout most of the school day. They

make conscious decisions about the work to be done, and these decisions have specific ramifications for students.

Borrowing from the work of Maynard-Moody & Musheno (2009), the work of the Opportunity teachers can best be described as street-level workers. They join the ranks of policeman and other front-line government workers in the way they approach their work.

> They convey a strong orientation toward faces, or who people are, and toward the workers' own beliefs, their value systems, in explaining their decision making. At the same time, these workers make it clear that policies, rules, and administrative oversight pervade their work and are ever present in their calculations about what to do. Whether on a patrol beat, in the offices of social services, or at the front of public school classrooms, street-level workers' beliefs about people continually rub against policies and rules (p. 4).

The street-level worker framework was similar to the observations and discussions I had with Opportunity teachers. In the case of standards and mastery grading, teachers confronted a variety of challenges. Their stories illustrate the frustrations associated with changes made to a deeply entrenched grading system along with their strategies to overcome or sidetrack issues.

Standards and mastery-based grading practices. Over the past two years, teachers have begun to share support for mastery and standards-based grading practices. It has been a process that has evolved over time. Teachers have slowly adapted to changes in grading. However, their support has differed for some student groups – especially those that require intervention and multiple assessment support. As two

middle school teachers describe it, the process is one of frustration when repeated assessment attempts are necessary.

> The bright students don't need the same practice. Yes, one of my students kept asking me, "Why are you assessing us all the time? I know this."

Similar statements like this were common among the middle school teachers that I observed or talked with. While teachers acknowledged the benefits of a revised assessment practice, they were frustrated when "bright" students challenged them on having to continually participate in assessments. Additionally, the teachers felt new burdens of having to offer multiple instructional paths to students who demonstrate mastery early. Left unsaid was a definition of what was meant by a "bright" student. One possible explanation is that this term has common meaning among teachers.

The frustration associated with student challenges was not the only source of concern related to the movement to mastery-based grading. Teachers were quick to shift the conversation from student concerns to that of parents. Parents play an integral role in many aspects of schooling. In some states they have choices among private, public and charter schools. Choice is often times an amalgam of convenience and reputation. Within this district-level committee, teachers shared different narratives about the ways in which they dealt with parents and student grading. One teacher described how a parent of a special needs student insisted that she give the student a zero on an assignment even though the student had missed school for medical reasons.

> They wanted to send a message to their child. The zero in the gradebook showed an F as the grade and that meant that they could continue to pressure the child to

> perform better. They didn't want the child's medical situation to become a crutch.

Other teachers shared their concern for a new grading practice that did not allow students to receive a zero on any assignment. Teachers refer to this as never getting out of the "hole". If students receive a zero then it becomes difficult for students to achieve even a passing grade since the zero score greatly impacts the overall average. Instead, some middle schools have adopted the practice of giving a 50% score for any missing work. The philosophical thought behind this is to support students in feeling a sense of hope. This is a commonly held sentiment among a variety of educational practitioners – especially those focused on supporting at-risk students. Even with this explanation the teachers shared stories of conversations with confused parents.

> I had a parent ask me how they think I am preparing the student for high school. She [the parent] asked me, "If they don't turn in an assignment then how can they get 50% credit?" I really didn't have an answer for her other than to explain that it was an administrative decision. In the end, she reminded me that they "just don't do this in high school".

Another teacher went on to explain the process that she uses to appease parents and her administrators.

> If the student fails to turn something in then I go in and give a grade of a zero. That way the student and the parents see that it is missing and how it may impact the overall grade. I give the student one week to complete the work and if they don't get it done then I go in and change the grade to 50%.

While other teachers shared their support of this method, district officials sat quietly.

Issues of zero grades were not the only concern shared by teachers. A second concern related to the use of a new grading scale that is a part of standards-based grading. Within this process, students are given a score 0 to 4 in terms of their mastery of a particular learning objective. The use of learning goals and scales was an integral part of the new teacher evaluation program that was implemented within the Opportunity district two years ago. Two concerns were presented by the teachers in terms of using these goals and scales for grading. First, was the difficulty in converting the scores (0 – 4) to letter grades. The second concern revolved around issues of subjectivity in interpreting the scales when assessing student work. Like the issue of zero grades, the teachers concerns involved explanations to parents and students.

Standards and mastery-based practices render the objective, final grade associated with the task of assessing student work. However, it is when this practice is merged with the subjective evaluation of student work that the process becomes more complicated for teachers and students. An example of this can be seen within the school improvement process that I observed at Opportunity.

School improvement assessment practices. As mentioned earlier, school improvement processes are commonly used by districts and school administration. They represent a managerial technique aimed at tracking and reporting overall student academic achievement on some regular schedule (typically quarterly). During this time, teachers are asked to assess students using a common methodology with the goal of tracking academic achievement for the entire student body. As part of my work with Opportunity teachers and students I was able to observe one of these assessment cycle.

Using a combination of Opportunity student writing examples and teacher/student narratives, the issues associated with subjectivity and grading can be analyzed. At Opportunity, the school improvement process begins with the definition of a particular learning goal and scale (i.e. curriculum standard). Figure 3, shown earlier in this chapter, illustrates the learning goal and scale given to students and Appendix D provides a copy of the accompanying reading passage. During a single class session, students were asked to identify the main idea and support their answer with textual evidence from the reading passage within a short response essay. Upon completion, I reviewed the work of the students that were part of my initial research. Table 9 provides a breakdown of the included students (by gender) along with the overall average final writing score assigned by teachers.

Table 9

Student Sample – School Improvement Writing by Gender

Gender	#	Average Teacher Assigned Score
Female	17	2.11
Male	7	1.92

Note. Three students work were not scored by teachers and therefore excluded.

During my follow up discussions with Opportunity teachers, a similar theme of frustration presented itself. However, new details emerged. Frustration within this school improvement process now focused on issues of time and teamwork. In terms of time, Opportunity teachers were frustrated with a process that seemed to lack cohesion with the daily activities of the classroom. For one teacher, the school improvement process involved a rush to find assessment materials. As Pat described more of the situation, he/she told me how certain content-level teams (i.e. science and social studies)

lacked preparedness not for conducting the assessment, but to understand the curricular standard.

> In the future, we could have been better prepared as a group. When we talked with the science and social studies teachers they were assessing main idea. They were confused about what comprised the main idea.

In this case the teachers' frustrations related to the content that they were being asking to teach and assess. The science and social studies teachers did not see themselves as needing to teach writing, and therefore saw the school improvement process as an intrusion into their established curricular territory. As my teacher interviewee put it,

> As a 6th grade getting all teams to agree would be a problem. The problem relates to trust. Some people believe because it is always been done this way, that it is the best way.

The frustrations related to issues of teamwork and time also seeped into the teachers' work with students. In one case, a teacher described how their rush to use an assessment "backfired" in terms of making sense of the assessment data and later explaining the results to students.

> Well, we didn't go over it [the assessment instrument] until afterwards. We really needed a grading rubric to share with students. So they knew how they would be scored. They [the students] told us "What? How did I get a 3?" I explained to them that you got the right answer but you didn't explain it. I copied the 4's for them and shared them. Then they understood.

There are several important points to consider within this teacher's description. First, even though there was an expectation, and agreed upon learning goal and student

proficiency scale, the teacher acknowledges that a lack of planning lead to confusion. The students confronted the teacher asking for an explanation of the score (i.e. a score of a 3 versus a 4). Once confronted, the teacher provides justification to the students by sharing work that met the highest proficiency standard. The issues of teamwork and time are not simply a factor of conscious choice. Opportunity teachers often had intrusions into their school day and schedule.

Parents regularly had complaints about a number of aspects of schooling, and the Opportunity teachers often times described conversations they had with parents about grades. In some cases the teachers framed this as "educating the parents" – requiring them to meet with them, along with the student, with the goal of increasing work completion and productivity of the student. The Opportunity teachers felt a keen sense of responsibility in terms of teaching responsibility along with curriculum content. Additionally, parents would regularly request updates from Opportunity teachers. Interestingly, these updates were most often requested by the parents of students classified as "gifted". The Opportunity teachers were often "put off" by these meetings. However, they understood the influential nature of these parents within the school (i.e. parents involved in the parent-teacher organization, or connected through after-school sports, etc.).

In other cases, frustrations of time and teamwork came from bureaucratic pressures to do more. Even with dedicated planning time, Opportunity teachers often were asked to cover new topics related to district initiatives or curriculum content. Administrators attempted to provide teachers with additional time to support the school improvement process, however, there was still an underlying assumption that teachers

who “find the time” necessary to make everything fit. In another interview with a different teacher, the issue of planning was more thoroughly described.

> We were not sure what was expected prior to the meeting. We were all in different places and we had a difficult time coming up with a common assessment. We just selected one of the quick assessments. In the future, we could have been better prepared as a group.

The frustrations of time, teamwork and preparedness were a common response from the Opportunity teachers. The tasks associated with preparation for the school improvement assessment were not “top” priorities for them, even though they knew their results (i.e. student data) would be shared among other teachers and administrators. As my conversations went deeper, many of the teachers shared with me their true feelings about the school improvement assessment process. They discussed how they went through the school improvement process because they had to comply with district and school administrator requirements. They shared stories with me about how little time they spent evaluating student work and how they knew that their administrators would oversee the process, but really never got into the details of things. As street-level workers, much of the work they did was hidden from direct supervision (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2009, p. 10). This enabled them to give the appearance of being concerned for the progress of their students. However, in the end they placed little value in anything that was not of their own making. What these teachers didn’t realize is that their feelings also seeped into those of their students.

