SUPERVISION AND SUPPORT:
STUDENT TEACHERS AND WRITING POLICY

Anne Marie Garth
A DISSERTATION
in
Reading, Writing and Literacy

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Education

2012

Supervisor of Dissertation:

Susan L. Lytle, Professor of Education

Dean, Graduate School of Education:

Andrew C. Porter, Dean

Dissertation Committee:

Susan L. Lytle, Professor of Education
Katherine Schultz, Dean and Professor, Mills College
Robert Fecho, Associate Professor, Language and Literacy Education
DEDICATION

To my father, George Joseph Liebel (1940-1997)
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Many people have supported me in this research and writing. I am most grateful to Susan Lytle for her wisdom and patience. Kathy Shultz and Bob Fecho have been insightful and full-of-care in walking with me these several years. I am also grateful to my former colleagues at Western Carolina University and Presbyterian College, who provided direction and an eager audience. I am especially grateful to Jim Charles and Carol Gardner at University of South Carolina Upstate, for allowing me to conduct this research there.

I have also been fortunate to have several excellent readers; thank you to Joan Denoncour, Sue Elliott, Carly Hutchinson, Betsy Gilliland, and Sarah Hobson for your scholarship, friendship, and fierce intelligence.

I thank my husband Stuart for his many years of understanding and good humor. I certainly could not have accomplished this without the unwavering belief of my mother, Mimi, and the thoughts and prayers of the Dailey, Liebel and Garth families. Finally, my friends in Pennsylvania and in South Carolina have my sincere and humble thanks for their constant understanding and encouragement.
ABSTRACT

SUPERVISION AND SUPPORT:

STUDENT TEACHERS AND WRITING POLICY

Anne Marie Garth
Susan L. Lytle

It is well known that over the past two decades, writing has been subjected to various policies, initiatives, and requirements, as “test prep is the new order of the day” (Schultz & Fecho, 2005, p. 12). Student teachers are learning to teach writing in these conditions. Yet they are usually left alone to make sense of the relationships between what they learn in teacher education, and what they are permitted or encouraged to do in their placement schools. Little is known about how student teachers make sense of the rules and expectations around writing in their placement schools, and what professional judgment they believe they are allowed to exercise as they learn to teach writing.

Dominant policy structures can lead the next generation of teachers to maintain the status quo, replicating practices that often limit children’s access to powerful literacy learning. To address this problem, this qualitative study examined how four student teachers, across elementary, middle and secondary schools, “read” the rules and expectations of their placement schools, and how they navigated the relationships of policy to practice in the teaching of writing. This study is also a practitioner inquiry into what role a first-time university supervisor played in student teachers’ sense-making process, with the goal of constructivist writing pedagogy.
Drawing on socio-cultural literacy theories, reflective supervision literature, and critical policy research, this study found that student teachers' negotiation of the policies in their schools went through phases, and that unofficial policies and interpersonal relationships were important parts of the policy landscape for student teachers. Furthermore, conversations with the university supervisor framed student teachers' interrogation and understandings of the rules and traditions around them, as well as their thinking about themselves as teachers of writing. Suggesting a critical policy approach within literacy education, this study implies that student teachers can see themselves as agents for change, but that this is a difficult process. It also argues for a revised role of university supervisors in teacher education, including support for "reading" policy along with student teachers while deepening their own knowledge-of-practice (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999).
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................... v

Chapter 1: Introduction .............................................................................................................................. 1

Study Background ...................................................................................................................................... 1

Literacy class, Fall 2008. .................................................................................................................... 1

Questions of policy in the field placement schools. ............................................................................. 2

Making sense of school contexts together. ......................................................................................... 4

Statement of problem .......................................................................................................................... 7

Purpose of the study. .............................................................................................................................. 9

Research questions .............................................................................................................................. 10

Research framework .......................................................................................................................... 10

Constructivism ..................................................................................................................................... 11

Critical pedagogy ............................................................................................................................... 12

New Literacy Studies ......................................................................................................................... 14

Qualitative orientations and ethnographic tools. .............................................................................. 17

Summary ............................................................................................................................................. 18

Chapter preview ................................................................................................................................... 20

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature .................................................................................................... 22

Writing Policy, Texts, and Practices .................................................................................................... 23

Policy Engagement as Part of the Work of Teaching and Teacher Education .................................. 28

Policy study frameworks under critique. ............................................................................................ 31

The nature of policy ............................................................................................................................ 35

What counts as policy. .......................................................................................................................... 36

Student Teacher Supervisors in Research and Practice .................................................................... 43

Models of reflective supervision. .......................................................................................................... 45

Contextual, situated supervision .......................................................................................................... 47

Supervisors and the policy contexts of teaching. ............................................................................... 49

vii
Practices .................................................................................................................. 97
Thematic Analysis .................................................................................................. 99
Overview of analysis chapters ............................................................................. 100
Chapter 4: “Don’t Reinvent the Wheel” .............................................................. 103
Introduction ........................................................................................................... 103
Policy Texts and Practices .................................................................................... 104
Teachers’ editions, welcome work, and more. ................................................... 105
Two telling metaphors. .......................................................................................... 111
Lesson plans. ........................................................................................................ 120
Tests and test preparation ..................................................................................... 124
Many Policy Players and Practices ..................................................................... 132
Playing the Game ................................................................................................ 139
My Initial Supervisory Practices ....................................................................... 146
Context ................................................................................................................ 147
Power and control ............................................................................................... 149
Wiggle room ........................................................................................................ 152
Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 154
Chapter 5: The Well-Oiled Machine Comes Apart ........................................... 157
Introduction ........................................................................................................ 157
Cooperating Teachers as Policy Monitors ......................................................... 158
Struggling with the Missing, Hidden, and Ambiguous ..................................... 165
Teaching Writing in the Gaps and Cracks: “What If We Take The Failure Out?” 176
“What Survive or Thrive?” .................................................................................. 195
Chapter Summary ............................................................................................... 202
Chapter 6: Building Something New ................................................................. 205
Introduction ........................................................................................................ 205
Subtle and Unexpected Policy Elements .......................................................... 206
Writing assessment policies ............................................................................... 207
People ............................................................................................................... 216
Guerrilla Pedagogy .............................................................................................. 220
Chapter 1: Introduction

Study Background

**Literacy class, Fall 2008.** The story of this research begins in a literacy class for elementary and special education majors, when I encountered the people, places and practices which would raise new questions and lead me to new insights about preparing teachers to teach writing. I was teaching the course, my first in literacy education, as an adjunct at a state university in the Southeast. Teacher education in literacy had been a concern of mine for many years, my ideas shaped by experience and study. In the Philadelphia area, I was a high school English teacher for nearly a decade, had taught composition for several years, and was close to finishing my doctoral studies in literacy. New to the Southeast and to teaching literacy, I investigated local literacy practices alongside my students as we proceeded through the course together. This investigation led to the questions at the heart of this study.

My overarching purpose in the course was to guide students in developing frameworks for their literacy pedagogy—frameworks which would allow them to serve the many different learners they would encounter over their careers. My course operated with "inquiry as stance" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), leading pre-service teachers to intentional and systematic questioning of their practices (Fecho, Price & Read, 2004; Medina & del Rocio Costa, 2010). I supported this work through choosing class readings which would encourage and challenge them, dedicating most of each class meeting to group discussion, and guiding students' engagement with and analysis of their field placement experiences. I offered students an inquiring stance and discussion based
format, and presented myself as a co-learner with them. These course actions also helped me keep collaborative learning at the center of my practice, learning I needed for my own developing understanding of the communities and histories within which my students and I lived and worked.

Questions of policy in the field placement schools. One of the first challenges I faced in teaching the literacy course involved the complex relationships between literacy policy and practice which students witnessed and experienced in their field placement schools. Students at this late stage in the professional program were expected to interact with children in local classrooms, gradually moving from observer to participant in preparation for student teaching the following term. These interactions with children, individually or in small groups, were designed to be opportunities for students to practice the approaches and activities discussed in their content area classes, including mine. Therefore, I anticipated that preparing for and reflecting on the field placement teaching experiences would form the bulk of the work of our course. However, students’ questions of policy and its relationships to practice challenged me to reconsider my assumptions about the teaching and learning of literacy happening in their placements schools, and about my students’ roles there.

Soon after the field placements began, students raised questions about the literacy policies and practices they encountered in schools. There were many happy stories of success, and admiration for the work of the host teachers. However, students also took issue with textbooks and multiple choice tests. They questioned standards and the disconnects they noticed between standards and assessments. They recognized the
importance of the many ideas, behaviors, and skills not defined in the standards—which therefore “got no time in class” (class notes, 9/12/08).

Although we read and critiqued standards and curriculum in class, students’ comments pointed to something more. For example, students mentioned that building and classroom level policies and procedures limited their chances to try practices from our course which they thought children would appreciate. Some of these limitations to practice came from literacy policies, including state writing tests, practice tests, and curricular materials. These texts, and the time dedicated to them, marginalized the child-centered writing pedagogies students attempted.

It was clear to me students were making sense of the environments of their field placement schools, and that this was a complicated process. When it came to writing, the focus of this study, students pointed to policies, people and procedures which they felt were constraining their opportunities to attempt writing activities. At the same time, I was encouraging them to practice in ways which would honor children’s out-of-school literacy practices while enriching their experiences with literacy in school.

Other policies not focused on literacy also impacted how and when literacy was conceptualized, taught and assessed. For instance, students wondered about the impact on practice of children’s fragmented schedules, miscommunication between and among faculty and administration, or grading policies that resulted in students being assessed as either “on grade or nowhere” (class notes, 11/3). Though students embraced some of the approaches and activities we discussed in class, they worried what would happen if the day’s other requirements were set aside for some unscheduled writing. Several students
remarked that they thought there would be little chance for them "to take the time out" (class notes, 10/3/08) to work with children's writing.

These pre-service teachers were struggling to find openings where they could enact writing pedagogies they believed were helpful to children. Practicing in such context-specific ways was the goal my course supported, a goal that seemed increasingly unattainable. Though it is true that in field placements, students were bound in various ways to the schools and teachers hosting them, the ability to read their contexts and make thoughtful judgments seemed a deeper issue, with political and personal aspects. Therefore, I paid close attention to how students talked about the rules and regulations they encountered, about who communicated these expectations, and about how they were experiencing these environments.

When students reported that their scope for practice was limited, I also considered my own assumptions about the relationships between policy and practice, about students' agency in their placements sites, and about our talk of practice and policy in class. Students' opportunities to engage children with writing did often seem restrictive. They felt their hands were tied, and I sometimes struggled to move our conversations beyond frustration and toward action. I realized if students were to have a chance of embracing the student-centered pedagogy at the heart of my course, we needed more explicit ways of thinking about policy and practice than I had anticipated—ways that could capture and support our inquiry into their teaching contexts.

*Making sense of school contexts together.* Students' thoughtful questions about the tense realities of classrooms, and my attitudes toward the teaching and learning of
literacy, led me to visit the field placement schools. I was new to the area, I was new to teaching literacy, and I was dedicated to building a "practice that is sensitive to particular and local histories, cultures, and communities" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999, p. 293). It made sense that I should visit the schools to increase my understanding of literacy in these contexts, and to observe and reflect upon the practices around me (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Ultimately, I visited these sites to gather information that would help me better understand the contexts within which teachers and my students were operating, in order to improve my practice and theirs.

Looking across different schools was important and helped me begin to understand the problem this study seeks to address: how pre-service teachers understand and navigate the writing policies and practices in their placement schools. I observed my students in their field placement classrooms, interacted with teachers and administrators, and examined aspects of the local attitudes and approaches to writing. My visits allowed me to see snapshots of how administrators, teachers and students operated in context, as I rethought my assumptions about literacy policy and practice in preparing students to teach writing.

My visits to schools throughout the semester allowed me and my students together to come to more nuanced understandings of their field placement experiences. After each visit, I shared my thoughts about writing policy and practice with students and invited them to reflect on their experiences with me and with each other. Students and I together were learning about teaching writing, about policy, and about the relationships
between them in specific contexts. We considered how students could enact child-
centered writing pedagogy and how I could support them in this process.

The events of this literacy class generated questions which led me to undertake
this study. My concern with what students thought of their policy contexts, and of
themselves as actors in those contexts, began there. I wanted to help students become
teachers who would advocate for children. Yet I was only beginning to consider what
assumptions students held about their rights or responsibilities to make decisions about
their practice as field experience students. The next semester, as student teachers, they
would again face complicated policy contexts, as they continued to learn about teaching
and about themselves as teachers. I realized that helping students manage these
processes, and recognize their agency, could occur during student teaching— with close
and careful support.

As much to continue my learning as to support my students' emerging pedagogy,
I asked the university to allow me to supervise some of my students during their student
teaching in spring 2009. The privilege of spending time with students as their supervisor
would help me understand the schools, the ways student teachers thought of their school
contexts, and how they saw themselves within those contexts. The literacy course also
solidified for me a vision of the centrality of co-learning, which having begun, I was
determined to continue in my supervision Our understandings of what it meant to learn to
teach writing in the current policy environment would develop alongside each other.
Four of the students from this class are the participants in this qualitative study, and I was
their university supervisor.
Statement of problem. The problem this research undertakes to study is multilayered. Across the country, educators struggle to match responsible and responsive writing pedagogy to public schools under pressure of federal mandates and local exigencies. The past two decades have seen writing subjected to various policies, initiatives, recommendations, and requirements. In this era of high-stakes testing, increasing accountability, and decreasing budgets, teaching writing is difficult for teachers across the country. These policies are taken up differently in different schools, and teachers have varying amounts of decision-making power about how policy becomes practice. It is within this national climate that teacher educators are preparing the next generation of teachers for teaching writing.

Though teacher educators like myself hope to change schools and children’s lives for the better through literacy instruction, field placements do not often reflect the ideals of the university preparation program. As my students and I learned, the current policy context can limit student teachers’ learning opportunities. Years of research, theory and practice in the teaching of writing inform teacher education in writing. Yet for these practices to see the light of day seems to require a kind of guerilla pedagogy and tactical thinking, as opportunities are few and student teachers are unused to looking for them. Navigating the maze of federal, state and local policies and practices does not somehow happen naturally. Nor does it happen in a vacuum. The decisions that can be made vary by classroom and school, though over-packed, testing-heavy writing curricula are found across the nation.
Student teachers are not insulated from the writing policy environment of their placement schools as they learn to teach writing. Student teaching is context-specific, and student teachers negotiate the process of becoming teachers and learning to teach writing in unique placement environments (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Schon, 1988). The student teaching experience ideally helps student teachers develop the attitudes and practices that will serve them throughout their career. However, encouraging student teachers to craft context-specific pedagogy includes making decisions about practice in different policy contexts. This decision-making process is already part of the student teaching experience.

In the face of the local, state and national policy environments, student teachers may or may not see themselves—or be encouraged to see themselves—as decision makers on behalf of their students. Student teachers may or may not feel they have room to talk back to policies they believe are not serving children. I acknowledge the tension and vulnerability of pre-service teaching experiences, and this research is conducted in part to help students manage the difficulties of practicing in ways responsive to students, in the midst of policy environments which often favor one-size-fits-all instruction. Therefore, student teacher supervision is the second focus of this study.

This study is about student teachers’ thoughts about and actions in their policy environments; it is also about supervision. Ultimately, this is a practitioner inquiry into my work as a first-time university supervisor. I believe educators serve their students and school communities in powerful ways when they connect their practice to the realities of local classrooms. These connections are possible through field-based supervision; being
a supervisor transformed my learning about literacy. The privilege of looking across
schools allowed me to build and challenge my understandings of what it means to prepare
students to teach writing. In terms of student teacher support, supervisors are with
student teachers through the parallel processes of learning to teach, reading their unique
contexts, and considering themselves as teachers in and beyond those contexts. Part
insider, part outsider to these school context, supervisors hold a unique position to help
pre-service teachers process their environments and experiences in them, and ultimately
to find and grasp opportunities to enact context-specific pedagogy. My experiences
across contexts are significant in part for what they can reveal about the social processes
of learning to teach writing. My supervisory position also brought to the surface my
assumptions about how I read the lay of the land in schools regarding literacy policy and
the people in them. This research contributes to discussions about the preparation of
student teachers, while claiming space for supervisors in these discussions as important
practitioners and researchers.

**Purpose of the study.** The purpose of this study is twofold: to understand four
student teachers’ navigation of policy and practice in the teaching of writing; and to
determine the role of supervision in this process, with the aim of student teacher agency
on behalf of children. This study describes and examines the meanings participants and I
made, separately and together, about policy and practice in learning to teach writing. My
goal as a researcher, instructor and supervisor is to develop my literacy instruction to
support the learning of student teachers and encourage their engagement with their
contexts on behalf of themselves and their students.
Research questions. Drawing on socio-cultural literacy theories, reflective supervision literature, and critical policy research, this research focuses on interactions between four student teachers and me, their university supervisor, in order to explore the student teachers' negotiation of the relationships between policy and practice in the teaching of writing. My research questions are:

What happens when four student teachers try to make sense of the writing policies and practices, and of how these policies and practices relate to each other, in their placement schools?

How do student teachers' writing practices reflect these understandings of the relationships between policy and practice? How do they enact the relationship between writing policy and writing practice during student teaching?

What role does supervision play in helping student teachers navigate writing policy and practice in their placement contexts?

Research framework. I undertake this qualitative research to call into question the social, cultural and political conditions of student teachers' learning to teach writing and the role of supervision in this process. Certain theoretical traditions have shaped my supervisory practice, research questions, data collection and analysis. In this section, I describe the complementary theoretical perspectives I use to capture the participants, their contexts, and the relationships between them, as well as to account for and interrogate my multiple roles in this study. In explaining my research framework, I follow Kamberelis and Dimitriadis' suggestion that research frameworks be thought of in layers, which they call 'analytic strata' (2005, p. 13). The researcher is responsible for
connecting these layers in explicit ways. I offer an overview of my framework and explain its cohesion, beginning as Kamberelis and Dimitriadis do with the most abstract concepts, and proceeding to the less abstract research practices and tools. I also detail my ontological and axiological assumptions (Cresswell, 2007) as they relate to my research decisions.

Firstly, I describe my epistemological position, constructivism (Cresswell, 2007), as it informs my practice of teaching, research and supervision. I then detail two theoretical traditions which shape my goals and guide my practices: critical theory, particularly as it relates to teacher agency, and New Literacy Studies' understanding of literacy as social practice (Street, 2006). Finally, I describe how a qualitative approach to research, using ethnographic tools and orientations, flows from my beliefs and is an appropriate means by which to understand the phenomena in question: student teachers' navigation of policy and practice relationships in the teaching of writing.

Constructivism. My social constructivist approach was revealed in the opening of this chapter, as I described my pedagogy in the literacy course. The practices emanating from this orientation include problem-posing, positioning myself as a co-learner, and inviting discussion of difficult issues. Importantly, my goal was not to come to consensus but to uncover, recognize and put into play the multiple meanings that participants and I constructed about literacy in schools, and thereby reveal opportunities for meaningful pedagogy. Our observations, actions, and discussions during the literacy course led me to walk alongside students in their student teaching placements—not to lead them.
It was in part my constructivist perspective which led me to become a university supervisor. I believed that the knowledge most important to improving my support of pre-service teachers would be the knowledge we created jointly about teaching writing in specific school contexts. This understanding developed collaboratively, through our daily experiences in real classrooms. I believed our multiple perspectives—and the inevitable differences of opinion that would arise—were crucial to arriving at ways of thinking about policy and practice that would help us and others understand more about the processes of learning to teach writing in the 21st century.

**Critical pedagogy.** Within my social constructionist frame, I also pay critical attention to questions of power and access in practice and policy. My research questions specify two situations marked by uneven power relationships: student teachers' experiences in their placement schools, and the student teacher /supervisor relationship. I believe student teachers' “agency is created through situations and statuses conferred on them” (Hesford, 1999, p xxxvii), These two sets of situations—between student teachers and their placement schools, and between student teachers and me—lie at the heart of this study, and questions of power and agency are central to them both. I briefly describe my approaches toward these two overlapping situations.

Supporting student teacher agency in schools is a goal of my practice of teaching, supervision and research. Therefore, this study interrogates the workings of power, specifically the relationships between policy, practice and professional decision making, in the daily classroom realities of student teachers. These relationships are built every day in their classrooms, and in the offices and hallways of their schools and districts. I
focus on student teachers' negotiations of and actions within their schools' policy environments, with the critical aim of challenging uneven power relations toward more socially just practices (Shor, 1999).

Claiming that student teachers have agency means I am rejecting the de-skilling and de-professionalization that too often characterizes teachers’ positions in current reform (Kincheloe, 2005). I argue that student teachers, among the most marginalized in the profession, enter student teaching wanting to make practice decisions to serve their students. The complicated, interrelated processes of understanding their contexts and the children within them, and making practice decisions, merits support. This support can begin in student teaching and extend through the professional lifespan. My supervisory practices, as the data chapters will show, are informed by this critical view.

My concerns with power inform my views of policy, particularly the ways in which policy can work on and through people in school systems. Marshall (1997) points out the interrelations of policy, power and privilege in schools, and their importance in research, a perspective I also developed while I worked within the field as a supervisor. I do not mean to suggest that all school writing contexts deprive teachers of the opportunity for professional decision making, though many do. My critical framework includes careful reading and re-reading of any context, however supportive or restrictive. Hesford (1999) draws attention to the fact that contexts place or frame people, sometimes in subtle ways; the policies and practices around writing placed the participants and the children they served. These placements or framings are inherently political, and this study calls them up for questioning.
These are difficult times for teachers, and my dedication to literacy education for social justice means guarding against becoming one of the many forces restricting, rather than supporting, pre-service teachers. Constructivism and critical pedagogy alert me to the importance of the values I bring to the research, and how they inform my relationships to the participants and to the phenomenon under study. My positions as supervisor and researcher make for complicated relationships between the student teachers and me. As a supervisor, my goal of helping student teachers to recognize their agency could easily be undermined if I were to control our professional interactions. As a researcher, I could compromise my commitment to student teacher agency in the ways in which I represent the participants in the data analysis. Because of my critical orientations, I mean to emphasize my mixed and overlapping roles, rather than gloss over them.

*New Literacy Studies.* This is a study about the processes involved with learning to teach writing. My views of the teaching and learning of literacy animate and are animated by my critical and constructivist frameworks. I am informed by the linguistic, pedagogic and research contributions of the New Literacy Studies (NLS). NLS theories have a many-layered influence on this study. NLS influenced my practice in the literacy class, my supervisory approach, and my research assumptions and tools.

NLS links to constructivism through its emphases on locally-conceived ideas of literacy. Literacy does not exist 'autonomously' but as a result of social action. Street's concept of 'literacy practices' (1984, in Street, 2006) helps reveal the richness and complexity of literacy in people's everyday lives. It also highlights the two-way
relationship between contexts and ideas about reading and writing. "The concept of literacy practices does, I think, attempt to handle the events and the patterns of activity around literacy but [also] to link them to something broader of a cultural and social kind" (p. 21). The 'broader' cultural and political contexts of literacy instruction—from the building level to the national level--are at issue in this study.

Also particularly useful to this study is the attention NLS draws to local instantiations, interpretations and enactments of literacy practices. The collective notions of a group of people—district administrators, a team of teachers, or a student teacher and her supervisor—matter in this study. What counts as literacy in these placement schools, and what those conceptions of literacy mean for actual children in specific classrooms, is the reference point for my actions and for those of the participants. Furthermore, the assertion by NLS that people construct and participate in literacy practices alerted me to the potential of literacy pedagogy, research and policy to change and be changed by people—including student teachers.

Furthermore, NLS theories led me to interrogate how everyday classroom realities relate to larger social, cultural, and political processes and issues. The conceptions of literacy active in the classrooms I observed were informed by ideas about reading and writing generated miles away and communicated through textbooks, posters, and state-supplied test preparation materials. The actions of local teachers and students around writing on state-level tests were subjected to intense scrutiny in and beyond the local school community; it is well known how school-level practices are drawn into public debate and connected to federal funding.
As they enter schools' complex, multi-layered environments, student teachers too become linked to larger forces in education. Their daily interactions with local, state and national policy had begun in early field experiences—and arguably much earlier, in their time as students in schools. This fact led to my goal of helping student teachers realize their agency as professionals at the start of their careers. As the analysis will show, I also came to realize the importance of revealing to student teachers their connections to larger issues in the field, and of helping them forge other such connections to support their ongoing professional development.

It is important to point out that through my use of NLS frameworks, I do not elide literacy with writing. NLS frameworks help break down the complexities of any literacy act by recognizing the surrounding events, practices and conditions which inform it. I agree with Schultz (2006) that the NLS focus on literacy as a set of social practices opens up ways of thinking about and researching language use in context, and "as such helps us to reimagine research, teaching and learning about writing" (p. 368). I undertake this study from a NLS perspective on school contexts, literacy practices, and positions of those involved.

NLS links to critical pedagogy as it exposes the many connections between language and power. In joining the many people who see literacy as situated sets of social practices, I recognize the complex relationships among literacy, language and power in education. I do not see any literacy instruction as ideologically neutral or value-free (Burke & Hermerschmidt, 2005). This means a critical examination of whose interests are, and are not, served by literacy practices and policies at play, from the local
level to the global. I encourage such examination on the part of student teachers, as I support their agency in these policy environments.

In addition to informing my teaching and supervision, NLS informed my research methods and analysis. NLS theories of the socially-situated nature of literacy invite careful attention to texts as well as contexts, and to the connections and tensions between the local and the global. Street insists “[t]here is an ethnographic issue here: we have to start talking to people, listening to them and linking their immediate experience of reading and writing out to other things that they do as well” (2000, p.22). Many who operate within NLS frameworks adopt qualitative orientations to knowledge production and understanding, as do I in this study.

**Qualitative orientations and ethnographic tools.** Qualitative, field-based naturalistic means of data collection allow me to observe the everyday uses of writing, including the words used by children and adults around that writing. I took field notes, made audio recordings, collected artifacts and reflected on my experiences as an observer in classrooms and as a participant in the student teacher-supervisor relationship.

Qualitative inquiry and ethnographic tools matter to my supervisory practices as well as to my research into them. My aim was to capture student teachers’ understandings of their contexts as I developed my own, and as together we made sense of our experiences. The more I listened, observed and sought to understand the specific school environment and the student teacher’s emic understandings within that environment, the better prepared I felt to offer each participant relevant, context-specific support. Qualitative orientations and ethnographic tools were especially well-suited to
this kind of supervisory practice. In 1989, Pajak and Glickman observed that
"[e]thnographic studies of teacher-supervisor interactions in actual school settings would be very enlightening" (p. 103). Similarly, in 1995, Waite argued that “A supervisor who was trained in ethnography would be more apt to see the underlying cultural assumptions” (p. 24) in place in schools, and thereby more helpful to teachers making decisions about practice in a climate of reform. Though this study is not a full-scale ethnography, I was able to combine my qualitative methods with ethnographic data collection tools in my practice of supervision and research over the semester-long student teaching experience.

Qualitative inquiry also supports my troubling of the relationships surrounding me, the people and phenomena I research, and how I conduct and make public any findings. I am alerted to my own subjectivities and to how my presence changes the nature of the contexts, people and phenomena I wish to study. However, being aware of these conditions is not enough. In this research and in the writing of it, I have struggled with whose story/stories I am telling, whose stories are not being told, and how I handle my responsibility for those decisions. The written study I share here is necessarily a "partial representation of what was actually encountered and created" (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 77) by the participants and me.

Summary. A few years ago, as I was beginning this research, I spoke with Denny Taylor, a literacy educator at Hofstra University, about the challenges she faced in teaching her masters' level literacy class. What she shared with me that day, at the annual Ethnography in Education Research Forum at the University of Pennsylvania,
became a powerful metaphor and guiding image for my research, as well as an assurance that I was asking important questions at the right time.

[Teacher education students are] in situations when they’re in scripted programs, and the idea of doing some of the [literacy class] projects--each year there is less and less space in their classrooms for them to do the kinds of things I’m sharing with them. And they are more and more anxious because I won’t ‘tell them what do to’....The [literacy education] courses have changed, because the conversation is, how do we create a teaching in the cracks curriculum? (Personal communication, 2009)

My task in this paper is to better understand what it means to assist student teachers as their supervisor in navigating the writing policies in place in their schools, with the goal of student-centered, responsible pedagogy—even if that pedagogy begins in the hidden cracks of the otherwise overloaded day.

Policy which encourages reductive notions of literacy reaches into classrooms in extensive, specific and high-stakes ways. Writing pedagogy which supports students’ engagement with their world is increasingly difficult to enact, as teachers are under enormous pressure to teach to tests. Research has directed attention to the ideological underpinnings of literacy policy, and to pre-service and in-service teachers’ reactions to policy. But current reform agendas demand more.

Similarly, a reductive approach to supervision seems rewarded in today’s educational climate, when time and resources scarcely cover supervisors’ infrequent visits based around checklists. However, alternate models have been developed, as I will detail in the literature review. I embrace supervisory practice which can help pre-service and in-service teachers negotiate their policy environments and recognize their agency. Fecho, Price and Read (2004) assert that “new teachers are not as powerless as they might imagine” (p. 264) and that to position them as such is to effectively deprive them
of agency. I claim the same for pre-service teachers. I do not view teacher agency as something that will come automatically with the first classroom assignment and somehow grow in proportion to years of service. As a supervisor, I support student teachers in reading the policy landscape in and beyond student teaching, in considering their positions as change agents within their placements, and in resisting the press for uniformity and enacting student-specific writing practice across their professional lifespan.

Focusing on the cases of four student teachers, I describe and analyze the similarities I observed across their negotiation of, and action within, the policy environments of their placement schools. As their supervisor and literacy instructor, I aimed to support them, without pushing them, through this process of reading the lay of the land and making decisions about practice. I invited student teachers toward student-centered, socio-cultural writing pedagogy based on what student teachers and I thought was possible in their contexts. Yet I kept in mind as much as possible the many political, personal, logistical and emotional considerations student teachers made each time they chose to engage in a practice.

**Chapter preview.** Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature to further contextualize this study, as I review relevant research from the past 20 years in the fields of writing education, policy study and supervision. I also describe in detail my orientations toward these three core concepts in this study. In Chapter 3, I elaborate on my conceptual framework by describing the methodologies and methods underlying this
project, my data sources, and data analysis frameworks. I also introduce the study participants and give a brief portrait of each school context.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are analyses of similarities in student teachers’ understandings of policy, their enactment of policy/practice relationships, and our supervisory interactions. They are organized chronologically and analyzed around themes that arose across participants’ talk and action over time and across locations. Finally, in Chapter 7, I make formal my arguments about student teacher preparation in writing, and university-based supervision, in the current reform climate.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This study describes and analyzes how four student teachers came to understand and navigate the relationships between policy and practice in their teaching of writing, as well as the role of university-based supervision in this process. Specifically, this research explores the ways in which policy, supervision and the teaching of writing intersect in the everyday lives of student teachers, an intersection not yet examined in other research. Other studies have examined the relationships between writing pedagogy and policy. Some attention also has been paid to student teachers' experiences of schools' policy environments in relation to writing practices. However, research is lacking on possible connections between student teachers' learning to teach writing and their supervision by the university. Furthermore, no study to date has combined writing pedagogy and student teacher supervision with a focus on policy - practice relationships.

This chapter offers a summary and critique of recent research that addresses issues and tensions central to this study. These studies are synthesized from a critical, constructivist perspective, thereby establishing the substance and importance of the conceptual space shared by writing pedagogy, policy and supervision. In the first section, I review research in writing policy and policy engagement in teacher education. The second section outlines some of the arguments for more complex and nuanced understandings of policy in research and practice.

I then turn to similar innovations in supervision, acknowledging two decades of alternatives to traditional clinical supervisory models. This review concludes with an
argument for a reimagined role of supervision and expanded notions of policy in the preparation and support of student teachers as they learn to teach writing.

**Writing Policy, Texts, and Practices**

Teachers, teacher educators, and the public are aware of the increase in testing, standardization, and accountability measures over the last 20 years. As writing figures into most states’ standards and assessments, some policies address what writing is and how it should be taught and tested. Each policy is intended to improve some educational situation, and standards and policies can and do influence English teachers’ thinking about and teaching of writing (Anagnostopoulos, 2005; del Carmen Salazar, 2008; Johnson, Smagorinsky, Thompson & Fry, 2003; Ketter & Pool, 2001; Morrell, 2009). Some good policies exist, based in good intentions. For example, the increased focus on writing in publicized score tables has caused some teachers to attend to writing more than they have in the past.

However, most of the research on the current state of writing policy - practice relationships indicates that this increased attention to the quantity of writing has compromised the quality of that writing. Policies emanating from (and leading up to) No Child Left Behind (NCLB) have encouraged narrow views of writing and literacy (Altwerger et al, 2004; Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Dickson, Smagorinsky et al, 2006; Graves, 2002; Lumley & Yan, 2001; McCracken, 2004; Strickland et al, 2001; White, Sturtevant, & Dunlap, 2003). As these critics have noted, the assessments central to NCLB compliance have promoted practices that contend with nearly forty years of advances in composition studies.
In addition to the many examples of such policies' reductive and impoverished view of writing, researchers have analyzed the nature of writing pedagogies underlying policy, as well as the ways in which policy positions teachers and students. States and districts sometimes create policies that send mixed or conflicting messages about writing to teachers and students. Most visible among these are standards and tests, as well as the various support materials attending them. These policies and texts can emanate from differing understandings of and approaches to teaching and learning writing, the nature of knowledge in literacy (Gewertz, 2010), what counts as good writing, and how writing is taught and evaluated (Graves, 2002; Sleeter & Stillman 2005; Stevens, 2003, 2008).

Tests and test preparation can limit teachers' capacity to enact decisions about how to teach writing. Au (2007), in a meta-analysis of high stakes tests and their relationship to curriculum, found that tests encourage “curricular alignment to the tests themselves” (263). The illusion may be that enacting such practices is a matter of choice, but teachers adopt a different relationship to knowledge and turn to “teacher-centered instruction” (263) in order to be able to accomplish all that must be done to prepare for these tests (Sleeter & Stillman, 2005). Del Carmen Salazar (2008) suggests that the “indirect or structural means” (43), and not only stated but “unstated” (351) literacy policies, impact teachers’ understandings and practices of policy. In the next chapter, I will explore more thoroughly the idea of informal policy and its role in the overall policy environment.

Teachers have long known the limitations of one-size-fits-all approaches to writing instruction. However, test preparation materials, including practice prompts,
ready-made graphic organizers, the long-lived five-paragraph essay, and the rubrics used to grade them, favor formulaic approaches (Strickland et al, 2001). Test preparation has been found to take time away from meaningful writing activities (Fleischer & Fox, 2004) and to lead to stress for teachers and students (Johnson, Johnson, Farenga, & Ness, 2008). Students themselves understand that their work on tests impacts their schools and potentially their teachers; their writing in testing situations shows how well they understand the rules of the game (Graves, 2002; Scott, 2008). Ketter and Pool (2001) also found that “students’ right to quality writing instruction is overshadowed by pressure on the teacher to insure that students pass the state-mandated test” (p. 351).

Different ideas about what should be valued in writing can be found across texts, tests and preparation materials. Smith, Cheville, and Hillocks (2006) point out the seductive simplicity of ideas equating writing with spelling, grammar and neatness, noting that this is the idea of writing underlying most writing tests. In an important study of writing assessment policy from a composition theory perspective, Hillocks (2001) found that the conceptions of writing underlying policy texts often conflict. The writing theories in the test preparation materials were internally inconsistent, conflicted with other materials, and did not always match the understandings of writing in the tests themselves. For instance, curricula and test preparation materials might lean toward the prescriptive or the constructive; they may be based in current-traditional or socio-cultural norms. Any combination of these different understandings can be, and sometimes are, present in the messages a district sends and receives about writing and teaching writing.
Teaching materials and lesson plans are consequential to the ways in which students and teachers encounter policy (Apple, 2000; del Carmen Salazar, 2005), though they are perhaps less formal, everyday parts of classroom life. "The design and interpretation of sets of course materials are implicated in power relations" (Burke & Hemmerschmidt, 2005, p. 348). Teaching materials include "posters, artifacts, and school communication displayed on the walls of the ESL classroom" (del Carmen Salazar, 2005, p. 345), "board documents, letters to the editor in local newspapers, media accounts, and conversations with parents and local administrators," as well as school handbooks and various publications shared with parents (Serafini & Rogers, 2001, p. 167). Teaching materials also include "standardized, grade level specific books," as well as "novels, trade books, and alternative materials" (Apple, 2000, p. 59). In the classrooms in the present study, as in many classrooms around the country, hang posters about "the writing process." These posters too are informal policy texts. What the writing process means on these posters, and to those who read them, varies widely; in some classrooms, it can mean the four or five steps from idea generation to publication, and "in other classrooms, it denotes a lockstep set of tasks to be completed on the way to an essay on a teacher-assigned topic" (Whitney et al., 2008, p. 202).

Lesson plans, ubiquitous in many schools and most teacher education programs, are texts whose form and content reflect and invite particular ideas about teaching and learning writing. Lesson plans are a "technology" (Linne, 2001) that can act as "apparently invariable" aspects of the policy context (p. 129). Koeppen (1998) indicates
that student teachers in particular use lesson plans in political ways, specifically “meeting the expectations of the cooperating teacher” (p. 409).

Formal, mandated policy often takes the form of a text, written by a group or corporate author, that is read, interpreted and re-interpreted at different levels of removal from the classroom. Several studies have examined the rhetoric of policy texts. Policy can define the problems it seeks to address and can write ideas and groups into (or out of) existence. For instance, the language of literacy policy, through specific terminology and phrasing, creates notions of failing schools and struggling adolescent readers (Franzak, 2006). “Names for individuals and categories of individuals within a policy text engender multiple meanings reflective of various orientations” (Stein, 2004, p. 12). These terms and the ideas they conjure can take on lives of their own, from the statehouse to neighborhood schools and students’ homes, as local interpretations of these names and terms linger long after their origin in policy texts has been lost (Stein, 2004).

This use of loaded language is not limited to the federal or state level policies. Achinstein and Ogawa (2006) examined the ways in which literacy programs are written and discussed by districts. They mention, in particular, the moralistic overtones of the term ‘fidelity’ as it is used by districts, and, specifically, the way in which fidelity to district policy is portrayed as a kind of general good. The language of top-down policy texts also has been exposed as paternalistic, moralizing (Ball, 2008), “alarmist” and invasive, with “an intervention orientation” (Franzak, 2006, p. 236).
Policy Engagement as Part of the Work of Teaching and Teacher Education

Preparing teachers to practice in ways responsive to their students has always proved challenging. This challenge, many believe, has been exacerbated by the current policy environment. Teachers and teacher educators face the most restrictive writing policy environment in history, even as understandings of students’ in-school and out-of-school literacy practices have deepened, as ways to connect students and writing have proliferated, and as writing education is being offered in more universities. Since the start of the standardization movement in the 1980s, teacher educators have been justifiably concerned about the narrowing of student teachers’ experiences as an unforeseen result of policy. Today, student teachers are learning to teach writing amidst a complex web of policies in schools under performance pressure. I offer a brief summary of how teacher educators are responding to these challenges both individually and collectively.

Many literacy practitioners and researchers believe that addressing policy directly is an important professional responsibility and should be part of teacher preparation. Teacher educators’ concerns about the relationships between current literacy policy and practice around the teaching of writing are the subject and object of much current research (Achinstein, 2006; Alsup et al., 2006; CEE, 2005; Cherian, 2007; Dickson et al, 2006; Edmonson 2001; McCracken, 2004; Meyer, 2004; Moje et al 2000; Nixon, Comber & Cormack, 2007; Pardo, 2006; Rosowsky, 2006; Strickland et al, 2001). Scholars have continued to note the importance of administrative support in teacher engagement with the larger policy contexts surrounding them (Stillman, 2011). Groups have begun issuing
statements, and individual practitioners are including policy study in their teacher education programs. “Finally, a small but promising trend in teacher education is the effort by some teacher educators to work simultaneously within and against the larger education system” (Cochran-Smith, 2006). This includes the possibility that teachers “can respond to accountability-driven reforms in equity-minded ways, despite complex challenges” (Stillman, 2011, p. 136). Researchers have begun to understand the difficulties and nuances of researching and analyzing the ways in which individual teachers experience and respond to the current policy contexts (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; Ingram Willis & Harris, 2000). These empirical and theoretical writings, taken together, communicate that part of current teacher education involves preparing pre-service teachers to negotiate practices favored in schools under pressure of mandate while also engaging in practices advocated by the preparation programs. This study is a step in that direction.

Several educators have drawn attention to the problematic ways in which teachers, including student teachers, are positioned in policy contexts. “Compliance with bureaucratic requirements becomes a way for pre-service teachers to understand teaching....a fixed political will that shapes their capacities, who they become as teachers, and positions them primarily as implementers of content and pedagogy as defined by the standards” (Delandshere & Petrosky, 2004, p. 7). Rosowsky (2006) in a study of student teachers’ thinking about literacy policy, found that the discourses of literacy were intertwined with the discourses of standards in the minds of the study’s small set of student teachers, and that policy has a “policing” (p. 84) function on practice.
F. Todd Goodson (in Hayes, 1998) points out the importance of student teachers' engagement with policy:

Often, reform comes from younger, or at least newer, members of a community. Certainly, reform will originate with those on the community's periphery, those who have not completely accepted the values at the core of a community's culture. (p. 50)

In a study similar to the current research, Stillman and Anderson (2011) draw attention to a student teacher who is balancing the conflicting expectations of her placement school's literacy policy and her teacher education program's dedication to students' cultural resources. They use her case to illuminate the need for whole-program buy-in to help student teachers manage the tensions they face in (and largely because of) the current policy environment. Similarly, Curry et al. (2008) contend that fostering a sense of agency in teacher education students means supporting them in reading the "bewildering organizational landscape" (p. 661) of any school context, starting during student teaching, in a way that allows for meaningful engagement with that context.

In the area of literacy education specifically, Achinstein and Ogawa (2006) speak to teacher educators' responsibility to support new teachers in any kind of policy environment and assert that navigating these contexts requires explicit attention in teacher preparation. Recently, more are recognizing policy as part of that context, specifically standardized and high-stakes writing assessments (Pardo, 2006; Cherian, 2007). Also addressing literacy education in particular, Altwerger et al. (2004) add that the positions that students are offered during teacher education often are challenged directly in schools under policy pressure. "The critical thinking we nurture in our students is often silenced during their internships as they struggle to teach as expected by
the school and classroom teacher” (p. 128). They go on to note that student teachers “may have a hard time visualizing the implementation of alternative approaches, because they rarely see them being used at their school” (p. 126). Imagining alternatives to current practices is another step threatened by the overwhelming policy climate.

Practitioners and researchers agree that policy engagement is part of modern teaching and that policy study is an important part of policy engagement. Yet recent studies of writing policy and its meaning in teacher education raise as many questions as they answer. Of principal concern to this study are the frameworks that researchers and teacher educators use and offer their students when they study and discuss policy. These frameworks shape discussions of the nature of policy and of the policy-practice relationship. Just as opinions about the nature of writing and its relationships to people and their worlds vary across composition scholars, ideas about the nature of policy and its relationships to people and their worlds vary across policy scholars. The conceptions of policy and the theories about the nature of policy engagement in some recent writing research differ in important ways. The next section provides a review of research that argues for carefully articulated concepts of policy in writing education practice and research.

**Policy study frameworks under critique.** How policies are studied—and the epistemological values animating these studies—are as important to understandings of policy as the policies themselves. The present study focuses on student teachers’ understandings of and actions within the writing policy environments of their placement
schools. Therefore, literacy and policy study are viewed in this study through complementary theoretical lenses, thereby occupying what Franzak (2006) calls “the intersection of research in policy studies and literacy learning” (p. 237). I offer here a brief overview of recent critical policy research and some of its core values.

Historically, policy-makers and researchers have approached policy as a solution to some problem in a social system.

Until recently, the preponderance of scholarship in the field has focused on the extreme ends of the process—how policy is formed and methods for evaluating policy impacts. ...however, in this conception, less powerful actors—students and their parents, and even teachers—are seen as adjusting their actions and expectations to a fait accompli. (Sutton & Levinson, 2001, p. 5)

This conception of policy, practice and teachers risks downplaying the social, cultural, historical and political processes surrounding policy, as well as the role of teachers as policy readers, interpreters and actors (Anagnostopoulos, 2005; Edmonson, 2001; Sutton & Levinson, 2001). Interrogating, shaping, or talking back to policy is not an option in these conceptions of policy.

However, some policy research over the past two decades has moved away from decontextualized notions of policy, toward policy as a set of socially and culturally situated texts and practices. These newer understandings of policy partially arose as a response to traditional policy paradigms, as well as from larger movements in the social sciences reflecting changed understandings of people’s places in modern political, economic and educational structures. Critical policy analysis approaches policy itself as a system of thought—a “technology” (Ball, 2006)—and a social process, including the people involved at any point in this process, the texts they produce and consume, and the
social, educational, and political contexts shaping and shaped by these people, texts, and processes. Policy means what people think it means.

Many thinkers propose that there can be just and useful educational policy, and they lay out frameworks toward such ends (Edmonson & D'Urzo 2007; Moje et al., 2000; Cochran-Smith, 2006; Ben-Peretz, 2009; Hall, 2004). Such studies share:

a concern to put education policy in a broader social context or the context of social and political regulation. In fact, one could argue that the critical involvement with education policy is rooted in the older scholarly concern with education, power and with social regulation. (Simons, Olssen, & Peters 2009, p. 15)

To encapsulate the basic differences between functionalist and critical approaches to policy, I offer a chart (Table 1) from Edmondson (2000, p.8) of the different questions asked of policy in each case:
Table 1

*Differences between functionalist and critical questions about policy.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functionalist analysis</th>
<th>Critical analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the measureable effects of the policy?</td>
<td>Where has the policy come from?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does the policy ‘work’ or fit within the current system?</td>
<td>What are the values of the author? How are key aspects defined?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the social, political, and historical aspects of the policy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the consequences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Who stands to benefit? Who is left out?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I add to this list other questions I have encountered in critical policy analysis:

What is really going on? How come? (Troyna, 1994, p. 72) What can be done to change things? (Beach, 2003 p. 17) What has been, why, and what might be? (Edmonson, 2002)

What do policies offer, and deny? (Edmonson & d’Urso, 2007). Other studies imply a functionalist stance when they offer answers to the (sometimes unstated) questions, How do teachers respond to policy? How do students respond to policy?

