

Perceptions of Teaching in an Environment of Standardized Testing: Voices from the Field

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This article reports research conducted to describe the perceptions of mentor teachers in elementary schools who work with preservice teachers in local school-university partnerships. Teachers shared how their lives in elementary schools/classrooms have changed as a result of new standardized testing requirements. Results focus on how accountability structures influence an increase in stress or pressure on teachers, how standardized testing influences a decrease in job satisfaction for teachers, and how standardized testing influences the narrowing of curriculum and instruction in elementary classrooms. In order to fight against the negative consequences of standardized testing and the implementation of assessment and accountability structures in line with new educational policy, teachers, administrators, and teacher educators must be aware of the perceptual influences at the classroom level.

Keywords: high-stakes testing, mentor teachers, elementary schools



In recent years, much emphasis has been placed on high-stakes testing within the larger context of implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2002). As teacher educators, reflecting upon Zimpher and Howey's (2005) call for "truly systemic P-16 partnerships" (p. 267), we set out to understand the impact that

high-stakes testing may be having in the lives of the mentor teachers who work within our elementary partner schools.

Teacher educators may wish to remain out of, or even above, such environments by continuing to promote progressivism, or what is more commonly now referred to as constructivism (Richardson, 2003). However, turning our backs on the realities of public school classrooms where direct instruction is believed to better prepare students for performance on a standardized test than other modes of instruction does a disservice to the prospective and practicing teachers with whom we work on a daily basis in order to engage in systemic partnership relationships. Furthermore, when we acknowledge teacher socialization as still largely based in functionalism (Zeichner & Gore, 1990) as a means to perpetuate the traditional social institutions of schools, we must also address the fact that public school contexts exert tremendous influence on teacher job satisfaction and motivation. Disregarding high stakes standardized testing and increased accountability in public education does little more than further marginalize teacher education in an area where it should have a larger deliberative

voice. Therefore, we embarked upon a study designed to strengthen our teacher preparation partnerships as well as work with teachers in public schools to ensure the best education for elementary aged students as well as prospective teachers. Embracing the tension of current education contexts and a critical, social reconstructionist reflective tradition for teaching (Zeichner & Liston, 1996) remains a dichotomous yet hopeful place for us in our work in teacher education across the professional life span.

Madaus (1988) claims

The power of tests and examinations to affect individuals, institutions, curriculum, or instruction is a perceptual phenomenon; if students, teachers, or administrators believe that the results of an examination are important it matters very little whether this is really true or false—the effect is produced by what individuals perceive to be the case (p. 35).

In order to gain insight into the experience of elementary school teachers in a local region, the authors (teacher educators) surveyed mentor teachers to gather information as to where to begin in supporting teachers in a high stakes testing environment. Considering the evidence of positive and negative consequences of standardized testing and accountability structures in education, we determined to explore the influences of the initial implementation of NCLB (2002) legislation in local school districts in a Northwestern Rocky Mountain Region. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions of mentor teachers in elementary schools who work with prospective teachers from a local university.

STANDARDIZED TESTING IN EDUCATION

Madaus (1988) warns that testing may become the “end of instruction” rather than a “tool of instruction” when high-stakes tests, which connect teacher performance and student achievement, weigh too heavily into curriculum and pedagogy. Currently, teachers view their professional work environments as changing due to the influences of multiple standardized assessments with varying levels of accountability attached to each (Pedulla, 2003). Scholarly literature contains multiple warnings of the dangers of standardized testing as a means for accountability in education (see Chudowsky & Pelegrino, 2003; Kohn, 1999; Holloway, 2001; Miller, 2001; Yen & Henderson, 2002).

Although a review of literature on standardized testing in K-12 education highlights both positive and negative aspects of this framework for an accountability system in education, a majority of studies highlight "the single greatest criticism of high-stakes tests is that they inevitably lead to teaching to the test" (Gordon & Reese, 1997, p. 346). Likewise, this trend toward "teaching to the test" emphasizes the need to focus only on content that is tested. Hence, curriculum becomes increasingly narrowed in classrooms, including that which emphasizes higher-order thinking skills (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Birkmire, 1993; Darling-Hammond, 1991; Madaus, 1988; Pedulla, 2003). Gilman and Reynolds (1991) report side effects of standardized testing included indirect control of local curriculum, a lowering of faculty morale, an increase in instances of cheating, and negative psychological and physical effects on teachers and students.



On the other hand, proponents of testing stress the importance of an accountability system in education. Cizek (2001) highlights positive consequences of high stakes testing, including improvement upon the quality and focus of professional development for educators; an awareness of the needs of *all* students; an increase in the numbers of assessment literate teachers; an increase in data-driven decision-making; and an increase in the quality of tests. Each of these positive consequences, according to Cizek (2001), should ultimately benefit student learning, or at the very least, student achievement.

