

REDEFINING THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT'S  
HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHER

by

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Abstract

REDEFINING THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT'S  
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This study shares the perspectives of eight, current Highly Qualified Teachers (HQT) and provides some insight into the points of view of these teachers who are directly affected by the decisions and policies handed down from lawmakers. There is value in deeply understanding the impact of the requirements set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001's (NCLB) definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher as it can help shape future policies to better serve the students it is intended to assist.

For this study, participants engaged in an in-depth semi-structured interview and provided demographic data and classroom artifacts. The researcher used a basic qualitative research design to present how NCLB's definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher has been/is being interpreted and how it has affected and continues to affect the ways in which educators construct their real-world classrooms. In addition, the researcher sought to: a) ascertain how well current

secondary HQTs delineate their proficiency with the subject(s) they teach; b) impart the perspectives of what current secondary HQTs feel it takes to be prepared to enter the classroom; c) convey the perspectives of how current secondary HQTs feel the government's requirements for becoming a HQT helped to prepare them for the realities of the classroom; and d) based on the findings, recommend policy reform to better meet the needs of current and future teachers.

The findings of this study revealed that the current definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher, as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, is inadequate to meet the needs and challenges of today's classrooms. Based on the data collected for this study, the following six changes to policy were recommended: 1) The language used in the definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher needs to be more specific and the loopholes need to be closed. 2) Policy needs to be informed by Highly Qualified Teachers and educators currently working in the school system. 3) As part of their teacher preparation program, all teacher candidates should be required to engage in student teaching. 4) In addition to the requirement for a four-year degree, all Highly Qualified Teachers must complete a minimum of 12 hours of coursework in the content that they teach. 5) The federal government must set some basic guidelines that all educator programs must follow. One of these guidelines must include a call for the introduction of realistic teaching opportunities. 6) Composite exams should be phased out and replaced by subject specific exams that test for knowledge and depth. The

Pedagogical and Professional Responsibilities EC-12 exam must be completely reworked to reflect the realities of teaching. Finally, exam attempts should be capped and uncertified teachers should not be allowed to teach beyond a year.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iii
Abstract.....	v
Chapter 1 Redefining the No Child Left Behind Act’s Highly Qualified Teacher.....	1
Federal and State Education Law .....	2
The No Child Left Behind Act.....	4
NCLB HQT Flexibility.....	5
NCLB HQT Requirement 1: A Bachelor’s Degree .....	6
NCLB HQT Requirement 2: Certification.....	7
NCLB HQT Requirement 3: Subject Competency.....	9
Statement of the Problem.....	10
Purpose of the Study.....	11
Research Questions.....	12
Research Goals.....	13
Organization of the Dissertation .....	15
Chapter 2 Review of the Literature.....	17
The Teacher-Student Success Connection.....	18
What Teachers Need to Know .....	23
Highly Qualified versus Effective Teachers.....	27
Challenges in Today’s Schools.....	29

What Teachers Have Said – Previous Research .....	33
Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework .....	41
Chapter 4 Research Design.....	44
Methodology.....	44
Research Site.....	46
Participant Selection and Recruitment Strategies .....	47
Data Collection .....	49
Data Analysis .....	51
Trustworthiness.....	54
Role of the Researcher .....	56
Chapter 5 Highly Qualified Participants.....	58
Participant Criteria and Demographic Results.....	58
Vivian.....	59
Orwellia.....	62
Tiffany.....	65
Militario .....	68
Caroline.....	71
Reginald .....	75
Wahine .....	79
Rose.....	83
Participant Summary.....	88

Chapter 6 Highly Qualified to do What? .....	90
What it Means to be “Highly Qualified” .....	91
Teacher Value .....	95
Tested Subjects .....	98
Non-Tested Classrooms .....	99
Tested Classrooms .....	100
Academic Freedom and Canned Curriculums .....	102
Chapter 7 Teaching in the Real World .....	109
Educational Background.....	109
Content: In-Field and Out-of-Field Teaching.....	110
Pedagogy: Teacher Preparation .....	114
Lesson Planning.....	115
Paperwork .....	118
The First Day of School.....	120
Observation Opportunities and a Need for Mentors.....	121
Student Teaching .....	124
The Real Classroom.....	126
Chapter 8 Tests, What are They Good For? .....	131
Teacher Certification Exams.....	132
Composite versus Subject Specific Exams.....	132
The Pedagogical and Professional Responsibilities Exam .....	136

Taking Multiple Exams.....	138
Taking Exams Multiple Times.....	140
Chapter 9 The Highly Qualified Teacher Speaks Out .....	143
HQT Recommended Policy Changes .....	143
Good Intentions (That With Which the Road to Hell is Paved) ..	144
Loopholes.....	145
Policymakers and Reality .....	146
Student Teaching .....	148
Educational Background.....	151
Teacher Preparation Programs .....	153
Exams.....	159
Summary .....	163
Chapter 10 Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion .....	164
Overview of the Study .....	164
Critical Educational Theory and Habermas' Four Stages.....	169
Key Findings.....	179
Implications for Policy, Research, and Practice .....	188
Implications for Policy.....	188
Implications for Research .....	198
Implications for Practice .....	199
Limitations .....	201

Final Thoughts .....	203
Appendix A Recruitment Letter.....	208
Appendix B Consent to Participate in the Study .....	210
Appendix C Pre-Interview Questionnaire.....	215
Appendix D Interview Protocol .....	219
Appendix E Participant Demographic Chart .....	225
References.....	227
Biographical Information.....	241

## Chapter 1

### Redefining the No Child Left Behind Act's Highly Qualified Teacher

Teacher preparation and support are of great importance when considering educational issues today because research has shown that teacher quality is the most significant determinant of student success; and, teacher certification and educational background are positively correlated with student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1999, 2000b; Darling-Hammond, Berry, & Thoreson, 2001; Dee & Cohodes, 2008; Haskins & Loeb, 2007; Heck, 2007; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Shen, Mansberger, & Yang, 2004; Smith & Gorard, 2007; Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011; Wright, Horn, and Sanders, 1997). In addition, researchers have found that even low-performing students, who face many barriers, can attain higher levels of scholastic success when taught by effective teachers<sup>1</sup> (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2012; Heck, 2007). And, when looking at schools as a whole, “Collective teacher quality [is] positively related to school achievement levels in reading and math...[and] higher teacher quality [is] associated with reduced gaps in student learning rates associated with social class and race/ethnicity” (Heck, 2007, p. 399). Therefore, when considering how to best

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<sup>1</sup> Although there is no concrete definition of an effective teacher, researchers do agree that effective teachers share common traits such as: clear and focused instruction, the ability to engage students and assess them continually, students respect them and see them as caring, and these teachers have good classroom management (Greenburg, Putman, & Walsh, 2013; Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997).

reach students of color, at-risk<sup>2</sup>, low socio-economic, and/or low-performing students, it seems that there should be a great emphasis on educators and the education, training, and support that they receive.

### Federal and State Education Law

The Tenth Amendment, which defines the relationship between the federal government and the states, reads: “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people” (Legal Information Institute, 1992). Therefore, Under the constitution, the states control K-12 educational law (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). However, the federal government has a “compelling national interest in the quality of the nation's public schools” (U.S. Department of Education, 2014), thus, through the legislative process, the federal government began providing financial support to states with conditions attached that allowed federal control over education (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). This “support” primarily began in 1965 with the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (U.S. Department of Education, 2014) which

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<sup>2</sup> At-risk, as defined by the Department of Education, is used to describe students who are thought to have a higher probability (than those not deemed “at-risk”) of academically and/or of dropping out of school. This term may be associated with students based on a number of variables including physical handicap, family poverty, troubled home life, homelessness, incarceration, teenage pregnancy, serious health issues, domestic violence, transiency, learning disabilities, low test scores, disciplinary problems, grade retentions, or any other factor that could hamper the student’s progression toward graduation (U.S. Department of Education, 1992).

authorized grants for K-12 school programs that served “children of low income families” (Department of Education, 2014).

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) passed and served as a reauthorization of ESEA and also led to a dramatic increase in federal education funding (Department of Education, 2014). According the Department of Education (2014) the “express purpose” of NCLB was/is to “raise achievement for all students and to close the achievement gap...through accountability, research-based instruction, flexibility and options for parents, so that no child is left behind.” No mandate in NCLB, including the requirement for all classrooms to be led by Highly Qualified Teachers (HQT), was imposed on states without federal funding. This is because “the conditions in federal law apply only when a state...voluntarily chooses to accept federal funds” (Department of Education, 2014). Therefore, states did/do have the right to refuse to abide by federal laws, however, they must also forgo the funding attached to those laws—funding that many states need (Department of Education, 2014). As such, federal education laws have great overarching powers and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is no exception.

While federal education laws work like an umbrella over all state laws (as long as the states accepted the funding attached the laws), this does not prevent state and local governments to add their own laws into the mix (this falls under the Tenth Amendment). For instance, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

requires that Highly Qualified Teachers have, at a minimum, a bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). However, because NCLB fails to stipulate what that degree be in (for example, specifying that the bachelor's degree must be in the content taught) states have the right to determine whether or not they want to add requirements to that law. Therefore, while it is possible for one state to require that this degree be in the content taught, it is also possible that another state has no requirement for what the degree be in. This is an important distinction because all of the participants in this study were Highly Qualified Teachers in Texas. Therefore, their experiences and perceptions of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 are reflective of how NCLB played out in the state of Texas.

#### The No Child Left Behind Act

In 2001, policymakers enacted the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), in which they emphasized the importance of teachers and teacher education. NCLB targeted students of color, at-risk, low socio-economic, and/or low-performing students whom policymakers feared were being "left behind" (Association of Texas Professional Educators, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2004) because these students are more likely to be assigned an uncertified teacher and more likely to be assigned an out-of-field teacher (Carey, 2004; Jerald & Ingersoll, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). As such, NCLB required that all teachers become "Highly Qualified" by the 2004-2005 school year.

In Section 9101 of the No Child Left Behind Act, the Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) is defined as one who: a) Has a bachelor's degree or higher; b) Holds full state certification; and c) Demonstrates subject specific competency in assigned core academics (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Although, on the surface, this definition may seem adequate thus ensuring that all classrooms will have Highly Qualified Teachers, the definition allows a great deal of leeway.

#### *NCLB Flexibility*

Because NCLB is a federal mandate imposed on school systems usually governed by each state, the government found it necessary to make exemptions from various requirements in certain situations (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). For instance, new teachers in rural districts who are asked to teach courses outside of their expertise and certification, are given an additional three years to become certified in these subjects. Current teachers are exempted from returning to school and/or taking a test in every subject taught in order to demonstrate Highly Qualified status (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). When looking for teachers of science, a high-need area, each state is allowed to determine how competent in science a teacher candidate need be (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Therefore, a teacher with a degree in chemistry can be deemed Highly Qualified by a state to teach biology; and/or, a teacher who took general science classes in college can be deemed Highly Qualified to teach a very specialized physics course.

Because special education is also a high need area, the requirement for special education teachers to become Highly Qualified and to demonstrate subject competency, only applies to those who provide direct instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Consequently, because the requirement for all special education teachers to be Highly Qualified and to demonstrate subject competency is waived, special education teachers who have no training or expertise in subjects like English, math, and science are charged with tutoring, developing alternate lessons for, and working one on one with students who need the most help with these subjects. This is even more concerning when looking at the demographics of special education because students of poverty and students of color, two of the sub-groups that NCLB aims to help, are disproportionately served by special education (Cosier, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis, 2013; Shifrer, Muller, & Callahan, 2011; Zorigian & Job, 2010).

#### *NCLB HQT Requirement 1: A Bachelor's Degree*

Although NCLB requires that a HQT hold a bachelor's degree, it does not require that the degree be in the subject taught. Therefore, in many circumstances, a teacher is placed into a classroom teaching a subject in which he or she may have little to no expertise (Carey, 2004; Ingersoll, 1999; Jerald & Ingersoll, 2002). In a national study of middle school teachers, The U.S. Department of Education (2004) reported that nearly two-thirds of math teachers and half of science teachers "did not have a major in their subject" (p. 8); almost 20% of these

teachers also “lacked certification in their subject” (p. 8) and researchers have concluded that it is this out-of-field teaching that, at the very least, has contributed to the achievement gap (Dee & Cohodes, 2008; Heck, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2004, 2011). Furthermore, when looking at the demographics in multiple studies, a pattern begins to emerge that shows students of color, low-performing students, and/or poor students, are “far more likely than other students to have teachers who are inexperienced, uncertified, poorly educated, and under-performing. Many of those teachers demonstrate most or all those unfortunate qualities all at the same time” (Carey, 2004, p. 8). Thus, the schools that legislators were most concerned about, the schools that need high-quality effective teachers the most, are still the schools where many teachers (not all) are undereducated, ineffective, and/or ephemeral, even if they are deemed “Highly Qualified” according to NCLB standards (Darling-Hammond & Green, 1990; Eckert, 2013; Ingersoll, 2001; Jacob, 2007).

#### *NCLB HQT Requirement 2: Certification*

The requirement for certification is also problematic when using certification to gauge the qualifications of a teacher. State certification varies across the country and there is no federally set standard for achieving certification. Darling-Hammond (2000b) points out that, “The number of credits of prescribed education coursework that are required for obtaining a state license can range from 18 to 40, depending on the state” (p. 194). As described by The

American Federation of Teachers, U.S. teacher preparation systems are “at best confusing and at worst a fragmented and bureaucratic tangle of stakeholder groups with varied, sometimes overlapping, responsibilities and blurry accountability lines” (*Raising the Bar: Aligning*, 2012, p. 2). Moreover, while policymakers made becoming certified part of the requirement for a Highly Qualified Teacher, they in no way defined what being certified should involve and set no standards or assessments for certification programs.

In Texas, the original model for NCLB policies and practices, a teacher candidate seeking certification must attend a certification program and pass two exams: a) The Texas Examination of Educator Standards (TExES) content exam and b) The TExES professional exam in order to achieve certification ("Educator Certification," 2013). However, even across the state, Texas certification programs have minimal standards set by the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) (Texas Education Agency, 2015) and the curriculums vary greatly from programs requiring 20+ hours of college coursework, programs conducted completely online, to programs meant to speed up certification, in some cases, only requiring one meeting. There is no mandated requirement for these programs to place teacher candidates in real world teaching environments or to actually prepare a teacher candidate for the classroom. Furthermore, because the success of these programs is measured by the passing rates on certification

exams, many of these programs are highly focused on test preparation and less focused on practical application (Selwyn, 2007).

*NCLB HQT Requirement 3: Subject Competency*

The final requirement for meeting the NCLB definition of a Highly Qualified Teacher is to demonstrate subject-specific competency. It would seem that this component would ensure that a teacher has expertise in his/her teaching field. However, this requirement is not met by showing subject-specific competency via a college education; it is met by passing a subject exam created by the state in which the teacher candidate is seeking certification. For instance, in Texas, to prove subject-specific competency, a teacher candidate must pass the TExES content exam. Furthermore, because NCLB allows states to create their own methods to prove competency<sup>3</sup>, once a teacher has passed one content exam and the professional exam, (s)he is allowed to sign up and take exams in any other content area offered ("Educator Certification," 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2005). And, once again, what is actually tested on these exams varies from state to state because, "NCLB provides flexibility in developing assessments for teachers to demonstrate subject-matter competency. States may tailor teacher tests to the subjects and level of knowledge needed for effective instruction" (U.S.

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<sup>3</sup>NCLB allows states to develop their own high, objective, uniform state standard of evaluation (HOUSSE) for determining whether a teacher is competent in the subject(s) he or she is teaching.

Department of Education, 2005). Therefore, states are allowed great leeway when it comes to proving that a teacher candidate has demonstrated subject competency; and, even if a teacher candidate has no collegiate background with a specific subject, it is possible for that teacher candidate to study for and pass a subject-specific competency exam resulting in the state's declaration that the teacher candidate has proven subject competency.

#### Statement of the Problem

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 focuses on background qualifications (teacher education and certification); however, as research has shown, having a college degree, attending a certification program, and obtaining certification, in no way guarantees success. Therefore, being deemed a “Highly Qualified Teacher” by the government, does not speak as to whether or not a teacher is effective. The educational expectations of students have risen over the years and both the public and policymakers want to ensure that all students are college- and/or career-ready and that United States teachers are effective and well qualified (*Raising the Bar: Aligning*, 2012). However, while student expectations have risen, the NCLB HQT requirements implemented in 2002, have not changed much. Additionally, to meet the needs of schools with teacher shortages, many educator preparation programs have reduced requirements and some schools of education have lowered standards (Darling-Hammond, 2000b; *Raising the Bar: Aligning*, 2012; Selwyn, 2007). Therefore, teacher candidates could conceivably

be able to enter education programs under lowered standards, they may be required to take fewer courses, and they may choose to become certified to teach in an area that they have no expertise in; however, they are still expected to prepare their students to pass state mandated standardized end-of-course exams, college entrance exams, and to make their students college-ready.

#### Purpose of the Study

Teachers are working in a very complex and demanding field and research indicates that teacher candidates are much more likely to become effective teachers if they invest the time in their college career to become experts in their fields and in pedagogy (Carey, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, Darling-Hammond, Berry, & Thoreson, 2001; Ekert, 2013; Ferguson & Womack, 1993). Thus, to better ensure that current teachers and teacher candidates are Highly Qualified *effective* Teachers, research should focus on what current HQTs, who are in the field: a) do and do not know about the subjects they teach; b) feel their education did right to prepare them for teaching; c) feel their education lacked when preparing them for teaching; and d) feel colleges of education and teacher preparation programs could do to better meet the needs of current and future educators. This study aimed to be a starting point for such research.

## Research Questions

The first research question is: What does it mean to be Highly Qualified<sup>4</sup> in today's secondary classrooms? The timeline set by the Department of Education (2004) demanded that all classrooms have a Highly Qualified Teachers in them by 2006. Therefore, every U.S. classroom should have a NCLB defined HQT at the helm. The intent of this study is to give these HQTs a voice.

The second research question is: What have the educational and pedagogical requirements set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 done to prepare secondary teachers for the realities of the classroom? The No Child Left Behind Act enacted educational and pedagogical requirements for teachers. These requirements were aimed at guaranteeing that all U.S. teachers are, indeed, highly qualified. However, what are the realities of these requirements? Have teachers really benefitted from the educational and pedagogical requirements set forth in NCLB? Once hired, teachers leave the classroom as a student and enter another classroom as the teacher—are they prepared? Do post-NCLB teachers perceive their experiences in the classroom positively? Did these teachers enter the classroom with confidence and prepared to manage a classroom?

The third and last research question is: How can the experiences of secondary Highly Qualified Teachers inform the decisions of future policymakers

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout this paper, capitalization is used to differentiate between the Highly Qualified title and the use of highly qualified as a descriptor (meaning “good” or “effective”).

when making educational reforms to the No Child Left Behind Act's definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher? In 2010 the Obama administration presented a blueprint for reforming the No Child Left Behind Act. This blueprint addressed multiple sections of NCLB including the definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher ("ESEA Reauthorization: A Blueprint," 2010). However, these reforms, meant to add support for teachers, have been on hold awaiting the approval of Congress. Even if these reforms do not come to fruition, as long as the No Child Left Behind Act remains a governing document of U.S. classrooms, it will require reform. As such, teacher perspectives and experiences could be of great value when future policymakers are writing these reforms.

#### Research Goals

A review of existing literature on teacher education, training, and effectiveness reveals extensive research on teacher certification programs, the challenges facing new teachers, the teaching profession in general, as well as, research pointing out the realities of the ever-growing students of color population (Carey, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1999, 2000a; Dee & Cohodes, 2008; Ekert, 2013; Ferguson & Womack, 1993; Gimbert, Bol, & Wallace, 2007; Greenburg, Putman, & Walsh, 2013; Haskins & Loeb, 2007; Ingersoll, 1999; Jacob, 2007; McDonald, 2005; Palardy & Rumberger, 2008; Shen, Mansberger, & Yang, 2004; Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011). However, there is minimal recent research on how well secondary teachers' college educations prepare them to teach their

assigned subjects. There is also minimal research on current secondary Highly Qualified Teachers' perceptions of their college educations, their certification programs, and how well they feel this education prepared them to perform all that is asked of them. Searches via SAGE and ERIC looking for teachers' perceptions of the Highly Qualified Teacher, their own education and training, and/or their own experiences with post-NCLB teaching, returned few studies and these studies only partially met the search criteria (Nieto, 2003; *Perspectives of irreplaceable teachers*, 2013; *Raising the Bar: Aligning*, 2012).

The present study seeks to impart the perceptions of current Highly Qualified Teachers who work with students of color, at-risk, low socio-economic, and/or low-performing students and to fill a gap in the literature by looking at secondary teacher education and preparation from the teacher's point of view. The No Child Left Behind Act laid out the federal government's idea of what it takes to be prepared to enter the classroom; however, this study seeks to: a) ascertain how well current secondary HQTs delineate their proficiency with the subject(s) they teach; b) impart the perspectives of what current secondary HQTs feel it takes to be prepared to enter the classroom; c) convey the perspectives of how current secondary HQTs feel the government's requirements for becoming a HQT helped to prepare them for the realities of the classroom; and d) based on the findings, recommend policy and pedagogical changes to better meet the needs of current and future teachers.

## Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into ten chapters. In Chapter 1, I provide an overview of the problem pointing out the importance of teachers and that the purpose of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was to ensure that a Highly Qualified Teacher be placed in every classroom within five years. This chapter also points out, however, that NCLB was implemented with much flexibility and has not evolved much over the last 13 years.

In Chapter 2, I discuss relevant literature related to the teacher-student success connection, what teachers need to know, Highly Qualified versus effective teachers, challenges in today's schools, and what teachers have already voiced (previous research). In this chapter, I add that although there are many studies about teachers, teaching, and education, there are minimal studies that have sought out teacher perspectives on these topics.

In Chapter 3, I describe the theoretical framework, Critical Theory (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Randall, 2004; Freire, 2011; Held, 2004; Morrison, 2001), which serves as a lens for my research and that will serve as a lens for my analysis. In Chapter 4, I discuss my research design, which includes the methodology, research site, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness; and I discuss my role as the researcher.

In Chapters 5-9 I present the results of the study. Chapter 5 serves as a beginning to the results chapters by introducing my eight participants and

discussing their educational and pedagogical backgrounds and some of their experiences as Highly Qualified Teachers. Chapters 6-9 discuss the four major themes that developed as a result of the study. Chapter 6 presents the first major theme: Being a Highly Qualified Teacher has three different meanings and levels of importance. Chapter 7 explains the second major theme: Educator preparation programs required by NCLB do not prepare teacher candidates for the realities of the classroom. Chapter 8 examines the third major theme: Teacher certification exams do not adequately measure subjected competency as intended by NCLB. And Chapter 9 discusses the fourth and final major theme: Highly Qualified Teachers have much to offer policymakers.

In the final chapter, Chapter 10, informed by the theoretical framework, educational critical theory, I present a discussion and interpretation of the results presented in Chapters 5-9. In addition, Chapter 10 includes the limitations of this study, implications for policy, research, and practice, and my concluding remarks.

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

The literature reviewed for this study is divided into five sections: 1) The teacher-student success connection; 2) what teachers need to know; 3) Highly Qualified versus effective teachers; 4) challenges in today's schools; and 5) what teachers have said, previous research.

The first section focuses on the connection between the success of teachers and the success of their students. Teachers who have more education in their assigned subject and who dedicated more time to their teacher preparation programs (for example, choosing a longer more thorough certification university program over a shortened alternative program), are often better prepared to teach their subject(s) and better prepared to manage a classroom (Darling-Hammond, 1999, 2000b; Darling-Hammond, Berry, & Thoreson, 2001). As a result, the hard work of the teacher often results in higher student achievement.

The second section looks at the demands placed upon teachers and what they need to know to perform the duties assigned to them. Teachers work under intense pressure and face many challenges. Regardless of their educational backgrounds and certification pathways, the expectations of and the duties assigned to teachers certainly seem to indicate that all teachers are expected to be experts in their field(s) and experts in pedagogy and classroom management.

The third section examines the traits of an effective teacher and whether or not being Highly Qualified results in being an effective teacher. To be deemed a Highly Qualified Teacher, the government requires that teachers have a degree, engage in teacher preparation programs, and pass certification exams. This title, therefore, refers to a teacher's completion of requirements, not the quality of instruction that a teacher delivers. Thus, the question becomes whether or not the Highly Qualified status guarantees that teachers are highly qualified effective teachers.

The fourth section focuses on the challenges today's schools and educators are facing. The demographics of U.S. schools are changing at rapid rates and the demands placed upon students and teachers are ever increasing (McDonald, 2005). Not only do teachers need to be able to teach their subject(s), but they also need to reach a diverse population of students with whom they may be very unfamiliar (McDonald, 2005).

The final section looks at three studies for which the researchers sought out the voices of teachers in the classroom. Although there are many studies about teachers, teaching, and education, there are minimal studies that have sought out teacher perspectives on these topics.

#### *The Teacher-Student Success Connection*

Since the implementation of NCLB, all students have been promised a Highly Qualified Teacher, who will not leave them behind, in the classroom (U.S.

Department of Education, 2010). This requirement for a Highly Qualified Teacher in every classroom comes as no surprise because there is extensive research available that connects teacher success to student success (Brooke & Shafer, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2000b, 2002; Darling-Hammond, Berry, & Thoreson, 2001; Dee & Cohodes, 2008; Druva & Anderson, 1983; Ferguson, 1991; Haskins & Loeb, 2007; Hawk, Coble, & Swanson, 1985; Heck, 2007; Ingersoll, 1999; Monk, 1994; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Shen, Mansberger, & Yang, 2004; Smith & Gorard, 2007; Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997).

Darling-Hammond (2000b) pointed out that increasing teacher education, results in higher student achievement more so than, “lowering Pupil/Teacher Ratio, increasing teacher’s salaries, and increasing teacher experience” (p. 2). Haskins and Loeb (2007) went even further stating that teacher quality is “the single most important factor of schools that drives higher student achievement” (p. 2). Researchers have shown a significant association between student success and teacher classroom effectiveness (Dee & Cohodes, 2008; Heck, 2007; Smith & Gorard, 2007; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). This association is so substantial that researchers have concluded that three consecutive years of effective teachers may overcome the achievement gap between low-socioeconomic students and others (Smith & Gorard, 2007). Furthermore, when looking at in-field teachers and out-of-field teachers, studies have shown that in-field teachers are associated with higher test scores and reducing the educational gaps in student achievement

attributed to socio-economics and race. (Dee & Cohodes, 2008; Heck, 2007; Smith & Gorard, 2007; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997).

Studies examining the teacher-student connection reveal large differences in student achievement gains (in some cases by more than 30 points) between students placed with effective teachers and students placed with ineffective teachers. Shen, Mansberger, and Yang (1999), using three data sources, 1) a policy survey of 50 states, 2) a 1993-94 study that used Schools and Staffing Surveys (SASS), and 3) a study from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), reported that “teacher-quality variables accounted for 67% to 87% of total variance in student achievement” (p. 230). Sanders and Rivers (1996) concluded that the effects that teachers have on student achievement are cumulative and that students who begin with similar achievement scores could be separated by as much as 50 percentage points in a three-year period as a result of differences in teacher effectiveness.

In high-need content areas like math, science, and special education there still remain shortages causing districts to hire out-of-field teachers. However, these high need areas are also the areas where students need the most help. Based on the research by Darling-Hammond, Berry, and Thoreson (2001), “Teachers who were certified in mathematics performed significantly better in both general mathematics ( $p < .05$ ) and algebra ( $p < .001$ ) than those who were taught by teachers uncertified in mathematics” (p. 67). The National Assessment of

Educational Progress (NAEP) also found that students whose teachers majored in the subject taught, had training in how to work with diverse populations, and had training in developing higher order thinking skills, performed better on assessments than those students who did not have teachers with these qualifications (Darling-Hammond, 2002). After conducting studies on science teachers, math teachers, and reading teachers, at both the high school and middle school levels, researchers found positive correlations between the amount of subject-specific college coursework taken by these teachers and their student's achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2002; Druva & Anderson, 1983; Ferguson, 1991; Hawk, Coble, & Swanson, 1985; Monk, 1994; Shen, Mansberger, & Yang, 2004). Darling-Hammond (2002) pointed out that in New York City schools, teachers' scholastic backgrounds accounted for almost 90% of the variance in math and reading achievement exam scores.

In states such as Texas, where schools still have a shortage of math and science teachers, students continue to find themselves in classrooms led by teachers without math or science training (Brooke & Shafer, 2007). Ingersoll (1999), looking at teacher qualifications in secondary schools across the United States, found that: A third of all secondary math teachers do not have either a major or minor in math, math education, or related disciplines; One quarter of all secondary English teachers have neither a major nor minor in English; One fifth of secondary science teachers do not have either a major or minor in one of the

sciences or in science education; And, that one fifth of secondary social studies teachers lack a major or minor in history, social studies, social sciences, or social studies education. Ingersoll (1999) added that out-of-area teaching is still the norm in most schools, even when the schools claim that all of their teachers are Highly Qualified. This is because a teacher, while certified in and teaching one subject, is still very likely to be assigned a class outside of their certification area. Ingersoll (1999) also pointed out that this problem is even more prevalent in high-poverty and small schools.

Teacher education, however, extends beyond subject specific coursework. Teachers are also supposed to engage in pedagogical coursework. And, just as research has shown a positive correlation between subject-specific coursework and student achievement, research has also shown that pedagogical courses can lead to more effective teaching of those subjects. In a 1993 study, Ferguson and Womack found that the number of education courses that a teacher takes correlate with supervisor evaluations of teacher effectiveness. This finding was further supported by a review of teacher preparation research in which researchers identified “positive effects of teacher-preparation experiences on teaching practices and student achievement” (Shen, Mansberger & Yang, 2004, p. 227). Furthermore, researchers have documented that professional training can provide teachers with teaching strategies that help them to teach comprehension skills; as a result, those teachers who engage in such training can significantly help students

improve their reading (Darling-Hammond, 2002). Therefore, whether researchers are looking at subject-specific education or pedagogical training, there is some degree of consensus that the teacher is the “common denominator” (Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011, p. 351) when it comes to student success and school improvement.

### *What Teachers Need to Know*

Secondary teachers are often certified to teach grade levels 6-12 or 8-12 (“Educator Certification,” 2013) and this assumes that a teacher has enough expertise to walk into any secondary classroom and teach their assigned subject at that level. As Milner (2013) pointed out, “Teaching is complex work requiring particular, specialized kinds of knowledge and skills to be effective” (p. 1). Teachers are required to teach students how to pass state mandated standardized exams and college entrance exams; they are charged with making sure that all students meet both federal and state levels of yearly progress; and, they are supposed to make sure their students leave their classrooms college-ready, regardless of whether or not their students entered the classroom at grade level or well below it. Quite simply, secondary teachers need a considerable knowledgebase in their assigned subject(s), they need to know how to successfully teach that subject, they need to know how to manage a classroom, they need to know how to meet administrative demands, and they need to know

how to do all of this while they keep their students engaged and manage discipline issues as they arise.

The educational expectations of students have risen over the years and “no educational issue today attracts more attention from the public and policymakers than ensuring that students are college- or career-ready and that America’s schools have the highest standards of teaching” (*Raising the Bar: Aligning*, 2012, p. 2). As a result, policymakers have turned their attention to teachers because, as studies have clearly shown, “The quality of teaching is the most important in-school factor in student learning” (p. 2). However, while student expectations have risen, the No Child Left Behind Act’s Highly Qualified Teacher requirements implemented in 2002, have not changed much. Additionally, to meet the needs of schools with teacher shortages, many educator preparation programs have reduced requirements and some schools of education have lowered standards (Darling-Hammond, 2000b; *Raising the Bar: Aligning*, 2012; Selwyn, 2007). Therefore, teacher candidates may be able to enter education programs under lowered standards, they may be required to take fewer courses, and they may choose to become certified to teach in an area that they have no expertise in; however, they are still expected successfully perform all of the duties that more complete every day.

