NOTES FROM THE BLOGGING FIELD:
TEACHER VOICE AND THE POLICY-PRACTICE GAP IN EDUCATION

by

KIERSTEN GREENE

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in satisfaction of the
dissertation requirement of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

for

Oma , Fay Jackson, and all the

children, parents, and teachers

in the struggle

Abstract

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By

Kiersten Greene

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Public education is in crisis. From the proliferation of reforms that support high-stakes testing and one-size-fits-all curricula to the overt privatization of schooling via the charter school movement, the system of public education in the United States is in dire need of repair. However, as many scholars, educators, and students have noted over the last century, public education has often—if not always—been in a state of constant crisis, reform, and hopeful repair. Parents, students, policymakers, and most recently the teachers, have been blamed for the failure of public education, though no viable, long-term solution has been successfully conceived and put into practice as long as there has been public schooling. This dissertation investigates teachers' daily work inside classrooms via blogs written by New York City public school teachers, and posits that 1) teachers, whose work provides the fulcrum around which all activity in a school revolves, have an important critique of policy to offer from the view of the classroom, and should be heard by policymakers; and 2) online spaces, and blogs in particular, provide a new venue by which to hear teachers' voices, which have long been both largely inaccessible due to the isolation inherent in teaching, and silenced by the policymaking process. This project is built on the acknowledgment that policymakers do not often consider teachers' voices in the policymaking process, but also on the hope that if enough voices are heard, they will have no choice but to listen.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION: What Is to Be Done?..1

1.1 Personal-Historical Context………….……………………………………………….3

1.2 A Pedagogy of One………………………………………………………………...9

1.3 Development of the Study……….…………………………………………….11

1.4 Structure of the Dissertation……………………………...…………………….23

Chapter 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: Links, Bridges, and Tunnels……………..……..24

2.1 Policy, Practice, and the Historical Rhetoric of School Reform…………………….25

2.2 Role of the Teacher in Educational Policy……………………………......……...32

2.3 Then and Now: A Century of Standing Still…………………………...…………33

2.4 Neoliberalism and Education…………..……………………………………...…36

2.5 Political Economy and Political Spectacle: The Significance of History………...…38

2.6 After Hours: Hidden Transcripts and the Publicly-Private……………...…………..…41

2.7 Why Blogs?...45

2.8 Conclusion………………..……………………………………………………...…46

Chapter 3 METHOD/OLOGY: In Context…………………………………………..........47

3.1 Significance of the Study……………………………………………………48

3.2 Sample…………………………...…………………………………………..49

3.3 More on Blogs……………………………...……………………………………..53

3.4 Privacy and Ethics of Online Research……………………………………...……55

3.5 Method for Data Collection…………..…………………...………………………...59

3.6 Anonymity……………………………..……………………………...63

3.7 Analysis……………………..………………………………………………67

3.8 Conclusion……………………..…………………………………………...71

Chapter 4 DISCOVERIES: Making Room for Teacher Voice……………….………………..72

4.1 Lack of Resources / Funding / Training……………………………………………77

4.1.1 Filling the Supply Gap……………………………………………...78

4.1.2 The Body Shuffle……………………………………………………...82

4.2 Escalation of Work Load………………………………………………………85

4.2.1 Paperwork……………………………………………………………..86

4.2.2 In the Name of Assessment……………………………………………87

4.3 Administrative Obstacles…………………………...…………………………90

4.4 Adaptive Resistance…………………….………………………………………92

4.5 Contradictory Policies…………………………………………...…………..95

4.6 Surveillance……………………..………………………………………………..98

4.7 Lack of Voice……………………………………………………………...…….100

4.7.1 Curriculum………………..…………………………………………102

4.8 Conclusion…………………………………...……………………………108

Chapter 5 CONCLUSIONS: Policy Recommendations and Next Steps….……..……………109

5.1 Policy Recommendations……………………………………………………..111

5.1.1 Lack of Resources / Funding / Training…………………………………111

5.1.2 Escalation of Work Load……………………………………………...112

5.1.3 Administrative Obstacles……………………………………………………...113

5.1.4 Adaptive Resistance…………………………………………………………...114

5.1.5 Contradictory Policies………………………………………………………....114

5.1.6 Surveillance……………………………………………………………………115

5.1.7 Lack of Voice………………………………………………………………….116

5.2 Next Steps…………………………………...………………………………..117

5.3 Conclusion……………………………...…………………………………….119

Appendix A: Visual Display of Blogs as a Network………………………………………...120

Appendix B: Visual Display of Data by Blog…………………………………...………..121

Appendix C: Additional Thematic Narratives………………………………………………….124

References…...135

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Clipping from *New York Times* Article……………………………………..……….5

Figure 2: First Classroom……………………………………………………………………7

Figure 3: Policy-Practice Gap………………………………………………………………13

Figure 4: Blogs and the Policy-Practice Gap……………………………………………….14

Figure 5: Born in a Digital World…………………………………………………………..18

Figure 6: How Many Classrooms?..19

Figure 7: You Have Value…..20

Figure 8: Upside Down……………………………………………………………………..21

Figure 9: A New Language…………………………………………………………………25

Figure 10: Blogroll………………………………………………………………………….49

Figure 11: Blogmaster………………………………………………………………………50

Figure 12: Dissertation Data……………………………………………………………..…57

Figure 13: Initial Tag Wordle……………………………………………………………....59

Figure 14: Comment Function……………………………………………………………...60

Figure 15: Tags……………………………………………………………………………..60

Figure 16: Coding Method………………………………………………………………….62

Figure 17: Data Summary Across Blogs…………………………………………………...76

Figure 18: Data Summary Within Blogs…………………………………………………...77

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: What Is to Be Done?

> I'm very tired of the myth that schools are bursting at the seams with apathetic, unskilled, surly, child-hating losers who can't get jobs doing anything else (Miss Eyre, 2009, July 28).

> Early in my time as a teacher I felt a frustrating disconnect between the policymakers handing down mandates from City Hall, Albany, and D.C., and those of us practicing in the classroom. I had been discouraged by a lack of preparation for my first year and a lack of support throughout it….Above all, I remain overwhelmed by the evidence that system is not working [sic] for the kids who needed it the most" (ruben_b, 2011, August 10).

> If we know public schools are not working, despite constant reforms, there must be more to the story, right? I think I want to come up with a new theory for why education policies fail, based on the experiences of teachers as they negotiate the on-the-ground reality of policy implementation (my journal, 2008, March 17).

Public education is in crisis. From the proliferation of reforms that support high-stakes testing and one-size-fits-all curricula to the overt privatization of schooling via the charter school movement, the system of public education in the United States is in dire need of repair. However, as many scholars, educators, and students have noted over the last century, public education has often—if not always—been in a state of constant reform and repair (Bruner, 1996; Dewey, 1938; Kliebard, 1986; Rousmaniere, 1997; Ohanian, 1999; Tyack, 1974). Parents, students, policymakers, and most recently the teachers, have been blamed for the failure of public education, though no viable, long-term solution has been successfully conceived and put into practice as long as there has been public schooling. This dissertation investigates teachers' daily work inside classrooms via blogs written by New York City public school teachers, and posits that 1) teachers, whose work provides the fulcrum around which all activity in a school revolves, have an important critique of policy to offer from the view of the classroom, and

should actively provide feedback for future policymaking decisions; and 2) online spaces, and blogs in particular, provide a new venue by which to hear teachers' voices, which have long been both largely inaccessible due to the isolation inherent in teaching (Cuban, 1993; Ingersoll, 2003; Rousmaniere, 1997), and silenced by the policymaking process (Smith, 2004; Stein, 2004). This project is built on the acknowledgment that policymakers do not often consider teachers' voices in the policymaking process, but also on the hope that if enough data is gathered, they will have no choice but to listen.

The question of teacher input in policymaking has been at the core of my interest in becoming an educational researcher from the start. My curiosity grew when, as a new teacher zg a New York City public school in 2001, I was told to purchase books to provide the library for my classroom (see Figure 2), and continued growing over the next several years as I observed an enormous gap between educational policy and teacher practice. There is an uneven distribution of resources, training, and funding among urban, public schools, and despite being the primary implementers of education policy, teachers' voices get lost, drowned out, and otherwise silenced in the political shuffle and dialogue around educational policymaking.

Our current approach to policymaking, which Debra Stone (1997) rightly refers to as a "paradox," begs the following question: if common sense says we need to understand teachers' interpretations of what works and what does not in classrooms, why does the policymaking process so often eliminate, rather than invite, their analysis? Some researchers agree that teachers should have a say in the educational policymaking process: "using practitioner experience as a referent for policy implementation [and creation] is both pragmatic and practical, given that teachers are the agents of implementation held to high levels of accountability for successful student performance in ambitious systemic reform efforts" (Tell, Bodone, & Addie, 1999, p. 4).

Other researchers have been asking for years why teachers' voices remain historically absent when it comes to effecting change in education policy (Shedd and Bacharach, 1991), yet few solutions have been offered. This dissertation situates blogs as a possible link to mitigate the sometimes deleterious effects of the educational policy paradox: blogs connect the intentions of policies on paper, and their reality in practice in the classroom.