METHODS

The resulting research questions guiding this study include:

1. How do new accountability structures influence the stress and/or pressure on teachers in elementary classrooms?
2. How does standardized testing affect the job satisfaction of elementary mentor teachers who serve as field placement mentors for preservice elementary teachers?
3. How does standardized testing affect curriculum and instruction in elementary classrooms?

As a quantitative study, the research reported here embodies both quantitative and qualitative perspectives due to the inclusion of narrative comments by respondents and focus group interviews. Survey methodology was used (Dillman, 2000). The survey instrument response rate was 90%.

PARTICIPANTS

The sample population consisted of the 106 mentor teachers who work with elementary preservice teachers in school-university

partnerships in the Northern Rocky Mountain Region. All of the respondents work in partnership schools, so named by university and school partners during an effort to increase participation in initial teacher preparation and teacher development across institutional boundaries (Teitel, 2003). With an interest in the Professional Development School movement (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Holmes Group, 1990), this university began partnering more strongly with public schools interested in initial teacher preparation. Each of the mentor teachers in this study work within one of these partnership schools at varying levels of mentorship. Preservice teachers spend three years in partner schools beginning with tutoring and one-on-one participation with students and moving toward small group and whole class instruction during a final internship year. Mentor teachers who responded to the survey instrument have an average of 19 years teaching experience and have served as mentor teachers for an average of six years. The majority of teachers work in first through fifth grades with a few kindergarten and sixth grade teachers as well as some specialists - for example, reading teachers. Nearly 30% of the mentor teachers teach in Chapter 1 schools, with 13% teaching English Language Learners (ELL) and children with identified special needs. This percentage of Chapter 1 and ELL students exceeds the state average.

Over the past three years, elementary teachers in the state have been required to administer, on average, seven different local, state and national standardized tests per academic year. Each school in this sample, at the very least, administered the following standardized tests: Students are assessed on a state Reading Indicator test, kindergarten



through 3rd grades, three times a year and rated on "reading fluency." The state standardized achievement test is taken in every grade 1st - 6th twice yearly with a mandatory "passing" regulation in 10th grade in order to complete high school graduation requirements. This state also has requirements for the regular administration of a standardized Direct Writing Assessment in 5th, 7th, and 9th grades and a Direct Math Assessment in 4th, 6th, and 8th grades. In the elementary grades, a sampling of students in grades 4th - 8th also take the standardized National Assessment of Educational Progress exams in math, reading and science. Additionally, local districts require standardized benchmark tests.

Given the fact that the mentor teachers are instrumental in preparing future teachers, we were interested to learn what, if any, impact the emphasis on testing has had on the work lives of elementary school mentor teachers. Changes in the school lives of elementary mentor teachers and their students affect preservice teachers. As the teacher preparation program at this university is working to redesign components of its elementary education program, we believe it is necessary to learn about the influences of testing on not only the mentor teachers but on curriculum and instruction as well. This data informs teacher education faculty in program and course content redesign.

INSTRUMENTATION

A survey was constructed after review of the research literature on high stakes testing, standardized testing, and teacher job satisfaction. A tested instrument, the Effects on Testing Study (Herman & Golan, 1990) was used to develop the survey for this study. This instrument has been used in large, wide-scale surveys of K-12 teacher perceptions. Dillman's

(2000) Tailored Design Method (TDM) was used in the instrument design. TDM is a protocol for implementing effective Internet and mail survey research. This protocol included criteria for question development and ordering as well as graphic design of the instrument.

The instrument addressed factors that support teacher job satisfaction, pressure, and curriculum and instruction issues. Respondents were asked to rate the pressure they felt to improve students' standardized test scores, how often they attended to testing issues in curriculum and instruction, how professional development at their school had changed, and how their job climate characteristics had changed over the last three years (see Appendix A).

DATA COLLECTION

Implementation procedures suggested in the TDM (Dillman, 2000) were followed to influence response rate positively. Four elements suggested in TDM that have been shown to improve response rate to mail surveys were followed:

1. A respondent friendly questionnaire
2. Up to five contacts with the questionnaire recipient
3. Inclusion of stamped return envelopes
4. Personalized correspondence

As suggested in element two, multiple contacts consisted of four contacts by first class mail. The contacts were a brief prenotice letter, a questionnaire mailing, a thank you postcard, and a replacement questionnaire. Data were entered into a statistical analysis software program as the survey instruments were returned. Narrative comments were also invited throughout the survey instrument. Nearly all respondents



included narrative comments in some form or another. Narrative comments of more than one or two sentences in response to the invitation to include “additional thoughts about how testing is affecting your life as an educator” were provided by 54 of the 91 respondents. These narrative comments were entered into a Word document for analysis and triangulation of the quantitative data.