Opportunity students. One point became clear to me as I reviewed and analyzed my field notes: teachers were underestimating the impact they had on students. In one

way, teachers underestimated the impact of their conversations with students in terms of their writing progress. Students countered these critiques of their writing abilities with their own descriptions of the writing process: as a "process to be completed" -- a ritual that was devoid of learning. In terms of the school improvement process, students understood what was being asked of them. However, they simply had little personal connection to the subject they were asked to write about. It illustrated what some would refer to as "rote" learning.

In my discussions with Opportunity students about their writing my first question was, "Why did the teachers give you this assignment?" One of the female students responded very succinctly: "The teachers told us our writing scores were not good." Initially I was surprised by the student's candor; however, it may be a product of the fact that these students have been a part of standardized testing for most of their school lives. As I probed further I began to uncover the true feelings that students had in terms of the task of writing in schools. Male and female students widely agreed on one point.

> It is not interesting or the topic is boring. It requires time and effort.

As I probed even deeper into their thinking, the male respondents typically kept with the issue of writing being "boring". They also consistently described the task as simply "not fun". One of the male respondents shared how teachers typically described his writing.

> It's sloppy. Writing is off topic. Not really organized. It is just wrong. A lot of teachers say they can't read it. I don't take my time.

While keeping with the descriptor of boring, one female student shared her feelings about teachers assigning writing for homework.

It's boring because it is not what I want to be writing about. If they assign writing in school it should stay in school. Otherwise it interferes with your social time outside of school. If you have questions then you really can't ask them [teachers]. You can EMAIL them but you can't really be sure that they will answer EMAIL. You also can get distracted at home [one person mentioned electronic devices such as cellular phones].

Other female students agreed with this respondent about the ways in which the tasks associated with writing intrude upon personal time. These sentiments from students' mirror what some researchers see as the deep structure of school life: classroom experiences, and the meanings derived from these experiences, are closely linked to the normative and communicative structures of industrial life (Apple, 2004b, pp. 54-55). In this light, Opportunity teachers and students envision learning as something that is quick and easy – a job to be done. After concluding the conversations related to the overall process of school improvement writing, I refocused the conversation on the scores that the students received as feedback. When I asked the group about their overall feelings about scores I received no responses. After several minutes of waiting, I rephrased the question to, "Why did the teachers give you this work?" At that point both male and females responds focused on the overall goals of the school improvement process.

To see improvement in our writing.

To see how much we understand the text as a whole.

To determine what we learned.

This feedback affirmed several important points. First, students understood the overall objective of the school improvement writing process. Second, they also knew how

teachers felt in terms of their past performance. What was still unanswered was the extent to which the subjective nature of the school improvement process (i.e. the assessment of student work) merged with the objective realities of student grades.

The Role of Subjectivity in Assessment Practice

The stakeholder stories from the Opportunity teachers and students brought to light some of the frustrations associated with assessment practice. For teachers, aspects of time and process revealed practices that did little to contribute to a better understanding of students and their needs. Student stories uncovered perspectives of the writing process as one where students not only knew what was expected, but had little investment in assessment outcomes. But it was a comment made by one of the Opportunity teachers that forced me to consider the connections between the subjective nature of evaluating student work and the final objective grade given to the student.

When talking about the school improvement process and grading of student work, one of the Opportunity teachers, Chris, described the results of his/her assessment and why the learning goal and scale has little influence on student behavior.

> It would not have made a difference in the ways the students will have scored. Students will use the rubric not necessarily to improve their score – instead they say, "Oh, well I am not going to get the answer, but at least I will get a…"

If this teacher is right then students have a specific disposition towards the way they approach assessments: get the best score with the least amount of effort. For this reason, I chose to review the school improvement writing samples of students along with the final grades that had been assigned by teachers. My hunch was that certain patterns may

be revealed that would add additional context to the Opportunity teacher and student stories.

As part of this analysis I solicited the help of another certified, experienced (over 20 years) teacher who was outside the Opportunity district. Student work was unidentified and therefore confidentiality of the school and all participants was protected. We discussed the learning goal and scale, reading passage and overall objective of the assignment. Each of us read the student written work and kept track of the scores given. After this initial evaluation the school improvement writing scores were compared with standardized testing and reading and math course grades. Five students emerged with some potential anomalies in terms of the subjective analysis of student work and objective grades. The written work of these five Opportunity students is included in Appendix E. [3] Also, Table 10 provides descriptive data of these students along with their overall course grades and standardized testing data.

As Table 10 indicates, no student received a score of a 4. This score would be considered advanced in terms of the learning goal and scale. However, when this same work was reviewed by another non-Opportunity teacher, student 4 was given a much higher score. As I discussed the students work with the non-Opportunity teacher she was confused and could not justify this low of a performance level. This same student received an overall course grade of an A in language arts from her teacher, and was proficient in her reading standardized test scores. This female, Asian student is not only

[3] These five students were selected at random. Attempts were made to balance gender and ethnicity in selecting these students. Additionally, another non-Opportunity teacher was used to evaluate and consult on this selection process.

advanced in terms of standardized math scores, but received an overall reading course grade of an A. The non-Opportunity teacher and I agreed that this type of score anomaly is not uncommon. In some ways it is a reflection of the time constraints that were part of the frustrations shared by the Opportunity teachers.

Two male students were also selected as a part of this analysis. They stood out in terms of the differences between their school improvement scores versus standardized test scores and grades. Student 2, similar to student 4, had lower than expected scores in the school improvement grade versus his course and standardized testing scores. Student 1 has an interesting opposite situation. His overall teacher-assessed writing score was higher that his overall course grade in language arts, however, he scores proficient on standardized tests. These examples point out the complexities that come into play when making sense of different assessment scores. Researchers have brought this point to light especially for male students (Sommers, 2013).

Table 10

Opportunity Student Writing Examples-Demographics

Student	Gender	Ethnicity	Teacher Assigned Writing Score (Non-Opportunity – Teacher reviewer score)	Math Standardized Testing Results	Math Teacher Grade	Reading Standardized Testing Results	Language Arts Teacher Grade
1	Male	White	2.5 (2)	Proficient (426 Scale Score)	D	Proficient (566 Scale Score)	C
2	Male	Non-White – Other	1 (2)	Advanced (478 Scale Score)	A	Proficient (566 Scale Score)	A
3	Female	Hispanic	3 (2)	Advanced (478 Scale Score)	A	Proficient (571 Scale Score)	A
4	Female	Asian	1 (4)	Advanced (460 Scale Score)	B	Proficient (542 Scale Score)	A
5	Female	Non-White – Other	3 (3)	Advanced (464 Scale Score)	A	Proficient (577 Scale Score)	A

The gist of this short analysis points out the problematic nature that exists in the assignment of grades and their use in terms of understanding qualifications or credentials. A point to be considered from the Opportunity teachers is the extent to which frustrations associated with the school improvement process leech over into student grades. Opportunity teachers had to prioritize this assessment task with others – each placing differing priorities on the quality of grading and time spent on the task. The Opportunity teachers had time to meet and discuss the assessment results, but the time allotted was simply not sufficient. The school improvement process assumes that teachers implement a process of validity and reliability as they grade student work. This process takes time and in many cases the Opportunity administration cannot "free up" this time in a regular school schedule.

The lack of time to support a process of validity and reliability may also be noticed by students. Based on the feedback from one Opportunity teacher, students may simply use a form of cost-benefit analysis to determine the grade they expect to receive and then adjust work patterns accordingly. It was at this point that I made the decision to dig deeper and gain a broader perspective of assessment practice. To accomplish this I went back to the larger sample of Opportunity students test scores and course grades, and balanced these data with more recent teacher observations in classrooms.

Broader Perspectives of Assessment Practice

As a part of my work in Opportunity classrooms I made it a point to visit a variety of teachers and classrooms. Many of these classrooms contained students who participated in my earlier research efforts. As a part of these observations I wanted to

uncover other ways in which grading was used in more informal ways. More specifically, I wanted to observe the ways in which these observations connected with the themes of routines, rituals and time that were part of the teacher and student stakeholder stories. Three Opportunity teachers provided nuanced and interesting perspectives that added to the themes of stakeholder stories.

During my first observation with an experienced teacher, Riley, I observed students completing a vocabulary activity. As part of their homework, students had been asked to study 15 vocabulary words and write the word, part of speech, definition and a sentence example on notecards. During class time the teacher spent about 20 minutes grading these cards with students. As the teacher reviewed each card through a document camera and projection screen, students were to review their cards and give themselves points for each correct response. I observed a number of students who simply flipped the cards without even paying attention to details (ritual). They knew there was an upcoming vocabulary test; however, their attention wasn't necessary at this point. Four students who sat together had no vocabulary cards and sat disengaged from the process. Afterwards, I discussed this group of students with the teacher.

> Yeah, they always sit together. They never do their homework and they have the grades to show it.

As our discussion progressed the teacher shared concerns for the academic achievement of these students. However, the teacher never pointed out any specific interventions that had been done to remediate the problem. Instead, he/she discussed with me the overall problem of home lives of students and how there was a systemic problem with some

students. In terms of the students, they were not behavior problems – they knew what had to be done. It could be that they knew that points associated with the class-based activity were not as critical as the upcoming vocabulary test. This experienced teachers comments were similar to the comment from the Opportunity teacher that discussed what she saw as a conscious choice by students in terms of the work they will do and what grade they expect to receive. In this light, grades are not necessarily associated with learning. Instead they act in some form of means-end relationship. Students know what grades are expected of them, most likely from parents, and therefore make choices about where to put their efforts.