1.1 Personal-Historical Context

The research presented in this dissertation is the result of a journey that is not yet finished—it represents the evolution of an idea that began the first moment I stepped into a classroom as a teacher in 1999. I was fresh out of college, I'd taken no teacher preparation courses, classroom management was not my forte, and the learning curve was nearly vertical. But I was immediately hooked on the practice of guiding individuals through stages of learning on the path to acquiring new knowledge. Though I have worn many instructional hats in the fourteen years since, I consistently encountered questions around the control of teachers' work, and at times felt like a ping pong ball, responding to constant changes in policies, rules, and regulations, rather than the practical, real-time needs of my students or colleagues. Teachers are held accountable for a set of shifting expectations that they do not initiate or control. I believe blogs written by teachers about their daily work tap into local knowledge and dialogue that can help demonstrate how this paradoxical practice might be avoided.

Assigned to be part of a remedial reading program at the on-campus school of a residential treatment center in Yonkers, NY, in the fall of 1999, my supervisor was offered a full-time position at Scholastic and quit two weeks into the school year. Nine of my colleagues and I were told to "find a niche and fill it," and we scattered across the campus to find a place to land on our feet for the next ten months. I discovered a defunct dark room, revived it, and developed a

black-and-white photography program for the high school. I spent the balance of the school year engaged in photography instruction with students, tutored the same group in GED skills, ran a literacy magazine, taught sexual education courses, and supervised a variety show. I was not immediately comfortable in the role—some of my students were my age or close to it (resident students ranged in age from 12-21), and I struggled with how to maintain authority. We were also separated culturally by a chasm—I was a young, white woman who'd grown up in a homogenous, rural community on the eastern end of Long Island and had just graduated from a prestigious university. My students averaged 15 years old, had limited literacy skills, and knew at least one person who was or had been incarcerated. They had all spent a bulk, if not most, of their lives in foster care, were Black or Latino, and grew up in an urban environment that was often unkind, unfair, and unequal. It was a difficult, but transformative, year that would lead me to pursue a graduate degree in education. I had been taught educational segregation ended; clearly, it had not. This realization, among others, about the real-life structural inequalities in schooling, and the widening policy-practice gap in education, was part of the reason I pursued teacher education and scholarship as a career.

Clear that my future included teaching, I was unsure of how to acquire the necessary credential to become a certified teacher in New York. Though both my sister and I would go on to be doctors (she got her MD last year; I'll hopefully graduate with my PhD next month), we came from a working-class family and relied on scholarships and loans to pay for school throughout; in short, I did not have the means to afford a Masters program. The New York City Teaching Fellows (NYCTF), which at the time fully subsidized a Masters of Science in Education, provided an attractive, viable pathway to certification. I joined NYCTF in the summer of 2001, and was assigned to a school in Central Harlem's District 5, a neighborhood

that was, more often than not as the former Superintendent of District 5 Thelma Baxter put it, “written off” (Elzas, 2001, p. 8).

Figure 1. As I appeared in *The New York Times* in the summer of 2001. The story was printed as part of an ongoing series chronicling the New York City Teaching Fellows program.

I was warned repeatedly about the district’s history of violent schools, poor student achievement, and high teacher turnover rate. I spent the first few months of the fellowship observing in a summer school class, and I wrote in my journal every night, commenting often on how much emphasis there was on discipline, order, and quiet in the building, while I was

learning in my teacher education program that classrooms should be child-centered, inquiry-based, and hives of activity. I saw (and still do see) learning as anything but a quiet, orderly process, and I wondered if I would be able to control my students—or if I wanted to. I was interviewed for a *New York Times* article featuring new participants in the NYCTF program (see Figure 1), and the journalist described my lacking classroom management skills: "When the senior teacher left for a few minutes, several students got out of their seats and two girls began talking across the room" (Goodnough, 2001). Of *course* I had no idea what I was doing: I was a brand-new teacher who was learning while doing. And it dawned on me: why was I being put into the classroom so quickly? Where did the urgency come from?

Looking back, I can see that I lacked the ability to fully wrap my head around the structural forces that produced the practice of keeping children quiet and controlled and an atmosphere that contradicts a supportive, collaborative teaching and learning environment, in which educators teach children "to commit themselves to the hard work of caring" (Charney, 2002, p. 23). I wrote the following in my journal during my first week as a full-time public school teacher:

> When I got to my school, other teachers looked sideways at me when I rolled out the rug in my room and grouped the desks into clusters that operated more like tables than individual desks. Though there was talk of putting desks in pairs or triads among my colleagues, the fear is that if you face students away from the blackboard, they won't be able to see. I don't see why we have to always focus on the blackboard—especially based on what I'm learning in graduate school. One of the staff developers came by yesterday during my lunch and said, "you have a great spirit, Ms. Greene. There was a teacher like you here a long time ago. She

> had a rug and threw out her desks in exchange for tables. But she didn't last. She couldn't handle it." And then he laughed and was all, "But I bet you will!" And as he walked off, muttered, "Great spirit…" Not sure if that's supposed to make me feel better or worse, but I get the feeling that all the talk of "child-centered" learning is just that—rhetorical talk. (my journal, 2001, September 10).

I couldn't comprehend how just eleven blocks down the street in my teacher education program, I was being asked to learn about "child-centered," "inquiry-based," and "progressive" education models, while I struggled every day against the strict, merit-based, high-stakes testing approach to instruction inside my school building that called for basal readers, lecturing over conversing, and teacher-proof curricula. There was a mind-boggling disconnect between the expectations of my work at school versus what was being taught in my graduate school courses

Figure 2. In the fall of 2001. You can see how empty the bookshelves are behind me. This is where I was told I had to purchase books if I wanted to have a library.

that would eventually lead to New York State teacher certification. I kept wondering how the pedagogical and curricular philosophies of the institutions in which I taught and learned could differ so greatly.

Everything about that first year was hard—from understanding how to set boundaries for classroom management to spending about $4,500 of my own money—or 20% of my net

income[1]—on supplies and books for my classroom. But 9/11 also happened during the first week of school. It was a sad, exhausting, and overwhelming time in New York City, and my students, colleagues, and I felt the tension every day for months afterward. From September 10, 2001, to sometime in March 2002, my journal remained blank, and I began turning to the emerging capabilities of the internet to connect with other teachers, professionally develop myself further, and stay up-to-date with the latest developments in digital communication.

In my third year of teaching, I was hired to teach graduate courses in the School of Education at Pace University. I instantly loved the dynamic in the higher education classroom, and received feedback from students that my approach and knowledge were relevant, refreshing, and based on experience. I immediately set out to look for full-time teacher education jobs—only to realize they generally require a PhD. (This would be the first time I fully understood the division and outsourcing of labor that occurs in university spaces: it made sense for a university to hire me, without a PhD, at low cost to them.) I began searching for PhD programs, and the CUNY Graduate Center Urban Education Program stood out because of its reputation for critical theory. In particular, Jean Anyon's work on the political economy of public schooling read like a language I'd been longing to learn—her five-school study that examined the connection between schooling and social class (1981) provided me a new lens through which to view the inequities in urban education. Eight years later, I am proud of the work I have done under the tutelage of the professors I have worked with, that draws together questions around educational policy, digital innovation, teacher education, and practice, and I cannot wait to start my career as a teacher educator. This dissertation is representative of one aspect of that journey.

[1] In 2001, my gross salary was $31,900. Adjusted for income tax (roughly 30%), my net income was $22,330. $4,500 is 20% of $22,300.

1.2 A Pedagogy of One

The experiences I had as a teacher guided every question I asked in class, every idea I had for research, and every piece of writing I have produced as a graduate student. Many of those experiences conjure an image of Sisyphus, pushing his enormous rock up the hill, only for it to roll down again. As a teacher in New York City, I perpetually felt like if I wanted something to change, I would have to do it myself. If I wanted color copy paper, I had to buy it; if I wanted a class set of scissors, I had to buy them; if I wanted a variety of writing utensils available to my students, I had to buy them. If I saw students were not getting extra services they were entitled to, I would tutor them on my lunch hour; if I saw students come to school without a backpack, I would get them one; if a child came to my classroom late every day, I would go to their apartment and pick them up early, etc. In other words, I was living as a teacher within the confines of a theory that I have started to call *a pedagogy of one*—a system of education shaped by neoliberal forces in which teachers are expected to shut up and put up: if teachers want to see things change, they have to bring it about themselves—one day, one classroom, one lesson, one child at a time. The pedagogy-of-one approach to teaching is not working, and is in clear contradiction to the "collaborative," "child-centered," "inquiry-based" approach to teaching espoused by the dominant rhetoric of school reform. This is not to say *no* important, legislated changes in public schooling have come about in the history of teaching; however, something doesn't add up after looking back for almost a century and seeing little change in teachers' working conditions.

Overwhelmingly, the colleagues at my school—and the principal in particular—worked incredibly hard in the name of education. I spent my final year as a New York City public school teacher as a literacy coach, and had the chance to see some of the inner workings of the school's decision-making process: based on my observations, though administration has some leverage, it

is really the system itself, not the personnel, that create obstacles to closing the policy-practice gap. These observations are substantiated by the data collected for this study. Moreover, the pervasive ideology that teachers are superpeople with extra sets of arms and eyes on the backs of their heads, who can perform simultaneous tasks that most people cannot dominates the public discourse. Teachers can only do so much in one day, and the escalation of work demands with each new policy has created a state of what Richard Elmore (1980) describes as "long on description and short on prescription" (p. 601). While there is no lack of innovation in education—many of which are exciting and necessary, particularly in the realm of instructional technology—policies can become "disconnected, episodic, fragmented, superficially adorned projects" (Fullan, 2001, p. 21). Policies—provided that they are thoughtful, appropriate, and infused with teacher input—need time to be reflected in teachers' daily work, and teachers need effective training in order to shift their practice to meet the expectations of shifting policies (Michelli & Early, 2011, p. 5). Moreover, practitioners and participants in education live nested, interconnected, complex lives (Berliner, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2006), and the isolation embedded in the pedagogy of one resists seeing teachers as experts of their craft—rather, it reproduces the narrative that curriculum needs to be teacher-proofed, teachers should be de-skilled, and education is a privilege, not a right. Despite research that points to the importance of the input of practitioners (Stein, 2004; Tell, Bodone, & Addie, 1999; among others), my dissertation suggests that New York City teachers still find themselves "speaking into an echoing silence" (Rousmaniere, 1997, p. 2), as they did in the 1920s.