Darling-Hammond (2000a) suggested, “the extent and quality of teacher education matter for teachers’ effectiveness, perhaps now even more than before”

(p.166). This is because schools have become much more diverse, the achievement levels that students are supposed to reach have increased, and the demands on teachers have steadily climbed (Darling-Hammond, 2000a). Compounding upon this, a secondary teacher can be moved, by a district, to any level he or she is certified to teach. Therefore, every secondary teacher, regardless of the grade level he or she currently teaches, is supposed to have enough expertise in his or her subject to meet state and federal standards for multiple grade levels of that subject, to prepare students to take multiple exams covering that subject, and to prepare students for college courses in that subject. As such, a secondary math teacher should be an expert in, and be able to teach, mathematical basics, Algebra I and II, geometry, trigonometry, statistics and probability, pre-calculus and calculus. A secondary science teacher should be an expert in and be able to teach biology, chemistry, and physics and work with science-based passages presented with graphs, charts, tables and research. Furthermore, the English language arts teacher should be well read and be an expert in and be able to teach grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, rhetorical skills, analytical writing, expository writing, persuasive writing, literary analysis, and critical reading (College Board, 2013; Texas Education Agency, 2013; The Princeton Review, 2013).

While subject specific education is clearly important, it cannot, however, stand-alone. Researchers have reported that teachers who have taken more

education/pedagogical courses are more likely to feel confident, are better able to encourage students, and are better able to deal with work-related obstacles (Darling-Hammond, 2000a; Eckert, 2013; Ferguson & Womack, 1993). There are also a number of studies that have found that teachers who graduated from longer collegiate education programs (typically 5-year programs) are more satisfied with their pedagogical preparation and education, are viewed by their co-workers as better prepared, are more effective, and are more likely to remain teaching professionals (Andrew, 1990; Andrew & Schwab, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 2000a; Denton & Peters, 1988). Moreover, studies of teachers with less pedagogical preparation report that these teachers tend to be dissatisfied with their certification program, have greater difficulties lesson planning, have difficulty teaching their subject, have weak classroom management, have more difficulty assessing student needs, and are more likely to leave the profession (Andrew, 1990; Andrew & Schwab, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 2000a; Eckert, 2013; Ferguson & Womack, 1993; Greenburg, Putman, & Walsh, 2013).

Therefore, secondary teachers are working in a very complex and demanding field with changing demographics and increased curricular expectations. In addition, research indicates that teacher candidates are much more likely to become effective teachers if they invest the time in their college career to become experts in their fields and well-versed in pedagogy and

classroom management. Thus, there does seem to be a connection between teacher education and expertise and success in the classroom.

### *Highly Qualified versus Effective Teachers*

The No Child Left Behind Act focuses on teacher education and certification, however, these factors alone cannot guarantee success. According to researchers, effective teachers share specific traits, engage in specific practices (Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Furthermore, “Effective teachers appear to be effective with students of all achievement levels, regardless of the level of heterogeneity in their classrooms” (Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997, p. 57).

Greenburg, Putman, and Walsh (2013), using three summaries of 150 studies that were conducted over the last 60 years, claimed that being an effective teacher has much to do with classroom management. Regardless of teacher expertise, a teacher must manage his/her classroom if (s)he is going to teach. Thus, the effective teacher has a well-managed classroom in which the teacher plans and implements routines and classroom norms before misbehavior and disruption occur. Along with this, effective teachers also engage in frequent positive interactions with students and maintain instructional focus (Greenburg, Putman, & Walsh, 2013; Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997).

Amongst the various studies on the effective teacher, there is some agreement on the five most prevalent strategies that these teachers use. First, the effective classroom has well-established rules that communicate classroom

expectations. Second, the effective teacher establishes routines that create structure and guide students. Third, the effective teacher reinforces positive behavior and does not focus on negative behavior. Fourth, when students do misbehave, there are consistent consequences for this behavior. Fifth, the effective classroom is filled with engaged students because the lessons within the classroom are interesting, invite student participation, and connect with students (Greenburg, Putman, & Walsh, 2013; Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011).

Stronge, Ward, and Grant (2011) expanding upon these five strategies, described the “four dimensions that characterize teacher effectiveness” (p. 340). The first two dimensions relate to teaching practices and describe instruction that is differentiated, focused on learning, clear, and complex. The next two dimensions relate to a positive learning environment that is created by physical classroom and the personality of the teacher. Effective teachers engage in teaching practices that provide a connection between the lessons and students, use technology, question students consistently, and continually assess their students (before, during, and after instruction). The effective classroom also maintains a positive learning environment in which students are productive and respectful and the teacher creates a positive climate where expectations are clear and reinforced from the first day of school (Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011).

When looking at effective and less effective teachers, critical differences that students respond to, surface. Effective teachers convey care for their students

and, as a result, their students enjoy higher levels of achievement. Less effective teachers, who do not convey this care for their students, are perceived by their students to be uncaring and these teachers have less success motivating their students. Effective teachers who are perceived by students to care, on average, only have “disruptions in their classrooms once an hour,” whereas less effective teachers who are perceived by students as uncaring, on average, “have disruptions every 20 minutes” (Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011, p. 348). Effective teachers encourage personal responsibility, are perceived as dedicated to their students, and develop connections with their students. However, less effective teachers may be more accusatory, may be perceived not to care about their students, and tend to lack student connection. (Covino & Iwanicki, 1996; Emmer, Evertson, & Worsham, 2003; Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011).

### *Challenges in Today's Schools*

Although students of color are expected to make up more than 50% of the public school population by the middle of this century, fewer than 20% of K-12 teachers are minorities (McDonald, 2005). As a result, many teachers find themselves unprepared to reach and relate to minority students and ask, “How will I relate to students who do not share my background” (McDonald, 2005, p. 419)? Furthermore, because schools are becoming increasingly diverse and teachers are finding themselves in situations where they must work with students who may differ in a variety of ways (for example, a teacher may be placed into a

classroom where students may be from differing races, cultures, socio-economic backgrounds, and intellectual abilities) thus, these teachers may be overwhelmed and unsure of how to reach all students (McDonald, 2005).

According to the National Education Association, half of all new K-12 teachers will leave the profession within the first five years (Lambert, 2006) citing a lack of support and poor working conditions. These beginning teachers “are particularly vulnerable, because they are more likely to be assigned low-performing students” (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2012) and, although they have less experience and are sometimes working in very challenging schools, most beginning teachers are given little to no professional support and feedback, and it is even less likely that these teachers will be given any sort of demonstration of what an effective teacher does and how to help his or her students succeed (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2012). Furthermore, many of beginning teachers are placed in the classroom after (or while currently) attending alternative teacher preparation programs focused more on certification exam preparation rather the necessary education and preparation teachers need in order to effectively deal with a variety of students in difficult teaching environments.

Shen, Mansberger, and Yang (2004), looking at teachers in schools that predominately serve students of color and low socio-economic students, pointed out that beginning teachers in these schools were more likely to have SAT and ACT scores in the lower quartile. For instance, in “schools where more than 50

percent of the students lived in poverty, 34 percent of the new teachers' SAT-  
ACT scores fell in the first quartile and only 8.0 percent in the fourth quartile" (p.  
230). On the other hand, when looking at schools where less than 4% of the  
students lived in poverty, "Only 8.6 percent of new teachers' SAT-ACT scores  
fell in the first quartile, but 22.9 percent fell in the fourth quartile" (p. 230). Shen,  
Mansberger, and Yang (2004) also looked at teachers who took remedial courses  
in reading, writing, and math during college and found statistically significant  
relationships between teachers who took these remedial courses in college and  
their employment within schools that predominately serve students of poverty.

Schools that face the greatest challenges are often the same schools where  
teachers who are least prepared are placed. As a result, a pattern emerges that sees  
less prepared teachers entering the schools who need the most prepared teachers,  
these new teachers receive little support or additional training, success rates of  
students assigned to these struggling teachers continue to fall, more demands are  
placed on these teachers as a result of falling student success rates, and then these  
teachers either flounder and become a less effective teacher or these teachers  
leave the profession, adding to the already high teacher attrition rate, opening a  
vacancy that will statistically, more than likely, be filled with another unprepared  
new teacher (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2012; Lambert, 2006; McDonald,  
2005).

Even when looking at teachers who are successful, who are described as effective, and those who report working in a *top school*, teacher attrition rates remain high. Research shows that teachers are more likely to stay in schools “where they feel successful, having created functional classrooms with students who are behaving appropriately and are academically engaged” (Greenburg, Putman, & Walsh, 2013, p. 1). However, many teachers cite “burnout” and describe teaching as “physically and emotionally exhausting” (*Perspectives of Irreplaceable Teachers*, 2013, p. 18). In a survey of top teachers administered by The New Teacher Project, teachers discussed challenges such as: “An excessive workload” (many stating that they work more than 60 hours a week), “insufficient time for planning or collaboration with other teachers,” and “poor school leadership” (*Perspectives of Irreplaceable Teachers*, 2013, p. 18). These teachers also expressed their concern about not being able to maintain the amount of energy it takes to teach for the duration of their careers; and, when these teachers were asked to describe the feeling they have when teaching, the most popular response was, “tired” (p. 18). Many of the respondents did report that they enjoyed their job “in spite of the way the teaching profession is structured, not because of it” (p. 24) and they reported finding “incredible fulfillment in their work with students” (p. 24). However, out of these respondents who reportedly represent some of the top teachers in America, 75% of them reported that they

plan to stop teaching at their school within five years and 60% reported that they plan to stop teaching within five years.

The challenges within today's schools are numerous. The demands on students and teachers have steadily risen. Student populations are becoming increasingly diverse, however, teaching educators how to reach a more diverse student population is neither mandated nor the norm (McDonald, 2005). To be better prepared for teaching, educators need more subject-specific, pedagogical, and classroom management education; however, teacher educational requirements have remained the same and, in some instances, they have decreased. Often, new unprepared/underprepared teachers who need the most help are placed in schools where students need the most help. Furthermore, when looking at teacher attrition rates, both effective and less effective teachers add to the problem citing issues such as: a lack of support, low pay and bureaucracy, and exhaustion due to the ever increasing demands placed upon them (*Perspectives of Irreplaceable Teachers*, 2013).

#### *What Teachers Have Said – Previous Research*

A review of existing literature on teacher education, training, and effectiveness, “reveals no shortage of opinions and philosophical essays concerning the kinds of knowledge that are essential to good teaching” (Sadler, Sonnert, Coyle, Cook-Smith, & Miller, 2013). However, as stated earlier, studies on the perceptions of teachers concerning their own education are few. As such,

searches via SAGE and ERIC looking for teacher's own perceptions of the Highly Qualified Teacher, their own education and training, and/or their own post NCLB teaching, returned only three studies that partially met the search criteria (Nieto, 2003; *Perspectives of irreplaceable teachers*, 2013; *Raising the Bar: Aligning*, 2012).

The first study, conducted by Nieto (2003), addressed the ongoing problem of teachers leaving the profession and sought to determine, from current teacher's points of view, notions of a Highly Qualified Teacher and asked why some teachers quit while others stay. The researcher led a group of Boston teachers through a one-year inquiry for which the researcher had no preset questions allowing discussions to evolve. The findings of the study revealed that the teachers felt that, "Rather than 'best practices' or prescribed pedagogy...a combination of interrelated conditions and values keeps excellent teachers going, including love, autobiography, hope, anger, intellectual work, and the ability to shape the future" (p. 386). The teachers in this study focused more on personal relationships and creating communities than they did on certification and educational qualifications. These teachers also expressed that, "The profession of teaching, although enormously significant in the lives of so many people, is terribly undervalued, undercompensated, and underrespected" (p. 396). As a result of this one year study, the following conclusions were made: 1) The ways that teachers are currently prepared to teach (professional development and

education courses) needs to change; 2) Teachers need to know more about their students; 3) A more diverse teaching population needs to be recruited; 4) There is not enough time to do everything teachers need to do; and 5) “No amount of decontextualized best practices” (p. 396) will prevent teachers from leaving the profession or make them more committed.

The second study conducted by the American Federation of Teachers’ (AFT) Teacher Preparation Task Force surveyed new teachers in an effort to better understand what must be done to “ensure teachers are adequately prepared to meet the demands of teaching in the 21st century” (*Raising the Bar: Aligning*, 2012, p. 2). AFT reported that there have been “improvements in teacher preparation programs such as a more rigorous focus on subject-area knowledge, extending programs to five years,” and that these improvements are helping somewhat; however, the teacher surveys still reported that, “A significant number of new teachers do not feel as prepared as they should to be effective beginning teachers” (p. 3). The new teachers surveyed reported feeling underprepared to deal with classroom discipline, managing time effectively, and lesson planning. Fewer than half of the respondents described their education training as “good,” most citing that their program failed to prepare them for the real world of teaching and all of the challenges that accompany teaching; and, of these respondents, those who received alternative training were “much more likely to report feeling unprepared than [were] the teachers who received traditional training” (p. 3).

Respondents also stated that on-the-job learning and assistance from fellow teachers helped them more than their formal training and offered that teacher education could be improved by offering more mentorship opportunities and by the establishment of “peer networks” (p. 3).

As a result of the new teacher responses, the task force recommended that the bar should be raised for entry into the teaching profession, “Preparation programs [should have] appropriate entrance requirements that ensure those students who choose to pursue a teaching career are academically ready and committed” (*Raising the Bar: Aligning*, 2012, p. 12). The task force added that educator preparation should include rigorous training that included theoretical study, as well as, clinical practice, a deep examination of subject and pedagogical knowledge, and that teacher candidates should be required to demonstrate teaching ability through “performance assessment” (p. 3). In addition to raising the educational bar, the task force suggested three additional significant educational reforms: 1) All stakeholders must collaborate to ensure that teacher preparation standards, programs and assessments are aligned with a well-grounded vision of effective teaching; 2) Teaching, like other respected professions, must have a universal assessment process for entry that includes rigorous preparation centered on clinical practice as well as theory, an in-depth test of subject and pedagogical knowledge, and a comprehensive teacher performance assessment; and 3) Primary responsibility for setting and enforcing

the standards of the profession and ensuring the quality and coherence of teacher preparation programs must reside with members of the profession—practicing professionals in K-12 and higher education (*Raising the Bar: Aligning*, 2012).

The third study, conducted by The New Teacher Project (TNTP), sought to ask “117 of America’s best teachers, representing 36 states and all 10 of the nation’s largest school districts” what they think about teaching (*Perspectives of irreplaceable teachers*, 2013, p. 1). TNTP described their goal as, “Simply to listen” (p. 1) to this group of teachers and to get their insights about their work, profession, and the major policy issues that their schools face. Based on the results of the survey, TNTP reported that, “Great teachers see successful teaching as multidimensional” (p. 9). Furthermore, the teachers reported that, “Practice, in the form of trying different lessons and teaching methods over time (100% agreed or strongly agreed); observations of other teachers at work (93%); advice or feedback from their colleagues (92%); and advice or feedback from their students (87%)” (p. 12) helped them the most to become effective teachers. These responses, however, were in stark contrast to their responses pertaining to their formal pedagogical training programs.

Many participants expressed that their pre-service training “was not very useful over the long run” and almost half disagreed that their training “had helped them improve the quality of their teaching” (*Perspectives of irreplaceable teachers*, 2013, p. 12). In fact, when asked to choose something that improved the

quality of their teaching, “The teacher preparation I received prior to obtaining my first full-time teaching job” (p. 12) was chosen *least*. On top of this, respondents reported that formal professional development at their school was not “especially helpful either” (p. 12). When asked details about their pedagogical training, respondents’ answers also suggested a “troubling lack of rigor in their training programs” (p. 12). For example, “59 percent said that nearly all their classmates successfully completed training—even those who didn’t work very hard;” and almost half reported that, their program “granted certification” (p. 12) to all candidates, even those who could not demonstrate success in the classroom (*Perspectives of irreplaceable teachers*, 2013).

TNTP also asked their respondents about their views on ineffective teaching and teachers. Collectively, the respondents expressed that, ineffective teaching is a significant problem and 90% of the respondents expressed concern that ineffective teaching is “negatively affecting the reputation of the teaching profession” (p. 10). When asked about the most common mistake ineffective teachers make, other than the top identified problem of poor classroom management, the respondents reported that these teachers have low expectations, do not seek help, and that they blame their students for all of their classroom issues. Finally, among the top three challenges that these respondents reported facing, having to work with ineffective teachers ranked fourth (*Perspectives of irreplaceable teachers*, 2013).

The final portion of the survey dealt with the respondent's feelings about teaching and teacher attrition. The most prevalent response to their feelings about teaching was, "They cherish the fulfillment that comes from making a difference in their students' lives" and that they love the actual work of teaching (*Perspectives of irreplaceable teachers*, 2013, p. 18). However, respondents did not report loving any other aspects of their jobs. Very few of the respondents reported that "compensation, career advancement opportunities [and/or] working conditions" kept them in the classroom (p. 18). And, when asked about teacher attrition, over 60% of respondents reported that they planned to leave teaching within five years (*Perspectives of irreplaceable teachers*, 2013).

There is much research showing the importance of the student-teacher connection. Where there is a connection, where there are positive relationships built, students tend to enjoy more academic success. Researchers have also studied the effects of teacher education on student success (Darling-Hammond, L., 2000a; Darling-Hammond, L., Berry, B., & Thoreson, A., 2001; Dee, T. S., & Cohodes, S. R., 2008). The results of these studies have shown that educational experience and pedagogical trainings do have an impact on student success and classroom management. In part, the ability to successfully manage a classroom helps to define a teacher as effective; and while there is no set definition of what is means to be effective, researchers have developed a list of practices shared by many effective teachers in challenging schools. However, what there does seem to

be a lack of are teacher voices. Teachers are required to meet specific governmental standards, they are required to manage their classrooms to meet specific standards, and they are expected to teach their students to reach specific standards. However, there is minimal research showing how the above is perceived in the classroom, what teachers think they need educationally and pedagogically, and asking what policy changes teachers would like to see. This study seeks to be a starting point to change that.

## Chapter 3

### Theoretical Framework

Critical theory is built upon the principles of social justice and when applied to educational issues, “questions the existing economic, political, and social purposes of schooling and examines policy through the lens of oppressed groups, with a normative orientation toward freeing disenfranchised groups from conditions of domination and subjugation” (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Randall, 2004, p. 9). Policy analyses from the perspective of critical theory focuses on the obvious and hidden uses of power through which “policy is transformed into power” (Morrison, 2001, p. 216). To do this, critical educational theorists study the relationships between schools and society and ask if inequality is reduced or perpetuated by various policies and curricula. Critical educational theorists seek to determine who is defining what is worthwhile, how power is produced and reproduced, and whose interests are best served with certain educational policies (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Randall, 2004; Freire, 2011; Held, 2004; Morrison, 2001). Using critical theory as a lens for this study focuses attention on the power structures at play behind the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Further focus is then applied to the definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher and whether or not this definition has reduced or perpetuated inequality within our schools.

Jurgen Habermas’ critical theory suggested that the ideologies of educational policy be critiqued to expose operations of “ideology in many spheres

of society and education and the working out of vested interests under the mantle of the general good...revealing to participants how they may be acting to perpetuate a system which keeps them either empowered or disempowered” (Morrison, 2001, p. 216.). Habermas also offered that this ideological critique can best be addressed in four stages. Stage one presents a description and analysis of the current policy/situation. Stage two requires an examination of the reasoning behind the current policy/situation. Stage three offers a plan for altering any policy/situation that perpetuates inequality and/or disempowerment. Stage four presents an evaluation of the policy/situation once the proposed changes are implemented (Morrison, 2001). For the purpose of this study, Habermas’ stages one through three will be utilized.

Critical theory seeks to determine how things are, suggests how things should be, and offers a plan for change, therefore, it is descriptive and prescriptive. Critical educational theory is practical and seeks to make modifications within the system. (Bronner, 2011; Cooper, Fusarelli, & Randall; Finlayson, 2005; Morrison, 2001). To make these modifications, critical theory not only addresses policy, but it also seeks to transform individuals from dominated objects into active subjects who are self-determining (Comstock, 1982; Cooper, Fusarelli, & Randall, 2004; Foster, 1986; Held, 2004). As such, researchers have focused on issues such as administrative practices that reinforce traditional power structures and promote inequalities, how schools engage in

exclusion practices, and the ideologies that schools use to justify such behaviors (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Randall, 2004; Fine, 1993; Foster, 1986; Reyes & Capper, 1991; Scheurich & Imber, 1991). This research seeks to inform policy and, in turn, aid in transforming individuals (teachers) and classrooms (the education that students receive). As written, the current NCLB definition of the HQT leaves many teachers unprepared for the realities of the classroom. As a result, these teachers enter the classroom feeling lost and completely dependent upon others (for example, administrators, curriculum writers, colleagues) to provide them with curricula and to assist them with classroom management. However, if the definition of the HQT ensured that these teachers entered the classroom as experts in their assigned subject(s) and as experts in pedagogy, then these teachers would be much more likely to be self-determining professionals who are better prepared to effectively teach their students, regardless of student background. As such, it is likely that these self-determining professionals would greatly reduce the number of ineffective teachers working with at-risk students and lessen the perpetuation of inequality in our schools.

## Chapter 4

### Research Design

Creswell (2013) described qualitative research as “an inquiry process of understanding based on a distinct methodological tradition of inquiry that explores a social or human problem” (p. 249). As such, this study required a qualitative research design to gain an in-depth understanding of current Highly Qualified Teacher’s perceptions of how well their collegiate and pedagogical education (as required by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) prepared them for the realities of the classroom. Through the use of multiple methods (for example, demographic questionnaires, interviews, the collection of documents and artifacts, and reflective and analytical memos) for gathering data, this qualitative research enabled me to capture the perceptions of these Highly Qualified Teachers.

#### *Methodology*

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe the word “qualitative” as one that implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on the meanings and processes that experimentally examined or measured. Qualitative researchers emphasize the constructed nature of reality, the relationship between the researcher and what is being studied, the situations that shape the research, and how social experiences are constructed and given meaning.

Merriam (2009) described basic qualitative research as underlined by

constructionism and one in which the “researcher is interested in understanding the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved” (p. 22). She added that the qualitative researcher, for this type of study, would be “interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 23). The purpose of the qualitative researcher using a basic qualitative research design is to understand in what ways people make sense of their lives and experiences.

Although all qualitative research, as described above, seeks to understand how people make sense of their experiences, some studies have added dimensions. For example a phenomenological study:

Seeks understanding about the essence and the underlying structure of a phenomenon. Ethnography strives to understand the interaction of individuals not just with others, but also with the culture of the society in which they live. A grounded theory study seeks not just to understand, but also to build a substantive theory about the phenomenon of interest. (Merriam, 2009, p. 23)

Narrative analysis takes stories people tell and analyses them to understand experiences as revealed through the stories (Merriam, 2009).

Basic qualitative studies, although found in all disciplines, are “the most common form of qualitative research found in education” (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). This is understandable given that educational research often seeks to improve and/or understand how to improve the practice of education. Basic qualitative research allows researchers to study educational practices, study how interpret

those practices, study how people construct their worlds in which they implement those practices, and it allows researchers to study the meanings attributed to these practices.

Because this study looked at the No Child Left Behind Act's definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher and described how this policy has been/is being interpreted and how it has affected and continues to affect the ways in which educators construct their real-world classrooms, I believe that a basic qualitative research design was the best choice. Merriam (2009) characterized educational research as studies with a practical purpose that often look to better the practice of education, this study is no exception. Along with determining how HQTs interpret and construct their educational worlds, this study hopes to inform the decisions of future policymakers when making educational reforms to NCLB's definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher.

#### *Research Site*

I chose school districts within Texas because the No Child Left Behind Act was "primarily based on education reforms that originated in Texas" (Resmotiv, 2013), the state in which former President George W. Bush served as governor. The Texas Education Agency divided Texas school districts into 20 regions (Education Service Centers Map, 2014). I chose schools within Region 11 because of their proximity to me, because I am professionally acquainted with educators within multiple Region 11 school districts, and because this region

contains a wide range of public school districts serving a multitude of populations. Region 11 covers 77 public schools in northern Texas. The districts within Region 11 range from large urban districts to small rural districts. Region 11 serves over 467,000 students and has over 53,000 educators ("Texas School Districts - Region," 2014). Furthermore, because NCLB specifically targeted at-risk, students of color, and low-socioeconomic student populations, I chose educators who work in large, urban, secondary (9<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> grades) schools within Region 11 that are currently serving these populations.

#### *Participant Selection and Recruitment Strategies*

Creswell (2013) explained that the “sample size in qualitative research generally follows the guidelines to study a few individuals or sites” (p. 126). Merriam (2009) stated that when researchers consider the number of individuals to include within their sample that there is “no answer” (p. 80). However, she did suggest that the interviewer continue sampling “until redundancy is reached” (p. 80).

For the purpose of this study, I interviewed individuals from various secondary schools and districts within the Region 11 service area. All participants met the following criteria: 1) be a NCLB defined HQT; 2) work within Region 11 in a school serving 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade students; 3) work with at-risk students; 4) teach one of the core subjects (English, math, science, and social studies); 5) already completed year of teaching; 6) were willing to be interviewed off campus;

7) were willing to submit pictures of their classrooms; and 8) were willing to allow me to collect a syllabus and sample curricula from their classes.

In part, I used convenience sampling for this study. Convenience sampling occurs when a researcher selects a sample based on “time, money, location, and availability” (Merriam, 2009, p. 79). Although, according to Merriam (2009), this method used alone is considered “not very credible” (p. 79), I used it in conjunction with snowball sampling. Snowball sampling, the most common form of purposeful sampling, involves “locating a few key participants who easily meet the criteria” (p. 79) and these key participants refer me to other participants.

I had three primary participants, on whom I used convenience sampling. These primary participants all teach 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade each within a different school and each within a different district within Region 11. These educators are former colleagues, none of us currently work together, however, we have stayed in touch via social media, and we occasionally engage in professional development together. I interviewed these three educators and then ask each of them to recommend other interviewees who meet the above criteria. Because English, mathematics, science, and social studies are most frequently considered *the core* in U.S. schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2011), the pool for this study was composed of core teachers from each subject. My complete sample consists of two teachers from each of the core areas. Therefore, my sample size consists of 8 secondary teachers.

### *Data Collection*

This study took place during the spring semester of the 2014-2015 academic year. The qualitative methods that I used for this study included demographic questionnaires, interviews, the collection of documents and artifacts, and reflective and analytical memos.

A demographic questionnaire was used to collect personal data from the participants. I obtained information pertaining to their previous professional backgrounds, as well as, their educational pedagogical backgrounds (see Appendix C). Pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of the participants and any information about individuals, institutions, and practices associated with them.

Marshall and Rossman (2011) recommended an in-depth interview strategy for studies that focus on “individual lived experiences” (p. 93). This study focused on individual perspectives of HQTs, therefore, the in-depth one-on-one interview was my primary data collection approach to impart the perspectives of what these current, secondary, Highly Qualified Teachers feel it takes to be prepared to enter the classroom and how they feel the government’s requirements for becoming a HQT helped them to prepare for the realities of the classroom. Creswell (2013) recommended developing at least five well-developed interview questions, conducting a semi-structured interview, and recording and transcribing each interview. Maxwell (2013) explains that, “structured approaches can help

ensure the comparability of data across individuals, times, settings, and researchers” (p. 88) while less structured approaches allow researchers “to focus on the particular phenomena being studied” (p. 88). However, Miles and Huberman (1994) cautioned that a “loose, inductive design is a waste of time” (p. 17) in certain situations. As such, I wrote well-developed interview questions to allow for comparability of data, however, I also invited interviewees to discuss topics not on my protocol in order to open the interview up and allow for a more contextual understanding.

Each semi-structured interview was conducted at a location of the participants choosing using the same protocol for each interviewee. Interview questions focused on the interviewee’s personal experiences as an undergraduate student, as a candidate in a teacher preparation program, and as a Highly Qualified Teacher who was teaching in a school that serves at-risk students (see Appendix D).

Merriam (2009) pointed out that documents, which include public records, personal papers, visual documents, physical materials, and artifacts, serve as a major data source in qualitative research. She added that documents of all types can help the researcher discover insights and develop meaning and understanding. Furthermore, because documents “exist independent of a research agenda” (p. 156) they are not affected by the research process and serve as a “product of the context in which they were produced and therefore grounded in the real world” (p.

156). To gain more insight into the world that my interviewees have constructed, I asked each participant for the following documents: 1) the course syllabus; 2) the course curriculum; and 3) photos of participant's classroom. In addition, I asked for any other artifacts that they felt would help me to better understand their teaching experiences. During the interview, I asked my participants questions pertaining to the documents and artifacts that I collected. I also contacted several of them (via instant message, email and online), after the initial interviews, and asked them follow up questions and for clarification.

Just as Creswell (2013) recommended, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Maxwell (2013) described memos as, "one of the most important techniques for developing your ideas" (p. 20). He adds to think of memos as a way of "understanding your topic, setting, or study" and recommends writing "lots of memos throughout the course of your research project" (p. 20). Memos were a primary technique for developing my ideas and analyzing my data. I wrote both post-interview reflective and analytical memos.

### *Data Analysis*

I was interested in uncovering and interpreting how meaning is constructed for Highly Qualified Teachers and how they make sense of their duties as educators. Merriam states that, "The analysis of data involves identifying recurring patterns that characterize the data. Findings are these recurring patterns or themes supported by the data from which they were derived"

(p. 23). As such, I analyzed my data looking for recurring patterns and themes. To accomplish this analysis, I personally transcribed all interviews and then coded these instances. I also wrote analytical memos pertaining to these findings and my interpretations.

Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that, “coding is analysis. To review a set of field notes, transcribed or synthesized, and to dissect them meaningfully, while keeping the relations between the parts intact, is the stuff of analysis” (p. 56). They further explained that, “codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (p. 56). Therefore, my primary method of analysis was coding.

Miles and Huberman (1994) recommended several coding approaches, predefined, accounting-scheme guided, and postdefined. For the purpose of this study, I chose a predefined coding approach. This approach required that I create a provisional start list of codes prior to fieldwork. This list came from the conceptual framework, research questions, problem areas, and key variables that I brought to the study. The start list can have 12 to 60 codes; I began with 17. These codes were then put into a list composed of three columns. The first column listed the general category; the second column listed the code (in this case, it is not the words themselves but the meaning behind the code words that matter); and the third column listed the research question from which the code was derived (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Once I completed my initial list, I read

through the data and assigned my predefined codes to chunks or lines of data. As my analysis continued, I assigned more general “etic” level codes and then more specific “emic” level codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 61).

As Miles and Huberman (1994) warn, it is possible that some codes will not end up working while others flourish too much. For those that did not work (there were 6), I deleted them; for those that flourished and resulted in “bulk,” I developed sub-topics. After my initial coding, I looked at the data for “surfacing”- identifying new categories and “bridging” seeing new relationships (p. 62). My coding maintained a “relational structure with larger more conceptually inclusive instances and smaller more differentiated instances” (p. 62).

Some researchers save coding for the end of data collection, however, Miles and Huberman (1994) warned that this is a “serious mistake because late coding enfeebles the analysis” (p. 65). Coding is a form of “early (and continuing) analysis” (p. 65) and “ongoing coding uncovers real or potential bias” (p.65). Because of this, I began my coding as soon as I collected my first set of data and I coded the “previous set of field notes before the next trip to the site” (p.65) to work out any issues and to look for any additions and/or clarifications that I wanted to add to my next interview.