Additionally, although all survey respondents were invited to participate in focus group interviews, only 30 % of the population participated in the focus groups. The focus group questions and goals were grounded in the themes that emerged in the analysis of the survey results. The goals of the interviews were to further understand how teaching changed for the participants, what specific emphasis was placed on various standardized tests, how teachers were able to differentiate instruction, if at all, and what school-university partners can do to better support preservice and practicing teachers.

RESULTS

Inferential and descriptive statistics were employed in the analysis of data for this study. Frequencies and percentages, means and standard deviations for each survey question were computed, and the data were reported in tables. The criterion variables for this study were job satisfaction and degrees of pressure felt by mentor teachers. The predictor variables were the measures of curricular and instructional changes and implementation of curriculum. Multiple regression analysis was used to test for relationships stated in the null hypotheses. Multiple correlations were computed and tested for significance. Additionally, narrative comments were coded and analyzed for themes by multiple readings

and memoing the data (Patton, 2004), and the two researchers held data analysis meetings to discuss findings and triangulate themes.

LIMITATIONS

The instrument used in this study was a survey instrument that relied on self-reporting from the participants. The design of the survey and the protocol followed for mailings and contacts helped reduce this limitation (Dillman, 2000).

ANALYSES

Three of the respondents were not currently classroom teachers and work in other capacities at school sites. All of the teacher respondents indicate that at least three district or state mandated tests are administered to their students each academic year with the average being seven different tests per year. Approximately 60% of the teachers are responsible for test administration, and, for the remaining 40%, the classroom teachers and a test proctor hired by the district are responsible for test administration.

HOW DO NEW ACCOUNTABILITY STRUCTURES INFLUENCE THE STRESS AND/OR PRESSURE ON TEACHERS IN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS? All of the teachers indicate that they feel increased pressure to improve their students’ standardized test scores with the greatest pressures being felt from the media, school boards, and their principals (see Table 1). Specific instrument questions can be located in the section of the instrument, “Teachers.” Approximately 95% of the teachers indicate “testing creates a lot of tension for teachers and/or students.” A factor analysis of pressure variables indicates that three major types of



pressures exist for these teachers: administrative pressure, media pressure, and pressure from other involved parties (see Table 2). Administrative pressure is evaluative pressure as the personnel involved have an actual or perceived role of evaluation and includes the principal, school board and "other," which is comprised of school superintendents and district office personnel. In essence, these people are the teachers'

"bosses." The factor of pressure from other interested parties constituent is a non-evaluative role but comprises people who have a vested interest in the school. This factor includes other teachers, parents, and community members. The media pressure factor stands alone. It is worth noting that the respondents perceive media pressure to be the greatest pressure.

Table 1. Percent Scores for Pressure to Improve Students' Standardized Test Scores

	Principal Pressure	Other Administrator Pressure	Other Teachers	School Board Pressure	Parental Pressure	Community Pressure	Media Pressure
Almost no pressure	0.0	5.3	12.8	0.0	15.4	5.1	1.3
Little	5.1	10.5	21.8	6.4	24.4	12.8	2.5
Moderate	32.1	27.6	34.6	25.6	32.1	34.6	11.4
Some	33.3	25.0	21.8	26.9	20.5	26.9	25.3
Great	29.5	31.6	9.0	41.0	7.7	20.5	59.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note. (N=78)

Table 2. Factor Analysis of Pressure Sources for Teachers

	Factor 1 Administrative	Factor 2 Other Interested Parties	Factor 3 Media
Principal pressure	.834		
Other pressure	.796		
Board pressure	.723		
Teacher pressure		.714	
Parental pressure		.842	
Community pressure		.690	
Media pressure			.896

Note. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 6 iterations. Absolute values <0.4 suppressed. Percent of variance explained in Factor 1: 30%, Factor 2:25%, Factor 3: 20%.

A majority of respondents' narrative comments mention feeling an increase in stress or pressure connected to their jobs due to increased testing and accountability. Most

of the comments focus on the increased stress or pressure teachers feel in their work lives. An important, and often-mentioned, aspect of teachers' work lives includes their



students. Hence, several of the comments include mention of the increased stress on students. Although some respondents indicate noticing an increase in standardized test scores, they struggle with the feeling that "the 'top-down' situation ultimately has put too much pressure on students and teachers" (Survey respondent 001). One respondent describes an opinion on the increased pressure:

Principals and teachers are threatened that they may lose their jobs and/or school if test scores are not raised. Although I have seen improved test scores through a strong effort of the principal... I don't believe that threats and pressure are the best ways to achieve this (Survey Respondent 001).

Another respondent indicates that the pressure to increase test scores has the undesired side effect of taking away from the love for the experience of learning she hopes to cultivate with her elementary aged students.

Standardized testing is adding tremendous amounts of stress to the school environment both for teachers and students. Accountability based on test scores is turning classrooms into environments where skills and memorization are receiving more attention than student discovery and developing a love of learning (Survey respondent 010).