Indeed, it was a rare occasion when my perspective, or that of my colleagues, was considered in the policymaking process when I taught in an elementary school in New York City: collectively, we had no voice. The development of the internet offered alternative channels

of communication in the last decade, and teachers began connecting via social networking tools and blogs, sharing stories of their lives in the classroom. The internet has the potential to resist a pedagogy of one; it can provide researchers and policymakers with alternative ways to gather data to inform their practice of creating policy to improve the conditions of teaching and learning.

As I reached into the blogosphere as a new teacher in the early 2000s to find out if my experience of a pedagogy of one was singular or unusual, I was met with similar stories that, woven together, create a hidden narrative in the educational policymaking discourse. Discovering the visibility of this hidden narrative in the digital sphere was a major impetus for this research project.

1.3 Development of the Study

The alleged failure and seeming immobility of American public schools have been a focus of educational researchers and policymakers for the last century. From complex systems of accountability and testing to progressive teaching methods and the incorporation of technology, school reforms have presented endless prescriptions and innovations in schooling over the last near century; however, the conditions of teachers' work have remained largely unchanged (Apple, 2006; Elmore, 1980; Rousmaniere, 1997; Spencer, 1996; Spillane & Jennings, 1997; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). As Cuban puts it, "the journey of school reform is a story of constant adaptation" (1993, p. 453)—one that leaves but a faint outline of the true story in its wake.

For Ingersoll (2003), "teachers' individual troubles in the workplace are neither unique nor isolated, but are really public issues, invisibly but indelibly shaped by the larger societal and organization contexts in which they lie" (p. 4). Accounts of how teachers understand and respond

to their working conditions—conditions that are fundamentally molded and shaped by policy and reform—have often been hidden from view in the research and policymaking processes (Cohen & Barnes, 1993; Cuban, 1998; Elmore, 1980; Hargreaves, 1998; Ingersoll, 2003; Stein, 2004). It is the goal of this dissertation to examine how teachers understand and respond to their working conditions via a new medium for the dissemination of information and communication—blogs written by New York City public school teachers. My hope is that blogs can help reveal how teachers both reproduce and resist the invisible, 'adaptive forces' that shape the conditions of their daily work. I hope teachers' local knowledge can offer important insights into better policy creation, implementation, and evaluation.

My research initially led me to cull popular culture literature—like Dan Brown's *Great Expectations School*, television shows like *The Wire*, and films like *Freedom Writers*—that feature teaching and learning in urban public schools for snapshots of teachers' lives in the classroom. I believed the infusion of these stories in the policymaking process—stories of the day-to-day realities faced by teachers—could influence policymakers to consider the logistical, economic, social, and political obstacles faced by teachers in urban public schools. Michael Moore's powerful documentary, *Sicko*, about the backward, profit-driven American healthcare system became my touchstone for what I wanted to create with my dissertation: a document that, like *Sicko*, exposes the truth. I wanted to make visible teachers' hidden narratives of the policy-practice gap in the American public school system (see Figure 3). According to my experience as a classroom teacher, which is substantiated by the research in this study, there is a distinct chasm between policy and practice in the classroom, and the responsibility to fill it rests with the teachers. T voices have the potential to fill this gap between educational policy and practice.

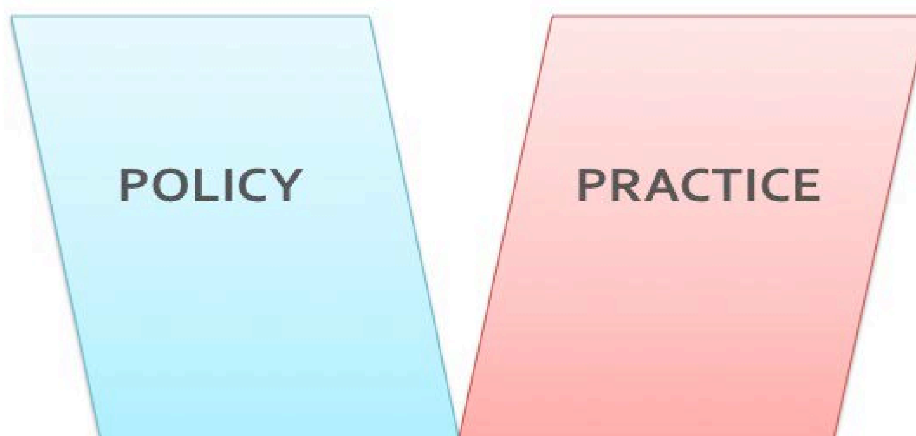

Figure 3. A graphic to illustrate the gap between policy and practice, as conceptualized in this study. Educational policy and practice are both attempting to do the same thing, separately.

I felt that if we could just expose how challenging it is to be a teaching participant, whether willingly or resistantly, in the underbelly of the public school system—in classrooms with broken chairs and lacking supplies, in schools with spotty internet or no gymnasium, in communities that have been abandoned by structural and economic supports—conditions in urban public schools would change. But I quickly realized that 1) not only are the stories about teaching that appear in movies, books, and magazines already part of the public discourse and therefore not hidden, 2) they are *representations* of the truth, not the truth itself. What *has* remained hidden, and has left little trace, is how teachers *actually* understand and respond to the conditions of their work in urban public schools (Rousmaniere, 1997; Spencer, 1996). This narrative—of teachers' adaptations to, resistance of, and alignment with the conditions of their work—is the story told in the blogs and this dissertation. I believe that instead of wasting money on high-stakes testing and packaged curricula, institutions of education, and particularly policymakers, have much to learn from teachers, and that by listening to them, policymakers might be able to effect systemic, long-lasting change in public schooling (see Figure 4).

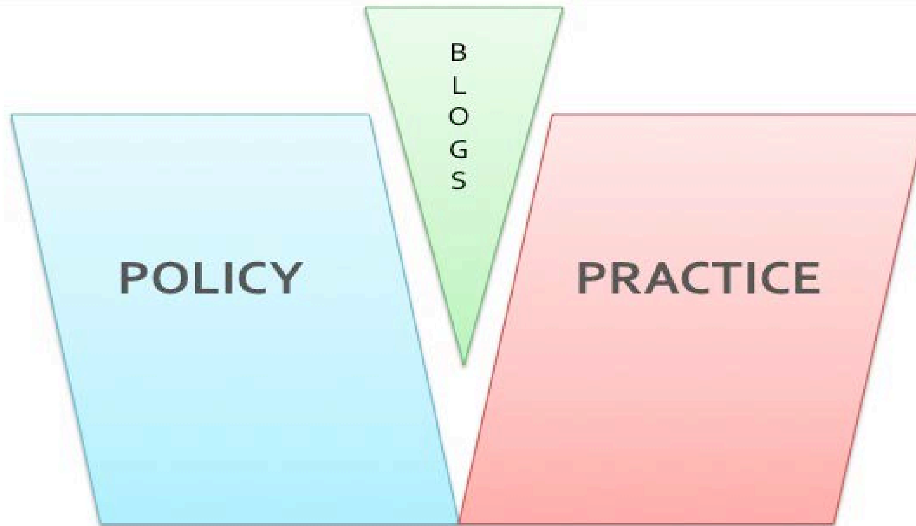

Figure 4. This dissertation suggests blogs as a possible vehicle for filling the policy-practice gap in education.

There were a number of reasons that I chose to focus on blogs for this research. I first encountered the blogosphere as a new teacher in the early 2000s. I found the blog as a genre compelling, and was fascinated by the fact that other people, and teachers in particular, were willing to so openly and candidly share stories of their lives online. I connected with other teachers at that time online, namely by reading their blog posts and learning from their experiences. I was timid about blogging publicly, and only did so from time to time at first: the outpouring of private stories in a public sphere felt both awkward and forced, and I felt naked and fearful of being exposed every time I posted something that dug beneath the surface of my thoughts, feelings, or experiences. But everywhere I looked, there was something to be learned from a blog, and I became interested in not only reading them and occasionally commenting and posting, but understanding their architecture. Blogs are constructed in a real-time, ephemeral, often-impulsive manner, and though there has been some debate about their authenticity, I argue that the genre has an already confirmed staying power and can bridge the gap between what we think will work in the classroom and what *actually* will.

In a chance dinnertime encounter with Howard Zinn on a New York City rooftop in the summer of 2004, we chatted about the state of schooling, history, and whether or not becoming a professor was an act of worthwhile activism in the early 21st century. I had been contemplating applying to graduate school, but wondered if I could have more of an impact as an agent of change in the world of education by staying where I was as a fifth-grade teacher, or, by teaching teachers how to teach in undergraduate- and graduate-level teacher certification programs. As we cleared the dinner table and prepared to walk over to a screening of his documentary *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, he leaned in and said, "do it—go to graduate school. We need more professors like you in our universities, who are on the right side of history." I started working on my soon after, and began to devour everything I could find written by Zinn. In the fourth edition of his now well-read tome, *A People's History of the United States*, he wrote, "there is no such thing as a pure fact, innocent of interpretation. Behind every fact presented to the world—by a teacher, a writer, anyone—is a judgment. The judgment that has been made is that this fact is important, and that other facts, omitted, are not important" (1999, p. 658). This idea would stick with me as I entered the higher education classroom on a quest to understand the ways in which teachers' voices are actively silenced in a broken system that desperately needs their input in order to be repaired.