While the more experienced teacher used a traditional process to evaluate student work and assign points, newer teachers at Opportunity use point-based systems as a tool for behavior management. In one classroom a newer teacher, having taught less than three years, used points or grading as a classroom behavior management tool. Students were rewarded with "quiet points" as they entered the classroom and started working. As the teacher checked homework, Jesse would point out certain students and say, "Oh, you get a quiet point in addition to your homework points." Some students responded by simply looking up at the teacher. For one male student, the issue of quiet points appeared to be more like a game. At certain intervals during class instruction the student would blurt out an answer rather than raising a hand. The teacher would respectfully remind him that points could not be given for that type of behavior. Within several minutes this same student would respond with the correct behavior and he would be rewarded with points. Near the last five minutes of class, the teacher recapped the overall point totals

for student groups and the two groups with the greatest number of points were able to participate in a dart game competition while other students packed their materials in preparation for the end-of-class bell. These point-based strategies represent another common, best practice within school -- positive behavior support systems. The goal of these systems is to structure dialogue and reward systems aimed at acknowledging those behaviors deemed appropriate by the teacher. In many of these systems, tokens or coupons are given and students are able to exchange these items for prizes or reward parties. It is unclear how well this reward process connects to student learning. Within this classroom it was a ritual used for classroom management, and in many cases the lack of disruption contributed to an effective use of time.

Another of the newer Opportunity teachers, Jamie, used a different time management strategy in terms of assessment practice. This was one of the many occasions where I observed Opportunity teachers conducting informal assessment. Like the experienced teacher, the use of student support for grading work "speeds up" assessment and can provide more immediate feedback. During this class I observed students exchanging papers – a recently completed quiz. The teacher utilized about a fourth of the class time to review and provide correct answers to quiz questions. Students were expected to follow along, grade a colleague's paper, and ask questions if they were confused about how to grade something. Students appeared actively engaged in the grading process and few questions were asked of the teacher. Once completed, students had another opportunity to reflect and ask questions about their grades. Only two students asked clarifying questions of the teacher, and the process resulted in immediate

feedback to students. In terms of time, the teacher was able to fulfill the grading of the quiz using student support which meant less usage of outside time for grading. The theme of time and intrusions upon teacher time was a theme enmeshed within a number of the Opportunity teacher stories. What is less clear is the impact of the process on students who may otherwise chose not to question the authority of the teacher or their colleague's grading. During my time at Opportunity I made a conscious effort to reflect on issues of gender and ethnicity. The literature is replete with examples of inequalities among student populations in terms of gender and ethnicity. For this reason, I wanted to return to the data that I had in terms of standardized test scores and teacher grades one final time.

When looking at a broader sample of Opportunity students, the connection between course grades and standardized test scores revealed some specific patterns. Table 11 breaks down a sample of the student population by gender and ethnicity and proficiency levels on standardized tests. A not proficient level would represent those students who are at-risk in terms of academic achievement within the NCLBA policy guidelines. Since these data are focused on a single middle school, minority classifications were merged to provide greater within-group descriptions.

One of the first patterns that appear exists in terms of gender. For white students the overall difference in math standardized testing scores is minimal (460.8 versus 459.6). However, in terms of teacher-assigned math grades the overall average is 3.32 for females versus 3.06 for males. This finding is similar to those discussed within the NCLBA policy analysis chapter. A rationale for the bias that exists in teacher grading

versus standardized test scores cannot be substantiated. Additionally, they conflict with the results from some studies that have linked lower achievement outcomes between female math teachers and their female students (Beilock, Gunderson, Ramirez, & Levine, 2010).

More striking is the pattern between language arts grades and standardized testing reading grades by gender/ethnicity. White males had higher reading standardized scale scores (560.4) than their female minority counterparts (550.3), yet teacher-grades represented an inverse relationship. Female minority students' grades averaged 3.52 while their white male counterparts averaged 3.14. This pattern has been discussed within the literature (Sommers, 2013); however, researchers have been unable to pinpoint causality. In some cases, schools have opted to implement single gender classrooms as a remediation technique to this problem. Research demonstrates the possibility of gender differences in learning styles between male and female students, and single-gender classrooms offer teachers the opportunity to differentiate instruction within their classrooms (Rex, Chadwell, Sneed, & Hefner, 2009). Still others perceive that gender and ethnic differences can be solved by teaching students to utilize specific strategies of their own to persevere within the classroom. Teaching grit is one example of what some see as an alternative to obsession with measures of intellect.

Table 11

Standardized Testing / Teacher Grades by Gender-Ethnicity (2013)

Gender-Ethnicity	**# of Students**	**%**	**Math Scale Score Average**	**Math Report Card Average**	**Reading Scale Score Average**	**Language Arts Report Card Average**
Male-White	**84**	**34.60%**	**460.8**	**3.06**	**560.4**	**3.14**
Proficient	83	34.20%	461.9	3.07	561.5	3.16
Not Proficient	1	0.40%	366	2	474	2
Male-Minority	**52**	**21.40%**	**453.6**	**3.04**	**547**	**2.94**
Proficient	50	20.60%	457.2	3.1	550.6	2.94
Not Proficient	2	0.80%	364	1.5	457	3
Female-White	**63**	**25.90%**	**459.6**	**3.32**	**568.1**	**3.51**
Proficient	63	25.90%	459.6	3.32	568.1	3.51
Female-Minority	**44**	**18.10%**	**450.1**	**3.23**	**550.3**	**3.52**
Proficient	42	17.30%	452.3	3.26	555	3.57
Not Proficient	2	0.80%	404	2.5	453	2.5
Totals	**243**	**100.00%**	**457**	**3.15**	**557.7**	**3.26**

Notes. Data are represented in averages in order to ensure the confidentiality of school site. Report card averages are based on a GPA scale (4.0=A, 3.0=B, 2.0=C, 1.0=D or F).

The Future? – Grit

Grit, framed as a social-emotional curriculum within schools, has become one of the latest topics within the educational field. The recent popularity of understanding student grit (i.e. perseverance) is an outgrowth of classroom practices aimed at "individualizing" or personalized student instruction. In this context, the competitive nature of classroom instruction is supplanted. The achievement of the individual student is highlighted, and unrelated to the goals of other students (D. W. Johnson, Johnson, & Scott, 1978). In this light, the focus of curriculum delivery and assessment becomes one of providing tools that a student can use to demonstrate achievement in a particular subject. A good example would be the use of instructional games and automation (Gee, 2000). The overall belief in the concept of grit is that those students with more tenacity or perseverance will see improved academic outcomes.

One set of scholars, led by Angela Duckworth (2007), are most associated with the sudden popularity of the grit measure. In terms of schools, the belief behind grit is that it helps understand which students can persevere in relation to long-term goals (Lehrer, 2011). In many ways, the attraction to the concept of grit relates to its predictive utility outside of IQ – a highly criticized topic within the educational field. In validating the grit measure, Duckwork et al. conducted six independent studies within a variety of settings. In terms of K-12 education, they focused on a sample of 175 finalists in the 2005 Scripps National Spelling Bee. Their findings demonstrated an internal reliability coefficient of .80 in relation to the Grit Scale (p. 1096). They discovered that grittier

competitors in the Scripps National Spelling Bee outranked less grittier competitors of the same age, at least in part because of accumulated practice (p. 1098).

In terms of Opportunity Middle School, the principal and I shared an interest in exploring the potential ways in which the Grit Scale related to standardized test scores, teacher grades and student demographics. This principal was greatly concerned with student achievement and sought new ways of thinking about students outside of existing I.Q. measures. Therefore a sample of Opportunity students (*n* = 243) participated in a short Grit Scale survey (8 questions) [4]. Table 12 provides descriptive data regarding the participating students and average grit scores.

Table 12

Grit Score Distribution by Ethnicity/Gender

Ethnicity/Gender	#	%	Average Grit Score
Asian	**34**	**14**	**3.36**
Female	17	50	3.35
Male	17	50	3.38
Hispanic	**35**	**14**	**3.24**
Female	14	40	3.29
Male	21	60	3.20
Non-White Other	**27**	**11**	**3.36**
Female	13	48	3.27
Male	14	52	3.45
White	**147**	**61**	**3.33**
Female	63	43	3.37
Male	84	57	3.30
Grand Total	**243**	**100**	**3.33**

Prior to offering any analysis of these grit data, it is important to acknowledge an important limitation in these data. The overall sample size (n=243) of Opportunity

[4] A copy of the 8 Item Grit Scale is available through Angela Duckworth's website along with publications related to validity and reliability of the instrument. http://psychology.sas.upenn.edu/people/duckwort

students provided a sufficient landscape for analysis. However, once these data were aggregated by various categories (ethnicity, gender and grade classifications) the overall effect size of a particular group became small. For this reason, this analysis is solely descriptive and exploratory in nature – no causal explanations are possible. The overall intent of this analysis is to explore one of the more current topics surrounding students and academic outcomes.

In analyzing these data, a pattern emerged related to the expectation that higher grit scores would be seen within higher grade classifications. One of the significant philosophical explanations associated with grit is its direct relationship with higher levels of academic achievement. In most cases, Opportunity student data matches this explanation. However, when viewed in terms of content (math versus reading) several exceptions were notable. In Table 13, Asian and non-White students with lower grades (C's) in math had higher grit scores than their better performing counterparts. Additionally, minorities had higher average grit scores in math than their white counterparts. The Opportunity teacher force is made up of a majority of White teachers (one or two teachers are Hispanic). One possibility is that minority students may be able to better persevere in situations of teacher-assigned grades than their White counterparts. This finding has direct relationships in terms of multicultural education efforts that seek to advise teachers on using pluralistic approaches in their teaching, a necessity being tolerance toward all racial and ethnic groups (Mitchell & Salsbury, 2002, p. 76).