The indication of stress influencing students is also included in the following teacher's comment. In particular, this teacher is concerned about students who are ELL.

My students are pretty well stressed about the tests. Some of them are not literate in their first language much less English so they just 'click away'

on the [state standardized test] (Survey respondent 028).

Another teacher speaks specifically to this state's perception of education in connection to increased pressure in the work environment:

There is a lot of pressure. It doesn't help that our legislature and [Governor] are so anti public education... As a parent I know my son has real anxiety about test taking...When I started teaching I had the same number of students at grade level at year's end as now. Many educators are very frustrated (Survey respondent 033).

Additionally, some teachers indicated they are questioning how much longer they can stay involved in the field of public education.

[State standardized] testing has added a major stress on all teachers. They are looked at by administrators, and we feel judged by our students' scores. Times of doing fun things are gone, no time. I feel we push children way too hard now and expect so much. I have students who feel stressed out from testing. It is a heavy pressure on them... I'm not sure how much harder I can be pushed as a teacher. Most of the time I feel I am close to breaking point. Too much pressure! (Survey respondent 037).

Hargrove, Walker, Huber, Corrigan, and Moore (2004) note that there is an increased level of frustration in teachers' lives due to testing, in particular when standardized tests do not appear to be in line with the state standards teachers are also mandated to meet with their curriculum and instruction. Some of the respondents in this survey mention their increased stress and



frustration in trying to meet standards and prepare students to achieve high scores on standardized tests at the same time. For example,

My co-workers (grade level) stress out to the point I can't work with them. I think we need more direction with the continuum from [regional education association] and our standards. Are we following our curriculum or the [state standardized test] continuum... there is a difference! (Survey respondent 056).

At the same time, another elementary teacher shares,

Expectations are made very clear from the top administrators to building level administration. 'Accountability' feels like a threatening word. I would say that the expectations and perceptions of the general public are a concern as well. Our curriculum continues to change as the 'powers that be' try to get it aligned and what our standards tell us to teach do not match. We feel pressured to scramble to teach 'extra' material which we must come up with. It is frustrating and inappropriate for the students in our grade level. The level of anxiety and stress is higher than I've ever seen it (Survey respondent 062).

With the increased pressure and accountability on teachers and students, educators and policy makers need to consider the long-term effects of increased testing and potentially inappropriate accountability structures in education.

HOW DOES STANDARDIZED TESTING AFFECT THE JOB SATISFACTION OF ELEMENTARY MENTOR TEACHERS WHO SERVE AS FIELD PLACEMENT MENTORS FOR PRESERVICE ELEMENTARY TEACHERS?

Overall, as pressure to improve students' standardized test scores has increased, teacher job satisfaction has decreased. The identified pressure factors have varying degrees of significance as independent (predictor) factors for teacher job satisfaction (see Table 3). The 'School' section of the instrument provided the variables for this analysis.

Additional variables that were considered for mentor teacher job satisfaction were changes in job climate characteristics. Statistically significant relationships exist between job satisfaction and changes in teachers' control over classroom curriculum, changes in teachers' perceived ability to meet individual student needs, changes in the image of the teacher as an effective educator, and changes in teacher control over the daily schedule (see Table 4).

Table 3. Summary of Regression Analysis for Pressure Factors Predicting Changes in Mentor Teacher Job Satisfaction

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Administrative factor	-.339	.082	-.412	-4.138	<.001
Other interested parties factor	.145	.081	.178	1.787	.078
Media factor	-.276	.081	-.340	-3.411	.001

Note: $R^2=.32$, ($p<.001$); Probability of F (entry=.05, removal=.10); (N=73)



Table 4. Summary of Regression Analysis for Changes in Job Climate Characteristics as a Predictor of Mentor Teachers' Job Satisfaction

	B	SE	β	t	Sig.
Control I have over classroom curriculum	.436	.134	.354	3.263	.002
Emphasis on using classroom teachers' professional judgment in instructional matters	<.0001	.124	.004	.041	.968
My ability to meet individual student needs	.206	.090	.199	2.283	.026
Teachers' influence on school decision making	.116	.091	.106	1.275	.207
Pressure to cover all the required curriculum	-.163	.100	-.120	-1.621	.110
My ability to cover any one subject thoroughly	<.0001	.087	-.023	-.278	.782
The image of the teacher as an effective educator	.195	.086	.198	2.281	.026
Control I have over my daily schedule	.282	.115	.221	2.450	.017

Note: $R^2=.66$ ($p<.001$). Probability of F (entry=.05, removal=.10); (N=77)