From educational professional development and instructional technology to knitting and cooking, there has been a steady stream of blogs in my life for the past ten years—I am both a consumer and producer of digital reporting and storytelling via blogs, and the research reported in these pages is very much a product of my extensive personal and professional partnership with the medium. As online communication grows, so do opportunities to listen and hear what teachers say about the conditions of their work. This dissertation argues that blogs in particular,

which house unsolicited, rich narratives of the conditions of teachers' daily work inside classrooms, can influence the direction of future educational policymaking.

This dissertation does *not* argue:

- *a wide readership for teacher blogs*—it is acknowledged that, given the logistical and other constraints of teachers' daily work, the websites used for this study are not necessarily widely read. The number of visitors or readers per site was unavailable information to the researcher, and was not relevant for the purpose of the study.
- *that all teachers blog*—the number of individuals who blog worldwide, period, is still a small, albeit growing, percentage of the population; moreover, teachers have tremendous time constraints due to the nature of their work and may not have time to blog.

However, the dissertation *does* argue that blogs need to be studied. As Nicholas Hookway (2010) puts it simply, "one area that has yet to be developed by social scientists as a rich source of qualitative data is the weblog" (p. 92). For the educational researcher, I argue that the blog is a channel through time and space, into the classroom. With the development of products like Google Glass[2] and the rapid spread of touchscreen technology, it is undeniable that digital communication is here to stay. I believe it is our obligation as researchers of education to explore the digital realm.

As I sharpened my blogging skills in preparation for conducting this research, I learned how to build a website using a blogging platform, in order to be able collect, store, and aggregate my data. Without a personal interest in blogging, I would never have developed the skill to

[2] Google is currently developing Google Glass, which is essentially a computer that you wear like a pair of glasses. It displays information like a smartphone, is hands free, and responds to voice commands.

navigate the genre for the purposes of this research study, and without the support of the Macaulay Instructional Technology Fellows Program, OpenCUNY, and the Internet Research Team, would not have been able to speak the language of blogging with such expertise or finesse. Using thematic analysis as a tool to make sense of what New York City teacher bloggers reveal in blogs about their daily work, this project examines the gap between educational policy and actual teacher practice through the following research questions:

- How do New York City K-12 teachers understand and respond to the expectations of their daily work via blogs they write?
- How do the ways in which teachers understand and respond to the expectations of their daily work offer practical suggestions for future school reform and policymaking initiatives?

As I began looking at teachers' blogs, I began blogging about education, too, on a private blog called "The Rhetoric of School Reform." I started noticing posters and ads around the city, in bus and subway stations, etc., and collected images that made me wonder about education and what kind of people are being valued over others in New York City classrooms. Taken on the 5 train in the spring of 2010, the following image, Figure 5, makes the assumption that everyone has access to a digital camera:

Figure 5. Photo of ad for digital cameras, taken on the 5 train in the spring of 2010.

At the time, I was working part-time as a literacy instructor at a school in Central Harlem. I was hired to work with students on high-stakes testing preparation in literacy and mathematics, and though classrooms were wired for access to the internet and some classrooms had laptop carts handy, students did not have digital cameras readily available, and were not always linked into digital technology. Without doing an empirical study that gathers information about access to digital cameras, I cannot make a quantifiable statement about student access to digital photography in urban public schools, but I was struck when I saw this image, taken in 2010, by what a daring assumption it is to think we all have equal digital access. We *should*, but we do not. And yet, the numbers for worldwide bloggers is increasing all the time—Tumblr and WordPress, two of the most popular blogging platforms worldwide, combined have 157 million

blogs (Pingdom, 2013), which makes the numbers from just six years ago—tens of millions (Perlmutter, 2007, p. 78)—appear tiny in comparison.

In the following image, Figure 6, the ad captured encourages individuals to participate in completing the 2010 Census, and makes a logical connection: if we know how many kids are in our schools' classrooms, we'll know how many classrooms we need for them to sit in. However, the ad doesn't take into account that we *do* know how many students attend New York City classrooms, and yet there are repeated reports of overcrowding, not enough furniture, and a general lacking of sufficient supplies for the number of students.

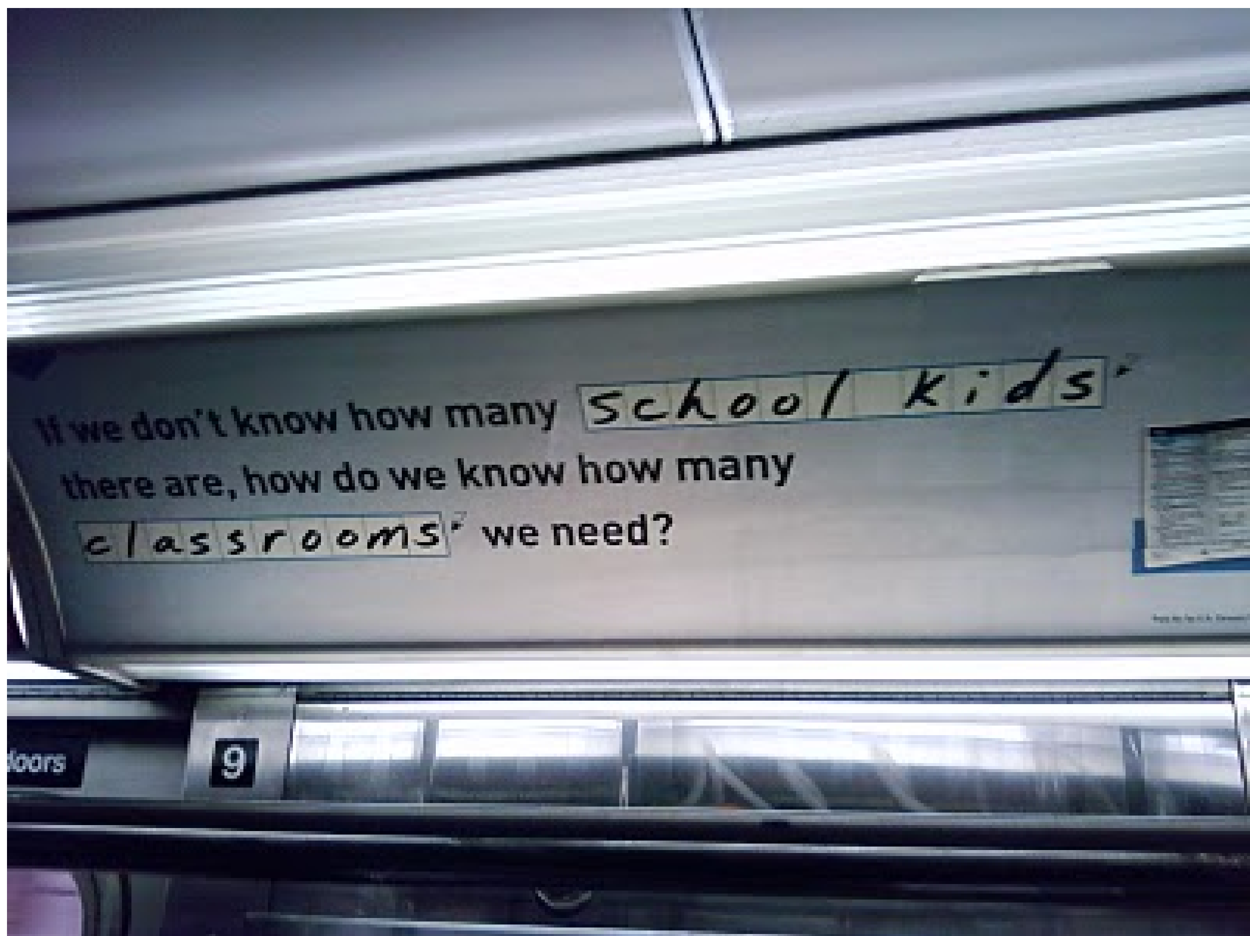

Figure 6. Census ad on the 6 train in the spring of 2010.

So what is the disconnect? This ad feeds off of the public discourse that schooling matters equally for everyone, and simultaneously ignores the hidden discourse that emerges behind closed doors in urban public school classrooms every day: there aren't enough educational resources for the students who need them, no matter how much money has been directed toward schools in need of improvement (SINI) and those under registration review (SURR).[3]

The following two images, Figures 7 and 8 respectively, inflate the same public discourse, while minimizing the hidden one.