All of my coding was conducted within the NVivo (a qualitative data analysis software) environment. Using NVivo allowed me to code each participant’s transcribed interviews and then run queries looking for units of

meaning similar in all participant responses. I was also able to run queries to look for specific phrases and words to better connect participant responses to the themes that emerged. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and entered into NVivo. All interview recordings were uploaded into NVivo, and all collected artifacts were digitally imported into NVivo.

Finally, while coding, the theoretical framework chosen for this study (critical education theory) informed my data analysis in that I sought to determine if inequality is reduced or perpetuated by the realities of the requirements set forth by NCLB as described by the interviewees. Furthermore, when looking at the curricula and syllabi of the interviewees, I sought to determine who is defining what is worthwhile and whose interests are being served (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Randall, 2004; Freire, 2011; Held, 2004; Morrison, 2001).

#### Trustworthiness

Validity deals with questioning how closely research findings match reality. Furthermore, as described by Merriam (2009), validity “hinges on the meaning of reality” (p. 213). However, the concept of “reality” is so abstract that it would be impossible to declare that anything was the absolutely real or a true depiction of reality. Therefore, data, which is always interpreted or translated, is better assessed with a notion of “credibility” (p. 213). This being the case, there are steps that can be taken to better ensure that findings are more credible. For the purpose of this study, in an attempt to increase credibility, I used three validity

strategies: 1) member checks, 2) researcher's position/reflexivity, and 3) triangulation.

Member checks required me to “take data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and [ask] if they are plausible” (Merriam, 2009, p. 229). Maxwell (2009) described this process as:

The single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your biases and misunderstandings of what [the researcher] observed,” (p. 127)

My sample was somewhat small which allowed me to be able to return to my interviewees and engage in member checking. I accomplished this via email, instant messaging, and in person meetings.

Researcher's position/reflexivity is “critical self reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation” (Merriam, 2009, p. 229). I engaged in self-reflection post interview and post member check. Maxwell (2013) offered questions for researchers to ask during this process and I answered as many of these questions as I could: “How might your results and conclusions be wrong? What are plausible alternative interpretations and validity threats to these results and conclusions...? How could the data that you have, or that you could potentially collect, support or challenge your ideas about what's going on? Why should we believe your results” (p. 4)?

As described by Merriam (2009), triangulation is “using multiple investigators, sources of data, or data collection methods to confirm emerging findings” (p. 229). Creswell (2013) offered that, “In triangulation, researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence...when qualitative researchers locate evidence to document a code or theme in different sources of data, they are triangulating information and providing validity to their findings” (p. 208). I used triangulation for this study by triangulating sampling methods: using semi-structured interview questions, demographic surveys, and by collecting artifacts that also sparked a more conversational interview discussion; and by triangulating data sources: interviews, memos, teacher curricula and syllabi. Through the use of this process, I gained a more complete picture of participant perspectives and added to the credibility of this study.

#### Role of the Researcher

Since I was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, I was mindful of my own biases and expectations. I have been in education for over 10 years, taught in both secondary and post-secondary settings, and I have served in supervisory positions. I am also a NCLB defined Highly Qualified Teacher with experience teaching students of color, at-risk, and low-socioeconomic students. Furthermore, I taught in secondary schools when the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act were first implemented.

My long history in the public school system allowed me to watch and feel the effects of the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act. My previous supervisory positions allowed me the opportunities to work with and observe both effective and non-effective Highly Qualified Teachers. All of these experiences have shaped my views; however, it is also because of these experiences that I first began pursuing this area of research and that I feel I have a greater understanding of the issues surrounding both the realities of the classroom and the realities of policy implementation.

When interviewing, I was conscious of my potential biases and I was careful not to project my own views onto my interviewees. I also approached these interviews without expectations because, while I also have experiences as a Highly Qualified Teacher, I was aware that my experiences are mine and I was mindful that these experiences might differ from those of my interviewees. Maxwell (2013) pointed out that memo writing is an important way of identifying “biases and misunderstandings” (p. 127) and advised that for all memoing, the researcher must “engage in serious reflection, analysis, and self-critique” (p. 20). Therefore, to become more aware of my own potential and projected biases and views, I engaged in memo writing in which I, as Merriam (2009) suggested, critically self-reflected about my assumptions, my educational views, and my and relationship, as an educator, to the study.

## Chapter 5

### Highly Qualified Participants

For this study I asked eight secondary NCLB defined Highly Qualified Teachers to meet with me and discuss their experiences. This chapter begins by discussing the requirements I set forth for becoming a study participant. I then discuss the results of the demographic data that I collected from each participant and explain how the study participants are similar and how they differ (see Appendix E). The chapter then introduces each of the study participants by providing a brief history of their educational and pedagogical backgrounds and some of their experiences working in the “real world” as Highly Qualified Teachers.

#### Participant Criteria and Demographic Results

The criteria of the study called for each participant to 1) be a NLCB defined HQT; 2) work within Region 11 in a school serving 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade students; 3) work with at-risk students; 4) teach one of the core subjects (English, math, science, and social studies); 5) have already completed a year of teaching; 6) be willing to be interviewed off campus; 7) be willing to submit pictures of their classrooms; and 8) be willing to allow me to collect a syllabus and sample curricula from their classes.

In addition to gathering information pertaining to the criteria above,

demographic data was collected from each participant. The data revealed that half of the participants earned a bachelor's degree and half earned a master's. Half attended an alternative certification program and half attended a traditional university certification program. Three of the participants began teaching prior to receiving their certification and five of the participants earned full certification prior teaching. Six of the participants reported teaching a subject that they majored in (in-field teaching) while two participants reported teaching a subject that they had little to no education in (out-of-field teaching). Ages of the participants ranged from 28 years to 43 years and their teaching experience ranges from 3 years to 13 years. Six of the participants are female and two are male. Six of the participants described their race as "white" or "Caucasian," one described her race as "Native American," and one described her race as "Asian."

*Vivian*

The only reason I am a decent English teacher is because I received my education in English, that is my bachelor's. I was able to pick from every type of genre and from every time period. It really helped me. You should not be able to take a test and then be considered "qualified." People can BS their way through anything.

Vivian, Highly Qualified English Teacher

Vivian attended college in Florida, majored in English and creative writing, and originally planned on becoming a college professor. Toward this goal, Vivian took close to double the number required English courses for her bachelor's degree. After earning her bachelor's degree, Vivian moved to Texas

and began working on her master's degree in English; however, as she explained, "we had children and other things and the master's degree that I was going for in English had to be put on hold and a job had to come about." Therefore, Vivian entered an alternative certification program to gain secondary certification and to begin working quickly.

Vivian felt that her college education had benefitted her greatly as a teacher. She said that she used the knowledge that she gleaned from her English courses daily and that this knowledge allowed her to teach her subject with creativity. She also felt that her education provided her with the tools she needed to provide background information for the topics she covers, with the ability to differentiate instruction, and with the ability to help students prepare for standardized exams.

Vivian did not describe her pedagogical education as a positive experience or a worthwhile investment. She did not feel that alternative programs provide teacher candidates with the knowledge and training needed to enter the classroom. Vivian expressed some regret for choosing an alternative program and when asked what her program did to prepare her for the demands of teaching she replied, "Absolutely nothing." She went on to say that she was pregnant and working when trying to obtain certification, so, she felt that an alternative online program was her only choice; however, after experiencing the realities of teaching, she questioned her decision. Because Vivian felt so underprepared for

the classroom, she explained that she had to supplement her alternative training, “I went, on my own, to go sit in classrooms to observe other teachers to try to learn.”

Vivian has been teaching for three years and described her teaching experiences positively and said that although she originally wanted to work in higher education, she believed she was where she was supposed to be. She expressed loving her students and the grade that she taught. Vivian’s room was student centered, meaning that her desks were set up for student engagement and that the majority of work on her walls was student created and/or educational materials. Vivian also spread student work outside of her room so that her student’s work could be shared with the whole school. When I asked Vivian about the student work on her walls she expressed, “I love student work and I love keeping it and displaying it because the students are proud when their work is shown. Even if it may not always be what I thought in my head was ideal, they are proud of it. So I have to remind myself that everyone has their own measure of greatness.”

Throughout the interview Vivian discussed what her students needed and how much she wanted to help them to succeed. For instance, Vivian explained that she engaged in one on one sessions with her students during which she went over all of their work, discussed areas for improvement, and got to know them better. During the interview, Vivian explained how she was not just a teacher to

her students. She expressed that she cared for them and worried about them. She said that to be a teacher a person really needed some training in counseling because students can become very close to their teachers and may not have anyone else. Vivian, a relatively new teacher, admitted that she still had much to learn and was very open to working with and listening to others to better her craft and to better prepare her students. Similar to her realization that her students had their own measure of greatness, Vivian's original measure of greatness (becoming a college professor) had clearly changed since her early days as an undergraduate student. Now, Vivian strives to do whatever it takes to be the most effective she can be.

### *Orwellia*

In middle school...they have these certificates for "generalists" and they can teach anything. So like, if your degree was English but you're certified as a generalist, you could teach science and that doesn't make any sense to me. How are you highly qualified if your degree is English but you're teaching science?

### Orwellia, Highly Qualified English Teacher

Orwellia was born and raised in East Texas and attended a Texas university. When she began college, she said she had no idea what she wanted to do. Orwellia said her family and friends encouraged her to become a teacher but, the more they pushed, the farther away from teaching she moved. However, because Orwellia chose to be an English major, she said she really left herself with few choices. So, after completing her degree, she decided to begin teaching

with an emergency permit and to take courses toward certification through her university.

Although Orwellia's certification was offered through the university, it was not part of a traditional certification program and she was not required to complete student teaching because she was already teaching. As a result, when Orwellia first began teaching, she had no teaching experience, no pedagogical training, and no idea what to do. She was shown to her classroom and given a textbook and keys. Orwellia recalled her first year teaching with much turmoil. She said she was working full time, taking education courses, received little to no help, and was assigned ESL (English as a Second Language) students with behavioral problems. Orwellia recalled one incident where one of her boys, who had just returned from juvenile detention, picked up a large textbook and threw it at her head, "I instinctively ducked. I have no idea how I moved that quickly, but I am glad I did. That book was heavy and it was thick. It would have hurt a lot."

Orwellia said that she had great difficulty managing her classroom her first year and that she received no formal training on classroom management from her certification program. As Orwellia described it, "My student discipline my first year was awful. But it wasn't my program that helped me; it was my school. They sent me to a weeklong classroom management PD through Region 1. It was the greatest thing and I still use it today." Orwellia recalled that before that one-week classroom management training, she was thinking of quitting teaching.

However, after 13 years of teaching, when I asked Orwellia about her future goals and plans, she responded:

Well, I'm a freak. Most of my friends go on to get master's, they move up. They become principals and AP's. My goal is to teach and I want to stay in the classroom as long as possible. I enjoy the struggle of the classroom. I also hate the struggle of the classroom. Some days I'll come home and I want to pull my hair out because the kids are driving me crazy and they just don't get it. Other days I come home and they've gotten it and it's magical. It makes sense and they finally understand it. So yeah, my goal is to stay in the classroom as long as possible.

Orwellia had a very colorful and student centered room. Her desk area and surrounding walls were bursting with tchotchkes, notes, cards, and pictures from her students. She had posters from the floor up to the ceiling and all of her cabinets were topped with student projects from the past and present. In addition, Orwellia had quite a few toys sprinkled throughout her room including a large stuffed Patrick Starfish (from *SpongeBob SquarePants*) and a SpongeBob piñata wearing a sombrero that she and her students named, "Bob Espongea." When asked about her room she explained:

My desks are set up for student engagement. I want them to talk to each other using accountable talk...My students know exactly what to do. The wall full of projects, there's only four store-bought posters on the wall because I want the kids to see that their work is important to me. I want to show them that they are important to me and I keep their stuff with me year after year and rotate things out. It's not just all talk. I value them.

Orwellia's room, filled with student work from all of her years of teaching, spoke volumes about her commitment to students and how much she really valued them. Furthermore, listening to the excitement in Orwellia's voice

as she discussed her students and as she recalled past classroom experiences, conveyed that her enthusiasm for teaching and for helping kids was not “all talk.” Orwellia has been teaching for 13 years, yet she reported that she continued to voluntarily attend professional development institutes. In addition to her formal trainings, Orwellia continually researches for new teaching methods and for new assignment and project ideas. Orwellia explained that she spent her nights and weekends grading or researching to better her craft. She was clearly a very dedicated teacher and, based on the items all around her desk, her students love and admire her.

*Tiffany*

Some people are good test takers and it’s a multiple-choice test. You can pass a test having minimal knowledge, depending on what questions you get. But that doesn’t mean that you’re highly qualified, it doesn’t mean you’ve gone through the training of how to teach math.

Tiffany, Highly Qualified Math Teacher

Tiffany was born and raised in North Texas and attended a Texas university. She explained that, while in high school, she knew she wanted to get a math degree. Although she was not completely sure what she would do with her math degree, she had an idea that she would either be an accountant or a teacher. When she began college, Tiffany decided that she wanted to go into teaching and majored in math education. After completing her bachelor’s in math, Tiffany completed a master’s degree in math.

Tiffany felt that both her content and pedagogical educations were

thorough and prepared her for success. She chose to pursue a degree in math education rather than math and she said that this decision explained her ability to manage a classroom well and her ability to come up with creative lessons. As part of her traditional teacher preparation program, Tiffany was required to student teach. While Tiffany felt that all educational programs lack some degree of reality (what it is like teaching in the real classroom) and that all programs would benefit from more honesty, she did report feeling that her student teaching experiences provided her with a glimpse of reality. Tiffany also felt that her student teaching gave her the tools and confidence that she needed when she actually began teaching. Tiffany taught for one semester under the supervision of a middle school teacher and expressed that this experience was very beneficial:

What I learned from that teacher, she taught me how she ran a classroom. I watched how she ran the classroom, how she interacted with parents, what she did in meetings, and that helped me take it to my classroom. I could think back on, okay I already watched someone else do this in a different situation but its similar to what's going on now, kinda like an example set, like this is how she runs a classroom, and I can copy that till I figure out how I want to run mine.

When asked if her college program could have done anything more to better prepare her, Tiffany responded:

Honestly I think the program that I took did a pretty good job overall covering all of the bases. We had learning classes and content classes. If I could take another, it would probably be more secondary content—how to apply that within the classroom. Like taking algebra II content, how would you take the content and apply it in the classroom?

Tiffany's classroom was very organized and clean. She had a specific

color theme throughout her room and had matching material on her bulletin boards and podium. Tiffany even made drapes out of the material for her windows and found matching boardette to outline her dry erase and bulletin boards. Tiffany's room did not display student work and did have a moderate amount of white space. What she did have up was very well organized and educational in purpose. When I asked about her desks, Tiffany explained:

I keep my desks either grouped in two's, three's or four's following the cooperative learning models where students work together to get things accomplished. I don't do rows because it takes up too much space and the students seem to be more resistant. If you group them, they seem like they are more willing to work.

Although Tiffany has been teaching a relatively short time, five years, she has taught both high school and college and she taught many math subjects: geometry, pre-calculus, AP statistics, algebra II, TAKS remediation, finite math, intermediate algebra, and college algebra. When I asked Tiffany about her future goals and plans she said:

I want to continually learn my content area and continue to grow as a teacher and in the knowledge of math. I like the area of developing curriculum. And I think maybe, possibly, if I ever leave the classroom, it will be to write and research curriculum and things to use in the classroom that are beneficial for teachers.

I asked Tiffany if she ever saw herself leaving secondary to teach full time at the college level and she said, "Right now I am very happy teaching and I also like picking up adjunct jobs at universities...I really like teaching."

Tiffany's education and her willingness to move beyond her subject and

get to know her students and what may be ailing them, was a testament to her commitment to be a great teacher. Tiffany spoke about her student's needs with great concern and demonstrated a deep understanding of her subject. Tiffany also recognized the need to take a subject that many struggle with, math, and apply it to the real world in an attempt to help her students better connect with difficult concepts. As she spoke about her students and her subject, it was clear that, just as she said, Tiffany really was very happy teaching.

### *Militario*

If someone is really not good at statistics, you want to know. Wouldn't you want to know how they are by subject and put the teacher where they ought to go? Someone could have missed everything about a subject on a composite test but still pass the test. And they could be put in that subject. So, really, are you getting a Highly Qualified Teacher? No. Maybe you're a highly knowledgeable teacher because you read a book. But qualified to teach the subject and knowing all the nuances of it?

### Militario, Highly Qualified Math Teacher

Militario is from Louisiana and earned his bachelor's degree in math at a university in Louisiana. He said he began as a Boy Scout leader and this caused him to catch the "teaching bug" because as he explained, "I enjoyed seeing others succeed and helping them do that. I think teaching is self-fulfilling." Militario said that his dream job would have been outdoor education, but because such jobs were rare and paid very little, he decided he wanted to go into teaching math. As such, Militario entered a traditional university teacher preparation program in Louisiana where he earned his master's degree in education.

Militario felt that the goal of his bachelor's degree in math was to make him a "human calculator" and that they succeeded. He felt that he received a "very good education," however, his math program did not teach application. As Militario explained it, his program had no responsibility to teach him application because application is not a mathematician's job—it is an engineer's job. This, therefore, caused some issues to arise in the secondary education classroom because administrators expect the teacher to teach mathematical application.

When discussing his teacher preparation program, Militario expressed concern about the amount of student teaching and practicum that he received:

I think they should have forced us into more practicum...I don't think the instructors took it to where it could have been—to really enforce teaching your peers, because teaching your peers is harder than students. Teachers make horrible students. I do not believe there was enough practicum, they didn't hold your feet to the flames and stress test you.

In addition to more practicum, Militario felt that the duration of student teaching was insufficient, "I only went in for 2 periods a day. I wasn't there for a whole day; it wasn't like a real job. If I experienced the real thing, would I have become a teacher? I don't know."

Militario's classroom was very clean, the desks were all in rows, and a book and calculator was neatly placed on each desk. His walls were best described by Militario— "Pretty sparse." There were no educational posters or student work samples on the walls. However, Militario said he compensated for this with an interactive journal:

I believe in student created work. And I do my best to keep an interactive journal. But that's hard in math because that's so hard to keep up with... So rather than have anchor charts on the walls, the posters are in their journals... I believe it's more important for them to generate their own work.

Militario added that posters on the wall become a burden because of standardized testing requirements:

We gotta cover 'em up, put 'em up, take 'em down, put 'em up, take 'em down, put 'em up and take 'em down—all because they can't see the word math on the wall. You have an EOC and you have to cover your whole room up again. So for the ease of the children and myself, I simply do the journal.

Militario has been teaching for eight years and, when I asked him about his future plans and goals, he expressed that he would really like to earn his master's in math and teach college. However, he did not feel this idea was financially sound because as he explained it, "Financially that does not pay out. I'd make less in college with a higher degree. So, I'm gonna stay teaching."

Militario added that although he was going to continue teaching, he was planning to move to the elementary level. When I asked him why he would make this change, he replied:

I'm tired of filling canyons; I want to fill potholes, if that makes any sense. They come to high school with so many gaps—so many atrociously large gaps in their learning. Not knowing how to multiply. Their mental math skills, their ability to problem solve, their desire to go beyond the first obstacle. I call it their level of stick-to-itiveness. A lot of students, they've never had a problem where they have to go beyond the first obstacle. They give up and quit and the answer is given to them. When they get into my class, it's very different. They have to figure it out. And they really struggle, panic, and they don't know what to do.

Militario had an obvious passion for his subject and did want his students to see the value in math for themselves. However, throughout the interview, he also expressed much frustration with what he perceived to be a lack of motivation by most of his secondary students. Militario also mentioned two other jobs that he would rather be doing, outdoor education or higher education, as he spoke about his current job. Although Militario seemed less than thrilled with his current position, he did express a desire to see his kids become better at math and for them to make connections between math and the world that surrounds them. During the interview, Militario mentioned that students at the elementary level were not getting the foundation that they need to be successful at the secondary level. His recognition of this problem and his expressed solutions, may mean that he would be better placed and more effective at the elementary level or out of the classroom and writing a curriculum that addresses K-12 math.

### *Caroline*

So, I get hired last year and they say, “Well you’re teaching chemistry and physics.” I don’t know physics. And I told them this and asked, “Are you sure? I don’t know physics; it’s not my strong suit. I can do basics but that’s about it.” They responded with, “You’ll be fine, just stay a chapter ahead of the kids.” I feel sorry for those physics kids last year because I was learning along the way with them and I don’t feel like I did them justice. I was running to a teacher in the morning saying, “How do I do this?” But that certification says, hey, you can teach anything under the sun in science, I’m highly qualified. Not really!

Caroline, Highly Qualified Science Teacher

Caroline grew up in North Texas and earned her bachelor’s degree in

business management at an online university. When she first began working on her degree, she was working 40 hours a week and her goal was to get out of college as quickly as possible. As a result, she asked the school counselor what the quickest program would be for her to complete and she was told business management; therefore, she pursued and completed a degree in business management and entered the corporate world. After some time working in a cubical, however, Caroline realized that business was not for her. When searching for a new career path, she thought back to one of her favorite teachers in middle school—her science teacher. Caroline checked into teacher certification and found that she could enter an alternative certification program, complete it in a month, and begin teaching. Because she enjoyed science in middle school, she decided that she wanted to be a science teacher.

When I asked Caroline how she was teaching science when she was a business major, she explained that she took several science courses as electives, including one in chemistry. This gave her some science background and as she put it, “I went through my alternative certification program, I studied my butt off and was able to pass a science composite test and that allowed me to teach.”

When I asked Caroline if she had any difficulties passing the exam she added, “I passed and it was very close. You needed a 240 to pass and I think I had a 252. So it was borderline and it was also my third time taking the test.” Caroline felt that her teacher preparation program did the best that it could considering it was just a

month long (an intensive 8-5, Monday through Friday program during the summer). She explained:

You go through everything, but in a compact way... They have other teachers come in and talk to you about what it's gonna be like. So, that month long training was a lot, it was kinda an insight, but at the same time, once you went through that they send you off to take your test and that's the last you hear from them.

When asked if her program prepared her for the real world of teaching she said:

I just feel it was the very surface stuff, you only have a month and they try to cram it all in. I was in there with people wanting to teach kindergarten all the way to high school. It's nothing that prepares you... You have two options to finish out your certification. You can do student teaching or you can get a probationary certificate and hope someone hires you... so I chose the probationary certificate because when you choose student teaching, you aren't able to work, you have to pay them \$800 a month, and it wasn't really feasible. So I had no idea what teaching would entail.

Caroline's classroom was a large chemistry lab, but it was decorated with student work, safety charts, a large periodic table of elements, and a 3D Einstein character that looked like it was protruding from the wall. Because her room was a lab, she did not have desks and her lab tables were set up for groups of four. Caroline said that her program had no influence on her room organization or décor. She explained that she had learned a lot from other teachers helping her and from looking at other teacher's rooms and altering their ideas to use in her room.

Caroline has been teaching for four years and half of that time was spent teaching at a charter school. When she began teaching in a regular public school,

she said that she was shocked by the large class sizes, administrative demands, paperwork demands, and not having as much time to actually teach. I asked Caroline if she had considered leaving the public school and returning to a charter school and she offered:

I love where I am and being able to teach chemistry with the people where I'm at. But it's getting a little ridiculous with everything they require, the paperwork and the accountability; it's not on the student. If they fail, it's what did you do, what did you put in place, why did he fail, did you call the parent, did you get seven blood samples, did you email home? I mean it's just crazy! Did the teacher do everything she's supposed to? Not why didn't the student turn in their work? So, it's more on the teacher now and that's what I don't care for.

When asked about her future goals and plans, Caroline said that she wanted to return to school to get a master's degree in Chemistry and "try college and see if I like that a little bit better." She also said that she may be interested in leaving teaching and seeing what else she could do with a master's in Chemistry adding, "I don't know that I could stay in a classroom for 30 more years."

Throughout the interview, Caroline showed much enthusiasm for her subject. This enthusiasm was important because she did not major or minor in chemistry in college and much of her knowledge had come from studying outside of any formal classes. In addition to showing a passion for her subject, Caroline also discussed her colleagues and her school with much fondness. Caroline's room décor was indicative of a teacher who was involved with her students and her subject, and when she spoke, she did convey this. However, all of the

paperwork requirements seemed to be casting a shadow on her views of being a secondary teacher and it seemed doubtful that she would continue teaching secondary education if she was offered a different opportunity.

*Reginald*

My degree was in biology, but I haven't taught biology since my second year teaching. I have a degree in science, so I took the composite test, and with that you can teach any science under the sun. It doesn't matter if you've had training in that science or not. Just because you passed that composite test, it doesn't mean that you have the content knowledge for every science subject. The kids always say to me, "Well you have a degree in physics." Well no, I took one semester of physics in college and I took a test that asked me a few questions about it.

Reginald, Highly Qualified Science Teacher

Reginald is from North Texas and earned a bachelor's degree in communication at a Texas university. After earning this degree, he entered the business world and worked in advertising. However, Reginald felt that he was not helping people and decided that he needed to change careers. When Reginald was 18 his sister had encouraged him to become a teacher, so, he decided to try her advice and he returned to school to earn a second bachelor's, this time in biology with the intention of teaching it at the secondary level. He said he chose science because he always found science interesting and "really wanted to help kids learn." To achieve certification, Reginald began an alternative certification program and after completing this, he returned to school for a third time and earned his master's degree in education.

Reginald felt that his undergraduate educations helped in the past much more so than they did in his current position. When he first began teaching, he taught biology, therefore, his major in biology helped with his content and he said that his communications degree helped him to better communicate with his students. On the other hand, Reginald did not feel that his alternative teacher preparation program helped him to do anything more than to pass his certification exams. I asked Reginald if he completed any student teaching as part of this program and he expressed that he did not, but wished he had. He offered that the most they did in his program was:

To go and observe three hours of teachers in their classrooms. But it didn't give you any hands on student teaching...my first time in charge of a class is when I started teaching. And I've found that it's that way for most new teachers coming in. It's all of these small things we do every day that affect how we teach our lessons. There really needs to be some type of class or some professional development on how to be effective in the classroom.

Reginald teaches physics; therefore, his classroom is also a lab. In one section of the room, he had a large area rug spread out in front of the board so that his students could sit on the rug when they were playing games to review material. Where he did have desks set up, they were set up in groups of three for cooperative learning, and he also had a string of Christmas lights hanging on one of his boards. Reginald's room did not display student work, but he did have a section of the room dedicated to helping his students know more about him. In this area, he had all of his degrees hanging, photos of his family up, and 11

medals that he won at different marathons on display. When I asked him why he chose to keep his degrees and medals on display at school, he explained that he wanted his students to look at his accomplishments and feel that they too had the potential to succeed, “I figure they look at me and think, if this old guy can do these things and run all these marathons, then surely I can too.” He added that it had been some time since he actually completed a marathon but, “the kids don’t need to know that.”

Reginald has been teaching nine years and, during those years, he has taught IPC (integrated physics and chemistry), biology, chemistry, aquatic science, environmental systems, and physics. When I asked him how he was able to teach such a variety of subjects with a biology degree, he explained that he took the composite certification exam which,

Prepares you for a wide variety of topics that you are able to teach...It doesn’t allow you to be an expert on any of it...The subject test forces you to be an expert. I took biology and it forced me to know biology. But with the composite, there is no way you could be an expert because it is such a broad range of stuff you have to know.

He went on to explain that although he could not answer the questions for some of the tested subjects presented on the composite exam, he was technically certified to teach all of the subjects tested on the exam. I asked Reginald why he did not teach biology when his degree and initial certification was in biology? He responded by explaining that there was a need for someone to teach physics, he had taken a physics class in college and he remembered liking it, so, he ended up

becoming the physics teacher. He added that he just stayed a chapter or two ahead of the students and taught himself and the students as they went along. He did stress, however, that his knowledge of physics was “surface level” and that he would not feel comfortable teaching an Advanced Placement (AP) course in physics:

When it comes to the AP, there is a lot of strategy needed. Another teacher asked me a question about the AP exam and I said, ‘I cannot help you with that, I haven’t looked at that.’ It’s, you know, college, because, it’s not the same material you teach in an on-level class.

Throughout our discussion, Reginald expressed his concern for teachers, the support they received, and the training they received for becoming a teacher. He also discussed the realities of teaching and how he felt these realities were missing from teacher preparation programs. In addition, Reginald discussed policymakers and his perception that policymakers are out of touch with the realities of education. When I asked Reginald what his future plans and goals were he said, “I’ve been reading a lot lately on strategies for the classroom. Different ways to teach others, you know, other than just ‘sit and get.’ I’d like to move up into administration or move into curriculum design. I want to help teachers in the classroom.”

Although Reginald did not major in his current content, he did seem to have a passion for it. During the interview, he expressed both excitement for physics and a desire to speak to his students and find out what interested them so

he could connect those interests to physics. Reginald also discussed his student's futures and said that he wants to be an inspiration to them. In addition to teaching, Reginald had an interest in curriculum and helping other teachers. He said that he did not just talk about his interest in these topics, he explained that he used his personal time to read academic journals that discuss curriculum and teaching issues. Reginald seemed to be successful in the classroom, but his personal interest in curriculum may eventually lead to him to trade his position as a teacher in for a position as an administrator—a position for which his undergraduate and master's degrees would be more utilized.

### *Wahine*

In my opinion, the exams do not accurately represent the subject knowledge you need to teach, especially the social studies. It pulls questions from every possible social science topic. From psychology to sociology to U.S. history to world history, economics and world geography, it just asks you so many questions over a broad range. That doesn't show I can teach world geography well. It just shows that I took some good classes in college and I can study and take a test.

### Wahine, Highly Qualified Social Studies Teacher

Wahine was raised in Hawaii and earned her bachelor's degree in cultural anthropology and secondary education in Hawaii. Wahine explained that going into teaching felt like the right decision for her and she knew early in life that teaching was what she wanted to do. Wahine described teaching as something that:

Was in my blood. My mom is a special education teacher and my dad is a

professor. I remember when I was younger going to their jobs, hanging around their classrooms... I loved hanging out after school with certain teachers. I felt cool when I'd hang out with them and just kinda talk about their day.

Although Wahine originally planned on staying and teaching in Hawaii, her fiancé moved to Texas to attend medical school and she followed. Once in Texas, Wahine applied for her first teaching job in a North Texas school—the same school that she has been teaching at for nine years.

Wahine chose a traditional educational program that combined content and teacher education. When asked about each, Wahine expressed that her program did a good job of covering each. Although her major was cultural anthropology, she also took more commonly taught social studies classes such as, economics, world history, U.S. history, and sociology. She felt that her content education was well rounded and thorough and that it has helped her in her classroom. As Wahine explained it, one of the advantages of taking her program was that learning content was combined with how to teach that content and how to, “understand the material and see how anthropology affects us. The educational objectives were to focus on how to be a good teacher. My cohort group would get together and focus on how to teach our content.” In addition to classes aimed at preparing teacher candidates to teach their subject areas, Wahine explained that her program also focused on, “pedagogy and ideas on how to deal with discipline, lesson planning, and how to be a professional in the classroom.” She continued by

explaining that student teaching was a very important part of her program, however, she was required to complete observations of teachers in the field before she was allowed to enter the classroom and practice teaching. Wahine said that her student teaching was conducted during her last semester of school, however, she added that she did not feel that her one semester of student teaching was enough, “I think it should be an entire year. I think it should be multi-grade levels and at different schools. You need those different experiences. That was the biggest thing. Our student teaching was not enough.”

Wahine’s classroom was very colorful and filled with educational materials and student work. Her desks were arranged in groups of four to better facilitate cooperative learning because in her class, as she explained, “I like my students to act things out, role play, and even do newscast type of skits with group members.” Wahine described her teaching style as very creative and she said that she liked for her students to be completely engaged and immersed in the topic. For instance, when studying the Amazon rainforest, Wahine decorated her room with a palm tree that went from floor to ceiling, she had green streamers coming down from the ceiling to create the illusion of a tree canopy, she turned her lights off and only allowed sunlight in, and she played sounds of the Amazon in the background. Wahine explained that although it took a lot of time to set up her room like this, “I wanted my students to truly feel that they were in the Amazon rainforest. I wanted them to form a connection and get excited about it. I wanted

them to feel like they were there.”