Additionally, the second most common theme in respondents' narrative comments focuses on an overall dissatisfaction with new tests and testing requirements in the targeted elementary schools. Although 25 of the 54 respondents expressed this dissatisfaction, there were also three respondents expressing pleasure with the new tests and testing requirements. Dissatisfaction is connected to the way new testing requirements are being implemented in their buildings and districts. The comments seem to indicate a sense of dissatisfaction due to a lack of balance in the school curriculum with new testing requirements. This thread demonstrates what Madaus (1988) warned: testing may become the "end of instruction" rather than a "tool of instruction" when high stakes are attached. Most of the teachers' dissatisfaction comments allude to not an innate dislike or distrust of tests so much as a dislike of the intense focus on "all things tested." For example, a teacher shares:

Testing and data are very important parts of learning and teaching; however we work with real little human beings and not tally marks on

a piece of paper. We have to get through the affective filter before a great deal of quality learning can take place. We need a lot more balance in education - life is not just a test score. We spend too much time on testing and paperwork - vs. kid-time and encouraging the love of life-long learning (Survey respondent 006).

Yet, more teachers allude to their worries concerning professional longevity in a job that includes so much pressure.

After 13 years, I still love my job. I still believe it's an important one and that I make a difference. But, in the last few years, it doesn't seem as enjoyable ... I have a growing concern about the long-term effects of all this standardized testing. I am afraid we are taking the joy and wonder out of education. I feel we are so concerned about raising scores that we focus more on rote memorization and test strategies than hands-on learning. I also think that the [State Reading Indicator] will produce a generation of readers who can read quickly, fluently, and excellently but hate to



do it because they weren't taught to love books. They were taught to read as quickly as they could (Survey respondent 030).

Another teacher shares this concern:

I think it ridiculous how often and how much we test our students in this day and age. This NCLB Act has caused both teachers and children to have test anxiety. Children are also in many cases only looked at for a single shot test score rather than overall school performance. In some cases teachers have even stopped sharing materials for fear another teacher's test scores will outperform theirs and receive extra bonus pay. (If this is the direction we are headed.) I know we need to make changes in the way we educate our children today, but is this much standardized testing the answer? (Survey respondent 045).

As can be noted in the respondents' comments, several teachers question the connection between standardized achievement test scores and student "learning." One teacher describes this tension in the following way:

Testing is turning educators to play the 'numbers' game. We must raise those scores even when it does not raise the students' learning. Testing has shifted a school's emphasis from individual learning to making the AYP [Adequate Yearly Progress]. As a teacher, I am faced with abandoning what I know is good for learning or leaving the profession I enjoy. It is not a great position to be in (Survey respondent 045).

The following comment indicates the presence in some of the teachers'

responses calling for more of a balance in education.

Assessments and standardized testing has a definite role and is a tool for teachers to evaluate student learning. However, the total emphasis on test results has a negative effect on students and teachers. The test is only one snapshot of the student's performance. We need to continue to focus on the total child and the growth that child has made - not just one test score. Teachers will continue to leave the profession if the current conditions and unrealistic expectations remain. NCLB is not new to any teacher. Equating a student's value to one test score is not what is best for any student (Survey respondent 063).

These teachers are not "anti-testing" or "anti-assessment." There was only one narrative comment that mentioned only positive aspects of new tests and testing requirements. Respondent 082 states, "Testing helps to keep teachers accountable as well as students. I like [new state standardized test] much more than traditional standardized testing." However, a major concern for the majority of survey respondents includes the all-out emphasis on standardized testing and its impact on their work environments and their students' overall learning opportunities. These teachers appear to be interested in "data-driven decision-making" in the sense they appreciate the information that assessments will provide. However, they remain dissatisfied with a total emphasis on standardized test results and their job security being connected to standardized assessments that do not take into



consideration all of the diverse learners with whom they work on a daily basis.

HOW DOES STANDARDIZED TESTING AFFECT CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION IN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS? Curricular and instructional changes have also occurred as a result of high stakes testing. More than 82% of the mentor teachers “to a thorough extent” make sure that test objectives are covered in their instruction as well as adjusting instructional plans based on students’ most recent test scores. Significant instructional time is spent regularly throughout the year on test preparation activities in 68% of the classrooms. In more than 60% of the classrooms, students are given worksheets that review expected test content, and students are given practice in the kinds of item formats that are on the test. 78% of the teachers indicate that test preparation activities have increased over the past three years while remaining the same in 22% of the classrooms. No teacher indicates that test preparation has decreased or indicates “don’t know.” Curriculum changes to improve student test scores has increased/occurred in 89% of the classrooms and remains the same in 10%. In contrast are the significant decreases in the attention given to social studies and science? More than 66% of the teachers indicate that attention to science has decreased and 60% indicate that social studies instruction has decreased.

Increased emphasis on preparing students to test well has occurred in 93% of the classrooms while lack of student choice in terms of curricular decisions has decreased in more than 50% of the classrooms. Student interest in learning has decreased in 14% of

the classrooms, remains the same in 53%, and has increased in 33%.