Table 13

Grit Scores by Subject and Ethnicity-Letter Grade

Math **Ethnicity/Letter Grade**	**#**	**Average Grit Score**	**Reading** **Ethnicity/Letter Grade**	**#**	**Average Grit Score**
Asian	**34**	**3.36**	**Asian**	**34**	**3.36**
A	22	3.41	A	25	3.41
B	10	3.16	B	9	3.24
C	2	3.88	C	0	0
Hispanic	**35**	**3.24**	**Hispanic**	**35**	**3.24**
A	10	3.73	A	8	3.47
B	8	3.31	B	15	3.43
C	11	2.95	C	7	2.95
D	0	0	D	5	2.73
F	6	2.85	F	0	0
Non-White Other	**27**	**3.36**	**Non-White Other**	**27**	**3.36**
A	10	3.5	A	10	3.49
B	12	3.18	B	12	3.41
C	5	3.53	C	4	3.03
D	0	0	D	1	2.88
White	**147**	**3.33**	**White**	**147**	**3.33**
A	65	3.47	A	71	3.52
B	51	3.39	B	52	3.31
C	22	3	C	21	2.9
D	4	2.75	D	2	2.31
F	3	2.58	F	1	2.5
Not Available	2	3.44	Not Available	0	0
Grand Total	**243**	**3.33**	**Grand Total**	**243**	**3.33**

Tables 14 and 15 offer additional description in terms of high and low performers. The purpose of these data are to offer a breakdown of those Opportunity students who received A's in math and reading versus those who received D's or F's. Gender was added as an additional explanatory factor in order to uncover additional patterns. Table 14 shows that Hispanic males demonstrated higher grit scores in both math and reading (3.85 and 3.81) versus their female counterparts (3.60 and 3.13). In math, non-White females have a noteworthy lead in grit scores (3.94) versus males (3.21). Another positive finding shows that White females had higher grit scores (3.56) in math than White males (3.37). These data demonstrate that grit may have the potential of offering explanation in the area of potential gender imbalances. Additionally, grit data may also shed light towards understanding at-risk populations.

Table 15 describes grit data among those students who were given failing grades in math and reading. The small numbers make it difficult to do more than offer "hunches". Overall, average grit scores for at-risk students were notably lower than the high performing students. In reading, females tended to have lower scores than their male counterparts. This may offer some insight into the female-male reading debate. When looking at grit scores it could be that males who are at-risk tend to persevere even in light of failing grades versus their female counterparts. This ability to persevere may be rooted in issues of masculinity and resistance that have become common topics of discussions when looking at male student outcomes (Sommers, 2000).

The Opportunity student grit data are not sufficient to make broad generalizations. However, the potential impact of these data in terms of becoming

another measure that impacts social mobility is real. Researchers have linked teacher practices to class and ethnic advantages and disadvantages (Collins, 1979, p. 3). Bourdieu (1984) recognized the issue of class social mobility in terms of schools and credentials.

> Academic qualifications and the school system which awards them thus become one of the key stakes in an interclass competition which generates a general and continuous growth in the demand for education and an inflation of academic qualifications (p. 133).

In light of the standardized testing and teacher grading data presented throughout this chapter, it is worrisome to think that a grit score may soon follow this same path. More recently, some states have begun to consider tying student grit results to teacher evaluations (American Educational Research Association (AERA), 2015, May 13). Based on the data collected from Opportunity, this could result in another mechanism with which to segregate students – rewarding some and providing another way to punish others.

In some ways, these findings simply add another complicated dimension to the convoluted practices of assessment. Assessing student grit may act as a tool to assist students in understanding their personal learning styles (i.e. strengths and weaknesses). However, these data could also be used as a tool to further segregate certain groups of students. These data offer an initial description in terms of potential patterns that explain both high performing and at-risk students. Arguably, the greatest danger associated with a focus on student grit lies in its impact in terms of social mobility.

Table 14

Grit Scores – High Performers (Grade A) by Ethnicity-Gender

Math			**Reading**		
Ethnicity/Gender	**#**	**Average Grit Score**	**Ethnicity/Gender**	**#**	**Average Grit Score**
Asian	**22**	**3.41**	**Asian**	**25**	**3.41**
Female	11	3.42	Female	17	3.35
Male	11	3.4	Male	8	3.53
Hispanic	**10**	**3.73**	**Hispanic**	**8**	**3.47**
Female	5	3.6	Female	4	3.13
Male	5	3.85	Male	4	3.81
Non-White Other	**10**	**3.5**	**Non-White Other**	**10**	**3.49**
Female	4	3.94	Female	6	3.4
Male	6	3.21	Male	4	3.63
White	**65**	**3.47**	**White**	**71**	**3.52**
Female	33	3.56	Female	39	3.5
Male	32	3.37	Male	32	3.54
Grand Total	**107**	**3.48**	**Grand Total**	**114**	**3.49**

Table 15

Grit Scores – At-Risk Performers (Grades D and F) by Ethnicity-Gender

Math			**Reading**		
Ethnicity/Gender	**#**	**Average Grit Score**	**Ethnicity/Gender**	**#**	**Average Grit Score**
Asian	**0**	**0**	**Asian**	**0**	**0**
Female	0	0	Female	0	0
Male	0	0	Male	0	0
Hispanic	**6**	**2.85**	**Hispanic**	**5**	**2.73**
Female	2	2.94	Female	1	2.38
Male	4	2.81	Male	4	2.81
Non-White Other	**0**	**0**	**Non-White Other**	**1**	**2.88**
Female	0	0	Female	0	0
Male	0	0	Male	1	2.88
White	**7**	**2.68**	**White**	**3**	**2.38**
Female	2	2.5	Female	1	1.88
Male	5	2.75	Male	2	2.63
Grand Total	**13**	**2.76**	**Grand Total**	**9**	**2.63**

Assessment Practice Implications

The combination of stakeholder stories, teacher observations and quantitative data present a quandary in terms of making sense of assessment practices. Themes of ritualism, routines and time presented frustrations for teachers and students. Within these themes, teachers and students enacted strategies that assisted them in accomplishing an objective. In some ways, these strategies resulted in a disjuncture between bureaucratic mandates and administrative directives – bureaucratic slippage (Freudenburg & Gramling, 1994). For example, teachers used assessment in traditional ways, but also implemented practices that rewarded behavior rather than intellect. In some cases, students took advantage of teacher practices deciding when to do some things and not others. Students also played off some teacher strategies giving the appearance of "managing" the teachers. Three potential explanations emerged as a way to summarize the potential implications and impacts associated with the stakeholder stories and quantitative data.

Gaming the system. Stakeholder stories demonstrate the ways in which assessment, as a legitimate practice, can be subverted. For teachers, their use of discretion plays an integral role in determine when and to what extent assessment practice should be implemented. For students, their narratives share stories of the ways in which assessment has become a task of finding the easiest route to a passing grade. In essence both parties "gamed the system". Teachers enacted street-level worker behaviors that searched for quick-solutions to move the process as quickly and effortlessly as possible (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2009, p. 12). Opportunity teachers realized that administrators simply did not have the time to oversee details of the school improvement

process. Administrators were unable to double check the work of teachers. To teachers, this was seen as another bureaucratic mandate that was being carried out with little regard to the end results. In this case, the Opportunity teachers followed clues given by the administrators and gave the process the time they felt it deserved. In some cases, Opportunity teachers were swayed to carry out specific practices based on the feedback of teammates. In teams that were comprised of more vocal, seasoned professionals, newer teachers would follow their lead. In some cases, they wanted to resist, however, they knew that confronting the seasoned professional would result in long conversations that simply took up more time.

For students, their job is simply to complete what is put in front of them. They have little concern or value for the outcome of the process. To them it is just "boring" work that needs to be completed. Researchers such as Paul Willis (1977) discovered similar results in his classroom research. Willis' work with a group of students referred to as the "lad's" revealed that measured intelligence, and exam results in general, are much more likely to be based on the individual's position in the social configuration of knowledge than on innate ability (p. 72). Additionally, this conclusion is supported by the Opportunity standardized test scores that show wide disparity within certain students groups – often linked to specific class structures.

The concept of gaming strategies is quite relevant based on my findings. Administrators, teachers and students all played a role in the "gaming" process. Administrators provided an overall direction for the process, however, they knew that time were not sufficient for teachers to carry out the process in its entirety – rendering a valid and reliable process. Teachers took clues from the administrative staff, offering up

an amount of time that gave the impression of fidelity to the school improvement process. However, they also knew that the results of student work may not be as meaningful as they should be. In some teacher teams, more seasoned professionals drove decision making which influenced others to "follow along". Finally, students participated in a process that was well known, albeit disconnected from what they constructed as meaningful learning. What should have been a process to support at-risk students was in fact a process that gave the illusion of compliance to larger, bureaucratic requirements.

The amount of unproductive time spent working around the school improvement process brings into question the reliability and validity of assessment results. The small sample of student writing samples demonstrated some perplexing grading patterns especially when compared with standardized test scores and teacher content grades. The overall goal of school improvement assessment is to ensure that ALL students are making academic progress. As teachers subverted bureaucratic processes they also put at risk data that is meant to identify and support struggling students. The fact that Opportunity students are quite negative about the writing process is worrisome. This type of attitude may explain other patterns of worsening standardized testing statistics. The potential impact of "gaming" the system in terms of student learning cannot be extrapolated from this study. However, additional research in terms of the impacts of student attitudes and the connection to assessments could offer more insight into needed changes.