Although Wahine took the social studies composite exam and could teach multiple social studies classes, she has taught world geography for her entire teaching career. I asked Wahine if she had ever been asked to teach other classes and she said that she had, but her expertise was in world geography and she wanted to do the best job that she could. Wahine did add that she teaches student leadership which includes student council and is aimed at developing future leaders. She said that she really enjoyed this class and loved to get involved with the students and help them grow. Wahine was also asked to teach AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), a class aimed at helping struggling at-risk students become more successful in school and to better their chances for attending college, for the 2015-2016 school year. When asked whether she would agree to teach this class she said, “I can see myself eventually taking on more leadership classes. My passion is student council. I could see myself doing that at a high school or another type of campus.” When I asked Wahine about her future plans and goals she stated:

I’m currently working on obtaining my master’s in special education. I am perfectly content being in the classroom right now. I don’t feel a need to change or do something different. I enjoy working with special education and ELL students. . . . Maybe down the road I will become a transition counselor for students with special needs or work in a BIC (Behavior Intervention Classroom) classroom with behaviorally challenged students. I’m definitely staying in education.

Wahine is a passionate teacher who spends much of her time working. She

has volunteered to sponsor the freshman and senior classes, student council, the step team, a tutoring program, and prom. She has also volunteered to go on multiple senior trips, she traveled with the step team, and she helps to set up prom every year. Wahine discussed her students with much care and concern and honestly believes that regardless of what gaps her students may have, she can reach them and help them. Of course, her career has not been without stress and she did admit that some students were very challenging. She has witnessed and broken up many fights, she has been called names, some of her students refuse to work, and, she admittedly works in a very difficult school. However, what is most impressive about Wahine is, that even with all of the challenges that her position presents, she still discussed her job with much positivity, she described her students with a smile on her face, and she has no desire to leave teaching.

*Rose*

I know that right now they are looking at Texas teacher preparation courses and discussing the required GPA for entering a teacher certification program. As of right now it only takes a 2.5 GPA to be admitted into these programs and that's ridiculous... A 2.5 GPA is a C average and you're gonna stick these teachers in a classroom? If you're a secondary teacher, 180 kids are gonna come in and out of your class. You are responsible for 180 kids and you had a C average? I mean, as a teacher, if one of my students is getting a C, I'm pulling 'em into tutorials and saying you don't know what you're talking about.

Rose, Highly Qualified Social Studies Teacher

Rose was raised in Georgia but moved to Texas to attend the university where she eventually earned her bachelor's degree in political science and her

master's degree in education. When I asked Rose why she chose to go into teaching she responded:

I went into teaching because my mom was a teacher; I grew up with a teacher. I have always been interested in education, I could have gone into politics and I could have gone into policy, but if I really wanted to make a difference in the classroom, I felt like I needed to be in the classroom. So, I went into education because I am very passionate about helping kids. I feel very, very passionately about being a kid's advocate, especially when they have none.

Although she did not necessarily intend on staying in Texas, Rose met her husband while attending college and they both moved to North Texas for him to work on his master's degree. It is in North Texas where Rose applied for her first teaching position. She did so in various schools across the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex and ended up driving down to Austin to interview because, at the time, there was a large principal's conference being held there. Rose fondly recalled that day:

I was leaving the building where we had the interview and he called me and offered me the job. I was not familiar the school where I was hired, I wasn't really familiar with the district, but, this was in 2008, when teachers were scrambling for positions, so I was just happy to get a job.

Rose felt that her content and pedagogical educations were both excellent and, for the most part, prepared her well. She chose to pursue a degree in world geography, which included courses in international affairs. As Rose explained:

That's why world history is such a good fit for me, because I know the history and I know what's going on currently. Most of my classes were dealing with international politics and you can't discuss politics without talking about the history of something—that was the main point of my

degree.

As described by Rose, the pedagogical component of her degree taught her, “how to be successful in the classroom...I mean, constantly drilling into us to build relationships with the kids, to know your area, to, I mean, just to be successful was the primary goal of the program.” In addition to the pedagogical basics, her program also focused on content and included specialized courses for teaching secondary social studies. It also focused on lesson planning, reading the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), and how to design a lesson based on the TEKS. As Rose put it, “By the time I graduated and I entered into the classroom, I knew how to look at curriculum, I knew what the kids needed to know, and I used my own creative devices as to how accomplish that, so I felt very prepared academically.” However, Rose did add that her program did not include student teaching opportunities; instead they were required to complete observation hours. When asked about what Rose would have changed about her program she stated that she would have added student teaching opportunities:

This would have offered the sink or swim, you're on the job, what are you going to do, you know? I mean, a fight breaks out in your room over, whatever, what are you going to do? I didn't learn how to handle that in my nice little education classroom in college... When I began teaching, it was sink or swim. I mean, my department head gave me the key to my classroom and said, “I'm down the hall if you need me, here's your, here's your teacher textbook, which I never used, I'm down the hall if you need me.” And I remember standing in that classroom being like, what the heck am I gonna do; so, how do I start?

Rose's classroom was very organized and clean and, based on the items on the

wall, there was no doubt where Rose attended college or that she was very proud of her alma mater:

I have a lot of college regalia in my classroom, because of where I went to college, and because I think it's important for them to see college stuff... They have no question where I went to school, and that I am proud of that school, and I think that that's good. Other teachers have the same stuff, just different schools, and I think that, you know, that's really important. So, I've always had alma mater stuff in my classroom because you need to take ownership in what you are a part of and you need to be proud of it.

Rose's desks were arranged into three sections of rows that formed a U-shape around her podium. When I asked why she chose to arrange her desks like this she explained:

They are arranged so that the students will face each other while still facing the front of the room to generate controlled conversation. I would often bring a stool out to that big open area and sit so we could have a casual discussion...but there was still a sense of me being in control.

Although Rose did have a substantial collection to represent her alma mater, she also had student work, educational materials, and a portion of her room dedicated to her heroes. I asked Rose who her heroes on the wall were and she stated, "It's my maternal and paternal grandfather and I gave their stories about being the in European and Pacific fronts of WWII. I also added my dad, a veteran, and a former student who joined the military." The wall behind Rose's desk was filled with cards from her former students. She explained that her students have always been very important her and that she cherished the cards that they gave her and that she looked at them to make herself feel better when she was having a bad

day. She added, “I also like the cards to be in plain sight for the other students so, on the first day, they see that I was liked in the past. While being liked is not a main goal, I feel that students respect me more if they like me first.”

Rose has been teaching six years and decided to return to graduate school four years into her teaching career. She said that when she returned to school, she was not entirely sure why, “I mean, I love teaching. I never saw myself leaving the classroom. I kept thinking, ‘Why am I doing this? I don’t need another degree to continue doing what I’m doing.’ I couldn’t even imagine leaving.” However, Rose said that her future goals and plans may have changed some over the last year:

I would love to teach a little bit longer but eventually go into educational policy. I think I might like to be a lobbyist for a teacher’s organization. I really want to be an advocate for teachers. I feel like I would be good at this because I have the experience in the classroom and I can actually add productively to the conversation at the policy level.

Rose seemed to have teaching in her blood and, until recently, she never imagined doing anything else. She understands what her student’s needs are, cares about them, honestly wants them to be successful, and even follows them through their college careers. Rose is very dedicated to her students and her school and, in addition to teaching history, teaches AVID. As such, Rose attends field trips on the weekends with her students to visit colleges. She often stays after school to help students with college applications and to meet with parents, and she pushes her students to aim high and believe that they can succeed in college. Although

Rose loves teaching and wants to enjoy it for a little longer, all of the student testing requirements and implementation of canned curriculums have begun to take their toll. She said that she worried that she will soon be prevented from doing what she knows is best for her students because of testing. Therefore, Rose may be moving away from the classroom and toward a job where she can influence policymakers because, as a teacher, she does not feel heard.

#### Participant Summary

The eight Highly Qualified Teachers in this study come from diverse areas across the United States (from Hawaii to Georgia). Although these participants are a small sample of secondary Highly Qualified Teachers, their views and experiences have much to offer. For instance, when asked what being a Highly Qualified Teacher meant, these participants fell into three distinct schools of thought (discussed in the next chapter) and their reasoning for each was well justified. Furthermore, these participants attended very different educational institutions and participated in diverse certification programs (no participants attended the same university or same educational program) and their experiences revealed that their teacher education programs, whether delivered in Texas, Louisiana, Georgia, or Hawaii, did not adequately prepare them for the realities of the classroom. In addition, discussions with these eight participants revealed that their certification exams failed to measure subject competency as intended by NCLB. The participant's own experiences as undergraduate students, as teacher

candidates, and as public school secondary teachers, have shaped their current perceptions of what it means to be a Highly Qualified Teacher and what changes they feel need to be made to policy; and these recommendations for policy reform, based on classroom realities and experience, have the potential to positively influence future educational policy.

## Chapter 6

### Highly Qualified to do What?

The first major theme: Being a Highly Qualified Teacher has three different meanings and levels of importance, developed because I asked the participants what being a Highly Qualified Teacher means and how it affects the teaching profession. This theme was further divided into three sub-topics: 1) *Teacher value*, although participants were not asked about the value of teaching, this sub-topic emerged and highlighted that some teachers not only feel undervalued, they unknowingly contribute to the devaluing. 2) *Tested subjects*, again, I did not ask the participants about tested subjects. I actually assumed that most core subjects are tested. However, standardized student testing was mentioned by most of the participants and, according to my interviewees, many secondary core subjects are no longer tested in Texas and this plays a role in how Highly Qualified Teachers are viewed and treated. 3) *Canned curriculums*, I did ask all interviewees about their experiences with and feelings about canned curriculums. Although most felt less than happy about the use of canned curriculums, they also offered how they could be used effectively in the classroom. The use of canned curriculums also caused some of the greatest emotional responses from the participants as they expressed the need to be allowed more academic freedom and to be trusted as Highly Qualified Teachers.

### What It Means to be “Highly Qualified”

In this study, all interviewees were asked what being a Highly Qualified Teacher meant to them and how important this distinction was. Out of the eight participants interviewed, three said that being a Highly Qualified Teacher is very important, two said that they felt it is somewhat important, and three said that it is not important and has little to no meaning.

The meaning or perceived lack of meaning was attributed to different aspects of being a teacher and teaching. For instance, Caroline felt that being Highly Qualified was an important distinction because it proves that the teacher accomplished something beyond earning a bachelor’s degree, “I think what they consider Highly Qualified is you don’t just have your bachelor’s degree, you’ve taken a test that shows you are proficient in that specific areas you want to teach. And I think that makes a difference.” Tiffany felt that the Highly Qualified distinction was important because it showed that a teacher went through specialized training on the art of teaching:

Being a Highly Qualified Teacher is important not because it says something about the content area but because it refers to teaching practices. I went through the traditional certification program and I had class after class of how to teach...I felt more prepared than my colleagues who didn’t go, especially the first couple of years.

Wahine felt the Highly Qualified distinction was important because she believed it added to her credibility and assured the community that she was qualified to do her job, “I think it’s incredibly important to be a Highly Qualified Teacher. You

would want a highly qualified doctor to operate on you and I would want my children to be taught by a Highly Qualified Teacher. So yes, I think it is incredibly important.”

Therefore, Caroline, Tiffany, and Wahine looked at the Highly Qualified distinction from a strictly policy point of view. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 required that these teachers earn the distinction by completing educational programs and by proving their competency via exams. These teachers completed all of these requirements and the title that they *earned* shows their level of achievement to other stakeholders.

The participants who viewed being a Highly Qualified Teacher as only somewhat important, looked beyond the policy requirements and connected the Highly Qualified distinction to being an “effective” or “good” teacher. These participants expressed that being highly qualified goes beyond academic and pedagogical success. For instance, Vivian explained that being deemed Highly Qualified does not automatically indicate that a teacher is “good.” She added that declaring all teachers who complete certification requirements, even those who are less effective, are Highly Qualified, dilutes the significance of the Highly Qualified distinction, “As far as the understanding of being Highly Qualified, I believe that I am a good teacher, however, if *all* are considered ‘highly qualified,’ I do not agree that *all* truly are. I think the standards need to be higher.” Militario

also expressed concern over the disconnect between the Highly Qualified distinction and the reality of being a good teacher:

I'll say 'good' means effective teacher. There is no way being a Highly Qualified Teacher guarantees you'll be effective. It's all about personality, its about relationships with children, how you deal with your administration. Teaching is a gift and not everybody has it.

Those who felt that being a Highly Qualified Teacher had no meaning looked at it from a policy point of view and attached the connotation of "effective" to it. These participants, Orwellia, Reginald, and Rose, attributed their perceptions to the distinction being nothing more than another empty government title created to appease the people. In addition, they censured it for being handed out to all teachers regardless of whether or not they were effective. For these participants, the Highly Qualified title was just that, a title. It did not speak to whether or not a teacher was well educated nor did it speak as to whether or not a teacher was "effective" or "good." Orwellia, who expressed the strongest viewpoint, stated that being a Highly Qualified Teacher, "doesn't really mean anything to me. And it doesn't really mean anything to anybody. Really it's just another acronym to throw out in education." Reginald's thoughts concerning the distinction were more centered on the realities of teachers in the classroom:

I think it doesn't really mean a whole lot. I think it's a box they check off. Everyone has a bachelor's and has passed their tests. It doesn't mean that I am more qualified than somebody else; it means I could pass a test. There are those who could be great teachers. There are some who are Highly Qualified Teachers but not good teachers because they can't relate to

students. The government is basing it all on do you know the content, not on can you teach.

Similar to Reginald, Rose also developed her perception of being a Highly

Qualified Teacher as a result of observing the realities of others in the field:

I know there are social studies teachers, who, you know, had to take the social studies composite exam four, five, six times to get certified to teach. Now they are teaching social studies so that they can coach. But, under No Child Left Behind, they are considered a Highly Qualified Teacher, so what is highly qualified?

Rose continued to explain that she was very troubled by a teacher's ability to be deemed Highly Qualified in additional subjects by taking more exams in other content areas. She offered the hypothetical example of her studying and passing a math composite certification exam:

I can go in and teach the class. But, I'm telling you right now, I have no idea what, I don't know how to teach math. I can teach social studies and I am good at it. I have no idea how to teach a math class. No idea. But under NCLB's guidelines, I could. I could walk in there and I could teach, well, I could attempt to teach kids math. So, I guess, Highly Qualified looks really good on paper; and then if you actually walk into the classroom of "Highly Qualified Teachers," and I'm using air quotes, then I think you might have a different perception of what a Highly Qualified Teacher is.

Although all participants are Highly Qualified Teachers, what this means to each of them and what they perceive that it means to others, varies from teacher to teacher. Some viewed the title as a badge of honor. Something that shows that they worked hard to achieve the distinction and that they have academic and pedagogical substance behind their name. Some felt that being deemed a HQT holds some meaning, however, the distinction is weakened by those in the field

who received the distinction but do not work at a highly qualified level. Finally, some saw the distinction as nothing more than an empty government fabrication meant to make the people think that something is being done to better education. Regardless of how any of the participants perceived their current Highly Qualified status, they all felt that the requirements for becoming a HQT needed to be reformed and that becoming a teacher was something that should be regulated by the government.

### *Teacher Value*

In every interview, without being asked, the participants expressed some degree of concern about what they described as a “lack of respect” for and the “devaluing of” teachers. Orwellia, associated this devaluing and lack of respect with her perception that being a Highly Qualified Teacher holds little to no meaning:

I don't think there is much respect for teachers, so I doubt there is much respect for the Highly Qualified status. How are you going to inspire change and get an entire population of people to respect teachers again? Everyone in America should be going through the educational system and they should be taught to respect their teachers. It's difficult because it's not just that the government failed, it's a people issue, it's a parental issue, and the majority of the people need to get on board.

Orwellia went on to explain that the media, parents, students, and even administrators often express disrespectful and condescending remarks about teachers. She used the example of the documentary, *Waiting for Superman*, to demonstrate her point. She explained that this was a popular movie that the media

hyped and that some schools and administrators bought the movie in and “forced” their teachers to view it:

How stupid is that? Anyone who watched this and paid attention knows that the whole point of it was to criticize public school teachers while promoting charter schools. This “documentary,” and I do put that in quotes because this was really a long piece of propaganda, Squealer would be proud, showed a world where all kids are desperate to learn and the mean teachers are just lazy and don’t care. The kid’s only problem is that they are forced to go to crummy public school where the buildings are bad, the teachers are bad, and the books are falling apart and old. Clearly the only option in this movie is to fire all the lazy over-paid teachers, close the school, and send your kids to charter and private schools.

Although all interviewees expressed some degree of concern about the negative perceptions of teachers, several of them made comments that mirrored some of the same negative attitudes that they criticized. Caroline made comments throughout the interview comparing her teaching to other teachers:

There’s several here whose kids come into my classroom everyday saying they are watching a movie or being given answers. But I’m busting my butt and we’re getting the same paycheck. I’m probably working 15-hour days, and you’re going home right after because you just showed a video. How does that make sense?

She went on to explain why she felt that teacher exams are a poor indicator of teacher success:

I don’t think just because you have certification everything is going to work out and you’re gonna be successful. Anyone could go in there and take that test and still sit in the classroom and say, ‘Leave me alone I’m gonna sit at my desk while you copy out of a book.’ It doesn’t mean it’s gonna make a teacher a success.

At another point in the interview, Caroline again discussed her belief that there are “many” teachers in the schools who simply do not teach, “They have to have that drive and that motivation and want to help kids and help them succeed because there’s too many teachers that say copy out of a book, don’t bother me, I just want a pay check.”

Orwellia, discussing her disdain for canned curriculums, added that, “There should be oversight. Ya know, because I am teaching. I know I will teach, I am never just sitting in there; but there would be teachers who did that.” Militario, not only criticized other teachers, he even criticized himself and the profession as a whole, “And as a teacher, I’ll go ahead and say it, I tend not to show the long way—because we are inherently lazy as teachers. Because we do it every day and we get tired.” He went on to say that teachers need to be pushed, they must be observed, they must be supervised, and they must be *forced*, to improve or they will not do so on their own, “Should you be professionally evaluated? Yes. And be mean about it, critique teachers. If we can’t take critique we shouldn’t be teachers. We should always be improving our craft. And not being forced to do so makes a bad teacher.”

Finally, Rose expressed concern about teacher preparation programs and teacher quality standards. As she explained it, teacher preparation program admission requirements have been lowered so much that there has been an influx of ineffective teachers and thus the devaluing of teachers:

The teacher is supposed to be an expert. People should see them that way. It's no wonder teachers are so devalued because they've [the government and teacher preparation programs] lowered the standards so much. It's the same thing that happens to a school district. It's the same thing that happened to the TAKS test. The standards were lowered so much and then they're like, 'well, we're producing these mediocre kids at best,' so, you know, I mean, it blows my mind that this is even an issue. I mean I still think that a 3.0 is low—we're supposed to be experts.

When discussing being a Highly Qualified Teacher, all participants made comments that indicated that they felt undervalued and underappreciated by most (for example, students, parents, administrators, the media, and policymakers).

This perception was a result of media attacks, difficult students, a lack of parental respect or support, and a lack of support from administrators; in other words, it does not seem that this perception was unfounded or surprising. However, what was surprising was how teachers themselves repeated and added credence to these negative impressions of teachers when discussing other teachers and the profession as a whole.

#### *Tested Subjects*

All of the participants in this study are teachers of a core subject (English, math, science, or social studies). Being a teacher of a core subject used to mean that the teacher was charged with preparing the students for a standardized exam.

However, in Texas, with the introduction of the end of course STAAR exams, not all subjects are tested.

## Non-tested classrooms

The interviewees who are no longer teaching a tested subject discussed this change with enthusiasm and some even expressed that they felt like they had been “set free.” Wahine whose subject went from tested last year to no longer tested this year explained that:

If you're not tested, it's whatever you want to do. This has given me freedom to not follow the curriculum frameworks too much. Now they are more of a guide. They give you what you need to do for the unit and give you examples of how you *could* use the information. I use them as examples anyway...they provide you with learning experiences that teachers could follow. We do still have to give our students assessments *every three weeks*.

Wahine continued by explaining that being a tested or non-tested subject also plays a part in teacher's morale and their perceived value and ability as a Highly Qualified Teacher:

When we were a tested subject we were looked at much more closely. We were judged and criticized. Again, they make us test the kids every three weeks, and when we did not perform well on our district assessments, we were provided a scripted curriculum to follow. We were supposed to read from the script like an actor and we were even told how the students were supposed to respond. It was sit and get and I don't teach like that. This was met with much hostility. Now that we are an untested subject, we are not looked at very often. Even our assessments that we have to give from the district aren't analyzed too much.

Militario, who also went from a tested to a non-tested subject, felt less enthused about the change. He expressed that this change not only made his subject seem less important but it also made him feel a little less appreciated. He also conveyed concern about the requirements for his subject being less than

adequate:

We have targets and goals, but they're not specific enough because geometry no longer has an EOC. In fact, none of 'em do except for algebra I, thanks to the great state of Texas. So really, they are the only ones who are now held accountable for the knowledge. We aren't monitored anymore because the kids aren't required to know stuff anymore except algebra I.

As Wahine's comments indicated, testing has been a thorn in the side of education for some time. Wahine's description of her students being tested every three weeks and that she was handed a scripted curriculum, showed how far some districts have gone just to ensure that students pass a standardized exam. The environment described by Wahine, paints a picture of school where standardized exams are the sole purpose of the classroom. It is telling that it was not until her subject became untested that she was given the freedom to teach with creativity. In other words, it was not until the exams were removed that she was able to do what a Highly Qualified Teacher is supposed to do. However, even more interesting, and troubling, are Militario's comments pertaining to his subject no longer being important. It seems that testing has become so exalted that some teachers feel that their class is pointless if its purpose is not to prepare students to take and pass a standardized exam.

Tested classrooms

When interviewed, the participants who were still tested expressed much frustration and reported that they felt tremendous pressure and stress. They felt

much more watched, critiqued, criticized, and always felt like their job was in jeopardy. Vivian, who taught a tested subject, reported that she frequently felt pressure and was dreading the day that tests results came in. She added that she was no longer allowed to teach to the best of her ability because her experience as an expert in her field and her ability to be creative was trumped by exam preparations:

We don't get to do the creative lessons that we want to because they take more time and we have to focus back on the test. By having some required documents by the district, it keeps us grounded because English teachers tend to have all these fantastic ideas about projects and creating things and I have a million of them. However if we got to do that all of the time, they may not be prepared for the test. And although we always say we will never teach to test, there are some parts we have to teach.

Orwellia who also taught a tested subject, explained that the stress and pressures attached to standardized testing have actually increased since she began teaching:

When I began teaching, the TAAS exam was on its way out and the TAKS exam was the new king. Everyone in the school was freaking out and said that the TAKS was so much harder and that we all had to stop what we were teaching and just teach to the test. I looked at the test and said, "I don't see what the big deal is; it's a test of minimal skills. My kids better be able to pass it." And I didn't change a thing. I've always done my own thing. I teach my way and I don't teach minimal skills. But now it's different. I'm worried. Not because the test is hard, but because it's bad. I had a training this year where the presenter actually said, "There's real world writing and there's STAAR writing." She basically said to teach crappy writing to pass the test and just tell 'em not to use that writing in the real world. I don't know what to do. I try to teach my kids to write well, not to write for a stupid test.

Clearly, as Orwellia demonstrated above, those who work in tested classrooms are under tremendous pressure and torn between what they feel is best

for their students and what administrators say is best for passing a test. Vivian, when she discussed the need to prepare her students for the STAAR exam, made comments about her concern that her students will not be prepared. With much trepidation, she discussed the gaps her students displayed upon entering her class. She displayed worry on her face as she repeated that she did not know if they would be ready for the exam and she did not know if she might lose her job. Orwellia discussed many of the same concerns that Vivian did and, she too, discussed that her students may not be able to pass their exams. What was more worrisome in Orwellia's case, however, was that she felt, for the first time, that she may have to bypass her own beliefs and teach to a test. Also troubling was the idea that students must be taught the wrong way to do something just to pass an exam.

#### *Academic Freedom and Canned Curriculums*

All participants reported being very familiar with three basic canned curriculum types: 1) Scripted, as described by the participants, was the most stifling of the three. With this type of curriculum, teachers are given a script for each day of class. These scripts contain all dialogue that is supposed to occur in the classroom (including what the students are supposed to say) and it accounts for every second of every class. In this situation the teacher is not allowed to add to, alter, or write any part of the lesson. Even with the requirement by NCLB to have a Highly Qualified Teacher in every classroom, these curriculums are still

written and assigned to teachers. Although no participants were using this curriculum type, two reported using them in the past. 2) Scope and Sequence, these curriculums, as described by the participants, dictate what every teacher must teach and, in some cases, what materials and methods they must use. When a school has implemented this type of curriculum, administrators expect to walk into any room and find that all teachers are on the same page at the same time. There is little to no room to add to and/or alter this type of curriculum. Two of the interviewees said that they were required to use this type of curriculum. 3) Curriculum frameworks, as described by the participants, this is the most liberal form of canned curriculum. This curriculum serves as an overarching framework for teachers to follow. Included in these frameworks are objectives, essential knowledge and skills, college and career readiness standards, required lessons, required materials, and major themes to follow. This curriculum allows a teacher to choose the tools, activities, and methods to present the lessons. This curriculum also allows the teacher to add additional assignments and materials to the curriculum. Although four out of the six participants who use this curriculum still expressed the desire for no canned curriculum, they did offer that this is the preferred of the three.

I asked all of the participants to describe both positive and negative aspects of using canned curriculums. Although, in general, all participants felt that canned curriculums were harmful to the teacher, the student, and to the teaching

practice, they did offer that they could be beneficial for new teachers, teachers who are unfamiliar with the subject assigned to them, substitute teachers, and teachers who lack effective teaching skills. Reginald, referring to curriculum frameworks only, said, “I would think the strength is that it provides a guideline or path to follow for beginning teachers or teachers who are unsure about a topic.” However, he quickly jumped to the negative aspects of canned curriculums, “But then the weakness is that it confines. If you are forced to do that, it confines the services to the kids. If a district enforced a scripted curriculum I would probably leave that district.”

Scripted curriculums generated the most vitriol and all participants said that if their current district demanded that they use scripted curriculums that they would refuse to do so and leave the district. Some added that the continued implementation of any type of canned curriculum could eventually make them leave teaching. Wahine, who worked for a district that unsuccessfully attempted to implement a scripted curriculum, stated that she firmly believed that Highly Qualified Teachers should not be required to use any canned curriculum much less a scripted one. Discussing the district’s attempt to require that she use the scripted curriculum, she laughingly described that her “script” required specific responses from her students. I asked her if the students responded appropriately and she replied, “Oh No, negative, not at all.” Wahine, throughout the interview, expressed great care for her kids and said that she knew what was best for them.

Referring to all canned curriculums, she explained that such curriculums do not “take in to account individual students and individual teachers. It doesn’t take into account what students need.” Militario also expressed concern about student success in the canned curriculum classroom, “You get rid of mastery teaching, you get rid of teachers teaching. If I have to follow a scope and sequence that says I have to be at a certain place on Tuesday, the kids aren’t gonna pass. They do not learn like that.”

Orwellia, who expressed absolute disdain for canned curriculums, said that implementing them undermines education and the idea of being a Highly Qualified Teacher:

You know as a Highly Qualified Teacher and someone who actually teaches, there is no academic freedom, learning, discussion, constructivism, nothing that leads to student success. And not just student success, but also what students teach me. All of this is lost when teachers are forced to use these curriculums. The students next to mine are different. The students in each of my classes are different. I have to differentiate for all of my classes.

She added that her previous district expected all teachers to be on the same page at the same time and she chose to leave because of the curriculum. She chose her new district because, when she interviewed, they assured her that they would never require such a repressive curriculum. However, she felt that the district did not represent their views on curriculum with total honesty because they handed her curriculum frameworks that seemed to be headed in the direction of a scope

and sequence. I asked her if she would alter her teaching if they start to tighten up the curriculum:

I teach the way I'm gonna teach and I don't look to see what they say. I think these curriculums are detrimental to both students and teachers. There's no free thought. There's no thinking. There's no independence for anyone. I asked before I took this job and they said they would never move to a curriculum where we are all expected to do the same thing at the same time. I hope that's true. I love my kids, the administration, and my school, but if they try to make us robots, I just can't work that way. Vivian stated that districts should not be allowed to require that Highly

Qualified Teachers use canned curriculums. Like the other interviewees, she felt that canned curriculums actually did more harm than good and that using them was detrimental to educational growth and innovation.

I think that there is such a plethora of resources and if we all have to use the exact same things, no one is looking for something new that could be amazing to add to a lesson, that could be used years later. I think letting everybody bring in their own materials, you kind of piece them together. The more exposure to the real world type things you find out there and the non-fiction pieces and the media and current events, the better. You need to find these things and tie them back to literature. The more you do this, the better off the students are going to be. It's a social world now. Everybody is technology based. They don't come in with life experiences like they used to.

Vivian, discussing a scope and sequence curriculum, recalled a story about a teacher who came from a district where all teachers were expected to be on the same page at the same time on the same day:

I think that's terrible! Your kids don't learn the exact same way. I have a class with 14 SPED students in one classroom and in my second period I have one – in that class we fly through things. In the other class, I have to reteach a few extra times. I can't be on the same page with all my students and classes, it's impossible.

Tiffany, who once worked in a district that implemented a scripted curriculum, explained that being forced to use such a curriculum made her feel like her education was worthless:

We were supposed to do this worksheet, have the students read this...it was like why did I go through all of this training and student teaching if I'm gonna read off a script? It was honestly like, the district was saying we don't trust you to do your job so you're gonna have to do this.

Tiffany went on to describe the situation as demoralizing. She did not feel that her work was appreciated and she certainly did not feel that she was treated like a Highly Qualified Teacher, "It's like why am I getting all this education and spending all my time doing this when someone could walk in off the street and do my job for me?" I asked Tiffany if she would stay in her current district if they required a more unyielding curriculum in the future. She responded by explaining:

I'm an expert in my field and I've dedicated years of study to be a good math teacher. If this school came in tomorrow and said this is the curriculum we are gonna do, read word for word off of the page, that would highly offend me. That's like them saying we don't trust you to do your job and we're gonna give you something that that anybody could do. I don't know that I could stay here.

Part of my questioning surrounding canned curriculums asked participants to discuss the positive aspects of implementing them in schools. Although all participants offered responses similar to, canned curriculums could be beneficial for new teachers and substitutes, it was a struggle for most of them to offer any positive responses. What all participants were sure about was that canned

curriculums demeaned their position, made teaching less appealing, may cause them to leave the profession, were detrimental to student success and teacher morale, and that Highly Qualified Teachers should have the ability to write their own lesson plans and should not be required to follow a canned curriculum.

Academic freedom was described by all interviewees as “very important;”

Therefore, the more that academic freedom is encroached upon, the less that these participants reported wanting to stay in the classroom.

## Chapter 7

### Teaching in the Real World

The second major theme: Educator preparation programs required by NCLB do not prepare teacher candidates for the realities of the classroom, developed as a result of the participants views on how much content and pedagogical education they felt Highly Qualified Teachers needed. This theme is further divided into four sub-topics: 1) *Content*, all core teachers have an assigned subject or subjects to teach, however, not all core teachers have formal education in their assigned subjects. 2) *Pedagogy*, all participants attended some version of a teacher certification preparation, however, their programs and experiences varied greatly from each other. 3) *Teacher confidence*, all of the interviewees had college degrees and were fully certified to teach all levels within their primary subjects; however, not all of the participants felt confident enough to teach the higher-level courses. 4) *Student teaching*, I did not have any questions on my protocol that referred to student teaching; however, this was a topic mentioned multiple times, even by those who did not engage in student teaching.