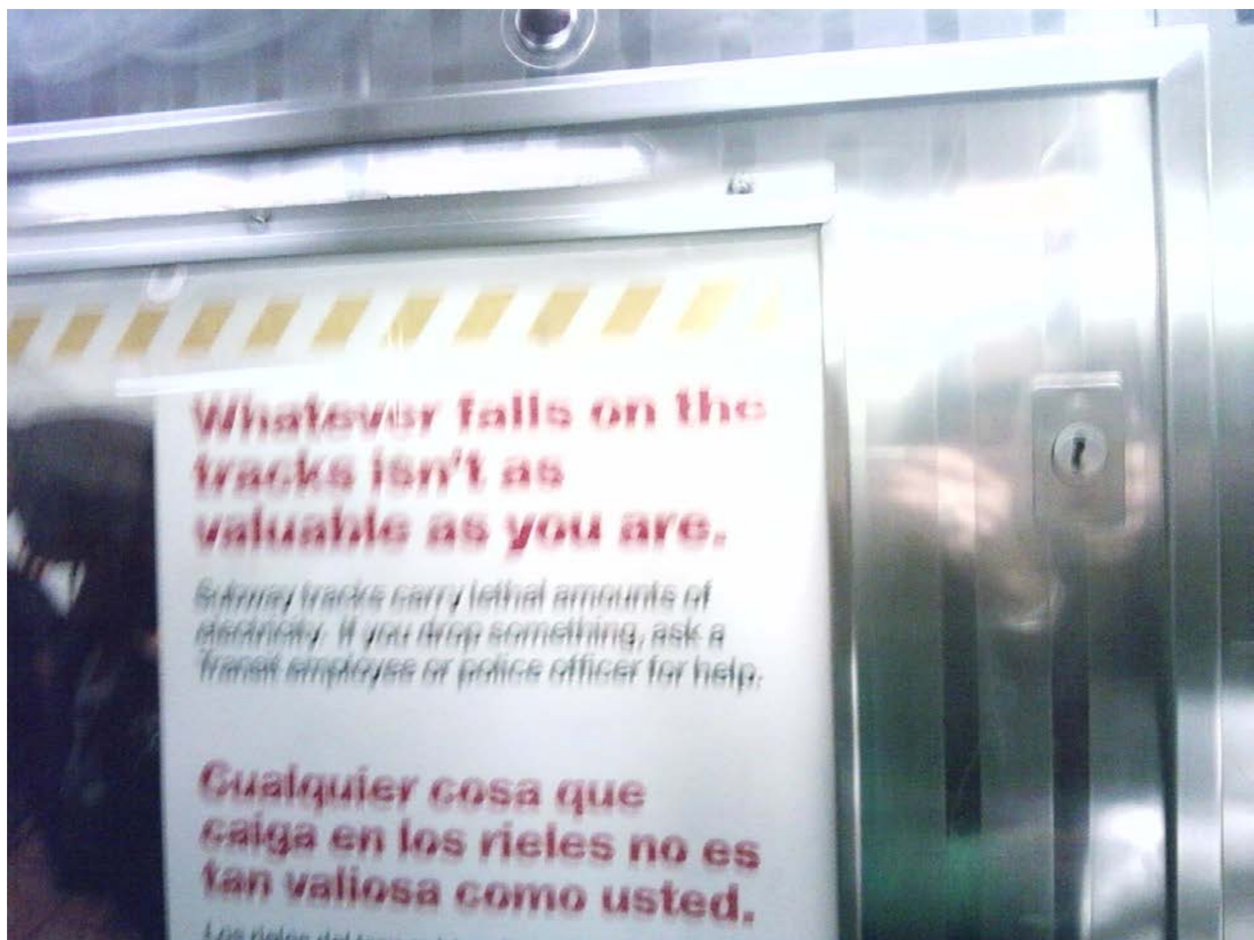

Figure 7. Metropolitan Transit Authority notice inside a subway car on the L train in spring 2010.

[3] SURR schools are those that the state has been authorized to take over. Sometimes this looks like replacement of some of the staff; other times it requires a full firing of old staff and hiring of new; and sometimes it results in a school closing. SINI schools, like the one where I worked, are one classification level away from becoming SURR.

Both taken from the walls of public transportation stations in New York City—the first on the wall of a subway car, and the second on the wall of a bus station—riff off of the public narrative that says *all human lives are important*, and *people look out for each other*. We are taught from an early age that we are to treat others the way we want to be treated; violence is bad; if you can give back, you should. And yet, when we step back and look around, we see people taking advantage of each other; endless war, violence, and unnecessary death; and unending unemployment, homelessness, and illness. Our realities and the policies that dictate their terms are disconnected—both in the realm of public education and those of other public policy systems, such as transportation and minimum wage (Anyon, 2005).

Figure 8. Ad for emergency readiness website on the side of a bus station in midtown in spring 2010.

All I could think when I saw both ads was that the conditions in some New York City public schools are *so bad* that students and teachers who inhabit them have few reasons to believe that their lives are valued by the City of New York. And while I know on a cognitive level that the next poster was created to get people who live in New York City to think about emergency preparedness, the team of people who designed and released it could never have spent time inside a New York City public school. For the lives of many children in classrooms that lack necessary funding, personnel, and resources, their lives are already "upside down" on a daily basis. Often, urban public schools do not have the stability of consistent teachers, classmates, classrooms, furniture, books, etc. While it is inaccurate and unfair to say that urban public school classrooms are "disasters," there is the basic assumption here that all lives are stable and "right-side-up."

The poster's caption, "Get a kit. Make a plan. Be informed" is, in essence, what this dissertation suggests to policymakers: instead of creating a constant waterfall of educational reforms that seem to throw money and people at problems instead of attempt to actually fix them, the data collected for this dissertation suggests that teachers have ideas that can help the system of public education move forward, not backward or at best, stand still. By *getting a kit*, teachers would help policymakers create a tool kit that guides them when they *make a plan*, or institute a new policy. The business of creating new educational policy cannot succeed without *being informed*. As Ruth Charney (2002) points out, "teachers currently have few choices. Budgets, schedules, standards, and curricula are imposed, often by state regents or invisible bureaucrats who never see or meet the teachers or children they are supposed to serve" (p. 404). It is a given that teachers' work is controlled in large part by people who have never stepped foot in a classroom, but why is that? If reform is not working, and informing policymakers of the

actual conditions of teachers work might help, who better to inform policymakers than the teachers themselves?

1.4 Structure of the Dissertation

The following chapter, “Theoretical Frameworks: Bridges, Links, and Tunnels,” paints a picture of how theory makes sense of the policy-practice gap in education, and how blogs might be able to help fill it. Chapter 3, “Method: In Context,” details the methodological approach taken for this research study, and describes the step-by-step evolution of the project. Chapter 4, “Discoveries: Making Room for Teacher Voice,” tells a data story. Strung together to tell a collective tale, this chapter summarizes the major research findings for the study in a narrative. And the concluding chapter, “Conclusions: Policy Recommendations and Next Steps,” offers conclusions drawn for policy implications and future research.

Chapter 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: Links, Bridges, and Tunnels

> All theory is, and what theory is at its best, is a way to make systematic sense of "what's goin' on," as Marvin Gaye would say (Dumas, 2009, p. 104).

During my tenure as a fifth-grade public school teacher in New York City, my colleagues and I routinely shared teaching tips and swapped classroom stories during overlapping lunch periods and later happy hours—whenever we found time to connect and talk shop. But such time was limited, and the bulk of our workdays were spent isolated from one another—doing similar tasks together in the same building, alone in separate rooms. My desire to connect with other teachers eventually led me to the blogosphere, which provided a network of avenues connecting practitioners through digital dialogues. My desire to connect with other teachers also led me to teach education courses at a local university as an adjunct. I was shocked to even be considered for the job: I couldn't understand how a university could hire me—a young, inexperienced teacher with only three years in the classroom under her belt—as an "expert" on assessment and evaluation. But several years in a public elementary school in New York City taught me that few things made sense when it came to education policy, and that adaptation—under the guise of strict rule following—seemed to be the norm. As a graduate student, I discovered a language (see Figure 9) and was swept up in the theoretical underpinnings and historical analyses of the American public school system, and learned that my experience of teaching as a lonely, often contradictory occupation, could be explained in a variety of ways, particularly by examining

structural forces in society. This chapter provides a literature review and shapes a theoretical lens through which I view education as a critical researcher, and guides the conclusions shared in the fourth and final chapters.