Maintaining the myth. In the previous chapter the notion of an ideology of merit was introduced. This ideology is one that advocates rewards be distributed according to individual merit (Young, 1990). In the case of assessment practice, the focus becomes one of credentialing and grading. Grades, and the capacity to get them,

operate as specialized forms of control within schools and classrooms, reflecting a teacher's judgement on student compliance with instruction (Collins, 1979, p. 20-21). It is a system that requires the technical definition of qualifications that embody or include particular values, norms and cultural attributes (Young, 1990, p. 204), and in the case of high-stakes assessments (i.e. standardized testing) asks students to strip away a richness of their knowledge in order to answer discrete test items that have a single correct response (Jones et al., 2003, p. 26).

Educational scholars acknowledge that existing assessment and grading processes have negative unintended consequences, and that it is often times complex to separate the intended from unintended (Jones et al., 2003, p. 3). This is because norms, values and purposes influence decisions about assessment content, format, scoring and grading (Young, 1990, p. 210), therefore making it an important consideration within the ideology of merit. Within Opportunity Middle School, the normative and value dimensions considered by teachers could be thought of as the ongoing maintenance of the ideology of merit. The maintenance involves the ongoing need to maintain a system of objective grading for students and parents, while at the same time dealing with frustrations that come with required, subjective evaluation of student work. These struggles were revealed both at Opportunity and by teachers who are a part of the Opportunity district.

Another possible explanation for the convoluted picture created by assessment practices may lie in the relationship between teacher expectation and student behavior. This relationship has been a topic of conversation ever since *Pygmalion in the Classroom* was published by Rosenthal & Jacobson (1968). The evidence from their study

demonstrated that when "teachers expected that certain children would show greater intellectual development, those children did show greater intellectual development" (p. 20). Opportunity teachers often constructed specific groups of students based on what they perceived as acceptable performance. Many of these definitions surrounded behavioral rather than intellectual aspects. For example, Opportunity teachers would discuss a particular student as a model student in terms of their overall behaviors: they are always the first one to raise their hand, they help other students, and they always do homework. In these cases, merit was awarded to noncognitive processes that met the behavioral standards of that teacher in terms of a "model student". In many cases, these students were pitted against definitions of struggling students in an "Oh, I wish Billy was more like…" This type of description is consistent with other research where educational views are often associated with pragmatic, not over-hopeful, and poorly integrated solidarity with the working class (Willis, 1977, p. 70). More recently, researchers have expanded this view to be more inclusive of system approaches that dovetail with neo-liberal policies embedded within the accountability movement. As such, teachers engage in specific assessment practice that seeks to guarantee certainty or rationalize and make explicit as many aspects of people's activities as possible (Apple, 2004b, p. 102). These objectives surround the overall objective of school improvement; however, at Opportunity gaming strategies subvert this ultimate goal. This may be one possible source of explanation for the differences seen within teacher-assigned writing scores and grades.

In her analysis of teachers and students, Pope (2001) discovered that teachers became "robo-teachers" – struggling to carry out their day-to-day duties. In this case,

teachers cut corners by relying upon standardized tests – trying to get students to pass exams and compensate for overbearing workloads (p. 162). However, one point – resistance -- seemed to encompass both aspects of gaming the system and maintenance of the merit myth.

Resistance. Aspects of resistance could also be seen by teachers and students as they performed the practices of assessment. Regardless of the rationale, this resistance fits into what Bourdieu describes as a “destabilized habitus” (1998a). This destabilization is the result of neo-liberal, economic threats. For teachers, the threat may surround the insecurity in their employment. Teacher evaluation mandates by federal and state officials seek to undermine job security – all part of the overall accountability movement. Assessment practice is at the heart of this matter since student work and outcomes are often a source of justification for failure.

On one hand, teachers and students both demonstrate resistance as they carry out specific assessment practices. For teachers, they resent the surveillance of administrators and the intrusions over what they see as their domain: the classroom and curriculum. For students, at least those deemed more knowledgeable by teachers, the resentment lies in having to complete assessments that may have little meaning or repeated assessments where they have already demonstrated mastery of curriculum content. All of the Opportunity teachers shared frustration in terms of time associated with the task of assessment. While the actual review of student work was time consuming the frustrations went deeper – focusing on the time it took to identify examples of student work that met the criteria associated with the learning goal and scale. Additionally, they resented the

amount of time they had to "give up" from their school day in order to grade these assignments and meet as content-level teams.

The frustration associated with a lack of time and preparedness by Opportunity teachers impacted their ability to carry out the school improvement process as intended. The lack of administrative awareness and focus on this issue may in fact go beyond the school walls – it could be a result of district, state and federal policy makers and unrealistic assessment strategy. Notions of accountability are embedded throughout many schools processes. For Opportunity teachers, it was a source of frustration which in some cases resulted in resistance.

For students, resistance is intertwined within the threat to the ongoing maintenance of their credentials (i.e. grades and test scores). The role of maintaining a perfect GPA or all A's is an ever present conversation between teachers and parents. However, the convoluted nature of teacher graded tests, course grades and standardized tests demonstrates a complexity that exists within this form of culture capital. For students, they must be on constant surveillance of grades and assessment data. One failing assessment, regardless of its purpose, threatens an overall stability in this form of student capital. This could explain why students argue with teachers when assessments are given in areas where they have already mastered material. Assessment data are a form of institutionalized capital and failure means a lack of preparedness for the best colleges and jobs, even though research demonstrates that measured intelligence explains no more than 15-30% of the variance in student grades (DiMaggio, 1982).

As Pope (2001) describes, students fall victim to a "grade trap". A system whereby they have a belief that they need to achieve high grades, test scores and honors

in order to secure future success, however, realizing that they are in many cases manipulated grading systems or "playing the game" (p. 154). This same situation existed among students at Opportunity. Student narratives and stories illustrated the ways in which grades were linked to a certain hope for the future, but at the same time described teacher misconceptions, how boring school was and the worthlessness of some assessment practices. One of the drawbacks from the Opportunity student narratives is a lack of understanding about potential ways to change existing relationships or patterns associated with assessment.

Within the next chapter I conclude my study with a focus on two particular topics: capital and disadvantage. These two topics stand out in the literature and as part of my overall research questions. Finally, I offer a potential future research effort that could increase student "voice" within the school improvement assessment process.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: ASSESSMENT FOR ALL

In his book, *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits and the Art of Battling Giants*, Malcolm Gladwell (2013) offers insight into a concept he refers to as the advantage of disadvantage. He uses an example based on the role that art played in nineteenth century France. At that time, painting was regulated by the government and considered much like a profession. Each year, artists submitted two or three of their finest pieces of work to a jury of experts. Rejected work was mark with a large, red R. In 1868, artists such as Renoir, Bazille and Monet all had works accepted for display in the infamous Palais gallery. However, their work was removed after three weeks and placed in a small, dark room along with other "failures". They later went on to open their own gallery and change the artistic field in significant ways.

This story has analogies to assessment practice in schools. First, it serves as a reminder that judging and credentialing exist in any number of culturally-based activities. The likes of Renoir and Monet lacked the artistic capital at one point to participate within a highly bureaucratized artistic field. Second, it suggests that talent and perseverance play a role in determining outcomes. As Impressionists, Renoir and Monet differed from the artist elite in their ideas of what represented art. They struggled with intense institutional barriers, but went on to establish themselves and a new art form.

At Opportunity, my study data revealed some of the ways in which standardized test scores and teacher grades serve to maintain existing disadvantage among specific student groups. Additionally, assessment practices, like the school improvement process, were part of a bureaucratic mandate within the education field – a practice aimed at

achieving accountability. However, at Opportunity this process was frustrating and demonstrated little in terms of identifying and assisting at-risk students. One of the more recent debates within the educational field is the use of grit to improve student outcomes. However, data from my study related to student grit showed little support for an argument that teaching grit to students will support at-risk students or positively affect credentialing practices. For these reasons, Opportunity represents what many see as the continuation of problems within the educational field. This failure does not diminish the possibility for change or that some students will develop into the next Renior or Monet.

Within this conclusion I attempt to link some of the major topics of the literature, along with the findings from my research at Opportunity, to address three significant topics. First, I address the issue of capital and some ways that it can be conceptualized within this study. The concept itself is widely used within the literature, and has a significant place in Bourdieu's work. However, in terms of the realities of the classroom field, the concept is somewhat murky. In the evaluation of the struggles between Opportunity teachers and students it was not completely clear as to which of the various capitals could or were being used. This interplay may refer to what Bourdieu posited as an instability that can exist in culture capital in situations dominated by suspicion and criticism. Finally, I consider the more recent concept of professional capital in terms of the Opportunity teaching staff. This new capital definition provides more relevant context when considering the actions of Opportunity teachers and the notion of bureaucratic slippage.

The topic of disadvantage is the second topic I consider. Within my literature review I presented a number of concepts and notions related to issues of embedded

disadvantage, along with the mechanisms that are used within schools to structurally maintain this embeddedness. My work at Opportunity provides some evidence of the ways in which credentials have the potential to act as a perverse effect for some student groups. This argument builds off the work of other researchers who connect school policy and process to larger structural problems. Finally, I focus attention on the issue of resistance and social reproduction.

As a final topic within this chapter, I propose a future research effort aimed at bringing student voice into the forefront of assessment practice. While there are a number of changes that could improve Opportunity assessment practices, adding student voice to the process hold tremendous potential for two reasons. First, it will open up a new discourse that could and should be considered in terms of feedback to teachers and administrators. Secondarily, this discourse in many ways supports the frustrations of teachers (i.e. a lack of focus and time related to the process). Including this voice, along with teacher feedback, may provide an impetus for change by the Opportunity district administration. Additionally, my proposals build off existing recommendations from other researchers.