The pressure factors identified in Table 2 have also influenced curriculum and instruction issues. The factor of media pressure was the significant predictor in “control I have over classroom curriculum” and “my ability to meet individual student needs” (see Table 5 and Table 6). However, the significant pressure factor for predicting “control over daily schedule” was the administrative pressure factor (see Table 7).

The third and final theme culled from the narrative comments includes remarks about the changes in curriculum due to new testing requirements. The majority of these comments mention the reality of “teaching to the test” in teachers’ lives, and several other comments in this theme speak specifically to the narrowing of curriculum in schools/classrooms. The mentor teachers who responded to this survey indicate that there was an increase in drilling students and preparing them with “test-taking skills” as well as teaching only content that they know will be covered on the test. One teacher shares this feeling by writing, I am saddened at how ‘driving hard’ for test results has caused other activities such as art to virtually disappear. I rarely have time to discuss the Weekly Reader or current events. I have cut way back on reading aloud to my class. Social Studies and Science have been lowered in priority (Survey respondent 002). Another teacher comments on the narrowing of curriculum:

We feel so much pressure that we spend most of the day teaching reading and math. Standardized testing is taking the fun out of teaching and learning. We drill and drill...I don't teach science or social



studies in a hands-on way. We learn science and social studies through our reading... I use vocabulary with children that they need for directions

and questions on the test that is not age appropriate (Survey respondent 013).

Table 5. Summary of Regression Analysis for Pressure Factors Predicting Changes in Mentor Teachers' Control Over Classroom Curriculum

	B	SE	β	t	Sig.
Administrative factor	-.102	.072	-.158	-1.415	.162
Other interested parties factor	-.026	.071	-.040	-.363	.718
Media factor	-.206	.071	-.325	-2.915	.005

Note: $R^2=.13$, ($p<.02$); Probability of F (entry=.05, removal=.10); (N=74)

Table 6. Summary of Regression Analysis for Pressure Factors Predicting Changes in Mentor Teachers' Ability to Meet Individual Student Needs

	B	SE	B	t	Sig.
Administrative factor	-.138	.089	-.171	-1.554	.125
Other interested parties factor	.047	.088	.059	.538	.592
Media factor	-.295	.088	-.369	-3.363	.001

Note: $R^2=.17$, ($p<.001$); Probability of F (entry=.05, removal=.10); (N=73)

Table 7. Summary of Regression Analysis of Pressure Factors Predicting Changes in Mentor Teachers' Control Over Daily Class Schedule

	B	SE	β	t	Sig.
Administrative pressure factor	-.243	.066	-.392	-3.682	<.001
Other interested parties pressure factor	.040	.065	.065	.609	.544
Media pressure factor	-.134	.065	-.221	-2.070	.042

Note: $R^2=.21$ ($p=.001$); Probability of F (entry=.05, removal=.10); (N=74)

Certainly, a concern with this narrowed curriculum and instruction leads to wondering about long-term effects on students.

I am afraid that children will only know things that are being tested and totally be ignorant in other areas. We have cut back on science, health,

social studies, art etc. to prepare for testing (Survey respondent 035).

Another teacher uses an efficiency metaphor to describe how classrooms may be changing due to new testing requirements in elementary schools:

I feel the 'real fun' of learning and exploring life has come to an end from the moment a child steps into a



Kindergarten classroom. We are forced to train these little bodies into a line of 'factory workers' where they must learn to be drilled and skilled. Unfortunately, we [teachers] are also in this line of 'factory workers' (Survey respondent 074).

As can be noted through all of the representative comments, there is a carry-over of the themes identified in the analysis of narrative comments. The narrowing of curriculum and emphasis on test content and skills is influencing the overall dissatisfaction that teachers describe. Likewise, teachers overall dissatisfaction and the increased stress and pressure they feel play into each other for a dynamic relationship that does not create environments most conducive to teaching and learning, in the opinions of these teachers.

Although teachers who participated in this study allow for the benefits of standardized testing and the importance of accountability in teaching and learning, they are hesitant to embrace the high-stress environment that emphasizes a narrowed curriculum and skill-based attitudes for their teaching and learning. Perhaps one teacher best sums up the skepticism many teachers may be feeling across the country:

It is difficult to express your ideas, thoughts, and feelings. I think it's great to assess children, but there is a point of over assessing them. I've noticed an increase in behavior and defiance toward wanting to work. Where do we establish the blame? Teacher: pushes too hard? Tests: too much too often? Lifestyles: parents model it? Computers /TV/ videogames? When is enough, enough for these youngsters? We will

see something big happen with these kids in the next few years. Good or bad? Yet to be decided! (Respondent 019).