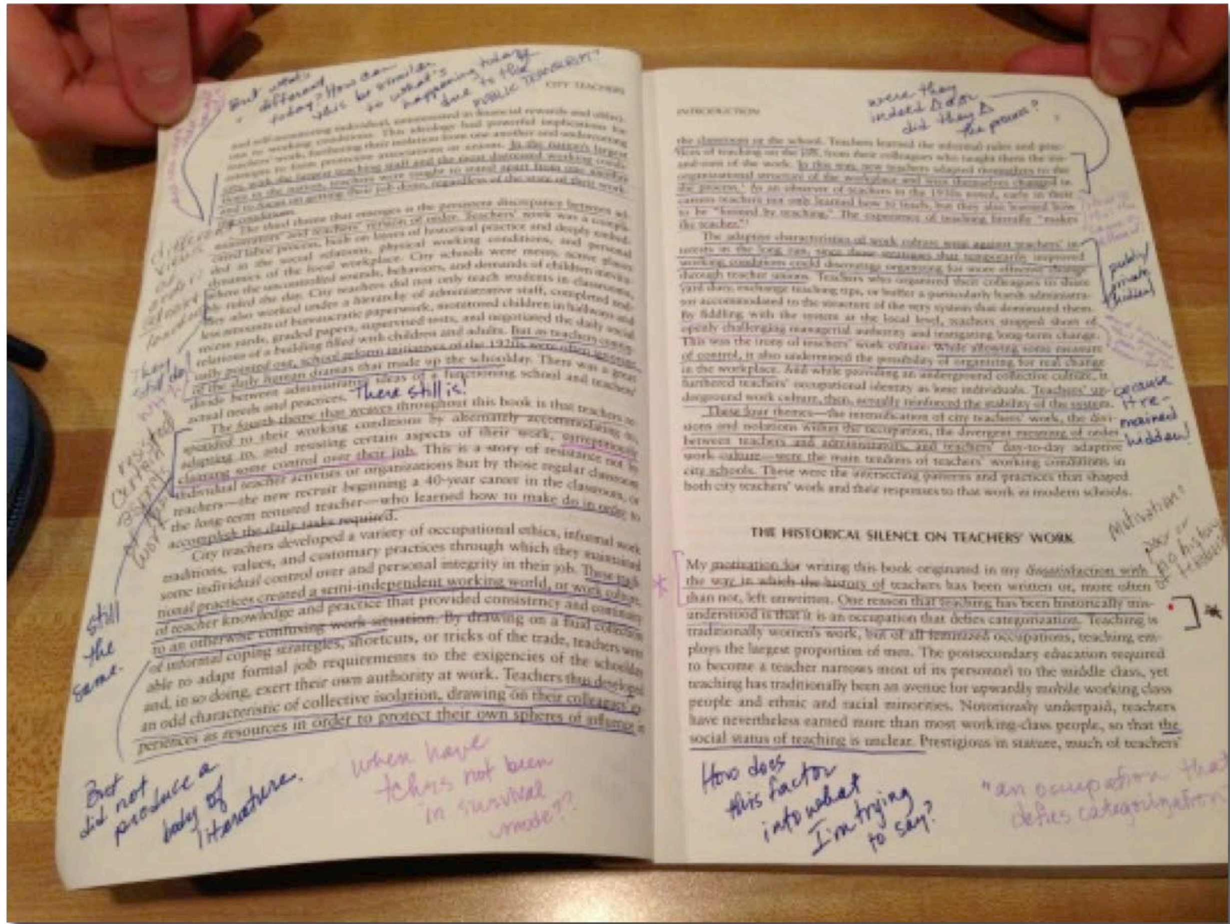

Figure 9. A page of my copy of *City Teachers* by Kate Rousmaniere. Though I ended up reading it outside of coursework, it became a pivotal piece in helping me develop a language for thinking about my research.

2.1 Policy, Practice, and the Historical Rhetoric of School Reform

In New York City in the 1920s, "teachers commonly referred to the failure of school reform, to policies that were promised but not implemented, to practices that were not followed and facilities that were not built….But they talked into an echoing silence, the validity of their perspective ignored by those who controlled their working conditions" (Rousmaniere, 1997, p.

2). Today, as one teacher blogger writes, “whatever the issues being debated….I’ve still found teachers’ voices startlingly absent from the public discussion on education reform” (ruben_b, 2011, August 10). Today, as nearly a century ago, there is a lack of teachers’ voices in the policymaking process. From teacher education to curriculum, and certification to class size, there is little evidence that teachers—the resident experts on teaching and learning—have the power to influence decisions that dictate the policies to which they must adhere in the classroom (Ingersoll, 2003; Shedd & Bacharach, 1991; Tell, Bodone, & Addie, 1999). How can this be?

To start, policymakers do not see—and have not historically seen—educators as experts, problem solvers, or professionals who know their craft: with the trend toward high-stakes accountability and teacher-proofing curricula, policymakers have no need to routinely consult teachers on policy or reform decisions (Apple, 2006; Ohanian, 1999; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Instead, policymakers are most often in conversation with other policymakers (Apple, 2006; Ingersoll, 2003; Tyack & Cuban, 1995), and many decisions they make are driven more by the market, as opposed to by the needs of schools, parents, teachers, students, etc. (Apple, 2006; Honig, 2004; Lipman, 2004; Smith, 2004). Susan Furhman (1993) refers to the lack of communication between the creators and implementers of education policy as a lack of “coherence,” and points to the problem of multiple centers of authority in the policymaking process. For Meredith Honig, coherence is not the only problem: policies created from the outside in—or from the top down—ignore “the subjective reality of coherence—that regardless of how standards, curricula and assessments may be organized, the same arrangement may be experienced differently by principals, teachers, and other implementers” (2004, p. 17). This dissertation posits that voices of practitioners—those who experience policy—must factor into the policymaking discussion, from creation to implementation.

Historically, the problem of how to most accurately capture teachers' voices prevented researchers, and by extension policymakers, from accurately interpreting teachers' work daily work: as Kate Rousmaniere (1997) succinctly puts it, "by not attending to teachers' accounts of their experiences, historians have misread the actual conditions of their work" (p. 7). Today, with the proliferation of online communication, blogs and other social networking media provide digital structures—links, bridges, and tunnels if you will—between the isolated work of a teacher, and that of other individuals in the same profession. Before exploring the importance of blogs as channels of communication between teachers and the public, I want to first take a look at how educational policy is made.

During my first year as a graduate student, I asked a professor to explain the educational policymaking process, and his response was, appropriately, "it's very, very messy." Indeed it is, and in my quest to unravel the knot of educational policymaking, I discovered that while the government—at various structural levels—holds significant control over policy creation and implementation, the vast majority of individuals making decisions at each level lack experience as a classroom teacher. At the federal level, Arne Duncan sits at the helm of education policy: he has never held a job as a teacher (Education Clearing House, 2013, February 16). At the state level, only one of the ten—or 10 percent of—New York State Regents, the main policymaking body for the state, has ever taught in a K-12 classroom (New York State Education Department, 2013). In New York City, the Panel for Education Policy, an appointed group of policymakers, is comprised of 35 percent former classroom teachers (New York City Department of Education, 2013).[4] Averaging these figures across all three levels of government, a mere 15% of the major

[4] These analyses were conducted using simple percentage calculations, based on the information provided on the relevant government websites. Although this rudimentary analysis does not paint an entire picture for why educational policy often seems so disconnected from the reality of the

players affecting New York City public school educational policy have ever experienced being a teacher. That contradiction is at the heart of this research: without teachers' input, how can educational policy actually ever succeed?

The United States (U.S.) Congress established the U.S. Department of Education in 1980, in an attempt to further regulate the creation of policies and distribution of funds to the states from the federal government (United States Department of Education, 2011). According to its website, the U.S. Department of Education's mission "is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access" (United States Department of Education, 2011, http://www.ed.gov). However, there is no evidence or indication in the articles available on the website of exactly how those goals are met. In the FAQ section of the website, there are few questions about policy. This one attempts to explain whose policies control the work of teachers:

> Q: I am concerned about a school policy or its implementation. Can you help?
>
> A: Education is primarily a state and local responsibility in the U.S. In creating the Department of Education, Congress made clear its intention that the secretary of Education and other Department officials be prohibited from exercising 'any direction, supervision, or control over the curriculum, program of instruction, administration, or personnel of any educational institution, school, or school system.' The establishment of schools and colleges, the development of curricula, the setting of requirements for enrollment and graduation—these are responsibilities handled by states and communities, as well as by public and

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classroom, understanding the background, experience, and expertise of the individuals in power helps make sense of that disconnect. The majority of Regents and Panel for Education Policy members are lawyers and business people, have sat on boards and foundations, and based on their public biographies, do not generally appear to live the lives of typical teachers.

private organizations, not by the U.S. Department of Education" (United States Department of Education, 2013).

Contrary to its intentions to make educational policy primarily a state and local responsibility, the U.S. Department of Education's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy determines a great deal when it comes to curriculum, program of instruction, administration, personnel, etc. (Cawelti, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2007). If the federal government is meant to have very little control over the creation and implementation of education policy—particularly those that affect practices at the school level—why does NCLB exert so much power over the everyday practices of teachers? Clearly, the federal government's role in education policy is larger than it purports—particularly when looking at the effects of NCLB on state and local practices in the education system. Scholars who examine the paradoxical economic, social, and political forces acting on school systems—forces that often obscure the immediate causes and effects of policy decisions—can begin to make sense of this contradiction (Berliner & Biddle, 1996; Stein, 2004; Stone, 1997). As Sandra Stein explains, "in every policy case, definitions of the policy problem are influenced by the policymakers' proximity to the issues, their understanding of the local community and economic structures, and their own investment in the matter at hand" (p. 5). In a sense, policymaking is like playing a game of telephone. Applying this analogy to education, the need for policy change, which starts as the identification of a problem in the classroom, travels through many channels and interpretations before arriving at those who make policy decisions; and the resulting policy travels back to the classroom, directed at only a hint of the original issue. Thus, resulting policy language is often vague, intangible, and contradictory. The Board of Regents website, like that of the U.S. Department of Education, leaves much open for interpretation—beyond enforcing accountability via testing—when it comes to its involvement in

meeting the educational goals of New York State.

In New York City, the schools are currently under mayoral control. Along with former appointed Chancellor of Schools Joel Klein, Mayor Michael Bloomberg pioneered Children First in 2003, a “comprehensive reform effort” meant to create an environment within New York City schools in which children “are able to learn the skills and receive the support they need to realize their potential” (New York City Department of Education, 2006). Though the language on the website has changed since 2006, when I initially investigated local educational policy, it remains nebulous, vague, and unspecific. Through “leadership,” “empowerment,” and “accountability,” the schools are to be successful, and though there is plenty of explanation for *what*, there is little explanation for *how*.

At each level of government, there is emphasis in the language on what is being done, as opposed to what isn’t, but the lack of specificity is unnerving. There is no indication on any of the websites for how one is to actually teach students to read or do math, nor is there a reasonable explanation for why testing is the main focus of most public schools. Perhaps educational policies fail because they do not make a praxis connection; in other words, is it possible that policymakers’ collective lack of classroom experience prevents them from marrying theory and practice—from seeing how policies would play out in the classroom?