#### Educational Background

All interviewees, even those who felt that their college education did *not* adequately prepare them for teaching their subject, considered a strong educational background and being an expert in content, a paramount aspect of becoming an effective teacher. In addition, all participants also stressed the

importance of a strong pedagogical background. As described by the participants in this study, being an *effective* Highly Qualified Teacher required that teacher candidates be exposed to the realities of today's classrooms, become experts in their content, become well versed in pedagogy, and have the ability to reach students. As Rose put it:

Teaching is very difficult... Teachers need to have a passion for what they are doing, I think they need to love kids, I think they need to know their content area, because if you do not know your content area, how can you teach somebody else about that content area? How can you come up with these innovative lessons that will help kids learn about this content area? You gotta think outside the box and, if you're working with a canned curriculum, which is really big right now, it's even harder to reach students.

It does seem reasonable to expect that a teacher of a subject earned a degree in that subject. It also seems reasonable that a Highly Qualified Teacher be an expert in pedagogy and be able to reach students, even reluctant ones. As Rose explained, teaching is hard and a teacher has many responsibilities, more than most outside of education realize. Therefore, it seemed obvious to the participants that Highly Qualified Teachers needed a strong educational background to support them as they tackle the challenges of teaching in the real world.

#### *Content: In-field and Out-of-field Teaching*

Out of the eight interviewees, two did not major or minor in the subjects they taught (out-of-field teaching) and six majored in the subjects they taught (In-field teaching). The first out-of-field teacher, Caroline, a chemistry teacher,

majored in business and only took “a couple of science classes” in college. She explained that because of the influence of a middle school science teacher, she developed an interest in science. However, she took online classes to earn her bachelor’s degree, so science courses were not an option. Therefore, when she decided to become a teacher, she entered an alternative program and studied to take the science composite certification exam. It took her three attempts, but she did eventually pass the exam and became a Highly Qualified science teacher which opened the door for her to teach a variety of science subjects.

The second, out-of-field teacher, Reginald, a physics teacher, majored in journalism and biology. However, after he taught biology for two years, he began teaching at a school that needed a physics teacher. Because he took the science composite exam, he was, by NCLB standards, Highly Qualified to teach physics. Therefore, he began studying the textbook ahead of the students. He credited his ability to successfully teach physics with his natural interest in the subject and his ability to relate it to life:

I find physics interesting, it’s everyday that you use physics. It’s common, driving your car, walking down the street. The first few years it was difficult. I was like, how do you do this? I just find situations to relate topics to the students. You like football? Okay, let’s talk football. That’s why I like physics because anything the kids are interested in, you can relate physics to it, it’s very relatable. But knowing the content has just been doing it year after year and then re-teaching myself because some of the stuff you use once a year.

Although both Caroline and Reginald seemed to be successful in the courses that they taught, they both expressed that they felt teachers should be experts in the subjects they taught. I asked Caroline and Reginald if they would be comfortable teaching AP courses in the subjects they taught and both said, “no.” Reginald explained that an AP class goes much deeper than an “on-level class” and he has “not even looked” at content at that level. Caroline offered, “I feel like, for AP chemistry in my case, it’s so in-depth that I don’t have that knowledge base yet.”

Orwellia, although she was teaching the content she majored in, described a time when she was asked to teach out-of-field:

I was asked to teach reading. I didn’t really feel comfortable. You know, reading teachers are often specialists, but I did it because I was asked. And some may say that reading is English. But it isn’t. English is analysis and reading is “how to.” I always worried that I was gonna screw these kids up and not teach them well. What if I did more harm than good?

Orwellia went on to say that this was the last time she taught out-of-field and she was relieved when the class completed. She expressed that she believed that having a degree in the content you teach was “at the very least helpful and, well, okay, you do need a college degree in your subject and anything else you can get a hold of for your subject.”

While all of the participants felt that it was best to have a degree in the content that the teacher taught, some did state that there are out-of-field teachers who did a very good job. Wahine, expressed that her views on in-field and out-of-

field teaching were not absolute, “I’m kinda in the middle on that because I had my BA in secondary ed., I had student teaching, observations, practice lesson planning, and that helped me when I got into the classroom. But, at the same time, I met some teachers who maybe got their bachelor’s in something else and had success in the classroom.” Vivian took a much stronger stance on the importance of in-field teaching:

If you are going to teach a content, you have to have a bachelor’s in that. I could go tomorrow, if I could pass a test in psychology, I could teach it. My problem with that is that I worked with a teacher who passed the English cert. test and graduated college with an art degree and he liked to read a lot. He was the worst teacher I’ve ever seen in my life. The only reason I am a decent English teacher is because I received my education in English, that is my bachelor’s.

Rose also took a strong stance on in-field and out-of-field teaching, “I think you really need to be an expert in your area, in your field, and I think you need to know how to translate these super good ideas and all this knowledge into lessons that a child can comprehend and that’s hard to do.” Militario stressed the importance of majoring in the content taught and went a bit further by stating that, “Teachers need to be an expert in their field and rotated through their subjects.” Therefore, according to Militario, when teacher candidates take and pass composite exams that certify them to teach multiple subjects, these teachers need to be rotated through all of these subjects, they need to study all of these subjects, and they need to become experts in all areas that they are certified to teach.

A secondary Highly Qualified Teacher may be asked to teach any level of

their assigned subject. Therefore, it follows that in order to do this, a teacher should have a strong educational background with that subject, as well as, a strong enough pedagogical background to effectively teach that subject. However, as exemplified by the participants in this study, not all teachers have a strong educational or pedagogical background. When I asked the participants whether or not they would feel comfortable teaching a higher level of their current assigned subject (for example, an Advanced Placement course (AP)), Reginald and Caroline, who lack a degree in their current content, both said no. The other participants, who hold degrees in their subjects, either said yes or that they would feel comfortable if given adequate time to prepare. Therefore, while some out-of-field teachers may perform well and may be good teachers, there is no doubt that an educational background in the subject taught is at the very least, helpful, however, most of the interviewees in this study, view it as paramount.

#### *Pedagogy: Teacher Preparation*

As required by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, all participants completed a teacher preparation program. Half of the interviewees, Reginald, Vivian, Caroline, and Orwellia, attended alternative certification programs. While the other half, Rose, Tiffany, Militario, and Wahine attended traditional certification programs. All participants who attended alternative programs felt that they received a poor pedagogical education, that the purpose of the program was not to prepare them for the classroom, but to prepare them for a test. Furthermore,

they expressed that the only reason they were successful in the classroom was because of their love of teaching and their willingness to continually research, learn, and attend professional development. Those who attended traditional programs spoke of their education much more positively, however, they still felt that major reform was needed. Regardless of type, all of the programs varied greatly from each other, even when comparing alternative to alternative and traditional to traditional. Not unlike many of the other participants, Orwellia gave educational programs a rather scathing review: “The majority of education programs fail to prepare teachers for the classrooms. I think that they are moneymakers. They are taking people’s money and churning out teachers. And I use the term “teacher” loosely.”

Although all of the participants had very different experiences, they frequently offered similar commentary and similar recommendations for change. The most common topics mentioned by the participants were: a) More time needs to be dedicated to lesson planning and paperwork requirements. b) Teachers need to be better prepared for the first day of school. c) Teacher candidates need mentors. d) Teacher candidates need observation opportunities. And, e) There is a need for more reality and honesty in certification classes and teacher candidates need student teaching opportunities.

#### Lesson planning

Throughout the interviews, participants frequently addressed lesson

planning and paperwork requirements. All, as teacher candidates, reported that their teacher preparation programs required that they engage in some sort of lesson planning activities. However, the type and the depth of these activities varied. Overall, those who attended traditional certification programs did report more experience with lesson planning, said that there was dedicated time for working with others on lesson planning, and they explained that they were also given opportunities to work with lesson plans covering their specific content areas. Out of all of the participants interviewed, Rose, who attended a traditional certification program, reported experiencing the most beneficial lesson plan training:

I learned how to write a lesson plan, I learned how to follow a lesson plan, I learned how to read the TEKS, and how to design a lesson based on the TEKS. So, you know, what is important about lesson planning is that you accomplish TEKS objectives and I took full creative license with that. By the time I graduated and I entered into the classroom, I knew how to look at curriculum, and I knew what the kids needed to know, and I used my own creative devices to accomplish that. So I felt very prepared.

While Rose studied the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and learned how to plan lessons around them as required by Texas Education Agency (TEA), Tiffany, who also attended a traditional certification program, discussed her training less than enthusiastically:

We learned you'll have paperwork and how to write a lesson plan, but it's not real practice. I got into my first year and I learned, okay, this is how you do it. The techniques they taught us might have worked for veteran teachers, but not someone fresh off the farm.

Orwellia who attended an alternative hybrid program (she attended classes at the university but they were not offered through the traditional education program) said that her program minimally covered lesson planning and if she could have added anything to her pedagogical training, it would have been classes on writing lesson plans: “I’ve heard that some have taken these educational courses where they teach you how to do lesson plans and I wish I would have taken that. I am a horrible lesson plan writer.” Vivian described her experiences with lesson planning as lacking because there is no follow through:

We did a lesson plan too, but they don’t show you how to take that lesson and implement it. On paper people can look amazing, but execution is something totally different. So actually taking the lesson and seeing the execution and being able to give constructive feedback would have been very helpful.

The participants described lesson planning as a very important aspect of being a teacher. Not only are teachers required to write lesson plans for legal purposes, lesson plans are also an effective way to make sure that all educational objectives are being met and that the teacher has thought out and planned for the best pedagogical practices to deliver that lesson. Even in schools where the participants were handed canned curriculums, they were expected to take those curriculums and transfer the information into a lesson plan. Thus, it is no surprise that all interviewees mentioned lesson plan training as something important for teacher preparation programs to cover.

## Paperwork

Although lesson planning is technically “paperwork,” all interviewees separated it from the other types of paperwork required in a school. All entered their schools as new teachers and expected to have to write lesson plans and complete some paperwork; however, the amount of required paperwork was considerably more than they expected and some even described the amount as, “shocking.”

Caroline, who worked in a charter school before her current school, stressed that one of the benefits of working in a charter school is that you have less paperwork and more time to focus on your teaching:

I liked the charter school being smaller, you had lots of parents involved and they wanted better for their kids. It was smaller and less paperwork heavy. It was more about being allowed to teach. But in a public school like this, it’s all sorts of documentation and tracking and the classes are so big. Seeing what they keep adding on, I don’t know that I would go back to a middle school charter, but I would consider a high school charter. I love where I am. And being able to teach chemistry with the people where I’m at. But it’s getting a little ridiculous with everything they require.

Vivian’s remarks were similar to the remarks of most of the interviewees when she recalled that when she first began teaching she was not prepared for the paperwork requirements. She explained that she felt unprepared because her certification program offered no trainings involving paperwork: “Paperwork was never something they talked about—just the legalities. They don’t tell you how much paperwork is behind the legalities. So when you are a new teacher, you

don't really understand and they don't get that.”

According to the participants, paperwork has become an overwhelming duty. Just as Caroline mentioned, teachers are expected to document all aspects of their job, track students, call parents and document the calls. In addition, interviewees discussed other paperwork requirements. For instance, attendance must be completed within 15 minutes of the start of each class, regardless of what may be going on when the students enter the room. Parent contact logs are required every six weeks. Discipline plans for troublesome students are required before a teacher is allowed to contact a principal. Feedback for required curriculums must be turned in every six weeks. Daily, weekly, and six week paperwork is required for each special education student. Grades must be turned in every six weeks, then grade audit forms must be completed, and if there is an error or change, a teacher must get administrator approval and then fill out paperwork for a grade change. Teachers are guaranteed one 45-minute period each day during which they are charged with completing paperwork, planning for their lessons, planning with other teachers, attending department meeting, calling parents, and meeting with parents and administrators. Overall, the participants reported feeling overwhelmed and overburdened by the ever increasing paperwork demands. They also asked, when, if they must complete all of the above, do they have time to teach?

## The first day of school

All participants referred to their first day of teaching as the moment when they realized how alone they were. Rose recalled that her department head handed her a key to her classroom and offered, “I’m down the hall if you need me, here’s your teacher textbook.” She explained how scared and alone she felt. How, even with all of her training, she felt completely unprepared, “I remember standing in that classroom being like what the heck am I gonna to do, so, how do I start?” Wahine also felt completely unprepared and scared on her first day of school and described walking up to her room, looking around at all of her desks and how she had everything perfectly set up, and then the bell rang and her students entered. She stood for a minute, looking at all of them, and thought, “Now what do I do?” She added that later she realized how much her program did not prepare her for:

It didn’t prepare me for the first day of school, it didn’t prepare me for when a student called me a “B” word. It didn’t prepare me for the little real things. It didn’t prepare me for the fights. It didn’t prepare me to have different activities, to be organized. For real world—it did *not* prepare me for that.

Although I did not ask participants about their first day on the job, they did offer their recollections when discussing what their pedagogical programs failed to prepare them for. Walking in on their first day was a stressful memory for all interviewees. They all described a feeling of being alone and thought, “Now what am I supposed to do?” They all felt somewhat let down by their programs and expressed that the first day of teaching was so significant in the

career of teacher that it should be a focus of every teacher educator program. The participants felt that teachers need to enter the classroom on day one having already experienced leading a classroom and with a plan of action, because, they warned, there is no time to figure these things out once the students arrive.

#### Observation opportunities and a need for mentors

Each candidate in this study attended a different teacher certification program and each program approached providing teaching experience somewhat differently. Three of the programs offered student teaching for different lengths of time. Four offered actual teaching experience while learning, some with a mentor. And one, the program Rose attended, offered observation hours. Although Rose described her observation experience favorably and felt that it did help her to better understand her role as a teacher, she also thought that it was a detriment because her observation hours replaced student teaching:

I thought it was a disadvantage. I did observation hours. I would say that if there was one thing that I could change, it probably would have been to do student teaching. That experience would've offered the sink or swim, you're on the job, what are you going to do now kind of thing, you know? I mean, a fight breaks out in your room over, whatever, what are you going to do? I didn't learn how to handle that in my nice little education classroom in college.

As Rose described, the lack of any real world training negatively affected her ability to perform as a teacher when she first entered the real world. Wahine, on the other hand, experienced the benefit of both observation and student teaching giving her a glimpse into the real world. She explained that each year of her

studies were geared toward preparing her for her final year of observation and student teaching:

The first few years were intro to education classes, like lesson planning and how to be a professional in the classroom. We looked at different video examples of teachers teaching various subjects. Then we had to do observations. I went to a middle school for so many hours each week and I had to take notes and assist. And then, well, the objective of the observation was really to prepare us for student teaching, which was during my last semester of college for the whole semester.

Although, as Wahine said, the objective of her observation hours was to prepare her for her student teaching, she found them valuable. She fondly recalled observing her assigned teacher and writing down ideas that she planned on using in her future classes. She also enjoyed the opportunity to sit down and talk to a teacher, ask questions, and help her complete some of her daily tasks.

As part of his alternative program, Reginald was assigned a teacher to observe who eventually became his mentor. Reginald felt that having a mentor was beneficial his first year because, “She was somebody to ask questions to. It’s difficult to go to the admin as a first year teacher and say you have no clue what you’re doing.” On certain days of the week, Reginald also observed his mentor teaching, “It was nice to see someone and how they operate their classroom. It was also helpful that she was someone I talked to, to gain ideas of how to solve things.” While Reginald felt that having a mentor and someone to observe was valuable, he also expressed that student teaching would have benefitted him more because he found it very difficult to enter the classroom his first year with “no

hands on experience.”

Vivian’s program did not require observation hours (although she did voluntarily go into classrooms and observe teachers) or student teaching, but it did provide a mentor during her first year of teaching. As described by Vivian, her mentor would, “watch a class period and provide feedback...she was a retired teacher and she did give pointers and suggestions. Like maybe how to set up the classroom to help with vision and the schematics. Nothing about content though.” Although Vivian felt that her mentor program lacked important aspects like help with content and constructive feedback, she still asserted that mentor programs are important, “I think that if that’s what they are going to do, no observation and not even just student teaching, I think that you need a mentor, daily, that sits and watches you for a year or semester.”

Not all participants had a mentor their first year of teaching and not all mentioned that they felt a mentor was necessary; However, those who were given a mentor, did find their mentor both helpful and comforting. As Reginald said, it can be daunting to go to an administrator and ask for help or admit that you may not know what to do; and, in his case, having a mentor allowed him the freedom to ask questions and get help without feeling judged and without involving administration. Even Vivian’s mentor, who only provided positive feedback, helped by offering support and ideas for future lessons. Therefore, it seems that, minimally, a mentor can provide much needed encouragement for new teachers

and may even help them to grow and become better teachers.

### Student teaching

Out of the eight participants interviewed for this study, only three engaged in student teaching. All, however, indicated that student teaching is beneficial, and most believed it should be a requirement. Those who did engage in student teaching reported that their experiences, while not exactly like having their own classroom, at least provided them with an idea of what teaching was going to be like.

Tiffany mentioned her student teaching experiences several times during the interview and expressed that student teaching played the greatest role in preparing her for her first year of teaching:

Student teaching was my focus the last semester. I had some classes that were specifically about how to teach math concepts and some that were general how to teach. I also did ESL with my certification, so we had some classes about how to teach and how to communicate with second language learners...I think that my student teaching experience, teaching with that teacher, prepared me more than passing my pedagogy test.

While Tiffany felt that her experiences did much to prepare her for teaching, Militario was left wanting more.

Militario student taught for one semester and repetitively stressed the importance of practice, experience, and planning. He explained that he conducted observations, practiced teaching his classmates, and he student taught, but this

was not enough to prepare him for the real experience of teaching his own class

all day:

We need experience. Student teaching is probably one of the biggest factors, in my opinion, that will ensure success; and not just student teaching in one school, but multi schools, multi grade levels, and different types of schools. I think you need that experience before you have your own classroom. [Teacher preparation programs] can have you read books and take classes, but to prepare you for a classroom with 30 living, breathing bodies, staring at you, and testing every button you have, I think just more practicum. Theory is one thing, practice is a whole other. I had one semester; it needs to be a full classroom year. Teachers need the experience of opening and closing a year. Honestly, I think they should make you sub.

Reginald did not student teach but he still voiced his belief that it is an important experience that he should have had because his program did not at all prepare him for the classroom, “I went through alternative certification. They didn’t prepare you for the classroom. There was no theory or why something happens. It was just, we want you to pass this test. There needs to be more training and practicum into the classroom.” Not only did Reginald state that he should have been required to student teach, he added that all teacher candidates need to student teach for a full year.

It is telling that only three out of eight participants student taught, however, all participants see student teaching as valuable. It makes sense that teacher candidates would be better prepared to enter the classroom if they had experience, even minimal, leading a classroom as part of their schooling. All participants seemed genuinely interested in being effective and described

experience in a real classroom as the best preparation that they could receive. Some were so concerned about entering the classroom without enough experience, that they declared that candidates need a whole year of student teaching, not just one semester. However, as several participants explained, a whole year of student teaching without pay would be difficult for many. Therefore, while all participants voiced the belief that teacher candidates should engage in student teaching, there was questions about how much student teaching is needed.

#### The real classroom

The topic that all participants brought up most frequently was that there needs to be a strong injection of reality into teacher preparation programs and exams. All interviewees discussed their programs and reality as two very separate things. Many said that their progr

ams presented perfect world scenarios and set them up in perfect classrooms to practice; however, one they began teaching, they learned that the real classroom is far from perfect.

Militario said that he had no idea what the reality of his classroom would be like. He had no idea that he would be entering a room where every student in there was trying to “push his buttons.” He had no idea that the students would have such large educational gaps, according to Militario, the size of “canyons.” Reality was so far from the picture that his program presented, Militario said he

may not have even become a teacher had the truth been presented—a very important statement considering the high teacher attrition rate.

Vivian declared that teacher preparation programs need to “more accurately reflect the world we live in today.” She went on to say that, she thought that she was “going to show up and leave and have summers off” and her program did nothing to correct that belief. However, she added, that this perception of teaching is:

A farce! You don't realize how much of a mother or father, confidant, and counselor you are to these kids. And they don't prepare you for that. They don't prepare you for how to handle that. When have you gone too far? How do you keep a separation but help? What do you do when the child has latched on because they don't have anyone else? The job of being a teacher “and other duties as assigned” it's so much. Those “other duties assigned” stretch longer than the teacher.

Vivian continued by describing some of the “other duties assigned.” She expressed sheer exhaustion because of the demands placed on her. She explained that summers off were a joke because administrators call you throughout. As she described it, administrators may call teachers in for a meeting, they may call them to attend a training that could last one to two weeks. Schools have summer programs for students and administrators want teachers to return to work early. Administrators want teachers to come in and help prepare for the new school year. They want teachers to come in during registration and help the students sign up for classes and guide parents around the school. Therefore, for Vivian, summers presented the dilemma of choosing work or kids: “They want us to do so much for

the school, but my kids are in school too, I need to show up for them.” This feeling of “being torn” also presents throughout the school year. Vivian explained that sometimes she and her husband, who is also a teacher, have to work 12 hour days, “We have to decide who will leave work and pick up the kids each day. Sometimes we just get them and bring them to the school with us.”

Rose, who also described her role as a mentor, support system, and counselor, expressed the same frustration with educator materials:

I just, in every scenario, all the textbooks and everything, it just seemed like it was perfect world. All your students want to be there, they have both parents at home, and those parents care about their kids’ education. You know, it’s the *Leave it to Beaver* house, where you all sit down at a dinner table and eat together, and talk about your day.

Rose continued by and explained that both parents were not at home for many students. Many of the students in her school did not have parents who had the time to be at the school and checking in on their kids work. Therefore, as Rose described it, teachers are confidants, they are mentors, and they are pseudo parents. If a parent cannot help their child fill out applications for college, the teacher steps in. If a parent cannot afford to give their child money for food on a trip, teachers chip in. If a child has a dilemma or a crisis, they most likely go to their favorite teacher. Therefore, the reality is, teachers have a lot more on their plates than teaching, and educator programs simply fail to mention any of this.

Tiffany, like Rose, repetitively described her pedagogical materials as presenting a perfect world, one that does not exist in reality. She continued by

discussing her program's use of theory and philosophy; and while she did not dispute the value of theory, she did disagree with the use of it as reality:

Yeah they want to do the philosophy of education and we want everything to be perfect and follow our theory, but its not gonna work because you're dealing with real kids and maybe they didn't have breakfast, or maybe they didn't eat all week. Or maybe they are working two jobs and pre-cal is the last thing on their list. This is more important to them now, so deal with that first and maybe you can get them to do some pre-cal after they have a snack.

Tiffany suggested that educational programs need to present material "just like the real world." Instructors need to explain what "might happen in the classroom" and offer what to do to handle these situations because:

Nothing happens in your classroom the same way every day and nothing happens in your classroom like the exam prepares you for. But, I think like an actual instructor or mentor program. Like someone you can go to and say this happened what do I do, what should I do? That would be good.

All participants reported that they were stunned when they entered the real world of teaching. Regardless of program type or where their program was held, all interviewees, as teacher candidates, were presented a nonexistent world of teaching. In the teaching world exhibited by educator preparation programs, all students wanted to learn, all parents were involved, students came from supportive homes, and all aspects of the education system worked. It is, therefore, easy to see why a teacher candidate may become excited to begin their career only to then quickly become disenchanted when slapped with the real world of teaching. Therefore, according to the interviewees, presenting a real picture of the

teaching environment would have given them the opportunity to ask questions and seek out the wisdom of those who have experience teaching, something simple that they all felt was missing, yet would have been very beneficial. Furthermore, this is something that they could have thought about to decide whether or not teaching was even for them. Because, as Militarino speculated, he may not have even gone into teaching; Thus begging the question as to whether this might be true for other teachers as well.

## Chapter 8

### Tests, What are they Good For?

The third major theme: Teacher certification exams do not adequately measure subjected competency as intended by NCLB, was addressed several times in my protocol and this topic elicited some of the most passionate responses. This theme is further divided into four sub-topics: 1) *Composite versus subject specific exams*, throughout this process I learned that many subjects are being combined and turned into composite exams. This allows a teacher who may have expertise in one or two areas to take an exam that tests for multiple subjects and thus become certified in multiple subjects. 2) *The Pedagogical and Professional Responsibilities Exam EC-12 (PPR)*, this exam is required in Texas in addition to the content exam. All participants took this exam and all had the same basic comments about this exam. 3) *Taking multiple exams*, once certified in one subject, a teacher may take additional exams to gain certification in other subjects. I asked the participants what their thoughts were about this and how they felt it affected the meaning of the Highly Qualified Teacher. 4) *Taking exams multiple times*, teacher candidates are allowed multiple attempts to take and pass exams. I asked the interviewees what they thought about this, especially in cases where a teacher is allowed to teach while they are attempting to pass these exams.

## Teacher Certification Exams

The No Child Left Behind Act mandates that teacher candidates must take two certification exams to fulfill two of three requirements for becoming a Highly Qualified Teacher (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The first exam is taken to prove subject competency. As described by the participants, this exam asked questions about content and about teaching the content. For instance, on Orwellia's exam, she had to answer multiple-choice questions pertaining to the subject of English and then, at the end of the exam, she had to write an essay and develop a lesson plan for teaching a concept in English. On Tiffany's exam, she had to demonstrate her ability to solve math problems, and then, she had to explain how she would teach certain mathematical concepts and make them meaningful to students. The second exam, the Pedagogy and Personal Responsibilities EC-12 (PPR) exam, is a requirement for all teacher candidates in Texas, regardless of content area. This exam tests for teaching specific concepts such as discipline issues, educational policies, and dealing with parents (Texas Education Agency, 2015).

### *Composite versus Subject Specific Exams*

To demonstrate subject competency, teacher candidates are presented with two types of exams: composite and subject specific (Texas Education Agency, 2015). The composite exam covers multiple subjects listed under one subject. For instance, Caroline took and passed the Science 6-12 composite exam and is now

certified to teach multiple sciences (for example, chemistry, physics, biology)

regardless of her educational background in these topics—something that

Caroline did not agree with:

I think it is important for [teacher candidates] to be able to pass subject specific exams, not so much composite. Because composite says I'm qualified to teach 10 different sciences but I only really know two. Or, if they do take the composite, they should only become certified for the subject areas they pass, something like that. Doing composite where you can teach everything is a bit much.

While taking a composite exam certifies a teacher candidate for multiple subjects, including those they have shown no expertise in, the subject specific exam covers one subject in depth. For instance, Orwellia and Vivian both took the Secondary English 6-12 subject exam and they are both certified to teach secondary English, nothing else. As described by Reginald, “The composite test prepares you for a wide variety of topics that you're able to teach. It doesn't allow you to be an expert on any of it because it's such a broad range. The subject test forces you to be an expert.”

All other participants in this study took the composite exams to achieve certification. However, each of them expressed some level of disagreement with the use of composite exams for certification. Militario voiced his disapproval for using composite exams for higher-level subjects:

The composite is broad spectrum. It has entry-level calculus, algebra I and II and statistics. It does give a good interpretation of everything we are supposed to know... It's just a surface, hot spots test... When you look at maximization and minimization problems, I think they should do it by

subjects. If someone is really not good at statistics, you want to know. Wouldn't you want to know how they are by subject and put the teacher where they ought to go? Someone could have missed everything about a subject on a composite test but still pass the test. And they could be put in that subject. So, really, are you getting a Highly Qualified Teacher? No.

Rose, like Militario, expressed concern about teachers being charged with teaching subjects they have little to no expertise in. She went on to share her belief that the use of composite exams should be stopped:

I took the social studies composite exam, so I was tested on U.S. history, world history, geography, economics, and psychology. So, because of the composite exam, technically I'm certified to teach psychology and there were only like two questions about psychology on that test! For economics, there might have been, like five. The majority of the questions were about world history and U.S. history, so that's good that I'm teaching a subject that there were a lot questions on, but if I were to teach psychology, I don't think that's a fair assessment of my knowledge about psychological issues.

Rose continued by expressing that teachers should only be hired to teach a subject if they have a background in that subject. For instance, Rose was technically deemed Highly Qualified to teach psychology because she passed a composite exam that included questions about psychology. However, Rose exclaimed that there is no way she should or could teach psychology because she has no educational background with that subject. She continued by warning that being certified does not necessarily mean any teacher is really qualified for a specific position and added that administrators need to make sure that a teacher passed a subject exam because, as Rose explained, while the exam she took may have

certified her to teach psychology, “I’m telling you, I remember two questions about psychology on that entire test.”

In some cases, there is no choice between the composite exam and the subject exam because not all subjects have their own dedicated exam (Texas Education Agency, 2015). However, there are still many subject exams available and, in those cases, teacher candidates can choose to take one or the other. For instance, Caroline who teaches chemistry, could have chosen to take the Chemistry 7-12 exam rather than the Science 7-12 exam; however, as Caroline explained it, taking a subject exam may show that you are an expert in the subject, however, schools prefer to hire teachers who took the composite because they are certified in more areas:

If I were taking the individual courses like chemistry, physics, or life science, I think that would be fantastic because they go really in depth. However, most districts now require the composite certification so they can move you wherever they need you. Because, if you’re only certified in one subject, you’re stuck there. Being composite certified means that whenever they need to fill a hole, you’re available to fill it.

Therefore, according to Caroline and the other participants who took composite exams, they were encouraged to choose these exams because becoming certified to teach multiple subjects makes them more marketable. However, these same participants admitted that while they may be deemed Highly Qualified to teach all subjects presented on their composite exams, they really know very little about many of the subjects tested. As described by the interviewees, a candidate

can have a strong knowledge of one or two areas and, if they do well on those portions, their score will be high enough to make up for missed questions on the other areas. Thus, even though teacher candidates may express their own shortcomings and lack of knowledge in certain subjects, what matters most to administrators is not expertise, but the legal ability to plug a hole in their school.

*The Pedagogical and Professional Responsibilities EC-12 Exam*

The Pedagogical and Professional Responsibilities EC-12 Exam (PPR) is a requirement for all Texas teacher candidates (Texas Education Agency, 2015). However, all teachers in this study referred to it as a “joke” and most laughed aloud when I mentioned it. This reaction was not because they felt that the exam was easy, it was because they felt the exam lacked any degree of reality. Caroline described the scenarios presented on the exam as:

Unrealistic and best case. It was just one of those where, well if little Johnny is sitting in the corner with his head down, what should you do for him? Well, what about the other 27 running around like wild animals? At least little Johnny is sitting by himself and not causing trouble. I have others trying to light the lab on fire. They present these perfect little scenarios that are in this perfect little world and it's never like that.

Orwellia, described her exam similarly to Caroline, the scenarios presented were unrealistic and the solutions were fit for a perfect world. Orwellia described her exam strategy for the passing the PPR:

The exam is like living in a perfect bubble. If an answer was there that reflected the real world, you were not to choose it. I went through the answers and drew a box around all of the answers that were perfect world and filled in all the bubbles. I just needed to look for perfect world to pass.

I did well on that one.

While Orwellia described a test where she could just box and choose the most “in the box response,” Militario described an exam that did not even offer real-life responses. When I asked Militario about the PPR he began laughing and exclaimed, “It’s a joke!” He explained:

Anybody who has taken this will tell you it’s perfect classroom. We don’t have perfect classrooms. That test is full of what-ifs. No I take it back, all of the what-ifs are taken out and all of the questions are vague. Like, “Do you call a parent first or an administrator?” But there is no option for both and policy says you do both. So I think it’s not realistic at all. I think it’s great on paper. It’s like communism. It’s really pretty on paper. It’s beautiful, until people get involved and mess it all up.