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

We believe that it is increasingly important to understand the influences of current accountability structures in elementary schools and classrooms on teaching and teacher education. In order to fight against the negative consequences of standardized testing and the implementation of assessment and accountability structures in line with new educational policy, teachers, administrators, and teacher educators must be aware of the perceptual influences at the classroom level. With this information, educators may partner together to create support structures and curriculum and instruction that meet the needs of all the diverse, individual children in classrooms. Likewise, teachers and teacher educators may be able to demonstrate an unprecedented unity toward policy-makers by voicing appreciation for standards and accountability while at the same time demonstrating limitations of local implementation structures. Bigelow (2000) and Christensen (2000) both advocate for teachers maintaining a critical stance toward standardized assessments while at the same time empowering their students to perform well. Beginning a critical analysis of standards and standardized testing at an early age should empower students to enter into test-taking environments informed not only about the content of a test but also about the social and political factors influencing the tests and their subsequent performance. Perhaps then students may



learn both how to perform well on tests and how to participate in a democracy where critical thinking and intelligent articulation are necessary.

With the current push for accountability attached to standardized test results, perhaps teachers need professional development opportunities focused on assessment literacy and an informed position on positive and negative consequences of standardized testing. They may then educate their students and potentially encourage student growth, learning, and understanding at the same time achievement test scores are increasing. One teacher in this study shares, "Several of my fourth graders who score at a very high advanced level on [state standardized test] do not show that same ability during assignments that require higher order thinking skills. They also have difficulty producing a product that requires thinking and written explanations" (Respondent 094). Considering not only the increased pressure new accountability structures clearly represent for teachers, but also the fact that these new accountability structures are unlikely to disappear in the near future, teachers and teacher educators must unite to become informed about the best means for responding to accountability structures and individual teaching and learning needs in classrooms.

Teacher preparation programs must strive to prepare teachers who are not only resilient but also proactive in asserting their professionalism in policy arenas. Encouraging a stance of teacher leadership (Lieberman & Miller, 2004) in preparation programs should encourage educators to critically consider and participate in the standards and accountability movement in public education. Of additional concern are

the increased levels of job dissatisfaction among mentor teachers in this study; although we do not assume that the phenomena is unique to this population. Mentor teachers are pivotal in preparing preservice teachers and in the socialization of novice teachers. The implications of messages, both overt and covert, of job dissatisfaction, helplessness, and lack of agency are powerful and often overshadow the voices of teacher educators. By working as partners with K-12 mentor teachers, teacher educators and administrators may be able to prepare future teachers who are proactive and who value their agency.

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APPENDIX A
Mentor Teacher Survey

General Information:

- 1) Including this year, how many years have you been employed as a classroom teacher? ____years
(Include years spent teaching both full and part time and in public and private schools)
- 2) What grade(s) do you currently teach at this school? (Circle all that apply)
K 1 2 3 4 5 6 other
- 3) How many years have you served as a mentor teacher for preservice teachers? ____years
- 4) Approximately what percentage of your current students:
 - a. participate in Chapter 1: ____%
 - b. are English language learners (ELL): ____%
 - c. are in special education or considered learning disabled: ____%
- 5) What state and national standardized tests are administered in your school?
- 6) Who administers these tests to students?
(circle all that apply)
 - a. their classroom teacher
 - b. other _____

Teachers

- 7) To what extent do you feel pressure from the following groups to improve your students' standardized test scores?

	Almost no pressure		Moderate		Great pressure
a. my principal	1	2	3	4	5
b. other school administrators	1	2	3	4	5
c. other teachers	1	2	3	4	5
d. district administration/board	1	2	3	4	5
e. parents	1	2	3	4	5
f. community	1	2	3	4	5
g. newspaper/media	1	2	3	4	5



8) How often are the following statements true for your school?

	Almost never		Some-times		Almost always
a. My school's instructional program emphasizes basic skills	1	2	3	4	5
b. My school gives a lot of attention to higher order thinking and communication skills	1	2	3	4	5
c. My school lets teachers know how their students performed on standardized tests compared to other teachers' students	1	2	3	4	5
d. My school considers test scores when evaluating teachers	1	2	3	4	5

9) How often during the year does your school administration engage in the following activities with teachers?

	Not at all	Once	A few times (2-3)	Several times (4+)
a. Holds staff meetings to review test scores	1	2	3	4
b. Discusses ways to improve test scores	1	2	3	4
c. Discusses ways to strengthen instruction in the specific areas where test scores indicate weakness	1	2	3	4
d. Provides materials to give students practice in test-taking skills	1	2	3	4
e. Provides special assistance to help individual teachers improve test scores	1	2	3	4
f. Discusses ways to improve instruction in higher order thinking skills	1	2	3	4
g. Checks to see that teachers are emphasizing skills which showed weakness from past test results	1	2	3	4
h. Discusses ways to improve students' attitudes/interest in learning	1	2	3	4
i. Introduces/discusses important new instructional ideas	1	2	3	4

10) How thoroughly do you engage in the following when planning instruction for your students?