Policymakers, politicians, and scholars have long scoured the educational landscape for ways to improve schools—particularly poor, urban schools. As a result, there exists a healthy body of literature investigating how to improve schools from the inside out. Everything from the physical layout of the classroom and curriculum to teacher education programs and accountability have been identified as a culprit for “failing” schools. While this literature has inspired and reviewed innovation in classroom materials, curricula, and certification routes, it

largely ignores the logistical, economic, and political obstacles faced by teachers when policies become practices. What Richard Elmore (1980) wrote over a quarter century ago holds true today: “implementation research is long on description and short on prescription” (p. 601). How does this result from a lack of teacher voice? What can we do to create a dialogue that does not privilege one facet of the issues faced in urban schools over others, and above all else, does not place the full weight of the challenges urban teachers face squarely on their shoulders?

Policies suggested at the federal, state, and city levels are well-intentioned, but remain rhetorical; in reality, no amount of empowerment, leadership, or accountability can alter the material reality of the vast majority of children’s lives in the U.S.—particularly for children who attend urban schools. If the federal government truly wants to minimize poverty, keep children in school, and ensure that no child was left behind—literally—it would need to turn to the creation of social and economic policies to address these issues specifically (Anyon, 2005).

The history of teacher involvement in policymaking is anything but straightforward and clear. A thorough review of the literature reveals that there are few, if any, documents, scholarly or otherwise, that clearly delineate how teachers are involved—now or in the past—at the federal, state, or city levels, in shaping the policy decisions that affect what and how they teach (Hargreaves, 1996; Ingersoll, 2003; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). More often than not, those who dictate educational policy have little to do with education in their professional lives: “During recent decades innovators who wanted to reinvent the public schools often turned to other social sectors for inspiration or support for the models of change they advocated—to business, the federal policy establishment, higher education, or foundations. They invoked the ideologies and practices of technology, business management, behavioral engineering, and new organizational forms to convince the public” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 112). The result has often been a

patchwork quilt of parameters that have, historically, failed to create a fair, decent, accessible system of public education in New York City and around the country (Tyack, 1974).

By examining the language and expectations of educational policy at each level of government, we can begin to make sense of what Sandra Stein (2004) defines as cultural policy, that which "examines the procedures and assumptions built into the policy process, while challenging the ways in which policies shape institutional and individual perceptions and treatments of those they aim to serve" (p. 12). This chapter helps shape an understanding of the procedures and assumptions built into the policy process, and the blog voices shared in the fourth chapter provide a snapshot of the individual perceptions of teachers, the primary implementers of policy. Without examining the overlapping rhetoric of educational policy at the federal, state, and local levels, we lack the ability as researchers and practitioners to fully understand the nature and condition of teachers' work.

2.2 Role of the Teacher in Educational Policy

Education policymaking may be a decidedly messy process, but one thing is clear: while many entities—think tanks, unions, the government, and community organizations—contribute to the creation of education policy, teachers are rarely, if ever, involved (Fuhrman, 1993; Hargreaves, 1996). For Malen (2006), "education policies often embody highly salient, value-laden issues that cannot be readily, fully or permanently resolved through rational deliberation or unanimous agreements" (pp. 83-84). In other words, while education policies are often initiated in an attempt to address very real and pressing problems, the waters of politics, organizations, and networks that must be waded through often end up diluting their original purpose, and an enormous gap between policy creation and implementation is created: "however cast, 'politics' is

an ever-present, at times pervasive force that can shape both the adoption and the implementation of education policies in vastly different but decisive ways" (Malen, 2006, p. 84). This begins to explain why teachers lack a voice in the educational policymaking process.

The disconnect between policy creation and implementation proves problematic for education in the U.S., because the process of creating policy often neglects the fact that "teachers are at once the targets and the agents of change" (Cohen & Ball, 1990, p. 237). In order for policies to be effective, there must be a universal understanding of how and why they are being put into place: "policies that seek to change instructional practice depend upon—and are changed by—the practice and the practitioners they seek to change" (Cohen & Ball, 1990, p. 238). If teachers continue to be silenced, policy may never be successful. Teachers' local knowledge of life inside the classrooms would be valuable to policymakers, if they would just listen. So how can we get them to? Part of the answer lies in how we view our system of education.

Though teachers have little input in educational policy, it is important to understand that their absence is not new. Therefore, the next aspect of the theoretical framework I am building has to do with another paradox in educational policy: consistency over time, despite constant change.

2.3 Then and Now: A Century of Standing Still

Without teachers, schools could not function. And yet, they are the first to bear the burden of blame for perceived poor performance, as the U.S. saw first-hand after the launch of Sputnik in 1957, and again after the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 (Gordon, 2003), and in waves before and since. When I arrived on the teaching scene at the turn of the 21st century, the economy was on the upswing, and teachers were on the brink of a spike in teacher-bashing

nationwide. Tenure has been under attack for the last decade, and the dominant discourse says teachers have it easy with summers off and a work day that ends by 3:00pm. This leaves out the fact that many teachers take on additional jobs to mitigate the effects of a low salary, or that planning rarely happens during the work day, and teachers stay at school much later than 3:00pm, often taking their work home with them on evenings and the weekend. However you examine the trend of teachers' work loads, they have been at a steady state of increase, and the demands on their already stretched time are greater than ever before. Even those teachers who are members of unions have gone without contracts for years in a row, only to face givebacks, pay cuts, or lay offs when a new agreement is reached. A century ago, teachers spoke of similar conditions—ever-increasing lists of expectations, piles of paperwork, and more work for less pay (Rousmaniere, 1997). It seemed the more reforms that were implemented, the more progress stood still. There has historically been little effect on student achievement in failing urban schools due to reforms that do anything short of providing economic supports to students and families who need them (Apple, 2006; Greene & Anyon, 2007; Lipman, 2004).

The debate for how to improve urban schools has been around as long as there have been urban schools; and yet, teaching and learning conditions have remained relatively unchanged for almost a century (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Kate Rousmaniere (1997) offers a snapshot of teachers' working conditions in New York City schools in the 1920s. They could easily describe conditions of teachers in New York City today:

> They described schools as unsystematic workplaces where teachers were regularly challenged with inadequate supplies and facilities, excessive responsibilities, inconsistent and poorly coordinated school policies, and little guidance in accomplishing their daily obligations. Early in their careers teachers

> found themselves stranded in the middle of a complicated, often nonsensical working environment and facing large classrooms of students who demanded more than any single teacher could ever give. In an era marked by great school reforms, teachers commonly referred to the failure of school reform, to policies that were promised but not implemented, to practices that were not followed and facilities that were not built. Where reformers bore witness to order and progress, teachers saw increasing disorder (pp. 1-2).

Taken from a journal entry after my first post-observation meeting in October of my first year of teaching, the following words begin to describe my own experience, which included being called to the carpet for not having enough materials in my classroom, lacking the classroom management skills that would keep all of my students in their seats at once, and neglecting to provide supplies that I understood to be the responsibility of the school and city:

> "Ms. Greene, where is your classroom library?"
>
> "I was wondering if you received my note about the same thing. Do you happen to know when it might be delivered? It's already October…"
>
> "Delivered?? It's up to you to provide it."
>
> Was she serious? I'm supposed to provide the supplies the Department of Ed can't (or won't)? This isn't just about pencils. This is about BOOKS. I officially feel like I've stepped into the twilight zone (my journal, October 28).

It was not the first, and would not be the last, time that I experienced a paradoxical contradiction between the fundamental needs of my students and the means by which I was supposed to meet those needs. Nor was it the last time I would feel the proverbial finger of school failure pointed in my direction for circumstances largely beyond my control. Discovering the similarities

between New York City teachers' working conditions of the 1920s and today, I knew I needed to follow the money.

2.4 Neoliberalism and Education

I have often wondered how we can live in a democracy if we don't elect our presidents directly; or how we can be the richest nation in the world and also have high levels of poverty, homelessness, and unemployment; or despite how much we educate, we do not have enough jobs for people who need them. In the United States, capitalism has trumped democracy—we live in a dog-eat-dog, neoliberal state built on the ideology (and false promise) of the open, free market. No matter who we elect president, and despite the democratic rhetoric of "hope" and "change" that concretized Obama's two successful campaigns, we live in a country that drops bombs on other countries; has a minimum wage that doesn't pay a livable salary; and does not educate equally. Here I argue that neoliberalism, the highest form of capitalism, is culpable, and plays a role in the failure of educational policy: without a constant revolution of the means of production—in this case, constant change in policy—capitalism will fail (Marx, 1887). Without constant reform or "constant revolution" in policy (i.e., overhauls of curricula, closing and opening of schools, hiring and firing entire staffs, etc.), the system of public education might actually work: Neoliberalism *needs* public education to fail so that it appears to need privatization and other market reforms of neoliberal policy. As an economic and political system that undermines the foundational processes and values of a true democracy, neoliberalism disguises itself in democratic rhetoric:

> Common sense is constructed out of long-standing practices of cultural socialization often rooted deep in regional or national traditions. It is not the same

> as the ‘good sense’ that can be constructed out of critical engagement with the issues of the day. Common sense can, therefore, be profoundly misleading, obfuscating or disguising real problems under cultural prejudices. Cultural and traditional values (such as belief in God and country or views on the position of women in society) and fears (of communists, immigrants, strangers, or ‘others’) can be mobilized to mask other realities. Political slogans can be invoked that mask specific strategies beneath vague rhetorical devices” (Harvey, 2005, p. 39).