As Militario said, anyone who took the PPR would describe it as an exam covering the “perfect classroom.” Reginald, Tiffany, and Rose were no exception. Reginald described the questions on the exam as presenting a world in which, “Everything is perfect, everything is great.” Tiffany, who took a semester long class dedicated to how to choose the correct response on the PPR stated, “Everything on the test was in the perfect classroom situation and you had to read it in the perfect world.”

Rose declared that the exam was a “common joke” and described her test taking strategy:

I had to take myself out of what I would actually do and say and think about what they wanted me to say. On this test you have to operate under the assumption that all of your kids want to be there, that you have all of the resources in the world that you want, that you have no overcrowding issues in your classroom, that there is a perfect teacher-student ratio, that

they have parents who care, and that the worst discipline issue you will have is, so and so stuck gum under a desk.

There was no dispute amongst the interviewees: the PPR is an unrealistic exam that tests for working in a nonexistent educational world. This is a test so far from reality that it seems to have become a game to look for the most unrealistic response. For all of the interviewees, as teacher candidates, they found the PPR both easy and amusing; however, I did ask them all if they thought they could still pass the exam after working in the real world for a while. All of them gave similar responses of, “I don’t know,” or “probably not.”

#### *Taking Multiple Exams*

In Texas, once teachers achieve certification, they have the option to take additional content exams to become certified to teach additional subjects. There are no formal educational requirements to be able to do this and all teachers are eligible, regardless of their educational background (Texas Education Agency, 2015). I asked all of my participants what their views on this were and they all expressed concern. Some felt that this ability would be a positive aspect of certification if there was a requirement to show some educational background in the subject. Some suggested that teachers should at least be required to take some professional development in the subject before being allowed to test. All felt that it would be possible to pass, even with no background, as long as they studied and/or took it enough times.

Caroline, who spent a great deal of time studying and preparing for the science exam, felt that she could possibly pass the history exam if she studied enough. She added, “The fact that I could be in there teaching an EOC tested subject is crazy. There’s no way that someone who got Ds and Fs in history should teach it.” Rose, who does not agree with this policy, discussed the topic with consternation, “I mean, I can go and take any content exam, any one I want to...If there is a need for a certain teacher at a school, I can just go take the content exam, and bam! Qualified!”

Reginald, who reiterated some of the concerns Caroline expressed, saw some value in the ability to take multiple exams and offered that teachers should be able to take them as long as they have some background or experience with the subject:

I think with the content, if you can pass the test, if you’ve taken the steps to be a teacher, I can see the benefit of allowing them to take multiple tests. Some people know a lot about different subjects... But I would think they also need to have a certain amount of experience. If you are just trying to take all the tests you can take, do you really know a lot about any subject? It shouldn’t be let me just take as many tests as I can and find a job somewhere. It should be, I really like teaching, what else could I do to help kids learn?

The ability to take and pass exams to achieve full certification and Highly Qualified status is both beneficial and troubling. For a teacher who may have majored in another subject or studied multiple subjects in college, the ability to take and pass additional exams makes sense. If a teacher has the knowledge and

can become more marketable by multiple certifications, the ability to take multiple exams helps both the teacher and the school. However, as the participants cautioned, many people have the ability to pass multiple choice exams, and if those exams do not test deeply, teachers may become certified in subjects that they know very little about. Furthermore, the ability to take exams multiple times raises the likelihood that an examinee will simply learn what an exam tests for, study those topics, and eventually pass the exam.

#### *Taking Exams Multiple Times*

Texas teacher candidates and current teachers who wish to add certifications, are allowed to take exams as many times as it takes to pass, although there is a 60 day waiting period between each try (Texas Education Agency, 2015). When I asked each interviewee for their thoughts on this, they all expressed that teacher candidates should be allowed multiple tries, however, they also felt there should be a limit to the number of attempts and there should be a limit to the amount of time an uncertified teacher can continue teaching without passing exams.

All eight participants discussed illness and test anxiety as one of the reasons why teachers and teacher candidates should be able to retry passing their exams. Tiffany, who passed her exams the first time, explained:

I think the multiple tries to pass a test is fine. You may have been sick one day or got the test with the hard questions or missed it by one question. I don't know, really, but I think multiple test taking opportunities is okay.

More important is, did you do the work in a class, did you do the research?

Even if an examinee did study and research the topic as Tiffany suggested, some participants expressed that the number of attempts to pass should be limited and that teacher candidates should not be allowed to continue teaching while they attempt to pass their exams. Militario said that he felt that teacher candidates should be able to test as many times as they need to, but the exams need to be changed for each try, “You should be able to take the tests again if it comes in different forms. I took the math test and the physics/math test and the questions didn’t change on the tests.” Wahine, who also passed her exams on her first try, felt that multiple tries was a positive thing because failing an exam does not necessarily mean you do not know the content, “Some of us really have extreme test anxiety. Just like our students. I would hate for an excellent teacher not to be in the classroom because they failed by one question.” Orwellia, who was one of those teacher candidates who failed the first time by one question, recalled seeing her exam score:

I received my score in the mail and, when I saw that I had failed, I was really embarrassed. Then, when I realized that I had failed by one point, I was mad. I have a lot of test anxiety and I freak out just by the thought of a test. I still remember the day I took the test. I was so paranoid that something would go wrong that I ended up making something go wrong. I was sitting by a friend and worried that they might think we cheated, so I didn’t want my answers to be like hers. So, when it came to the lesson plan part, I didn’t write what I should have. I went off in some crazy direction and messed it up. The worst part was when I returned to work, the head of the department told me that not everyone was suitable for teaching. I almost gave up right then. But I went back and took it again

and, this time, I had to write a lesson plan about teaching the 1900 storm. I knew it was for me! I was from Galveston and it was my thing. I passed with points to spare.

I asked all of my participants questions about teacher certification exams and, for the most part, their responses were quite similar. Because composite exams certify teachers for subjects they may know little to nothing about, most agreed that these types of exams should be phased out or scored by each subject. The PPR was viewed as a joke by most of the interviewees and as unrealistic by all interviewees. The lack of reality did cause some of the participants to question whether the PPR should even be required for certification. The ability for examinees to take multiple subject exams to achieve a passing score was met with criticism; however, most offered that this practice could be a positive thing if the examinee shows some educational background in the subject tested. Finally, all participants, once again, expressed the same sentiments and concerns when asked about the ability to take exams multiple times. All were concerned about the possibility of test anxiety or illness during an exam, therefore, all stated that candidates should be able to re-take exams. However, Militarico added that the exams need to change for each attempt and Rose and Orwellia added that teachers should not teach until they have successfully passed the exams; furthermore, if a teacher candidate is allowed to teach while seeking certification, that candidate should not be allowed to do so for more than a year.

## Chapter 9

### The Highly Qualified Teacher Speaks Out

The fourth and final major theme: Highly Qualified Teachers have much to offer policymakers, developed as a result of direct questions about policy and as a result of the interviewees spontaneously offering policy changes throughout their interviews. This theme is further divided into three sub-topics: 1) *Student teaching*, the participants had much to say about student teaching and think that this topic should become part of policy reform. 2) *Exams*, teacher candidates must take a minimum of two exams to become certified and these exams are placed on a very high pedestal by policymakers. All interviewees had much to say about these exams and how they are used. 3) *Educational background*, all teachers are required to have a college degree but the specifics of that degree are very vague. All interviewees offered suggestions for reform pertaining to the educational backgrounds of teachers.

#### HQT Recommended Policy Changes

When the participants were first questioned about their ideas for policy change, they seemed a bit perplexed. Some paused, looked a little surprised, sat back, and took in a deep breath. Some asked for a moment to just stop and think. Some began speaking and then stopped and said, “Wait, let me start over.” Several said, “I’ve never been asked about that before.” However, as they began to think, and occasionally with a little probing, all interviewees discovered that

they had a lot to say about policy and change.

*Good Intentions (That with Which the Road to Hell is Paved)*

When discussing The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001's implementation into law, all participants expressed that they believed that the government had "good intentions" when first writing and passing NCLB. All participants also believe that the government's definition of a Highly Qualified Teacher was a "great first attempt" at regulating who leads American classrooms. As Rose explained:

I think that No Child Left Behind, when it was passed, I think the intentions behind the early stages of it were really good. We want Highly Qualified Teachers in the classroom; we want our students to be producing highly qualified work. I really think that the intention was there, that we've got to have these standards, and we got to set the bar high, and if you set the bar, research shows the kids are going to race to that level. So I really think the intention was there.

Although Rose offered that the intentions behind NCLB were good, she and several other participants, expressed that what started off with good intentions became problematic when implemented. As Orwellia described, states were given waivers for various requirements and the language was not definitive:

I think that they set out with good intentions. They thought, "You have a college degree in that and you should teach it." And, I agree, you should have a degree in what you're gonna teach. So, okay, that's a good plan. But, then they filtered it down with, "Okay you have a college degree in something and it doesn't have to be in what you teach." That's where they messed up.

When NCLB was written and implemented, it did seem to offer some

solutions to the problems that ail education. Specifically, because teachers have such a great influence on student success (Darling-Hammond, 1999, 2000b; Darling-Hammond, Berry, & Thoreson, 2001), policymakers defined the Highly Qualified Teacher (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). However, just as Orwellia explained, even with the rather loose language in NCLB, states were allowed waivers to opt out of certain requirements. These waivers began to undermine the perceived initial goals of NCLB and the policy did not achieve the results the policymakers purported it was meant to achieve.

### *Loopholes*

According to the participants, one of the most troublesome aspects of the No Child Left Behind Act is that policymakers implemented it and then allowed so many loopholes that it undermined the initial intentions of the law. Rose addressed this issue passionately:

You have all these loopholes that these politicians did not account for and the reason they didn't account them is because they don't know what it's like in the classroom. And they don't know their own educational policies, they have no idea, and they don't consult educators because we're not in this big Pac that's getting them elected. I think that their intentions were to create Highly Qualified Teachers who are producing these highly qualified students who are going to go on to these highly qualified universities and who graduate with these highly qualified degrees and to be highly qualified citizens of this country...but I think all these loopholes kept that from happening.

Orwellia and Vivian, just as Rose did, voiced angst about the loopholes in the law. They went on to suggest that perhaps policymakers did not understand

that being so vague in the language of the law left too much room for interpretation. For instance, Orwellia discussed NCLB's requirement that HQTs have a bachelor's degree was a good first step; however, she stressed that there was a need for policymakers to go further and stipulate what the degrees needed to be in for each subject. In addition to tightening the requirements for a degree, Vivian, Caroline, and Reginald mentioned that while it was a good idea to require that teacher candidates enroll in a preparation program, lawmakers needed to regulate those programs and verify that they were actually preparing teachers for the classroom. Therefore, it is these "loopholes" and instances of "vague language" that all participants referred to, which led to their first suggestion for policy reform: *Tighten the language and close the loopholes.*

#### *Policymakers and Reality*

Rose declared, in her discussion of loopholes, that politicians "don't know what it's like in the classroom." This was a sentiment reiterated by all of the interviewees. Vivian, discussing policymakers, was agitated by what she described as "politicians thinking we don't do that much." She added that:

Anyone in the government who thinks all we do is teach, they are so wrong. You have people making decisions about education who have never stepped foot in a classroom. Those people should take the state and AP exams. The reality is so much different from what they pictured. I've had drug deals in my classroom. The politician's kids don't even go to public school. They have no idea. At minimum you need a minor in pedagogy to even make policy.

Vivian's concerns pertaining to the qualifications of educational policymakers, was also voiced by other participants. For instance, Reginald discussed that policymakers have no educational experience and need to consult with a panel of educators before writing any policy:

Right now everything is made up from people with no educational experience. They need to get educators and create a panel and make policy based on that panel. They do need to require that people get experience to be a teacher. A lot of people leave within the first 5 years because what they learn in school is different from what happens in the classroom. There isn't the actual hands on to show you what its like. They teach you about a utopian classroom.

Reginald felt that politicians refuse to see and deal with reality and this hurts teachers and teacher candidates. He attributed a high attrition rate to the lack of reality in preparation programs and in the policy that lawmakers write. Orwellia also discussed these issues and conveyed concern about the need for policymakers to "deal with reality," adding:

They need to understand the real world of teaching. Maybe policymakers need to spend a month in a school. Go through everything, all of the stuff that happens, the good and the bad. You're not truly exhausted until you've been in a school for a month.

Overall, the participants revealed concern and annoyance with the current make-up of educational policymakers and their lack of educational knowledge and experience. As a result, the second suggestion for policy reform is: *Educational policymakers should be required to have experience in the real world of public*

*school teaching. In addition, an advisory board of current Highly Qualified Teachers should be formed and consulted when writing policy.*

### *Student Teaching*

Although less than half of the participants engaged in student teaching, all brought it up when discussing the requirements for becoming a Highly Qualified Teacher. Currently, certification programs vary greatly and there is no federal regulation that dictates that these programs should offer student teaching. However, student teaching was perceived by the participants as one of the best ways to prepare teacher candidates for the real world of teaching.

There was very little wavering on this topic when discussing how to better prepare teacher candidates for the classroom. For instance, Wahine declared that, “Every teacher candidate should spend time as a student teacher before they ever enter the classroom.” She explained that this would at least better ensure that teachers were more effective and better prepared because, as she stated:

We need experience. Student teaching is probably one of the biggest factors, in my opinion, that will ensure success...I think you need that experience before you have your own classroom...I think a semester of student teaching is not enough. I think it should be an entire year and I think it should be multi-grade levels and at different schools. You need those different experiences. That was the biggest thing. Our student teaching was not enough.

Reginald, who did not have the option to student teach, suggested that student teaching should be a requirement for all teacher candidates, “not just for a semester but for the whole year.” He explained that he came to this conclusion

because his “first time in charge of a class was when [he] started teaching.” He went on to recall that he had a very difficult time with all of the “small things we do every day that affect how we teach our lessons.” Upon further investigation, Reginald discovered that his experience was not uncommon. He found that most “new teachers coming in were in the same boat.” As a result, Reginald concluded that, “You should have to student teach and lead a classroom. You should start out observing, then co-teach, and then teach a few lessons.” Reginald went on to discuss the importance of this experience and explained that teachers need to see how students react to them in the classroom.

Militario was much more dogmatic in his proposed approach to teacher candidate preparation. He discussed the need to make candidates write lesson plans over and over again. He stated that teacher candidates need to have, “their feet held to the fire,” they “need to be criticized,” and they “need to be pushed.” He exclaimed that teacher candidates need to observe classrooms, they need “a lot of practicums,” they need to student teach (for a year), and they need to “sub.” He added:

Not only do you have to sub, you have to go in for your practicum for the whole day, because I only went in for two periods a day and that’s not enough. That’s not real. You don’t get to feel the drain of a whole day that way. They need to feel it.

Tiffany stated that her “student teaching opportunities probably were the most beneficial things that I did.” She added that “being mandated to go to

student teaching every day as a college class was one of the best things that prepared me for being a teacher.” However, like the others, she too felt that a year of student teaching would have been more beneficial.

Although most of the interviewees were able to focus on their schooling and could dedicate entire days to student teaching, Vivian, Caroline, and Orwellia, were working full time jobs when they were teacher candidates. Vivian said that she wished she would have student taught, but there was no way she could have because she was pregnant. She that not being able to student teach resulted in her working much harder when she began teaching. Caroline also said she wanted to student teach and felt that it should be a requirement; however, in her position, she could not afford to pay for her schooling to student teach and she could not afford the time to student teach. Orwellia was the least passionate of the interviewees when it came to student teaching. She explained that she felt very lost when she first began teaching and that student teaching would probably have helped her, but it “would have been very hard to afford it for a semester, much less for a year.” She went on to explain that while student teaching was a good idea, there needs to be something for those who would not be able to do it. She added, “If there had been a requirement for student teaching to be a teacher, I don’t think I’d be teaching today. And that’s hard to imagine because I love teaching, it’s what I do, it’s what I want to do.”

Overall, the participants agreed that student teaching is beneficial and possibly the best practice for preparing teacher candidates for the real world. However, three of the participants pointed out that not everyone can afford to student teach for an entire day or an entire year. Therefore, the third suggestion for policy reform is: *As part of their teacher preparation program, all teacher candidates should be required to engage in student teaching, but the duration and hours are dependent upon the program.*

#### *Educational Background*

Although several interviewees stated that they knew effective teachers without an educational background in the subjects they taught, and although two of the interviewees lacked an educational background in the subjects they taught, all interviewees said that teachers do need an educational background in the subjects they teach. Six of the participants offered that a teacher could be considered Highly Qualified if he or she earned a minor and/or completed at least 12 hours of coursework in his or her assigned subject; however, no participants felt that teachers should be considered Highly Qualified unless they have some sort of formal training in their content.

When I asked Rose if she thought teachers should be considered Highly Qualified without a degree in their content, she firmly responded with, “No! Absolutely not.” She went on to explain:

Well maybe if they have taken at least 12 hours of the subject in college or

15 hours of the subject, or maybe if they minored in it. But, I do not think that you should be allowed to teach with no education in your subject. There are some people who will, who won't have any background in their content area, and they'll go in and they will do a great job. And those kids are gonna learn and it's gonna be an awesome environment. They could be the best teacher in the world. But, in my experience, this is not the case across the board. So, I think that it is imperative that you have some kind of knowledge on the subject that you are teaching.

Although Rose began quite dogmatically stating that teachers needed a degree in their content, she did ease up and settle for at least 12 hours in their content. However, Vivian was much more firm in her views on this topic, "If you are going to teach a content, you must have a bachelor's in that content." She continued by explaining:

I could go tomorrow and if I could pass a test in science, I could teach it. I have no background in science. You should not be able to take a test and be considered "qualified." You need to show something. You need a background. I'm an expert in English because I majored in English. I took a lot of classes, more than were required. This allows me to create lessons that help my kids. I know what to cover and how to cover it. I can do that because of my degree.

Vivian was not alone in the declaration that teachers need a degree in the subject taught. Often teachers are asked to teach new concepts and help students delve deeper, and several participants indicated that they did not believe this was possible without a formal college education in the content a teacher is assigned.

Orwellia declared that teachers need a bachelor's degree in their content to be considered Highly Qualified. She expressed frustration with policymakers for not recognizing the value of a college degree:

Why don't they see a connection between what you majored in and what you should teach? I mean, it doesn't make sense. How is a teacher who majored in criminal justice but teaches English highly qualified? Do they think degrees are all the same? Are they just all interchangeable? It just doesn't make any sense.

Although the participants varied on how much of an educational background in their subjects they felt that Highly Qualified Teachers needed, they did all agree that they need some amount of college coursework in the content taught. Thus, the fourth suggestion for policy reform is: *In addition to the requirement for a four-year degree, all Highly Qualified Teachers must complete a minimum of 12 hours of coursework in the content that they teach.*

#### *Teacher Preparation Programs*

When discussing what teachers need to know and teacher preparation programs, the participants had much to say. None of the participants attended the same certification program and three of the participants achieved their certification outside of the state of Texas; However, they all said that teacher preparation programs need to be regulated and that their program failed to do one thing: Present the real world of teaching and then help them learn how to handle that reality.

Across the country, teacher education programs vary in type, cost, content, and the time required to complete them (Darling-Hammond, 2000b). In the state of Texas alone, there are over 150 State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) approved educator programs and, just as they do across the country, these

programs vary greatly across the state (Texas Education Agency, 2015).

However, to obtain SBEC approval, these program are subjected to minimal regulations:

Students entering the programs must have a minimum GPA of 2.5 and the board shall require an educator preparation program to provide candidates for teacher certification with information concerning the following: (1) skills and responsibilities required of teachers; (2) expectations for student performance based on state standards; (3) the current supply of and demand for teachers in this state; (4) the importance of developing classroom management skills; and (5) the state's framework for appraisal of teachers and principals. ("Texas Education Code," 2009)

Looking at these regulations, it is easy to see why these educator programs vary so much. In reality, to meet the standards set forth by the state, a program would not need to do much more than provide candidates with a booklet or PowerPoint listing information pertaining to the above.

When I asked the participants about their teacher preparation programs, one of the problems they discussed was that all teachers have to attend certification programs, however, there is no accountability for these programs. Orwellia pointed out that, teachers are continually bombarded with new rules and regulations and that “politicians are always talking about holding teachers accountable while the programs that create teachers aren’t even looked at.” She added:

If the government is going to improve these programs they are going to need a uniform system of teacher preparation. The federal government is going to have to step in say, “This is what it’s going to be and how it

needs to be.” They need standards for everyone. They’ve been allowed too much freedom and that’s where the problem is coming in.

Caroline’s experience seemed to stand as proof for Orwellia’s views. As described by Caroline, her program was more of a “Mom and Pop” organization created with the goal of making money and employing the family members, rather than the goal of preparing candidates for the classroom. Caroline, discussing her program said:

My program was family run. Mom owns it, the sons work for her, the sister, wives, everybody works together. And a lot of what we would deal with is that if you were a friend of theirs or related to them, you got more special treatment...The government needs to regulate these programs. They are putting teachers out there and affecting our future.

Caroline’s program, although seemingly unprofessional, is not an outlier. Many teacher preparation programs have surfaced all over the state of Texas and, when considering SBEC requirements, there is very little regulation over these organizations.

One of the changes that participants said needed to happen within each of these programs is an injection of reality. As Caroline put it:

They need to get down to the nitty-gritty stuff, the paperwork, what they expect as far as parent contacts. They need to make you realize that you’re gonna call 100 parents and only get a hold of 5...And then they need to put you into some real world stuff. Let you see a classroom and see what’s it’s about. See the real world stuff. Like, they didn’t say anything that would ever make me think I was going to get threatened and deal with probation students. But schools with these students are the ones that hire first years, so we need to know.

Again, Caroline reinforced the idea that teacher candidates need to know what really goes on in schools and how many demands are placed on teachers. Orwellia, discussing parent contacts, added that teacher candidates need to be aware of these requirements because contacting parents can easily take hours every week. She went on to discuss how little support teachers receive when it comes to discipline:

Well, teachers coming in today need to know how to deal with parents. They need to know how the real world is. Not the ideal. They need to know that you may be told to call over 150 parents every six weeks, and it will take hours, and you might not have a phone in your room, and that this will be stacked upon a mile-long list of other demands that you must complete before the end of the six weeks. They need to know that before you receive any help from an administrator, they will tell you to call parents.

Orwellia went on to tell a story about a “teacher friend” of hers who had a student who admitted that he attended school “just to sell drugs.” This student spent time in and out of alternative campuses and in and out of juvenile detention.

Occasionally the student decided to return to school “just to sell drugs” and was allowed to return to his regular classes. One day, after an extended absence, the student returned to Orwellia’s teacher friend’s class and began “throwing food across the room and hitting students in the head.” The teacher called the principal was asked, “Have you called his parents yet?” Orwellia added, “Really? Have you called his parents? Not send him down so others can work. Not let me come get him and help you out. But, have you called his parents?” Orwellia went on to say

that there are many stories out there similar to the one about her teacher friend and some are much worse. Reality is not something that teacher candidates are going to escape, thus presenting real scenarios to teacher candidates could be beneficial and allow them to discuss real solutions to real problems and to allow them time to ask if teaching is really something that they want to enter into. As Orwellia explained, teachers will run into difficult situations in the classroom and may feel completely lost or unable to stop whatever is going wrong. Even worse, many teachers will experience such things and lack the administrative direction and support that they need to solve the problem.

Tiffany who felt that her program was successful, said that they could have improved her education had they just prepared her better for reality:

I feel like the professors could have been more honest about what they did in the classroom and how they handled situations. They taught us how to handle theoretical situations, but rarely does that work. I guess I just would have liked more honestly. Something like, it's not gonna be perfect and you're gonna mess up and that everybody messes up, even the veteran teacher.

Vivian, whose program was no exception and failed to provide her with a glimpse into the real world of teaching, said that she experienced a bit of "culture shock" when she first entered the classroom. She added that teacher preparation programs need to provide candidates with "real world type of situations." She went on to explain, "I think you need to be exposed to all different types of schools and students. You need to be exposed to low socio-economic classrooms.

They need to let you know what you might run into out there. They should tell you what the biggest gotchas can be.” Vivian even went so far as to suggest that programs should require their candidates to volunteer in places like, “soup kitchens” or “girl’s clinics” so they can be “exposed to world realities that they may not be aware of.” Vivian was not only astounded by the realities of teaching, she was also taken aback by how much more students seem to need from her. She expressed feeling very pulled in different directions. She wanted to help students but keep a distance at the same time. She also felt the need to explore the world that her students came from because her own world was very different making it harder for her to understand the needs of her students.

Although the participant’s educator program experiences were quite diverse, they all felt that their programs fell short when it came to exposing them to the realities of teaching. Furthermore, all participants felt like some of the shortcomings they experienced in their educator programs could have been eliminated if the federal government set some guidelines that all programs must follow. Therefore, the fifth suggestion for policy reform is: *The federal government needs to set some basic guidelines that all educator programs must follow. Additionally, one of those guidelines needs to include a call for the introduction of realistic teaching opportunities.*

## Exams

All participants, when asked about certification exams, expressed the following: 1) An exam cannot determine if a candidate will be a good teacher; 2) An exam cannot adequately determine if a teacher candidate is an expert in content; and 3) An exam may not accurately reflect the knowledge or ability of the person being tested. However, all participants also asserted that they believe teacher candidates should take and pass exams to achieve certification; and, most added, that they believe the exams need to be more difficult.

Caroline, Rose, Reginald, Tiffany, and Militario all took the composite exams for their content area and all expressed that they felt composite exams should be replaced with subject exams. They based this assertion on two characteristics of composite exams: 1) Composite exams only test surface level knowledge. As the participants explained, there are so many subjects tested on composite exams, that there is no way that they can test for deep knowledge and understanding. Subject exams, on the other hand, are able to test for a much deeper knowledge and understanding because they focus on the one subject. 2) Composite exams test for multiple subjects and, if passed, certify the teacher candidate for multiple subjects. This aspect of the composite exams was what participants found most objectionable. This aspect is also what resulted in Caroline and Reginald being placed in physics classrooms—something neither had training for. Caroline, Reginald, and Militario, all three described scenarios

where a teacher candidate could have missed every question presented about a subject and still passed the exam. In this scenario, that teacher candidate would still be certified and deemed Highly Qualified to teach the subject for which no questions were answered correctly.

Militario and Caroline suggested that composite exams score each subject tested and only certify teachers for the subjects that candidates received a passing score for. Reginald and Rose suggested that composite exams be phased out and replaced with subject exams. However, there was some doubt as to whether composite exams could really be replaced because school administrators prefer them. This is because, as Caroline put it, “wherever they need to fill a hole, you’re available.”

The exam that, when mentioned, sparked the greatest participant reaction was the Pedagogy and Professional Responsibilities EC-12 Exam (PPR). Almost all participants, when I began asking the question about this exam, began to smile and some began to laugh. The most frequent word that came up associated with this topic was: “joke.” Reginald explained that the exam needed to be, “tweaked to make it better, make it real life.” He went on to explain that the exam currently discusses a “utopian classroom” and it needs to add “real life questions with real classroom scenarios.” Vivian described the PPR as a test based on a “perfect world.” She too suggested that the exam be revised to reflect the “real world” because “nothing about education is perfect.” She also criticized the exam for not

evolving and updating:

The stuff I had to study to pass the test is the same stuff my husband used to study seven years earlier. To me this meant the test didn't change in almost a decade. Well, I can tell you that education has changed in the last decade.

Wahine discussing her concerns with testing requirements, explained that an exam could, "keep a good teacher out of the classroom" while a "bad teacher might pass it and become certified." She recalled her own testing experience and explained:

I was very concerned that I would not pass the content test because I am not a good test taker. But, I am a really good teacher. It would be horrible to not have me in the classroom because I couldn't pass the test. Something needs to happen there. Maybe if you can't pass the test there should be an alternative. I think maybe add a portfolio to the Highly Qualified Teacher requirements. Teachers should have to showcase their work. They should have to videotape their teaching. Have a lesson plan, have student artifacts. This should be required as part of the assessment.

Wahine was not the only participant who suggested testing alternatives, however, she was the most ardent and the only one who offered solutions.

Tiffany objected to so much weight being given to the exams because as she explained:

I don't think becoming a Highly Qualified Teacher should depend on the tests. I'm a good test taker; I could probably study for a month and pass the science exam. But I've never taken a lick of chemistry in my life. I'm not qualified to teach science, it's not what my studies are in. I think that there should be some formal education backing your test taking. You know, I've known some really good teachers who can't pass the exams and some who did who are horrible teachers. People are good test takers and it's a multiple-choice test. You can pass a test having minimal knowledge, depending on what questions you get.

Tiffany was the only participant who claimed to be a good test taker and explained how easy it might be for some to take and pass a multiple choice exam with very little knowledge about the subject. In addition, not only might being a good test taker help candidates pass, teacher candidates are allowed as many tries as they can afford to take to pass the exam (Texas Education Agency, 2015).

This ability to take the exams as many times as a candidate wishes, is the final aspect of certification exams that participants found most troubling. Furthermore, if candidates received emergency or probationary certification, they could begin teaching before passing any of the exams. Discussing the unlimited number of tries candidates are given to pass certification exams, Caroline stated:

I think they should limit the tries because anyone who takes the test enough times should get the gist. But I also don't think it should be a one shot deal. I was very sick the first time I took it. But I had already paid, so I figured I should try. Maybe limit it to three tries and if you can't pass it, you need to prove you are learning something about that subject, not just constantly taking it to pass it.

It does stand to reason that candidates taking the same exam over and over would eventually pass it. However, as Orwellia explained, this is not always the case:

We had a teacher in our school who was able to get emergency or probationary certification. I'm not sure which one. Anyway, he was able to teach while he worked on passing his exams. Every couple of months he would take his content exam but he was never able to pass. He continued testing and teaching for five years! I guess at that point he couldn't get his temporary certification renewed. Anyway, he had to leave teaching at that point. But, five years! That's how long he was allowed to teach these kids even though he couldn't pass the test. I think five years is too long to be in the classroom while you are trying to pass an exam. I

think that's just too long to be teaching kids. I think two years. Really, I think one year. And that sounds harsh coming from someone who failed the first time. But you're affecting students in the classroom. Too much damage can be done.

Although the participants expressed multiple concerns pertaining to various aspects of certification exams, they all felt that teacher candidates did need to take and pass them as part of the certification process. However, they also felt that the exams, as they currently are, do not adequately do the job they are intended to do. Based on these assessments, the sixth suggestion for policy reform is: *Composite exams need to be phased out and replaced by subject specific exams that test for knowledge and depth. The PPR needs to be completely reworked to reflect the realities of teaching and it needs to evolve as education evolves. Finally, exam attempts should be capped and uncertified teachers should not be allowed to teach beyond a year.*

### Summary

Highly Qualified Teachers, including the participants in this study, are often treated as objects who must follow the directives prescribed in educational policy without question and without playing a role in its development. However, Chapters 5-9 served as a beginning, as an attempt to give these teachers a voice and, as critical theory suggests, transform individuals from dominated objects into active subjects who are self-determining (Comstock, 1982; Cooper, Fusarelli, & Randall, 2004; Foster, 1986; Held, 2004).

## Chapter 10

### Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

At the inception of this study, one of my goals was to give a voice to those who are rarely consulted when educational policy is developed and implemented: Highly Qualified Teachers (HQT); specifically, HQTs who work with students of color, at-risk, low socio-economic, and/or low-performing students. Chapters 5-9 presented the voices of these HQTs. Throughout chapters 5-9, the stories, experiences, and views of the participants in this study were exhibited without commentary or analysis. This final chapter, Chapter 10, provides a discussion and interpretation of their stories, experiences, and views. In addition, this chapter also discusses implications for the future and my concluding remarks. I begin with an overview of the research, continue with a discussion of the theoretical framework, and then highlight the key findings that emerged from the study. Based on these findings, I discuss the implications for research, policy, and practice, and explain the limitations to the study. I end the chapter with my final thoughts.