	Not at all		To some extent		Thoroughly
a. I make sure the content and skills covered in the test with my class are reviewed within the week or two prior to test administration	1	2	3	4	5
b. I look at old or current tests to make sure that my curriculum includes all or most of the test's content	1	2	3	4	5
c. I make sure the objectives of the test are covered in my instruction	1	2	3	4	5
d. I adjust my instructional plans based on the test	1	2	3	4	5



performance of the class I had last year					
e. I adjust my instructional plans based on my current students' most recent test scores	1	2	3	4	5
f. I adjust the sequence of my curriculum based on what's included in the test	1	2	3	4	5
g. I choose curriculum based on what's included in the test	1	2	3	4	5

11) How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities?

	None	A day	A few days	A week	4 weeks	Regularly throughout year
a. Giving students worksheets that review expected test content	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. Giving students practice in the kinds of item formats that are on the test	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. Giving students commercially produced practice tests	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. Giving students old forms of the test on which to practice	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. Instructing students on test-taking strategies	1	2	3	4	5	6

School

12) To what extent have the following characteristics changed at your school over the last 3 years?

	Decreased	Same	Increase	Don't know
a. Programmatic efforts to improve student learning	1	2	3	4
b. Emphasis on preparing students to do well on tests	1	2	3	4
c. Implementation of non-traditional instructional strategies	1	2	3	4
d. Support for school-wide or grade-level planning	1	2	3	4
e. School or grade wide efforts to improve school or class climate	1	2	3	4
f. Students' interest in learning	1	2	3	4
g. Opportunities for students to choose what they want to study	1	2	3	4
h. Students' pride in school	1	2	3	4
i. Curriculum changes to improve student test scores	1	2	3	4

13) To what extent has the attention you are able to give to the following subject matters **changed** over the last 3 years?

	Decreased	Same	Increased	Don't Know
a. Higher order thinking and problem solving	1	2	3	4
b. Basic skills (e.g. computation, grammar, vocabulary)	1	2	3	4



c. Science	1	2	3	4
d. Social studies	1	2	3	4
e. Test preparation (homework and classwork)	1	2	3	4

14) To what extent have job climate characteristics **changed** over the last 3 years?

	Decreased	Same	Increased	Don't Know
a. Control I have over classroom curriculum	1	2	3	4
b. Emphasis on using classroom teachers' professional judgment in instructional matters	1	2	3	4
c. My ability to meet individual student needs	1	2	3	4
d. Teachers' influence on school decision making	1	2	3	4
e. Pressure to cover all the required curriculum	1	2	3	4
f. My ability to cover any one subject thoroughly	1	2	3	4
g. The image of the teacher as an effective educator	1	2	3	4
h. My satisfaction with my work	1	2	3	4
i. Control I have over my daily class schedule	1	2	3	4

15) How has your school's performance on the standardized test changed over the last three years?

- Scores have increased
- Scores have decreased
- Some grades' scores have increased while others' have decreased
- Scores are about the same
- I don't know

16) If test scores have changed, why do you think this change has occurred? (Check the importance of each of the following factors)

	No factor	Minor factor	Moderate factor	Major factor
a. Changes in student population	1	2	3	4
b. Alignment of curriculum with test content	1	2	3	4
c. Attention to test-taking skills	1	2	3	4
d. Changes in instructional strategies	1	2	3	4
e. Changes in textbooks	1	2	3	4
f. Changes in test administration practices	1	2	3	4
g. Changes in teacher effectiveness	1	2	3	4
h. Changes in school climate	1	2	3	4
i. Changes in the community	1	2	3	4
k. Other, please specify _____	1	2	3	4

17) The following items refer to your personal attitudes. Please indicate your agreement with each item.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
a. I expect my students to perform well on tests					
b. Standardized testing is helping schools improve					



c. Testing creates a lot of tension for teachers and/or students					
d. Many of the students I teach are not capable of learning the material I am supposed to teach					
e. I sometimes feel it is a waste of time to try to do my best as a teacher					
f. Most of our school staff have a strong sense of pride in their work					
g. Our school is more interested in increasing test scores than in improving overall student learning					
i. Faculty feel there is a discrepancy between what they think should be taught and what the tests emphasize					
j. Teachers can substantially influence how well their students do on standardized tests					
k. Teachers who complain about testing are usually poor teachers who do not want accountability as professionals					
l. The school's emphasis on test results shows a real commitment to raising student achievement					
m. Tests give me important feedback about how well I am teaching in each curricular area that is tested					
n. Standardized tests help to clarify which learning goals are the most important					

Your Comments

We are very interested in your perceptions and experiences as they related to standardized testing. We would appreciate it if you would share some additional thoughts about how testing is affecting your life as an educator (personally and professionally).

Thank you for your patience, time, and lots of good thought.