Capital

Bourdieu (1984) recognized the connections between academic capital, the family and schools.

> Academic capital is in fact the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family and cultural transmission by the school (the efficiency of which depends on the amount of cultural capital directly inherited from the family) (p. 23)

Within the Opportunity district, teachers often discussed students in terms of being "bright". There was also a connection between these definitions and the ways that Opportunity teachers dealt with parents and their assessment practices (i.e. grades). For those students who had the necessary cultural capital in terms of their grades or other noncognitive behaviors, they were the ones who could challenge teachers and their grading practices. Conversely, as I heard from one Opportunity teacher, other students approached the task of assessment hoping to gain some minimal level of performance. In these cases, the teacher suspected that students simply looked at the assessment and decided what level of performance they felt they could achieve or wanted to achieve. Student discussions confirmed some aspect of this; however, in their words the task was simply "boring". The difference in explanation between teacher and student *habitus* illustrates one of the complexities in the classroom: perception.

Bourdieu (1994) discovered a similar problem that he discusses in one of his lesser known books, *Academic Discourse: Linguistic Misunderstanding and Professorial Power*. He acknowledges that in the search for causes related to the breakdown in the contemporary teaching relationship, factors such as the "generation gap" or those at a general level are often considered (p. 9). The disconnect between the perceptions of Opportunity teachers and students and Bourdieu's assertion could act as a "nudge" – a reminder to consider issues of class, gender and ethnicity. These factors have direct connection to issues of academic capital. Data from Opportunity show a wide disparity between standardized test scores of White versus minority students. In some cases, the proficiency gap of African American/Native American math scores was negatively impacted by 20% or more from their White counterparts. However, large gaps were not

limited to minority students. Special education student math scores were more than 50% less than their white counterparts. Even among White students, the percentage of growth has been declining over the past six years. This acknowledges Bourdieu's concerns that forms of academic capital and classification tend to reproduce-reinforce inequality (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 25).

The data from my study demonstrated that the scores from the school improvement assessment practice had a real effect on the dialogue between teachers and students. Teachers felt that students made a conscious choice in terms of their academic ability and simply resigned themselves to be a "2" on the established learning goal and scale. Opportunity teachers may not have realized the effect of their words on students. As they discussed student writing scores, students took in the negative feedback and constructed themselves as "bad writers". The scoring mechanism, combined with teacher discourse, impacted the academic capital of some students. This could explain why students discussed the task of writing as "boring".

There were also incidents in the Opportunity assessment process that appeared to create a form of capital instability. Much of the Opportunity school improvement process followed a traditional path. In other words, it matched bureaucratic mandates. However, in the cases where time pressures and frustration were present, bureaucratic slippage created a form of instability. For example, when students confronted teachers about their grading practices, the credential itself was called into question. This situation could be what Bourdieu recognized as potential instabilities in terms of culture capital accumulation. Factors such as criticism and suspicion create instabilities in what is typically recognized as a legitimized assessment practice (Swartz, 1997, p. 80). What is

unknown is the extent to which and how capital accumulation is undermined. How do students perceive the instability? Is it a part of student *habitus* to challenge situations where grades do not match perceived performance levels? What role do levels of culture capital accumulation (i.e. grades and credentials) play in determining whether or not a student would be successful in challenging grading situations? In her work with high school students, Pope (2001) discovered that students had a nuanced understanding of schools, teachers and grading practice – using a variety of strategies to persevere and achieve specific academic goals.

For Opportunity teachers, capital accumulation is best described by using more recent conceptual definitions. Hargreaves & Fullan (2012) have proposed a conceptual definition of professional capital within their work with teachers and schools. Within this framework, professional capital defines the job of teaching as one of hard work: high levels of technical knowledge and education, wise judgement, continuous improvement of practice and collaboration. At Opportunity, professional capital accumulation was evident in a number of different ways. Some Opportunity teachers were able to accumulate professional capital as they resisted some of the mandates by administrators. When faced with time constraints and frustrations, more seasoned Opportunity teachers resisted some of the school improvement processes. A few new teachers simply ignored the comments of the seasoned teacher – following administrative directives. However, a number of new teachers stayed silent – following their more experienced colleague. In this later situation, grading processes were sidelined and in some cases not completed. The seasoned teacher was seen by the newer teachers as a leader thus increasing their

professional capital. This reaction undermined the overall integrity of the school improvement process (i.e. bureaucratic mandate).

The overall purpose of the school improvement process is intended to bring together teachers as a professional learning community to understand the performance of students and react in cases where student achievement is at-risk. Opportunity teachers were supposed to develop and implement specific intervention plans within their classrooms. The data from the school improvement process is supposed to be part of an ongoing discussion related to student achievement. However, I never heard an Opportunity teacher discuss any follow up work done after their one-day planning meeting. One possible explanation for this is that Opportunity administrators and teachers were new to the school improvement process, and therefore less experienced in many of its facets. Aspects of bureaucratic slippage and resistance may in fact be a necessary component towards ongoing development and change.

Since the late 1990's, the educational field has been awash with change. New or revised educational standards represent one source of constant change. For teachers, this change means revisions to teaching methods and new curriculum (i.e. textbooks or instructional materials). Additionally, these revised educational standards translate into new standardized testing changes. Over the past four years, Opportunity has been involved in a significant shift to the new Common Core State Standards. The frustration and time necessary to make shifts in teaching methods or to adapt to curriculum materials is often underestimated and unfunded. In other words, teachers simply find "time" to develop professionally.

This type of reaction and implementation method is similar to the current debate regarding the potential of using grit as a way to increase student achievement. There is a new fad within the educational field: the use of grit to improve student outcomes, and policy makers/school officials are considering the use of a grit measure within teacher evaluation systems (Zakrzewski, 2014). It was this fury that led to the inclusion of a grit survey within this study. In many ways, policy makers and supporters of grit see no problem in using the measure to understand ways to assist students in understanding their abilities to persevere within the existing structural aspects of schools. However, data from Opportunity students suggests that the grit measure may be described best as "old wine in new bottles". Survey data revealed no significant correlations between grit scores and teacher-assigned grades and standardized testing scores. This is not to question the fact that grit has shown to be a significant predictor of academic achievement within a variety of post-secondary and school-related studies. In the case of Opportunity students, it failed to show little power to explain improvement for at-risk populations. At Opportunity, data demonstrated strong grit scores for White students whose academic achievement was not a risk. These same data also showed that one group of minority girls had higher than expected grit scores. However, this finding could simply mean that these students understand the structural realities that face them in schools and make the conscious choice to persevere. In terms of future study, it may be fruitful to understand and conceptualize possible relationships between grit and resistance.

Disadvantage

In the literature review a number of concepts related to disadvantage were discussed. School practices such as tracking/ability grouping are becoming more apparent – given the data that demonstrate a widening achievement gap. Many of the current practices (curriculum and pedagogical) of the U.S. education system play a role in encouraging specific patterns of behavior (Zwiers, 2007). Schools no longer provide an equal education with competition occurring outside of school. Now, an unequal education with competition for social positions takes place in the classroom (J. Spring, 1989, p. 96). At Opportunity, student narratives demonstrated that grades have power and influence classroom and assessment practice.

During my time at Opportunity I saw shades of practice that if maintained would serve to disadvantage students. I was disturbed by the ways in which test scores and grades have negatively impacted student groups over time. Special education students had passing percentages that were 50% less than their White counterparts. In a larger context, Opportunity test scores and grades (credentials) mirror other societal issues such as poverty and can be conceptualized as a perverse effect.

The notion of perverse effects implies that the disagreeable consequences for individuals and some collective (i.e. dropouts) are maintained because of the prohibitive cost for the elimination or neutralization of the phenomena. Perverse effects are commonly seen in social life, and in situations of imbalance and social tension may seem normal (Boudon, 1982). Akin to other large scale social issues such as incarceration or welfare reform, it illuminates the ways in which programs are structured to appear valuable (in order to receive wide public support) but in fact address little in terms of root problems.

A current perverse effect within the educational field is represented by student socio-economic status. Two important points summarize the disadvantages of the poor in terms of education: 1) poor kids who succeed academically are less likely to graduate from college than richer kids who do worse in school, and 2) even if they graduate from college, poor kids are still worse-off than low-achieving children of the rich (Stiglitz, 2012, p. 19). Mirroring Bourdieu's critiques, a concern from my work at Opportunity is that test scores/grades have become a structural tool so valuable that student problems/issues associated with these scores will be ignored.

Some researchers call for a policy of "credential abolitionism" due to the expansion of credentialing and its impact on aspects of social mobility: a four year degree is now needed to obtain a manual labor position (Collins, 1979, p. 197). At Opportunity, the teachers were most concerned with test scores and assessment practice in terms of its impact on classroom time and management. If the conversation focused on student grades, it was typically framed around the issue of student self-discipline (i.e. needing to "work harder"). Absent from my conversations were discussions about the long term impacts of grades and student life. Void from the conversation were the structural implications of a grade within the life of a student.