This work is critical in nature, exploring and reshaping the ways policies position people, their contexts, social ‘problems’ and recommended ‘solutions.’ Critical theorists in education policy articulate assumptions behind policy and show how texts, practices, and curriculum (Burke & Hemmerschmidt, 2005) constitute systems of power which can and do position students and practitioners (Delandshere & Petrosky, 2004; Levinson,
Sutton & Winstead, 2009; Morrell, 2009; Nixon, Comber, & McCormack, 2007). It is important to point out that in many critical policy studies, teachers, students and parents, though not equally influential in policy as policymakers, are not powerless and have more responses to policy than resistance or accommodation.

I summarize here some important research on policy-practice relationships, predominantly in literacy, which embraces expanded notions of policy, with a critical edge. These combined works provide three important innovations: observations about the complex nature of policy; an expanded view of what constitutes policy in research and practice; and thoughtful attention to processes involved in, around and through policy. Together, these studies draw attention to the multi-layered policy environment, with an eye toward its power to shape the ways in which practitioners relate to each other and to their students.

The nature of policy. Teachers interact with policies in specific places at specific times while they and the policies are connected in complex ways to other people, policies, locations and histories. Recent policy frameworks offer fine-grained understandings of policy's social and contextual character. For example, Levinson, Sutton, and Winstead (2009) approach policy as “a complex, ongoing social practice of normative cultural production constituted by diverse actors across diverse contexts” (p. 6). This particular definition captures policy as a verb, an action of practitioners across space and time. Complementary perspectives in this same paradigm reveal policy to be a noun, “a rich and complex system of belief, with all the nuances and subtleties implied therein” (Stein, 2004, p. 5). Accounting for structure and agency, as well as for the many
tacit and explicit elements of policy, these innovative perspectives offer researchers and practitioners ways to understand the complex modern policy environment overall. These views also support interrogation of the unique ways in which policy presents itself in specific classrooms with specific people.

Overlapping policy environments sometimes conflict with or contradict each other. In classrooms, multiple levels of policy constantly overlap and interact, sometimes cohesively, but often not. Policy influences the classroom to the State House, and lawmakers, administrators, and teachers create and enact policy. Achinstein and Ogawa (2006) highlight the inconsistency of the policy messages that districts send to new teachers and describe the frustrated actions of one principal caught between the pressure of state mandates and the innovative practices of his teachers.

Studies grounded in social and contextual notions of policy expose how the language of policy, as described earlier, can be used to shape people’s understandings of the nature of the educational situation it seeks to influence. Policies and the discussions surrounding them “provide a new language, a new set of incentives and disciplines and a new set of roles, positions and identities within which what it means to be a teacher, student/learner, parents and so on are all changed” (Ball, 2008, p. 41-42). Several studies challenge the often vague but powerful language used in policy (McDermott et al., 2007), specifically, the role of policy language in privileging certain kinds of ideas about teaching and learning (Adams, 2007; Perryman, 2009; Stein, 2004).

**What counts as policy.** Some policy research in language arts expands definitions of what traditionally counts as policy in research and practice. Policy texts,
which are easy to spot in districts and classrooms, figure prominently in traditional policy practice research, but current research adds needed depth and variety to this picture. Policy texts clearly include state and national-level documents but can also refer to benchmarks, support materials, assessments including end-of-course tests (Fecho, Malozzi, & Schultz, 2007), and, up until recently, Reading First grants (Pardo, 2006) and other grants tied to NCLB (Spillane, 2002). Less visible, more subtle texts include “commission reports...report cards, reform proposals, foundation initiatives, and position statements” (Cochran-Smith, 2001), as well as district initiatives and letters (Grossman, Valencia, & Thompson, 2001). These additional artifacts allow researchers to capture the many layers of texts present in schools, a step toward reflecting the complex reality of policy negotiation at the classroom level. Though texts undoubtedly are significant elements of the policy environment, they are only one set of elements. Ball (2006) notes, “[i]t is also important not to reify policy – not to identify policy solely with a set of texts” (p. 45), in part because of the real danger of oversimplifying and underestimating the power of other policy elements on and through teachers.

Clearly, people and their positions matter in the policy environment. People create policies, interpret and re-interpret them, and interact with them in any number of ways. Some people—statesmen, policy-makers, and textbook authors, to name a few—have more power in and through the policy environment than others. Apple (2001) noted, “There are very real differences in power in one’s ability to influence, mediate, transform, or reject a policy or a regulatory process” (p. 606), and one can imagine the
position of teachers situated at or near the bottom rung of the ladder of power, and
student teachers even lower.

Multiple studies have found that student teachers’ relationships to the curriculum
are tied to their relationships with their cooperating teachers. In terms of this study, it is
important to note that the cooperating teacher may be the single most important factor in
the student teachers’ experience of the writing policy environment (Johnson,
Smagorinsky, Thompson, & Fry, 2003). Student teachers’ perceptions of their
cooperating teachers’ attitudes toward teaching and learning play a role in student
teachers’ responses to curriculum (Bullough, 1992) and policy. If student teachers
perceive that their cooperating teachers support traditional or test-centered practices, this
may prevent them from “exploring social justice, constructivist, and inquiry-oriented
pedagogies” (Cherian, 2007, p. 25) in an effort not to offend the cooperating teachers or
disturb the operation of the classroom.

School administrators, including principals and district-level personnel, are
important in the ways teachers understand policy. New teachers also learn what matters
in their schools from administrators. Principals and administrators are among those who
construct policy discourses that become the “cultural codes” (Schempp, Sparkes, &
Templin, 1993, p. 462) of the school as they are “informally passed to the newcomer by
other members of the culture, usually during informal school meetings” (p. 462).

People’s words, actions and interactions within a school environment affect the
ways in which policies are created and handled, as well as some of the possible
relationships of those policies to classroom practice. Achinstein, Ogawa, and Spiegelman
include in their analysis of literacy policy the literacy textbooks that a district adopts, and the adoption procedures themselves. Their study found that the relative importance and meaning of these textbooks were determined largely by the words of the principal, literacy resource teacher, literacy coach, and director of curriculum and instruction regarding the books. Spillane (2002) found that professional development activities at the district and building level also shape the policy landscape that teachers navigate, as these activities embody the thinking of administrators about policies’ relations to teaching and learning. Other studies also have pointed to the influence on policy of school ‘culture’—the district and building climate (Debray, Parson, & Woodworth, 2000; Zancanella, 1992). Presenters or spokespeople at federal, state and local levels hold and communicate to teachers, parents and students a variety of conceptual understandings about teaching and learning (Stevens, 2003). Teachers’ different perceptions and interactions may be due in part to the way in which policies are introduced or disseminated, and by whom.

Both formal and informal conversations, as well as other environmental cues, are among the contextual factors that shape teachers’ understandings, translations and implementations of policy (Cohen & Ball, 1990). An easily-overlooked policy element is talk in the hallway (Coburn, 2001), an everyday occurrence that, along with other casual and unofficial communications, constitutes a policy discourse. Stein (2004) also draws attention to the hallway as context: “In written documents, hurried hallway conversations, and general educational parlance, myriad policy-generated terms pass between practitioners, parents, and students” (p. 85). The hallway, a no-man’s land
between classrooms, can exist as the site of off-the-record talk, alliance building, or micropolitical conflict (or conflict resolution). The impact of these locations and the talk within them on many facets of the teaching life, including the ways in which teachers understand policy and their place in the school, should not be underestimated.

The past twenty years have revealed the complexity of the policy environment as well as the means by which to delve empirically into that complexity. Policy is not limited to rules and regulations, but includes formal and informal arrangements, relationships and interactions, which are potentially important to student teachers' experiences of and actions within the policy environment. One study particularly noteworthy for its nuanced readings of the policy context was conducted by Grossman, Valencia, and Thompson (2001). In their study of literacy policy and practice, they include as part of the district’s policy context professional development opportunities, conversations between faculty, informal leadership arrangements, and the physical resources and support services offered by the district. At the same time, they expand the policy context by ‘looking up’ from the district level to the state level and ‘looking down’ to the classroom level. Having carefully accounted for multiple policy texts, players, practices, and contexts, Grossman, Valencia, and Thompson (2001) carefully demonstrate that these policy elements do not work harmoniously within or across schools in the same district. They suggest that district policies taken together can constitute a lens through which new teachers view their literacy practice or, more specifically, learn “what to worry about” (p. 16).
Within those studies that examine policy in context, some highlight the importance of micropolitics—the complex power relationships in organizations. Kelchtermans (2005) defined micropolitical literacy as “the competence to understand the issues of power and interests in schools” (p. 1004) and the knowledge, understandings and tactics teachers use to act within any situation. Kelchtermans insisted that teacher educators are responsible for developing these competencies, knowledge and understandings. Kelchtermans & Ballet (2002) importantly noted that learning to “read” situations (p. 117), understanding situations in terms of different and potentially competing interests, and dealing with them effectively are also elements of teacher learning. Moreover, this learning “should start during teacher education” (p.118). Teacher education should develop teacher agency by supporting student teachers in critical understandings of policy systems and interrogating their beliefs about where they belong in those systems.

In related research, Blase & Blase (2002) also address micropolitics, defining it as “the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations” (p. 9). They include parents in the micropolitical sphere to draw attention to the breadth and depth of the policy environment. They also include the ways in which parents and others can operate in the policy environment by emphasizing the importance of formal structures as well as informal “spheres of influence” and “tangible and intangible goods” (p. 16) as elements of the micropolitical environment.

An organization’s political processes, for example, a school’s formal and informal [processes and structures] (e.g., organizational stakeholders and their power sources, interests, ideologies, and interchanges) as well as its political culture (e.g., patterns of interests, ideologies, decision making, power distribution)
dramatically influence most school outcomes, including teaching and learning. (p. 10)

A school's culture, patterns and ideology, and the relationships among them and between groups of people, exist as sturdy structures within the policy environment. These structures can encourage compliance or innovation, and discourage types of thinking in teachers, in the way writing is conceived of, taught and assessed. Some literacy research finds teachers' understandings and implementations of policy influenced by departmental micropolitics (Grossman, Valencia & Thompson, 2001; Johnson, Smagorinsky, Thompson, & Fry, 2003). Existing power structures involving other faculty and staff are important to the policy context as experienced by the pre-service or in-service teacher.

The research reviewed in this section offers an expanded perspective of policy through careful conceptualizations of texts, people and practices. These close readings of its texture and clearer notions of the many ways in which policy and people interact are specific tools for researchers and practitioners. Together, they constitute a policy platform that makes it more possible to give credence to the specific experiences of individual teachers, including student teachers, in their respective policy environments. This research does not suggest that all policy is bad or that policy should be eliminated. On the contrary, it generates ways for teachers and researchers to push back against dominant conceptions of policy and popular overestimations of its power, and to reimagine policy along more egalitarian lines. Research in this area has refined ideas about policy in a way that allows people to see opportunities for richer engagement and purposeful action.
The present study suggests ways in which teacher educators can continue to pass the message of agency to the newest generation of teachers, even in this stifling policy climate, by framing inquiry into student teachers' power over their own professional decisions. It is not inevitable that student teachers and early career teachers “succumb to the dominant culture” of the school (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006, p.53) or become lured by the promise of ready-made lessons, hands-free pedagogy, or facile explanations that they are doing a good job by raising test scores. As Fecho, Price and Read (2004) declared, even the newest teachers have agency. They are not merely passive objects of reform.

Student teachers impact and are impacted by the policy environment. Equipping them for such mindful action can become part of the supervisory and teaching practice. In this next section, I summarize and critique current research about supervision and university supervisors, concluding with what this study offers to these knowledge sources.

Student Teacher Supervisors in Research and Practice

Supervisors occupy a unique position to provide situationally-relevant, context-specific support to student teachers. Supervisors also have the perspective to link student teachers’ concerns to larger discussions in the field and to contexts beyond the immediate. Yet, the supervision of student teachers has a history marked by competing ideas about the role of supervisors and about their relation to the larger project of teacher education. Some current supervisory practice and research still emanates from the top-down clinical model of supervision. Though this model was conceived originally as
classroom-based collaboration between the student teacher and supervisor, it has become synonymous with infrequent, spot-check visits to the sometimes unsuspecting student teacher by a checklist-bearing supervisor. Possibilities for reciprocal learning do exist within the supervisor/student teacher relationship (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008), but in many supervisory arrangements, this potential goes unrealized (Slick, 1998).

Because of their location in the schools and their access to teachers, students, and administrators, supervisors are in positions to observe, interrogate and interact with the policy environments of actual placement contexts. This interrogation can be performed on behalf of teacher education programs, student teachers, school communities and children. Yet, research on, with and by university-based student teacher supervisors remains scant (Levine, 2011). Seldom portrayed as decision-makers or learners in the student teaching experience, supervisors instead play a marginal or supporting role, marked in “visible and invisible ways” (Cuenca et al, 2011, p. 1068) as low status, even in the research. Supervisors conduct few studies themselves, though the past decade has seen an increase in self-study (Alderton, 2008; Basmadjian, 2011; Martin, Snow, & Franklin Torrez, 2011; Montecinos et al., 2002; St. Maurice, 2002; Trout, 2008). As adjuncts, graduate students, or retired administrators, supervisors are rarely tenured or allocated the resources necessary (Fielding, 2003) in terms of time to reflect (Norris, 1991) and share their work with the larger educational community (Krause, 1997). Though no research yet has examined the professional development of university supervisors, it is suggested they undergo little (Levine, 2011).
Supervisors' learning has gained research attention (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Kelehear, 2010; Krause, 1997; Lange & Burroughs-Lange, 1994; Nguyen, 2009; Tate et al., 2005), as has their professional development (Abt-Perkins, Hauschildt & Dale, 2000; Bates, Ramirez, & Drits, 2009; Fayne, 2007; Fielding, 2003; Hamlin, 1997), including within learning communities (le Cornu & Ewing, 2008; Levine, 2011). Some of this attention has been directed toward the site-based supervisors of in-service teachers, though some has reached conversations about university-based supervisors of pre-service teachers. Encouraging teacher education students toward constructivist, inquiry-oriented pedagogy means rethinking the form and purpose of supervision (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Cuenca et al, 2011; Young et al., 2005) and constructing a new focus on university supervisors as researchers and fully invested members of teacher education programs. This brief overview summarizes the supervisory research and models that call themselves 'reflective' and then drills down within this large area to the studies that offer images of supervision most closely aligned to the current project.

Models of reflective supervision. Educators have been responding to the call for expanded forms or revisited notions of supervision for over three decades. In marked contrast to the top-down supervisory models still in place around the country, these models offer intellectual heft and a critical edge, along with arrays of responsive supervisory practices particularly valuable in these times and to the present study.

Reflective supervisory models resound well with situated notions of literacy as social practice, with critical approaches to policy, and with constructivist attitudes toward pedagogy, such as those at the heart of this study. Like literacy and policy, supervision
does not happen in a vacuum (Waite, 1995), nor is it a one-way street. Supervision involves people with certain values and assumptions acting upon each other in particular contexts, but with the awareness that those contexts have their own histories and power (Waite, 1994).

The broad umbrella of reflective supervision covers many different understandings of and approaches to supervision. Similarities exist across these approaches, however, that are useful to the present study. Most reflective supervisory models stress the importance of collaborative learning, of awareness of personal assumptions and attitudes, and of cohesion and consistency along the entire teacher education program. Several forms of reflective supervision recommend collaboration between student teachers and university supervisors, often including the cooperating teacher as well (Adams, Morehead, & Sledge, 2008; Awaya et al., 2003; Bloomfield, 2010; Bullough, Draper, Smith, & Birrell, 2004; Freidus, 2002; Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008; McIntyre, Hagger & Wilkin, 1993; Weiss & Weiss, 2001). Other forms emphasize the affordance of collaborative supervision (Gray, 1999), shared supervision (Eberly, Joshi, & Galen, 2009; Melser, 2004) or joint supervision. Some focus on de-centering the supervisor in the supervisory relationship, such as collaborative student teacher groups in which each student teacher plays a role in others’ supervision (Yusko, 2004).

There is a trend toward collaborative action research to deepen the learning of student teachers, university supervisors, K-12 students, and cooperating teachers (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Clift, Meng, & Eggerding, 1994; Halim, Buang, & Meerah, 2010; Harrison, Lawson, & Wortley, 2005; Mitchell, Reilly, & Logue, 2009). Inquiry
approaches to supervision have been around for nearly two decades (Jensen, 1998), though what kind of inquiry and to what ends varies. These different conceptions of supervision can help educators perceive the student teaching experience in new ways, with supervisors as co-learners.

**Contextual, situated supervision.** Within the broad spectrum of reflective supervisory practice, frameworks known as contextual supervision (Ralph, 2003) and situationally contexted supervision (Waite, 1994) offer understandings closely related to the current study. Both focus on the mentee and the context of mentorship, and assert that mentors should vary their practices and responses with these factors in mind.

Situated or dialogic supervision also takes an ethnographic approach (Waite, 1992) or, as Helen Duffy and her colleague Mary K. Healey (2001) describe it, an "anthropological stance" (p. 136). Through the use of ethnographic tools, such as field notes, rich descriptions, and a qualitative inquiry orientation, situated supervisors can utilize their access to schools to read the unique circumstances of the placement contexts, both separately and together with student teachers. All the while, supervisors are also examining their own assumptions and supervisory practices.

The contexts within which student teachers learn, as experienced by children, become open for question as part of the teaching/learning processes.

There are situational factors that affect the mentorship process just as is the case in any human social activity. During the day to day routines of work-life these elements become intertwined. These variables may be: psychological, social, organizational, political, cultural and economic. Although supervisors will recognize the presence and the effect of these factors upon the supervisory process, they often may not be able to later many of these contextual influences. (Ralph, 2003, p. 6)
Supervisory boundaries also include “what matters” (Waite, 1992, p. 325) to the student teacher, classroom climate, hidden curriculum, and local power structures. Borrowing ethnographic tools in the place of checklists, supervisors “to be aware—to the extent humanly possible” (Waite, 1995, 102) to the multiple and overlapping contexts of practice and the people within them to inform and support mutual learning between the teacher and supervisor. The supervisor dedicated to situated or contextual practice occupies a prime position to understand teaching contexts from multiple viewpoints, and to bring these understandings to interactions with student teachers.

Though some contextual or situated models of supervision position the supervisor as a guide, some teacher educators envision supervision as a relationship espousing collaboration and collegiality. This actively challenges the expert/novice dualism, in which one person relies on a more knowledgeable other.

Rather than the university lecturers and/or co-operating teachers acting as ‘facilitators of reflection’ there is a move to more shared learning and joint construction of what it means to teach.... Reconceptualising mentoring as a process of co-learning challenges the traditional hierarchical relationship dynamic by positioning the participants differently. (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008, p. 1803-1804)

When supervisors pay critical attention to power differences between themselves and the student teachers and when they behave ethically given those differences (Trout, 2008), supervision can support mutual learning. University supervisors can help student teachers inquire into the nature of the placement policy environment, as together they begin to see opportunities for student-centered pedagogy as part of their shared learning process. These supervisory models encourage university supervisors to create a space for student teachers to reflect on their practice and to offer themselves as co-learners. When
university supervisors act as supportive collaborators more so than evaluators of the clinical paradigm (Slick, 1998; Vasquez & Reppen, 2007), meaningful, mutual learning can occur (Kilminster & Jolly, 2000).

**Supervisors and the policy contexts of teaching.** Student teachers encounter powerful learning opportunities in their student teaching placements, opportunities they are too often left to themselves to manage. Part of the aim of this research is to contribute to conversations about the supervision of student teachers in an era of neo-liberal reform and accountability.

Within the contexts of reform, supervision and supervisors' roles must be re-examined and reconceptualized if supervisors are to participate in the dialogue of reformed and reforming schools. Profound systemic change must be accompanied by different forms of thought and action, and at all organizational and conceptual levels (Waite, 1995, p. 111)

It is well known that a school's political climate, broadly construed, is important to new teachers. At the micropolitical and macropolitical levels, ideas of what is important, valued, and true are communicated, officially and unofficially, to newcomers. Each day, student teachers witness their cooperating teachers, other faculty, and administration acting within the policy environment. They see compliance, resistance, enthusiasm—any number of reactions—yet, what sense they make of these sometimes conflicting messages is not well understood. Disconnects often are cast as a personal issue of teaching style (Freidus, 2002) rather than a public or structural issue of policy.

Although all practitioners are reading the political environments of their practice in one way or another (Achinstein, 2006), university supervisors rarely are supported in reading policy along with student teachers, to question taken-for-granted arrangements with the goals of humane, learner-centered pedagogy. University supervisors are "in a
prime position" (Levine, 2011, p. 264) to contribute to their own and others’ learning through thoughtful reading and analysis of policy structures. Achinstein (2006) points out that recognizing and analyzing the “knowledge and understandings of cultures and systems, key players and political processes in the school and the district” is “difficult for someone immersed in a culture” (p. 126). Yet, the supervisor’s role often is limited to one of mediator or peacemaker. More substantive and nuanced understandings of policy and supervision can honor the value of the unique perspectives of student teachers, while leveraging the under-appreciated perspectives of university supervisors.

Unfortunately, few studies of school policy address issues of student teacher supervision, nor do many studies of student teacher supervision address school policy contexts. Those which address both issues draw needed attention to the constraints that NCLB has presented to supervisors, specifically, the narrowing of the nature and amount of feedback that supervisors give to their student teachers (Miller & Carney, 2009; Bates & Burbank, 2008). Yet, expanded conceptualizations of policy and progressive models of supervision have not been combined in research.

Some studies do situate themselves at the intersection of education policy and teacher supervision, and a number of these come from educational leadership literature. Though these studies construe leadership broadly, they often explicitly include supervisors, though usually school-based supervisors of in-service teachers. These studies, emanating from a critical policy analysis framework, remain the closest to the concerns of the present study in their attention to actual and possible relationships between supervision and policy. Gunter and Forrester (2008) interrogate national school
leadership policy in the UK. They contend that leadership policies have created a “network” (p. 144) of lead teachers and administrators, working together though with different claims to decision-making power. The thrust of their argument is that this network encourages administrators to “operate as policy entrepreneurs” (p. 144) in their schools, taking responsibility for the creation of new and innovative ways to compel their faculty to meet goals set by the government.

Kim (2010) undertakes a similar critique of the Korean government’s teacher evaluation and assessment policies. Referring to Ball’s policy sociology (1994), Kim finds that school leaders are positioned as arms of the government through policy. Expected to be in collusion with policy, school leadership act as overseers and disciplinarians of faculty. In the United States, Maxcy and Nguyen (2006), also citing Ball, draw similar attention to how current policy dicta have transformed leadership in two Texas elementary schools into managers who ‘pressure, monitor and redirect practice...to achieve pre-specified ends’ (p. 180). Not merely puppets of the state, school leaders are being persuaded by policy to view the success of their schools and the meaning of their work in different—often competitive or functional—terms. They find these schools are sites of struggle, framed by policy, and geared to performance indicators. Indicating the complex relationships among policies and school leaders, the research in this group nonetheless supports the notions that school leaders—including supervisors--have power in policy environments.

Critical policy analysis has informed studies, closer yet to the present research, which claim critical tools to open spaces for re-imagining the relationships between
policy and school leadership. Coronel Llamas (2005) utilizes Ball’s perspectives on the pressure to align teachers’ work to standards, to open for inquiry ‘the relationships between leadership and teachers’ (abstract) in Spanish schools. He concludes that examining professional relationships between teachers and teacher-leaders can provide a ‘new understanding of teacher work, decision-making, professional development and organization development’ (abstract), a view with which I agree and upon which this study is predicated.

One additional study, also from a critical theory perspective, asks similar questions about the connections between leadership and policy. McDermott et al. (2007) investigate a teacher support network in Ireland, formed in 2001 with the explicit charge of supporting educational reform. At its inception, members were excited by the opportunity to support their colleagues toward the progressive practices then being encouraged by policy, and committed to teacher autonomy and critical pedagogy. However, the wave of reform that swept around the globe changed the tone of the policies the organization was created to support. The members’ shared stance conflicted with what was required and requested by the funding body.

The network members’ desire to follow their professional judgment was tempered by their concerns about losing funding and teachers losing the support network. The research embraces critical reflection and self-study to detail the ethical and pedagogical decisions over which the network deliberates, highlighting the challenges of providing professional development in the current climate, and legitimizing the psychological
impact on the members of negotiating such challenges. The pressure of leadership is real, yet leadership has power in the policy context.

**Contributions from research of in-service supervision.** The preparation and support of university-based supervisors of pre-service teachers has suffered, as indicated above, from a lack of empirical attention. School-based supervision of in-service teachers, on the other hand, has been the subject and object of significant research and theory. Therefore, this body of research can also contribute to discussions in which the research on university-based supervision of pre-service teachers runs thin. This summary turns next to research on site-based supervision of early-career teachers, to examine writings on supervisors' actions within the policy contexts of their supervision.

Recent supervision research reflects awareness of the difficult political climate and of the responsibility of educators to address that climate with new in-service teachers. In ways that lie parallel to the developments in policy study discussed earlier, which acknowledge micropolitics, some researchers explore the impact of local formal and informal power structures on new teachers, as well as the role of supervisors in this relationship. Betty Achinstein devoted several studies to what she called the “political literacy” of mentors, a term that includes those involved in the induction, support and required mentoring of early-career teachers. She described political literacy as a lens or way of seeing the daily happenings in schools. Moreover, this way of seeing necessitates a “multi-leveled reading of (con)text” (2006, p. 135), which echoes the conceptions of policy mentioned previously. Achinstein believes developing political literacy falls
under the responsibility of a thoughtful mentor, and encouraging political literacy in mentees allows mentors to develop new teachers’ agency:

One job of mentors is to learn how to help novices read their school contexts. Mentors also need to know how to navigate the school and district cultures to advocate on behalf of their new teachers’ work lives. Finally, they need to support the development of novices’ own political knowledge and ability to advocate for themselves. (Achinstein, 2006, p. 124)

Ideas of support, advocacy and political contexts recur across Achinstein’s work and act as both groundwork and springboard for more vigorous models of university-based supervision.

Achinstein is one of several scholars who insist upon mentors’ attention to schools’ political contexts when the goal is to promote teaching in context-specific ways that serve all students justly. Ballet & Kelchtermans (2002) agree that supervisors should interrogate the dominant ideology of a school and that student teachers should collaborate in this interrogation. Goodson (1998) added that such policy interrogation should be encouraged consistently across teacher education programs:

If we are pleased with the state of public education, then it would be in our interest to help new teachers understand and adapt themselves to existing teacher culture as quickly as possible. If we are not pleased with the public schools, then we need to provide somehow a supportive context where innovative and creative teachers can find the resources and encouragement to initiate reform. (p. 53)

The message here speaks to the necessity of building relationships between teacher education and K-12 classrooms that account for policy as experienced locally by specific teachers. However, that relationship should not involve replacing one top-down structure with another. Goodson added, “Supervisors of teachers can facilitate reform; they cannot mandate reform” (p. 51). Inviting thoughtful interrogation of policy environments means encouraging multiple and potentially disparate readings of those environments without
campaigning for one preferred reading. Furthermore, supervisors can invite student teachers to read a school’s policy context together with them, but they cannot force such interaction.

Whereas several researchers drew necessary attention to the dangers of the uneven power relationships between supervisors and student teachers in terms of supervisors’ power to force a point of view, if the goal is collaborative supervision, there is another step yet to take. As mentioned earlier, Le Cornu & Ewing (2008) challenge the notion of supervisors as “facilitators of reflection” (p. 1803), instead invoking an image of supervision as a collaborative process of mutual learning. Framing a supervisory practice around critical collaboration means leaving room for the perspectives of both participants.

Though many supervisory models place high priority on supervisors’ careful reading of contexts, the link has not been made to how supervisors can support the student teachers’ reading and understanding of those contexts. Blase and Blase (2002) describe this oversight in serious terms:

Despite the considerable theoretical and empirical work on the fundamentally political nature of life in schools, very little along these lines has been produced in the area of instructional supervision per se. As a result, supervision theory and practice seem relatively naive and ill-formed with regard to the political nature of schools. (p. 17)

University supervisors rarely are portrayed as people who notice and account for, let alone critically examine, the policy environment of their supervisees’ placement schools. The point of the present study is to suggest a way forward. Student teachers’ agency and supervisors’ interrogation of schools’ policy contexts rest upon the
framework of their teacher education programs and the willingness of program members
to honor the perspectives of these two traditionally low-status groups.

We believe that induction programs bear some responsibility for promoting
discourse and dispositions that position novices to pursue social justice; to do so,
induction providers must help teachers understand and navigate the institutional
and organizational space of their schools. Little empirical work has investigated
how beginning teachers grapple with micropolitical issues or how induction
efforts might systematically help novices productively traverse their schools,
districts, and communities. (Curry et al., 2008, p. 661, emphasis added)
Calling for empirical work into the sense-making processes of pre-service and new in-
service teachers constitutes an important step toward legitimizing their developing policy
understandings as part of the process of learning to teach. Acting upon this call for
research, and incorporating it into the teacher education process, represents another set of
challenges altogether.

Understanding policy and supervision as sociocultural practices, a university
supervisor and student teacher can help each other understand practice/policy
relationships in local contexts. Situated supervision and policy as discourse open up
room for educators—including supervisors—to support student teachers in negotiating
the writing policy environments of their placement schools in ways that will serve them
and their students throughout their careers. Fecho (2000) notes that this goal must be
shared by the entire education program:

I believe those of us in schools of education who embrace principles of critical
inquiry pedagogy need to imagine ways of working with beginning teachers that
institutionally, and not just individually, bridge the last few years as college
students with the first few years as classroom teachers.... As student teachers who
are benefiting from a more intense pre-service experience take positions in the
school districts that surround our universities, we need to place them where their
struggles to develop and put critical inquiry into practice will be appreciated and
supported. (p 198)
This study is based on my belief that our support in this difficult intersection of policy and practice, at the vulnerable time of student teaching, should extend into student teaching supervision.

A cohesive theory of policy informing teacher education programs will facilitate a reimagining of the form and purposes of student teacher supervision, as well as the relationships of university supervisors to teacher education faculty. When educators recognize multiple possible interactions with policy, they can work in multiple ways toward student teachers’ sense of agency as they learn to teach writing. Such action has immediate relevance in the student teaching experience, and long-term (potentially large-scale) benefits as we work to shape writing policy toward responsive, humane, socially-just pedagogy.

Teaching Writing, Policy, Student Teachers and Supervision

Somehow, most supervisory practices do not seem to have kept pace with the policy concerns surrounding the teaching of writing. Literacy educators have been alert for decades to the importance of issues of politics, social justice (Christiansen, 2006, 2007), and action as they prepare students to teach. As schools encounter increasingly diverse student populations, but consistent homogeneity in teaching populations, teacher education in writing encourages students toward culturally relevant pedagogy (Rosen & Abt-Perkins, 2000; Crotteau, 2007) and a recognition of students’ ways of knowing (Medina & del Rocio Costa, 2010). Yet, a teaching program’s goals for its students may not extend into the supervisory frameworks in place within that same program (Cochran-Smith, 2003). Maintaining that a consistent vision across a program is possible and
desirable, Rosen & Abt-Perkins (2000) offer important conceptual contributions in the form of recommended components and goals of literacy programs, including field placement supervision, which seek to support student teachers' preparation to teach reading and writing in diverse schools.

A small group of studies involves the supervision of student teachers and the teaching of writing. These studies help uncover the potentially different ideas about writing and teaching writing, some of which are policies, surrounding the student teacher. Colby and Stapleton (2006) study early field placement experiences of pre-service teachers as they learn to teach writing. They recommend that supervisors provide context-specific support as pre-service teachers learn to make instructional decisions responsive to their contexts. In their study, supervisors (who were faculty) are portrayed as coaches, observers, models and feedback-givers as students learn to enact writers' workshop practices. However, they are secondary to the concern of pre-service teachers' learning, and a colleague or co-learner position is unexplored.

Smagorinsky, Jakubiak, and Moore (2008) draw attention to the difficulty of supporting the teaching of writing. The university supervisor is one of many people, along with university professors, the cooperating teacher, and the student teacher, involved in teacher preparation; each of these practitioner's theories of writing can compete with the others'. Moreover, they can conflict with the school curriculum and with how the cooperating teacher and students understand that curriculum. Brockman, Luoma & Potocki (2007) adds another player to this crowded situation, as, for some student teachers, a faculty representative from the English Department shares supervisory
responsibility with the Education Department. Though these studies portray the complexity of the policy environment and of the supervisory relationship, the supervisor acts as a potentially complicating factor rather than a partner in investigating the multiple perspectives present and their implications for practice.

Smagorinsky, Jakubiak, and Moore (2008) raised a concern in their study that is worth mentioning for its relevance to the present research. They caution that student teacher supervision is not an appropriate site for addressing policy conflicts, “given that the beginning teachers themselves are the most likely casualties in that battle” (p. 453). The stress of student teaching is well documented, and some have argued that teacher burnout can begin in student teaching (Fives, Hammana, & Olivarez, 2007). I agree that student teachers should not be placed under further stress, or in riskier positions, than they already experience.

However, student teachers are not insulated from the political happenings of their placement contexts. Hallway conversations, worksheets, faculty meetings, and many other policy elements can and do impact what student teachers think they should be doing in their host schools. Such constant negotiations of policy context and practice will likely mark their careers after student teaching. Student teachers’ feelings of efficacy may help ameliorate their feelings of being burned out before they even have their own classrooms (Fives, Hammana, & Olivarez, 2007). Reading policy contexts with the aim of exercising some professional agency on behalf of their students, while maintaining productive relationships with their host teacher and colleagues, is a difficult and
important balance to strike. Student teachers can feel supported in this process when teacher education programs embrace expanded views of policy and supervision.

In some teacher education programs, pre-service teachers are receiving support in their interrogation of policy contexts as they attempt writing practices that respond to students' needs, unique contextual factors, and the student teacher's professional judgment. However, university supervisors are not prepared, facilitated or researched as partners in understanding and navigating these local policy environments along with student teachers. "[I]f an important aim of teacher educators or school administrators is to establish a community of inquiry, a community centered on teacher growth, not merely on being supportive, something more and different is required" (Young et al., 2005, p. 186). This study unpacks what the difficult task of "merely" supporting student teachers entails, and suggests what "something more and different" may include. Support at this difficult intersection of policy and practice, and at the vulnerable time of student teaching, can be realized through supervision.
Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

This chapter has four parts, in which I explain my research design and methodology, introduce the participants and study sites, and describe my data collection and analysis processes. I begin in Part 1 with a brief overview of the study, from the end of the Fall 2008 semester literacy class described in the opening chapter, through data collection, and on to the development of my analytic frameworks, concepts and tools. In Part 2, I detail the methodological frameworks which guide the research and my analysis, and how these overlap with my teaching and supervisory practice. In Part 3, I describe my data sources and collection methods, introduce the participants, and offer brief descriptions of the school study sites. I subsequently situate these school sites within their state and federal writing policy contexts by describing some large-scale policies. Finally, in Part 4, I describe my data analysis framework and procedures.

Part 1: Study Overview

This research describes and analyzes the interactions between four student teachers and me, their university supervisor, at the intersections of writing policy and practice. This study's contributions lie within its expanded notions of policy and a reimagining of supervision, both of which I explain in more detail later in this chapter. The main aim of this study was to gain insights into how we made sense of and responded to the rules, expectations and policies of the placement schools, individually and collectively.
My research questions emanate from “the day-to-day experiences” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 14) of my work the prior semester as a literacy instructor. As a consequence, I began to read critical policy research, eager to find some ways to help students sort through the many messages they were receiving—requirements, assessments, scores, standards—the many policies operating in, around and through classrooms.

My reflection on my practice of literacy education led me to become a university supervisor, as I described in Chapter 1. In December 2008, near the end of the literacy class, I asked for permission to supervise some of my students in their spring student teaching placements. I saw supervision as a position through which I could learn about and support student teachers and develop professional knowledge about teaching writing in the current policy environment.

I requested six particular students from my literacy course as supervisees. I asked to work with these students because they took up bravely and with seriousness many of the core ideas of the literacy class: reflection, teaching for social justice, expanded notions of literacy, and process-oriented, sociocultural writing pedagogy. They were open to inquiry and comfortable with ambiguity. Each had strong ideas about students, teaching, and themselves as capable professionals. Importantly, they also believed in their power and responsibility to make decisions in their practice about what was best for each student—regardless of what other teachers were doing.

When I told these students I would be their supervisor, I also asked them what I could do for them as a supervisor, how I could help them, and what they needed from me. Liz, a study participant, answered immediately, “We need your support.” That sentiment
was the basis for my new supervisory role. I began to wonder, *How do I support them?*

*What does it mean to support someone?* I read some theory and empirical research about supervisory practices, and pre-service teacher supervision in particular. I also thought about the "rules and regulations" students had talked about in class, and read critical policy research. I began to imagine how I would supervise, based on my beliefs about teaching and learning. I also started to make room for the ways in which this new role might shape my views going forward.

In January, student teaching began. I asked four of my student teacher supervisees, all female, to participate in the study, and all four agreed. I was fortunate already to have professional relationships with these women. At the start of our student teacher-supervisor relationship, each student teacher and I knew about each others' attitudes toward many aspects of the teaching/learning relationship in and out of schools. Over the course of the study, we came to know more about each others' families, homes, sense of humor, romantic attachments, quirky habits, and other such information people share when they are at ease with each other and willing to build a personal relationship. This familiarity grew from, and became part of, our professional interactions.

Participants did not all have the same ideas about writing and teaching writing. They were different people with different and evolving ideas about writing and teaching writing. Yet they were walking into practice situations already embedded with different messages about what writing is and how it should be taught. They stepped into an already rich soup of people, policies, and texts, each with their individual and group histories, interacting in politically-charged environments. Therefore, I prepared to help
student teachers' ideas about writing and teaching writing develop in constructive and just directions. I assumed that this would involve a continuation of the careful interrogation of writing practices and policies we had begun in the literacy class as described in a prior chapter.

The cooperating teachers, though certainly important to the student teaching experience and to this study, are not participants, nor are the administrators, faculty, staff or students at any research site. I did not attempt to record them at any time, and they are not represented directly in the study. However, these peoples' importance is reflected in the data. Student teachers and I talked about them, and I was able to observe and talk with them during my visits to schools. As I will describe in the sections below, much of what I did for my supervisory role overlapped with my research practices. Therefore, cooperating teachers, students and other people are present, indirectly, in this study.

This study is not a textual analysis of policy documents. It is a thematic analysis of our interactions within the frame of the policy environment. I am not studying my influence on student teachers, nor suggesting some sort of causal relationship. I am looking at what happens when a supervisor pays close attention to the writing policy environments of her student teachers. This is not an implementation study, nor does my focus on the classroom level imply that I see the classroom as the end point of the policy process. Instead, I am adding my work to a distinct body of knowledge within critical policy analysis which instead is informed by classroom and community - level ethnographic investigations of policy from critical, emancipatory frameworks (Walford, 2003). I saw policy being interpreted and created, I heard and was part of it being
discussed, and I observed it being ignored, challenged and transformed while student teachers were learning to teach writing.

Part 2: Methodology of the Study

The theories of knowledge and the interpretative frameworks that guide my research project are practitioner inquiry and critical pedagogy. Both have informed my selection of topic, my approaches to writing, policy and supervision, and my methods for fieldwork and data analysis.

Practitioner inquiry. This study is my inquiry into my practices as a first-time supervisor, and into what I observed as part of that practice. The primary methodological commitment with which I imagined, designed and conducted this research was practitioner inquiry as a way of knowing. Practitioner inquiry calls for a contemporary revolution in the knowledge base for teaching, through the practice and legitimating of rigorous practitioner research. Three specific ways in which practitioner inquiry guided and shaped my practice are 1) its attention to practitioners’ examinations of assumptions and attitudes; 2) its questioning of inherited wisdom; and 3) my view of student teachers as knowers and collaborators.

I sustained an intentional and destabilizing inquiry into my own belief system through my examination of my practice as a first-time supervisor in a new area of the country. As a supervisor, instructor, former classroom teacher, and researcher, I bring years of beliefs, practices, and assumptions to this study. Practitioner inquiry leads me to question, in careful, intentional, and evolving ways (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992), the beliefs, assumptions and theories I bring to my work. Throughout this research, I
uncover and interrogate these assumptions about my supervisory practice, policy, and my role in preparing pre-service teachers. I approach practitioner inquiry as a reflexive examination of the relationships between my belief and my practice, wherein I am teacher and learner, learning about myself, about the work of the student teachers, and about the relationships between them.

Lytle and Cochran-Smith (1992) have characterized teacher research as a way of knowing about teaching locally that also can be useful to the larger educational community and can inform public debate. In so doing, practitioner inquiry challenges teachers’ singular reliance on outside expert knowledge and strategies for “what works” in classrooms. Teachers, as well as policy makers, professors and school administrators, can sometimes "assume expert and hegemonic knowledge are more appropriate, more reliable, and more ‘true’ than suppressed knowledge" (Agnello, 2001, p. 172), such as that generated by teachers. Practitioner inquiry is a claiming of the power denied teachers in local and global conversations about education. Through this teaching and research, I have begun to explore, challenge, refine and extend my awareness of what it means to prepare teachers to teach writing.

Practitioner inquiry helped me move toward a constructivist supervisory practice, as it challenges the taken-for-granted relationships between teachers and knowledge. I valued the student teachers’ impressions of their teaching, my practice, and the school rules and expectations for writing. Embracing my belief in student teachers as knowers meant crafting my supervisory practice along collaborative, democratic lines. I framed
my work with student teachers and cooperating teachers toward a collaborative notion of supervision with a goal of increasing student teacher agency.

**Critical pedagogy.** Here I summarize the critical pedagogy concepts most closely related to the theories of knowledge underlying this study and my practice. Specifically, I focus on what I draw from critical theory to guide and challenge my thinking about three facets of my research: education policy, reflective supervisory practice, and the difficulties of bringing the two together.

This study is explicitly concerned with the ways in which student teachers view the relationships between policy and practice at their placement schools. Critical pedagogy invites practitioners to challenge and interrogate policy as one of the systems or structures in public institutions with the potential to act as tools of oppression. Marshall (1997) draws attention to the study of such systems, including policy, and emphasizes their ability to shape people's engagement with their environments: “Critical theorists place at the center of analysis the power, policies and structures that restrict access; their work often demonstrates how privilege is maintained and the disempowered and silenced are kept that way” (p. 9-10). This study is driven by critical attention to policy and to the relationships schools allow teachers to build between policies and practices.

As I detailed in Chapter 2, critical policy analysts have articulated some of the assumptions behind policy texts and practices, as well as the power of policy as a system, and the particular positions it offers students, teachers and administrators. Critical theorists show that curriculum (Burke & Hermerschmidt, 2005), texts (Apple, 2001), and
practices are systems of power which can and do position students and teachers (Delandshere & Petrosky, 2004). Critical theory helps me see that policy environments relate curriculum, texts and practices to teachers in particular ways and that these ways are open to interrogation. Critical practitioners have challenged such positioning of themselves and their students.

Schools have seen standards--and standardized texts and practices--proliferate as part of the policy environment for the past two decades. These texts, practices and policies encourage certain relationships among teachers, students and knowledge. These relationships, it has been well established, can place policy compliance at the head of a district's priority list, while teachers are disempowered and students disenfranchised. As one critical theorist explains:

Teachers engaged in critical practice find it difficult to allow top-down content standards and their poisonous effects to go unchallenged. Such teachers cannot abide the deskilling and reduction in professional status that accompany these top-down reforms. (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 19)

Critical teacher educators prepare students to make decisions about curriculum to serve all students and to include the world view of the marginalized. Where top-down policies invite practices which do not serve all children, I encouraged student teachers to challenge the status quo.

For student teachers, thoughtful interrogation of accepted ways of teaching can begin in collaboration with the university supervisor. My critical practice encouraged participants to take a critical view of the customary practices and conventional roles in their placement schools, and supported them in imagining other possible relationships among themselves, their students and knowledge. My work with student teachers at their
entry into the profession seeks to encourage student teachers to recognize the policy structures surrounding them and to interrogate their nature. This goal of this investigation is to increase their opportunities to make practice decisions that will benefit their students. I believe student teachers are capable of this interrogation and action, in collaboration with university supervisors.

Critical pedagogy also attuned me to the challenges of working with people at a vulnerable time in their professional lives. I have the power to be the oppressor, most immediately in my supervisory practice. I struggled with imposing critical practices while in a power position. I realized that I risked destabilizing certain ways of thinking and teaching by inviting participants to undertake an investigation of policy. Though I sometimes saw reductive attitudes and practices at play in the schools, it was not my place to critique them for the student teacher. I also had to honor those times when we did have differences of opinion. Ultimately, I am advocating for a critical, collaborative supervisory practice.

My Supervisory Framework

I came to this study as a first-time supervisor. My belief that, as a supervisor, I could help student teachers learn to teach writing in their school settings—and student teachers’ belief that I could provide such support—gave rise to this study. My research, supervision and teaching practices are all based on qualitative, ethnographic approaches to understanding what happens in classrooms and what those happenings mean to those involved. I saw that qualitative and ethnographic approaches would help me learn about the schools’ traditions, expectations and the kinds of written and unwritten rules and
expectations my students had discussed the prior semester. Many of the supervisory practices I undertook became the data sources for this study. I offer here a brief overview of my supervisory practices.