#### Overview of the Study

In 2001, policymakers enacted the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), in which they emphasized the importance of teachers and teacher education. NCLB targeted students of color, at-risk, low socio-economic, and/or low-performing students whom policymakers feared were being “left behind” (Association of

Texas Professional Educators, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2004) because these students are more likely to be assigned an uncertified teacher and more likely to be assigned an out-of-field teacher (Carey, 2004; Jerald & Ingersoll, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). As such, NCLB required that all teachers become “Highly Qualified” by the 2004-2005 school year.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001’s definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher focuses on background qualifications (teacher education and certification) and defines a Highly Qualified Teacher as one who: a) Has a bachelor’s degree or higher; b) Holds full state certification; and c) Demonstrates subject specific competency in assigned core academics (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Although, on the surface, this definition may seem adequate, it actually undermines the purported purpose of the law by allowing a great deal of leeway. In addition, having a college degree, attending a certification program, and obtaining certification, in no way guarantees success (*Raising the Bar: Aligning*, 2012), especially when there is no set standard for teacher candidate’s college degrees or certification programs. Therefore, being deemed a Highly Qualified Teacher by the government, does not speak as to whether or not a teacher is effective.

Researchers have conducted many studies on teacher certification programs, the challenges facing new teachers, the teaching profession in general, as well as, research pointing out the realities of the ever-growing students of color

population (Carey, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1999, 2000a; Dee & Cohodes, 2008; Ekert, 2013; Ferguson & Womack, 1993; Gimbert, Bol, & Wallace, 2007; Greenburg, Putman, & Walsh, 2013; Haskins & Loeb, 2007; Ingersoll, 1999; Jacob, 2007; McDonald, 2005; Palardy & Rumberger, 2008; Shen, Mansberger, & Yang, 2004; Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011). However, there is minimal recent research on how well secondary HQT's college educations prepared them to teach their assigned subjects. There is also minimal research on secondary HQT's perceptions of their college educations, their certification programs, and how well they feel this education prepared them to perform all that is asked of them. Thus, to better ensure that teachers and teacher candidates are Highly Qualified *effective* Teachers, the purpose of this research was to give HQTs a voice and focus on what they did and did not know about the subjects they teach, what they felt their education did right to prepare them for teaching, what they felt their education lacked when preparing them for teaching, what they felt colleges of education and teacher preparation programs could do to better meet the needs of current and future educators, and to comment on what reforms they thought policymakers should enact to increase the likelihood that teacher candidates will leave programs much more prepared for the classroom.

I employed critical educational theory as a lens for this study (this is discussed in more detail below) because critical theory seeks to determine how things are, suggests how things should be, and offers a plan for change (Bronner,

2011; Cooper, Fusarelli, & Randall; Finlayson, 2005; Morrison, 2001). I chose a basic qualitative research design (Merriam, 2009) to present how the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001's definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher has been/is being interpreted and how it has affected and continues to affect the ways in which educators construct their real-world classrooms. In addition, I sought to: a) ascertain how well current secondary HQTs delineate their proficiency with the subject(s) they teach; b) impart the perspectives of what current secondary HQTs feel it takes to be prepared to enter the classroom; c) convey the perspectives of how current secondary HQTs feel the government's requirements for becoming a HQT helped to prepare them for the realities of the classroom; and d) based on the findings, recommend policy and pedagogical changes to better meet the needs of current and future teachers.

As such, the guiding research questions for this study included:

- 1) What does it mean to be "Highly Qualified" in today's secondary classrooms?
- 2) What have the educational and pedagogical requirements set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act done to prepare secondary teachers for the realities of the classroom?
  - The No Child Left Behind Act enacted educational and pedagogical requirements for teachers. These requirements were

aimed at guaranteeing that all U.S. teachers are, indeed, highly qualified. However, what are the realities of these requirements?

- Have teachers really benefitted from the educational and pedagogical requirements set forth in NCLB?
- Once hired, teachers leave the classroom as a student and enter another classroom as the teacher – are they prepared?
- Do post-NCLB teachers perceive their experiences in the classroom positively?
- Did these teachers enter the classroom with confidence and prepared to manage a classroom?

3) How can the experiences of secondary Highly Qualified Teachers inform the decisions of future policymakers when making educational reforms to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001's definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher?

The two main sources used in this study for data collection were demographic questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. I used convenience and snowball sampling methods to select my participant pool which consisted of eight Highly Qualified Teachers (six female and two male) who were working in schools that serve at-risk, students of color, and low-socioeconomic student populations.

The data collected from this study revealed (all results from this study are discussed in more detail below) that the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001's definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher is insufficient; and while it is better than nothing, it does not guarantee that teacher candidates are highly qualified in the content that they teach or in pedagogy. Because of this, the policy that defines the HQT needs to be reformed. In addition, the results of this study indicated that both traditional and alternative teacher preparation programs need to be regulated by the federal government and they need reformation including an infusion of more realistic teaching scenarios and more student teaching opportunities. Finally, teacher exams, both the content and the Pedagogical and Professional Responsibilities EC-12 exam (PPR), need revision, and an implementation of new controls.

#### Critical Educational Theory and Habermas' Four Stages

I employed critical educational theory as a lens for this study because critical theory seeks to determine how things are, suggests how things should be, and offers a plan for change. It is descriptive and prescriptive (Bronner, 2011; Cooper, Fusarelli, & Randall; Finlayson, 2005; Morrison, 2001). Critical educational theory is practical and seeks to make modifications within the system. (Bronner, 2011; Cooper, Fusarelli, & Randall; Finlayson, 2005; Morrison, 2001). Jurgen Habermas' critical theory suggests that the ideologies of educational policy be critiqued and he offered that this critique can best be addressed in four

stages (Morrison, 2001). This study utilized the first three of Habermas' four stages.

- 1) Stage one presents a description and analysis of the current policy/situation.

Description:

In 2001 policymakers enacted the No Child Left Behind Act because students of color, at-risk, low socio-economic, and/or low-performing students were being, what then President George W. Bush, termed "left behind" (Association of Texas Professional Educators, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Furthermore, these students were much more likely to be assigned an uncertified teacher and more likely to be assigned an out-of-field teacher (Carey, 2004; Jerald & Ingersoll, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). As such, NCLB required that all teachers become Highly Qualified by the 2004-2005 school year. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001's definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher focuses on background qualifications (teacher education and certification) and defines a Highly Qualified Teacher as one who:

- a) Has a bachelor's degree or higher;
- b) Holds full state certification; and
- c) Demonstrates subject specific competency in assigned core academics (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Analysis:

Although the definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher may seem adequate at first glance, it actually does very little to ensure that a teacher is what most would describe as highly qualified, and does even less to ensure that teachers are effective. What weakens this definition is not what it says, but what it does not say.

The first requirement for becoming a HQT is earning a bachelor's degree; however, there are no stipulations pertaining to the major subject of that degree. Therefore, a person who majored in criminal justice could teach math, even if that person did not take one math class in college. A person who majored in hotel management could teach science, again, even if that person did not take one science class in college.

The second requirement for becoming a HQT is demonstrating subject competency. The problem with this requirement is that the way candidates demonstrate this "competency" is via a standardized, multiple-choice exam. Because the government failed to implement any requirement for an educational background to access an exam, any candidate can request to test for any subject. Furthermore, as discussed earlier in this study, these exams do not necessarily require any depth of knowledge and could conceivably be passed by studying prior to the exam. To make matters worse, teacher candidates can take these exams as many as it takes to pass and the questions do not necessarily change.

The third and final requirement for becoming a HQT is earning certification. This requirement is achieved by attending a teacher preparation program and passing the PPR exam. The problem with this is that the government failed to set any standards for these educator programs, failed to regulate them, and failed to enact any means of accountability. As a result, educator preparation programs have emerged all over the country and there is much variance in content, quality, and cost (Darling-Hammond, 2000b).

Therefore, while NCLB's definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher, at first glance, seemed like a significant step toward improving education. The reality is that the policy requires very little that would lead to an increase in teacher effectiveness. What it does do, however, is significantly add to the cost of becoming a teacher because candidates must pay for their exams (each time they take a new one or retest), they must pay for their educator preparation programs (two participants said that their alternative programs charged them over \$8,000), and they must pay for their certification (this must be renewed every five years in the state of Texas).

- 2) Stage two requires an examination of the reasoning behind the current policy/situation.

Stated reasoning behind the policy:

As explained earlier in this study, research has shown that teacher quality is the most significant determinant of student success in the classroom; and,

teacher certification and educational background are positively correlated with student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1999, 2000b; Darling-Hammond, Berry, & Thoreson, 2001; Dee & Cohodes, 2008). In addition, researchers have found that even low-performing students, who face many barriers, can attain higher levels of scholastic success when taught by effective teachers (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2012; Heck, 2007). Furthermore, students of color, at-risk, low socio-economic, and/or low-performing students are much more likely to be assigned an uncertified teacher and more likely to be assigned an out-of-field teacher (Carey, 2004; Jerald & Ingersoll, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Therefore, it stands to reason that if policymakers looked at the data and looked at the students who were most negatively affected by underqualified teachers, they would have focused on improving teacher quality. This is especially true if their intended goal really was to improve education, provide better educational opportunities for all students, and if they were looking to make education the “great equalizer” it is meant to be. Thus, the reasons behind NCLB policy and the requirement that all teachers become Highly Qualified, seemed reasonable and like a positive step forward. Even educators who were directly effected by this new policy (for example, in this study, Orwellia and Rose), saw NCLB as a positive change and something that the government created with the best of intentions. However, when looking at the language used to define the HQT, it is difficult to believe that the government did not recognize how easy it

would be to meet the requirements and still be underqualified for the classroom. Moreover, it is no secret that there are still ineffective teachers in U.S. classrooms;<sup>5</sup> Yet NCLB has been in place since 2002, and the definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher has remained unchanged.

Alternative reasoning behind the policy:

Since George W. Bush first took office, one educational movement that has consistently gained traction is the idea of the expansion of charter schools (Ravitch, 2010). At first, charter schools were painted as an alternative for children from all backgrounds who could not get a decent education in public schools. However, the realities of charter schools seem to differ from what was originally portrayed. For instance, Swalwell and Apple (2011) reported that charter schools are actually more segregated than public schools and have become for profit institutions in many states. Apple (2005) defined charter schools as “schools that have individual charters that allow them to opt out of most state requirements” (p. 279). He went on to explain that researchers have demonstrated that many charter schools have become ways through which “religious activists and others gain public funding for schools that would otherwise be prohibited such support” (p. 279). Diane Ravitch (2010), discussing how the media has

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<sup>5</sup> The numbers of ineffective teachers still in the classroom vary based on location and not all states rate their teachers. These numbers are predominately based on test scores. The range is as low as 1.5% and as high as 18% (Strauss, 2013).

helped promote the charter school narrative (at the expense of public schools), pointed out that in less than one year, three documentaries were released, all declaring that the “American public education system is a failed enterprise” (p. 1). In addition, these documentaries painted a negative picture of these failed schools, claimed that too much money had already been wasted and more would not help, and described students as the victims of bad, unionized, teachers who did not care and did not teach. After declaring that the future of public schooling was disastrous, these documentaries then swooped in and offered the answer: “poor black and Hispanic children [must] escape from public schools” and run to charter schools— “schools mostly funded by the government but controlled by private organizations” (p. 2). If, however, charter schools were not available, the second suggestion was that the government provide vouchers so that students could attend private schools.

Based on the claims in these documentaries, claims given credence by many politicians and the media, the answer to all that ails public education was to privatize it. This push for privatization, along with NCLB’s inadequate definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher, followed by a failure to reform this policy, and combined with the government’s push for standardized testing (a requirement that the participants in this study said undermined their ability to teach as effectively), could indicate that the failure of policymakers to reform NCLB has not been a result of accidental oversight. In reality, *if* the agenda was/is to appease the people

by enacting a flawed law (NCLB) in order to privatize education and place more money in corporate pockets, then, overall, the policy has been successful. Testing companies make tremendous amounts of money from the testing requirements of teachers and the standardized testing of students (a way to funnel government dollars into private companies) (Bracey, 2005). Private certification programs have benefitted financially and many new programs have emerged since the enactment of NCLB. Finally, charter and private schools have gained much popularity at the direct expense of the American public school system and all persons involved with it, including the Highly Qualified Teacher and the very students it was drafted to support: students of color, at-risk, low socio-economic, and/or low-performing. Thus, for these students, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has not only left them behind, it has perpetuated inequality and neutralized the equalizing effects of education.

- 3) Stage three offers a plan for altering any policy/situation that perpetuates inequality and/or disempowerment.

Because the No Child Left Behind Act failed to adequately define the Highly Qualified Teacher, a plan for altering this policy would include redefining the Highly Qualified Teacher. The requirements for becoming a HQT are not without merit; they are just so inadequately defined, that, as shown above, in many situations they are rendered meaningless. Therefore, the current

definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher does not need to be eradicated, instead, each of the three requirements need transformation and strengthening.

#### Requirement One: Earn a bachelor's degree

The requirement for a bachelor's degree, while positive, needs to be strengthened. While earning a bachelor's degree is an important step for a teacher, it does matter what that degree is in. Therefore, the new requirement should state that a Highly Qualified Teacher must have a bachelor's degree in the primary content taught or in a closely related field. Furthermore, there should be specification as to what "closely related field" means for each subject.

#### Requirement Two: Demonstrating subject competency

This requirement is important for all candidates, however, it is even more important for teachers who met the first criteria under the "closely related field" clause. Subject competency exams should be federally regulated. While each state should be able to develop and create their own exams, there should be some oversight to ensure that all states are adequately testing their teachers. In addition, composite exams should be phased out. Asking two questions about a subject on an exam that tests for multiple subjects in no way tests for competency. All subject competency exams should be written for individual subjects and they should test for basic knowledge, depth, and application.

### Requirement Three: Earning certification

The portion of this requirement that is in need of major reformation is that which requires teacher candidates to attend an educator certification program. These programs need to be federally regulated to ensure that all programs across the country provide similar amounts of contact hours and similar core course requirements. In addition, observation and student teaching hours should be required for all teacher candidates. Finally, professional exams (in Texas the PPR) should be rewritten to include more realistic classroom scenarios. Because these educator programs are rated according to successful exam scores, this would, most likely, result in an infusion of more reality into teacher preparation programs.

Regardless of the motivations behind the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher, the results have fallen short of its publicized purpose. Furthermore, according to the Highly Qualified Teachers interviewed for this study, NCLB has actually caused more problems than it has solved and the definition of the HQT has not only failed to ensure more effective teachers in classroom, it has made it relatively easy for teacher candidates, who have little to no education or experience in specific subjects, to become certified. Therefore, based on this, it seems that the No Child Left Behind Act and the definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher has perpetuated inequality for the students it is supposed to serve. As a result, NCLB as a whole, certainly

needs reform, and, because teachers do have such a large impact on student success, that reform needs to begin with a redefining of the Highly Qualified Teacher.

### Key Findings

After an analysis of the qualitative data that I collected via semi-structured interviews, demographic questionnaires, a collection of artifacts, follow-up interviews, memoing, and member checking (conducted in person, via chat, and via email), three major findings emerged. These findings were galvanized by the research questions presented in this study and listed above. Through the use of my research questions, I also sought to ascertain how well current secondary HQTs delineate their proficiency with the subject(s) they teach; b) impart the perspectives of what current secondary HQTs feel it takes to be prepared to enter the classroom; c) convey the perspectives of how current secondary HQTs feel the government's requirements for becoming a HQT helped to prepare them for the realities of the classroom; and d) based on the findings, recommend policy and pedagogical changes to better meet the needs of current and future teachers.

*Key Finding #1: The Highly Qualified Teacher distinction meant different things to different participants, however, they all felt the requirements for the title need to be strengthened.* The first major finding in this study was formulated as a result of the first research question: What does it mean to be “Highly Qualified” in today’s secondary classrooms? Out of the eight participants interviewed, three

said that being a Highly Qualified Teacher was very important, two said that they felt it was somewhat important, and three said that it was not important and had little to no meaning. Participants who said it was very important looked at the title as something that added to their creditability and distinguished them as educators who went beyond a bachelor's degree. Participants who said it was somewhat important looked at the title as something that indicated their educational achievements, however, the meaning was undermined by other HQTs who were not good teachers. Participants who said that the title had no meaning looked at it as another empty appellation handed out by the government. Because teachers are not valued and because not all teachers are "highly qualified," the HQT distinction had no meaning.

The first problem with the Highly Qualified distinction is that it represents two possible attributes: educational achievement and effective teaching. While all Highly Qualified Teachers have the educational achievements needed to receive the HQT title, all HQTs are not effective teachers. For some, this simply renders the title meaningless. However, in the situations where a teacher has both the credentials and is seen as an effective or good teacher, the title has meaning.

The second problem with the Highly Qualified distinction is that a teacher who has no educational background in a particular subject may be deemed a HQT based on examinations. This is a very troubling aspect of the requirements for becoming a Highly Qualified Teacher. It seems counterintuitive to require a

degree but not to specify that the degree need be in the subject taught. Perhaps Officials thought that it was common sense, however, multiple years after the definition of the HQT became law, nothing has been added that stipulates that the degree be in the content that a teacher is teaching. Several participants did state that they believed it would be possible for them to study for and pass exams outside of their content; however, they also admitted that they would not be effective teachers of this content and that they should not be considered highly qualified if they were able to earn additional certifications.

The third problem with the Highly Qualified distinction is that if it is associated with good or effective teaching (as it was by participants in this study) then it is misleading and/or meaningless. This title is given to all teacher candidates who complete the educational requirements. There is no proof of teaching ability required. There is no need to turn in a portfolio. There is no requirement for a supervisor to observe a teacher and then recommend the HQT title. As such, many teacher candidates achieve certification and are granted the HQT distinction before ever setting foot in a classroom. In addition, there are HQTs in classrooms today who are simply not effective. Therefore, calling a teacher who has never taught or a teacher who is not effective, a Highly Qualified Teacher becomes very problematic.

To make being a Highly Qualified Teacher more meaningful, the educational requirements need to be better defined. To teach a subject, the teacher

needs to have some educational background in that subject. Furthermore, teacher candidates need to attend teacher preparation programs that prepare them for the classroom, not just to pass a test.

*Key Finding #2: The educational and pedagogical requirements set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act have done very little to prepare secondary teachers for the realities of the classroom.* The second major finding in this study was formulated as a result of research question two: What have the educational and pedagogical requirements set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act done to prepare secondary teachers for the realities of the classroom?

The educational requirement set forth by NCLB is that candidates have a bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). As stated above, some teachers obtain that degree in what they teach and some do not. Participants who had their degree in their content, reported that it did much for them. Orwellia and Vivian for instance, both majored in English and teach English. Vivian discussed how extensive her program was and much she used the information she gleaned from her degree in the classroom. She said that she depended on the information to guide her as she determined what materials to use for her students. She reported using her degree to understand the concepts her students needed to learn and to know what books to choose to teach them these concepts. In addition, she said that her education helped to inform her thinking as she created lessons. Orwellia's knowledge was also extensive. She knew much about the literature that she

teaches and she uses this knowledge to help her students make real-world connections. She also took courses in college geared toward the teaching of English and she reported that these classes gave her many ideas that she still used in the classroom.

Because Vivian and Orwellia majored in and have an interest in the subject they teach, they both reported that they would be comfortable teaching upper level courses in their subject. They both regularly volunteered to attend professional development sessions that cover the teaching of their subject and they continued research and look for new ideas and new materials to best teach their subject.

Caroline and Reginald, on the other hand, do not have degrees in the subjects they teach. They both reported being placed or, in the case of Caroline, pushed into the physics classroom—not because either of them had an expertise or an interest in physics, but because administrators needed to fill a hole. When this first happened, both reported feeling somewhat lost and very apprehensive about teaching a subject that they knew little (Reginald) to nothing (Caroline) about. Reginald said that his first year teaching physics he took the student textbook home at night and studied to stay ahead of the students. He said that he tried to use examples that have some meaning for the students, but there were examples that he could not use or teach because he did not know enough about them. Caroline said she had no interest in physics and took the textbook home to

study, but still did not have a complete understanding of the material. She told the administrators who placed her in the physics classroom, that it was a bad idea, however, they assured her that she would be fine. Caroline only taught physics for one year, but she did say that she felt bad for her students from that year. Caroline now teaches Chemistry, another subject for which she has no background or degree. She explained that chemistry was different, however, because she enjoyed it and enjoyed studying it. I asked both of them if they would be comfortable teaching higher-level courses in physics or chemistry (for example, an AP version), they both said no. They both mentioned that AP courses go too deep and they only have surface-level knowledge of their subjects.

The pedagogical requirement set forth by NCLB is that all teacher candidates attend a teacher preparation program (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). In theory, this program is supposed to prepare teachers for working in the classroom. According to the participants, to adequately prepare a candidate for the realities of the classroom, the educator program needs to cover: lesson planning, paperwork requirements, TEKS (in Texas), the psychology of teenagers, the craft of teaching, the legalities of teaching, classroom management, and real-world classroom scenarios. In addition to the coursework, the preparation program needs to offer observation and student teaching opportunities. However, as described by the interviewees in this study, not one program covered all of the topics mentioned above. The traditional programs covered a majority of the topics and

offered observation and student teaching opportunities. The alternative programs briefly covered some of the topics and did not offer student teaching opportunities. Neither program type offered any psychology to help teacher candidates understand the emotional needs of their students and neither program type covered the real world of teaching. Therefore, participants who attended traditional programs, received more of the training they needed and reported that it only took them six weeks to become comfortable in the classroom. On the other hand, participants who attended alternative programs and received less of the training they needed, reported that it took them an entire school year to become comfortable in the classroom.

Looking at the above situations, as described by the participants in this study, the answer to research question two (“What have the educational and pedagogical requirements set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act done to prepare secondary teachers for the realities of the classroom?”) is: very little. The effectiveness of the educational requirements to prepare secondary teachers for the realities of the classroom depends upon what the teacher candidate majored in and/or studied in college and what the teacher is then assigned to teach. In the case of the participants who studied their assigned subject in college (in-field teachers), this requirement did much for them. They reported having a deeper knowledge of the subject and the ability to use that knowledge to plan their lessons and to write creative activities. In the case of the participants who did not

study their assigned subject in college (out-of-field teachers), they reported making little use of their degrees in the classroom and that they depend upon further study and curriculum frameworks to teach their assigned courses. Likewise, the participants explained that the effectiveness of the pedagogical requirements to prepare secondary teachers for the realities of the classroom also depended upon what teacher candidates choose to do to fulfill this requirement. Participants, who chose a traditional program, reported feeling better prepared for the classroom. However, participants, who chose an alternative program, were less likely to feel prepared for the classroom. In either case, however, neither program did what it was intended to do: to prepare teachers for the *realities* of the classroom.

*Key Finding #3: Highly Qualified Teachers have much to offer policymakers.* The third major finding of this study was formulated as a result of research question three: How can the experiences of secondary Highly Qualified Teachers inform the decisions of future policymakers when making educational reforms to the No Child Left Behind Act's definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher?

Highly Qualified Teacher's experiences could (and should) offer much to policymakers when reforming and/or creating educational policy. First, these teachers are the people in the field who abide by educational policy and who feel the effects of educational policy. Thus, it follows that if policymakers want to

know how effective their policies are, they should talk to the stakeholders who are most directly affected. For instance, in the case of the definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher, to better understand how effective this policy is and to look for areas to improve, policymakers should talk to the people who met the requirements for becoming a HQT and ask about their experiences. Unfortunately, rather than investigating this way, policymakers rate the effectiveness of most educational policy by using standardized exam scores of students (Harris & Herrington, 2015; Isensee & Butrymowicz, 2012; Ramaswamy, 2015). However, making a connection between the results of student scores and the requirements set forth in NCLB's definition of the HQT fails to offer any information as to *what* is and is not working and it certainly offers no explanation as to *why* something is or is not working. This study, with just eight participants, sheds much light on why certain aspects of the HQT requirements may not be producing the desired outcomes; therefore, an even larger sample has the potential to provide an even deeper understanding of the issues. Thus, when determining what is and is not working with educational policy, allowing research, such as the research presented in this study, to inform their decisions would be very beneficial. In addition, or alternatively, it would also be beneficial to form advisory boards of Highly Qualified Teachers to inform policymaker's decisions.

The Highly Qualified Teachers in this study did not just discuss the problems they perceived; they also discussed implications for policy. As such, the

participant's responses resulted in six suggestions for policy reform. These suggestions are listed and discussed at length in the following section (Implications for policy).

### Implications for Policy, Research, and Practice

Although there is much information about the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Highly Qualified Teacher, as well as, opinions and essays concerning the kinds of knowledge needed for effective teaching (Sadler, Sonnert, Coyle, Cook-Smith, & Miller, 2013), there is little on the perceptions of current teachers concerning their own education as required by NCLB's definition of the HQT. Because there is much debate about the qualifications needed to become a teacher and what makes a teacher more effective, this research highlights aspects of current educational programs that are working and aspects of programs that are not working. It is my hope that the findings from this study will inform policy and assist policymakers when determining the educational needs of current classroom teachers and the educational requirements of future teacher candidates.

#### *Implications for Policy*

There is value in deeply understanding the impact of the requirements set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001's definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher as it can help shape future policies to better serve the students it is intended to assist. Research findings from this study could offer some explanation as to why policymaker's efforts to place a Highly Qualified Teacher

in every classroom has not resulted in more wide-spread success in U.S. schools. In addition, the findings from this study could inform policymakers when deciding how to reform and increase the effectiveness of the No Child Left Behind Act's definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher.

This study shares the perspectives of current Highly Qualified Teachers thus providing some insight into the points of view of educators directly affected by the decisions and policies handed down. Below are six suggestions for policy reform developed as a direct result of conversations with the participants presented in this study.

*1) Tighten the language and close the loopholes in the definition for the Highly Qualified Teacher.* This suggestion developed as a result of the participant perceived inadequacies found in the educational and certification requirements of NCLB's definition of the HQT. Because NCLB requires a bachelor's degree but fails to stipulate what that degree should entail, many out-of-field teachers are in U.S. classrooms (The U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Although it is possible for out-of-field teachers to be effective teachers, research shows that, overall, in-field teachers are associated with greater student achievement (Dee & Cohodes, 2008; Heck, 2007; Smith & Gorard, 2007; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Therefore, if policymakers want to increase the likelihood of placing effective teachers in classrooms, then the definition of a Highly Qualified Teacher should go beyond a bachelor's degree and stipulate what the degree should be in.

Because it is possible for a teacher to take and pass an exam with little to no educational background in that subject, participants expressed that the definition of the HQT must include language that requires a certain amount of college coursework in a subject in order to be allowed to take an exam for that subject. Again, this aspect of certification was very troubling for all participants. The idea that a candidate with no background in a subject can study, take a multiple choice exam (multiple times if necessary), pass, and be deemed Highly Qualified by the federal government, is both confounding and absurd. Therefore, it stands to reason, that reform is needed to prevent candidates from taking exams for which they have no background qualifications. Teacher candidates are not allowed to take the PPR exam without showing proof of completing a teacher preparation program, the same should be done for content exams.

*2) In addition to the requirement for a four-year degree, all Highly Qualified Teachers must complete a minimum of 12 hours of coursework in the content that they teach.* This recommendation is an extension of the above recommendation to close the loopholes in NCLB's definition of the HQT. All participants voiced that in order to receive the Highly Qualified Teacher distinction, a teacher must have expertise. This was surprising because not all participants had this expertise, however, all did discuss the importance.

In a school, a teacher may teach several subjects. In these cases, it would be very difficult to find someone who had a degree in every subject taught.

However, studies have shown that in-field teachers are associated with higher test scores and reducing the educational gaps in student achievement attributed to socio-economics and race (Dee & Cohodes, 2008; Heck, 2007; Smith & Gorard, 2007; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997); therefore, when it comes to the core (English, math, science, and social studies) teachers should have a major in these areas. Perhaps for courses outside of the core, having a degree in a closely related field or a minor (18 college hours) would suffice. However, when teaching a core subject, something that many college bound students will take advanced courses in, it seems that requiring the high school teacher to be an expert in the field is not only sensible, it is crucial.

*3) Educational policymakers should be required to have experience in the real world of public school teaching. In addition, an advisory board of practicing Highly Qualified Teachers should be formed and consulted when writing policy.*

Many of the participants in this study mentioned a disconnect between policymakers and the realities and needs of the classroom. As described by the interviewees, policymakers have either been out of education for years or, more commonly, they have never set foot in a classroom. These realities combined with policies that many saw as failures, led the participants to suggest that policymakers need to spend an extended amount of time in a classroom. However, they also acknowledged that this was highly unlikely. Therefore, the participants determined that educational policymakers should have a background in education

and/or consult advisory boards composed of HQTs when deciding on new policy or when reforming policy.

*4) As part of their teacher preparation program, all teacher candidates should be required to engage in student teaching, but the duration and hours are dependent upon the program.* This suggestion, made by all participants, presented because of how underprepared and anxious they felt when first entering the classroom. Student teaching was a focus for the participants because the majority of them had not experienced it. Thus, they reported feeling much more angst and for a longer period of time than those participants who engaged in student teaching as part of their educator preparation program. In addition to the general feelings of nervousness, participants who entered their classroom with no student teaching experience, had a much more difficult time with classroom management and lesson planning than those who had student teaching experience. This led the participants to deduce that student teaching should be a requirement for all teacher candidates.

The participants who engaged in student teaching did recommend that all teacher candidates complete a full year of student teaching. When I asked my other interviewees about this, several mentioned that a year of student teaching would not have been financially feasible. In addition, the student teaching experience is not like real teaching, it is similar, but candidates still have a teacher in the room to help and guide them. At some point, teacher candidates just have to

enter their own classrooms and gain the confidence and ability that comes with experience. Furthermore, to require that a candidate spend entire workdays in a classroom for a whole year without pay is unfair and likely would prevent many people from being able to become teachers. Perhaps this could work if the candidate was paid as an aid for their time in the classroom; however, with potential school budget cuts always lurking around the corner, it is doubtful that a school would have the funding or desire to do this. Therefore, while there was no consensus amongst participants as to the duration of student teaching, the value and recommendation was mentioned by all.

*5) The federal government needs to set some basic guidelines that all educator programs must follow. Additionally, one of those guidelines needs to include the implementation of realistic teaching opportunities.* As discussed multiple times throughout this study, educator preparation programs vary greatly throughout the country because, as Darling-Hammond (2000b) points out, there is a lack of regulation and set standards by the federal government. Moreover, while some states, including Texas, have set some standards (Texas Education Agency, 2015), these standards vary and, in the case of Texas, do very little to strengthen these programs. While states are allowed to add any standards and requirements they determine necessary to meet the specific educational needs of the state, the participants in this study stressed that the federal government needs to define the minimum requirements for certification programs and they need to regulate these

programs. It is not reasonable, when considering all of the stakeholders in education, to simply rely on the goodness of program developers or the free market to dictate the quality of educator programs. While some teacher candidates may honestly want the best education they can receive, some may want the easiest or quickest education they can receive. However, allowing candidates to earn credit for poorly developed programs not only affects the teacher, but it also directly impacts students (Andrew, 1990; Andrew & Schwab, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 2000a; Eckert, 2013; Ferguson & Womack, 1993; Greenburg, Putman, & Walsh, 2013). Therefore, as recommended by the participants in this study and supported by research, the federal government needs to set minimum standards that all programs must meet, including, but not limited to, a set amount of required contact hours, objectives that all programs must cover including familiarizing candidates with teaching realities, and student teaching experience.