McLaren & Giroux (1994) point out the importance of a collective vision of a shared political future based on what people do, what they invest in and where they belong:

> If we are to imagine a different, a better, future, we need to consider the different ways people participate in social, cultural, economic, and political life. We need to recognize not only that these are related but that they are themselves the sites of struggle, that it is here, right here, in the practices of educators (in our practices) that,

in part, hegemony is constructed. And it is for this reason that pedagogy must always remain a central and yet modest site of struggle. (p. 20-21)

In the spirit of this collective vision, I offer a potential framework that re-considers assessment practice. Figure 4 illustrates a potential re-structuring of assessment practice within the K-12 environment. It provides change at three levels that are common features in U.S. schools. The overall emphasis of this restructuring is to streamline curriculum focus, put off formalized credential structures until high school, and maintain equitable forms of accountability.

Assessment Restructuring for K-12

School	**Curriculum Focus**	**Assessment**	**Accountability**
Elementary	Foundational skills through science and social studies. (inquiry-based)	No testing – no grading	Accountability by Anecdote
Middle/Junior High School	Collaboration building – topical in nature – continuing focus on science and social studies	Standards-based grading – pass/fail indicators	Accountability by Product
High School	Student-based tracking – single homeroom teacher as facilitator – content is "pushed in" based on the needs of a group of heterogeneous students. Resembles workforce as much as possible – directly addresses goals and issues of social mobility.	Letter grades	Accountability by Outcomes

Figure 4 – Assessment restructuring for K-12.

In terms of curriculum, elementary and middle schools students will have their education focused in science and social studies – shifting the current focus on math and reading. Math and reading processes are integrated into science and social studies topics with the

hopes of lessening rote/discrete, skill-based instruction. Instead, students work on understanding real-life problems and situations which also addresses the concerns of some who see science and social studies curriculum as a key to democratic understanding and active citizenship (Ravitch, 2010). By high school, students would begin the traditional subject-based coursework.

Assessment, grading structures, would also be adjusted to align with student developmental levels. Formalized grading processes would not begin until middle/junior high school using pass/fail indicators. The hope would be that the use of a pass/fail methodology would: 1) limit over-zealous remediation efforts by educators, and 2) begin associating parents with grade processes that would be more focused on work produced rather than obtaining an “A”. Formalized and existing grading processes would begin in high school in order to prepare students for college or career.

While researchers acknowledge their concerns over existing accountability measures (Nichols & Berliner, 2007), policy makers and parents appear to have adapted to these measures over the past decade. Therefore, it seems unreasonable to recommend eliminating accountability measures. Instead, within this proposed assessment restructure, accountability is linked to student development levels. For example, this restructure would allow elementary students a chance to experience an education without worrying about a letter grade. The process would be one that would focus their reflection on work products. For elementary students, accountability is that of anecdote. This would include prescribed parent-teacher conferences and other parent satisfaction measures. Discourse, rather than a single credential, becomes the focal point. By middle/junior high school, accountability takes the form of specific assessment products

(i.e. portfolios) that demonstrate proficiency in areas of science and social studies. Such products would be jointly chosen by teachers/students. School districts could use events such as science fairs and other parent/community events that allow for sufficient evaluation of progress. This portfolio would then be used as a transitional component as the student moves to high school. Finally, high school students would participate in existing standardized testing efforts. At this point, students understand the work to be done and can assimilate testing results and make necessary changes in their chosen course of study. High schools could be evaluated based on college/career participation and outcomes.

Future Research

Scholars see a profound importance to questioning class inequality in education and the transmission of knowledge (Nash, 2004, p. 621). Others see the necessity of this type of research as a way to interrogate "how power works through dominant discourses and social relations, particularly as they affect young people who are marginalized economically, racially, and politically" (Giroux, 2003, p. 14). Research findings would include the reexamination of democracy -- a struggle over values, practices, social relations and subject positions (Giroux, 1997, p. 227), and the analysis of schools through concepts of hegemony, ideology and selective tradition (Apple, 2004b, pp. 5-6). In other words, research results would demonstrate in more concrete terms the real-life implications of school-related actions on the lives of students.

So much of our educational research has sought to explain practices and pedagogy, and this work has value. However, we have abandoned or silenced the person that is most affected by this work: our students. Teachers must be prepared to open their minds to new

research methods and to embrace the concept of reflexivity within their practice. Students must be given the opportunity to reflect on their work and develop the sense of shared accountability and responsibility within the classroom. Only then can the power of data that reflects the true practices of classroom teaching (including that of institutional arrangements) be understood.

Several researchers argue that a critical aspect of assessment practice, especially formative assessment, should involve students (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Falchikov, 2005). At Opportunity, I was not able to observe a teacher who involved students actively in assessment, however, they did exist. As a classroom teacher, I have used student self-assessment processes as part of my assessment practice with mixed results. While completing my National Board certification, I used student self-reflection data to justify my understanding of student achievement within my classroom. This process involved regularly scheduled processes that allowed students to evaluate and reflect on their work. These processes took a significant amount of time and planning, and like Opportunity teachers, I was frustrated at having to balance this with other school-related mandates. However, these frustrations were short-lived based on the positive comments and insights that I received from students and parents. One particular memory I have with this process was during a parent-teacher conference. The parent sat across from me crying, “This is the first time my daughter has come home from school saying that she could do math.” The student knew her strengths and we worked together on areas in need of improvement. However, more research is needed in understanding student self-assessment. For this reason, I outline a specific research project that could be undertaken within any school. This research project could be integrated into any assessment effort – school-wide or within a small group of teachers. The project is structured with a focus on understanding specific groups of students – fitting in line

with recommendations from another researcher (Falchikov, 2005). Based on my classroom experiences and Opportunity research, a group-based assessment approach has the potential to address issues of equity discussed previously.

In the spirit of teacher-led research, this research project uses an action research methodology focused on a particular group of teachers and students. Within a professional learning community, administrators and teachers would work together to focus on a particular assessment and purposeful student groupings. Student groupings could be setup any number of ways: homogeneously or heterogeneously. The important factor is to ensure that small student peer groups have sufficient time and resources to review and comment on assessment results. Additionally, teachers need adequate time to instruct, review and revise processes and data associated with this effort. For this reason, the first step should be the development of a specific protocol that addresses issues of pedagogy and method.

In terms of pedagogy, a specific protocol would be developed that outlines the necessary curriculum to instruct students on the practice of evaluation. The goal would be to limit student bias and establish guidelines for assessing work. A methodology would also be established by the participating teachers to ensure equal participation within classrooms and address issues of data reliability and validity. Additionally, the methodology would address the ways in which group equity was accomplished along with the tools that students will use throughout the process. Once the protocol is finalized, commitments from administrative stakeholders would be solicited to ensure that issues of time and project management are addressed. It is estimated that a research project of this nature could take six months to complete. Results could comprise student work, narratives, and presentations along with teacher feedback.

The results from this research effort may play a small role in the ongoing need to address assessment practices. However, my work at Opportunity illuminated the significant ways in which classroom decisions impacted assessment outcomes. For this reason, I argue that the work that is done in classrooms may be underestimated, and has the potential to contribute to the changing needs of students. As bell hooks (1994) so eloquently put it:

> The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows U.S. to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. (p. 207).

As educators we can envision the possibilities, however, we must begin the difficult task of making them happen. Together, everyone shares a role in helping realize the goal of equality within our educational system and classrooms. The first step may lie in reevaluating and redesigning the assessment practices that are done within classrooms on a daily basis.

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APPENDIX A

ANALYSIS RESULTS - NCLBA LEGISLATIVE BILLS

Bill Date	Bill Reference	Title	Focus
4/1/1998	105 H.R. 3680	To amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to establish a program to help children and youth learn English, and for other purposes.	Immigrant children, English Language Learners
9/18/1998	105 H.R. 3248	To provide dollars to the classroom	Changed targeted programs -- allowing states more flexibility in allocation of funds
2/9/1999	106 H.R. 645	To provide for teacher technology training.	Professional development for teachers
3/24/1999	106 H.R. 1265	To develop a demonstration project through the National Science Foundation to encourage interest in the fields of mathematics, science and information technology	Has GPA and other grade requirements for participation by 12th grade students
6/16/1999	106 S. 1225	To provide for a rural education initiative, and for other purposes.	Adjusting federal redistribution programs to support rural schools
6/22/1999	106 S. 1264	To amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and the National Education Statistics Act of 1994 to ensure that elementary and secondary schools prepare girls to compete in the 21st century, and for other purposes.	Focus on female students and their ability to compete in 21st century programs.
6/29/1999	106 H.R. 2387	To amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to provide grants to local educational agencies to encourage girls to pursue studies and careers in science, mathematics, and technology.	Focus on female students and their participation in STEM programs.
7/22/1999	106 H.R. 1995	To amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to empower teachers, improve student achievement through high-quality professional development for teachers, reauthorize the Reading Excellence Act, and for other purposes.	Teacher quality

Bill Date	Bill Reference	Title	Focus
8/5/1999	106 H.R. 2725	To provide for a rural education initiative, and for other purposes.	Adjusting federal redistribution programs to support rural schools
9/21/1999	106 H.R. 2888	To provide funds to assist homeless children and youth.	Funding support for homeless children and youth
10/21/1999	106 S. 1767	To amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to improve Native Hawaiian education programs, and for other purposes.	Addressing educational achievement gaps associated with Native Hawaiians
10/25/1999	106 H.R. 2	To send more dollars to the classroom and for certain other purposes.	Changing disadvantaged to low-achieving
10/25/1999	106 H.R. 2300	To allow a State to combine certain funds to improve the academic achievement of all its students. The short title of this bill is the Academic Achievement for All Act (Straight A's Act)	Describes the ways in which accountability translates to the use of Title I monies.
4/13/2000	106 H.R. 4272	To amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to establish and expand programs relating to science, mathematics, engineering, and technology education, and for other purposes.	Expanding STEM programs
9/13/2000	106 H.R. 3222	To amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to improve literacy through family literacy projects and to reauthorize the inexpensive book distribution program.	Literacy within disadvantaged families
1/22/2001	107 S. 40	''The Careers to Classrooms Act of 2001''	Alternative certification programs to support new teachers
1/22/2001	107 S. 120	To establish a demonstration project to increase teacher salaries and employee benefits for teachers who enter into contracts with local educational agencies to serve as master teachers.	Supporting a master teacher initiative
1/22/2001	107 S. 123	To amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to extend loan forgiveness for certain loans to Head Start teachers.	Teacher loan forgiveness program