Student teachers and I participated in bi-weekly supervisory observations and post-observation conferences over the course of the semester, between six and nine for each participant (on account of absences and schedule conflicts). I gave student teachers their choice of dates and times I was available to come and observe them. I also did not visit unannounced, though as the semester went on, each participant told me I could drop in at any time, and that my doing so would not be a source of stress for them.

My supervisory role is inescapably evaluative, and therefore powerful. I was careful about the power relationships in these interactions because of my double role as researcher and supervisor. As I will show more fully in my data analysis, I sought to dismantle through talk and action the ‘snoopervisor’ reputation related to checklist-bearing clinical supervisors. I tried to encourage straightforward talk and keep communication flowing. I did this through sharing discursive control in our interactions, encouraging participants to question me, and trying to resist the impulse to solve their problems and step in with advice.

When student teachers and I spoke in person, before and after my observations of their teaching, I was aware I had power to open up the formal conference. What I said could determine the direction of the conversation. I took care to begin the conferences by asking the participants what it was they wanted to talk about, and to follow up on that offer by genuinely letting them take the conversational lead. I usually opened
conferences with some form of the questions, *What do you want to talk about?* or *How do you think it went?* though I knew this invitation could be interpreted in different ways by the student teachers. Later in the term, I began to ask them to direct my observation to what I could be thinking about or paying special attention to when I visited.

We interacted between meetings via email, phone calls and text messages. These contacts were sometimes initiated by me, and sometimes by the participant. These interactions were casual and friendly in tone, and though we usually shared information about the student teaching/supervisor experience, we often talked about other topics as well.

As I describe in Chapter 2, I was informed and energized by Duncan Waite’s idea of situated supervision (1992) for its resonance with my qualitative, ethnographic background and with practitioner inquiry. The conceptual thrust of situated supervision is close reading of context, including people in context. Waite (1994) emphasizes that ethnographic approaches are invaluable to supervisors attending to the multiple events occurring at any time in a classroom, as well as the local significance of those events. I did not limit myself to the check-list forms supplied by the university for observing student teachers. I chose to take ethnographic field notes.

While I visited schools to observe student teachers, I wrote constantly, describing all I could see and hear as well as noting my thoughts and questions. I observed both student teachers and their teaching environments. I took notes on my laptop, talked with teachers, students, and administrators, wandered into media centers, front offices and cafeterias, and listened (and sometimes eavesdropped). The more I knew about student
teachers' situations and the people in them, the better prepared I felt to be able to understand and respond to their concerns, and help them reflect meaningfully on their practice.

The discussions in the prior semester's literacy class led to my concern over how texts and practices were presented to student teachers. Therefore, my ethnographic-style field notes were also an effort to capture the local significance attached to texts and practices. For instance, the two elementary school sites were in the same district, just above a mile away from each other. Both schools had the same tests; the policy texts were identical. But I soon realized they were handled very differently by the schools' administrations, and the resulting environments afforded very different options for participation by teachers, staff and students.

These ethnographic-style field notes were textual accounts of student teachers' practices as I saw and understood them over time. They also provided situationally specific records I could refer to and share as I talked with the student teachers. Overall, they were a rich source of qualitative data to which I turned constantly to reflect on, to guide, and to rethink my nascent supervisory and research practice.

My primary focus is student teachers' perceptions of and maneuverings within the policy environments of their placement schools. However, I too was reading those environments and the people within them. I acted on what I saw and heard, and attempted to fold the perspectives that student teachers shared with me into my supervisory approach. Stepping back and taking an antagonistic approach to my own
practice, I focus on our separate and collective readings of context, and how I managed them both in the moment and over time.

While reading the policy environment, I was not seeking some ‘true’ reading of the environment or the ‘real’ policy. Nor was I trying to bring student teachers to see policy as I did. The sense they made of the written and unwritten rules and power structures of their placement schools was as important to me as what sense I made of them. Our readings of each situation, though often complimentary, sometimes presented challenges. These situated and often complicated “readings” informed and were informed by our ongoing professional interactions.

Another part of my supervisory practice, which also became part of this research, was the journal that the university required each student teacher to keep. They were to share their journals with their supervisors and with the faculty members who oversaw their bi-weekly student teaching seminar meetings. I adapted this requirement to fit with my supervisory practices, shaping it as a reflective journal. Each week’s topics were open to the student teachers, though I also provided them with a list of open-ended, reflective questions to use if they wished. These were written as individual documents that were emailed regularly to me, each week, though sometimes several were sent at once if a participant had fallen behind. I read their journal entries in conjunction with our other interactions, and they were frequently a source of valuable information for my supervisory practice.

As a first-time supervisor, I had much to learn both from the school settings and from the participants. Included in my goals as a supervisor were to help student teachers
navigate their immediate environment and to help them reflect on their practice as a way of thinking about their future teaching. Furthermore, I was reflecting with student teachers, as well as privately regarding my developing practice as a supervisor. I kept a supervision journal in which I reflected on my observations, interactions and practice overall. I describe further in the sections below how my supervision overlapped with my research processes and how situated, qualitative, ethnographic frameworks inform my data collection and data analysis.

Part 3: Data and Participants

Data sources and collection methods. This study’s multiple data sources offer a multi-layered perspective on student teachers’ deliberations and actions, and reveal my supervisory practices over space and time. Data sources include our many spoken and written interactions, my field notes and supervisory journal, and student teachers’ reflections. I observed and took field notes on student teachers’ practice. Then, student teachers and I discussed that same practice. In those post-observation conferences, participants explained, explored and questioned their practice. Furthermore, they often referenced events I had not seen, and the many “invisible” parts (Erickson, 1986) of their experience, including their evolving knowledge of students, administrators, the cooperating teacher and the school rules and expectations. Thirdly, my supervision journal and their reflective journals captured our thinking about past, present and future situations. Data sources thereby gave multiple tellings of, and thoughts about, the same situation, and often connect these situations to others before and after.
Our various professional interactions were audio-recorded, transcribed and included in the data set. Reflection on these recorded conferences was one of the most potent sources of data for our knowledge production. Pairs of students and I met outside the school and university settings to talk about the research.

I also acted as the facilitator of the bi-weekly student teacher seminars for two of the participants. Facilitating this seminar was another first for me. Each student teacher was required to attend the seminars, and the university attempted to limit each seminar to a small group. As a result, there were several sections of student teacher seminar, and it was by chance that two of the participants were assigned to my group. The seminar was designed for student teachers to share stories of their practice with each other and with the faculty facilitator, work on their teacher work samples required for graduation, and prepare for the job search. The seminars were not a research site. However, my role as a seminar facilitator meant I had some additional contact with two participants.

For me, the seminars were also an additional forum in which to challenge and extend my thinking about being a supervisor. Other student teachers in the seminar shared stories of their experiences and their relationships with their supervisors, and with each story I considered and re-considered my supervisory practices. I did not audio-record these meetings, but took notes during them and reflected on these notes as part of my supervision and teaching practice. Some of these notes are included in the data set.

Our communication records and my observational field notes constitute most of the data sources; however, I contextualize these interactions through several other data sources. I include biographical information on the participants, gathered through two
semesters of professional and personal interaction; demographic data on the districts; and specific portraits of the individual classrooms where they practiced.

Artifacts also constituted an important part of this study's data. These included state standards for English, English language arts, and related supporting materials, as well as state and district policy documents describing literacy policy and instructional reform. Physical materials from classrooms and schools, including curriculum documents, course texts, planning books, posters and other displayed materials, are important to the policy environment and were also included in my field notes. Public records, district web sites, and archival records, along with other publicly available site data, were used to give further information on school sites to shed light on the pressures each was operating under and some of the priorities each held.

The following section offers this background information and describes the multiple, overlapping contexts within which the student teachers' practices were situated. I then introduce the participants with short biographic sketches and give brief descriptions of the cooperating teachers. Table 2 lists the names of the participants, cooperating teachers, and school sites, as well as the grade levels in which each student teacher was placed. The participants, cooperating teachers and school sites are introduced in the order in which they appear in this table. All names are pseudonyms.
Table 2

Participants, Cooperating Teachers, Schools and Grade Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student teacher</th>
<th>Cooperating teacher</th>
<th>School name</th>
<th>Grade level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colleen Galloway</td>
<td>Marni Navin</td>
<td>Lake Caroline</td>
<td>First grade Special Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marie San Fellippo</td>
<td>Mountain View</td>
<td>5th/6th grade Special education ELA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Shaffer</td>
<td>Marjorie Moore</td>
<td>Forest Hills</td>
<td>Second grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz Ambuster</td>
<td>Sonya Krivda</td>
<td>James Baldwin</td>
<td>Third grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann McGinley</td>
<td>Sandra Stout</td>
<td>Graeme High</td>
<td>10th grade Special Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Context: Student Teachers, Cooperating Teachers, And School

Sites. The following section describes the overall geographic area to explain more fully the setting of each student teacher’s experiences, and to draw attention to the resources and challenges across districts as well as those specific to each building.

This study took place in the Southeastern United States, in a metropolitan area which encompasses two small cities. Politically and religiously conservative, this region suffered as many did with the steady decline in the textile industry through the mid-20th century. However, this area has experienced population growth over the last 20 years, fuelled in part by its accessibility to other major Southern cities. Efforts to revitalize the cities, entice families, and establish a reputation for the fine and performing arts have been largely successful. Multinational corporations opened sites on the plentiful, inexpensive land. There are, perhaps as a result, significant and visible economic
disparities, alongside historical racial tensions, in the large metropolitan area where this study took place.

Several districts, including some in this study, serve a mixture of rural, suburban and urban communities of diverse economic and racial makeup. The same stretch of rural road could be shared by newly-built, high-income households and decades-old mobile homes. The suburbs are dominated by large but disconnected builder-designed subdivisions. Most were built within the last fifteen years, on former farm land. The cities’ downtown areas are chiefly commercial, though the past decade has seen gentrification of both city centers. Not far from the city centers are the long-shuttered mills, surrounded by the houses built for the millworkers some 80 years ago. These are some of the area’s oldest, and poorest, neighborhoods, almost exclusively African-American in racial makeup. The five sites in this study serve different communities within this greater metropolitan area.

These five sites span elementary, middle and secondary level classrooms. They cross lines from urban to suburban to rural. Some schools are recognized for their achievement, and some are struggling to ward off redevelopment sanctions. NCLB had various impacts on the policy environments in each school; specifically, several schools in these districts (including one study site) were in phases of school improvement because of their scores on state tests. School improvement processes changed the allocation of government funds, and other academic and professional development priorities of each building. Colleen Galloway, Michelle Shaffer, Elizabeth (“Liz”) Ambuster, and Ann McGinley were undergraduate seniors in my literacy class in Fall
Semester 2008 (all names are pseudonyms). Their student teaching in the spring was the end of their university careers, and they would become certified teachers soon afterward.

Student teachers' experiences learning to teach writing cannot be separated from the cooperating teachers' roles in the writing policy environment. Therefore, in this section, I also introduce the cooperating teachers, who are not participants in this study. This study is not about cooperating teachers' writing policies and practices, but about how student teachers understood these practices and policies. Michelle, Elizabeth, Colleen and Ann saw from the start of their placements that their cooperating teachers were connected to writing policies and practices. But their awareness of the cooperating teachers' power over policy, and policy's power over their cooperating teachers, deepened over time. As that awareness grew, so did student teachers' view of what the cooperating teacher's policy relationship meant to the student teachers' practice of writing.

*Colleen Galloway.* Colleen Galloway is gregarious with a personal magnetism that made her a favorite among faculty and students alike at our university. Colleen is a generation older than her classmates, and is a decade older than I am. Articulate, enthusiastic and self-effacing, Colleen had moved to the area from the Southwest 20 years ago, and teaching was her second career. Colleen has an adult daughter who is profoundly mentally and physically handicapped, but as outgoing and upbeat as Colleen herself. Colleen usually brought her daughter to join us when we would get together outside of school, including once for dinner at my home.
Parenting a special needs child was, Colleen freely admitted to me, the motivation for her becoming a teacher and taking special education certification. Her roles as mother and teacher, and the parallels and comparisons she saw between her students and her daughter, were often a source of strength and wisdom for her. However, they were also occasionally sites of conflict and sadness, as her personal life and professional life drew closer to one another. As a special education major, Colleen had the option of taking two separate school placements at two different grade levels. Her first six weeks were in an elementary school, and the second six weeks were in a middle school.

Lake Caroline Elementary School. Lake Caroline (all school names are pseudonyms) is a suburban school, serving 770 4-year kindergarten to 5th grade students with 52 teachers, nearly 60% with a master’s degree (county web site). Just over half (53%) of its students were eligible for free and reduced lunch (state Department of Education website). Lake Caroline prided itself on being an International Schools Program school, and had received several state awards the years before and including the year of the study. The school placed special emphasis on Language Arts and considered its writing program a defining feature, with student publication in multiple media a priority (school web site). Lake Caroline, as all elementary schools in this study, also participated in the thrice yearly MAP testing program for grades 1-5.

Colleen was placed with Marni Navin in her first grade special education classroom. Marni was a young and intense special education teacher. This was Marni’s sixth year teaching, and her second year at Lake Caroline. I respected the adult tone Marni used with her students, and her almost business-like approach to the seemingly
constant stream of paperwork crossing her desk. Marni was curious and interested about what I could offer her from my literacy background, particularly about writing across the curriculum.

The room was colorful and small, but appropriate for the number of students. There were approximately 8 students in attendance each time I visited. On most days, there was also a teaching aide assisting Marni and Colleen. The layout was spacious, with desks and tables which facilitated the frequent grouping of students for separate mini-lessons or one-on-one work. The room had windows along the far wall, and a private bathroom.

Mountainside Middle School. Mountainside was the site of Colleen’s second placement, a middle school which served approximately 1150 6th to 8th grade students with 73 teachers and was suburban in its population. 38% of Mountain’s students were classified as racial minorities, a demographic reflected in Colleen’s classes, and 35% received free or reduced lunch. Mountainside had enjoyed many state and regional honors in the 1980s and 1990s, including the U.S. Department of Education Excellence in Education award.

Colleen’s second placement was with cooperating teacher Marie San Fellippo in her 6th and 7th grade ELA support special education class. Marie’s background was in math, science and special education. However, a few years prior to the study, she had been assigned to teach English/language arts support classes. Marie worked diligently to bridge the disconnect between her background and her teaching duties. Marie’s out-of-
field assignment, however, did emerge later as a factor in Colleen’s experience of the writing policy environment.

Marie was nearing the end of her Master’s of Education Degree in Teaching at the time of Colleen’s placement. Marie and I talked several times about the difficulty of teaching while in graduate school, and she found in me a sympathetic listener for her master’s thesis woes. I appreciated Marie’s sense of brisk professionalism, her personal confidence, and willingness to either join our conversations or give Colleen and me privacy to talk in the classroom.

Their was a sizeable room with plenty of space for different configurations of students in it at each period, and Marie and Colleen’s largest class size was 15. Their teachers’ desks were at the back of the room, and there were computer stations on two walls. Writing process posters and student work were hung around the room, and I was struck by the several different series of grammar and composition books on the shelves.

Michelle Shaffer. Michelle Shaffer was born and raised in the area where she student taught. She was talkative, enjoyed interacting with young students, and was happy teaching in 2nd grade. Michelle was a member of the same church as some of her students’ families. This was a significant factor in her relationship with them because in this area of the country, church communities are also a primary source of people’s social activity. Already connected to the community, Michelle was at ease in the classroom but talked with me frequently about the great pressure she placed on herself to assimilate into the culture of the school. Concerned about the social and personal well-being of her
students, Michelle often made connections between their worlds inside and outside school.

Michelle was a part of the teacher cadet program at the university, a special honor for its most promising candidates. As part of the cadet program, Michelle had a year-long placement at the school where she would do her student teaching, Forrest Hills. The first half of the year was more observation than teaching, and during the second half of the year, she would assume full student teaching responsibilities. This allowed her an extended period of time to get to know her students, her cooperating teacher Marjorie, and the way things were done at Forrest Hills.

**Forrest Hills Elementary School.** Forrest Hills enrolls approximately 400 students from pre-kindergarten to 5th grade, and has 35 teachers. Sited on the west edge of the city, Forrest Hills’ community could be described as part urban, part suburban. Approximately 46% of Forrest Hills’ students are classified as racial minorities, and 57% receive free or reduced lunch.

Forrest Hills was the only school in its district to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2008, and the only district school to meet it all three years for which data are available (state Department of Education web site). Forrest Hills is a state Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, a state Exemplary Writing School, and has won several other state awards, including a ‘Closing the Achievement Gap’ award (school web site). Their principal seeks to shield faculty from a focus on state mandates, and supports teachers in taking building concerns to state Dept. of Education meetings (travel is funded in part by staff grant writing). Other grants helped fund the school’s mission of arts-based
instruction, including appearances by travelling artists and faculty workshops by a popular speaker on arts integration. Several faculty sent their own children to Forrest Hills, I learned.

A 2nd grade teacher, Marjorie Moore, was Michelle's cooperating teacher. Marjorie was organized, vibrant and talkative, with more than 20 years of teaching experience. Marjorie was a grade-level team leader, and one of the many faculty in her building to have written successful grant applications for reading materials in her room. A lingering memory from my early visits to Marjorie's classroom was her 'secret door' to the playground. When it was time for recess, rather than walk students out the classroom door and down the hall, Marjorie silently motioned with an air of mock secrecy for students to climb out a low, large classroom window instead. They did, gleefully—including a student who had lost one of her legs. She calmly vaulted her small body over the window ledge using her arms, while a classmate held her crutches and passed them to her on the other side. There was no fuss; for them, this was business as usual.

In my visits, I was struck by Marjorie's orchestration of the busy room; she seemed to have thought of everything. In the almost-excessively-decorated classroom, student desks in a U shape faced the interactive whiteboard. There were purchased materials and student work displayed on nearly every available inch of wall space. The teacher's desk was off to the side; a rocking chair was at the windows overlooking the playground. A few computer stations sat in the back of the room, which I only saw used for Accelerated Reader™ testing.
Elizabeth Ambuster. Elizabeth ("Liz") Ambuster had fierce ideas and tremendous personal strength. Intelligent and full of conviction, Liz was an accomplished athlete who had come to the university from the Midwest on an athletic scholarship. Liz was coaching during student teaching and did not want to teach after graduation. Instead, her goal was medical school, and through student teaching, this desire became clearer. Yet, her rapport with her students was joyful to watch—both she and they seemed to enjoy their time together. She had wanted to be placed in a 6th grade class, but at the last moment was sent to a 2nd grade class instead. During her student teaching, Liz was upset at what she saw as teachers’ willingness to engage in what she saw as objectionable practices. She felt that her outsider status—both in terms of not wanting to teach full time, and not being part of the local community—gave her a measure of immunity from such pressures.

James Baldwin Elementary School. James Baldwin shared a border with Forrest Hills, also included pre-kindergarten to 5th grade, and had approximately 450 students and 32 teachers. Baldwin had 97% student eligibility for free and reduced cost lunch, and like Forrest Hills, was a Title 1 school. In the past 20 years, Baldwin "has begun to serve a more transient student population from a wide range of socio-economic levels" (school web site). During my visits, I noticed an evident concern among faculty and administrators with increasing test scores. Baldwin had not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for three years.

Liz was placed in a 2nd grade classroom with cooperating teacher Sonya Krivda. Sonya had taught at Baldwin for decades and was close to retirement. Sonya was soft-
spoken but of undeniable presence; the more I learned about Sonya, the more I respected her. Sonya and I began our professional relationship with a long talk during my first visit to Baldwin. We sat at an empty table in the library, and she told me of the significant personal struggles of the past year, including the death of her nephew, and her upcoming heart surgery. She had taken on Liz at the last moment. Though she was happy to do so, she expressed to me her concern that her co-workers would think she took on a student teacher as a way of taking a break from teaching. This concern would arise several times over the semester.

In Sonya’s long, narrow room, desks were in pairs, and those pairs in rows. There were a few computers along one wall, a reading area with a chair, an incandescent lamp, and a bookshelf on a small, carpeted space. In the back near the windows were Sonya’s desk, a lab sink, a semi-circular table, and personal refrigerator that also held children’s juices for snack time. As much as the hallways of Baldwin were dimly lit and somewhat bare, Sonya and Liz’s room was warm, and their students were affectionate. The children were happy to see me whenever I visited; I got hugs when they were allowed out of their desks, and smiles and waves when they were not. Students pulled me into the action when I was observing, showing me books and writing me into their stories. Perhaps as a result, I made more of a personal connection with them than with any other class.

**Ann McGinley.** Ann McGinley came to student teaching as an insider to the local community. She grew up in the area where she student taught, though she had not attended the high school where she was placed. Ann is patient and unassuming, yet
strong and confident. She has a peaceful demeanor and is deeply religious. Though she considers things carefully, she moves and responds swiftly.

Ann is flexible, yet with a clear vision of the kind of practitioner she wanted to be. Ann’s younger sibling is permanently disabled, and she cites this as her reason for seeking a special education degree. Ann often recalled her second-hand experience with special education as she watched her parents navigate her brother’s schooling. She therefore saw special education from both the family’s perspective and the educator’s perspective. I admired her ability to do so, and saw it in action often.

Ann also was aware of misconceptions about special education classes and students, in schools and even among her classmates. During our literacy class, Ann and Colleen were part of a small panel discussion, which they and the other special education majors in the class organized. They had noticed their classmates’ erroneous assumptions about special education programs, teachers and students, and wanted to address them. I gladly turned over a class period to their thoughtful question-and-answer session. Ann’s strong message during that discussion was that special education is ‘just good practice.’

**Graeme High School.** Ann McGinley had her student teaching experience at Graeme, a 9th to 12th grade high school with about 1000 students and 69 faculty members. Graeme High school is in “one of the top academically performing school districts in the state” (district web site), the only study site in that district. Far distant from the other three sites, Graeme served a predominantly rural community. Eighteen percent of its students were classified as minorities, and 51% received free or reduced lunch. Graeme
was situated on a sprawling campus with extensive athletic fields and a beautiful new building.

Ann’s cooperating teacher was Sandy Stout, who had taught at Graeme in this new location and at its prior, smaller site for more than a decade. I often saw Sandy interacting with students, and their mutual respect was evident to me. Sandy quietly was able to organize the many responsibilities of her course, including the seemingly endless stream of papers from content area teachers.

Classes at Graeme were mixed 9th to 11th grade special education resource classes. Sandy’s room was long and narrow, with an interactive board at one end and a small alcove on the left side. There were more desks than students; some students preferred to sit at a semi-circular table in rows facing the interactive white board. There were generally between 7 and 10 students in class at any period. A defining feature of the room was a large locking cabinet, which housed laptops to be signed out by students in this room and from other rooms in the hall. There was a slow but steady stream of students in and out of the room, removing or returning laptops.

Research Context: Federal and State Level Policy

As I described in the literature review, the writing policy environment of each school is shaped by forces at the federal, state and local level. Data analysis focuses on student teachers’ negotiations of these policies, players, texts and practices. To provide background on the larger policy forces at work in each school, I turn now to broad-stroke descriptions of the state and federal level policies operating in and through the placement sites and people within them.
Tests. All states are now required to show student performance through state assessments and to make those results available to the public. As is commonplace among states, this accountability has greatly influenced daily activity in schools (Fecho, Malozzi, & Schultz, 2007). Three classroom sites were in their state “testing years,” the 3rd grade, the 5th grade ELA resource class, and the high school skills development room.

Two of the sites, James Baldwin and Mountain View, administered a state writing test exam (which here I call PATH) during the study data collection phase. Yet the tests and their administration are a conspicuous absence in the data set. The reason for this is clear. School students signed statements promising not to talk about the test with their teachers, and as I discuss later, that would include me. Teachers, including the participants, were also forbidden to talk with me about the tests.

That is not to say that the data set includes nothing about the state writing tests; they were an overarching concern at all sites, throughout the data collection phase. The year of the study, the state released a new PATH writing test. Teachers were not told if, or how, the new test prompts would differ from prior years’. The PATH writing test directions and rubric were released, but the prompts were not, and they remained a mystery to the staff to whom I spoke. Additionally, I saw both classrooms near the time of the state testing. The posters, boards, word walls and displays had been covered over with papers, ostensibly so students could not see them during the test.

Another text and practice in the writing policy world of grades 3-9 is a computer-based multiple choice test, the Measure of Academic Progress, called “MAP.” This several-day-long test is given three times a year, at the start, midpoint, and end of each
year. Therefore, the MAP test was a recurring concern at three of the five sites. Writing is assessed in this test, so it is a text and a practice relevant to the study.

The MAP test offers immediate feedback to educators on students’ performance in reading, writing, math, science and, at some levels, history. As many educators have rightly noted, state assessments on these subjects take too long to grade and return in order for teachers to have any meaningful information before the students have moved on to the next grade. Therefore, the MAP test, as it was used in the schools I observed, allowed teachers to pinpoint students, and topics, that did not score well before the state test came along. This was another “set of tests to monitor [teacher and student] progress toward very uncertain ends” (Wixson & Pearson, 1998, p. 210).

Devised by a commercial assessment company, the MAP test claims, “For educators, it means at last having timely information that, used well, can change the course of a student’s school year — and life” (Northwest Evaluation Association, 2009). Students do not actually compose anything for the writing portion of the MAP test. Instead, the writing portion consists of multiple-choice items. One example shows that students are asked to pretend that they are writing, rather than write:

You are writing about a vacation you just had. How will you write it so the reader can picture what you saw?
1. I read comic books in the car as we drove.
2. The mountains were high and white with snow.
3. We ate a lot of good stuff and saw many things.
4. The highway was bumpy, and I got sick. (Northwest Evaluation Association, 2009)

Banal writing test prompts are common; the MAP test does one better by asking a multiple choice question about a hypothetical writing test prompt. This question, like the others in a sample exam I read, tests children’s reading skills more than their writing
performance. The answer, #2, seems to test students’ ability to choose which writing sounds most like what an adult would expect on a test, more than what a child might write. At the time of the study, 90% of public schools in the state used the MAP test (state Dept. of Ed website), the largest such adoption in the country. Therefore, in addition to the pressure on teachers and students to raise their scores on state tests, the entire state’s rate of success with the MAP program is being carefully watched by other states.

At the senior high level, 10th, 11th and 12th graders face end of course exams (EOC). Students also take exit exams, a graduation requirement. Receiving a diploma is tied to the successful completion of all coursework and the exit exams. In Graeme High School, both the PATH writing and EOC were a large part of the environment surrounding writing. These tests’ strong messages about what matters in writing were communicated to and through teachers, parents, children, administrators, and student teachers, messages which I will explore throughout my analysis chapters.

The acronymic names of tests and practice tests gained situated meaning, said and heard as words as potent parts of the daily work of teaching and learning. In the environment, ‘MAP,’ “PATH,” and “AR” (pronounced ‘ay arr’) were said with seriousness, and speakers and listeners seemed to share an understanding of their gravity. Their situated meanings adhered, were taken up quickly by student teachers, and entered our interactions as loaded terminology.

Test preparation. The tests themselves were strong presences in schools’ conceptions of writing pedagogy and assessment. Test preparation also exerted influence
through texts and practices. Students practiced writing to prompts in the months and weeks leading up to these tests, prompts similar to what had been used on prior years’ tests. This was the source of much talk and tension because teachers were unsure that their preparation would help.

Students in three sites—with Liz at Baldwin Elementary; with Colleen at Mountain View Middle; and with Ann at Graeme High—practiced for the PATH consistently and with increasing frequency closer to test time. Their preparation methods were similar and involved writing on practice prompts similar to prior years’ tests, and answering multiple choice questions about writing conventions and grammar.

Despite the new version of the PATH test, Sandy and Ann practiced with prompts from a workbook. One example read:

Surviving in strange or hostile places is a popular topic on television these days. Many people enjoy the challenge of surviving in these environments. Imagine that you are stranded on a tropical island for two weeks. Besides three days of food and clothes, you can take only three other personal items. Write an extended response in which you list these items and explain why you would take them. Include details and examples to support your discussion. (American Book Company, 2009)

It was easy for me to imagine how this preparation could strain students’ relationships with writing, as they responded (in one draft) to banal, decontextualized prompts, far removed from their real life concerns. The test preparation workbook corresponding to the writing portion contained readings, each approximately a page long, followed by multiple choice questions about the organization of the piece, punctuation, subject/verb agreement, and parallel structure.

Technology had a place in the writing test preparation atmosphere. It was both policy text and practice. As previously mentioned, the thrice-yearly practice tests were
administered (and practiced for) on computer. Accelerated Reader™ software was used consistently in both elementary school placements. The Graeme High School resource room used computer-based test preparation, PLATO™ and USATestPrep™, with increasing frequency leading up to May, state testing time. By that time, students were in the computer labs every other day.

Textbooks. There has been substantial research on teachers' use of commercial literacy programs driven by textbooks. This study builds on that research, as certain programs, frameworks, methods and materials recur across the data as important policy texts. In elementary schools, basal readers (Harcourt Trophies™) and their teachers’ editions (called “TEs” by participants) were the textual bases of many practices. In the middle school, several different series of English/language arts textbooks lined the shelves. The high school resource class relied primarily on the test practice workbooks as their course texts for reading and writing. These texts and practices matter in their own right for their embedded assumptions about teaching and learning writing embedded in them. In addition, the ways different people handled these texts were important to the student teachers’ interpretations of them. The texts were often a stand-in for curriculum, as the coming analysis chapters indicate.

Part 4: Data Analysis

The data come from my professional interactions with student teachers as their supervisor. From this data, I chose to analyze situations in which the student teachers encountered and attempted to manage different facets of their policy environment, situations which also presented me with challenges as a supervisor. In this final section, I
explain how I identify different elements of the writing policy environment, and then trace themes looking across participants’ experiences.

The primary focus is student teachers’ interpretation of and actions within the writing policy climate of their schools, as revealed throughout our professional relationship. My unit of analysis is the student teacher/university supervisor dyad. My secondary focus is the nature of our supervisory interactions. My multiple responsibilities influenced how I read and re-read data. During the data collection process, I wrote memos to myself about both the data and data collection process. As I read field notes and other interactions, I considered and reconsidered our interactions, participants’ actions, and my actions.

**Organization of data for analysis.** In this analysis, I identify three phases. The first is the opening weeks of student teaching, roughly from the first week of January to the middle of February. The second phase, from the middle of February to the middle of March, saw the administration of the state level writing test. Each school gave the state tests, and this had an effect on the day-to-day work of classes, even when students were not themselves completing the test. The final phase was from the middle of March until the end of student teaching (this date varied for each participant).

**Analytic framework.** In the review of the research, I drew attention to the writing policies, players, texts and practices of the current national policy environment, including the ways in which these policies positioned teachers. For my analysis, I again take up the terms *policies, players, texts and practices*. This section defines them as they relate to the data, attending to shades of meaning and including some related concepts.
**P/policies.** Saying that the policy environment includes policies may seem redundant. Yet defining policy is a challenge. As I explained in the literature review, people have different ideas about what counts as a policy. An additional difficulty in defining the term ‘policy’ arose in my experiences as a classroom teacher, and again in this research with student teachers: some policies have no identifiable source. They seem to exist in the air. The concept of “P/policy” (Evans et al., 2008) helps me define policy, while addressing the ephemeral nature of some policies, by grounding policy in people’s perceptions.

Plainly put, policies are what people think they are, and they are as official or serious as people believe them to be. Evans et al. (2008) draw distinctions between people’s perceptions of policies as official, “Policies,” or unofficial, “policies.” Following Evans et al., in my analysis I use Policy to denote “formal”, state-sanctioned, usually legislated education Policy” (abstract). These Policies include state standards, testing, and curriculum, mandated textbooks, and the like.

Small p policies include policies that people do not believe are based in state or federal regulations. These policies are “informal,” “institution-based, state ‘approved’ but non-legislated, pseudo-policy initiatives, often merely reflecting expectations and pressures” (abstract). They include “initiatives taken by schools themselves or induced by central government” (p. 390, emphasis added).

This concept allows me to address a policy as important, significant or valued when it is perceived as such by the people in the environment. I do not mean to say that my interpretations of the “Big P” or “little p” nature of the policy are shared by student
teachers, cooperating teachers or other policy players. Indeed, there are occasions in my analysis when the distinctions between "big P" policy and "little p" policy are quite rough, as people's perceptions of the importance of a policy differ.

**Texts.** Texts are some of the most visible elements of the policy environment. In the analysis, policy texts include those with certain authorship, as well as those with ambiguous authorship, or 'no' authorship. Policy texts include those texts produced far from the classroom, as well as those texts produced by the teacher in the classroom.

**Players.** To risk stating the obvious, policy environments are populated by people, and I underscore here the attention I will pay to the different influence, scope for choice, and power each policy player has in and through the local policy structure. First, I wish to clarify and explain my use of the term *players*.

It is customary in policy analysis to refer to people across the policy lifespan as *players*. I prefer the term *players* over another common term in policy analysis, *actors*. I believe *actors* not only highlights agency but implies equal agency across people and positions, which is inaccurate. *Actors* also implies a kind of one-way movement: actors act, and act with, but are not necessarily acted upon. On the other hand, a policy *player* plays in the policy environment, and can be played on, in the sense of playing on someone's fears or insecurities. Teachers are also played, or manipulated, by policy, another important image in this study.

I also appreciate the affordances of this term in the sense of *play* as in *room for manoeuvre*, another concept integral to this study. Additionally, players have the power to put something *in play*—an artefact, an idea, a practice—and make it a part of the scene,
in this case the policy environment. Again importantly to the notion of situated supervision and the policy environment, when players put something in play, it is difficult to control whether or how others take it up.

Players in the policy environment are crucial in (re)interpreting policies, creating them, challenging them, or dismissing them. Spillane (2002), in his policy research, notes “district administrators, curriculum specialists, and lead teachers...by virtue of formal position or informal role, are actively involved in developing district policies...and supporting teachers’ efforts to implement these policies” (377). As mentioned earlier, the cooperating teacher is usually the source of most policy information, and may be the most powerful policy player in a student teacher’s experience. I argue that the cooperating teacher also constructs, shapes and possibly subverts policies her/himself. Classroom level policies, which I describe further below, are also an important part of the student teacher’s policy setting, as is the cooperating teacher who created and maintains them.

Practices. Practices are also part of the policy environment, though I do not claim that all practices are part of the policy environment. In keeping with the overall approach to policy as equal to people’s perception of it, I include in the analysis those practices which people believe to be or claim to be rooted in P/policy. It is most important to note that I do not ascribe more or less importance or value to practices at the district, school, group or individual level. The power or importance of a practice is in the eye of the beholder.
District practices emerged in this study as a significant element of the policy environment. As I explained in the literature review, the ways in which policies are handled by those in power are as important a part of the policy structure as the policies themselves. Spillane (2002) finds that professional development activities at the district and building level are part of the policy landscape that teachers navigate, as these activities embody the thinking of administrators about policies' relations to teaching and learning.

Groups of teachers—grade level teams, or subject area departments—also have practices that, to them, count as policy. Student teachers also encountered these practices. Some examples of such group-level policy, drawn from my experience as a teacher and as a supervisor, include assessment policy, such as collaborative writing of course exams; curriculum policy, such as pacing and scheduling of units; or overriding of some policy, such as the ways in which students are identified for promotion.

Finally, the cooperating teachers initiated practices which they identified as policies—or which student teachers were led to believe were policies. These policy practices differed from other practices chiefly in the ways in which they were handled by the cooperating teacher. The data set is replete with examples of these policy practices, and sometime participants or cooperating teachers used the term 'policy' when describing them. These included weighting grades for report cards, the sequence of units, and many other practices that the cooperating teacher considered non-negotiable.

In the analysis chapters which follow, I use these concepts to help identify the many overlapping and interconnected elements of the policy environment. These
elements, separately and collectively, communicate site-specific messages about what it means to teach writing. My analysis includes my perceptions of those messages, as well as student teachers.’ I also describe how I saw these elements positioning the student teachers, and when possible, the positions in which student teachers saw themselves.

**Thematic Analysis**

The state writing exam came at a particular moment and catalyzed certain thoughts and conversations. I decided it would be a fruitful analytic move to look for phases in student teachers’ experiences, and in phases to look for themes. I identify themes across the four participants’ understandings of and actions within the policy/practice environment. Student teachers’ interpretations of policy and their resulting teaching decisions are the primary focus of the study; the role of supervision in those processes is the secondary focus. Therefore, in each phase I also identify themes across our professional interactions over the semester. In this way, I draw attention to the similarities in the student teacher/supervisor relationships across participants, and track changes over time.

In qualitative traditions, conceptual frames, but not a priori categories, are brought to research sites (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Deliberate data collection and reflection helped me develop an emic classification scheme derived from the data themselves (Merriam, 1998, p.157). I constructed categories through open and eventually focused coding that reflected a recurring pattern cutting across data. As the data indicated, I developed thematic threads. The thematic analysis I offer is a set of interrelated concepts, not merely a listing of themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Themes
emerged in participants’ talk, our interactions, and our written reflections, and I piece them together to form a picture of our professional interactions.

Although they do align chronologically, the themes that emerged suggest phases in student teachers’ views of the policy environments. These understandings clearly changed over time, but other factors—such as their taking on teaching responsibilities, and the administration of the state writing tests—also seemed to catalyze changes in participants’ understandings of their environment and their actions within it.

**Overview of analysis chapters.** The three analysis chapters which follow are arranged chronologically along the three phases I identified in student teachers’ experiences of their placements’ policy/practice relationships. In terms of the analysis work, the three chapters build on each other.

The thematic thrust of Chapter 4 illuminates the student teachers’ initial conceptions of the rules and expectations of their placement contexts. From our professional interactions over the first weeks of their student teaching, I select situations which featured the student teachers’ interactions with their policy environment, and which presented me challenges as a supervisor. I delineate the texts, players, practices and P/policies of each situation. I do this in a way that allows readers to become familiar with the particular contexts of each participant’s experience and with my approach to the multiple elements in each policy environment. I analyze similarities across student teachers’ interpretations of their policy system and beliefs about where they belong in that system. I also analyze thematically my professional relationships with each participant, and in particular the challenges I faced in the given interactions.
In Chapter 5, I analyze what I call the second phase of student teaching, when the participants assume full teaching responsibilities. The players, texts, practices and P/policies from Chapter 4 often reappear, new elements of the policy context emerge, and the relationships among these elements undergo some change. Again, I select key interactions to analyze in depth. The thematic focus of Chapter 5 is student teachers’ evolving awareness of their policy contexts and their places within them. At this stage, their power over their own professional decisions emerges as a key concern. Additionally, as this phase spans February into March, all five school sites administer state writing tests. Therefore, this chapter’s thematic analysis includes what the tests, and the preparation leading up to them, mean in practice for the participants. I also analyze my struggles as a supervisor, particularly against my own notion of what it means to be supportive.

Chapter 6 follows participants to the end of their student teaching. The situations I select reveal that they have each continued to notice more, and more subtle, elements of their policy contexts. The primary theme of this chapter explores how their increased awareness of the relationships between policy and practice relate to their thoughts about writing, and themselves as teachers, in and beyond their placement experiences. The secondary theme of this chapter brings to light the surprises and frustrations I experienced as a supervisor, including those from my own beliefs about the policy environment of each school.

Each chapter does slightly different work in probing the complex policy atmospheres of student teaching, revealing the maneuvers of student teachers within their
environments, and investigating the role of university supervision in the navigation between policy and practice. I turn now to this analysis, and the beginning of student teaching in Spring Semester 2009.
Chapter 4: "Don’t Reinvent the Wheel"

Introduction

My primary concern in this investigation is learning how student teachers understood the relationships between policy and practice in their schools and how these understandings informed their teaching. In this chapter, I analyze student teachers’ initial conceptions of the rules, expectations, people, materials, and practices that composed the policy environment in their school sites overall. Whether or not these people, policies and practices directly involved writing or teaching writing, they all impacted student teachers’ practice of writing and other subjects. Therefore, in some cases in this chapter, the connections between policy and writing practice are not immediately apparent. I describe what student teachers considered policy in their schools, and what those policies meant to them and to their teaching. I pay special attention to ways in which policy encouraged student teachers to reproduce existing practices and their relationships to policy, people, and materials.

Throughout this study, I examine the relationships between practice and policy that student teachers encountered in their placements, from their perspective and from mine. In this chapter, I argue the following: 1) student teachers initially experience the discourse as unified; 2) they and I both see the relationship between policy and practice as one-way and top-down; and 3) they and I see their initial positions as student teachers as imitative or mimetic.

The secondary focus of this study is the role of supervision in student teachers’ sense-making and navigation of their placement sites, particularly regarding the
relationships between policy and practice. My supervisory practice was predicated upon my close reading of context, including people in context, using ethnographic approaches. As a supervisor, I met with, observed, and communicated in person and electronically with student teachers throughout their field placement experiences. I was prepared to observe classrooms and schools while taking ethnographic-style field notes and paying attention as much as humanly possible (Waite, 1995) to these busy contexts. Reading the lay of the land and making sense of it all was challenging, and I was supervising for the first time.

This chapter has two sections. The first section deals with the many rules, expectations, people, and materials student teachers encountered; what sense they made of them and the relationships among them; and their thoughts about the roles they saw available to them as student teachers in their schools. The second section explores some of the challenges of supervision in these opening weeks of student teaching. My discussion of the policy elements includes a general discussion of data across sites, and one or two illustrative cases. In each example, student teachers encountered multiple sources of multiple messages. For clarity, I present two dimensions of policy/practice relationships: texts/practices, and people/practices. But these are not distinct categories, and in the reality of everyday practice, people, materials, P/policies, and practices are joined together in many ways.

Policy Texts and Practices

This section describes the many books, binders, and other materials and texts that the student teachers encountered in their first weeks of student teaching, and analyzes
how the cooperating teachers and other school personnel related these texts to practice. First I describe some of the books, materials, and text-based practices that made up subtle yet important parts of student teachers’ surroundings. I then explain the prominence of two groups of texts in student teachers’ early experiences—lesson plans and tests—which functioned as both text and practice.

**Teachers’ editions, welcome work, and more.** Student teachers’ understandings of the policy context surrounding texts unfolded over time, though the process began immediately with first impressions. As I explained in Chapter 3, what is important is the way in which the student teacher interpreted the kind of weight given to a rule, a practice, or a text, rather than some objective sense of its importance. Most of these materials were “Big P” Policy—mandated and official. Some, however, were likely “little p” policies whose use was approved or encouraged but not strictly mandated. I combine those texts which seemed to have official status and those which seemed to be accepted rather than required in order to provide a richer understanding of the ways in which student teachers made sense of the materials and practices they encountered.

Many documents, and how they were handled, sent messages to student teachers about what was valued and preferred regarding writing and how it should be taught. Despite the appearance of neutrality, documents, materials, textbooks, and the practices tied to them all hold meaning about teaching and learning. Fairclough (1996) pointed out that this appearance of neutrality can go far toward encouraging certain ideas or positions: “Ideology is most effective when its workings are least visible....texts do not typically spout ideology. They so position the interpreter through their cues that she
brings ideologies to the interpretations of texts – and reproduces them in the process!” (p. 85). Indeed, these “cues” came to student teachers from an assortment of materials, including, for instance, hallway displays, curriculum and pacing guides, testing rubrics, teachers’ editions of commercial textbooks, and handouts at staff meetings and workshops.

Del Carmen Salazar (2008) suggests that in addition to formal big P policies, “indirect” (p. 43) and “unstated” (p. 351) literacy policies impact teachers’ understandings and practices of literacy, including teaching materials and posters. Indeed, there were writing process posters in all sites, and in all of them, this process was presented as four or five steps, beginning with “prewriting” and ending with “publication.” In high school and middle school, graphic organizers were required in students’ writing as an early step (if not a first step); in the high school classroom where one student teacher was placed, there were posters of several possible organizers across the walls. The elementary school sites also used graphic organizers for writing, but it was unclear if this was Policy. In one elementary school, a bubble map was used as a pre-writing organizer; in another, students wrote on paper shaped like a hamburger, which a teacher told me was to help young ones write “your basic five sentence perfect paragraph” (field notes, 9/26). These P/p materials suggest that in sometimes subtle ways, schools were communicating to student teachers, as well as to students, faculty, and parents, what was valued and acceptable regarding the teaching and learning of writing.
Not all P/policy texts were physical artifacts; some were written on the board. In multiple sites, I saw the English/Language Arts portion of the day begin with "welcome work" that was presumably connected to writing. It consisted of some sentences written on the board with which students worked at the beginning of the ELA portion of their day. This sentence work required different kinds of tasks, though they were chiefly related to editing. In one elementary school, this work seemed to be more about handwriting practice; in another, students corrected agreement and spelling in the sentences. In the middle school, I saw students copying sentences from the board, then circling the cause and underlining the effect in each one. In the high school, the sentences on the board lacked punctuation and contained spelling mistakes; volunteers punctuated and corrected spelling. These texts and practices communicated to student teachers that isolated technical skills are part of how writing should be taught and learned, and that this process could be repeated daily as part of a routine.

Among the most visible texts were teaching materials. As may be expected, each student teacher was presented with a set of materials, most noticeably commercial textbooks, for her teaching. These texts were not simply handed to student teachers by the cooperating teacher, but were given to them along with other texts, talk, and directions. I was present for a conversation that took place soon after such a sharing of resources. I offer here data from this meeting as an example of the overall image of unity that student teachers encountered between texts and practices in their first weeks. I also give context for this meeting in terms of the materials, practices, and people involved. This includes information about the school and about the professional relationship
between the student teacher, Michelle, and her cooperating teacher, Marjorie. This information contextualizes how these materials, rules, and expectations were shared with Michelle, and provides background regarding how we received this information and how we both proceeded after this meeting. While I tell Michelle’s story, I also refer to similar aspects of other student teachers’ experiences.