*6) Composite exams need to be phased out and replaced by subject specific exams that test for knowledge and depth. The Pedagogical and Professional Responsibilities exam (PPR) needs to be completely reworked to reflect the realities of teaching. Finally, exam attempts should be capped and uncertified teachers should not be allowed to teach beyond a year.* This is a very specific participant recommendation that has several areas to address. The first area, the phasing out of composite exams, much like the requirement for a bachelor's degree in the content area, was made by both the participants who took

subject exams and by the participants who took composite exams. As a matter of fact, participants who took subject exams knew very little about composite exams. They reported that their subject exams tested for depth and application and felt that the exams were adequate. However, participants who took the composite exams viewed them dubiously.

The participants made a rather compelling point when they explained that composite exams that test for multiple subjects, especially subjects as specialized as calculus and physics, do a disservice to education. The fact that a teacher candidate, who knows nothing about physics, can become certified in physics simply because one or two questions (that the candidate may not have even answered correctly) about physics appeared on a composite exam, is concerning. More concerning, is that teachers can then be placed into physics (and two participants were) classrooms as Highly Qualified Teachers, even after admitting to administrators that they have minimal to no knowledge about the subject. Therefore, it seems that the use of composite exams, while convenient for administrators, may be damaging to both students and teachers. Thus, it stands to reason that these exams should be phased out and replaced by subject exams.

The second area addressed in this participant recommendation, is a revision of the Pedagogical and Professional Responsibilities EC-12 Exam (PPR). When all of the participants laughed aloud about the PPR and described it as “a joke,” it was not surprising. The PPR is commonly described by teachers as

“easy” and the ridiculous nature of the scenarios presented are often mocked. Because all interviewees expressed a desire for more realistic scenarios in educator preparation programs, most likely, the best way to ensure this is done, is to revise the PPR to test for real classroom scenarios. Preparation programs have a tendency to teach to the exams (Selwyn, 2007) and standardized exams hold much weight. Furthermore, if candidates do poorly on these exams, the programs they come from are then looked at more closely (Selwyn, 2007). Therefore, to better address the needs of teacher candidates and to create a better exam, the PPR does need to be revised from top to bottom with the addition of realistic classroom scenarios.

The third area addressed in this participant recommendation, is the number of attempts teacher candidates should be granted to retake exams. All participants understood the need for allowing multiple attempts on certification exams. Because so much relies on the successful completion of these exams, allowing only one attempt would be unjust. However, the participants also felt that allowing unlimited attempts was too lax, especially because, according to the participants who took their exams more than once, questions from exam to exam do not vary much. Therefore, there does need to be some limit applied (perhaps three attempts?). After this limit is reached, it should also be possible to reset the attempts; but this needs to be done by showing that the teacher candidate is attempting to improve. Therefore, this reset could be accomplished by requiring

that candidates complete a course in the subject of the exam before returning for another round of tries.

The fourth and final area addressed in this participant recommendation, is that uncertified teachers should not be allowed to teach beyond a year. Several participants shared stories about teachers who could not pass their exams yet remained in the classroom year after year. The concerns and stories discussed by the participants do beg the question: Why did the federal government write and enact a requirements for becoming a Highly Qualified Teacher only to then turn around and allow teacher candidates to bypass these requirements? The uncertified teachers who participants discussed were in classrooms teaching hundreds of students a year. If policymakers composed the requirements for becoming a HQT because they believed these qualifications were necessary for student success, what does that say about the success of the students who were/are taught by uncertified teachers? Carey (2004) explains that students of color, low-performing students, and/or poor students, are more likely to have teachers who are uncertified, therefore, the students who need effective teachers the most, the students that NCLB is supposed to help, are the same students who are most affected by this loophole that allows uncertified teachers to remain in the classroom. Thus, the participant's recommendation that teachers be allowed no more than one year in the classroom without completing the requirements to receive Highly Qualified Teacher status, is not only logical but critical.

### *Implications for Research*

Research has shown that meeting the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001's definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher in no way guarantees success (*Raising the Bar: Aligning*, 2012). Furthermore, teachers working with students of color, at-risk, and low-socioeconomic students are more likely to be undereducated, underprepared, and/or new to the profession (Darling-Hammond & Green, 1990; Eckert, 2013; Ingersoll, 2001; Jacob, 2007). These teachers are also far more likely to leave the profession within five years, adding to teacher shortages and constant teacher turn-over and adding significantly to the costs of education (Andrew, 1990; Andrew & Schwab, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 2000a; Eckert, 2013; Ferguson & Womack, 1993; Greenburg, Putman, & Walsh, 2013). Therefore, while there is research that looks at how successful NCLB has been, where teachers are most likely to be placed, and teacher attrition rates, there is minimal research on Highly Qualified Teacher's views on educational policy and their own education and training as required by NCLB.

As such, to better ensure that current teachers and teacher candidates are highly qualified effective teachers who are more likely to stay in the profession, as well as, to begin to fill a hole in the literature, this study focused on what current Highly Qualified Teachers, who are in the field, do and do not know about the subjects they teach. This study also sought to determine what these teachers

felt their education did right to prepare them for teaching, what they felt their education lacked when preparing them for teaching, and what they felt colleges of education and teacher preparation programs could do to better meet the needs of current and future educators.

This qualitative study had a rather small sample. However, the participants did represent all four core subjects; And they were somewhat diverse in educational backgrounds, certification backgrounds, and when and where they obtained their college educations and certifications. Nonetheless, my hope is that this research is just a start. I hope that the types of questions asked in this study could be asked of other HQTs in future research projects. I also hope to conduct an expanded version of this study for which I will have a larger sample that spans schools across the United States. In addition, future studies, including the one I wish to conduct, could utilize a quantitative and/or mixed-methods approach. Finally, future research could also be expanded to include middle school and elementary teachers.

### *Implications for Practice*

Policy reform is a slow process; therefore, while I hope that this and future research serves to inform policymakers, there is much to be gleaned from this study that could be used to help educators currently working in the school system. Because these participants shared their own educational experiences, discussed what did and did not work, and voiced their ideas for change, the university,

teacher preparation programs, and administrators could all find this, and future research of this type, very beneficial.

Colleges of education are charged with preparing teacher candidates for the real world of teaching. Candidates may choose to follow a traditional path or they may choose to earn their degree first and then obtain certification. In either scenario, there is much that the university could do, based on the findings in this study, to better prepare students. For instance, when reforming and/or developing new programs, university officials may want to create an advisory committee of current HQTs in the community to inform which courses candidates should be required to take. Officials could also allow the findings of this and similar studies to justify the need to create new courses that cover content specific pedagogy (courses that focus on teaching the specific content each candidate plans on teaching). In addition, university officials could use this study to determine what types of changes need to be implemented in their pedagogical programs, including an injection of more realistic teaching scenarios, bringing in more guest teacher speakers, and including more observation and student teaching opportunities.

Alternative educator preparation programs could use this study to reform their current programs to better meet the needs of the students who achieve certification through them. For instance, based on the results of this study, these programs need to provide more coursework and information pertaining to lesson planning, paperwork, and classroom management. They also need to dedicate a

portion of the program to preparing for the first day of class. Like the university, these programs need to inject much more reality into their curriculum and invite teachers to talk to the candidates and allow for questions. They also need to add more fieldwork opportunities such as school observations and student teaching.

Although a large portion of this study pertained to teacher education, administrators in the field (superintendents, principals, deans of instruction) could also benefit from this research. Several of the participants mentioned professional development and opportunities for continuing education. Administrators could use the information from this study to inform their professional development choices and/or they could create a committee of their own teachers who could ask fellow teachers questions, similar those used in this study, to determine what teachers on their campuses feel they need to better their craft. Additionally, administrators could use the information presented in this study to better understand where their teachers are coming from, what needs and concerns they may have, and, as a result, make some changes that make their Highly Qualified Teacher's jobs easier (for example, lessen the paperwork demands, give them the time they need to do their jobs, offer mentors to help them become more effective).

#### Limitations

This study sought to highlight the perceptions of current Highly Qualified Teachers in northern Texas public secondary schools. While Texas is a large state

and much of the current NCLB policy was derived from Texas educational reform, it is not representational of all states within the United States and, as a result, this limits some of the universality of this study. The sample size for this study is also somewhat small and this further limits the universality of the findings.

In 2011, the proportion of K-12 teachers who identified as “white” was 84%, teachers who identified as “black” was 7%, teachers who identified as “Hispanic” was 6%, and teachers who identified as “other” was 4%. Furthermore, the fastest growing group of non-white teachers in the United States identify as “Hispanic” (Feistritzer, 2011). Additionally, the 2011 K-12 teaching force was comprised of 84% female and 16% male (Feistritzer, 2011). Although participant demographic data did not determine whether or not they were chosen for this study, six of the participants identified as “white,” one identified as “Asian,” and one identified as “Native American” (see Appendix E). Thus, the participants in this study did not represent the current racial demographics of today’s teaching force. On the other hand, the gender ratio of this study, 75% female and 25% male, more closely represented the national average; however, a larger pool would allow for more male participants, something that I think is important because males and females do tend to perceive situations differently. Finally, a larger pool would hopefully produce more teachers who took subject specific exams to achieve certification. Only two out of the eight participants in this study

took the subject exam and both participants teach English. While they were able to provide insight about the English exam, I would like to hear the perspectives of teachers who also took subject exams in science, math, and social studies.

Therefore, this study could later be expanded to increase its universality and to increase understandings about the effects of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001's definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher. As such, possible changes for expanding this study could include: 1) increasing the sample size; 2) including districts from other states; 3) conducting the research using a quantitative and/or mixed-methods approach; 4) expanding the sample to include middle school and elementary teachers; 5) including racial and gender demographics in the participant selection criteria to more closely match the current U.S. teaching force; 6) including exam (composite or subject specific) in the participant selection criteria to include more subject specific exams.

#### Final Thoughts

Once common schools have been established, there is no social evil that cannot be attacked by their beneficent influence. Universal education could be the *great equalizer* of the human conditions, the balance wheel of social machinery, and the creator of wealth undreamed of. (Mann, 1957 p. 8)

Horace Mann, 1837

Since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, I have seen a devaluing of teachers and the American public school system. I suspect, but do not know with certainty, that this devaluing was not entirely accidental.

Regardless of intent, I do believe it is a result of a dramatic increase in the value placed on standardized testing, something that many teachers and students find stifling, at the expense of innovation and creativity, something that teachers should be allowed to encourage and cultivate. In addition, there has been a campaign to privatize education and increase the number of charter schools and vouchers for private schools at the expense of the American public school system. This campaign has not just been waged by politicians, but also by the media, and by the people in our educational system who stand to profit from this privatization.

I do not believe the myth that the American public school system is a failed enterprise. I do not believe that the answer to our educational woes is to throw out a system that has been educating Americans for over 190 years and to replace it with a for-profit system run by corporations. I still believe that the American public school system has the potential to be the “great equalizer,” and perhaps, that is what troubles some the most.

I have seen wonderful things happen in today’s schools. I have seen teachers change lives and inspire students to go further than they ever thought possible. I have seen teachers reach students who had been deemed unreachable. And I have seen teachers give their time and money to help students who others had cast aside. I once witnessed a special education teacher, who lived paycheck to paycheck, use her own money from one of those paychecks and take one of her

students out to buy her new shoes and clothing because her parents sent her to school in shoes that caused her toes to curl under. I once witnessed a teacher stay at a school till three in the morning with a student because his parents forgot to pick him up and she was not allowed to drive him home. I have seen teachers work till the wee hours of the morning, preparing for homecoming or prom because they know how important these events are for kids. I have seen teachers come in to schools exhausted day after day and week after week because they were up late grading and/or preparing lessons for their students. And I have read stories about teachers who gave their lives protecting their students from crazed gunmen who entered their schools with the intent to murder. These are not the actions of lazy uncaring people. These are not the actions of people who are in our schools because the unions refuse to allow administrators to do what is best for kids. These are our American public school teachers who change lives and give much of their own to do so.

While I do wholeheartedly believe in our schools and our teachers, I did teach in public schools for almost a decade and I am not unaware that there are problems. I am also am aware that not all teachers are caring. However, these teachers are the exceptions not the rule. I am also aware that there are many teachers out there who are less than effective; however, I do not agree that this is because they do not care. Many of these less than effective teachers lack the educational and pedagogical background and trainings needed to make them

effective in the classroom. I worked in a supervisory role for a period of time and observed many teachers work very hard and want so desperately to be effective, only to fail. When I spoke with these teachers, they did not express a lack of caring, they actually cared very much. Their goal was to help. They wanted their students to succeed; they just had no idea how to help their students do that. These experiences are why I began looking into the definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher; I wanted to know why so many teachers seemed so lost in the classroom.

I did not decide to conduct this research to criticize or belittle any of the accomplishments of my participants. I did not set out looking for participants whom I felt were underqualified. I used convenience and snowball sampling and, by chance, ended up interviewing two participants who do not have a degree in the subjects they teach and who admit that their knowledge is only surface level. However, what I appreciate about both participants is how honest they were, how much they seemed to care about future educators, and how much they have had to do just to keep up with the demands of subjects that they were not trained to teach. I do not blame them or criticize their efforts, instead, I criticize a system that allows this to happen and then publically demonizes teachers. I also criticize a system that demands that teachers prepare students for a standardized exam while also insisting that teachers differentiate instruction and kindle creativity in students.

Our schools are not beyond repair and our teachers are not lazy and uncaring, this is a myth, a narrative that has caused much damage to the reputation of our schools and has demoralized many of our teachers and students. Positive change is possible and policy reform is necessary, not just as it pertains to teachers and preparing them for today's classrooms, however, that would be a valuable start.

APPENDIX A

Recruitment Letter

Dear Region 11 Educator,

My name is Jackie Gill. I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies within the College of Education and Health Professions at the University of Texas at Arlington.

Under the advisement of Dr. Ifeoma Amah, I am working on a dissertation study that examines the perspectives of secondary (i.e. high school) highly qualified teachers in North Texas (i.e. Region 11) and asks what it takes to be prepared to enter the classroom. I am also interested in ascertaining how teachers feel the No Child Left Behind Act's requirements for becoming a Highly Qualified Teacher helped to prepare them for the realities of the classroom.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study if you meet the following criteria: 1) be a NLCB defined highly qualified teacher, 2) work within Region 11 in a school serving 9th – 12th grade students, 3) work with at-risk students, 4) currently teach one of the core subjects (i.e. English, math, science, and social studies), 5) have at least one completed year of teaching, 6) be willing to be interviewed off campus at a location and time that is most convenient for you, 7) be willing to submit pictures of your classroom, and 8) be willing to allow me to collect a syllabus and sample curricula from your classes.

If you are willing to be part of this study, I would like begin the process by asking you to fill out a demographic questionnaire. Once I receive your questionnaire, I would like to set up a 60 to 90 minute face-to-face interview with you. During this interview, I will ask you questions about your experiences as a HQT working in the classroom. I will ask about your college education and your certification program and how this has helped you to be a more effective teacher. This interview will be conducted at a location and at a time of your choice. If we run out of time and/or if I have additional questions, I may ask you to participate in a follow up interview, which will last between 30 to 60 minutes. In addition to the interview, I would like to collect the following from you: 1) pictures of your classroom; 2) your course syllabus; and 3) curriculum for your course. I would like to examine these artifacts to gain a better sense of your teaching environment and to better understand your course requirements.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and the information that I collect will be completely confidential. Therefore, I want to assure you that your real name will not be used in any portion of this study and I will not share the information that I collect with your supervisors or anyone affiliated with your school district.

If you have any questions please feel free to call me at (817) 371-4856 and/or email at [jackeline.gill@mavs.uta.edu](mailto:jackeline.gill@mavs.uta.edu).

I look forward to hearing from you and appreciate your help with this study.

Sincerely,

Jackie Gill  
Doctoral Candidate  
University of Texas at Arlington  
College of Education and Health Professions

APPENDIX B

Consent to Participate in the Study

**UT Arlington**  
**Informed Consent Document**

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR**

Jackie Gill, The University of Texas at Arlington, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, [jacqueline.gill@mavs.uta.edu](mailto:jacqueline.gill@mavs.uta.edu) (817) 371-4856.

**FACULTY ADVISOR**

Dr. Ifeoma Amah, The University of Texas at Arlington, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, [iamah@uta.edu](mailto:iamah@uta.edu).

**TITLE OF PROJECT**

Redefining the No Child Left Behind Act's Highly Qualified Teacher

**INTRODUCTION**

You are being asked to participate in a research study about the No Child Left Behind Act's (NCLB) Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT). As defined by the No Child Left Behind Act, A HQT is one who: has a bachelor's degree, shows subject competency, and holds state certification. Specifically, this study seeks to understand how well high school teachers' college and pedagogical educations, as required by NCLB, prepared them to teach their assigned subjects and to perform all of the duties asked of them. Your participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate or discontinuing your participation, at any time, will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Please ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

**PURPOSE**

Educational policymakers often write and implement policies without conversing with educators. As such, more research is needed that asks educators how current educational policies have affected them and what changes, if any, they would make to these policies. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of current high school Highly Qualified Teachers (HQT) and to understand: what they do and don't know about the subjects they teach; what they feel their education, as required by NCLB, did right to prepare them for teaching; and what they feel this education lacked when preparing them for teaching. Furthermore, this study hopes to glean what current HQTs feel colleges of education and teacher preparation programs could do to better meet the needs of current and future educators. Specifically, this research will examine what it means to be a Highly Qualified Teacher in Texas and what changes to policy current HQTs would recommend.

**DURATION**

You will be asked to participate in one face-to-face interview lasting between 60 to 90 minutes. If we run out of time and/or if I have additional questions, a follow up interview may occur which will take place over the phone or in person for 30 to 60 minutes.

**NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS**

The number of anticipated participants in this research study is 16.

IRB Approval Date: **DEC 22 2014**

## **UT Arlington Informed Consent Document**

### **PROCEDURES**

The procedures, which will involve you as a research participant, include the following:

- 1) You will fill out a demographic questionnaire that asks for personal, educational and professional information.
- 2) You will be asked to provide the following documents and artifacts related to your experiences in the classroom: a) pictures of your classroom; b) your course syllabus; and c) curriculum for your course. I would like to examine these artifacts to gain a better sense of your teaching environment and to better understand your course requirements.
- 3) You will participate in a face-to-face interview lasting between 60 to 90 minutes during which I will ask questions pertaining to your prior educational and pedagogical experiences as required by NCLB. I will ask about the realities of the classroom and how well NCLB's requirements helped to prepare you for these realities. Finally, I will ask you about your experiences with required curricula and with standardized exams.
- 4) If we run out of time and/or if I have additional questions, I may ask you to participate in a follow up interview, which will take place over the phone or in person for 30 to 60 minutes.

The interviews will be audio recorded and take place a time and location most convenient for you. After the interview, the recording will be transcribed, which means it will be typed exactly as it was recorded word-for-word, by the researcher and/or a professional transcriber. The audio recording will be destroyed at the end of the study. Pseudonyms (fake name) will be used to protect your anonymity. The only identifying information will be your printed name and signature on this consent form.

### **POSSIBLE BENEFITS**

The possible benefits to conducting this study include sharing the perspectives of current Highly Qualified Teachers (HQT) with researchers, policymakers and leaders. There is value in deeply understanding the impact of the requirements set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act's definition of the Highly Qualified Teacher as it can help shape future policies and practices to better serve the students it is intended to assist. This study will begin to fill a gap in the current body of research looking at teacher preparation, qualifications, and education, as required by NCLB, from the educators' point of view.

### **POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

There are no perceived risks or discomforts for participating in this research study. Should you experience any discomfort please inform the researcher. You have the right to quit any study procedures at any time at no consequence.

### **COMPENSATION**

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

### **ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES**

There are no alternative procedures offered for this study. However, you can elect not to participate in the study or quit at any time at no consequence.

IRB Approval Date: **DEC 22 2014**

**UT Arlington**  
**Informed Consent Document**

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to decline participation in any or all study procedures or quit at any time at no consequence. Choosing to participate has no effect on your relationship with Region 11 school districts or with UT Arlington.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of this signed consent form and all data collected including transcriptions from this study will be stored in a secure locked filing cabinet and password protected computer in Trimble Hall 103J, at the University of Texas at Arlington for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Additional research studies could evolve from the information you have provided, but your information will not be linked to you in any way; it will be anonymous. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the UTA Institutional Review Board, and personnel particular to this research have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. The IRB at UTA has reviewed and approved this study and the information within this consent form. If in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review your research records, the University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law.

**CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS**

Questions about this research study may be directed to Jackie Gill at (817) 371-4856 or [jacqueline.gill@mavs.uta.edu](mailto:jacqueline.gill@mavs.uta.edu) and/or Dr. Ifeoma Amah at 817-272-0991 or [iamah@uta.edu](mailto:iamah@uta.edu). Any questions you may have about your rights as a research participant or a research-related injury may be directed to the Office of Research Administration Regulatory Services at 817-272-2105 or [regulatoryservices@uta.edu](mailto:regulatoryservices@uta.edu).

**As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:**

---

Signature and printed name of principal investigator or person obtaining consent Date

**CONSENT**

By signing below, you \_\_\_\_\_ (print your name) confirm that you are 18 years of age or older and have read or had this document read to you. You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign and have been told that you can ask other questions at any time.

**UT Arlington**  
**Informed Consent Document**

You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which you are otherwise entitled.

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**Signature and printed name of volunteer**

**Date**

IRB Approval Date: **DEC 22 2014**

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DEC 22 2014

APPENDIX C

Pre-Interview Questionnaire

QUESTION	RESPONSE
<i>Note: All identifiable information listed in this questionnaire will remain confidential and will not be included in the study results.</i>	
1. Name	
2. Pseudonym (i.e. fake name) you would like to use for this study.	
3. Email Address	
4. Phone	
5. Race	
6. Gender	
7. Age	
8. What district do you teach in?	
9. What school do you teach at?	
10. What grade level(s) do you currently teach?	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Circle all that apply:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">9<sup>th</sup> 10<sup>th</sup> 11<sup>th</sup> 12<sup>th</sup></p>
11. What subject(s) do you currently teach?	
12. How many years have you been teaching (as a full time teacher)?	_____ Years
13. What courses have you taught throughout your teaching career?	
14. What institution(s) did you attend for your undergraduate degree(s)? Please list all institutions you attended.	

15. What was your major(s)?	
a. What was your minor(s)?	
b. How many credit hours did you earn in the subject that you currently teach?	_____ Hours
c. What is your highest degree earned?	<i>Bachelors          Masters          Ph.D.</i>
16. Were you traditionally or alternatively certified to teach in Texas?  <i>Please circle your choice&gt;&gt;</i>	<p>Traditionally (certification was obtained through a university)</p> <p>Alternatively (certification was obtained through a program outside of the university)</p>
17. Where did you obtain your training for teacher certification?	<i>Name the university or alternative program:</i>

18. Have you passed the ExCET and/or TExES <i>professional</i> exam?	YES      NO
19. Have you passed the ExCET and/or TExES <i>content</i> exam?	YES      NO
a. Did you take the exam for other content areas?	YES      NO
b. If yes, which ones?	
20. Were you teaching before your certification was complete?	YES      NO
a. If yes, what subject(s)	Subjects: _____ _____
b. And for how many years?	_____ Years

If possible, would you please provide the following and email them to [Jacqueline.gill@uta.edu](mailto:Jacqueline.gill@uta.edu):

1. A few photos of your classroom (empty, no students present)
2. A copy of your syllabus
3. A copy of your district's course curriculum

Thank you.

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Interview Pseudonym: Date: Location: Time Interview Started: Time Interview Finished:
---

### Reminders

- Prior to interview have the participant complete the consent and demographic information forms.
- Collect artifacts from the participant
- Research Questions
- Recording Device

### **Interview Script**

Thank you for consenting to this one-on-one interview. I will audio record our session and capture your responses. If at any time you would like me to stop recording, please let me know and I will do so. I will be following an interview protocol but I may also ask you to clarify or elaborate. I would like to ask for the opportunity to follow up with you later if I need clarification and/or for you to verify the accuracy of my analysis. I may also need to schedule a second interview if we run out of time during this interview and need to complete any of the questions on the interview protocol.

Educational policymakers often write and implement policies without conversing with stakeholders (e.g. educational leaders, teachers, parents, students). The aim of this research is to look at one of those stakeholders: The Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) (As defined by the No Child Left Behind Act, A HQT is one who: has a bachelor's degree, shows subject competency, and holds state certification). More research is needed that asks HQTs how current educational policies (e.g. No Child Left Behind Act) have affected them and what changes, if any, they would make to these policies.

During this interview, I will ask you questions about your experiences as a HQT working in the classroom. I will ask about your college education and your certification program and how this has helped you to be a more effective teacher. I will also discuss educational policy and ask for your thoughts on future policy reforms. Do you have any questions before we start?

## **Introductory Questions**

1. Please tell me a bit about yourself.  
Probes:
  - Where are you from?
  - Why did you go into teaching?
2. How did you end up at the school you are currently at?  
Probes:
  - What are your students like?
  - Administration?
3. What are some of your future goals and plans?

## **Interview Questions**

1. In 2001 the Federal Government passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and part of this law required that all teachers become NCLB defined Highly Qualified Teachers (HQT). You are a Highly Qualified Teacher, what does this mean to you? Is this distinction important?  
Probes:
  - If yes, in what way?
  - If no, why not?
2. Do you think the requirements of NCLB ensure success or, at the very least, ensure that the majority of teachers will be successful?  
Probes:
  - What do you think teachers need to be successful?
  - What do you think the government can do to ensure that teachers are effective?
3. NCLB laid out three requirements for becoming a Highly Qualified Teacher. The first required that you to obtain a bachelor's degree. Based on your own experiences, what were the primary objectives of your undergraduate program?
4. What did your undergraduate program do to prepare you to teach your assigned subject?
5. If possible, give me a specific example of something you learned in your undergraduate program that has helped you to teach your subject.

6. Looking back, are there any classes that you wish you had taken in college to better prepare you for teaching your assigned subject?  
Probes:
  - If so, what courses?
  - How do you feel these courses would have enhanced your teaching?
7. The second requirement set forth by NCLB required you to attend a certification program. Based on your own experiences, what were the primary objectives of your teacher education/certification program?
8. What did your teacher education/certification program do to prepare you for the demands of teaching?  
Probes:
  - Classroom management
  - Handling student discipline issues
  - The implementation of differentiated and socially just instruction
  - School duties and district requests
  - Paperwork requirements
9. If possible, can you give me a specific example(s) of something you learned in your teacher education program/certification program that has helped you as a teacher?
10. What could your program have done, if anything, to better prepare you for the real world of teaching?
11. Pertaining to the artifacts that I collected: I asked for these artifacts to gain a better sense of your teaching environment and to better understand your course requirements.
  - Is there anything pertaining to these artifacts that you would like to discuss?
  - Is there anything present in the pictures of your room that you did as a direct result of information that you learned in your educational and/or pedagogical experiences?
12. The final requirement set forth by NCLB, is that you prove your subject competency via a state standardized exam (e.g. ExCET, TExES). Based on your own experiences, how well do these exams represent the subject knowledge needed to teach the subject you teach?

13. You were also required to take and pass the professional and pedagogical responsibilities exam. Based on your own experiences, how well did this exam represent the realities of the professional and pedagogical responsibilities of a teacher?
14. Do you think it is important for teacher candidates to be able to pass these exams? If so, why is it important? If not, why not?  
Probe:
- Perhaps you don't think they are important, why not?
15. Is there anything pertaining to the exams that you would change?  
Probes:
- Content
  - Timeframe
  - Ability to take additional exams
16. In an attempt to raise standardized exam scores and to ensure that all teachers teach the same thing, does your district require the use of curriculum frameworks and/or scripted curriculums? If yes, do you use them? Do you find them beneficial?  
Probes:
- Do you augment the frameworks (or scripted lessons), if so, how?
    - i. If applicable, will you please point out district curricula and augmentation within your lesson plans?
  - What are your feelings about the requirements by many schools to use a canned curriculum?
  - Do you think that fully certified HQT's should be required to use district curriculums?
  - Discussion pertaining to participant provided copies curriculum and syllabi, will occur here.
17. You met the federal government's requirements to be a Highly Qualified Teacher, should the Federal government weigh in on the requirement to use canned curriculums (e.g. or define)? How? Why?
18. Based on your own experiences, what are the strengths and weaknesses of using canned curriculums?
19. If asked to teach a course aimed at preparing students for the SAT, ACT, or AP exam in your specific area, how comfortable would you be?

20. If you were asked to take a yearly EOC/AP/standardized exam in your subject, how would you feel about this?  
Probes:
- Do you think this should be a requirement for all core teachers?
  - How confident are you that you would pass each exam?
  - Do you think that such exams have any place in the Federal requirements for becoming an HQT?
21. The Obama Administration, in 2010, presented a blueprint for reforming the No Child Left Behind Act. Part of this reform specifically addressed teacher preparation and education. This new policy has yet to be passed, however, reformers did call for increased accountability for teacher preparation programs. This is because policymakers feel that many educator preparation programs fail to prepare teacher candidates for success in the classroom. What are your thoughts on this?
- Do you think that your program adequately prepared you?
  - What do you think the government can do to achieve their stated goal of making teacher preparation programs more effective?
22. Are there any other reforms that policymakers could implement, pertaining to teacher education and preparation, that you think would better prepare teacher candidates to meet the demands of today's classrooms?
23. Is there anything pertaining to the No Child Left Behind Act and the requirements for becoming a Highly Qualified Teacher that you would like to comment on?
24. Is there anything else you want to say about NCLB and/or your experiences as a student or teacher that we haven't already discussed that you would like to add?

***Thank you so much for participating and sharing your experiences with me. I look forward to talking to you again if I have any additional questions.***

APPENDIX E

Participant Demographic Chart

Participant	Subject	Years Teaching	Degree	Certification	Race	Gender
<b>Orwellia</b>	English	13	BA English	Texas Hybrid Alternative	White	Female
<b>Vivian</b>	English	3	BA English	Texas Alternative	White	Female
<b>Militario</b>	Geometry	8	BS Math	Louisiana Traditional	White	Male
<b>Tiffany</b>	Statistics & Pre-Calculus	5	MS Math	Texas Traditional	White	Female
<b>Reginald</b>	Physics	9	BA Journalism BS Biology	Texas Alternative	White	Male
<b>Caroline</b>	Chemistry	4	BBM Business Management	Texas Alternative	Native American	Female
<b>Rose</b>	World History	6	BA Political Science	Georgia Traditional	White	Female
<b>Wahine</b>	World Geography	9	BA Anthropology	Hawaii Traditional	Asian	Female

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## Biographical Information

Jacqueline (Jackie) Gill began teaching secondary English and Journalism in 2001 after earning her Bachelor of Arts degree in English and Journalism at the University of Texas Pan American (UTPA). That same year, Jackie was one of 25 educators chosen from across the United States to take part in a journalism institute through the University of Florida, the America Society of News Editors, and the Poynter Institute. In 2006, Jackie earned her Master of Arts degree in English Writing at UTPA and, that summer, was accepted into the Rhetoric and Composition doctoral program at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA). Jackie moved to the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, where she taught secondary AP English and served as the English department chair by day and attended doctoral classes by night.

In 2009, Jackie completed the coursework for her Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition and began teaching composition and literature at a community college. However, after witnessing the gap between K-12 and higher education and after experiencing many of the issues that ail America's public schools, Jackie decided to shift focus toward looking for a way to help reform issues within the U.S. educational system. As such, in 2011, Jackie began working on her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at UTA where she developed an interest in educational policy and law.

In 2014, Jackie became a Clinical Assistant Professor at a university teaching technical writing and presentation skills to business students. This position nicely merged Jackie's work in writing and her work in leadership; however, she does plan on moving into educational leadership and policy. Jackie's research interests are educational policy and law, especially how policy and law effects teachers; the effects of canned curriculums on the Highly Qualified Teacher; K-12 teacher attrition; K-12 teacher education and preparation; and Texas teacher certification.