Bill Date	Bill Reference	Title	Focus
1/24/2001	107 S. 167	To allow a State to combine certain funds to improve the academic achievement of all its students.	Providing new guidelines that allow additional flexibility in the ways in which states and school districts use federal funds.
2/13/2001	107 S. 316	To provide for teacher liability protection.	Provide new liability protections for teachers when dealing with classroom behavior situations.
3/20/2001	107 H.R. 1103	To provide safer schools and a better educational environment.	Teacher liability protection reconsidered under "safe schools"

APPENDIX B

NATIONAL NEWS COVERAGE OF NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT

National News Coverage of No Child Left Behind Act (1-1-1999 to 3-1-2002)

Headine or Byline	**Publication Date**
Passage of legislation helps to ensure that no child is left behind Douglas Dispatch (AZ)	05/25/2001
U.S. EDUCATION CHIEF: NO CHILD WILL BE LEFT BEHIND THE ORLANDO SENTINEL	08/24/2001
Hilleary leads on 'No Child Left Behind' bill Herald-News	12/16/2001
Will no child be left behind?	12/17/2001
'No Child Left Behind' - Education Is the Key to Better Life	12/21/2001
State being pressured on teacher credentials - New bill requires full qualification in 4 years	12/25/2001
New options take schools to task 'No child left behind'	12/30/2001
'NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND'? - EDUCATION'S REAL PROBLEM IS 'ELSEWHERE'	01/05/2002
'No child left behind'	01/08/2002
Hope for best in 1,200 pages - Legislation: The new No Child Left Behind Act contains something for everyone -- which may prove to be a bit too much.	01/09/2002
Locals mixed on ed plan President Bush signed the 'No Child Left Behind' Act of 2001	01/10/2002
Bush's school reform plan is full of promise It's titled the "No Child Left Behind Act," House Resolution 1, the top domestic legislative priority of President Bush. The new law, he said, "begins a new and hopeful era for American education."	01/13/2002
'NO CHILD SHOULD BE LEFT BEHIND'	01/23/2002
'No Child Left Behind' law to help Fall River	01/24/2002
Schools across the state will be seeing a boost in their federal school funding in the next school year, including $6.7 million for Franklin County, thanks to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001	01/25/2002
No child left behind?	02/03/2002
Forum to Discuss No Child Left Behind Act	02/26/2002

APPENDIX C

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT – LEGISLATIVE OUTLINE

TITLE I — IMPROVING THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF THE DISADVANTAGED

PART A — Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Education Agencies
PART B — Student Reading Skills Improvement Grants
PART C — Education of Migratory Children
PART D — Prevention and Intervention Programs for Children and Youth Who are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk
PART E — National Assessment of Title I
PART F — Comprehensive School Reform
PART G — Advanced Placement Programs
PART H — School Dropout Prevention

TITLE II — PREPARING, TRAINING, AND RECRUITING HIGH QUALITY TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS

PART A — Teacher and Principal Training and Recruiting Fund
PART B — Mathematics and Science Partnerships
PART C — Innovation for Teacher Quality
PART D — Enhancing Education Through Technology

TITLE III — LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION FOR LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT AND IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

PART A — English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act
PART B — Improving Language Instruction Educational Programs

TITLE IV — 21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS

PART A — Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities
PART B — 21st Century Community Learning Centers
PART C — Environmental Tobacco Smoke

TITLE V — PROMOTING INFORMED PARENTAL CHOICE AND INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS

PART A — Innovative Programs
PART B — Public Charter Schools
PART C — Magnet School Assistance
PART D — Fund for the Improvement of Education

TITLE VI — FLEXIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

PART A — Improving Academic Achievement
PART B — Rural Education Initiative

TITLE VII — INDIAN, NATIVE HAWAIIAN, AND ALASKA NATIVE EDUCATION

PART A — Indian Education
PART B — Native Hawaiian Education
PART C — Alaska Native Education

Notes. General provisions, Titles VIII, X and IX aspects of the legislation are not shown since they are not significant in the analysis of target populations.

APPENDIX D

STUDENT ASSESSMENT – READING PASSAGE

Everyone has heard on television and in the movies, accompanying the slap of handcuffs on a criminal's wrists, the following words: "You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law." These words are known as Miranda rights, and they were not always followed.

Ernesto Miranda, a poor Mexican immigrant living in Phoenix, Ariz., was arrested in 1963 after a crime victim identified him in a police lineup. Miranda was charged with rape and kidnapping, and interrogated for two hours while in police custody. The police officers questioning him did not inform him of his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination, nor of his Sixth Amendment right to the assistance of an attorney. As a result of the interrogation, he confessed in writing to the crimes with which he was charged.

During his trial, the prosecution used his confession to obtain a conviction, and he was sentenced to 20 to 30 years in prison on each count. Miranda's defense attorney appealed to the Arizona Supreme Court. He argued that Miranda's confession should have been excluded from trial because he had not been informed of his rights, and an attorney had not been present during his interrogation. The police officers involved admitted that they had not given Miranda any explanation of his rights. They argued, however, that because Miranda had been convicted of a crime in the past, he must have been aware of his rights. The Arizona Supreme Court denied his appeal and upheld his conviction.

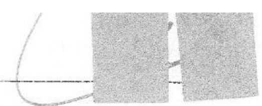
The case came down to the fundamental question: What is the role of the police in protecting the rights of the accused, as guaranteed by the Fifth and Sixth Amendments? The Supreme Court of the United States had made previous attempts to deal with these issues. The court had already ruled that the Fifth Amendment protected individuals from being forced to confess. In 1964, after Miranda's arrest, but before the court heard his case, it ruled that when an accused person is denied the right to consult with an attorney, the Sixth Amendment right to the assistance of a lawyer is violated. But do the police have an obligation to ensure that the accused person is aware of these rights?

In 1965, the Supreme Court of the United States agreed to hear Miranda's case, as well as three other similar ones. The Court combined all the cases into one, which came to be known as Miranda v. Arizona. The decision in the case was handed down in 1966.

APPENDIX E

STUDENT WRITING SAMPLES

Understanding Informational Text



Identify the central/main idea of the text and explain how the author communicates that idea. Give details from the text to support your explanation.

The main idea is that every man should be informed of 5th and 6th Amendmnt rights. Miranda was one of the people who had these rights violated. Miranda was not informed of his rights, and confessed, not knowing that it could be held against him. He also had no attorney, because he did not know that he could have one. In the end, police must inform suspects of their 5th and 6th Amendment rights.

Student 1

Understanding Informational Text

Identify the central/main idea of the text and explain how the author communicates that idea. Give details from the text to support your explanation.

In this passage, the main idea is about the Miranda rights and its origin. One way the author explains this is by telling us that Ernesto Miranda had to do with it. Another thing is that police did not enforce the fifth and Sixth amendment. which stated some factors of the Right. From the story we also know that Miranda explained the right in Miranda v Arizona. Each and everyone of these facts Support the Start of the Miranda rights because they show events and steps until the dicision was handed down.

Student 2

Understanding Informational Text

Identify the central/main idea of the text and explain how the author communicates that idea. Give details from the text to support your explanation.

The main idea in this text is about the words that people say (mostly police I guess) "you have the right to remain Silent. Anything you Say can and will be used against you in a court of law." It sort of explains that these word were known as the Miranda Rights and they were not always followed. The 5th and 6th amendment are amendments they didn't mention Mirandar about and three other cases were what was happening the same. In conclusion the main idea is about these words of the 5th and 6th amendment that reads "You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law".

Student 3

Identify the central/main idea of the text and explain how the author communicates that idea. Give details from the text to support your explanation.

The main idea of this story is that this poor Mexican immigrant named Ernesto Miranda was accused of crime & he didn't know what his rights were. First, to be in a situtation dealing with the court it is very import-ant to know what you're objected to. It was smart for Ernesto to agrue about him not being informed of his rights. secondly, he did admitt to it, but they said It had been a crime in the past, he must have been aware from before. The supreme court denied it & held his conviction still. Thirdly, the case came down to a question that the supreme court had an issue with already. In the end the supreme court agreed to hear Mirandas case. Therefore, if Mirandas attorney hadn't spoken up, there wouldn't be Miranda rights. Everyone should know what was rightfully given to you, it is important to know your rights.

Student 4

Understanding Informational Text

Identify the central/main idea of the text and explain how the author communicates that idea. Give details from the text to support your explanation.

The central main idea of the passage is about the rights of people in trial. In the passage it talks about Ernesto Miranda, a man being charged with rape and kidnapping and his fight with Arizona. Prosecution had used Miranda's confession against him and he was sentenced to jail. Miranda's defense attorney argued with the supreme court saying Miranda's confession should not have been included in his case because he was not aware of his rights. Also, the attorney wasn't there during the interrogation. The police hadn't told Ernesto Miranda of his rights so there for his rights were not present. The whole passage is about Miranda being denied of his rights. The fifth and sixth amendment are there for the rights of the people and to protect them. So, the main idea of the passage is protecting the rights of people.

Student 5