As I explained in Chapter 3, Michelle had been in Marjorie’s 2nd grade classroom for the semester prior to student teaching as part of the teacher cadet program. She was also local to the area and very motivated to be hired at this particular school. These factors had some impact on her experience, as this analysis will show, but in most ways, her student teaching experience paralleled that of the other student teachers.

When I visited Michelle at her school the semester before student teaching, Marjorie and other teachers and administrators talked with me about the school’s history, goals, and reputation. It seemed to me a dynamic and exciting school, recently the recipient of a multi-year grant written by teachers to support arts-based education. It was the only school in the district to make AYP three of the years prior to the study. I also learned that the school principal discouraged faculty from talking about test scores, or testing, at faculty meetings.

In addition to eliminating testing talk during faculty meetings, the principal also supported her faculty’s policy engagement at the state level. An active 3rd grade team took building concerns to state department of education meetings in the capitol at least once a year and reported the latest news back to their colleagues. Teachers spoke to me of the principal’s efforts with admiration and appreciation. This information did color
my sense of what was to come for Michelle’s student teaching experience. I was both
glad to hear about the impact a single administrator could have on a faculty, and curious
about how the overall school culture was reflecting or reflected by classroom culture.

Yet there was also tension around the meeting, conceivably impacting Marjorie’s
selection of the books and other materials, and how she talked about them. In short,
difficult family situations had developed for Michelle at the end of the fall term, and her
attendance at her placement school (and at our literacy class) was spotty prior to the
winter break. Marjorie contacted me in mid-December, worried that Michelle was
unprepared to begin taking full control of the class beginning in January. Marjorie felt
the few lessons Michelle had taught in the fall term had been disorganized. Marjorie
thought that giving Michelle a lesson plan format would address some of this problem,
and she had one for her. She then requested that the three of us meet before school
resumed in January.

I refer to data from my field notes taken during the meeting among Michelle,
Marjorie and me because they include policy texts which were present, and
consequential, across all school sites in this study. This meeting also is indicative of the
kinds of messages that accompanied texts in other participants’ experiences, especially
regarding their connections to practice.

I had reflected about this meeting in advance; it would be my first meeting in a
supervisory role. I was prepared to talk about the three of us as professionals with our
own goals and roles, with Marjorie and I joined in support of Michelle. I did share these
ideas at the start of the meeting, and also offered myself as a resource and support for
Maijorie in her complex and often-thankless role of cooperating teacher. However, Maijorie did most of the talking. Possibly because of her concern over Michelle’s readiness to teach, Maijorie seemed eager to communicate large amounts of information rapidly. In the paragraphs below, I paraphrase her dialogue from my field notes, though I also include important phrases I wrote down in the moment as Maijorie spoke.

In this school, Language Arts was held from 7:30 – 11:15 each day and included “word skills” and phonetics, though I was unsure what Maijorie meant by those terms. Writing took place after lunch, and usually was based on the story students read in the morning. Maijorie wanted Michelle to submit lesson plans to her one week in advance, including long-range plans, following a template used by the grade level, called “Cunningham 4 block.” She had given Michelle teachers’ editions of commercial textbooks, and advised that she “go right by the book to cover all the standards.” She took account of Michelle’s novice status and suggested because she was “just starting out,” she should “just do it from the book. Then tweak it.” Maijorie wanted Michelle to get the “bare bones” under control, and not place too much emphasis on designing activities for the students at first. Maijorie gave Michelle two weeks to pull materials out of Maijorie’s teaching resources for the following two weeks’ plans. She concluded by notifying Michelle that the Language Arts coordinator would be coming to talk from 11:00 – 12:00 about either the new state writing test or the new standards. She also proclaimed proudly, “I know these standards inside and out,” but admitted there were some new additions to the standards she was not sure of (field notes, 1/7). Many of these materials and practices were straightforward directions, as well as subtle cues, that
Michelle was supposed to do specific things in a particular way. I now turn to an analysis of what was shared during the meeting.

In this meeting, Marjorie presented a persuasive image of successful teaching and professionalism. Marjorie offered Michelle explicit guidance, textual resources, her expertise, and even her own materials, created and collected over decades of teaching. She was proactive and organized, and her "expertise implies certainty and state of the art practice" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001, p. 53). I was grateful Marjorie had invited me for this meeting; what I learned was valuable for my professional relationship with Michelle and my growth as a supervisor.

This information-heavy meeting specified several texts, instructions, rules, practices, and people—and the preferred relationships among them. The daily schedule, long-range plan template, new standards, and new state test are "big P" Policies. Policy texts include lesson plans, long-range plans, and the teacher’s edition textbook. These texts were common across student teachers’ experiences. A "little p" policy text included the resources of the cooperating teacher. Invested with the power of past success, these resources (I imagined) were, like Marjorie, working hand in hand with the standards, the book, the lesson plans, and the curriculum. Questions of what should be taught and how it should be taught were not at issue in the meeting; to me, the challenge in the air seemed to be how well Michelle could keep up with this model of success.

Two telling metaphors. I return now to my field notes from this meeting for additional data. In this meeting, Marjorie offered Michelle and me two metaphors to explain how Michelle should think about the materials she was sharing with her and how
they should connect to her practice. These were, in short, Marjorie’s conceptions of the relationship of policy to practice. Even as I wrote them down in my notes during the meeting, they struck me as key phrases, and I turn to analyze those now.

In the first metaphor, Policy, planning and practice enjoy the unity of a human body. “Marjorie sees this long-range plan as the bones. The lesson plans are the skin, and the clothes are the activities.” Lesson plans, a local level Policy, flesh out the skeletal structure of long-range plans, another local Policy, referred to also as “bare bones.” These bones are covered by skin—the standards, which are state-level Policies. The activities, the clothes, are chosen by the teacher. Michelle’s role was to dress the body, as if clothing a mannequin. This policy-and-practice body, made of parts, some of which come from far away, Michelle was to animate through careful application of activities.

I have been helped to see some of the assumptions implicit in such a metaphor through critical policy analysis. Connecting local conceptions of policy to larger discourses of power and equality challenges the notion that policy is value-neutral. “Such approaches critique existing forms of domination, that which is made to seem “natural” or “inevitable,” in order to clear the way for a possible world of social justice and non-domination” (Levinson, Sutton & Winstead, 2009, p. 769). Marjorie shared this corporal metaphor for the local connections between policy and practice as a kind of argument that it reflected the natural state of things.

Marjorie used another metaphor that captured her professional opinion of how policy and practice should relate, and Michelle’s role in policy implementation. Again in
reference to Michelle’s use of teachers’ editions and other materials to plan her lessons, Marjorie said, “Don’t reinvent the wheel.” This well-known and often-used metaphor expresses the futility of trying to rediscover what is already known and working well. Through the wheel, Marjorie offered the image of curriculum, assessment, and practice already aligned to each other and to standards. This process of policy implementation was already in motion; Michelle could roll with it.

The status quo—the wheel already invented and turning—suggests that the ways in which the policies had already been interpreted and implemented by Marjorie and the faculty at her school was the way Michelle should interpret them herself. She should apply the practices already figured out for her by master teachers. Texts and practices are joined to each other, to policy, and to the cooperating teacher.

Whether or not Marjorie’s goal was to control the meeting and Michelle’s teaching, she gave the impression that control was desirable, and uncertainty to be avoided. This image of teacher professionalism is not uncommon. Stevens (2003) recalls the ways in which teachers were positioned relative to policy in the words of speakers at a national professional development conference regarding the Reading First legislation when it was introduced. The speaker, Louise Moats, said, “Teachers don’t want endless choices. They want structure. They want fewer choices. They don’t want to invent their own curriculum. They want to know what works.” Stevens analyzes those comments:

Through her words, Moats paints the picture of a teacher whose job is to closely follow the reading program, reading the script.... This is a teacher who “wants” products ... who declines engaging in the rich, substantive, and sometimes
confusing complexities of literacy development; and who is externally motivated to maintain the appearance of instruction. (Stevens, 2003, p. 666)

The tight alignment among the policy environment relieved student teachers of the responsibility of personally navigating the connections among standards, assessment, and curriculum.

Another student teacher, Liz, was given and expected to use several Policy texts in her 3rd grade placement, including what she called “your basic basal reader” and a workbook that accompanied it. For each story in the reader, the workbook provided a “spelling page, vocabulary page... [and] a test and two short-answer questions” (FG, 4/19). In addition to the basal reader and workbook, Liz was given a set of texts that had complex relationships to policy. She was given “a black binder of Sonya’s long range plans,” complete with “a tab for 3rd grade standards.” The binder also included a chart of “each subject area, the standards attached to it, and what Sonya has done to meet that standard in the past, or what her plans were had I not been here” (POC 4/6). These texts, and the practices they encouraged, showed Liz that written records of the explicit connections between classroom-level practice and state-level mandate was a high priority. Furthermore, the paperwork involved seemed to imply that these connections should remain stable from year to year: “what Sonya has done to meet that standard in the past.” Liz should expect to be teaching reading from a basal reader, and teaching writing would involve responses to those readers. This image of interrelation of texts, and of those texts’ multiple connections to practice, repeated across the schools in this study.

I began to consider how I could invite student teachers to think about these issues with the goal of beginning to unpack the complexity of the many texts and practices
cooperating teachers offered. Then I thought of several points we might discuss about the nature of the curriculum, how else the curriculum could be connected to the lives of a specific group of students, and any room for invention by student teachers. Even if they felt warmly toward the support of a prescribed curriculum, they could reflect on what their context was allowing, and discouraging, in terms of meeting students’ needs. I did not want to increase the stress on them, but also did not want to stand by silently while everything seemed to be running smoothly as experts passed on knowledge to novices. There would be challenges to this, as other researchers have noted, considering the larger policy contexts that surrounded the classroom:

The imposition of fixed standards predefines both the process or procedures for teaching and learning to teach and the content of what should be taught, regardless of local conditions that determine what particular students need at particular times....teachers’ learning is bound by, and requires compliance with, a set of predefined standards, and the alignment of curricula and assessment that they entail. (Delandshere & Petrosky, 2004, p. 7)

Teachers using texts to support instruction is sensible and prudent; what was happening here seemed to be different than that. Now I turn to the positions offered to student teachers in and through the guides, materials, books, and other texts that they were given.

In the meeting among Michelle, Marjorie and me, Michelle was positioned as a novice, in need of guidance when addressing the many challenges of teaching. This guidance would be, in large part, provided by the many books, materials, and policy texts Marjorie shared. For instance, Marjorie indicated that the problem of meeting or covering standards was solved by teaching lessons straight from the teachers’ edition: “go right by the book to cover all the standards” (field notes, 1/9) The teachers’ edition was assumed to be oriented to the state standards. I am not the first to point out standards as
part of student teachers’ experiences: “The activities in which prospective teachers have
to engage in order to ‘meet the standards’ become part of learning to teach and frame
their understanding of teaching: the policies prescribe the meaning of teaching”
(Delandshere & Petrosky, 2004, p. 6). I add to this discussion from the supervisor’s
perspective, and the challenges of an inquiry into the standards and other P/policy
materials that student teachers navigate, including smaller-scale texts such as textbooks
and teacher resources.

The teachers’ edition solves the problem of being a novice. As Marjorie said
during the meeting, because Michelle is “just starting out,” she should “just do it from the
book. Then tweak it.” What was going to be taught, when, and possibly how (the
activities) should not worry Michelle at this early stage. Those questions are answered in
the teachers’ edition textbook. There is the implication in Marjorie’s statement that later
in her practice, with more experience, Michelle might then begin to innovate or
experiment—“tweak it.” Ball (2006) refers to “guidelines and indicators, benchmarking
and sharing of best practice” (p. 38) as subtle features of the policy environment called
“soft law mechanisms,” which contribute to the maintenance of the status quo.
Sometimes, policy messages were communicated by texts less visible or politically
charged than standards or high-stakes tests.

At this point, I perceived that the job of student teachers was to follow the rules,
and those rules were embodied in texts, lesson plans, and the approval of the cooperating
teacher. Their position seemed to me—and I would soon learn, to them—to be mimetic.
This troubled me for several reasons.
Classroom practices that shift the status quo in favor of inclusive pedagogies are arguably more challenging in the present results-driven climate... [Teachers] are discouraged at their schools to be independent decision-makers and creative thinkers and are, instead, expected to be passive recipients and translators of a script, teacher’s manual, or curriculum guide. We also find they may have a hard time visualizing the implementation of alternative approaches, because they rarely see them being used at their school. (Altwerger et al., 2004, p. 126)

I concluded that they were not quite in the role of an apprentice, who learns by observing and reflecting on the work of the master. It seemed they were to learn through embracing the texts and imitating the practices of the expert teacher. Michelle’s, for instance, was in a high performing school, the only school in the district of any level to make AYP. This school also attracted the children of faculty, and had embraced an arts-based curriculum. They were succeeding, on many counts. That success, combined with a newcomer status, could understandably immobilize a student teacher, and serve as strong justification for the textbooks, standards, and lesson plans at the center of the practice. Being new was a deficit to be overcome—quickly—by imitation of successful local practice.

It is well understood that school texts and practices hold and encourage particular ideas regarding reading, writing, and literacy. There is also widespread agreement that curriculum, texts, and standards can shape teachers’ thinking.

The standardized curriculum and standardized testing that are now commonplace in American schools and endorsed by NCLB both indoctrinate and manipulate students and teachers, forcing narrow understandings of what it means to educate and to be educated, and as this continues across generations, the cycle becomes increasingly difficult to break as educators come to understand reading [and writing] as it is reified in particular practices in classrooms. (Edmonson & D’Urso, 2007, p. 82)

The standards were not disconnected from other policies and practices; they were part of a system which the student teachers experienced in its totality. Furthermore, cooperating
teachers, as all teachers, are under pressure to meet or exceed standards. These factors and more were part of student teachers’ experiences.

These opening weeks were characterized by cooperating teachers telling student teachers what to do, when, and usually, how. Big P and little p policy texts communicated messages immediately and constantly. Student teachers experienced the rules, expectations, traditions, and materials as unified. The seeming—and real—unity among policies, texts, and practices may have glossed over diversity of opinion, or pushed aside problematic issues. These texts, materials, and practices were more than a backdrop for each student teacher’s early experiences in schools; they were a structure and a process.

I knew these posters, graphic organizers, welcome work, and other materials held ideas about writing and teaching writing, the power of which it was important for student teachers to grasp, especially in scripted situations which, by their nature, tend to silence the voices of students and teachers. However, in these opening weeks, I did not always know what the student teachers were thinking of these texts and the practices attached to them. In the hectic first weeks of student teaching, student teachers might not have been thinking of the often subtle messages these texts held. Bates and Burbank (2008) point out:

One current challenge that supervisors face is the impact of NCLB on the classroom practices of many teachers. Specifically, the narrowness with which student teachers quickly accommodate to classroom practices that appear to be responsive to NCLB often takes place without considering the impact on student learning. (p. 2)

I was yet unsure if or how student teachers might “accommodate” to the various texts and practices around them, but I believed that through careful observation, I would gradually
learn. Partially so that I could learn more about the contexts around these texts, and partially out of respect for the difficulty of student teachers' opening weeks, I determined I would not yet talk about the meaning of writing within these materials, unless the student teacher raised this issue first. I knew from our literacy class the prior semester that these student teachers were prepared for this type of discussion of the values behind curricula. I thought it best to follow their lead, at least in the beginning.

Student teachers did not wait long to express their thoughts about this overarching attitude toward teaching and learning, and about the positions they were expected to hold. Later in this chapter, I describe Michelle's response after the meeting with Marjorie. Another of the first to speak up was Colleen. Colleen was placed with cooperating teacher Marni in a 1st grade special education resource class. Colleen, too, had been given a scripted program, reinforced by a page-by-page lesson plan format, which I analyze in the next section. At the end of her first week, Colleen informed me of her disapproval in a way that also provided insight into how she understood her role: "I know I must follow Mrs. Navin's examples and lesson plans which makes it difficult for me. I am just the student. She uses SRA for math and reading. I must realize that I am the student, not the teacher. It seems to me that when everything is written out step by step, the art of teaching is lost and some children can get left behind" (Reflection, week 1).

Being "just the student," Colleen learned she was not in a position to question why the texts, planning, and instruction are one, or in what other ways they could be tied to standards and assessment. Colleen's thinking about her cooperating teacher's practices, and the texts in use at her school, showed she had made distinctions between teaching
children and teaching curriculum. Though I was holding back my professional opinions at this early stage, discussing with student teachers the implications of policy seemed to me more difficult, and more necessary, as time went on.

Lesson plans. Lesson plans reinforced the impression of alignment among people, texts, and practices, and emerged as a more potent policy force than I could have anticipated. Lesson plans did more than present a record of student teachers’ thinking about what to teach and how to teach it. They also tested how well student teachers understood what was expected of them. Submitted in advance, lesson plans indicated that student teachers had earned a chance to operate in a teacher role. These are relevant considerations for the present study because of lesson plans’ embedded assumptions about teaching, learning, and student teachers’ positions in those processes.

What struck me were the many policy messages built into these plans, including what to teach, how to teach, and how to connect various policies to classroom practice. Moreover, these messages were generally hidden. Fairclough has indicated how texts can quietly encourage and maintain particular ways of thinking: “The operation of ideology can be seen in terms of ways of constructing texts which constantly and cumulatively ‘impose assumptions’ upon text interpreters and text producers, typically without either being aware of it” (Fairclough, 1996, p. 83). Research has explored the value of lesson plans and planning. Here, I mean to draw attention to the ways in which lesson plans reinforced the idea that policy and practice connected in strong—and commonsensical—ways, and how they positioned the student teacher as policy interpreter and subject.
Each school site had a preferred or required lesson plan format. The university did not require a lesson plan style but expected student teachers to follow the format that their cooperating teacher used. Student teachers’ lesson plans also were to be made available to university supervisors. Each student teacher therefore was required to write these plans according to template, submit them in advance to the cooperating teachers, determine activities for the plans, and adhere to the daily schedule. In three sites, teachers were required to submit lesson plans to an administrator. Student teachers, therefore, saw their cooperating teachers and other faculty enacting this policy.

Some lesson plans read like scripts, with opening and closing statements and focus questions. For example, Liz described the school’s lesson plans to me as “really involved,” the format requiring “the standards, each subject area, an opening” statement, and then statements of “activities, ‘SW’ students will, ‘TW’ teacher will,” followed by “focus questions,” “page numbers, materials,” and then a summary “closing ‘today we learned about...’” (FG 4/19). Similarly, Colleen’s required lesson plans were broken up by time and included the lessons by number. For example, according to Colleen’s lesson plans, Monday was reading lesson #68, Tuesday was reading lesson #69, and Wednesday was reading lesson #70. On these plans, the lesson number was followed by pages read from the teachers’ edition for each day, and what assessment was scheduled. I wondered if teachers may have been conceding to the lesson plan policy in letter, but not in spirit. However, my observations, and student teachers’ accounts, showed that the teachers did teach what they had planned.
In Liz’s experience, another layer of connectivity among people, practices, texts, and policies existed in her classroom: lesson plans were read by the children. “When I was observing my first few weeks, [Sonya] put the lesson plans on the overhead. The kids read them” (POC, 4/2). This was different from the teacher writing an agenda on the board; apparently, the teacher shared the entire lesson plan with the students. Not only the teachers, but the students as well, were expected to be aware of the connections among classroom practice, district accountability, and state mandates.

I was concerned about the interpretations of writing, and assumptions about teaching and learning, that the lesson plan formats reflected. In most cases, there seemed to be a focus on ‘covering’ content.

Such coverage of reading and writing as that prescribed by textbook publishers and conservative coalitions of textbook adoption procedures proposes that the reading and writing curriculum follow the book, avoid controversy, and assure accountability as measured by tests of reading comprehension. (Agnello, 2001, p. 86)

That the proper materials must be used, sometimes along with page numbers, baffled me. More troubling to me was the implied—if not directly stated—message that all of the students’ and teachers’ actions, as well as their learning, could and should be predetermined. I perceived that specific relationships among P/policies, people, practices, and materials were being played out and reinforced through lesson plans and lesson planning. I was ready to encounter any kind of lesson plan format, but I was surprised at how many I saw were “script-like” and that, in one case, students read them.

Again, a critical policy lens has helped me see that such texts and practices focus “teacher and pupil attention to the articulation of clear and observable outcomes and attendant learning-teaching interactions designed to maximize the probability that such
outcomes will be attained” (Adams, 2007, p. 7). Lesson plans became a way for student teachers to encode practice, display skill, and indicate readiness to teach in their policy context. They were an accountability mechanism, and a Policy that, as Ball (2008) points out, a way “to organize human forces and capabilities into functioning systems” (p. 41-42). I wondered if lesson plans were acting as stand-ins for an actual visit by the principal or other administrator to ensure compliance.

During those opening weeks, student teachers talked with me often, but not always, in a kind of matter-of-fact tone about these lesson plans and the expected relationships among people, rules, expectations, texts, and teaching. Student teachers may have anticipated alignment, or expected things to be straightforward. Student teacher Ann expressed such a viewpoint in an email about what she learned in the first weeks: “I guess the rest was just normal stuff, like seeing how things are done, where your curriculum and goals come from, and just seeing all the responsibilities of teachers” (1/15). With little exception, student teachers at first seemed to regard their policy surroundings as “normal.”

However, I began to see that their policy surroundings were more than the sum of their parts. Texts, practices, P/policies, and people were presented as aligned and unified, top-down and one-way, in what Delandshere & Petrosky (2004) describe as a “fixed political will that shapes [student teachers’] capacities, who they become as teachers, and positions them primarily as implementers of content and pedagogy as defined by the standards” (p. 7). I was concerned about how student teachers understood this tight arrangement, and the connected messages about their role and position. As I will explain
in a later section, I did not have to wait long for them to begin sharing their thoughts with me. Student teachers were already looking at their contexts and beginning to voice concerns to me about contradictions they noticed. They did not take everything at face value all the time.

**Tests and test preparation.** It is well known that tests communicate strong messages about what is valued and shape what students are taught. I anticipated that tests would be significant in student teachers' experiences, based on their reports from their field placement schools the prior semester. They had returned to the university each week with what seemed like a new vocabulary—"MAP," "HSAP," "AR," and "PATH." These acronyms for tests and test preparation programs were so common across local districts that suddenly my entire literacy class that fall was speaking a new language.

Indeed, tests were woven through each student teacher's experience. This was not limited to a particular document or single practice test; there were many layers to student teachers' experiences with testing. Tests and test preparation were a part of the unity of policy and practice, and sometimes served as a kind of justification for everything operating efficiently. Student teachers quickly learned that state assessments and end-of-course exams pushed their daily schedules. To anchor this section, I analyze two student teachers' experiences with state mandated testing in the opening weeks of student teaching. Both Liz and Ann entered classrooms where testing and test preparation were in full swing. (In later chapters, I will discuss Michelle and Colleen's experiences with testing, as they encountered it later in the semester.) This first example illustrates how
quickly the student teachers began to make sense of what writing and teaching writing meant in their placement schools.

Writing policies and practices encourage student teachers to think in particular ways about students. Before my first visit to Liz in her 3rd grade classroom, Liz sent me a message with a request from Sonya, her cooperating teacher, regarding the teaching of writing. In it, Liz indicated what she had already learned about her context, including what counted as good writing in preparation for the state test. I reproduce here the email in its entirety:

My host teacher wanted me to ask for your advice with our kids' writing. There are some very gifted students, but the majority of them are regressing to bad habits. They often leave out words in their writing and then throw them in (orally) during presentations, their writing begins on topic and then slowly goes out into left field, they forget to capitalize the first letter of a sentence, and they are often completely ignoring punctuation. Any advice on how to help them become more independent writers? My teacher worries for the 3rd grade writing exam this spring. (1/9)

This e-mail is dated January 9; student teaching had started the week before. Therefore, within the first few days of the semester, Liz had made several observations about the writing policy environment and those in it. Though I suspected that Liz might be repeating her cooperating teacher’s words, it was apparent she had learned what writing skills were valued in her classroom, how those skills were taught or reviewed, and what was appropriate for teachers and students to do in preparation for the state writing test.

I did not know for how long Liz and Sonya’s students had been writing in preparation for the test, or what kinds of writing they were doing. It was also unclear from Liz’s message how students’ prior writing related to what they did specifically for the test. The message revealed instead that Liz (and likely her cooperating teacher)
focused on what most students could not do. She mentioned their mistakes, their ad-hoc revisions, and their forgetfulness. Composing successfully in Liz’s context involved single-draft writing, unwavering focus, and attention to punctuation and capitalization. There also was a vague notion of children policing their own grammar while writing.

However, when I read Liz’s email, the students’ writing activities she described looked like successful drafting. Students were writing without concern for mechanics, and they shared aloud. In these sharing sessions, students revised in the moment. The test arguably influenced a different focus on students’ writing. I saw the problems were made to look as if they rested firmly with the students and their bad habits, rather than in the testing and the bad practices it encouraged.

Researchers and educators have certainly been interested in the kinds of writing encouraged by state tests, and how teachers interpret testing requirements and preparation. I want to draw attention to one aspect of student writing in Liz’s message, as a way of showing how the conceptions of writing in test preparation can frame student teachers’ views of writing and of their students as successful writers. Liz mentioned that “the majority of them are regressing to bad habits.” Since she could not know this first hand, I assumed Liz was trusting Sonya’s viewpoint that students were somehow not performing as well as they had been, or were seemingly forgetting something Sonya had already taught them. Schultz and Fecho (2000) have addressed that children’s writing can be seen as regressing, if teachers assume some kind of linear model of writing development:

When students attempt a more difficult task, (e.g. a new genre) writers may appear to ‘go backwards’ in terms of their use of mechanics or other writing
conventions. If viewed within a sequential and uniform conception of writing development—in other words, with the assumption that all children follow a single trajectory from novice to expert—this pattern might be cause for concern. (p. 58)

It is entirely possible that the test preparation curricula and assessments encouraged a few mechanistic skills, and an idea that students would progress, through practice, in measurable ways. Instead, they seemed to be going backwards.

Testing also shaped the ways in which student teachers came to know their students. I was surprised to hear this kind of negative view of students’ writing from Liz after our months together in the literacy course. A deficit perspective seemed to have replaced the hopeful, student-centered attitude Liz expressed during our literacy class. The beliefs teachers develop about students’ abilities can linger beyond the classroom context (Graves, 2002), and I wondered if my literacy class had or had not prepared Liz for what she would encounter about teaching writing.

It was not only the view of writing that shaped the way Liz may have thought about her students; the language used in and around the writing test and preparation also had the power to shape how she saw them, as Stein (2004) points out:

The acts of naming and defining social problems hold great relevance for how policies shape practitioners’ interpretations of their clientele. The very language, terms, phrases, and constructions embedded in policies suggest particular orientations to a given phenomenon..... Names for individuals and categories of individuals within a policy text engender multiple meanings reflecting various orientations....[and] Circumscribe the daily sense making in the language and routines of schooling. (p. 12)

The language in Liz’s message about “independent writers” made me wonder in what context she had heard that phrase, which seemed to me particularly loaded. The instructional moves in Liz’s school attached to test preparation minimized Liz’s chances
to learn how students were using language to compose, but emphasized what was assumed to be important on the test.

I had learned some background information that helped me in going forward with Liz’s situation. My reading of the schools’ contexts was a complicated process but central to my supervisory practice. Several contextual factors contributed to what Liz, in her email, had called Sonya’s worry over the test. Unlike the school in which Michelle was placed, this school had not made AYP the past three years. Adding to the tension, the middle school that these students would attend had been subjected to extensive state intrusion the year before Liz’s placement because of several years of unacceptable performances on state tests.

I imagined that Sonya, a long-time teacher and part of the neighborhood community, felt the pressure to keep students’ scores at a passing level and to protect her school from state intervention. I could only guess at how she may have been working with her students in order to bring about test scores that would reduce the risk of state involvement. It seemed to me in that way understandable that Liz would join Sonya in her drive to increase students’ test scores. But what was yet unclear to me was how Liz was making sense of this experience, and if or how Sonya spoke with Liz regarding the testing pressures.

There was no simple relationship between state level policy and classroom level practice. Sonya was in the real-life scenario of raising test scores as a form of action with the goal of saving her school from state intervention. In that sense, she was helping Liz learn the complex mechanisms that reach into everyday classroom realities. There
are several reasons why it was, and is, important for me to point out the context
surrounding the test. I was bound to help Liz as her supervisor, and learning more about
the history of her school helped me deal with issues as they arose. Additionally, as a
researcher, I am making public the activities of specific people in a specific place and
time. Representing the sometimes uncomfortable negotiations, such as those faced by
teachers in schools under pressure, is an important responsibility of educators and
researchers:

Teachers tend to be portrayed in unidimensional ways. That is to say, both the
public discourse and the educational literature presents teachers as mostly passive
agents whose teaching behaviors are leveraged (negatively or positively) in
seemingly predetermined ways by accountability-related curriculum policies,
such as rigidly scoped, sequenced, and benchmarked curricula that are vertically
aligned, and high-stakes tests. Increasingly, however, researchers are exploring
and reporting the complexities and uncertainties involved in trying to understand
the ways individual teachers experience and respond to test-based systems of
accountability. (Sloan, 2006, p. 121)

In giving some background information, I am attempting to represent Sonya’s
experiences as fairly as possible, which also helped me to better understand and represent
Liz’s reactions.

I thought carefully about my response to Liz’s email, and wrote back to propose
that during my first visit to the classroom I observe the students and talk with her and
Sonya. I thought I could serve both Liz and Sonya better with more information about
Sonya’s concerns and Liz’s thoughts about test preparation, as well as some examples of
the students’ writing and a chance to observe them in action. I believed the three of us
together, watching students and reading their writing, could benefit Liz, Sonya, the
students, and me.
However, Sonya and Liz did not accept the help from me that they had requested. When I made my first supervisory visit soon after these emails, I reminded them of their request, and restated my willingness to help, but to no effect. As much as both Liz and Sonya knew of my background in literacy, and my commitment to writing, my response may not have been what either of them was hoping for. I was ready to observe and question, in a context that may have been asking for a different kind of problem-solving strategy from teachers. I wondered about what it meant to be seen as helpful in the present policy environment.

Similar to Liz, Ann entered a school fully engaged in district and state testing. Her experience led me to think about the specific impact testing has on student teachers, who do not yet know their students, and have limited time with them. Ann’s opening weeks of student teaching were marked by the overwhelming presence of testing. Tests were present as texts, policies, and practices. Her 10th grade students in a special education resource class faced end-of-course testing (EOC) within two weeks of Ann’s arrival. The primary responsibility of the special education class was content area support, followed by test preparation. Though the resource class lasted for a full year, the students had EOC tests at the end of each semester in their content area classes.

In the following e-mail, Ann reveals that testing and the testing schedule prevented her from forming relationships with her students and from assuming a teaching role:

Wednesday they would just be doing the placement test in the new PATH books we got. We have this planned most of that week. Then from there I hope to see where their skills are weak and begin to help them prepare for the next test in April. Since the students have been testing since I have been here, I have not
been able to do a whole lot of jumping in yet. I have an activity about stereotypes to do with the students to kind of break the ice and get to know them. (email, 1/15)

Ann assumed that she would be interacting with her students. These comments show how that assumption conflicted with the reality of testing. Between local-level EOC testing, "just doing the placement test" in the commercial practice book, and practicing for state-level testing coming in April, Ann and her students seemed caught in an endless looping cycle of tests. Ann imagined the teaching role she wanted to step into, but the testing environment prevented her from doing so. By postponing her ice-breaker activity, testing also kept Ann from knowing her students well enough to develop personalized instruction, which I knew was central to her vision of a student-led practice.

In a later email, reflecting on her first two weeks, Ann repeated her frustration over the testing that was hampering her student teaching experience. She had also realized that the students were impacted by the testing. "These two weeks have been very slow. The students have been working on end of course testing and the end of the semester exams for each class. Boy do I feel sorry for the students" (journal, weeks 1 and 2). To her credit, Ann recognized that the testing environment did not provide her with a fair representation of the students' personalities, and she was meeting them when they were likely stressed and possibly unhappy to be in school.

I began with and maintained a commitment to helping student teachers work within the system where they were placed. In her message, Ann mentioned the workbook that she would be using to prepare students for the state test. Realizing the dominance of the texts as practice, I thought there might be ways for Ann to accomplish what she wanted while fulfilling her curricular requirement. During my visit, we spent time
looking through the test preparation workbook. This was one of the first of many times I advocated for a student teacher to find some space within a policy where the school requirements and their planned practices might meet. I believe in raising questions about inherited wisdom and comfortable arrangements. However, as the coming chapters will show, I was still underestimating the pressure of those arrangements on student teachers, and I had much to learn about that kind of advocacy.

**Many Policy Players and Practices**

One of the central policy elements of student teachers’ early practice was the group of people whom I refer to as policy players. It is helpful to recognize that many different people contribute to student teachers’ perception of the rules and expectations of their schools. Early in their experiences, student teachers were led to believe that most teachers interpreted policy the same way, abided by rules in the same fashion, and were objectives of policy more than creators of policy. I have already indicated that the ways in which cooperating teachers handled texts was as important as the texts themselves in student teachers’ initial experiences in schools. Further, a critical policy lens has helped me see that exploring how people interpret rules and polices is important to the marginalization of certain students and ways of thinking:

The culture of policy is best examined through systematic attention to the language and behaviors of those individuals performing the policy process....the culture of education policy requires investigation of how policymakers and practitioners communicate about, make sense of, and act on.... policy itself. (Stein, 2004, p. 6)

Stein’s perspective here draws attention to the fact that student teachers observe people in classrooms communicating about and acting on policy; they do not often observe policies
directly. Some of this involves school personnel coping with mandated change, which is itself a complex process. People involved in schools communicate multiple policy messages to student teachers; I now discuss how student teachers made sense of those messages.

This section identifies the players and the practices they communicated to student teachers. It also shows how student teachers related these peoples’ roles to the rules and expectations at their schools in the first phase of student teaching. The faculty and administrators included here were not participants in this study, but were part of the daily experiences of the student teachers and of the policy environment. I do not know their exact opinions, only what student teachers and I observed. With little exception, school personnel seemed to uphold and understand the rules in the same way. Upon further analysis, I see that these various people were perpetuating a certain paradigm. It is that paradigm, and not the people within it, that I focus on.

Across sites, student teachers encountered administrators who influenced their understanding of school and district rules and expectations, and ultimately how much freedom they felt they had to make decisions about practice. Administrators are the most obvious gatekeepers, those “key mediators of policy in any setting who are relied upon by others to relate policy” (Ball, 2006, p. 45). As noted earlier, Michelle’s school principal began an arts-based curriculum and supported faculty trips to the state capitol to be involved in the policy process. I met Michelle’s principal and was present for her cooperating teachers’ comments about the principal. District-level administrators influenced student teachers. In Michelle’s case, as mentioned in the above transcript, the
language arts coordinator was a policy player, influential through her interaction with Michelle’s cooperating teacher and other faculty regarding standards. Similarly, Liz interacted in those first weeks with a curriculum coordinator who received all faculty lesson plans, had an interest in writing, and periodically dropped in to observe Liz. To ground this theme, I analyze an interaction among another student teacher, Colleen, her cooperating teacher, Marni, and a district administrator.

I use Colleen’s story as a frame for excerpts from other student teachers’ experiences with multiple policy players. The overall message is that all school personnel, at all levels, contribute to maintaining the school policy structure and function. Additionally, these data highlight the importance of the “little p” policies, including unwritten rules, that nonetheless impact student teachers’ experiences in learning to teach.

Colleen was student teaching with Marni in a 1st grade special education support class. Colleen was a returning student and the mother of a profoundly disabled adult, two factors which entered into her teaching identity in multiple ways. During her first days of student teaching, Colleen noticed that Marni was very busy, and offered to help. She assumed some responsibility for assessing students using a tool she had encountered previously, ‘running records.’ However, after performing several evaluations, her actions were rebuffed.

The following excerpt comes from a reflection that Colleen wrote about her first week as a student teacher. I focus here on the way in which information about assessment, the work of teaching, and Colleen’s role as a student teacher was
communicated to her, and what she took away from this interaction about her role in professional decision-making.

My cooperating teacher has so many things that need to be done: testing, re-evaluations, trying to make sure all of her students’ needs are met, and making sure the goals and objectives she has for her individual students mesh with the state standards. I am overwhelmed with the amount of things she does. Marni was informed that she needed to have the running records up to date. I was unsure of myself once I began administering the running records. After I had been giving some one day, Marni introduced me to the school special ed coordinator. [The coordinator] said something about the way [running record scores] were to be interpreted. I asked if she was sure, and told her I was under the impression that it was done this way. I saved myself and remembered that I am only the student, and I need to take direction!... (reflection, week 1, italics added)

This reflection shows Colleen’s thinking about an experience around specific policies and their preferred relationship to practice, but also about who is in the position to determine that relationship.

Colleen’s reflection opens with her feeling “overwhelmed” by the many assessments and accountability measures in Marni’s day. It then provides information that an unnamed someone, presumably someone in a position of power—“informed” Marni that her records about language arts assessment must be up to date. The role of teachers at this school includes keeping records, presumably to be seen and used by others, and ensuring that those records are up to date. Marni was expected to find time to administer these ‘running records,’ among her many teaching responsibilities. This put her under so much pressure that Colleen offered to help. Ball (2003) suggests that the pressure to stay “up-to-date” (p. 218) is a policy mechanism itself and encourages certain kinds of thinking about teachers’ work and public displays of progress. Being a teacher
at this school demands certain kinds of thinking, including understanding the need to keep updated records and utilizing particular methods to accomplish this.

The coordinator reinforced the message that teachers use specific texts and practices in a specific way, and that these arrangements are not open to discussion. The special education coordinator entered the scene and corrected Colleen on her use of the running records. Colleen suggested there was another way to interpret the scores, but her suggestion does not seem to have been accepted. The conversation is closed by Colleen resuming her inferior student position: “I am only the student, and I need to take direction!” She repeated “I am the student” three times throughout the remainder of her reflection. She was to listen and observe; she was to “follow” and “take direction,” as a student. To Colleen and to me, the cooperating teacher, the coordinator, and the unnamed person who reminded Marni to be up-to-date, came across as united in the policy context, whether or not they actually were.

Across contexts, student teachers encountered indications that faculty and administrators interpreted and enacted policy in the same way. For example, Marjorie repeated the phrase “how we do it here” more than once, in reference to how Michelle should address the standards and curriculum in her 2nd grade practice. “How we do it here” suggests power in the practices of the collective ‘we’ of the school. Marjorie implied that she was speaking not only for herself, but for many or all of the teachers, who employ the same practices. Furthermore, the phrase implies that such practices have been tested over time by the faculty and are now a kind of routine. The message was
clear: If Michelle wanted to be seen in a favorable light by the faculty there, this was what she should do.

Ann’s case offers an interesting insight into what happens when a student teacher perceives that faculty do not all interpret policy the same way. Ann was placed with cooperating teacher Sandy in a high school special education support class. More than any other participant, Ann had a direct relationship to other teachers’ ideas about writing and teaching writing in their subject areas, specifically the content area teachers in grades 10 and 11. This was because a large part of Ann and Sandy’s responsibility in the support classroom involved accommodating students’ learning needs as they worked in their content area classes, according to students’ individual education programs (IEPs). Ann was present for a meeting which provided a rich example of different faculty members’ interpretations of policy. She reflected on the meeting, and in her reflection I draw attention to the roles different people play:

I was very surprised with how the teachers reacted to the list of accommodations for students and how each teacher interpreted it differently. I was also impressed with how the principal conducted the meeting. She was very professional and was seeking the help of the regular education teachers about the accommodations, but it still felt like the room was a battle of the special ed teachers versus the regular ed teachers. (reflection, 1/27)

Ann’s comment reveals impressive political awareness in its distinctions between two groups of teachers’ engagement with policy. As an observer in this meeting, Ann judiciously read the roles of the many people there.

In our literacy class the prior semester, Ann had volunteered with Colleen and other special education majors to hold a discussion with their classmates. When stereotypes about special education students and teachers began to surface, they agreed to
convene a kind of question and answer session and present some obstacles in our class discussions. In hindsight, Ann concluded that this class discussion was a kind of foreshadowing of the faculty meeting she attended, and that the attitudes of her former classmates were reflected in the attitudes of the faculty at the high school.

First, Ann pointed out teachers' "reactions" to the accommodations, and then indicated that each teacher "interpreted it differently." The end of her message shows that, though different from each other, she grouped those versions into two: the special education interpretations, and the content area interpretations. In this case, the principal serves a valuable function as a go-between, or moderator, in the "battle" over the meanings of policy, with the ostensible goal of establishing a workable common interpretation. Ann recognized that she, Sandy, and the few other special education teachers were reading important Policy documents "differently" than other faculty, and she inferred that these readings were grounded in teachers' understandings of the nature and purpose of special education. Though Ann witnessed a divergence of faculty opinion on the ways in which policy relates to practice, other student teachers' experiences were marked by common interpretations and implementations of policy by faculty and administration.

As the opening weeks passed by, I reflected that the school environments were presenting student teachers with a rigid structure. Such a structure could act as a support for them in the tense and high-stress time of student teaching. Individuals have agency, but structure mediates that agency. Part of what they, and I, were doing was looking for what is valued and who is valuable in each policy structure. I turned over in my mind
how these messages, images, and positions raised questions about teachers’ autonomy in what happens in their own classrooms. I thought deeply about the implications of policy for student teacher learning.

Whether or not student teachers agreed with the people or practices they witnessed, these people and practices communicated messages regarding student teachers’ positions that were clear to them and to me. Student teachers were expected to do what was being done already. Yet each student teacher was eager to move from an observer or assistant role into an autonomous practice role. I understood this to be the heart of their student teaching experience, and already several obstacles had presented themselves. I did not know to what extent the student teachers saw the various rules, materials, or expectations as troubling, but they would soon tell me.

**Playing the Game**

Research has explored the differences between what student teachers want to do, and what they ultimately do, during student teaching. I offer a different look at the student teaching experience, from a supervisor’s perspective and through a critical policy lens. I show student teachers as agents and their contexts as complex structures. What is occurring within these policy environments is not simply a matter of young upstarts not getting their way.

This section shows that some of the student teachers’ actions, as they freely admitted, were carried out purely to satisfy what they saw to be the demands placed upon them. “[T]eachers who are the local implementers of policy frequently sift through contradictory values, support systems, and requirements as they try to put into action
what legislators, the distant makers of policy, legislate” (Fecho, Malozzi & Schultz, 2007, p. 38). Teachers do this “sifting,” and the student teachers in this study were sifting as well. In this section, I discuss student teachers’ early attempts at practice in their particular policy contexts.

By the second week of student teaching, student teachers had hinted to me that they had formed opinions about the practices, rules, traditions, and materials they encountered. I have already mentioned Colleen’s observation that the “art” of teaching is lost and that students are “left behind” when scripted programs are used. Soon afterward, Liz described the trade-offs that she and other student teachers had resigned themselves to making, as they became aware of the differences between what they wanted to do and what they were asked and allowed to do: “Something I know a lot of us (student teachers) are dealing with was finding a balance between trying out our own ideas and playing the game of the school in which we are teaching” (Week 2 reflection). Liz used the phrase “playing the game,” which became a recurring theme in our professional interactions. It was an operative metaphor for Liz, herself an accomplished college athlete and coach.

Yet playing the game was not easy for anyone to do. Reading school contexts from a policy lens, and paying attention to issues of power, politics, and advocacy, reveals that there are constantly policy negotiations taking place within student teaching; some were arguably more visible than others.

New teachers’ socialization into school organizations and subsequent conflicts with colleagues, administrators and policies result in another form of shock. New teachers’ beliefs and actions may conflict with existing organizational norms and
they face issues of power, interest and negotiation. One job of mentors is to learn how to help novices read their school contexts. (Achinstein, 2006, p. 123-24) Achinstein’s perspective is helpful to the present study, though she focuses on newly in-service teachers and their school-based mentors. In terms of my supervisory role, I believe student teachers were helping me read their surroundings as much as I was helping them.

Student teachers were reading messages about what they should do and the “positions” from which they were “invited” to act (Ball, 2008, p 5). They also had begun to read their school contexts for opportunities to practice and to exercise their professional judgment. However, few occasions presented themselves. Ann had little chance to do much teaching in the first phase, as it was nearly the end of January before the testing was over. Colleen, as I have described, was rebuffed for trying to analyze running records according to her past experience, and she interpreted this as a reminder of her status as “just the student.” I have referred multiple times to the meeting among Marjorie, Michelle, and me, and have endeavored to show how Marjorie’s good-natured assistance communicated strong messages to Michelle about what, how, and why she should teach—messages Marjorie may or may not have intended. I return to that meeting for my next example.

Marjorie’s near-complete discursive control of the meeting had an effect on Michelle and on our student teacher/supervisor relationship. When the students returned from lunch and Marjorie commenced teaching, Michelle and I went out into the hallway. She had been so quiet during the meeting, I had no idea what she was thinking: “Michelle didn’t talk much at the meeting... but when she and I got out into the hallway she was all
talk” (Journal 1/16). We had a few moments of semi-privacy where we could talk about the meeting that had just taken place. The ensuing discussion, quick whispers in the hallway, was one of the most intense interactions of our professional relationship. It also disrupted my assumptions about student teachers’ responses to a highly-structured curriculum, and the particular kind of acclamation associated primarily with student teachers or early career teachers. Though I did not record our interaction, I took notes on what had happened as soon as I could.

Michelle was angered and insulted by Marjorie’s actions. She was upset, physically tense and expressive. Michelle said she resented that Marjorie was maintaining full control; Michelle had ideas of her own that she felt Marjorie was not allowing her to talk about, let alone implement.

The imposition on teachers’ thinking of a fixed set of standards that define how one knows and what one is to know is not conducive to open inquiry—a necessary condition for development of the generative understandings that teachers need in order to address the important questions and problems of their work (Delandshere & Petrosky, 2001, p.7) An “open inquiry” into Marjorie’s practice, or into Michelle’s ideas and “important questions and problems,” seemed unlikely to both of us. Michelle was irritated both by the way Marjorie was practicing and by the position she was given as a kind of copy of Marjorie. Michelle wanted opportunities to try her own ideas. Michelle also felt bound for personal reasons—she had been absent—and professional reasons—she wanted to be hired there. I wondered about how I could support her professional growth in these circumstances.

A similar situation developed for Colleen over the first weeks of student teaching. Looking for opportunity to exercise her professional judgment, she was silenced in
several ways after the running records conflict. She concluded that she was not to talk back to or question those in authority. By the second week of student teaching, the many pressures for Colleen to maintain the status quo resulted in her changing the way she spoke.

As mentioned earlier in regards to lesson plans, Colleen’s included lesson by number, and the pages that would be read each day. For her first attempt at teaching, Colleen was given a pre-made lesson “directly from the SRA and is taught step by step” (reflection, week 2) to teach. She prepared for days. While she was teaching, the lesson threatened to run over its allowed time and thereby disrupt what was expected, having a kind of domino effect on the week’s subsequent lessons. Therefore, Colleen changed the tone of her voice to something she described as more teacher-like in an attempt to get through the lesson in time. She ultimately covered only half as much as she should have, and as a result, Marni had to change her plans for the week.

In situations in which Colleen and Marni disagreed, Colleen gradually determined that talking about conflict with Marni did not help resolve those situations. Her reflection the third week looked back with a kind of bitterness at the lessons she had learned so far: “I have learned so much this past week, including how to make lesson plans, how to have a disagreement and most importantly how to keep my mouth shut and my opinions to myself” (reflection, week 3). I remained encouraging and sympathetic, but I felt unsure about what else to say without understanding her context better. I had just met Marni, and had been to the school only twice.
Colleen's gradual loss of voice was significant to her, and I came to understand this. As I have mentioned, Colleen was the parent of a disabled adult, and her students and cooperating teacher were aware of this. Through our interactions, Colleen revealed to me the emotional impact of working with special needs children. In particular, such work engaged her thinking about her daughter, and about herself as a mother, thoughts which themselves shaped her relationships with her students. In the 1st grade class, one student had not been speaking audibly to Colleen. In her fourth week of student teaching, Colleen wrote me that she finally had succeeded in opening communication with this student—by singing to her. Colleen shared with me that when her own daughter was young, Colleen sang to her frequently. Colleen had found that, after her daughter's many surgeries, she could calm her daughter's heart rate by singing. Colleen's literal and figurative voice was powerful. I began to understand why she had other reasons to be upset at learning that she "should keep [her] mouth shut."

This next data excerpt, from the fifth week of student teaching, details another kind of silencing involving Colleen, her students, and Marni. Colleen's retelling of this situation, and reflection on it, yielded me further insight into how her positions outside the school context shaped how she was experiencing and making sense of the policies, including the unwritten rules, inside the school. Particularly relevant to the current discussion are the many ways in which Colleen references talking and speech.

Every day I have sat among the students at lunch. I prefer to be in the middle of them and watching everything that goes on with them. This past Thursday I was asked to sit with Marni, at the end of the table with students. I assumed she had wanted to speak with me or just have conversation. No. I almost felt as though I had been doing something wrong and was being punished. That may sound
ridiculous, but I cannot shake the thought. ... I can’t grasp exactly why this has bothered me so much. (reflection, February 9-13)

One can assume that Colleen may have accomplished meaningful professional work in the social relationships she established with students. She intentionally sat close to the children to learn about them by observing them in different situations, drawing from her experience raising her daughter. However, after having sat with students for five weeks, Colleen apparently was not allowed to sit with them any longer. She had, in the words of her email, done “something wrong,” broken some unknown rule, and been “punished.”

Undoubtedly, many schools have a policy against students and teachers sitting together in the cafeteria, and it is not hard to imagine several good reasons for such a rule. There were, ostensibly, reasons for Marni asking Colleen to move, but no one shared these reasons with Colleen. The mystery and silence surrounding her apparent digression confused Colleen, along with physically being taken away from the students. She struggled to make sense of her reaction. Such policies—even the unknown one at issue in this situation—“are devices for changing the meaning of practice and of social relationships” (Ball, 2008, p. 41). Normal “social relationships,” such as conversations around the lunch table, were, it appeared, inappropriate between the children and Colleen. Nor did Marni want to “speak with [Colleen] or just have conversation,” as Colleen reasonably anticipated. With similarity to the events surrounding the reading records, Colleen was left in silence.

As her supervisor, I wondered how to help Colleen. I told her I understood why she sat with the students, and that I thought she was justified in being upset. I wanted to defend Colleen to the school, say something, and explain her reasoning. However, I did
not take any such action. Partly because of my inexperience, and partly due to what I was learning about the importance of following the rules in this school, I did not speak up. During my initial visits to schools, I sought to build relationships with cooperating teachers and offered to remain in dialogue with them. However, this did not clear enough discursive space for cooperating teachers and I to talk about such difficult situations as Colleen faced.

**My Initial Supervisory Practices**

These excerpts portray student teachers’ tense and complicated beginnings in the profession. I had been thinking about how student teachers observe policies and what they understand about how those policies are to be enacted, as well as how student teachers initially understood their place in what was going on around them. My supervisory practices also developed over the term. As a new supervisor, I had difficulty knowing where to begin to understand each student teacher’s situation, and what roles I could enact within their experiences of learning to teach writing. Yet this was what I tried to do. My careful reading of contexts and the people within them led to more questions than paths forward. Supervision from a qualitative perspective quickly exposed complexities and challenges in our professional relationship, and in the placement contexts. As I sought to support student teachers, uncertainty and further questions were uncomfortable bases for that support, and the going was rough at times.

There were phases that I can now see that I want to point out, and they roughly correspond to the phases I have discerned in student teachers’ thinking about themselves.
and their contexts. In this section, I describe and analyze these supervisory moves of the first phase.

**Context.** My first visits were not to observe student teachers, but to begin to understand the school contexts and build relationships with the cooperating teachers. I also spoke with other faculty and administrators, and observed the school students and daily happenings in the schools. I was doing more than familiarizing myself with each building; I was learning about the people, practices, texts, and policies of each school.

"One of the assumptions of the present work is that every aspect of a context or situation has possible relevance for teaching and learning and thus for supervision" (Waite, 1995, p. 101). In an ethnographic sense, then, I was attempting to read the policy system, all the players and texts and practices I could observe, and the messages communicated through them. I was looking at context for what its messages were, what its relationships to the student teacher might be, and how I could help the student teachers make sense of those relationships and messages.

As I explained in the first chapter, I learned about the importance of rules, polices, and recommendations in students' field placement experiences during the literacy course the previous semester. I was prepared to initiate conversations with student teachers about the lay of the land as they saw it, and what their reading of context might have to do with their practice. Cooperating teachers were showing student teachers what to do, and how to succeed in their schools the best they could. I was trying to make space to question those arrangements and received wisdom, without challenging the cooperating teacher, in keeping with my inquiry stance. However, in this first phase, I kept my
thoughts about the school contexts to myself, most of the time. I did not question the
desirability of the curriculum, materials, or positions offered to student teachers. I
treaded lightly when student teachers raised objections regarding what was happening
around them. For instance, in my relationship with Colleen, when I read and heard her
reports of how she was encouraged and discouraged, seemingly arbitrarily, I reserved
sharing my thoughts with Colleen until I knew more about her context and the people in
it. Instead, I asked more questions and observed; this may have been frustrating to
Colleen, insomuch as it may have appeared that I was not ‘on her side,’ partly because I
did not explain my actions to her.

I was also careful not to press points with the student teacher where I saw
evidence of faulty notions of students and their writing, such as with Liz and the
preparation for the state writing test that focused on students’ “bad habits.” It was unfair
to assume that student teachers’ initial responses to these situations were indications of
their thinking. Some of the policies and practices they faced could well have elicited
short-term loyalty. I believed that with further information I would find out how student
teachers were negotiating the boundaries between what they were asked and allowed to
do, and what their own plans were for teaching. I believed student teachers were only
beginning to try out their thinking, through talk and writing, about how they wanted to
teach, what they stood for, and what they stood against. I did not want to shut down
those conversations before they got started, by saying too much and imposing my own
reads on our interactions.
I believed the policy/practice relationship at the classroom level was in the eye of the beholder. I have been explicit about the fact that I was reading those contexts from particular standpoints and with specific lenses. I also read context in terms of what the student teachers revealed to me about their goals and their professional philosophies. I was alert to possible conflicts or mismatches between the student teacher and her context. I anticipated there might be situations in which the student teacher was being asked to replicate practices which marginalize some students or ways of knowing. Yet as those situations arose throughout the opening weeks, I rarely addressed them with the student teachers. Working within the system was my perspective, for the time being, partly because I did not want to create tension for the student teacher, or between her and the cooperating teacher. I also needed more time to figure out what my next steps should be, and what lay beyond working within the system.

**Power and control.** Student teachers and I had a prior relationship from the literacy class, so we were able to talk and interact with some level of familiarity, and we did not, as many student teacher/supervisory pairs do, have to build our relationship from the ground up. I did pay attention to the ways in which I opened the formal supervisory conferences (Vasquez & Reppen, 2007); usually I asked the student teacher what she wanted to talk about, where she wanted to start, or what she thought of the lesson I had just observed. I did this for the following three reasons: 1) I wanted to share discursive power as a step toward collaboration; 2) I wanted to discuss what was top priority for the student teachers, and 3) I understood that knowing those top priorities was a source of insight into how the student teacher was experiencing her placement.
As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) have noted, an inquiry stance is more about questions than answers, and more about uncertainty than certainty. I realized during the first phase of student teaching that I was not explaining my inquiry stance adequately. I learned that the question-posing of my inquiry stance could be interpreted as needling the student teacher, rather than opening topics for discussion. Therefore, I began to preface my questions by explaining that I was not asking student teachers to defend themselves, as much as encouraging them to articulate their thinking to themselves and to me. Also in keeping with my inquiry stance, I worked to dismantle expectations of an expert/novice arrangement in our relationship, work that had begun the prior semester in the literacy class. In this way, I sought to create the circumstances in our professional relationship that would invite uncertainty, being in-process and willing to contradict ourselves at times (Abt-Perkins, Hauschildt, & Dale, 2000). Part of doing this involved articulating my own assumptions and speculations, being vulnerable and in-process myself. For example, in one conference, I referred to the importance of a community of inquiry: “I’m asking my friends ... I need their help in trying to unpack some of this stuff and help me in what I’m doing” (POC, 2/11). I explained to the student teachers that my friends also adopted an inquiry stance toward practice, and so helped me in mine, especially as I felt nervous and tentative as a first-time supervisor who was also new to the area.

I was most careful to disrupt any assumptions about the ‘snoopervisor,’ and such attendant abuses of power when supervisors make unannounced, sneak-attack visits. In
different ways throughout the opening weeks, and indeed throughout the semester, I
repeated to the student teachers that:

I do not want or need to see some show. I support how much goes on in any
given lesson and piece of a day. I had tried in many ways to let my supervisees
know that there was no need to do something special when I visited, but if they
wanted to, they could show off. Or they could direct my attention to a problem
spot as they saw it. (field notes, 2/13)

I also had to face my own assumptions about student teachers’ roles in our relationship. I
came to acknowledge that one of my expectations was that student teachers would talk
openly with me. Though that was often true, I did not consider how much they may have
wanted to present to me a polished, positive demeanor. My position of power as
supervisor, evaluator, and researcher also made me a person to impress. This
complicated my supervisory practice, as I realized I had to take into account the reasons
student teachers might have for presenting to me an appearance of calm, efficient
organization and control.

For instance, after the meeting between Marjorie, Michelle and me, Michelle had
an impassioned reaction in the hallway, as described earlier. However, after that, she
seemed to back-pedal. She did not repeat her request for more autonomy, nor did she talk
with me about Marjorie’s control. She seemed to make an effort to sound upbeat and
positive regarding Marjorie and their professional relationship. There could have been
many reasons for her apparent change. As a person, Michelle was always polite and
generally talkative, but I guessed that she was trying to be careful about managing her
own appearances with me, with the school, and with the university. This impacted my
ability to serve her as a supervisor. I began to wonder to what extent my position as a
university supervisor, and my concurrent evaluative role, would be an obstacle to helping student teachers reflect openly on their practice.

**Wiggle room.** As I began my supervisory practice, my qualitative orientations to supervision quickly challenged my ideas about what it meant to support student teachers. I came to understand that the conflicts student teachers were experiencing between their professional goals, and what they felt able to do, did not pertain solely to what any one policy, practice, or person meant on its own. These conflicts also involved how these elements worked together and their collective power to open up and shut down choices about teaching and learning. As Delandshere and Petrosky (2004) indicated, policies can discourage the consideration of alternatives indirectly: “Active intellectual engagement in understanding teaching and learning is undermined and atomized by the requirement or pressure to implement uniform standards” (p 12). To counter this pressure, I did some reframing work in conversations with student teachers, leading them to imagine a troubling scenario some other way, or playing out possibilities when they were frustrated in their roles and seemingly sidelined in their own professional development.

The relationship of policy to practice that we saw was one-way, and top-down. We had not yet seen in the placement schools any alternative models of thinking or acting. The mimetic positions offered to student teachers were troubling to me because I felt some basic relationships between student teachers and their practice were not being allowed to develop. I began to think of how I could still help them think, grow, and reflect in situations that admitted little professional action. I was ready for them to have some practice to reflect on, and so were they.
In schools across the country, many teachers are not free to educate: to determine curriculum, to express disagreements with each other and with administration, to create and become a part of a democratic classroom. Sadly, although these teachers entered the profession with a firm belief in their charter to educate, in practice they find instead a mandate to train: to compel adherence to implicit and explicit behavioral norms; to demonstrate loyalty to business-promoted, state-sustained, traditional curricula; and to support bureaucratically imposed rules and regulations that include standardized testing and tracking. At the very least, these teachers are expected to remain silent in the face of their own ethical disagreements with the hierarchy that governs schools. At worst, they are forced either to abandon their projects or lose their positions. (Hadden, 2000, p. 243)

When there is a decline in teacher control over practice and decision-making, the implications for the learning of student teachers placed with them is unclear.

At times, I felt part of my role was to hold onto the thread that connected the student teacher to the teacher she wanted to become. There were many situational and organizational barriers to demonstrating or entertaining ideas of what could be, as alternatives to what was. By the second week of student teaching, I was journaling about what I had observed so far, and how I might reflect these observations in my interactions with student teachers.

I'm here to get you to stay true to your vision, to help run interference, because I'm aware of the kind of tough situation you're walking into. That you have a vision that's already compromised. I need you to have that vision. Kids need you to have that vision. (journal, 1/13)

On January 28, three weeks into the semester, I wrote in my supervisory journal about the relationships between schools' expectations and room for student teachers' decision-making. It was the first time I used the phrase 'wiggle room' in reference to curricula, standards, and the cooperating teacher's interpretation of policies. From that point on, I continued to think of the wiggle room—the cracks and gaps—in the well-oiled machine. Ball (1997) calls attention to "the degrees of 'play' and 'room for manoeuvre' involved in the translation of policies into practices" (p. 262), and I felt sure that those small spaces
were affordances that student teachers could use to engage in practices of their own choosing. I believed they constituted some small opportunities for professional action.

Aware that I was advocating for their working within the system, I also began to advocate working in the system's cracks. "Opening a space for such thinking and talking is a complex and delicate process" (Koerner, Rust & Baumgartner, 2002, p. 56), which in this case was heightened by my inexperience and the power of the various discourses in operation overlapping our professional relationship. I knew they would have to play the game to some extent, and I wondered to what extent a questioning stance could compromise their appearance as team players.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argue that federal, state, and local policy contexts inform the practice of being a student teacher by constructing, communicating, and reinforcing context-specific ideas about teaching and learning. Complex networks of people, texts, and practices also create and maintain particular relationships between policy and practice, which these student teachers perceived, consciously or not. The ways in which policies are interpreted and implemented varies across time and space, as does the nature of the interpretation and implementation of processes, as well as the power of individual teachers and administrators in those processes. These conceptions of teaching and learning, and of the relationships between policy and practice, inform how student teachers think about themselves, their students, and the work of teaching.

As demonstrated through the examples in this chapter, in the first weeks of student teaching, participants saw the policy environment as united. Alignment became a
recurring theme in student teachers’ reads of their environments. Texts and practices seemed aligned with policy, all faculty players were equal, and all faculty were in agreement with administrators, who enforce policy. Student teachers made sense of the various roles of individuals, practices, expectations, policies, and texts in their contexts, and understood them to be related to each other. In their initial observations, these student teachers saw that policies dictated practice. Student teachers believed that cooperating teachers, other faculty, and administrators utilized texts and practices in similar ways, to satisfy implementation of federal, state, and local policy. Further, student teachers were expected and sometimes pressured to conform to this agreed-upon relationship among people, practices and policies. Though it later became a more significant obstacle, as the coming chapters will reveal, at this stage student teachers experienced difficulty discerning between authentic alignment and the appearance of alignment; what mattered early on was student teachers’ understanding that their policy environment prized alignment.

Policy environments clearly positioned these student teachers in specific ways and shaped the kinds of relationships they built with their students. These student teachers perceived that learning to teach was connected to learning to use, produce, and manage texts. What student teachers needed to know about subjects and how to teach them was housed in teachers’ editions and curriculum documents, Policy texts with the weight of authority. Knowledge could be given, with the expectation that students would receive it.

As the first weeks of student teaching came to a close, student teachers negotiated their policy contexts, and each of them hoped to exercise some judgment and enact
practices over which they had some decision-making power. In my supervisory practice, I sought to support these desires, encouraging them toward reflective, humane, inquiry-oriented practice. Evidently, student teachers read the environment constantly whether teacher educators helped them to or not; one of the roles I enacted was helping them make sense of what they were noticing. In part because different elements of the policy environment operated upon each other and student teachers differently, and in part because each student teacher approached her placement with different goals and assumptions, my professional interactions with the student teachers turned out to be highly context-specific. Yet, I unavoidably remained a source of pressure in a position of power.

In the next chapter, I continue my exploration of student teachers’ understandings of their policy contexts and their roles within them. Though only two participants had opportunities to teach writing in this first phase, the second phase sees student teachers fully engaged in teaching. Chapter 5 describes all four participants’ teaching of writing. Our professional relationships also move into another phase, as we become more comfortable in our contexts and our respective roles. However, with this increased familiarity came increasingly more complex questions about the relationships between policy and practice.
Chapter 5: The Well-Oiled Machine Comes Apart

Introduction

In Chapter 4, I showed that the dominant theme of alignment recurred across school sites in the first phase of student teaching as student teachers experienced their placement contexts as unified. I introduced the metaphor of the well-oiled machine to explain the image of multiple pieces working together in predetermined ways. By the end of the first several weeks, however, the student teachers’ initial images of a unified policy context had begun to dissolve, and they began to talk about various policy elements as separate instead of unified. These various policy elements still appeared to have a bearing on the ways in which student teachers understood and acted within their writing policy environments. More than anything, this chapter is about what the student teachers did when they taught writing, in ways that kept with their professional goals, and how these practices related to the policies around them.

Three inter-related themes characterize what I call the second phase of student teaching, from the middle of February to the end of March. One of these themes is that student teachers saw their cooperating teachers as policy monitors. The second is that these student teachers noticed complexities and contradictions in the policy environments. The third is that, despite many pressures, student teachers each managed to teach writing according to their professional judgment by identifying gaps and cracks in the tightly-aligned, well-oiled machine.

In this chapter, I also describe and analyze my supervisory practice with each participant, and across schools, as my understanding of student teachers, their contexts,
and their goals within those contexts grew in complexity. Therefore, in my analysis of the student teachers’ thoughts about, and actions within, their writing policy environments, I try to represent what Ball (1997) has called “the complex interplay of identities and interests and coalitions and conflicts within the processes and enactments of policy” (p. 257). I offer this view of policy to draw attention to the many points of contact between the student teacher and her school surroundings, points which I also believe may be opportunities for meaningful action.

**Cooperating Teachers as Policy Monitors**

As I argued in Chapter 4, the cooperating teachers seemed to be aligned tightly with all other faculty in their interpretation and implementation of policy. The cooperating teachers had presented themselves as models of practice, and other policy players had stepped in to reinforce that image of the cooperating teacher as a part of the well-oiled machine. Student teachers had the impression that their cooperating teachers were teaching the material that ought to be taught, in the way it ought to be taught.

The tight alignment they saw among people, policies, texts, and practices changed the way in which student teachers perceived and related to their cooperating teachers after the first few weeks in their placement schools. By mid-term, the student teachers perceived the cooperating teachers’ control as constraining their practice. Student teachers told me that when cooperating teachers were present, they interacted with their students, and occasionally interrupted the student teachers’ lessons. This gave student teachers the impression that cooperating teachers were actively shaping lessons in specific ways. It was not their individual cooperating teacher’s ways of teaching, or
managing a classroom, that student teachers struggled against, but the *monitoring* and *surveillance* pressure the cooperating teacher represented. This pressure had meaning for the student teachers’ opportunity to experiment, or to attempt different practices. At issue was the way in which student teachers were learning to teach by observing and imitating examples of successful, skillful practice, and the cooperating teachers’ position to encourage or enforce particular relationships between policy and practice.

Student teachers worried about their ability to teach as expected. Kelchtermans (1996) found that when teachers feel uncertain or vulnerable, those feelings have moral and political roots in “the lack of clear reasons and norms,” which cause teachers to “wonder what they are doing wrong, or in what respect they are not meeting the never-explicitly-stated expectations” (np) of those in power. Similarly, Ball (2006) notes that current policy structures can elicit fears and insecurities in their subjects. He goes further, referring to the pressures of current education policy as “A recipe for ontological insecurity: ‘Are we doing enough? Are we doing the right thing? How will we measure up?’” (Ball, 2000, p. 3). These questions, as the coming pages will show, echo those asked by the participants.

For example, Ann talked with me about the pressure to teach how Sandy wanted the class taught. For Ann, Sandy’s presence, and her continued interaction with students, had been a complication since late January.

I have also realized that with the teacher in the room, [students] still respond to her some and I am not sure when to take full control over the students and when not to….I have been left alone with the students for short periods of time this week, and the students responded well to this. (Email, 1/27)
If Sandy remained in the room, which Ann said she usually did, then Ann did her best to teach the way Sandy taught.

As Ann wrote in another email, “It is hard to come up with things that are going to work. I have a lot of ideas but I am not certain that anything will certainly work, and this scares me” (Email, 2/3). Ann’s ideas seemed unproven and risky in comparison to the certainty of proven success.

What a performance orientation for educational advancement certainly does is further compound professional confusion: in one sense teachers wish to implement more creative learning-teaching episodes, whilst in another, more dominant narrative they are required to ensure that their students do well on nationally imposed examinations. (Adams, 2007, p. 9)

The cooperating teachers appeared to the student teachers, and to me, as if they were ensuring that the instruction kept moving the way it was supposed to. Indeed, when I observed Ann, Sandy nearly always remained at her desk in the back of the room. I saw how this could constrain Ann’s practice, whether or not Sandy meant to. Ann wrote in her journal about her fear that if she attempted a practice outside of Sandy’s view of good teaching and it did not work, that failure would give Sandy a reason to say, “I told you so” (POC, 2/12). She and other student teachers worried that trying practices of their own creation might send students to the next year’s teachers without adequate skills and knowledge, when around them it seemed all that was worth knowing about teaching was already known.

These fears extended beyond simple anxiety over first-time teaching. As McLean (1999) points out, “Thus, for teacher educators as for beginning teachers, the process of teacher education is characterized by personal doubts as well as very public conflicts and questions” (p. 60). There were other indications that student teachers were being asked to
reinforce the status quo. Michelle wrote me to express her concern that she was not
teaching the way Marjorie wanted. I quote here from her email:

I had no problems with what I had to teach my students, due to the fact that I had
seen Marjorie teach them all year, but sometimes I feel like I was not teaching the
material the way she wants it taught... I cannot help but wonder if maybe I was
not doing it the way she wants it done... I do not want to disappoint her or hinder
the students from learning something vital. (Email, 2/12)

A specific relationship between policy and practice—the way Marjorie “wants it done”—
Michelle felt she had not successfully replicated. Michelle’s emails reflected worry that
she would disappoint Marjorie and somehow hinder her students. She was worried that
because of what she had or had not done, students might miss “something vital.”

Cooperating teachers seemed to be reinforcing a particular set of rules and
expectations, whether or not they were, and this mattered to student teachers’ teaching.
Liz’s language in the messages that follow provides the most pointed example of these
student teachers’ concerns that their cooperating teachers were acting as monitors of the
policy contexts. During the last week of February, Liz communicated to me through her
journal about her frustration with her professional relationship with Sonya. The two
women had at first enjoyed a friendly, workable relationship. However, more than six
weeks into Liz’s student teaching experience, Sonya remained in the room while Liz
taught, and this strained their relationship because Liz had little chance to be the adult in
the room, while Sonya sat at her desk. In this data excerpt from one of Liz’s reflections, I
draw attention to Liz’s feelings of being “scrutinized:”

Something that has been on my mind this week is the fact that I would really like
to be left alone more with the students. I think I’m doing a good job of keeping
the balance between preparing the students for PASS and doing what my
cooperating teacher needs accomplished, and experimenting with my own
methods and ideas...I know Sonya trusts me with them ...but it’s frustrating
because I feel like I’m constantly being scrutinized or something. (Reflection, 2/23)

Liz felt that Sonya’s presence did not support her, nor offer her another set of helpful eyes on her practice. Instead, Liz felt judged. Sonya’s presence enforced Liz’s keeping to what she thought Sonya wanted —whether or not Sonya meant to. Pressure to teach by the book and according to established practices would not necessarily be a problem, except that there was little room to question the books or practices, and small scope for student teachers to make professional judgments.

Unlike some of the other participants, Colleen had significant control over her instruction once she changed placements at mid-term from an elementary school to a middle school. Her new cooperating teacher, Marie, gave Colleen much room to make decisions. As a special education faculty, Marie was often out of the classroom with IEP paperwork, and Colleen enjoyed a relatively high level of independence. Still, she felt pressure to conform to the way things were supposed to be in Marie’s classroom and school. In one post-observation conference, she confessed to me her stress over some of her decisions about a writing assignment, which I will discuss in a later section. She pleaded: “I know, I know that that is way not what I’m supposed to do in this class, please don’t repeat this” (POC, 4/1).

In offering these examples, I do not mean to suggest that each cooperating teacher was monitoring policy, only that the student teachers saw it that way. Cooperating teachers’ appearance of reinforcing particular practices and ways of learning to teach presented me with a difficult set of situations. I had reminded all the cooperating teachers of the importance of allowing their student teachers to assume responsibility for
the whole teaching day, without their presence. This encouraged cooperating teachers to leave the room in some cases, but not all. Ultimately, these were their classrooms, and we were there only because of the cooperating teacher’s generosity. They wanted to be good mentor figures and guides, and I had only limited access to the many important and valuable lessons they were sharing with student teachers on a daily basis.

Because of the standardization movement of the past decades, teachers and researchers are familiar with the image of the teacher who is surrounded by rules, a consumer of commercial texts, and adept at managing many clerical responsibilities. Well-recognized is the image of “the technocratic teacher who masters a knowledge base and develops curriculum accordingly, controls classrooms, attains high evaluations, and helps students to perform well on competency tests” (Agnello, 2001, p. 77). It would be easy to characterize cooperating teachers this way—but it would be inaccurate and one-dimensional. Well-run, lively classrooms were a powerful form of persuasion toward mimetic practice, and this made it difficult for me to decide how to talk with student teachers about finding room to grow as practitioners, even if that meant doing things a little differently than they were already done.

There was one element that simplified some of my conversations with student teachers about their learning. Student teachers did not fully accept all of the cooperating teachers’ ideas and approaches. They were already willing to talk about alternatives, and after many weeks in their classrooms, they were ready to do more than talk. However, there was more. A critical policy frame helped me see that student teachers might not yet be aware of the policy pressures on their cooperating teachers. The student teachers,
upon observing the writing practices of their cooperating teachers, may or may not have been aware of when and if those practices emanated from the teacher's sense of what was best for their students. I realized that student teachers easily could lean toward criticizing their cooperating teachers, without understanding what pressures they, too, were under. It was important to counter this kind of thinking. The problem as I saw it was that inviting student teachers to take an inquiry stance on imitative practices risked becoming a critique of the teacher being imitated.

Their cooperating teachers had been practicing for years—even decades—in a system that the student teachers themselves had just begun to experience. Teachers all over the country are being made to practice in ways they do not believe are best for their students:

Dehumanizing practices can potentially stifle the academic and social possibilities of learners. Such practices rob children of their full humanity through a banking method of education that encourages students to receive, file, and store deposits of knowledge that is transmitted by teachers (Freire, 1970). This approach promotes passivity, acceptance, and submissiveness. (del Carmen Salazar, 2008, p. 343)

A critical policy frame helped me see the importance of listening for, and disrupting, any notions that teachers were somehow guilty of "passivity" or "submissiveness" under these pressures.

This became one of the biggest planks in my supervisory framework. One challenge as a supervisor was to help student teachers see the policy system, and see cooperating teachers not as victims, but as people engaging with policy in different ways. I began to offer the student teachers images of the cooperating teachers and administrators also at the mercy of larger policy contexts, wondering aloud with the
student teachers how their cooperating teachers might be compromised by the policy pressure.

**Struggling with the Missing, Hidden, and Ambiguous**

These student teachers' understandings of the policy context grew in complexity, as did their awareness of their own position(s) within the context. In their conversations and interactions with me, rather than a unified whole, they referred to individual policies, practices, and texts. Student teachers also began to notice conflicting and contradictory policies, both formal and informal, regarding the teaching and assessing of writing. These conflicting and ambiguous policy messages entered into their thinking about practice; specifically, they contributed to the student teachers' reservations about taking the risk of making their own decisions about practice.

One of the assumptions of my supervisory practice was that student teachers would be given curriculum documents—possibly many of them—to support and inform their teaching. It seemed to me that they would benefit from some kind of a list or set of topics that teachers were responsible for teaching. These would include “Big P” Policy requirements, and maybe “little P” policy, such as course structures or pacing guides. I assumed these texts would be reference points, sources of information and accountability.

They would also be useful to my support efforts. If student teachers had questions too uncomfortable to ask cooperating teachers, or felt constrained and stifled by these texts and their relations to practice, I thought we could examine teaching materials and curricular documents together. I could sit with them and their various guides, charts, and binders, and talk about their responsibilities, alongside what they were learning about
their students, through the lens of their professional goals. We could then talk, think, and plan in ways that would allow them to work within the structures they saw, but still achieve some of their professional aims. From the opening weeks, that assumption seemed accurate. However, as these examples will show, sometimes clear statements of student teachers' responsibilities and requirements were difficult to locate.

In Ann's case, her course had no curriculum of its own that Ann knew of. The only structure it seemed was the three-part nature of the course: 1) supporting students' work in their content area classes; 2) preparing for high-stakes tests through preparation programs; and 3) skill development. During my visits, I saw different students simultaneously working on different subjects, their work for Ann and Sandy, and test preparation. Clear messages about Ann's (and Sandy's) responsibilities to the group, and to the individual students, were in short supply. She had goals and ideas, but between Sandy's presence and the haphazard course structure, Ann struggled to find any opportunity for her own practices, and worried about what time she had being spent as productively as possible.

Whereas Ann was limited by working within an amorphous course structure, Michelle did not have first-hand access to curricular documents. Regarding her writing lessons, Michelle told me that Marjorie had spoken about curriculum guides, but Michelle had never seen them. Rather, Marjorie told Michelle what to do, and when, and then she approved Michelle's lesson plans. I did not know why these curriculum documents were not part of Marjorie's mentoring, especially considering the many texts mentioned in the meeting. I did not understand why she relied almost exclusively on
telling, but not showing, Michelle her responsibilities. Michelle indicated that it was stressful to wait and wonder constantly about what she should do next, and if she was doing it the right way. However, Michelle was reluctant to ask to see the documents because she was not sure Marjorie wanted to share them with her. In one of our interactions, she wondered aloud to me if Marjorie was not forthcoming with curriculum documents because some of Marjorie’s practice might not align with state standards.

I suggested that if Marjorie had decided not to share those policy texts, she might have good reason, though I acknowledged how stressful the lack of information was on Michelle. I wondered if Marjorie’s tight control and insistence on “how we do it here” may have been to protect a unique way of doing things, a set of practices which happened to result in high scores—but which did not conform to some P/policies. As I noted earlier, her school was the only in its district to reach AYP for the three years prior to the study. Evidently, Marjorie and her school were successful on state assessment.

I began to rethink the image of strong alignment that Marjorie had portrayed in the meetings, and it occurred to me she may have done so in my presence at least partially because this was what she thought would be valued. It could have been that Marjorie was not sharing the curriculum guides, or her reasons for withholding them, so as not to send mixed messages to a new teacher about selectively attending to standards. This would have been a very valuable set of conversations for a student teacher to have, but I could see why Marjorie might not want to have them. Doing so could give people—including me, as a representative of the university—the wrong idea. Perhaps this was based on her experience with other supervisors from the same university. It was
possible she did what she thought she should appear to be doing, and told neither Michelle nor me about it.

A silence also surrounded tests, and this was consequential for student teachers' practice in multiple ways. Firstly, the spring during which this study was conducted marked the first time a new state writing test was given. This test, however, was shrouded in secrecy. No practice prompts were issued, nor were any directions released to the schools by the state. I spent time looking online at state Department of Education websites, during and after the data collection phase; I found little beyond release dates. Based on what I heard in the hallways during my school visits, this lack of information incited a kind of anxiety among teachers. The "absence of language" in this policy (Schultz & Fecho, 2000, p. 15) was not seen as an opportunity, but as a penalty. With the secrecy around the new state writing test, there was no talk that this might mean that the new test espoused a broader view, or more inclusive ideas, of what would count as good writing. There was instead panic over what looked like the keeping of secrets. Teachers tried to guess at what the test would hold for them and their students, and in the absence of reliable policy information, they went with what they knew from previous tests. They utilized the prompts from the year before for preparation and practice because it was all they had.

A different kind of silence—a Policy of silence—surrounded the test Colleen helped administer to her 8th grade students. I first visited Colleen at the middle school the week after her 8th grade students took the state writing test. As soon as I asked Colleen if we could talk about the test, I regretted the question. She told me in
uncharacteristically serious tones that neither she nor the students could talk about the testing. They had all signed statements promising not to discuss the test in any way. I did not raise the issue again with Colleen, though I considered asking her what she thought about being pressured to sign a de facto gag order. This was one of many occasions when I had to decide between a probing question and student teachers’ stress levels.

The missing or hidden policy elements also included students and their test scores. The next example, involving Liz, is a case in which a whole school seemed complicit in “playing the game” through paying particular attention to some students—and marginalizing others—based on their capacity to influence overall school scores on the next state assessment. When I visited Liz around the mid-term, she relayed the content of a faculty meeting she had just attended, and her thoughts about that meeting. In marked contrast to her earlier comments, which blamed students for poor performance on the recent state writing test, this exchange saw Liz disappointed in the actions of the adults, specifically, state-level policy makers, and the administration and faculty at her school:

Liz: But, ok yesterday we had a staff development meeting. Hhh. We got the MAP scores back. The raw, range scores. And ((chuckle)) we targeted our bubble group, which is anybody within 6 points of being proficient or advanced. Everybody else, it doesn’t matter at this point. So the ten kids Sonya’s pulling are in that range. The kids that I have are so far below, that it’s like it doesn’t matter. And it’s frustrating that they just target certain kids because the school gets measured by their proficient and advanced kids, not by basic and below basic. These kids are falling by the wayside.

Anne Marie: So it’s become an accounting game where you find out, ‘where do we get the greatest payback if we put our resources there.’ It’s crazy.

Liz: We literally highlighted kids’ names yesterday on the MAP score sheet.
AM: The whole staff at the staff meeting was told to do this?
Liz: Everybody, 2nd through 5th grade.
AM: Were the teachers given direction as far as what to do with those students?
Liz: ((Shakes head no)) They were just told to target them.
AM: Target them.
Liz: (Chuckle.)) (POC, 3/12)

There was much here to be sad about. It was the first time I had come face to face with this practice, so I was trying to process it in the moment. How did those teachers feel highlighting students’ names? How did staff developers or administrators feel telling teachers to do so? How could I explain this to Liz in a way that would show the teachers and administrators as actors, not victims, who yet were engaging in objectionable practices?

There can be no doubt that the pressures of high-stakes testing are real. This school and its students had to appear a specific way. Appearances had to be managed through concentrated training of certain students (Adams, 2007). Teachers had to perform in certain ways, for the sake of their jobs, as part of the larger team, perhaps the grade level as a unit, or the whole school. Yet, these tactics held meaning for student teachers and their thinking about their practice. Liz was given the ‘low’ students who had no chance of making acceptable test scores. Later in this conversation, she told me it felt like she was getting these students out of the way, so others could learn. Even though the children were not told what was happening, Liz saw disappointment on their faces when they left the room each day with her, having figured out what the groupings meant, and that they were in the ‘low’ group.
The pressure on teachers and administrators to increase test scores has gained attention around the globe. Ball’s policy research points to the kind of business logic behind publicized scores and situations similar to the one Liz experienced:

That is to say, if this teacher’s school managers wanted to extract increases in performance as measured against external targets or competitive averages, they would be unlikely to ‘invest’ in work with children with special needs where the margins for improved performance were limited. In the hard logic of a performance culture an organization will only spend money where measurable returns were likely to be achieved. (Ball, 2003, p. 223)

This staff meeting about the “hard logic” of performance measures showed Liz how students had been pressured and “targeted.” She began to resent what seemed like teachers’ and administrators’ enactment of a policy which led to some students “falling by the wayside.”

I realized the policy environment can make teachers seem averse to conflict, while glossing over real differences and systemic injustices. The problem as Liz saw it was teachers’ actions in the face of policy. Of course, the problem is in the policy itself, which prizes higher scores at all costs. Yet, the ways in which policies link to practices and people had relocated the problem. The central conflict is no longer a (bad) policy, but what looked to Liz like a kind of resignation from teachers, or what Hadden (2000) calls “inactivity” or “appear[ing] apathetic,” though “their motivations may stem from a realistic view of the power of hierarchy or fear of personal reprisals” (p. 251). It was unclear if student teachers were aware of this. Even if they were, they may or may not have thought teachers’ motivations seemed to justify what was happening. They may have thought poorly of the teachers, thinking that somehow they would do better when
they had their own classrooms. If these student teachers were to do better, they would need some way to deal with the pressure they would undoubtedly encounter.

Up to this point, I have described the student teachers’ awareness of the missing and hidden elements in their overall policy contexts, including materials, information, practices, and people, namely students. In the following example, I show how these ambiguities, contradictions, and mixed messages also related directly to writing.

In her middle school English Language Arts support class, Colleen encountered terminology doubtless familiar to many classroom teachers. These terms ostensibly referred to rhetorical genres or modes of essay development sometimes used in writing pedagogy, including narrative, expository, persuasive, and other similar sounding terms. I had encountered these terms and their ambiguous meanings throughout my teaching career, from junior high school to freshman composition, and each time I saw them, they were defined slightly differently.

Indeed, Colleen was surrounded by these misleading terms. According to Marie’s syllabus, students had already written a 5-paragraph essay, a comparative essay, and a descriptive essay, and had engaged in some kind of persuasive writing. The how-to essay, next on the list, coincided with Colleen’s arrival. The syllabus did not explain what these essays involved, but that did not strike me as unusual. I assumed Marie had talked with Colleen about each of these categories of essays as they were taught at her school.

These conceptions of writing loaded into policy texts and practices found ways to perpetuate themselves. The concept of writing in rhetorical genres appeared in both state tests and state standards, all policy texts. There was a further school-level policy (it was
unclear if it was a district-level policy) that I observed there and at other sites. At some administrative level, these loaded terms--expository, narrative, descriptive, and more--were translated into so-called “Essential Questions” (“EQs”) that were basically a restating of a standard or benchmark in question form. Teachers were then required to post these EQs on the board for each lesson. For example, in Colleen’s classroom, I saw on the board “EQ: what elements need to be present in an expository essay paper?” (FN, 2/16). They were also to post these EQs in the hallways wherever student work was displayed. I observed that this could be a subtle way of publicizing or legitimizing particular teacher actions and the resulting student outputs in terms of standards so that faculty, students, administrators, and visiting parents could see.

This language, though used for decades by state curricula and testing prompts, is not readily accepted across composition studies experts. At first glance, the labels seem to invite a certain kind of writing from the student. They sound specialized, technical, even somewhat intimidating. The directions and descriptions of these genres are often so broad as to be nearly meaningless. Moreover, these genres, as they often appear in state testing documents, both flatten and oversimplify the writing task. They suggest that structure and well-placed signal words can make the difference between radically different texts, and that creation or invention is subsumed by format. In an important study of state writing prompts, Hillocks (2002) addresses the point that the view of writing espoused by these labels is far from good writing practice:

Labels such as expository, narrative, and persuasive do not in themselves stipulate the kinds of tasks to be performed for the sake of assessment. Even narrative, which may seem fairly specific, encompasses everything from fairy tales and fables to novels, epic poems, some writing about history, and even directions.
Persuasive writing may encompass an even greater breadth. We can argue that most pieces of writing intended for public consumption involve persuasion. Even a poet must persuade an audience to accept the conventions and assumptions if a poem is to work its magic on a reader. But the term also has extensive overlap with expository writing. (p. 54-55)

Though unpopular within large segments of the composition community, terms such as "persuasive," "narrative," "expository," and others I had not heard of before all appeared on state test preparation materials and commercial programs across all schools in this study.

The key point in this theoretical tradition is that texts vary linguistically according to their purpose and context. As a result, it is possible to specify linguistic features of particular text-types according to whether they are spoken or written, whether they are recounting, describing, informing, instructing, and according to the formality and certainty of the situation. (Ivanic, 2004, p. 232-33)

During our conversations about these writing policies and practices, I struggled to understand what Colleen meant, or thought she should mean, by each term. I was lost sometimes in her use of the terms "narrative," "how-to," "sequential," "expository," and others. I was trying to read through her words to get at the requirements, what in particular she was being held responsible to teach. I was listening for clues as to what Marie had told Colleen, or any curriculum documents she had been given. When I asked her to clarify for me some of the terms she was using, her explanations did not help me understand her meaning. However, I did begin to guess that Colleen might be doing her best to make sense of and use the ambiguous explanations given to her.

I did not, at the time, stop to think about Marie's understanding of these terms and what that might have meant to Colleen. Since then, I have reflected on the fact that Marie had been teaching outside of her field. Colleen was impressed, and admittedly
intimidated, by Marie’s knowledge of “ELA.” Marie had, from what I could see, worked hard to learn what she needed to know to teach her courses. She had surrounded herself with resources. The bookshelves of her room were filled with class sets of several different English and grammar textbooks, including Prentice Hall grammar books and Pearson Global editions. Her room also had more writing process posters on the walls than any other. Yet, I wondered what mixed messages about writing those many texts housed, in addition to those I had noticed in the state- and district-level policy texts, and if they might have conflicted with each other. I also wondered if some of those terms were local creations, little p policy that had come to be used among the faculty and become official perspectives on teaching writing. I missed here an important opportunity to portray Marie to Colleen as a practitioner under immense policy pressure and scrutiny, perhaps exacerbated by her out-of-field assignment.

Though there is danger in blindly trusting experts, when teachers need help, turning to textbooks is sensible. Yet these writing policy terms and the ambiguity surrounding them threatened to be obstacles to Colleen’s work with students and their writing. In our next post-observation conference, Colleen told me that the curriculum was making her “nervous.” I decided to talk about these loaded writing terms for two reasons. One was to reduce her stress over trying to reconcile them with each other, and with any meaningful notions of writing. The other was to find, perhaps, some wiggle room in the materials she had been given, a way she could fulfill her responsibilities and not let the terms get in the way.
Because she was nervous and I saw her looking uncomfortable, I felt I was doing the right thing by exposing that some of the reasons she might be uneasy had nothing to do with her. I did not challenge Marie’s curriculum directly, and phrased my questions and statements in terms of general composition theory, as well as some of the myths surrounding what makes for good writing scores. She was happy to hear that the generic terms were not universally accepted, and that they oversimplified the writing task. We both knew she could not completely ignore the terms, but I thought I could help her by showing that the conflict was not some sign of her misunderstanding. However, it was difficult for me to tell if this information would help her in the short term with her students. As much as I sought to dislodge some obstacles when I saw conflict in writing policy or practice, only the student teachers could decide whether the obstacle was worth the trouble of removing.

Teaching Writing in the Gaps and Cracks: “What If We Take The Failure Out?”

This section is about student teachers’ teaching writing, in ways consistent with their professional goals, in the midst of contexts that often seemed to prize uniformity of practice. From mid-February until the end of March, each of the student teachers discovered or created opportunities to practice writing according to their own professional judgment. Overall, these practice opportunities existed in the gaps, cracks, and wiggle room of the policy environment. I describe and analyze an instance of each student teacher’s teaching that I was present to observe, though there were other instances I did not see. In this section, I also provide excerpts from student teachers’ writing in the literacy class, in which they shared some of their beliefs regarding the teaching of writing.
to ground the decisions they made about their practices. I also analyze the relationships between these practices and the complex policy environments surrounding them.

Sometimes, even the tightly-knit connections between policy and practice admitted for some decision-making. For example, Michelle was told to teach students how to write a letter, a 2nd grade curricular requirement. During the lesson I observed, Michelle managed to make her own practice decisions regarding this writing Policy. Michelle asked her students to write a letter to her brother, Anthony, who was serving in the U.S. military in Afghanistan. This, I learned, would be their second letter to him, and he had recently written back to the students. She projected a picture of him in uniform on the screen as students wrote.

What struck me about this decision was how much of an impact it had on the writing opportunity offered to the students. Though she still used a letter-writing software program that asked students to fill in the parts of a traditional letter, Michelle managed to exercise professional judgment. She gave the writing a real audience beyond the classroom, one who also wrote back and sent pictures. She offered students a chance to write for a purpose—they were reaching out to a local person far away, and thanking Anthony for his service to the country. Students also sent some of Anthony’s favorite foods to him in a package with their letters. Though this purpose and audience were the same for all students, they each took up the opportunities in their own ways, asking him questions or sharing stories about their lives.

I saw Michelle’s decisions in keeping with goals she had set for herself in the literacy class: “When I start to teach someone reading and writing, I would like to think I
could come up with ways to make it fun for that person...I would find out what the person is interested in” (literacy autobiography, Sept. 2008). She also explained to me that she wanted to give students an alternative to the prompts she saw Marjorie using, which included a strict paragraph format, “and they can’t go outside that box” (FG 4/19) which limited the forms of expression and the content of the writing. She seemed to take for granted that she would be able to shape her writing practices to fit the students, rather than shoe-horning students into a pre-determined program. I thought the letter writing was a step in that positive direction.

She constructed an opportunity for genuine, real-world dialogue when it would have been easy to assign an imaginary audience or a one-time letter that got no reply. In our interactions, I applauded her choices and also pushed her further in her practice. I wrote, “There are many possibilities with this kind of activity, the way you position the kids, and the purposes and powers of writing available to them” (email, 2/21). The students had brought their papers to her for editing; I suggested she let them peer edit next time, as we had done as writers in our class. When I saw her willingness to move a policy toward her notion of what would be interesting to students and responsive to them, I encouraged this kind of thinking, gently.

Ann also found room for professional judgment in writing in a building-wide writing Policy. Ann’s case shows how even those policies which sound writing-supportive can play out in classrooms in counterproductive ways. Ann’s beliefs regarding the teaching of reading and writing, expressed during the literacy class,
acknowledged how people’s natural uses of language could be constricted or shut down by some school practices:

The first thing that I am going to say is that I strongly believe that we want to read and write. I believe students want to learn how to do these things and sometimes we, as teachers, make it too complicated...Reading and writing are such a part of our world that students have to come into contact with things daily that they wish they could read or write about, but the more failure at this they have the less they will want to do it. What if we take the failure out, as much as we can, and let them write however and whatever they want to? (Discussion board posting, Nov. 2008)

The above portion of a longer online discussion reveals a number of ideas relevant to the present argument. Ann, like Michelle, also seemed to assume that teachers would have the power and responsibility to make decisions about curriculum, based on their readings of students’ needs and interests. Ann’s posting here suggests that teachers have the ability to remove obstacles to students’ learning, even when those obstacles are built into the ways in which reading and writing are constructed in schools: “What if we take the failure out?” She also acknowledges there are larger forces limiting this action: she and her classmates should do “as much as we can.” These two dueling ideas—teacher agency, and the policy structure shaping and constraining it—Ann articulated months before her student teaching placement.

In her high school resource class, Ann encountered a writing Policy that had an effect on her thinking about teaching writing: mandated journals. Students were required in each class to write on a journal topic provided by the teacher; this was school Policy. She learned quickly that her students had come to “hate writing” (POC, 1/28) and resisted the daily journals in her class.
In our literacy course, we had discussed journals, both their usefulness and their limitations. In those discussions, we talked about how journals, though a good idea, can have a negative impact on students' relationship with writing. For instance, one member of the class described for us her frustration, when she was in junior high school, over her school's mandatory journal policy. The teachers were required to have students write journal entries in every subject, each day. Ann quickly found that her high school students, like her former classmate, had come to resent the journals.

When a policy is meant to be followed, regardless of the outcome, it can become a barrier to teachers' reading of and response to her students. When I visited and observed Ann, I saw that she did not have choice whether or not to journal. I tried to help her work within the policy, even though it was having the opposite of its likely intended effect. She mentioned some alternate journal topics she had written. Together, we briefly brainstormed some more. Attempting to help her fulfill her requirements and her professional goals, I also suggested we look through the test preparation workbook, and its section of practice prompts. Together, we might find some prompt that appealed to Ann's sense of what was best, based on her reads of her students. I was more willing to talk about how to work the system than how to change it, at this point.

With effort and imagination, Ann remade the journal policy into a teaching tool, when it would have been easy to turn a deaf ear to students' complaints about the constant journaling. What had become a barrier to students' positive relationships with writing, Ann made into a bridge. Over time, I saw that Ann had expanded and varied the mandated journal according to her professional goals, which focused on students’
strengths, needs, and interests. She used the journals to pique student interest in the books they read. Other days, Ann wrote topics based on what students shared with her about their lives outside school (for instance, getting a driver's license) or wrote topics to address what she saw as the prevalent mood of the room. She was particularly interested in drawing students back into the class when they seemed detached, as well as opening up discussion if there was tension.

Her work with the journals, Ann told me, came directly from her experience in our literacy class in two ways. First, we wrote freewrites as a group nearly every week. Second, it allowed her to do what I had described as 'taking the temperature of the room.' This was a practice I developed as a secondary teacher, a respectful reading of students, paying attention to various verbal and non-verbal cues. I read students' talk and behavior at the start of a class, and especially after a difficult conversation or heavy topic, and allowed this reading to shape practice. I was proud to see Ann using the journal as a way to take the temperature of her room. By expanding the role of journal writing in her classroom context, Ann subtly increased students' relation to the curriculum, in keeping with her professional goals. Her writing practices, as did Michelle's, offered students more meaningful relationships with writing in school, and they both managed to enact these practices in their complicated policy contexts.

This next example describes and analyzes two days of a multi-day writing activity that Liz shared with her 3rd grade students. I use data from my field notes and our interactions to provide an overview of the activity, and then zoom in to key moments by sharing direct quotations from transcripts. Liz’s writing practice and her thinking behind
it reveal a complicated interplay of policy and practice. Before I describe her practice, I analyze her assumptions about professional decision-making as revealed in a writing from the literacy class. I draw attention to the similarities between Ann’s and Michelle’s writings, described above.

Liz entered student teaching with some ideas about “playing the game,” and teacher autonomy in the face of rules and standards:

I have lost my passion for reading and writing outside of school and I want to do everything in my power so that this does not happen to my students. I think that it is possible to give our students options and make learning to read and write meaningful, but that it will take a lot of time and effort on our part. (Something our reading and writing teachers obviously didn't do!) I also think there are certain times in life when you simply have to "suck it up" and play the game. We have to teach our children reading and writing conventions as determined by standards and curriculum guides, but the way we accomplish this is up to us! (Discussion board posting, Nov. 2008)

There are in Liz’s comments, as in Ann’s and Michelle’s, some assumptions about the choice teachers will have while teaching in accordance with policy. She expects teachers will have a measure of autonomy—“the way we accomplish this is up to us!”—along with ‘options’ for practice. She believes with “time and effort” teachers can address students’ passions for reading and writing while still fulfilling policy requirements. I understood Liz’s position, and I felt she and the other student teachers were right to assume teachers should have a degree of professional autonomy that allows them to connect students and curriculum in fruitful ways. However, there can be no debate that teachers are subjected to organizational control through policy. As Liz’s student teaching experience progressed, I wondered if she thought the teachers around her had that autonomy, or were putting in the “time and effort,” and what this might have meant to her
thinking about her own future practice. I turn now to analyze a writing activity I witnessed in which Liz exercised professional judgment.

Liz saw opportunity in the unscripted time immediately following the state writing test. Sonya had left the room, and the relentless drill of test preparation could cease. In this free time, Liz chose to take up ideas of writing as both a social and a school practice. In our literacy class, we had discussed academic literacy (Lea & Street, 2006) and the different official and unofficial rules governing writing in the disciplines. We also had used freewrites (Elbow, 2000) frequently. Both of these approaches emerged in Liz’s writing practice during this off-the-record time following the state writing test.

In a post-observation conference, Liz explained to me her thinking in beginning the writing activity. Specifically, she drew attention to the antagonistic relationship that she witnessed being encouraged between students and writing. I quote from the transcript of our meeting:

[T]hey never get the opportunity just to write about what’s on their mind or what they’re feeling. Or what they did this weekend, or anything like that. They don’t even really get a chance to share that kind of stuff. I just wanted them to have that opportunity to write about whatever they want however they wanted, without having the stress of ‘how do I spell this word,’ or, ‘should I indent my paragraph’ that kind of stuff. So it’s just a really break away from what they’ve been taught for the past 3 years. (POC, 3/19)

From this and other comments, I discerned that Liz was objecting to the form and the process of writing she had witnessed as students prepared for the state writing test. But she was also taking issue with the situation, topics, content, audience, and purpose of students’ writing. She felt the school’s policy of test preparation, and the kinds of writing it emphasized, was limiting students’ development as writers, and potentially constricting
the ways they used writing in school. Liz noticed that writing was often for meeting
some scoring criteria, rather than—or instead of—writing for critical or creative thinking.

What is perhaps most alarming to writing educators and researchers about this reliance
on high-stakes testing is that many writing tests—and the curriculum that prepares
students to take them—encourage narrow and formulaic writing, and the
teaching of writing merely as a skill. (Schultz, 2006, p. 358-359)

Based on what she had heard and seen, she had planned something different. Liz seemed
to me to be offering students a perspective which challenged dominant traditions.

Practicing in the cracks and gaps, the downtime immediately after the state writing test,
Liz “engag[ed] students in unofficial spaces wherein students are encouraged to be critics
and articulators of their realities” (Agnello, 2001, p. 170). The data below will show that
students were certainly articulating and criticizing, if not perhaps critiquing, the rules and
expectations for writing in school.

Liz’s writing activities addressed writing policy directly. Liz boldly asked
students what they knew about the rules for writing in school, and she wrote down what
they said. Then, she turned the conversation away from school writing, instead asking
students to think about writing for themselves, and writing they did out of school. She
made a graphic organizer to show the differences and similarities between the two kinds
of writing. This discussion reflected the academic literacies framework we had discussed
for several weeks in our class. She then made a sign with two sides, one blue and one
yellow, to hang on the front board. She let students choose the names, ‘yellow’ writing,
which they called ‘relaxed writing,’ and ‘blue writing,’ which they called ‘writing with
rules.’” The side which faced out indicated to students the writing situation. It seemed to
me that Liz planned to use this sign and their discussion to build on for future teaching.
All of this happened the day before I came to observe. I observed Liz on the second day of this writing “break.” I was excited to hear Liz was giving students opportunities to connect with writing in different ways, after all the preparation and the state writing test. As I arrived, Liz asked students to review the rules for in-school writing they had discussed the previous day. There were vivid responses. I captured as many as I could, typing on my laptop. Although not a direct transcript, this interaction provides a colorful picture of students’ talk about their experiences writing in school:

Student: Boring!
S: Do what our teacher says
S: It’s boring writing three paragraphs
S: Capitalization
S: It’s torture!
S: You have to indent
S: We have to write with rules, man!
S: It’s like you gotta go back, and if you mess up again, you gotta go back
S: I don’t like when I get stuff marked wrong
S: I have to write a pretty copy
S: You have to write the same thing over and over
Liz: Sometimes we have to write like that. ((Students moan)) Sometimes we have to play the game. ((Moans)) We have to learn we have to play the game. We talked about how our yellow writing is just as important as our blue writing.
S: Yay! Yellow writing! (Field notes, 3/19)

Evidently, Liz was not the only one tired of the status quo. Although it is possible that students responded to Liz the way they did because she was someone different and young, I feel a more helpful reading is to look at how this interaction shaped and was shaped by the policy structures surrounding it. A critical policy lens encouraged me to consider the positions students are offered in the policy contexts of high-stakes writing assessments and the preparation associated with them.
I am not the first to examine how writing is related to students’ roles in the policy environment. Schultz and Fecho (2000) draw attention to the importance of attending to the contexts within which students write, and the sometimes subtle ways in which contexts shape writing: “A social contextual perspective on writing development helps us to understand the ways in which people write with and against culture and how these choices shape their growth as writers” (p. 55). So far, students had been writing with the testing culture to such an extent that they had internalized the test-centric rules and expectations surrounding writing. They expressed dissatisfaction with topics, form, revision, the nature of teacher feedback, and the physical challenges of writing— neatly!—at age eight. They also knew they had to follow these rules, and I did not doubt they knew the rules related to the state test. It seemed to me that Liz was trying to get them to think about the test as a unique situation, and not the way all writing had to be. Her students knew the bureaucracy around writing in schools (Scott, 2008). I laughed at their energy but could not help but be troubled by the fact that writing in their school lives had become “boring” and “torture.”

I argue that the students had become repositories of policy. When people speak and act in a recognizable way, Gee (2005) claims they are “carriers” (p. 27) of larger discussions and ways of thinking and acting. These students are carrying writing policy with them. As much as the children disliked the writing policies and practices to which they had been subjected, they still had internalized them, and could recite and reproduce them, whether or not they wanted to do so. Other research has described this phenomenon, when it seems that children have writing habits which are hard to break:
While teachers were concerned to open up spaces for child participation and decision-making, the influence of the dominant institutional practices closed down many opportunities for the transfer of power to children...it was interesting that children themselves would spontaneously conform to the dominant practices. (Cox & Robinson-Pant, 2005, p. 62)

The rules and regulations had become part of what students were used to, how they talked and acted around writing, and what they expected regarding writing. Liz suspected that Sonya’s writing practices had been shaped in one particular direction by testing. Yet Liz was trying to use the students’ awareness of the dominant practices to pry open space for different relationships to writing.

As social spaces are created in moment-to-moment interaction, postmodern teachers and their students understand how competency-tested literacy is stilted and skills based. Teachers help students differentiate between necessary skills and literacy for basic literacy and literacy for personal, social, and political engagement. (Agnello, 2001, p. 170)

It seemed to me that she wanted to open students up to other ways of writing in school.

In this way, she used what students knew about test-centered writing as a jumping-off point for, and a contrast to, students’ writing in their everyday lives.

Students answered her invitation to talk about, think about, and do writing in a new way.

When the teacher moves beyond the teacher monologue or script, student counterscript or what Gutierrez, Rymes and Larson (1995) refer to as ‘underlife’ can emerge. Student resistance to teacher-dominated discourse can handily become part of the transformation of dominant curriculum and skills-based literacy script. (Agnello, 2001, p. 171)

I observed two days of this writing activity, and what a vivid underlife Liz let loose. She had initially thought of this as a one-day break, but stretched the activity out over multiple days because of students’ enthusiastic responses. She explained to me that she also wanted more opportunity to break them of some of the testing habits, and had begun to build more positive relationships between them and different forms of and reasons for writing. She explained to me she was thinking ahead to writing in the content areas.
In spite of the recent state writing test and the preparation around it, the students still were happy to write. After their conversation remembering the rules of in-school writing, students discussed “relaxed writing.” They brainstormed together, and then Liz let them freewrite for ten minutes, while writing with them on the overhead. They would have those writings returned to them the next day to continue, or they could start something new. Given the opportunity to write for themselves, students wrote, and wrote, and wrote. In our post-observation conference that day, when Liz and I were paging through the students’ work, we both marveled at how they did not want to stop writing after ten minutes:

Liz: This [paper belongs to] the little girl that said, “We can write whatever we want.” She never writes when we have a prompt.

Anne Marie: Yeah?

Liz: When Mrs. Krivda was teaching she [wrote] nothing. She’ll get maybe a sentence out, the entire time we’re writing. And--

AM: And she’s got two and a half pages.

Liz: Mmhmm

AM: That’s amazing. That’s one of the things I noticed [while observing] and I wrote it down [reads from field notes] “they keep going.”

Liz: Mmhmm. It takes them a week to get this much information out, when they have a prompt. (POC, 3/19)

As we continued to talk and page through papers, I noticed several papers were double-spaced; students had written on every other line. I asked Liz about it. For some reason, this double-spacing had been encouraged in test preparation. Apparently, even in their “relaxed” writing, the students conformed to certain practices, some unique to the test.

One child drew a heavy line around his writing to box it in. Liz explained to me that they repeatedly had been told that, on the test, their writing had to be in the box.

Liz finished these few days’ break by allowing students to share their writing with the class. Though it was not clear to me what writing they would be sharing—
blue/formal, yellow/personal, or either, I returned to hear what they had written, and sat in the back of the room. For this sharing opportunity, Liz set up the microphone for the classroom sound system and placed a stool at the front of the room, author’s chair-style. There was no shortage of volunteers to share. Calvin, a boy who had repeated 3rd grade twice and was often in trouble in class, stood up to read what he had written. At first, his lines were timid, silly phrases, spoken softly. But while writing, he had seized upon the idea of transcribing lyrics to a favorite song, from memory. When he performed those words, he transformed: his voice boomed, his body eased, and he suddenly had confidence in front of his class.

A girl approached the microphone to read her work. She had created a poem by playing with the alphabet. She read words with rhythm, turning lists of letters into a lyric. Her classmates giggled. I fumbled with my audio recorder, and wished I had captured these performances in greater detail to share with Liz in our conference. There was much we could talk about, and I was curious to discuss with Liz any differences between students’ performances and their writing, specifically any changes they made while or after sharing.

A boy known for his musical talent stood up to share. The students twittered with anticipation; they hoped he would sing. I had my voice recorder still in my hand, and I pressed the button. He sang in a style part blues, part gospel, with a voice and skill that astonished me. I draw attention to the lyrics for their emphasis on the relationships between this boy, his worlds, and his words:

I’m still holding on
To what I believe
Still holding
I’m holding, I’m holding on
I’m still standing, I’m standing, yes I am
Oh I’m standing
On the word
That’s in my heart (03/20/08)
As his classmates listened, they started to clap along in rhythm with him, and gradually the whole class was participating. I felt I had seen a blending of in-school and out-of-school worlds through writing and sharing, as this young man’s song became a truly social practice. I share this song because of the close connection between writing, this young man’s conviction, the communal performance, public sharing, and a sense of what was waiting to be tapped into in these students’ writing lives. Liz allowed her students to show themselves to her and to each other in a new way.

Overall, Liz’s writing practices connected in complex ways to the writing policy environment. In large part, the state writing test was responsible for much of what Liz had experienced so far in her student teaching. The test-centric view of writing had limited her practice to increasing scores. The strategic grouping “targeted” students in preparation for the next test. Though she struggled with Sonya’s scrutiny, Liz did not have the testing pressure on her directly. This kind of outsider position may have facilitated Liz’s actions with her students. This raised a question for me about the role of a teacher’s autonomy in what happens in their own classrooms, a question I take up later in this and subsequent chapters. Both of us were intrigued by what happened over those few days. It was also, as I will show throughout the rest of the analysis, the source of much discussion between us.
This chapter's final example of student teachers' writing practice illuminates a student teacher's navigation of a different kind of policy conflict. In this case, there was not so much pressure toward narrow conceptions of writing, and the student teacher had room for professional judgment. Even then, specific components of the larger policy context played a role as the student teacher taught writing. I want to shift from an example of a practice that used the strict rules of test-based writing to pry open wiggle room where other writing might take hold, to one where a set of supportive and student-centered writing practices clashed with school policy.

In her second placement, Colleen expressed some sense of participation and ownership of the writing activities in her classroom. In more ways than one, this was a supportive writing environment for Colleen and her students. Marie wanted students to write about real-life issues in class. She also gave them their choice of topic. She offered Colleen control of the lessons within local expectations, and frequently repeated in my hearing how confident she was in Colleen as a professional.

There had been a recent flare-up in gang-related activity at the school, and I have no doubt that these events entered into Marie's choice of writing topics. She had found a set of topics online that were specifically geared toward teenaged writers (though I did not know if the topics invited writing in specific genres). Sixty-one topics remained after Marie and Colleen eliminated those they thought too risqué for their students. Among the safe and silly options (such as what animal a student would want to be if he or she could), what drew Marie's attention were the many topics that addressed personal or controversial topics, such as drug use, gang activity, and skipping school.
In our literacy class the prior semester, Colleen had shared her view that factors such as students’ social, cultural, and private lives should play a role in the teaching of writing.

There is not a single approach that encourages writing from every student.... I try to look at it as also taking into account the physical, mental, and social conditions of the student as an individual. Wouldn't that make a difference in how I taught them? (Discussion board posting, 2008)

Understanding some of the challenges her students faced in their everyday lives, Colleen joined Marie in excitement over these personal topics. However, attempting student-centered, authentic writing practices opened up teachers and students to different conversations and potentially delicate negotiations.

Colleen’s primary goal as a teacher was to connect her practice to her students’ lives, and this writing assignment would offer her the chance to do so. Marie turned the class over to Colleen, who then faced the delicate task of supporting students’ writing about their personal lives. Working from definitions of rhetorical genres that were fuzzy at best, and with graphic organizers that encouraged highly-artificial forms of writing, Colleen nonetheless engaged her students in drafting, conferencing, and whole-class instruction. Marie later told me she had never conferenced with students individually, and she admired that Colleen did. The conferences underscored Colleen’s larger goal with this writing assignment, as Colleen addressed the difficult and sensitive nature of the topics several times with the students as they conferenced with her. She retold stories from her own life experience to show students that she welcomed their writing about the realities of their lives, even if those realities were controversial.
However, the supportive writing environment of Marie’s classroom was still surrounded by school-level and district-level policies. Colleen’s understandings of and assumptions about these policies, and about her position as a student teacher, entered into her thinking about her teaching of writing. This classroom-level practice of encouraging writing on personal topics conflicted with some building-level policies. The many thoughtful decisions she and Marie had made up to this point led Colleen into a difficult professional situation. Specifically, Colleen was concerned about her obligations and actions if students revealed sensitive personal information in their writing about dangerous or illegal activities. For this data excerpt, I turn to the transcription of a post-observation conference between us:

Some of the things that we’ve talked about were like, being in gangs, doing drugs. Y’know skipping school. Big personal things for these students. But then y’know there’s consequence to that. I get these papers and I go, ‘Holy cow! Wow. This is what they’re facing.’ And then I’m going, ‘Wow, I need to get rid of this, it’s like evidence.’ (POC, day 2)

In this brief excerpt of a long conversation, Colleen describes her students’ writing and the “consequences” she faces, her surprise at what students were revealing, and her feelings of guilt and a kind of panic that she had caused students possibly to incriminate themselves with the school (or perhaps the police). Colleen realized that she had potentially subjected students to punishment, from school administration or more, simply because they had responded to her and Marie’s invitation to write about difficult personal situations.

In this conversation, Colleen and I dug into the particularly sensitive topic of asking students to ‘expose’ their personal lives, in writing, for a grade. While we were talking, Colleen handed me a paper from a student who had been in trouble at school. As
I read the paper, I realized the student was revealing violent events in his life outside of school. Colleen explained why he had been suspended recently, shared some of her thoughts about her next moves with him, and asked for my advice. I felt it was my role to let her know that I understood why she would be worried, while reinforcing the importance of what she was doing with her students, including this boy.

Here I tried to frame Colleen's practice in terms of larger conversations in the field of composition, specifically so she could begin to think of what it means to invite students to write about their personal lives. I was mindful of Colleen's present situation, and her future practice. In part of our lengthy post-observation conference, I focused on how Colleen was helping this boy by offering him a chance to write out his thoughts about his world, for an adult who offered herself as a safe and sympathetic audience. We talked briefly about what she could do as a teacher when a child was in danger, or threatening to harm others. I then shared stories of my years teaching high school, as a way of processing for myself what Colleen was going through. I recalled times when students revealed painful aspects of their lives in personal essays, and how I responded, thinking aloud and inviting Colleen to do the same. I encouraged Colleen to put any interaction with administration in Marie's hands, trusting that Marie would know which courses of action would best serve the child.

As uncertain as she felt, Colleen brought new practices to the discourse and to Marie's room. She had to forge relationships with the students to make these conversations possible. She worked to set up the relationship so the writing could happen; when the writing conferences happened, it deepened their relationship. Both Colleen and
her students were in difficult and vulnerable situations, but I saw their bravery. She respected them, and they trusted her. I applauded the topics, and that Colleen had embraced some process pedagogy in writing over days, including multiple drafts and conferencing, with students she had just met.

“Survive or Thrive?”

My supervisory practices continued to develop as I was trying to achieve some specific goals. This second phase of student teaching supervision brought these goals into clearer focus for me. I was trying to walk with student teachers as they developed as practitioners throughout this experience, so I could help them in ways sensitive to their daily lives. They were growing; they were being challenged and stretched; they were being tried and taxed. They were learning about themselves as well as learning some of what it could mean to teach in the current policy climate, and I found these two were inseparable. I already knew of their concern with rules and expectations, and I was trying to give shape to, or frame, that concern. I wanted to make sure they were not letting their frustrations with the rules and regulations of their student teaching experience impact their feelings about teaching. I had conversations with all of them about addressing present realities in ways that might lead to theorizing about future practice, over what I hoped would be long and fruitful careers.

As I mentioned in Chapter 4, I had begun by advising student teachers to work within the system in which they found themselves, but still to remain true to their judgment when they talked and thought with me about how to serve children. I did not want student teachers’ particular writing policy environments—or any policy
environment—to limit their thinking when it came to imaginative or creative ways to encourage learning and serve children. It was important to be a voice counter to the many messages that encouraged sameness, which could lead them away from considerations of individual students' strengths and needs, in favor of one-size-fits-all curriculum.

I was trying to find the good impulses that would lead the student teachers to the decisions they wanted to make, and to help them imagine the different ways these impulses could be followed, where their thinking was not circumscribed by particular traditions or expectations. "Through talk and writing, [practitioners] make their tacit knowledge more visible, call into question assumptions about common practices, and generate data that make possible the consideration of alternatives" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001, p. 53). I was determined that our interactions could be the space for questioning what they saw around them, and imagining alternatives. In our conversations, I encouraged them to keep the ideal in mind; not lose sight that the way things were done around them was only one set of possibilities for practice; and not to give up thinking about ideal situations in terms of their professional goals and how they could achieve them. I sought to offer them a chance to become comfortable with challenging the policies and practices around them, for the benefit of their students and communities, wherever they taught.

As much as I wanted to challenge student teachers, and unsettle their notions of what writing in school was and could be, I did not want to push them too far past their current understandings because of the vulnerability of their positions. I also worried that
if they did not appreciate a reflective framework in our time together, they would be reluctant to pick it up later.

We also wonder, as Kagan (1992) does, about the amount of tension that is helpful or harmful to pre-service teachers as they learn to teach. The ‘right amount of gap’ to enable student teachers to transform discomfort into a learning opportunity is, however, difficult to predict, and seemed to depend on a variety of personal, interpersonal and contextual factors. (Orland-Barak & Kinyon, 2007, p. 966-67)

It was difficult for me to gauge when such action would be too much to handle in their already vulnerable position. I wanted part of our conversations to be about fitting in, at least in the short term, and part to be about challenging that position in the long term. I continued to recommend working within the policy structure while questioning it and imagining alternatives.

As much as student teaching is a unique situation with its own particular set of roles and responsibilities, it also has many similarities to classroom teaching. I began to wonder how I could help student teachers extent their thinking about policy and practice relationships beyond student teaching. I considered how I could help them to see that some of the problems and obstacles they faced in student teaching would not somehow disappear when they were teachers in their own classrooms.

My journal writing in this second phase began to show changes in how I understood some of the challenges we faced, and my conceptions of my role as a supervisor. Though I operated with a commitment to inquiry, I had not articulated my short-term goals for supervision. I became clearer in my thinking about supervision, and I admitted that providing support was more complicated than I had anticipated:

That’s what I want to get out of this. An understanding of what they’re encountering and how they make sense of it, and how we can make some sense of
it together, and what different forms support can take, and if it’s actually supportive after all. (Supervision journal, 2/27/09)
I believed then, as I do now, that I could offer support while I was supervising.

Particularly because I was supervising for the first time, with an inquiry stance and critical lenses, I have learned the value of reflection on the question, “What am I trying to make happen here, and why?” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001, p. 52). I knew I was trying to help student teachers learn to teach writing in inclusive and constructive ways, even as they were realizing how constrained they were by larger forces and local expectations. I saw that rules and expectations, people and practices, encouraged student teachers to teach writing in particular ways, and that specific moves within those policy structures could open up opportunities for other perspectives on writing and teaching writing.

By the middle of student teaching, I had shifted my focus toward student teachers working in the “wiggle room,” but imagining what more could happen, in the present and in their future practice. I had been advocating, as I have pointed out, that student teachers work within the systems in which they find themselves, and make the most of any wiggle room they can find. I had been encouraging student teachers to keep a kind of ideal situation in mind, to fight against the constraints of any one policy arrangement—a kind of decontextualizing. However, I began to doubt that I was spending enough attention on how student teachers could be agents of change within communities they would encounter across their careers. I had to consider what happened after practicing in the gaps and cracks, and what it meant to look for wiggle room in the first place. I journaled in frustration: “At this point, I don’t even know what I’m trying to help them do...get
through their time with the kids? Actually try something? Survive or thrive?"
(Supervision journal, March 5). This was a turning point in my thinking about supervision, policy, and the preparation of teachers to teach writing.

I was turning away from merely coping with problems the policy contexts presented, and toward overcoming them. But student teachers would have to be able to identify the sources of these problems first, without internalizing them—blaming themselves—or externalizing them—blaming students or teachers. I considered ways to recontextualize the practices they engaged in and observed how to help student teachers look differently at the situations around them, and how to use what they were learning to advocate on behalf of their students for their practices to faculty, administrators, and parents.

I had to clarify my commitment to teacher agency, to myself, and to student teachers, without seeming to criticize the schools and teachers. I respected the cooperating teachers, and as much as some of them occasionally enacted practices with which I disagreed, it was not difficult to find the source of those practices tied to local efforts to comply with state and federal policy. Working in the wiggle room allowed student teachers to deflect or escape surveillance, but it did not help them counteract the forces that worked against agency.

At this point, I also began to clarify why the mimetic practice had troubled me, and what I could do about it with student teachers in this short time frame. Making decisions about practice involves student teachers’ interpretation of policy, their understandings of children’s strengths and needs, and their awareness of their own role in
bringing the two together. This decision-making process is also a part of the cycle of reflective practice. As the semester continued, I saw how the policy environments were shaping and constraining student teachers' practices, and thought about what this had to do with their chance to enact student-centered pedagogy. Practitioners spur their own professional development by considering the thinking behind their practices, and the outcomes of those practices. When there is little or no decision-making behind the practice, there is little purpose in reflection on practice.

I realized I wanted to be an agent of change, and to show student teachers they could be agents of change as well. Together, we could throw the wrench into the machine. But I knew this was risky, and did not want to alienate the student teachers, or somehow make them look like they were not 'team players.'

From the perspective of inquiry as stance, professional development is associated more with uncertainty than certainty, more with posing problems and dilemmas than with solving them, and more with the recognition that inquiry both stems from and generates questions. In many situations, 'questioning' and 'challenging the system' are rather difficult to explain as the consequences of inquiry-based professional development, and yet these may be precisely the kind of consequences that lead to more democratic schools and to the formation of a more just society. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 56)

Reading the present context was helpful, but not enough; we needed language and a framework, something to prepare us to encounter and act agentively within policy/practice situations yet unknown. This was about being ready to challenge any system they were in, through a careful and thoughtful reading of it from a policy angle.

Further complicating this picture, student teachers may have been overestimating the power or control they would have as teachers, as I pointed out in their writing from the literacy course. Student teachers also occasionally mentioned in conversation that
they thought they would have more freedom, or nearly complete freedom, when it was their classroom. They wanted to believe that things would somehow be different. I knew that in many ways, they were mistaken. There would be pressure toward imitation and alignment and compliance anywhere. At this point in the semester, I realized part of my role was to develop with them ways to deal with this pressure. “One job of mentors is to learn how to help novices read their school contexts…. Finally, they need to support the development of novices’ own political knowledge and ability to advocate for themselves” (Achinstein, 2006, p. 123). I began to think of what it would mean to help student teachers learn how to advocate for themselves, even as I was struggling to advocate for them.

My goal was to help prepare student teachers for long careers, in yet-unknown places, with uncertain writing policy environments. A new perspective, the one I began to develop over the course of my time with student teachers, includes attention to the complex policy environment. This way of seeing makes it more possible to find opportunities for action, agency, and autonomous decision-making. I feel this is a small reclaiming of professionalism as student teachers choose writing practices that will serve the individual students in their care. The gaps and cracks were difficult, uncomfortable places within which to practice. There was not much wiggle room. I did not want nor expect student teachers to be satisfied with operating in the cracks, but to find satisfaction in making decisions and having an impact. I had begun to think about their future practices.
Complicating matters, I was divided in my sense of how to move forward. On one hand, I realized I had to build in to our supervisory relationship some ways to help them. At the same time, I had begun trying to move toward more collaboration in my supervisory practices. If I were to advocate for agency, I would have to examine how some taken for granted supervisory practices were limiting my effectiveness, and I looked to how I handled myself in our interactions. I attempted to share more power and control with the student teachers, and to open myself to learning with and from them. But this goal in particular was and is difficult to realize, and I faced the question of what I thought was possible to accomplish in a single semester with student teachers. I was just beginning to explore the meanings of collaboration, advocacy, and agency—and tensions among them. Untangling this complex situation is one of the purposes of this research, and has helped me reimagine the role of the university supervisor going forward.

Chapter Summary

Student teachers were finding their own ways to teach writing, in the context of schools with specific and seemingly non-negotiable ideas about teaching writing. This constituted a challenge to the widely-shared belief that student teachers respond warmly to the support of a prescribed curriculum. These practices in the gaps and cracks had different relationships to policy. Ultimately, we were all looking for practices that would be appropriate for their specific students, and that would be acceptable to their cooperating teachers, but that we could talk about in terms of their future practice.

Student teachers sometimes had limited access to elements of the policy environment, including curricular texts, course scope and sequence, and even student
scores. There were obstacles to practices, and the policy opacity made inquiry and reflection more challenging. The problems presented to student teachers by the missing or ambiguous policy elements could be internalized, as the student teachers sometimes thought the problem was their fault, or externalized, as they sometimes thought it was the fault of teachers in the schools. As the supervisor, I knew both of these perspectives were unhealthy.

Good writing practices can lead teachers into difficult situations, even in the best circumstances. If teacher educators are going to attempt to prepare teachers to teach writing in ways that allow for uncertainty and spontaneity, attention must be paid to developing student teachers’ awareness of their policy surroundings and any pressures toward the certain and predictable. Part of the conversation in teacher education has to be about being ready for the unexpected. Preparing teachers to be ready for the unexpected would seem to indicate a need to be able to read the students, and the structures surrounding both students and teachers, with the goal of successfully navigating the boundaries of expectations and innovation. Individuals have agency, but structure mediates that agency, so part of this effort means looking for what counts in each policy structure. Doing this kind of work in the student teaching experience makes sense, with the supervisor alongside the student teacher, both reading and questioning the ground rules with the intention of finding room to move practice in more just and humane directions.

I came to realize that my goal was to help each student teacher realize some agency. This agency is ultimately what I felt they were being denied by the seemingly
tight alignment of the policy structure. The close alignment seemed to leave little room, and less incentive, to imagine things otherwise, and to challenge or question current arrangements.

Even maneuvering within the confines of mandated curricula, recommended pedagogies, or traditional governance procedures can seem to challenge the status quo. The simple maneuvering itself can appear threatening to administrators tenaciously protecting their authority. (Hadden, 2000, p. 251, in Plaut & Sharkey, 2003)

One could argue, as several have, that student teaching is a time of already-significant stress, perhaps unsuitable for the additional responsibility of critical policy talk or an inquiry stance. I did not want to be another force bombarding them with expectations. One could also then argue against university supervisors as question-posers, challengers, or “positive irritants” (Abt-Perkins, Hauschildt, & Dale, 2000). I wanted to encourage but not require ways of thinking about themselves, their students, and the time they had together. At times, I had difficulty remembering that I occupied a position of power.
Chapter 6: Building Something New

Introduction

This chapter follows student teachers and myself through the last weeks of student teaching, from mid-March to the end of April, which I call the third phase. By the end of student teaching, these four participants had developed sophisticated understandings of their schools’ policy environments. I continued to see ways in which these policy elements and student teachers’ interpretations of them related to their writing practices and to their opinions about their futures as teachers.

In the closing weeks of student teaching, student teachers continued to question the policy texts and practices, finding more conflict and mixed messages. Participants noticed that subtle elements of the schools’ policy contexts shaped what was possible, and what was preferred. Teaching writing according to their professional judgment sometimes meant strategic and diplomatic action on the part of the student teachers. As they considered their future practices, they all expressed feelings of doubt or cynicism.

The professional relationship between the student teachers and me is also a focus of this study. The increasingly complex pictures student teachers painted offered me, as their supervisor, new ways to view support and supervision, ways that at first presented me with more challenges than ideas for ways forward. One of the last moves I added to my support of student teachers was sharing information across contexts, and bringing them together in focus groups to talk about their experiences away from the schools and
the university context. Several of the data excerpts in this chapter are from those two focus groups.

**Subtle and Unexpected Policy Elements**

In these final weeks, student teachers recognized and discussed parts of the policy environment which will be familiar to educators. These official ‘Big P’ policies, such as assessments and report cards, and unofficial ‘little p policies’ and practices, such as grade level arrangements and socially shared (or regulated) understandings, mattered to the ways in which student teachers taught writing. Student teachers understood them as parts of the overall policy discourse, specifically for their power to reinforce certain policies, practices and messages about teaching. They drew my attention to many policy elements I had not discerned, and suggested relationships of policies practices, texts and players I had not considered.

These were all subtle elements of the writing policy environment—not as flashy perhaps as state tests or standards, but not necessarily easier to identify or navigate. These “little p” policy elements may have, in fact, been more difficult to interrogate:

Such assumptions and expectations are implicit, backgrounded, taken for granted, not things that people are consciously aware of, rarely explicitly formulated or examined or questioned. The common sense of discourse is a salient part of this picture. And the effectiveness of ideology depends to a considerable degree on it being merged with this common-sense background to discourse and other forms of social action. (Fairclough, 1989, 1996, p. 77)

Some of the events I analyze in this section did not present themselves as policy-related at the time, and occasionally not for weeks afterward. Viewing policy as process has helped me see how writing potentially touches and is touched by many other policies, in and beyond the school. I perceived how unwritten rules, informal arrangements, and
some quieter policy elements still had an impact on the ways student teachers thought about and taught writing. These various elements, not out of the ordinary for the workings of school, are important to the present study.

**Writing assessment policies.** More than any other policy besides testing, writing assessment policies played a role in student teachers' teaching of writing. As the coming examples will show, these policies often appeared in the form of texts teachers were required to use, including graphic organizers and rubrics. There were also policies about how student writing was graded and reported. These and other policies, texts and practices structured what student teachers were expected to do, and not to do, when it came to writing.

Assessment draws attention to what is valuable, or valued. Wide-scale assessments, regulated at a state level, are at the core of most districts' accountability measures in terms of state funding through federal policy. Small-scale assessments, used at the classroom or grade level, are shaped by local beliefs and expectations. Student teachers encountered both of these, as they were enacted in the unique contexts of their schools. There were many pieces to the writing assessment picture:

It is clear that the overall quality and equity effects of accountability policies depend on a variety of complex and interrelated factors. However...[o]nly through close attention to and prolonged engagements with these site-specific factors will researchers be able to produce multidimensional portraits of teachers working with, around, and against accountability-influenced curriculum policies. (Sloan, 2006, p. 146)

Indeed, student teachers worked "with, around and against" the writing assessments in place at their schools. They each struggled with the ways in which writing was assessed in their schools. By the end of student teaching, they had both come to reject or
challenge particular assessment policies based on their beliefs about teaching writing.

Michelle’s talk about her experience provides the frame for this portion of the analysis, and through her example, I explore other participants’ experiences.

I saw over the span of months that Michelle encountered mixed messages from the writing policy context. As far as I could see, Michelle’s school prided itself on its arts-based education and writing across the curriculum. Michelle spoke with pride of the student writing displayed up and down the hallways, even from kindergarten students. But this writing culture was undermined, Michelle noticed, by at least two other policies.

With as much writing as I saw being done, I assumed there would be some kind of accountability to parents, and some reflection of the work students were doing.

Michelle informed me that there was no grade for writing in students’ progress reports or report cards, in second grade and possibly in other grade levels.

Anne Marie: You don’t grade writing? What do you do?
Michelle: We grade handwriting, but not writing.
AM: Intentionally? Or just it’s not set up to?
M: It’s just not set up, in the way our grades go, for them to get a grade for a writing project, ... I think it’s a district policy; they have to have every six weeks a grade in math, reading, science, social studies, and now handwriting. (Focus group, 4/19)

There was a grade for handwriting, and a grade for reading, which Michelle then explained was chiefly made up of reading activities and tests, including weekly spelling lists and dictation exercises. But there was no representation in the students’ grades for anything but the outward appearance of a final product. Handwriting being graded is not unusual, nor in itself a bad idea. However, penmanship and writing are two very different matters. When handwriting is graded instead of writing, it potentially reinforces attention solely on surface features. During this conversation, I recalled the ‘neat sheet’ I
had seen Michelle’s student create, and the many student writings hanging in hallways. I connected these outward displays to the handwriting grade. It is important for teacher educators to know that pre-service teachers are plausibly being asked in subtle ways to accept that appearances matter most in students’ writing.

I wondered at the impact such a grading policy might have across the school. Writing assessment that values students’ perspectives and language is complicated work, but defining writing solely in terms of appearance is not a solution. “Every teacher has to resolve a tension between writing as generating and shaping ideas and writing as demonstrating expected surface conventions….Too much emphasis on correctness can actually inhibit development (NCTE, 2008, np). Without representation for writing in student reports, I could see how teachers might be tempted to minimize the time spent developing the content of students’ writing, and focus instead on form. Michelle had her own ideas about this conflict of policies, and she addressed them in her assessment, which I discuss in a later section.

Support across contexts meant my talking with student teachers about assessment in terms of how it might serve one purpose, but not another, and about the importance of keeping in mind what messages assessments might send to students about what was not valued. Michelle was not the only one to struggle with the grading policies, as this chapter will continue to show. In this same focus group, Liz talked about her trouble with some of her school’s writing assessment policies. Though her frustration was clear, Liz’s words showed me how she was grappling with disconnects between good writing practice and dominant writing assessments in her school and in Michelle’s.
We have to give them a handwriting grade. Ridiculous, too. Penmanship rubric. Spacing and neatness and staying in the lines, and at the 3rd grade level, just the process from here [points to her head] to here [points to her hand] is difficult. Getting thoughts out of their heads—which is hard—they have to physically get it out of their hand! (Focus group, 4/19)

We had discussed in our literacy class how some prevailing notions of what counts as writing could leave children worrying more about what their writing looked like than what it expressed. “These beliefs lead to ‘skills’ approaches to the teaching of writing, which focus on the autonomous linguistic ‘skills’ of correct handwriting, spelling, punctuation and sentence structure” (Ivanic, 2004, p. 227). Liz recognized the challenges her young students faced in making neat marks on paper, and contrasted that physical work with the mental work of having a thought worth writing. Liz seemed to suggest that the time spent mastering the physical aspects of writing could be better spent helping students develop their thoughts. In this case, my role was to affirm and ask questions. I was surprised there was no grade for writing in these two schools, especially with as much practice writing that I had seen for the test. I was glad to hear, however, that Michelle and Liz thought assessment should reflect students’ invention, discovery and creation of a text. As the conversation went on, we unpacked more about these curious assessment scenarios.

As Michelle continued talking about her frustrations in trying to teach writing, she revealed another policy that compounded the difficulty she had experienced teaching writing at her school. Michelle explained to me that writing had a specific time slot in the 2nd grade day. This was a Big P Policy, connected to the daily schedule followed by each teacher in the school. I had learned about this scheduled time for writing in the meeting among Michelle, Marjorie and me described in Chapter 4. What I had not
appreciated at that early point were the several implications of this time slot for Michelle’s practice. Support in this case meant my puzzling out and talking with student teachers about how multiple and sometimes unexpected policies worked—or did not work—together.

Firstly, writing was taught apart from English Language Arts. ELA occupied the whole morning, but this time did not seem to include writing, which was held until after lunch. “Language arts is 7:30 – 11:15 each day. Writing [is] after lunch” (Field notes, 1/6). At least within the 2nd grade team, language arts time did not include time for writing. Secondly, its separation from the morning’s work, and from all other content areas, seemed to invite the idea that writing was detached from other learning.

A lack of sufficient time to teach writing is a common complaint among teachers. Faced with a growing number of curricular demands on the available instructional time, and with standards for each subject, teachers are likely to think of each subject separately. Thus, they are less likely to integrate writing across the curriculum. By fragmenting the curriculum, they reduce the amount of time available for writing. (Strickland et al., 2001, p. 396)

When I considered this schedule, along with the lack of a writing grade, I suspected these policies could give the impression that time for writing was expendable in a busy day. The principal’s apparent dedication to writing somehow lost force at the classroom level.

Michelle struggled to include as much writing as she wanted, and thought her struggle was a sign or her inexperience or perhaps some disorganization. She knew that every 2nd grade teacher held to the same schedule. She saw and heard of other teachers teaching writing. In her talk, I heard Michelle come close to the conclusion that if she could not find time for writing, it was her fault:
Miss Moore looked at me and said ‘we do reading, and this, and this, and this, and you can do writing when you have time to do it.’ But she always seems to have time to do it. Me, I could never find time to do it. She’s like, ‘take math out of the day and let em write’… So I had a lot of problems with that. I hear other teachers talk and it’s like [they have] so much time to write! [Another teacher], he writes every day in his class. Every single day. And his schedule’s the same as my schedule! And I don’t understand how he can get it in there, and still get everything else done too” (Focus group, 4/20).

At the time, I also wondered how other teachers were making time for writing. Although it is possible that the time it took Michelle to complete routine tasks—tasks that had become automatic to Marjorie and other teachers—made for less instructional time in Michelle’s day overall, I knew Michelle to be organized and efficient. Marjorie even joked about Michelle’s organizational skills as surpassing her own. I began to think that Michelle could be made to feel that the loss of time for writing was her fault because of her inexperience, when in fact she was operating within several conflicting writing policies and practices.

From my perspective as an occasional visitor, I was able to discern multiple layers of potentially contradictory writing policies. I had trouble reconciling them, and was unsure how to help Michelle. After all, on the face of it, her school was dedicated to an arts-based curriculum, and supported grant writing and guest speakers. It would not be until after the semester ended that I realized this too was a complication of the policy environment:

These schools had enrichment programs where speakers came in to share their experiences or bring animals from zoos. All of these created a well-rounded
educational program, but it made for a very tight schedule. Even so, the teachers were expected to meet the state-mandated curricular goals. (Martin & Kragler, 2009, p. 239)

Teaching writing, in this complicated policy environment seemed to come down to the teachers’ cleverness. Michelle expressed regret at how little writing she was able to do with her students throughout the semester. Her surroundings encouraged her to blame herself for this. As Ball observed, 'The problem' is 'in' the school or 'in' the teacher but never 'in' policies” (2006, p. 17). No one had talked with Michelle in meaningful terms about how they were able to teach writing in a crowded day, not even Marjorie. I was surprised that no one discussed writing as part of learning across content areas. The examples set by teachers around her did not help Michelle navigate this complex situation, but seemed to indicate that she might be less organized than those around her. Sleeter and Stillman (2005) discuss the several policy aspects of situations like Michelle’s:

Because of the theoretical contradictions present throughout all three reading/language arts documents, a teacher may be given the impression that he or she can implement a literature-based and linguistically responsive reading/language arts program, but then be limited from doing so simply because of a lack of available instructional time, and/or state and district pressure to "teach to the test." ...Compliance is also enforced through the sheer prescriptiveness of a packed curriculum, particularly at the elementary level. (p. 42-43)

Marjorie’s suggestion to “take math out” Michelle found unhelpful, and I suspected it might have underlined the fact that students’ days were congested to the point that teaching writing meant not teaching something else. I surmised Michelle could be learning that, in spite of the schedule policy, which seemed to enforce the principal’s dedication to writing, teachers taught writing when and if they found the time, and with attention to neatness. In the moment, this information presented itself to me as a thorny
problem, and I was hearing about it too late in the term to make a plan for going forward with Michelle.

Colleen also identified the conflict between policy expectations and realities of practice at her middle school. She explained to me in a focus group that she was expected to do a ‘sequential’ paper. In this part of our conversation, Colleen explained this particular conflict and asked my advice on the specific dilemma she was in when it came to “pleasing” her cooperating teacher. Marie had said Colleen could grade the papers as she wanted to, but had given her a rubric and let Colleen know she would be looking over a few of the papers. This worried Colleen. I draw attention to how Colleen articulated the two sides of her assessment conflict. From the transcript:

"Today everybody’s getting a hundred, because I’m looking at these [student papers] and going, “wow.” Then there’s that other part of me that’s saying, “I know that this isn’t a sequential paper. We have to have “first, second, third,” [for a sequential paper], there’s gotta be some sorta order to it. There’s no order to [some of these papers]. What do I do in order to please Marie? (POC 4/3)

This excerpt highlights an internal conflict, a push-pull which also reflects the extent to which Colleen has taken to heart the importance of fulfilling the expectations for writing in her building. Apparently, the writing Colleen’s students had produced did not align with what was expected for a sequential paper as communicated through the rubric.

Colleen pointed out that the rubric included scoring for transition words, number of paragraphs in a particular order, number of sentences in a paragraph, a title, spelling and grammar. She was proud of their work, but worried about her accountability.

Colleen understood well the uniqueness of each learner as she had conferenced with each of them. She also grasped the limited value of one-size-fits-all approaches to writing, including rubrics and conventional grading. The rubric would penalize students
for minor proofreading errors, inconsequential spelling mistakes, or omissions from the
"sequential" five paragraph structure. She also knew these surface features paled in
comparison to the real intellectual and emotional work students had done to produce
these essays. She described her thinking about using the rubric, and I draw attention to
her frustration at the end of this excerpt:

I don’t wanna use the rubric because some of the kids worked so hard and
produced so little. That’s one of those things. And it’s because I’ve taken time
with each individual student to work on theirs specifically. I know how hard --
they’ve either tried, or they didn’t get the transition words. I’m not gonna, I just--
[leans into the voice recorder] talk about that Garth! Put that in your paper; see if
you can fix that! ((laughs)) because I think that’s big, do you know what I mean?
I don’t know if anybody else runs into that. (FG, 4/4)

Of course she is right; the conflict is “big,” and many practitioners “run into it.” Colleen
was trying to teach writing as a process and social practice, in the midst of policies which
encouraged attention to the surface details of a final product. She also knew how hard
they had worked to create what they turned in, and believed a rubric would not accurately
capture that part of the process. This conflict took place within Colleen, as she struggled
with being expected to do something with which she disagreed. Strickland et al. (2001)
cast this conflict in terms of teacher professionalism: “The dilemma occurs when rubric-
driven curricula replace quality teacher-designed programs, undermining teacher
initiative and professionalism,” a professionalism that Colleen showed even as a student
teacher, in her reluctance to “move away from a constructivist and integrated approach
to writing as part of language arts across the curriculum and toward a more atomistic and
fragmented view of writing and writing instruction” (Strickland et al., 2001, p. 391).

This was one of many moments when it would have been easier for her to go with the
policy than to follow her judgment. She did come to a conclusion regarding the
assessment, and shared that decision with Marie. However, as later sections will explain, Colleen’s professional ideas about writing came into conflict with other policies.

**People.** In each context, through their student teaching experiences, student teachers gained information about and insight into their policy environment by/through/from people aside from their cooperating teachers. Student teachers were learning important norms and expectations through the ways in which their cooperating teachers interacted with other faculty. In Michelle’s talking about the writing assessments and schedules, I noticed an additional aspect of cooperating teachers’ influence on student teachers’ practices. Michelle referred to Marjorie as the “second grade team leader” in her school. Liz’s cooperating teacher, Sonya, was also a team leader in her school. Whether these were official or unofficial positions did not seem to matter. Other faculty turned to these lead teachers for guidance. Michelle and Liz also told me that teachers borrowed ideas, materials and practices from their cooperating teachers. Seeing so many people in step with their cooperating teachers plausibly limited Michelle’s and Liz’s chances of observing, or even talking about, alternatives to their cooperating teachers’ policies and practices.

I had not appreciated until this conversation what cooperating teachers’ positions in the policy environment could mean for student teachers’ opportunities to observe or discuss alternate ideas and practices. Other researchers have written about unequal power relations among faculty within the policy environment and its impact on newer teachers (Martin & Kragler, 2009; Schempp, Sparkes, & Templin, 1999) but at the time it
was a revelation to me in terms of what it could mean for the student teachers, specifically their attempts to make professional judgments.

Whether or not those teachers were formally mentored, or informally coached by the cooperating teachers, the result was the same: many of the 2nd grade teachers did similar things in similar ways—from setting up grade books to preparing for yearly evaluations by the principal. The cooperating teachers' status in the school can impact who else the student teacher talks to and sees, as well as their chances of observing or discussing alternate models of relating policy to practice.

Teachers and administrators were not the only people maintaining traditions and expectations; students did as well. Students shaped policy environments in multiple ways. At different times, each student teacher's struggle to enact student-centered pedagogy was exacerbated by the fact that students themselves had conformed to writing policies and related practices. As described in Chapter 5, Liz's 3rd grade students had internalized the rules of writing in school and gleefully shouted them to her when asked. Similarly, in her work with students' essays, Colleen felt she was “undoing” what students had been told “over and over and over and over” about writing (POC, 4/3), specifically how many sentences were in a paragraph, and how many paragraphs were in an essay.

In Ann's case, students had taken advantage of the problems at the core of her course. They had become used to class as a study hall, and resisted Ann's attempts to change that (Schempp, Sparkes, & Templin, 1993). I saw Ann fight to keep her students' attention, with some on computers, some wearing headphones, and some with heads
down. The more she understood about her policy context, the more she saw how deep and complex the situation was, and how little chance she had of “pushing the boundaries” (Gee, 2005, p. 30).

Ann thought the relentless focus on test preparation seemed grossly misplaced when teachers were struggling to keep students in school until graduation. Ann and other special education teachers were concerned about students’ opting out of school once they reached their 16th birthday, the age of compulsory school attendance in the state. In a focus group with Colleen, Ann talked about the pressures on the special education students and teachers in her school, and trailed off at the end, rather than give voice to her thoughts:

And you know half of them are just waiting on their birthday. I know one guy who just quit ‘cause his birthday came. And another boy who keeps saying, ‘I’m outta here on my birthday.’ They’re just outta here. It’s hard, and, I see Sandy genuinely cares. And to see her put all that work in, then… (FG 4/4)

The state policy of testing clashed with the state policy of obligatory education. “For such reluctant learners, the increased test preparation and narrower curriculum resulting from high-stakes testing exacerbates the problem. Faced with an increasingly disjointed, decontextualized curriculum, many become actively disengaged; others simply leave” (Nichols & Berliner, 2008, p.16). As a former high school teacher, I was aware of this specific challenge for teachers, but I had not thought of what it might mean to student teachers. Ann’s response was revelatory to me. She did not blame her students, several already working for their families’ farms or service businesses, for valuing full-time work in the world outside school over practice for yet another set of standardized tests on the
way to a diploma. The texts and practices surrounding testing policies held little meaning for students compared to their outside lives, and Ann had grasped that painful fact.

In this section, I have argued that writing is connected to other official and unofficial school policies, and that these connections entered into student teachers’ thinking about teaching writing in their placement schools. Student teachers’ talk helped me to assemble a policy framework. As this framework took shape for me, I shared it with them. Viewing the policy context as both the parts and the logic holding them together gave me a way to frame some of these conflicts. Practices encouraged and prioritized by policy sometimes can threaten to undermine respect for students and faculty. This frame helped keep our conversations from descending into a critique on some teacher’s personality or practice. We often were able to unpack some complexities confronting their cooperating teachers and to entertain why their cooperating teachers may have seemed to be going along with some objectionable practices. Our talk was the engine of my supervisory practice. Yet it was not what Kelehear (2010) calls “bidirectional,” when “the relationship that emerges from the conversation can be beneficial to both the teacher and the supervisor” (Kelehear, 2010, p. 5).

By the second half of the semester, student teachers became increasingly comfortable with my visits. We had established a level of trust at which each participant said she did not need notice of my visits, and that I was welcome at any time. As I have shown, student teachers continued to experience stress and doubt, caught between the constraints of the policy contexts and the force of their own beliefs. In these situations, I felt part of my role was to validate their frustration, and I became increasingly
comfortable with recognizing and responding to their words and actions in terms of the policy environment around them.

Guerrilla Pedagogy

Throughout this study, I have suggested that finding the spaces to make professional decisions was challenging for student teachers. Determining to work in those spaces was quite possibly difficult as well. Teaching in the cracks also often presented a challenge, yet student teachers continued to seek opportunities to exercise their agency. Student teachers were not waiting to be told what to do, as some conventional wisdom suggests. Though the policy environment appeared to send strong messages to teach writing in a particular way, student teachers did not always teach in that direction when it came in conflict with their principles.

Sometimes, student teachers mentioned hiding their practices, or told me how they were planning to hide these practices, when they judged their actions might not be institutionally sanctioned. Student teachers felt somewhat able to make professional judgments regarding writing projects, but they did not always think they should share those judgments openly with their cooperating teachers. For example, as I mentioned in Chapter 5, Liz did not tell Sonya about her yellow writing/blue writing, which she called her “writing experiment,” even though it was a practice of which she was justly proud. The student teachers in this study show how important it can be to think tactically about the teaching of writing.

Struggling with writing assessment expectations, Michelle found an opportunity to alter the grading policy to reflect her professional judgment. She realized individual
teachers could determine what was recorded in each of the categories on student report cards and progress reports. It seemed she had been doing the record-keeping for Marjorie, and she saw there an opportunity. She decided to take strategic advantage of this relationship to make a decision about assessment. Marjorie’s grade book had a space for an ELA ‘unit’ grade. ELA, in Michelle’s experience at her school, had become synonymous with reading. However, Michelle determined that for this unit grade, ELA would mean writing. She decided the writing she had been undertaking with students in an interdisciplinary unit was important to recognize and reward. I continue our earlier conversation where Michelle had just explained the lack of a grade for writing in the 2nd grade policy. As I offered Michelle a way to think about the policy, she revealed she had made a decision about it already:

Anne Marie: That’ a pretty strong message about writing, that all of the teachers are getting. If there’s no space for it in the grade book, so to speak…

Michelle: For overall grade, I’m actually looking at their writing for their overall unit grade. Because I think they’re gonna do it right [and] they deserve the grade for it.

AM: Do you feel like Marjorie’s alright with that?
M: Well, She’s gonna have to be because I’m giving the grade.

AM: ((laughs)) Fair enough.

M: Yeah. I think if I wanna give them a grade on their writing, it should be included in their [reading] comprehension and language arts grade.

(Focus group, 4/19)

Michelle saw some room to stretch the writing assessment policy to reflect the practices which flowed from her beliefs about writing. I was proud of her for finding ways to serve her students in keeping with her judgments. I also inferred that Michelle felt comfortable explaining her decision to Marjorie.

Sometimes, classroom writing can be shared with the school community in a way student teachers had not anticipated, potentially exposing student teachers’ writing
practices to a larger audience. Colleen struggled against multiple constraints in her writing activity with the personal topics. One policy I have already discussed was the rubric used by teachers in Colleen’s school to grade writing. Another policy caused her concern near the end of the activity. There was a policy at the building level, and possibly the district level, that a portfolio of student work was compiled each year. This portfolio was handed to, or made available to, students’ teachers the following year. As students were finishing their essays with Colleen, Marie told Colleen that she wanted these writings in the students’ portfolios. I could imagine Marie wanted the papers to be included in the portfolios because of all the hard work students—and Colleen—had done. Surely, these papers would be showing her students at their best.

For two reasons, Colleen worried what students’ portfolios meant for the papers they had just finished. First, Colleen felt a kind of guardianship over these papers. Students had trusted her in writing about their lives, some revealing difficult details, and she did not want to betray that trust by sharing their writing with a potentially much larger audience. Colleen had a feeling of being responsible for and to her students. She had carefully handled this assignment since the start. When Colleen talked with me, her feelings about the students and their writing were strong. Though writing portfolios can yield powerful insights into students’ writing, and have been popular for decades, they can also “exert more control over the work of teachers and students” (Scott, 2008, p. 150) than other forms of writing assessment. The purpose of this portfolio was not clear, and the portfolio policy seemed to present a kind of affront to Colleen’s work and her goals.
Second, though her grading would reward students for what they had done well, it would not be aligned to the policy of assessing on a rubric, as I discussed earlier. The portfolios potentially exposed her decision to a large audience. Deciding to grade papers without a rubric, and rewarding students for their writing processes, caused Colleen to suspect that her professional judgment would be called into question by other teachers, and possibly by administrators. Colleen worried that when a future reader of the portfolio looked at the student’s paper, they would see Colleen did not use a rubric, or deduct points for spelling or grammar errors. It would look, in her school’s way of grading writing, like poor work on Colleen’s part.

Colleen worried aloud what such a decision might mean for her reputation; she imagined another teacher reading and reacting to the graded papers. I draw attention to her position as a student teacher and the separation she perceived between the student teacher and ‘professional’ teacher in terms of decision-making power:

If somebody were to take a look at this paper, they’d go, ‘wow, [this student] got 95 points? But look at this paper! … This is how I would’ve graded the paper, being the professional. She is just the student teacher.’ That’s my big concern. That’s my fear. Absolutely. (FG 4/4)

The possibility that others would monitor Colleen’s grading for fidelity to writing policy prompted fear in Colleen. She was trying to make a professional choice when one was not openly offered, and she worried about the consequences. “Even maneuvering within the confines of mandated curricula, recommended pedagogies, or traditional governance procedures can seem to challenge the status quo. The simple maneuvering itself can appear threatening” (Hadden, 2000, p. 252). Taking sole responsibility for grading a major assignment for the first time can be nerve-wracking. However, it would be
underestimating Colleen's professional judgment, and the complex situation in which she found herself, to see it as the fear of a novice. Colleen was concerned with being found going against the grain (Cochran-Smith, 1991), and being judged as deficient. My role here was to support her decision and acknowledge the personal and professional risk she was taking in doing so.

In Ann's case, she planned to hide her practice—literally—in order to better serve her students. Ann spoke to me of her plans for her future teaching of writing. She saw students had become tired of writing. She also knew they were fond of cell phone text messages, as was Ann herself. She thought a change in writing mode—from paper or computer, to cell phone—would be a way to invite students to write. Through this, Ann felt she could invigorate students' relationship with writing in school. However, her school banned cell phones. She was willing to cover over the window in the classroom door so no one passing by could look in and see what students were doing. I quote from a conversation during a focus group:

Ann: They're bored with the paper and pencil, and they're bored with that keyboard. And I was telling them one day about my text [messaging] -- remember, I told you about the cell phones? If they're gonna have 'em in the school, why not use em? So, I've gotta put something over the window. Whatever.

Anne Marie: A lot of people are doing that [working with cell phones].
Ann: Really? I just think they're just so bored with the regular classroom. And just traditional stuff.
AM: There are lots of people, at least 7, 8 years now--podcasting in the classroom and letting kids use their texting in the classrooms. It's big; you're not the only one. (FG, 4/4)

Ann seemed to be moving toward a clever and thoughtful writing pedagogy that could engage students by recognizing the role of technology in their lives. I reaffirmed her that her instincts were on target. She planned to incorporate, rather than deny, the presence of
cell phone text messaging in students' lives. Such practice would violate school policy against using cell phones. Yet, in this scenario, as in others I have analyzed, the student teachers’ judgment was right on target:

The traditions and practices of print literacy continue to dominate in our educational institutions, even while the emergence of electronically based digital culture is reshaping how people live their lives. In addition, rapidly declining school retention rates point to a significant number of young people disengaging from schools because they fail to see a connection between their lives and the formal curriculum (Smyth et al., 2000). Established structures and processes can no longer accommodate the extent, nature and pace of contemporary change.

(Reid & O'Donoghue, 2004, p. 561)

However, Ann plans to cover over the “window” into her practice. She would rather risk being discovered than let institutionally-sanctioned writing practices limit her avenues for action. I do not know if Ann did enact this writing activity, but I realized after the fact that I had missed this opportunity to help her find the language to defend her practices, and put what she had learned about students and writing into terms administrators, teachers and parents might find acceptable.

I do not offer these examples as a way to celebrate defiance for its own sake. These student teachers were placed in schools where teaching writing had been set up so that there seemed few options to move practice in a learner-centered direction, and few rewards for doing so. Through their talk, I concluded that these student teachers changed local policy because they understood progressive writing pedagogy and grasped the conflicts between that pedagogy and local policy. In this way, my findings echo Achinstein & Ogawa’s (2006) in their study of two first-year teachers:

These teachers’ resistance to their districts’ instructional policies was rooted in professional principles, rather than in psychological deficits or a basic reluctance to change. Both teachers engaged in resistance that was firmly based in professional principles: a principled resistance. The program they were expected
to use ran against their conceptions of teaching and professionalism. Their resistance was manifest both in their discourse and in their instructional practices. These professional principles are not idiosyncratic to these two individuals. Rather, they are rooted in widely shared conceptions of teaching and professionalism. (p. 52)

Teaching writing is not easy under most circumstances, but as in these example, the local norms had made the thoughtful teaching of writing seem almost foolish to attempt. Yet student teachers found ways to teach writing according to their professional judgment even when they felt those practices might not be supported in their surroundings. At the time, I was proud of the student teachers and their accomplishments. Yet, as challenging as it was for them to embrace progressive writing pedagogy in schools under pressure, dealing with the implications of these practices was also demanding.

Success, Stress and Futility

Student teaching was coming to an end, and the student teachers thought back on their experiences and ahead to their careers. In this final section, I discuss student teachers’ comments, and my own, as we neared the end of their student teaching and of my first experience as a supervisor. Student teachers had become familiar with their schools’ many complexities. They had begun to see the larger system not as a simplistic good or bad environment. They also gradually came to entertain thoughts of themselves as part of the policy system in and beyond their schools. The view of the field from those positions, however, was sometimes less than positive. Student teachers had become aware of the psychic toll of teaching according to one’s principles—at the same time as teaching according to the script. They had realized that teaching by their professional principles was difficult, and could make feelings of success hard to come by. They also
perceived that playing the game did not necessarily lead to satisfaction. By the end of their experiences, these student teachers were considering what it would mean for their future practice to teach student-centered writing in an age of top-down reform.

Their experiences made me very conscious of the challenges of supervising student teachers from an inquiry stance, with a policy lens, toward critical and humane practice. I explore ideas of success and satisfaction, through two student teachers’ comments about futility. Two student teachers, Ann and Liz, saw their work being overpowered by the dominant attitudes toward teaching and learning in their buildings. These feelings of futility became an important consideration for me as a supervisor and literacy instructor. I had been advocating for student teachers’ agency, and I had to look seriously at some of the implications of my practice. I was and continue to be concerned about their feelings of success and satisfaction, in part because of two student teachers’ comments. I thought deeply about what it meant for them and for me to be doing a good job, when outward signs of success were scant. I turn now to comments made by Ann, and then by Liz, as a way of exploring what counts as success in the terrain of student teaching when viewed through a policy lens.

Ann seemed to have a firm idea of the structures around teachers and students, including the many layers of policy. Ann witnessed what happened when her cooperating teacher met conflict at every turn. She observed that Sandy was worn out, and Ann could understand why. “You can see where she just got burnt out from pushing so hard” (POC, 3/17). Ann seemed to me to have a reasonable grasp on the complicated
relationships between structure and agency. Yet these ideas did not necessarily translate to Ann’s thought about her own practice as a student teacher.

This transcript of a late post-observation conference highlights both of our struggles. I began with some friendly teasing—telling Ann not to have a “meltdown” when she was easily the most calm and level-headed of all the student teachers, and that she should stay in teaching, when for her it was close to a vocation. Still, she was experiencing stress, and our talk turned to the amorphous territory of student teaching. I draw attention to imagery of a playing field and a battlefield:

Anne Marie: Ok, my top concern is you, not having a mental meltdown, and get through student teaching, and decide that you still wanna teach, and stay in the classroom for a very long time ((we laugh)). Some of the battles you’re facing with students aren’t really yours to fight.

Ann: And I feel like it’s not my place to fight. When I leave they’re gonna go right back, so what progress did I really make? Besides just totally fighting this battle for 2 months for---

AM: For, for...

Ann: Nothing

AM: Right

Ann: ((Laughs)) Which isn’t even--

AM: Yeah, it’s not your playing field to an extent. But I also want to be able to make this work for you. (TS POC, 2/11)

Ann worked throughout the semester to teach in ways meaningful and relevant to her students. Though, as I mentioned earlier, students treated class like a study hall, Ann continued to find other ways to connect her students to school. Yet when we talked, Ann regretted that she did not seem to make an impact that would outlast her presence in the class. She felt any progress she had made with students was temporary. Old habits and ways of being would win out when she left.
This conversation brought into focus for me the time of student teaching as a particular territory with its own expectations and rules. I was trying to figure out what was the best thing to do in this very complicated environment, which is like a battlefield. When Ann said, "Besides just totally fighting this battle for two months, for...," I could not bear to hear her articulate that her work had been for 'nothing,' and so I interrupted her, and tried unsuccessfully to disrupt that line of thinking. It took me another few moments to offer her another way to think about 'fighting,' and I turned to the less threatening metaphor of the playing field.

As the supervisor, I resolved to turn toward student teachers’ future practice and their thinking about themselves as teachers—to be realistic about what we were seeing, but not defeatist. At the time, I heard Ann’s concern over finding some satisfaction, some reason to feel like her presence and participation in the classroom mattered. She understood that the structure—or lack of structure—around the course led to a kind of piecemeal arrangement without clear expectations. My first move was making room for her to try practices she felt strongly about, more wiggle room. Weeks later, another conversation took place between Liz and me. Liz used language similar to Ann’s in terms of her feelings of futility, and the similarity led me to go back and revisit both conversations.

Liz, more than any other student teacher, struggled with what was happening in her school. In the last phase of student teaching, she seemed to renew her decision not to teach after graduation, but to go on to graduate school for a medical degree. This decision was the topic of several conversations between us, including the one excerpted
here. It was clear to me she enjoyed the students, and they enjoyed her, and I was open with Liz about my admiration of her ability and level of care. She acknowledged she would like to teach at some future time, perhaps even while she attended graduate school. We continued to discuss her teaching in terms of her future practice.

Liz’s success with students’ writing was not seen as successful in the testing environment. She made efforts to share with Sonya some insights about the children from their writing. Sonya was happy to hear what Liz had to offer, but there was little further conversation. Liz interpreted this to be a result of the test preparation for the upcoming state reading assessment. This reminded me of my offer to help Sonya and Liz with their students’ writing at the start of the term. Particularly relevant to the present discussion are the terms on which Liz felt she can be successful in resisting the status quo:

Liz: And I mean I feel good about what I’ve done, but I just, I can’t help feeling like it was for nothing, or like it was in vain, because nothing’s gonna change. When she takes over, and they’re in 4th, 5th, 6th [grade], y’know? I hope that it kinda opened them up to enjoying writing ((laughs)) I dunno. But if nothing else, I gave them a little break for a couple weeks ((laughs))...

Anne Marie: I can see when you’re frustrated, but those smiles are real... You’re wrestling with teaching and teachers, and some of the big issues in in the field.... and getting depressed about it because it’s very depressing. Liz: If I didn’t feel so helpless about it either. But I’m not the kind of person that can just pretend that everything’s ok. And I feel like a lot of teachers here are doing that.... I’m just, it makes me want to fix it ((chuckle)). And, I’m not even sure how to begin going about something like that. I think I’d feel more comfortable trying something if it was my own classroom and my own school. And y’know, hey--I may, for the first couple years, have to play the game like this. Once I have some clout I can say, ‘this isn’t working.’ And ((laughs)) I looked really seriously at teaching and doing night school for medicine. And since that’s kind of my ultimate goal, I’m ((laughs)) kind of excited because I feel like I will be less afraid to go against the norm and stand up for stuff that I think is just...
ridiculous and not working. I don’t understand. Everyone is aware that there is a game to be played. And if everyone is aware of that, why is nothing changing? (POC, 3/24)

I struggled to maintain an inquiry stance, and to balance questions and answers, especially in situations such as this when I saw student teachers’ stress over truly worrisome issues. Several times in this conversation with Liz, and in others, I reframed her concerns in terms of the policy pressures on teachers. However, Liz assumed she would be able to side-step some difficulties as a teacher with “clout” or possibly with a second career option. The school policy structure and teacher agency were long-standing issues for Liz, and she seemed equally frustrated by the many harmful parts of the local and state policy structure as she was by what she saw as teachers’ squandering their individual and collective voices.

On reflection, I noticed that the student teachers seemed to be defining their success by their impact or effect on students. Prior research has pointed out how important the feedback of students is for first year teachers’ feelings of success (Boydell, 1985; Schempp, Sparkes, & Templin, 1993). These student teachers did receive positive feedback from students on their work. Instead, the larger structures around them were what seemed to weigh on them and their hopes for effecting change. Ann and Liz—and Michelle and Colleen—had all “alter[ed] or dismantl[ed] fundamental practices” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2011, p. 55) for a short time. How long would it take, how much of an alteration, for them to feel successful enough to continue teaching?

Both of these student teachers’ comments challenged my assumptions about success in the present policy context. I continued to believe I could provide support while I was supervising and advocating, but this became more difficult as the semester
drew to a close. I quote here from my supervisory journal during the last days of student

teaching, about power in our professional relationship, and the push-pull of supervision—

which implies hierarchy—and collaboration, which dismantles it:

I was hoping for a collaborative notion of support, as if one could just be conjured

by me. I know they want support, but I'm not sure how collaborative we've been

in figuring out what it could be, and how it could be brought about. Now it's just

my listening. I was counting on their wanting and knowing how to ask what I
could do for them. So it's about power here too--my power to make things

happen, and their relative power (or not). (Supervision journal, April 14, 2009)

I worked from the assumption that I could help them, without a consistent equal belief

that they could help me. By the end of the term, I felt that listening was the only

approach left to me; I knew I could not solve their problems, but I could listen on behalf

of future student teachers I would supervise. As much as I sought to turn power in our

professional relationship over to the student teachers, there was a far way to go to achieve
true collaboration. The last phase of student teaching, however, we came close.

I realized I had not thought carefully enough about what student teachers were
expecting—what success might have looked like to them. In adopting an inquiry stance,

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) suggest that practitioners ask themselves, “How do my

efforts as an individual teacher connect to the efforts of the community and to larger

agendas for school and social change?” (p.52). I was assuming more of a connection

between my agenda and theirs, and it was not until this late stage in the term that I

confronted this.

How do I look at my practice? How can I tell that I’m doing a good job? How

can I see success? And success of what, of whom? Is it success if they feel

supported? How can I know? What kinds of questions am I asking, and what

kinds of responses am I giving? (Supervision journal, April 13, 2009)
I was struggling with being helpful, and the same time I was trying to be collaborative. I was doing something I had never seen or heard of in supervision. I was a new literacy instructor in a new part of the country. I was willing to throw out or "challenge common routines" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001, p. 53) of supervision and the teaching of writing. I thought we were together doing good work, but I questioned that assumption when some student teachers felt their work had been futile. I realized I had been depending on student teachers' feelings of agency to have confidence in my own practice as a first-time supervisor.

I had begun to consider, and re-consider, what it meant for me as an instructor and supervisor to advocate for student teachers' agency. I knew what I was helping them toward, but was unsure what they thought of those goals. I had to remind myself that they were not necessarily interacting with me willingly all the time; they had to meet with me because I was their evaluator and university representative. I was not asking student teachers to be satisfied with the wiggle room nor did I expect it to be enough for feelings of success. I might have overestimated its potential to be satisfying to the student teachers.

Part of what seemed to be frustrating to student teachers was that they could see that their definitions of good or worthwhile work conflicted with expectations or traditions at their schools. Student teachers' contexts may have challenged their assumptions about success, assumptions they might have been facing for the first time.

It seems crucial to take into account the complex interaction between structure and agency within the specific social and political context, and the current ideology in order to understand the impact of central government (and other
policy groups) and the ideological discourse on teacher’s thinking and practice. (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2002, p. 8)

Even within strict policy confines, what “success” means undoubtedly varies within and among teachers, administrators and other policy makers; I turned over in my mind what might count as success to student teachers. What had I been assuming about student teachers and success? Liz—and Ann as well—seemed to be proud of their work, yet they both expressed feelings of futility. We had disposed of checklists and checklist mentalities long ago.

Policy works on people in intimate ways, and the student teachers too were subject to feelings of frustration, worry or inadequacy in meeting the (sometimes conflicting) demands of their schools’ policy environments. The policy situations certainly had suggested, or outright scripted, paths to success. Across schools, for instance, there were thrice yearly standardized tests, and success was measured by student scores. I saw teachers moved to tears by students’ progress from one MAP practice test to the next, emphasizing the value attached to increasing test scores. I saw a framed certificate outside a classroom door, proclaiming that this teacher’s class’s scores had earned her $350 toward curricular materials. Such a reward system works against creating collaborative spaces where teachers support each other. Intentionally or not, federal mandate has recast what counts as success, good practice and acceptable performance. These effects are arguably stronger in schools serving the most marginalized populations and with the fewest economic resources, as Liz’s school was.

Talking about teachers as players within policy structures is altogether different, and invites different conversations and insights, than talking about teachers as people
working independently who can close the classroom door and who pursue their own particular teaching style and preferences. "Teachers need to understand how to engage in critical analysis of institutions, rather than accepting classroom failures as attributable solely to individual teacher performances and developing resignation about circumstances" (Athanases & de Oliveira, 2007, p. 134). Though practices exist in plain view, teachers think privately about those practices. These thoughts are away from the public eye. Some of their policy/practice decisions may be difficult, even painful, on a personal level—and student teachers may or may not be aware of this.

In the last weeks of student teaching, I began to use the policy frame to discuss success with student teachers, specifically how success or "good work" had been shaped and defined for teachers and administrators, and loaded with punishments and rewards. Policies pose or frame problems, and suggest or limit solutions; therefore, ideas of success are similarly limited in the scope of the policy. The policy environment had set up a dilemma. On one hand, a new teacher can play the game, but risk feeling separated from her own goals and the idea of the teacher she wants to be. On the other hand, a teacher who practices according to her principles can be separated from colleagues who have different feelings, or risk her job security (Waite, Boone, & McGhee, 2001; Athanases & de Oliveira, 2007).

I wondered if their awareness of the complexity of the policy environment and its particular definitions of success may have made a successful experience that much more difficult to achieve. It was possible they saw the structure more clearly than they saw their agency. They had challenged local writing norms and made "problematic the
current arrangements” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001, p. 50) in their classrooms. Yet I understood their desire for some kind of visible or noticeable outcome.

Do we know we are good at what we do, even if performance indicators tell us different? Do we value who we are able to be, who we are becoming in the labyrinth of performativity? Again much of this reflexivity is internalised. These things become matters of self-doubt and personal anxiety rather than public debate. (Ball, 2006, p. 148)

We had talked; they had expressed this “self-doubt and personal anxiety,” and I took some comfort in this open communication. But working in different ways, as we were doing, could mean looking for different signs of success, finding different ways to talk about our work, and perhaps looking for different listeners.

Conclusion

By the end of the semester, student teachers were aware of their schools’ rules and expectations regarding writing and teaching writing. These norms included far more than tests and curriculum. The policy structure included people’s attitudes, habits and accustomed ways of teaching writing. These student teachers understood that currently used texts and practices communicated what some people deemed important in the school, people with their own agendas and different levels of power. Gradually they had learned that past policies and plans for future policies also shaped what happened in the present. They also came to understand that conflicts and contradictions existed in the school policies.

Children’s ideas about writing were one of the more powerful aspects of the policy environment. Student teachers all came in contact with schools’ writing policies though the words and actions of their students. By the time student were in third grade,
they seemed to be already stressed by the state tests and tired of playing the writing
game. Middle and high school students were arguably more stressed, and more tired, by
more years of the same tests and similar expectations. Students’ sedimented notions of
writing were a policy element which required energy and thought from the student
teachers, and equally as important as the obvious and large-scale Policies.

There is always policy negotiation; sometimes it is more visible than others. It
would not be until after my supervisory role ended that I would come to see the potential
difficulty of asking cooperating teachers to discuss with student teachers their personal
negotiations of the policy-practice relationship. In my supervision, I was also trying to
facilitate and encourage certain ways of practicing and thinking about practice. As I
walked with student teachers and they learned how to teach writing, I encouraged them to
reflect on that teaching. Listening to their reflections, I weighed carefully their
negotiations with policy contexts that were the backdrop for all they did.

I noticed what student teachers were talking about—starting with the rules, must-
do’s and non-negotiables. These were revealed to be tied to people, materials, habits,
conversations and practices. I gradually adapted labels from critical policy literature
during the data analysis to capture what it was we had been talking about. Because of
student teachers’ talk, I developed a policy framework to help us sort out the complexity
of the policy structure, and within that structure, find some agency.

Much of participants’ stress related to the policy environment, particularly their
marginal positions in it, the confusion and contradiction it reflected, and the expenditure
of energy in unrewarding or even upsetting directions. We were crafting something new;
our experiences with policy and practice led me to a rethinking of supervision and of success and satisfaction. Inviting people into these critical conversations also meant leading them away from easily quantifiable signs of progress, improvement or change.

In the end, I believe I helped student teachers to see themselves as part of a group of people trying to do something very difficult, amidst many pressures and constraints. We had together identified some of the systems in place, systems designed to get them moving and thinking in certain directions and not others. Ultimately, success was elusive, but I believe that is because our work demanded a kind of redefinition of success.
Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

Findings

My task in this research was to better understand what it means to support student teachers as their supervisor in navigating the writing policies in place in their schools, with an aim of student-centered constructivist pedagogy. The value of the present study lies in its findings from the rich overlap among writing education, supervision and policy. I briefly summarize the findings as they relate to each of my three research questions, and then move into the discussion.

1. What happens when four student teachers try to make sense of the writing policies and practices, and of how these policies and practices relate to each other, in their placement schools?

These student teachers read for their schools’ explicit and implicit policies, translated into rules and expectations, as soon as they arrived in the schools. They came to their student teaching with particular frames of reference for understanding rules, expectations, traditions, and use of materials. I identified three phases in student teachers’ understandings of their policy environments, phases which were a building of awareness through adding a policy frame. At first, student teachers seemed to look for the rules to play by, and focused on finding out what they had to do. They saw their policy environments as seamless, policy as top-down, and policy interpretation as similar across faculty and administration. One student teacher, Ann, saw that her cooperating teacher was part of a group of teachers who tried to interpret and implement policy in a way different from most of the other faculty.
Student teachers experienced difficulty discerning between authentic alignment and the appearance of alignment. This, to them, seemed normal, but within two weeks (or less in some cases) they wanted to try their own practices. They began with an orientation toward what to do but soon looked for spaces for professional decision making.

Over time, their understandings of the policy environments became more nuanced and sophisticated. Student teachers realized the policy environment was made up of many parts, including norms, traditions policies formal (Big P) and informal (little p). They also discerned that present policy and practice was connected to the past and to the larger community in complicated ways. Mixed messages and ambiguities in the policy contexts were confusing and added to stress. The problems presented to student teachers by missing or ambiguous policy elements could be internalized, as the student teachers sometimes thought the problem was their fault, or externalized, as they sometimes thought it was the fault of teachers in the schools.

The cooperating teacher was an important figure in student teachers’ understanding of policy/practice relationships in different ways over time. At first, the cooperating teacher was an important source of information for the relationships between practice and policy, and for the ways teachers interpret and enact policy. This role changed to one of policy monitor and enforcer, a source of pressure rather than collegial support. Student teachers all eventually came to see their cooperating teachers as people under pressure.
2. How do student teachers' writing practices reflect these understandings of the relationships between policy and practice?

Policy environments clearly positioned these student teachers in specific ways and shaped the kinds of relationships they built with their students. The parts of the discourse—players, texts, practices and policies—seemed to be closely aligned to each other, and working efficiently together, and student teachers generally saw their positions at first as mimetic.

My findings challenge some common notions about student teachers. Specifically, these student teachers did not cling to the prescribed curriculum. They felt an obligation to follow their judgment at times, rather than go with the program handed to them, due to their conviction that teachers should practice in ways beneficial to all students. Student teachers learned they did not have to be at the mercy of the policy system. They oriented themselves not as victims, but as players capable of making some change, even small or temporary. In their initial observations, these student teachers saw that policies dictated practice.

These student teachers perceived that learning to teach was connected to learning to use, produce and manage texts. Housed in teachers' editions and curriculum documents was all that student teachers needed to know about subjects and how to teach them was; these were "P"olicy texts with the weight of authority. Knowledge could be given, with the expectation that students would receive it. Student teachers realized that they were encountering remnants of other teachers' writing practices, as well as the fact
they were preparing students for future years’ writing demands as set by curriculum.

They also realized this made a difference, a pretty significant one, to what they did.

Student teachers were finding their own ways to teach writing, in the context of schools with specific and seemingly non-negotiable ideas about teaching writing. This constituted a challenge to the widely-shared belief that student teachers respond warmly to the support of a prescribed curriculum. These practices in the gaps and cracks had different relationships to policy. Ultimately, we were all looking for practices that would be appropriate for their specific students, and that would be acceptable to their cooperating teachers, but that we could talk about in terms of their future practice.

Positioning teachers to work from simplified statements that take the place of broader theoretical understandings results in an attempt to standardize thinking or, in effect, to replacing it with someone else’s thinking. Standards, as they are written, replace teachers’ intellectual work, and focus their efforts on executing others’ ideas. In the absence of theoretical understandings, teachers are being asked to sway to the latest directives from above (Petrosky & Delandshere, 2000, p. 12).

Student teachers were expected and sometimes pressured to conform to this agreed-upon relationship among people, practices and policies. They did eventually take a different stance and moved toward what would serve their students, according to their professional judgment, and not the dictates of local P/policies.

Student teachers read their contexts critically; each articulated awareness that policies themselves could be unhelpful or counterproductive. Some student teachers shared these thoughts with me within a week at their school sites, some later, noting that even small scale or unofficial policies could be unhelpful. Student teachers saw that practice is sometimes purely to satisfy P/policy. As the first weeks of student teaching came to a close, student teachers negotiated their policy contexts, each of them hoping to
exercise some judgment and enact practices over which they had some decision-making power. Student teachers felt unsure of sharing some of their ideas and practices with their cooperating teachers. When student teachers wanted to exercise their professional judgment, they often found ways to do so in the "wiggle room," the gaps or cracks of the policy landscape. They all taught writing in constructivist, process-oriented ways, even though they all identified in the writing policy environment many obstacles to their doing so. They ultimately challenged, overcame, or managed to avoid some of these obstacles.

Student teachers found there are complications and problems with practicing in ways not overtly supported in the writing policy environment. However, though their writing practices were successful in many ways—the amount of writing they elicited, the quality of that writing, the excitement of the students over the writing, students’ desire to continue writing—student teachers did not always feel successful themselves. Much of participants’ stress related to the policy environment, particularly their marginal positions in it, the confusion and contradiction it reflected, and the expenditure of energy in unrewarding or even upsetting directions. They each had anticipated greater control and decision-making power than they were accorded. All teachers are constrained, and though some student teachers saw that their roles as first year teachers would not mean greater autonomy, other student teachers still believed it would.

3. What role does supervision play in helping student teachers navigate writing policy and practice in their placement contexts?

Our interactions shaped, and were shaped by, the policy environments. My supervisory practice went through three phases, though I always advocated working
within the structures where they found themselves. At first I collected information about school sites and student teachers' experiences, and let student teachers take the lead in raising questions about the policies, materials, and practices surrounding them. In the second phase I encouraged student teachers to find "wiggle room" and other small opportunities for professional judgment, and we engaged in some critical discussions of policy and practice. I also began to offer student teachers images of their cooperating teachers and other faculty as people under pressure within larger policy structures. Our professional relationship moved closer to collaboration. At the end of student teaching, I struggled with what made a successful supervisory practice, with the tensions between advocacy and collaboration, and the implications of my activist stance for student teachers.

In my supervision, I was also trying to facilitate and encourage certain ways of practicing and thinking about practice. I weighed carefully their negotiations with policy contexts that were the backdrop for all they did. Evidently, student teachers were reading the environment constantly; one of the roles I enacted was helping them make sense of what they were noticing. I noticed what student teachers were talking about—starting with the rules, must-do's and non-negotiables. I gradually adapted labels from critical policy literature during the data analysis to capture what it was we had been talking about. From student teachers' talk, I developed a policy framework to help us sort out the complexity of the policy structure, and within that structure, find some agency. Supervisors are capable of reading for power, conflicts, and micropolitics as well as
large-scale rules and regulations in student teachers’ placement schools, and doing so can be a powerful contribution to teacher learning.

Discussion

What I Learned about Policy

This research led me to rethink some of what I was assuming about policy, what counted as policy, the nature of policy, and the room for negotiation and decision making teachers and districts had in terms of policy. I began to read critical policy analysis, and in those works I saw references to situations similar to some I had faced in my teaching career where “policy” was invoked by someone trying to achieve a certain purpose—whether or not the policy existed. The idea of a policy, the possibility of a policy, could have power. The perception that there was, or might be, a policy was important. This possibility was weighed against the listeners’ possible ignorance—could they say with certainty that there was no such rule? And what would happen then? Therefore those who had been in the school system and had more time to encounter policies and learn them gradually arguably had an advantage over the newcomers, who were learning rules and expectations as they went along. Student teachers were certainly newcomers, who had much more than policies to learn and remember.

The policy framework I use throughout this analysis was shaped by, and in turn shaped, the interactions between student teachers and me and my observations in schools. Critical policy analysis helped me see that policies work on and through teachers in complicated ways. This helped me understand some of the complexities and seeming contradictions in the practices student teachers witnessed, understandings which informed
my interactions with student teachers. I realized I could not simplify those contexts for student teachers, but I could help them look, for themselves, from a particular frame of reference, and so see the policy landscape in specific ways.

It was not my goal to uncover the 'truth' about policy, but to talk about the inescapable subjectivities around policy. What was going on was as important as what student teachers thought about it. When student teachers were told something was a rule, an expectations, or a policy, than it became an element of (or barrier to) that student teacher's practice. There were representations of policy preferred by the cooperating teacher, and circumscribed by the larger policy environment and school culture.

Rules are easier to point to than expectations, traditions, arrangements, maxims and pressures. It was sometimes difficult for me to distinguish policy from the cooperating teacher's personal beliefs, decisions, or systems of rules for themselves. Their practices are in response to what they know about policies they have to follow, and there are contradictory policies. However, the systems of rules that the cooperating teachers have for themselves can become the rules the student teachers play by. Student teachers in this study also learned to play by the lack-of-rules and unwritten rules. When we talk about rules, it would be helpful to ask whose rules, and which rules, to allow student to question the many structures that can be marshaled to maintain the status quo. It makes a difference to the student teachers to see classroom policies as non-negotiable.

*Wiggle room.* Over time, what I called "the well-oiled machine" began to dismantle, as student teachers realized contradictions, power differences, and contrary purposes around them. Gaps began to appear. Different theorists have noted these
spaces or gaps, and referred to them by different names: they are “unofficial spaces” (Agnello 170), “room for manoeuvre” (Ball, year), “underlife” (Gutiérrez, Rymes, Larson 1995), or “cracks” (Taylor, 2009; Tierney et al, 2000) in the system. I came to realize that my goal was to help each student teacher realize some agency within the policy structure. Individuals have agency, but structure mediates that agency, so part of this effort means looking for what counts in each policy structure.

The spaces we were able to find within the policy confines were places of freedom, but also of risk. In these spaces, student teachers enacted what they felt was responsible pedagogy, but in doing so they were also leaving themselves vulnerable to criticism. Some student teachers worried rightfully about being hired. The close alignment seemed to punish some practices and reward others. Challenging this system was risky. Yet doing this kind of work in the student teaching experience makes sense, with the supervisor alongside the student teacher, both reading and questioning the ground rules with the intention of finding room to move practice in more just and humane directions.

**Big P/little p.** After data collection I read Evans et al’s (2008) concept of BigP/little p policies, and Ball’s (2009) use of this term. This concept helped me understand more about the range and variation of rules, expectations, traditions, and interpretations I had encountered in data collection. The “big P” Polices seemed to be those that most people could agree did in fact exist, like state standards, national mandates, and so on, and were made up of relatively stable elements. For instance, there
is a bell schedule, and these are its normal times; or, there is a pacing guide, and it suggests three weeks for topic x.

Then there were the normative statements, the ways things were or should be done. These included references to possible policies, traditions, and expectations. Furthermore, there were potentially different opinions on their existence, or their importance, depending on who was talking. These I referred to as “little p” policies. Arrangements, traditions, and expectations, normative as they are, can make a difference to the scope for professional judgment a new teacher has.

What’s more, the difference between a big P-- where there seemed to be broad consensus-- and a little p--where it seemed to be more subjective--was often in the eye of the beholder. To the student teacher, when it came to a particular practice, sometimes it seemed ‘everyone does this.’ The assumption of popular consensus mattered to the ways the student teachers thought about their scope for judgment. But more than once, looking at the same policy, I saw that everyone did not necessarily ‘do that,’ and sometimes argued that the student teacher had more room for decision making than it might seem to her. She saw a big P, and I saw a little p.

Where this became useful was in my analysis of the ways student teachers encountered and made sense of policy as revealed in our interactions. Though I did not have the terms ‘P/policies’ during my supervision for this study, I could see when we were talking across purposes or not connecting because our ideas of the seriousness of and negotiating room in a policy were different. I also saw how teachers and administrators could intentionally or unintentionally present policies as big P, giving the
student teacher the impression that there was little or no choice involved. I suspect there may be systemic reasons why I found policy talk leans to the big P in my analysis.

People’s perceptions and experiences and degree of access to ‘truth’ varies. Throughout my teaching career, I saw how individuals could wield power in a group. The line between big P and little p policies could be crossed and re-crossed by individuals seeking to influence the functioning of the group and/or its members. There always will be people whose interests are served by maintaining a façade of policy. Those same facades will marginalize others and their interests. The appearance of policy where there is none usually works against innovation, and toward the status quo.

I suggest using big P/little p as a potentially fruitful heuristic in discussions of policy. Such an heuristic will allow teachers, educators and student teachers to take an inquiry stance on policy, rather than focus on what is or is not policy, with the goal of realizing agency. My research sheds light on how student teachers receive multiple messages, some of which blur the important line between what they are supposed to do and where they are allowed to make decisions.

I am not trying to draw a line between P/p policies, but to offer a way to discuss policy that will allow for something like equal footing in conversation for official and unofficial policies, as both clearly matter. This is my attempt to bring critical attention to softer, subjective policies. Students and teachers can identify their personal big P/little p policy ideas, and bring these ideas into discussion with others.

Such discussion can be a way to highlight interpretation in the policy process, and find where there might be unappreciated or unanticipated room for interpretation. Big
P/little p can open up talk about how teachers create their own policy: what problem the teachers see, and what they see as the solution. Furthermore, big P/little p can also draw attention to how policies can be present in classrooms, and the lives of those in classrooms, in subtle ways. My aim is to open up conversations and considerations of policy based in people's perspectives and their own experiences with policy. The bottom line is increasing teachers' power to practice in response to their individual students by looking critically and creatively at policies for those opportunities to exercise judgment.

Players, Policies, Materials and Practices. The patterns emerging from this data indicate that their understandings of their policy environment and their place in it changes over time, and is influenced by the policy texts, people and practices in the school environment. Since this study I have supervised many more student teachers. There have been times, often around conversations regarding planning lessons, when my interactions with student teachers have led me to ask student teachers what their responsibilities were, in terms of curriculum. I assumed student teachers would expect, and be given, a curriculum, or some kind of accountability.

On several of these occasions, my assumption was incorrect. Student teachers had been relying on their cooperating teacher's reporting what subject or topic would be taught next. This in itself I did not object to, but the opacity of the relationship between policy and practice I felt did student teachers a disservice. Sometimes the textbook was the curriculum, and teaching the text was seen as equivalent to teaching the required curriculum. The difference between the state standards, the school curriculum, and the materials used (whether these materials were policy or not) was often difficult to talk
about. Some policies and their relationship to each other and to teachers’ practices therefore remain somewhat obscured.

I found myself explaining what student teachers might ask or look for, in terms of a curricular guide, pacing guide, or chart. I wondered what assumptions students had about curriculum. As a result, I began to ask questions in my classes about what students were assuming about curriculum, who wrote it, what scope there might be for interpretation and what we could learn from individual states’ curriculum battles and how they were covered in the national news.

I have argued that the elements of the policy discourse—players, texts, practices and policies—operated in and through each other and student teachers in largely similar ways, positioning student teachers as imitators, overwhelming them in their enormity and seemingly flawless unity, and sending messages that learning to teach is inseparable from learning to use, produce and manage specific texts. I summarize these points in Table 3. My point is not to make some final statement or necessarily come to consensus, but to facilitate dialogue about a common but historically opaque realm of teaching.
Table 3

**Student teachers’ and University Supervisor’s understanding of the relationships among policies, texts, practices and players, over time**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First phase</th>
<th>Second phase</th>
<th>Third phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student teachers</strong></td>
<td>All elements are unified, aligned</td>
<td>Some contradictions within and among</td>
<td>Complicated, many-layered relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Top down</td>
<td>Different interpretations</td>
<td>Players, policies, materials and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arrangement is unproblematic, “normal”</td>
<td>Gray areas, wiggle room</td>
<td>practices can undermine each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Players similarly interpreted/utilized/enacted</td>
<td>Top down plus teacher created</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Little/no distinction between P/policies, all equally weighted/important</td>
<td>Some distinction between P/policies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>University Supervisor</strong></td>
<td>Strong appearance of unity, alignment</td>
<td>Top down plus teacher created</td>
<td>Complicated, many-layered relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Top down</td>
<td>Similarities in enactment due to micropolitical factors</td>
<td>Difficult to discern between P/policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arranged to ensure smooth running of system</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Often Similarly enacted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difficult to discern between P/policies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**A Critical Policy Framework.** I have wondered about the ways teacher education programs present teacher decision-making across various courses. It is right and fair for courses to focus on crafting instruction around students’ needs and interests, but that is only part of the story. Teacher decision making happens in a policy context—a durable, shifting, and unique context, as I have argued throughout this paper. Teacher education that neglects policy, or under-plays its roles, may be leading student teachers to overestimate their agency simply by separating talk about teacher judgment from talk.
about policy. When policy reality hits student teachers in the classroom, student teachers may suffer shock at the unanticipated role of policy in their practice negotiations.

This research is a step toward suggesting a frame within which to start pre-service teachers’ lifelong examination of context and themselves in context. In the introductory chapter of Investigating Education Policy through Ethnography (2003), Geoffrey Walford underscores the importance of ethnographic research in understanding and challenging current policy issues.

By examining the scope and limitations on what can be said and thought, and also who can speak, when, where and with what authority, the study can expose and begin to modify the discourse. Policy as discourse gradually builds over time, such that some interpretations and some patterns are more likely than others. Here ethnographic work can also influence new policy through the indirect path of informing the policy debate. The ideas, concepts and images that ethnographic work produces can have a crucial impact on policy debates or, at the least, contribute to the policy discourse. (p.8) Policy frameworks can help student teachers look at their environments, and consider their positions within and outside these environments, with the goal of enacting meaningful writing practice across their professional lifespan. I attempted to move beyond categorizing student teachers’ resistance to policy; I do not see policy necessarily as something to be resisted, but something to be negotiated. Resistance implies a kind of relationship that is not inclusive of all I saw happening, and sets up a hierarchy, with policy at the top. Teacher educators can equip student teachers with ways to think about themselves as change agents, and to resist the press for uniformity of practice across the various contexts they will encounter in their careers.

*The Role of Policy in Student Teachers’ Learning to Teach*
One of the most unwelcome realizations for me was the extent to which teachers’ professional judgment had been proscribed. Decision-making was all but taken out of their hands in many situations, and along with it, many opportunities to craft practices in response to specific students at specific times. In this study, my first time supervising, it took me some time to think about how to handle the facts that, one, cooperating teachers’ hands were tied, and two, that they were not talking much with student teachers about being constrained.

My study data suggest a relationship between the student teacher’s perception of policy, and the nature of her relationship with her cooperating teacher. This study is not about cooperating teachers. But as players in the writing policy, they are important sources of policy information, and examples of how one may interact with policy. Cooperating teachers seemed to follow tests and curriculum, and so did most other teachers. As I discussed in chapters 5 and 6, participants eventually realized some faculty (including their cooperating teacher) were participating in policies the student teachers saw as detrimental to teaching and learning.

Regarding these situations, a phrase which repeated across participants was “playing the game.” Liz characterized the case of the ‘bubble kids’ at James Baldwin Elementary as game playing, gone tragically too far. Teachers under pressure of meeting some policy requirements may not be in the position of choosing between the policy and their judgment. In Sonya’s case, years of low test scores threatened her school with state sanctions similar to those forced upon the local middle school. They were in a desperate bid to increase test scores, in order to keep their school intact. Following the policy was,
in an awful way, what was best for the students. Teaching always involves compromise. Yet the language of compromise—whether a game or not—can gloss over real threats: schools taken over by outside agents, jobs disappearing, class sizes growing, resources dwindling. When Ann and I talked about fighting and a battlefield, those violent images seemed somewhat more fitting to the situations around us, the cooperating teachers, and students.

**Performativity.** Teachers may or may not be aware of how much scope they have to interact with policy, because of the manipulative and coercive nature of some policy elements and processes. Operating in today’s policy environment involves what Ball (following Lyotard) calls “performativity”:

[Performativity is]...a system of “terror” that employs judgments, comparisons and displays as means of control, attrition and change. The performances (of individual subjects or organizations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of “quality” or “moments” of promotion or inspection. (2000, p.1)

Particular accountability structures—the pressures of performativity—lead teachers and administrators to practice, or appear to practice, in certain ways. However, this complicates the picture presented to student teachers. Student teachers, observing the writing practices of their cooperating teachers, may or may not be aware when, and if, those practices emanate from the teacher’s sense of what is pedagogically sound. Performativity makes practice tricky to read, and, arguably, uncomfortable to talk about.

Teacher educators cannot assume that pre-service teachers are aware of the struggles their cooperating teacher may be undergoing in the present policy environment. Much of what is important about the cooperating teacher’s practice may be hidden, though not with bad intention. It can be nearly impossible to view practices as an
expression of professional judgment, partly because of what Ball calls the “opacity” of fabrication. Student teachers evidently can struggle with the difference between what is seen to be done and what is substantively done, and how the cooperating teacher manages the difference. I am not suggesting we prepare student teachers to be duplicitous, but to recognize that some policy environments engender performativity in thoughtful practitioners.

Furthermore, teachers under pressure of performativity may be unwittingly restricting student teachers’ writing practices. Student teachers felt they were being monitored by the cooperating teacher for adherence to policy of all levels. This may have made student teachers more reluctant to step out of the script—especially if they thought the cooperating teacher was adhering to the script unproblematically. Additionally, student teachers’ feelings of being watched did not always translate into awareness that their cooperating teachers might also be watched.

I learned during this research how important it is to inform students about the struggles their cooperating teacher may be undergoing in the present policy environment. The concept of performativity helped me help student teachers see their cooperating teachers as people also responding to the policy environment we are interrogating. Later, I discovered a study of the policy negotiations happening within teachers, but hidden from our view. In an interview excerpt from a qualitative study of the traumatic effects of a national educational policy, Jeffrey and Woods (1998) reveal what Ball (2004) calls “the incipient ‘madness’ of the requirements of performativity” (p.147) on a head teacher. Parallels to the present discussion are disturbing.
My first reaction [to the policy directive] was ‘I’m not going to play the game,’ but I am and they know I am. I don’t respect myself for it; my own self respect goes down. Why aren’t I making a stand? Why aren’t I saying, ‘I know I can teach; say what you want to say,’ and so I lose my own self-respect. I know who I am; know why I teach, and I don’t like it: I don’t like them doing this, and that’s sad, isn’t it? (p. 160)

Although I did not have this study at the time, when I spoke with student teachers I imagined out loud the kinds of responses faculty might be having to the policies around them.

In the second half of the semester, as student teachers raised more instance of practices, policies and texts with which they disagreed, I found myself talking about teachers and administrators as within the policy discourse. I attempted to show them as under pressure themselves, from policies constructed at a higher political level. I hoped such talk would keep from teacher-bashing and deficit perspectives. I believe it was important for student teachers to understand cooperating teachers were not unthinking victims, but doing their level best in the system forced upon them.

I do not know if any cooperating teachers spoke with their student teachers about performativity, or about the difficulty of “playing the game.” I could understand why they might not have wanted to hold such conversations. Cooperating teachers may have been satisfied with their practice, and they may have not; either way, there would be many reasons not to share those thoughts with student teachers or the university representative. I overheard a comment from Sandy, directed at her students, that preparing for testing through computerized programs was something they just had to submit to, for the sake of the test. As much as I wanted to ask cooperating teachers to
discuss with student teachers the personal-level policy decisions they were making, I felt I had no right to ask for that level of vulnerability.

I am not suggesting teacher educators press teachers to ‘tell the truth’ about how they regard their roles in the policy landscapes of their schools. What is essential is that the student teachers realize policy interactions happen on a personal level. The policy structure seems to have taken doubt and uncertainty away from the public realm of idea-sharing and imagination, and made them a private burden. I had no idea the kinds of deals the cooperating teachers may have made with themselves to get to this point in their careers, and I could not ask.

I suggest the current policy environment discourages people from finding conflict within policies, and instead, encourages people to look for conflict within themselves. Eliciting and supporting reflection must be done in a framework that takes into account the complexities of the contexts within which student teachers operate, specifically, the local power of the policy surroundings, and the actions and ways of being it privileges and makes irrelevant. It seems important to equip student teachers for prudent and strategic reading of the lay of the land, which is now so complicated, and operating in and beyond it, when the costs are so high. How they were told to use texts or engage in practices, and by whom, influenced student teachers’ perception of their meaning in the discourse.

An awareness of the different ways student teachers make sense of their placement policy contexts can inform how we discuss policy with them as teacher educators. I realized that student teachers’ perceptions of the people, texts and practices
in their schools were as important to their teaching, as were the ways they saw those policy elements operating. At an early meeting with Michelle and Marjorie, the image occurred to me of a well-oiled machine. I later encountered a similar metaphor that confirmed for me the affordances of this image, and helped me understand its nature.

Referring to social theory, Jameson (1984) postulates that in creating a policy text which mobilizes its own reality,

...the theorist wins, therefore, by constructing an increasingly closed and terrifying machine, to that very degree [the policy reader] loses, since the critical capacity of his [sic] work is thereby paralyzed, and the impulses of negation and revolt, not to speak of those of social transformation, are increasingly perceived as vain and trivial...(Jameson 1984 in Ball 2006 p. 49)

There were many times over the semester that student teachers' attempts at unique practices were cast as "trivial." There was much in place to make them feel like any conflict was their fault, or a result of their inexperience or naïveté.

The shifting notions of success were one of the many stressors student teachers encountered in their practices. I found that the policy environment discourages looking at contextual factors as possibly conflicting. Instead, teachers can be encouraged to see themselves as the only obstacle to a smoothly running educational system. Student teachers saw the costs of practice, and had their own share of tense moments, and seemingly unsolvable dilemmas.

**Writing and Teaching Writing**

Through this layered experience of writing education, policy and supervision, I have learned a great deal about preparing teachers to teach writing in the current policy environment. Four different people, with different and changing ideas about writing and teaching writing, walked into practice situations already embedded with several and
possibly conflicting messages about what writing is, and perhaps how it should be taught. As a literacy teacher, I was concerned with what different messages these people were receiving, how they were sorting them out, thinking about them, and understanding them. Furthermore, when they taught—when their response took the form of practice—what happened to their thinking afterward?

I understood that people and texts shape each other; during the study, policy theory added another dimension to my understandings of the relationships between practitioners and basal readers, textbooks and lesson plans. Policies may work to build writing-rich environments; they may work against such goals. But they are always working. There are general, generic, and vague English and Language Arts standards in schools, along with progressive and student-centered policies. Each writing policy was enacted and embedded in complex social, cultural and pedagogic contexts. This research has shown me the importance of inquiry into school contexts for what kinds of writing are promoted, what kinds of teaching, and what kinds of students.

This research has shown me the many elements of policy I overlooked. I had assumptions about which policies would matter to student teachers, namely curriculum and standards. Until this point I had read little research about “little p” policies—the informal or pseudo-policies which people take seriously. Nor had I thought about the importance of people’s perception of policy. Children’s ideas about writing were one of the more powerful aspects of the policy environment. Third graders were already stressed by the state tests, as were the middle level and high school students.
Some of the most potent writing policies in terms of student teachers’ practice were unofficial, ‘little p’ policies—attitudes, ways of using texts, casual arrangements, posters on walls. The fact that these policies were unwritten made them more difficult to interrogate, and may have made them more difficult to resist. Discerning what was and what was not a policy became less important than determining what scope for decision-making the student teacher might have.

Writing was connected to other policy elements, some of which I could not have anticipated. Furthermore, neither student teachers nor I could easily tell how negotiable or non-negotiable these practices and policies were. Student teachers, and teacher educators may only be aware of a fraction of these, but they all potentially shape the way student teachers teach writing. Teacher educators are already engaging students in the critical reading of policy and examining the assumptions about writing and writers within texts and practices. This work should be continued, keeping in mind that helping pre-service teachers find where to look for these policy/practice connections would be less fruitful than suggesting how to look for them.

I have pointed out how my approach to policy informed and was informed by my approach to supervision. Similarly, my research focus on writing had an impact on how I supervised and how I understood policy.

Our personal, professional, and even political views are evident in our selection of our objects of study, in our approach to these subjects, in the way that we carry out our fieldwork, and in the methods we employ for varying forms of analysis. The decision to become ethnographers, therefore, is inextricably linked to our own personal and political interests, and these are in turn developed and reinforced in our ethnographic studies. (Flores, 2002)
In the literacy class, I was explicit about my attitudes about teaching writing and encouraged students in many ways to be explicit about theirs. This I felt—and hoped—would have influence on the ways we could talk together about writing and teaching writing in our professional relationships. In this way, my supervisory relationship was intentionally informed by my research focus. This was quite different from those times since, when I have supervised student teachers who were not students from my literacy classes.

Student teaching is a site of important writing policy negotiation where university-based supervision can play a role. Student teachers are constantly interacting with the policy environments of their placement contexts as they learn to teach writing. Supervisors have unique access to this discourse and the student teacher's place in it. This suggests a relationship between teachers of writing and those who supervise, one that would admit for respectful dialogue including transparency about differences of professional opinion on writing. Consensus is, I believe, not as important as allowing student teachers access to the healthy conflicts within the field of composition and literacy.

Knowing about the many connections of writing practice to policy has already entered my literacy teaching, and leads me to consider how I can help student teachers address them with administration, school board, and state legislators. I am still contemplating how these connections could become points of strength. Because policies are so varied, and instantiated in different ways across time and contexts, it makes sense
to encourage student teachers’ critical readings of policy by offering them strong conceptual frameworks.

Good writing practices sometimes can lead teachers into difficult situations, even in the best circumstances. If teacher educators attempt to prepare teachers to teach writing in ways that allow for uncertainty and spontaneity, attention must be paid to developing student teachers’ awareness of their policy surroundings and any pressures toward the certain and predictable. Part of the conversation in teacher education in writing should include being ready for the unexpected. Preparing teachers to be ready for the unexpected would seem to indicate a need to be able to read the students, and the structures surrounding both students and teachers, with the goal of successfully navigating the boundaries of writing policy expectations, and teacher innovation.

Student teachers in this study used what they knew about their students, about writing, and about their schools to plan their teaching of writing. Supporting them in ‘reading’ and deliberating about ways to respond to all of these factors is important. To continue the process of looking at and beyond the policy landscape, to resist the press for uniformity of practice across the various contexts they will encounter in their careers, student teachers could benefit from cohesive approaches to the teaching of writing from their education programs.

Literacy educators do not have to be policy experts, in order to have rich and fruitful understandings of policy and of policy processes. As I have tried to emphasize throughout this study, the policy framework I have assembled draws heavily on Ball, but is based in notions I believe are shared across literacy, anthropology, and qualitative
inquiry. As I have argued throughout this paper, there are ways of understanding policy that emanate from the same critical, constructivist impulses behind progressive literacy pedagogies.

**What I Learned About Supervision**

Through this research, I have examined my initial assumptions and understandings about supervision specifically as they were played out and challenged in interactions with student teachers. My plan was to follow them; my agenda was to support them all along; my imagined line of inquiry was into the policies they encountered and how these reinforced or conflicted with their beliefs and plans about writing.

One of my assumptions about supervising is that I would try to be as specific as possible to the person and situation in front of me. I would pay attention to details and think about them. I wrote in a journal in advance of the first meeting:

I'm aware that the student teachers and I will be reading their policy environments from different places, and that may result in different readings. I am expecting this. Whereas they will have their own reasons for reading their local writing policy, I will have mine.... They're also reading other things at the same time and trying to make decisions based on them. And all along, they're observing and taking over teaching duties. So their practice may come into play in their readings of what they should be doing and how, when it comes to writing. (Supervision journal, 1/4/09)

I would listen closely, and observe carefully, and reflect. These actions would be the basis of my supervisory practice and enable me to be helpful in different situations with different people. I assumed I would be able to help, to support, and this turned out to be a most problematic assumption.
In the first chapter, I described when the participants learned I was going to be their supervisor. I asked them what they felt they needed most from me. Liz said without hesitation, “we need your support.” I made some assumptions in that moment about support, and what Liz meant by it, and what I thought support might involve. But I also assumed I could provide support to these people, as they began in the profession with courage and intelligence. I journaled before I began supervising, reflecting that I had some fixed notions, and some flexibility, about what support meant:

Support. What does support mean in this day and age when it comes to the teaching of writing? I need to walk with them, find out what their situations are, how they’re reading them, what they see as their positions. Help them think differently about things, not just for the sake of difference but from a critical constructivist pedagogy, something that can give them hope and satisfaction, and for everyone that may be different. They’ll all have their goals, and [I will be] asking them what their goals are, and not judging them on their goals but helping them reach those goals, and interrogate them as well. (Supervision journal, 1/4/09)

I knew that teaching was difficult, complicated, and messy work. I had some ideas about the kinds of problems that could come up, but I tried to remain open-minded and ready to hear and see what happened.

Differences across Participants and Contexts. Student teachers constantly interact with the policy environments of their placement contexts as they learn to teach writing, and supervisors have unique access to this discourse and the student teacher’s place in it. Much of my supervisory actions would up being in response to the conflicts between the student teacher’s goals and beliefs and what they (and I) saw to be the prevailing notions about teaching and learning in the placement classroom. Obviously each student teacher, and each site, was different; therefore, each student teacher/site combination was also different, and their points of conflict changed throughout the
semester. Each cooperating teacher was different, and my relationship with each cooperating teacher changed over time. The cooperating teacher was the representative of school culture—at least for a while, the primary representative. The cooperating teachers may well have wanted to present school culture in a certain way to the student teacher, and to me.

I am not drawing some general ‘progressive student teacher in traditional school site’ conclusions. The conflicts were sometimes basic philosophical differences, as my analysis shows, but not always. There are implications for the ways programs choose, support and involve cooperating teachers. It would be up to the university to choose teachers who are willing to take an inquiry stance on their own practice, or to prepare supervisors and faculty to talk about the pressures of performativity. The supervisor, as an insider/outsider in both the university context and the school placement context, can be a resource in these complex negotiations. Educators and supervisors can help student teachers navigate particular contact zones, with a goal of student teacher agency on behalf of her present and future students.

I took each person’s personality into account, and their ways of talking and being with me. Our talk did reflect attention to details and specifics of each situation. I followed their lead as much as I could, and this opened up different conversations, on different topics. I tried to take my cues from student teachers in terms of how much they felt comfortable revealing to me, particularly about sensitive or difficult topics, such as their relationship with their cooperating teacher (especially at first) or their thinking about themselves. I found myself often mirroring or echoing the student teacher’s
conversational style, usually in an attempt to put her at ease and keep conversations flowing. The more we talked, the more I felt I could be helpful. In that sense I was using our talk to drive my supervisory practice, not an unproblematic approach.

Some student teachers were better than others at telling me quickly when I had misread a situation. This let me know that I had to build in many times and ways of 'member checking' with student teachers. My information was always partial, and sometimes that meant faulty conclusions or suppositions on my part. I am still working on framing my thoughts in such a way that they are open for discussion immediately.

I was more successful with some people than with others in positioning myself as a partner, a co-worker in the sense of someone who could plan with them, reflect and learn with them. In the beginning, I showed no vulnerability, and little uncertainty, in our professional interactions.

Over time, my understandings and roles changed, and my supervisory framework continued to take shape. By the end of student teaching, I was thinking about how to help student teachers use policy-style language to explain their choices to those in power. Clearly I advocate for the small spaces, the toeholds student teachers can find within the structure, but with the goal of changing it. This involves action, including “Speaking up at school sites about inequity, claiming voice as a change agent even in the induction period of teaching” (Athenases & deOlivera, 2007 p. 134). However, it also involves risk, which some may argue conflicts with prospective teachers’ aim of securing employment.
As I indicated in the last data analysis chapter, advocacy and collaboration are two somewhat opposing impulses. As a new supervisor, I had only begun to face the fact I would have to advocate for myself. I believe I learned at least as much from the student teachers as they did from me in the realm of micropolitical literacy. I was impressed throughout the semester at their savvy, and how well they were able to manage the many relationships they were thrust into—ours included. Advocacy, the role of advocate for others and for myself, is one I struggle with on multiple levels. I was walking a fine line.

I am still wrestling with promoting advocacy, while building a collaborative supervisory framework. I have argued throughout this study that good supervision is context-specific. The student teachers seemed to appreciate most my listening, and the talk we had when I was clearly plugged into what was happening around them, referencing individual students and past conversations. But there is more to supervision than being context-specific; it is also person specific, and in that sense the more I understood about the person, the more I felt able to tailor my supervision. That is not to say I knew these people's inner selves, nor that I was always accurate in my reads of their situations and personalities, nor that I did a fine job matching my actions to each scenario. Furthermore, though I learned more about them over time, as they did about me, knowing more did not always or automatically translate into supervising better.

In the end, I am not sure if I was supportive, or if they felt supported by me. Nor have I, in the semesters since, developed some way to support, as much as I have learned that support is highly context- and person- specific. That is not to say that support is endlessly varied, or impossible to talk about. The goal is the same for each student:
increasing educational equity and humane practices for all their students. My frameworks, flexible as they are, also remain.

**Where I Am Now in Terms of My Supervisory Framework.** My more current supervisory experiences have provided me a way to look back on what I learned in the study, and since. I have learned that supervision can be collegial, that the hierarchical arrangement can be dismantled to an extent, but that such a relationship is challenging to initiate and to maintain. I struggle to be aware of the evaluative position I hold, and the ideas about supervisors that student teachers may have. I have learned to ask, and ask again, what the student teacher would like to have happen in their student teaching experience, and what she or he thinks I can do to help that come to pass. I try to be clear about why I am talking and acting in certain ways, on certain topics, and give student teachers chances to talk back to those actions. It is difficult, but worthwhile, to provide support and advocate for someone, while also collaborating with that person.

I learned that University supervisors’ low status and peripheral role are, somewhat ironically, advantageous positions from which to read the local policy environment. Part of why I am compelled by this particular rethinking of supervision is that the pieces are already in place; collaborative supervision, with a policy frame, does not necessitate more time, people, or resources. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle suggest about an inquiry stance and the kind of teaching which can flow from it, this does not mean more work, but different work.

My argument here is that supervisors can help student teachers negotiate the intersections of policy and practice, but that such work requires deep contextual
knowledge of the school and of the student teacher, her attitudes toward writing, and her position in and understanding of the policy environment. To stem the tide of new teacher attrition, teacher preparation programs are looking for ways to help their graduates find some measure of agency and professional satisfaction. Fives, Hammana and Olivarez (2005) suggest that student teachers' feelings of efficacy during student teaching may help ameliorate their feelings of burnout. Teacher preparation is charged with more than helping teachers cope. I am still struggling with including coping strategies in my practice. Across contexts and over time, priorities of mine included monitoring student teachers' stress levels and keeping doors of communication open, for our interactions to be a way to work through questions, challenges or setbacks. I worried then, and I do now as a supervisor and instructor, about advising people to practice in these gaps and cracks. I weigh the differences between nudging someone out of a comfort zone, and pushing her into something like a combat zone.

This study further suggests a focus on the preparation and support of supervisors, who are in unique positions to understand local policies, and to support student teachers in their context-specific readings of policy texts, people and practices. University supervisors are already part of the university discourse, have some access to schools and can leverage that access. Serious efforts to redefine the role of university supervisors (university-based educators) would require teacher education programs to commit time, energy, effort, and finances to support university-based educators. Faculty can take more role as supervisors, and supervisors can take more active roles in teacher education (Ball, 2000; Slick, 1998).
Based on my work as a university supervisor, I argue that contextualized supervision of student teachers is difficult, yet essential to meaningful preparation for teachers to teach writing responsively and responsibly, in this standards-driven policy environment. University supervisors are not reading context as observers, but as participants, reading long with the student teachers, reading it to change it, not just to function in it. I believe some answers lie in teacher community.

Teachers are going to have to begin to mobilize; they can’t do this alone—they can’t talk about engaging educational problems and closing the door and inventing a neat pedagogy that nobody knows about. They’re going to have to work inside and outside the schools; they’re going to have to force policy to be changed. They’re going to have to vote people on boards that have power that represent what they’re doing. They’re going to have to fight for the power that they have; they’re going to have to realize that education is not a method, it’s the outcome of struggles. It’s not a method: it’s not some a priori discourse that you simply invent and then apply; it’s in flux all the time. (Edmondson and d’Urso 2007, np)

There seems to be a need for ways to help student teachers and early-career teachers link up with other like-minded practitioners to combat feelings of isolation, particularly in light of the pressures on faculty toward the appearance of alignment, as this study shows.

What It Means To Take an Ethnographic Approach to Supervision. In a very real sense, I am trying to take current critical literacy work and extend it into the field placement experiences of pre-service teachers, through critical policy frameworks and supervision. There are supervisory frameworks which are built on inquiry, and use ethnographic methodologies and insights from anthropology. These are needed now, more than ever, as accountability threatens to standardize practice at many levels. The work that I did as a supervisor was also based on an ethnographic approach to
understanding what happens in classrooms, and what those happenings mean to those involved.

I have cited Waite (1998) and Duffy (2001) in calling some supervisory approaches “ethnographic” or “anthropological” and I wish to develop these ideas further. In discussing why ethnography is appropriate for educational issues, Walford (2008) identifies what he calls the ‘minimum requirements’ for a study to be called ethnographic. As I have stated, mine was not an ethnography, but Walford’s list provides a way to consider how my supervisory practices might be called ethnographic.

To begin, as the supervisor, I took account of context. I believed I would be able to listen and observe carefully, and these moves would help me know what to do as a first-time supervisor. I believed it was essential for me to develop a sense of the inner workings of these classrooms, getting to know a context and its culture, and how these may conflict with other cultures. There is no monolithic culture for all classrooms; each had its own operations and rules. The connections to the larger school were complicated; what teaching and learning writing meant was connected in visible and invisible ways to the larger school and district ideas.

I also knew I could rely on my education in qualitative inquiry and ethnographic methods and tools. I assumed that walking with student teachers—going into the school with them, meeting their cooperating teachers, students, and administrators, listening to the many pressures they were under from the school and the university—would provide me with enough information to underlie my supervision. Walford (2008) remarks that ethnographers must “balance attention” on the macro and the micro, the minute details
within the larger structures (p. 7). Supervision from an ethnographic perspective would seek to see as much of what is going on in the schools and possible, in an effort to understand the micro culture and the student teacher's real and desired roles in it, and link this to larger conversations and cultures in the field of education. I believed I could record and reflect on this information reliably, and built time into my schedule for rereading and reflection. An awareness of the dynamics of their individual contexts might help supervisors support the negotiations of those contexts.

Additionally, as the supervisor I attempted to be ready and willing, as Walford says, to "see everything and suspend premature judgment" (8). I recognize there is not a single culture in any school. I had learned ways, as Waite put it, to pay as much attention as humanly possible to the many people and situational factors in any given lesson, and to record these as factually as possible, while leaving separate space on the page for my thoughts and interpretations.

Field notes became a key part of the engine of my supervision. Along with our emails back and forth with student teachers, the notes I took during my observation of a student teacher's lessons served many purposes. First they were a record of all I could see and hear, including what I knew about the situation (the forecast called for snow; the talent show was the next day; the cooperating teacher had been out with a sick child, etc.). These records also frequently included information the student teacher had shared with me prior to the lesson, sometimes weeks prior, which came back to my mind in the moment. I wove into the record of my thoughts, questions, and interpretations in a kind of braiding of past and present for possible future discussion.
Secondly, these field notes, and my in-the-moment reflections, became a text that I took with me to our post-observation conferences. I held them, and I sometimes referred to them when it seemed they could help our conversation. I gradually realized these notes gave me a sense of grounding, of relevance, of dealing in the real moment-by-moment happenings of a lesson. Regardless of whether I consulted the notes during our post observation conferences, I knew I had them. I also took some comfort that I had concentrated as hard as I could on what was happening with the people in and around that room. I knew I was thinking hard about this specific person, and her specific words and actions with specific students.

Walford also recommends multiple research tools and forms of data for ethnographic researchers, and I claim the same for an ethnographic approach to supervision. An “openness to looking in many different ways” (p.8) including observations, field notes, discussions and “chance conversations” and “overheard remarks” (p. 8). I wrote reflections before and after observations. For this research I usually audio recorded our post observation conferences, and then transcribed them. I could not have guessed at how important these tapes and transcripts would become to my practice. “A study which uses only one field technique, however exhaustively, does not constitute an ethnography, since it can generate only one kind of data” (p.8). I am thinking here about the checklists which too often restrict supervisors’ observations to that which is included on the list, and restrict the tools to that one checklist.

A thoughtful relationship between the student teacher and supervisor is important in many models of supervision. Several researchers have written on the quality and
nature of this relationship. Similarly, the "principle of engagement" is what Walford terms the trust that ethnographers build with their participants so that they will "perform less" (2008, p.9). I learned that people all eventually became comfortable enough with me that I could visit unannounced, but that this process took different amounts of time for different people.

Though Walford points out that prolonged engagement is part of the ethnographic contract, and a prolonged period was not part of my research access in this study, supervisors generally have one semester with their students (perhaps two). During this time, as a member—an insider/outsider—of the school culture, the supervisor can open herself to a "process of enculturation" (p.10). I have struggled and do still struggle to remain open to how each school context may shape me as a supervisor.

Walford warns ethnographers to be aware of their own power in the research process, and as I have argued through this study, the same was and is true for me as a supervisor with an ethnographic orientation. As I have supervised more student teachers over the years, it has become more challenging to bring to light my sedimented understandings of student teaching, and to keep my assumptions in the forefront. I have learned that the supervisor is part of the student teaching experience as lived by the student teacher, cooperating teacher, and students. The supervisor's agenda is part of that experience as well. The complementary side to this checking of power is the privileging of the participant's point of view and accounts of their experiences, and allowing them to influence the supervisor.
The ethnographic supervisor is a participant-observer, and as such, brings her own beliefs and assumptions to each school site, and to each interaction with individual student teachers and cooperating teachers. The issue of participant observation is integral to ethnography. "Somehow a balance must be struck between suspending preconceptions and using one’s present understands and beliefs to enquire intelligently" (Walford, 2008, p.10). This means constant reflection on the progressive collection of data, in the recursive cycle well known to qualitative researchers.

The Supervisor as Inquirer alongside Student Teachers. I wish to put a finer point on the contribution this work might make to the idea of the practice of supervision, specifically of the supervisor as inquirer. What is involved here is not simply the understanding of the nature of supervision, but also the image of supervision that grows out of that understanding. Taking an inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999, 2009) toward supervision is both similar to and different from other approaches to supervision and the research of supervision. At issue are the relationships assumed between research, practice, theory and knowledge in these models. In this section, I briefly discuss research on other recent supervisory models, then what an inquiry stance toward supervision has meant for my supervisory practices so far, and finally the next steps I imagine alongside implications of an inquiry stance for other supervisors.

It is important to note that in writings about alternate models of supervision there is often the theme of change, renewal, or outright transformation. Often there is a move to challenge the status quo and/or dominant power relationships. Sometime the impetus for change comes from the author/researcher, and sometimes an outside force or agent
invites, incites, or allows for study of practice in a new way. Who initiated this creation of an alternative, and what the purpose of the research is, has implications for the research process and its goal, as well as for the impact of its findings.

An obvious difference among studies on alternate supervisory models is between supervisors who are researching their own practice, and those who are researching the practice of others. Across the writings about supervision, sometimes there is an examination of the researchers’ assumptions about supervision and its role in teacher learning; sometimes these assumptions are stated but not examined; and sometimes they are not stated at all, but implied. The supervisors’ sense-making processes and the results of these processes occasionally are shared; sometimes the researchers’ sense-making is privileged. In some studies of supervision, it is difficult to tell the relationship of the researcher to the researched, and sometimes the theory or theories of supervision behind the study is/are unarticulated. Notably, in many studies of alternate forms of supervision, supervisors continue to be the researched, rather than the researcher. This too has implications for the nature of knowledge about supervision, its relation to research, and the place of knowledge about supervision in schools of education that employ supervisors. The relationship of the practice of supervision to the researching of supervision usually goes unexplained.

I sensed that much of the research on and by supervisors I reviewed for this study to have a kind of goal or endpoint in mind—to be searching for the answers to a particular problem. This was reflected in the nature of the questions at the heart of several studies, which took the form: how can I/we do x (or do x better)? Or, what can
those involved in supervision do to bring about x outcome? These studies usually employ the documentation and analysis procedures as well as publication formats of university-based research (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, year, p. 25-26). However, some others are essays and conceptual writings that leaned toward a description or analysis of a particular approach to supervision.

I do not mean to simply critique these writings; on the contrary, I have relied on them to challenge and develop my own thinking about the practice and research of supervision. I supervise, and learn from supervision, from an inquiry stance, which involves interpreting and theorizing what I am doing (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999, p.291). I see inquiry as a process and a product; it is both how I come to know, and what I come to know, by researching my own practice and sharing that research with a larger community, as I do here.

In practitioner inquiry, answers share pride of place with the “complex and provocative questions of ethics, access, and research methods” (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1999, p. 292) supervisors ask of themselves and of their work with others. As I first stated in chapter three, a supervisor who is also an inquirer might ask questions such as “What is going on here?” “What am I trying to make happen here, and why?” “What sense are my student [teachers] making of what is going on in the classroom?” “Who am I as a [supervisor]?” This presents a stark contrast to clinical models; it is also a facet not usually present in other alternative models. These questions informed my research and practice of supervision to begin with, and continue to drive my theorizing of my supervisory practice. Some of the emerging questions for me include where my blind
spots are as a supervisor, and a continuing exploration of my attempts to be more collaborative.

In adopting an inquiry stance, I am encouraged to question received wisdom and traditional arrangements. This “shift from problem solving to problem posing” (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993, p. 55) allowed me to look into what assumptions student teachers, cooperating teachers, schools and the university had about supervision. I have, in this dissertation, begun to unpack and explore these assumptions. I began to interrogate my own assumptions as part of the process an inquiry stance invites. I also seek to invite other supervisors into a community of inquiry around supervision so that we may discuss our own and others’ supervisory theories and practices, consume and produce various texts, and generate new understandings for ourselves and for larger teacher education communities. “Supervisors as theorizers, critics and interpreters of their own practice” (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999, p. 1) can mean a different way of generating and sharing knowledge about supervision; a different relationship between knowledge so generated and the assumed knowledge base for teaching; and a different role for supervisors in the larger project of teacher learning.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is its short duration; student teaching was only one semester. This limited the length of my data collection phase. Another is that student teachers and I had a professional relationship before the study began, which is not usually the case with university supervisors. Our professional relationship had a chance to develop the previous semester, and this level of familiarity meant we did not have the
challenges of getting to know each other, as supervisors and student teachers often do. Furthermore, I selected the participants by requesting the university allow me to supervise these people in particular. The participants knew I had requested to supervise them before I asked them to participate in the study. I was able to choose people who responded well, who did not (entirely) resist my inquiry stance and constant questioning of taken-for-granted arrangements. In that sense, they were ideal candidates, and are not necessarily typical of student teachers nor do they represent a range of possible attitudes, actions and experiences.

I have since supervised people I have not met before, which is often the situation with university supervisors and their supervisees. I have found this means my trying to get up to speed, quickly, with the student teacher in terms of her or his personality, professional goals, specific strengths, and needs. I also try to explain my own philosophies, my ways of supervising--including a reliance on field notes rather than a checklist format, a desire to be collaborative, my casual communication style, qualitative orientation and inquiry stance. This relationship building is a process which takes time and overlays the observations.

Another limitation to my practice and research of supervision is my understanding of situations in the moment, and afterwards. I used my background in qualitative inquiry, and ethnographic orientations and tools. That does not mean I read situations accurately all the time. I tried to read contexts on student teachers’ behalf--what might matter to them, as well as what I thought mattered about teaching writing. There was, as a result, some guessing and assumptions on my part. Sometimes I hit the mark, but oftentimes did
not, and misread situations and people. As I was a solo researcher, I could not cross-check my analysis with another researcher. Therefore, in my data analysis, I chose situations where there were multiple converging data sources. That is to say, I did not choose events that were isolated or unique in student teachers' experience or our professional interactions, but those which echoed across other situations, in an effort to represent fairly student teachers' thinking and experiences.

Conclusion

A university supervisor's contextualized view of policy and practice is especially important when it comes to student teachers, and to writing, in this standards-heavy environment. Because of the current policy emphasis on assessment, teachers can be pressured or coerced to practice in ways specifically to raise scores, even when these practices run contrary to their beliefs about what is right for students. A policy frame and an inquiry stance allow me to raise the idea that the rules student teachers encounter are not normal or natural. There are times when it is good to follow rules and times when it is good to be nervous about them. It is always good to interrogate them.

As I have argued, student teachers did briefly enter into dialogic relationships with their policy environments, sidestepping them, deflecting surveillance, and for a brief time, changing what counted as writing in students' experiences of school. I agree with Fecho: new teachers are not as powerless as they might imagine. (2004, p.264.) Because of this research, I have been able to Teaching students explicitly about negotiating their contexts with goal of agency specifically through decision-making power on behalf of students.
Being taught explicitly is not the same as being told what to think. I have provided, and continue to provide, other student teachers with a way to think about their policy contexts that will show spaces for action. The policy contexts they will encounter over their careers will change, but rather than focusing on the kinds of ‘responses’ they have to policy, teacher education can equip them for change by helping them see themselves as players in the policy landscape. My hope is that pre-service teachers will not get lost in student teaching’s complexity and overwhelmed by its scope, but see themselves as thoughtful practitioners with the capacity to be agents of change. Student teachers and I gradually saw the policies, players, texts and practices, and at the same time, the spaces within the structure where student teachers could make practice decisions. This policy frame helped reveal both the structure and student teachers’ agency within that structure.

By introducing contradictory discourses the ethnographer may be able to restructure the boundaries to what actors are allowed to think and do. While actors are still embedded within a variety of discordant and contradictory discourses, with some discourses more dominant than others, the new discourse may gradually grow in strength as it is used by the researcher and others. (Walford, 2003, p.8) Based on an understanding of literacy, supervision, and policy as enacted and situated, I argue that writing education which seeks to explore and trouble student teachers’ understandings of their beliefs about writing, within various policy contexts, should support these sense-making processes with a situated university supervisor. The supervisor, as an insider/outsider in both the university context and the school placement context, can be a resource in these complex negotiations. Policy, supervision, and writing instruction overlap at important points. Because of my research I am able to open
up conversations about what structures make some practices more likely than others; how some students are positioned differently than others; and what alternatives there might be. These conversations are important to have in the present environment, which seems to drive dynamic practices underground, and brand talking about them as a potentially dangerous act.
Marshall (1997) notes that traditional questions can be asked in a feminist critical policy analysis, when coupled with concerns for the effects on races, sexuality, class and gender.

Franzak, (2008) calls them “phantom policies” (p. 466).

I use abbreviations for the following data sources: FN = field notes; POC = post-observation conference transcripts; FG = focus group transcripts
REFERENCES


Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (2001). Beyond certainty; taking an inquiry stance on
practice. In *Teachers caught in the action; Professional development that matters.* (pp. 45-58): Teachers college press.


*SUNY Series, Studying the Self.*


reading Conference (pp. 21-42). Oak Creek, WI: National Reading Conference.