How does this fit into the theory I am building about education policy and teacher blogs? Neoliberalism has become the template, the blueprint, for educational policymaking: under neoliberalism, education is approached as a business, and the rhetoric of school reform protects the interests of companies creating new curricula over those of the students, parents, and teachers. Under neoliberalism, “the sanctity of contracts and the individual right to freedom of action, expression, and choice must be protected,” which is represented in the charter school movement: “private enterprise and entrepreneurial initiative are seen as the keys to innovation and wealth creation” (Harvey, 2005, p. 64), and can explain the competition between education publishing corporations over new curricula, models of classroom management, and innovative gadgets for the classroom. As long as policymakers ignore what is actually happening in the classroom as a result of decisions they make, we cannot rely on a future of long-lasting, systemic education reform. Blogs can provide a link, providing a new path toward understanding the inner workings of a classroom.

2.5 Political Economy and Political Spectacle: The Significance of History

As a new teacher in difficult daily working conditions, I wrestled with ways to understand what I encountered on the job: a gross mismatch in the appearance of education policies on paper that dictated my daily work, and the actual educational practices that played out in my classroom and school. I found myself poring over accounts of history that I'd never encountered before—American soldiers' accounts of turning against their commanding officers in Vietnam when the anti-war movement at home grew to epic proportions; Black auto workers' fights against racism and exploitation in Detroit; the Haymarket struggle; labor strikes; etc. I quickly resolved to become involved in the union at my school and was elected as a delegate for the local chapter of the teachers' union, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). Simultaneously, chats with colleagues over happy hour, lunch, or email revealed that I was indeed not alone in my experience. And despite the whirl of school reform around us—from constant shifting of tacit policies around silent hallways and school-based disciplinary systems on up to the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind and Children First legislation—it seemed that the means of teaching and learning conditions remained in direct contradiction with their ends, no matter how much change was legislated. The policies and reforms that purport to improve student achievement—and by extension, conditions in the schools themselves—rarely do anything of the sort, and leave the possibility of effective change up to the teacher.

As I devoured more books, I gravitated toward those that offered an explication of Marx's ideas in the realm of education, and historically situated the present—in other words, accounts that offered history in a nested, contextualized way as opposed to episodic, disconnected points on an arbitrary timeline (which is how I recall learning about history). Jean Anyon's work on the political economy of schooling made sense of the experience I had as a

teacher by linking education to other public realms: "until the economic and political systems in which the cities are enmeshed are themselves transformed so they may be more democratic and productive for urban residents, educational reformers have little chance of effecting long-lasting educational changes in city schools" (1997, p. 13)

Anyon's work offers an explanation for why this might be: "It is widely acknowledged that one of the most important causes of poorly funded, staffed, and resourced schools is the poverty of the families and neighborhoods in which the schools are located. What is rarely acknowledged, however, is the proactive role of the federal government in maintaining this poverty—and therefore poverty education" (1997, p. 17). When I read Anyon's *Radical Possibilities* (2005), I began to understand the intricate connectedness of how policy decisions affect reality in real-time (or don't), and her work reinforced and expanded upon some basic understandings of Marxist theory that I had learned—most importantly: schools do not exist in an ahistorical vacuum. Prior to reading Anyon's work, I lacked an understanding of how public policy networks connect, and how education stands enmeshed within these networks, and further, what the possibilities for countering the popular belief that the insidious problems facing our nation's urban public schools can be solved by policy and school reform changes alone. Instead, Anyon (2005) suggests the following solutions, among others, that would begin to support education as part of a network of public policy systems:

- the enforcement of comparable worth laws—laws that call for equal pay between men and women—which estimates suggest would reduce poverty by thirty percent;
- a substantial rise in minimum wage, which, as Anyon points out is "a major determinant of wages for almost one out of five employees in the U.S." (p. 30);

- a more fair system of taxation, in which the rich are taxed on their income at just as high a percentage rate, if not more than, the poor and working class; and
- "an equitable distribution of affordable housing throughout" metropolitan areas (p. 101).

By placing education in the context of other public policies, we can identify ways in which the federal government keeps education in a constant cycle of failure that unabashedly points the finger at teachers, parents, and students.

Mary Lee Smith (2004) builds on Murray Edelman's theory of the political spectacle by applying it to the American school system, and argues that the construction of crisis in education diverts attention away from the real issues at hand. Smith's analysis helps make sense of wildly contradictory reports on the success and failure of public schools and student achievement. As Smith (2004) points out, well-meaning educational policies are often enacted without the logistical or financial backing necessary for implementation, and teachers end up bearing an unnecessary, and often inappropriate, burden. She asks, "Who could be against 'accountability'? Who could argue against 'freedom of choice'?" and explains: "words and numbers appear precise and rational; yet depend entirely on context and interpretation. An achievement test score epitomizes this contradiction between appearance and reality. To enact policies of high-stakes testing, a state must select a score to separate those students who pass from those who fail. Often the process of setting the passing score follows political, rather than technical, logic" (p. 13). Smith makes sense of the constant shift in policy directives and expectations felt by classroom teachers by noting policy's role as political spectacle.

Education policy cannot act as a substitute for other economic policies, but often appears as such. Take No Child Left Behind as an example—the expectation for all children to read on grade level by 2014 seemed like an appropriate goal one decade ago—of *course* all children

should be reading on grade level; however, changing curricula without the necessary supports for teachers, classrooms, and schools has created little support for the improvement of public education. The blogs analyzed for this study tell behind-the-scenes stories from the perspective of the classroom—stories that undermine the public narrative of schooling that calls for teachers, parents, and students to 'just work harder.' Riffing on the rhetoric of the 'American dream,' policies make it seem like all schools have to do is teach better, or students have to get better at tests, or try this or that latest innovation. According to Smith (2004), the constant change, purportedly in response to crisis, is part of a political spectacle around accountability—rhetorical message, but no substance. Part of what this dissertation seeks to argue is for the uninvasive, inquisitive exploration of spaces—like blogs—in which authentic, genuine discussions are happening about education.

2.6 After Hours: Hidden Transcripts and the Publicly-Private

Armed with a deepened understanding of public policy and the roles of the government and the media in sustaining the status quo, I still recognized holes in my theoretical framework regarding policymaking and the potential for teacher blogs to infuse the process with local practitioner knowledge. I wanted to make sense of where change comes from, and the process by which what is said/experienced/acknowledged by subordinated groups switches from being unheard, hidden, or private to heard, seen, or public. In my last year as a fifth-grade teacher, I became a member of a progressive caucus in the UFT called Teachers for a Just Contract (TJC), and was elected as a member of the Delegate Assembly (DA). Teachers had been without a contract for well over a year, negotiations were not going in our favor, and it seemed that not only would the school year be extended, but tenure, a policy that had protected the rights of

teachers as workers for years, was under attack. TJC called for a no-give-back policy, among other things, and we organized members of the rank and file to put a resolution on the agenda at a meeting of the UFT Delegate Assembly (DA) that would provide the opportunity to openly discuss the issue.

The TJC planted members around the room, and everyone had been prepped on what to say if they were called on to put the resolution on the agenda. My raised hand was acknowledged, and I'll never forget the moment: I was sitting in the front row of the meeting, was handed the microphone, and turned around to face the room. Roughly 3,000 teachers stared back at me as I spoke into the microphone: "Hi. I'm a teacher, and I'm tired." The room erupted in applause and shouts of "me, too!" and the overwhelming feeling that teachers were being steamrolled into accepting terms of a contract that required more work for less pay was palpable. The proposed resolution called for organized actions such as honor pickets and rallies in support of protecting the rights of teachers preserved under the current (though, at the time, outdated) contract. The dominant caucus of the union was not amenable to the suggestion, and our resolution failed; however, the president would change her tune months later, and end up urging teachers to turn out at demonstrations in support of protecting their work rights. I would later look back on the moment I spoke into the microphone at the DA as a type of tipping point—which Malcolm Gladwell (2002) describes as "the moment of critical mass, the threshold, the boiling point" (p. 12)—when the conversations teachers had been having behind closed doors at lunch time and happy hour, in blogs online, in meetings of TJC and other like-minded groups, and in hushed corners of the hallway flipped from being hidden to being heard. Though I find Gladwell's work at times espouses political views and values removed from my own, his term "tipping point" helped me realize I needed to find a theory that could help me explain this

phenomenon.

In my third year of graduate school, I encountered James C. Scott's *theory of the hidden transcript*, which he describes as a site of resistance in the face of oppression: "every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a 'hidden transcript' that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant" (1990, p. xii). Scott's theory of a hidden transcript as a critique and form of resistance developing in response to the public, dominant discourse would help me make sense of and articulate the space in which teachers congregate out of earshot of administrators and policymakers and share the local knowledge of their experience. It is the main assertion of my dissertation that this local knowledge, if heard by policymakers, may help close the gap between policy and practice in urban public schools. While I do not believe that changes in policy alone will change the course of education, I believe in Anyon's interpretation of Marx's idea that we must "'start where we are' and use whatever means we have at hand in the struggle against exploitation and subordination" (2011, p. 14).

I found myself wandering through the stacks of a Barnes & Noble in downtown Brooklyn one afternoon, and, as I typically do, sat down amid the stacks in the section labeled "Education" to browse. Titles such as *Teach Like Your Hair's On Fire, Classroom Teacher's Survival Guide, Whatever It Takes, Not In My Classroom, Failure is Not an Option,* and *Fires in the Bathroom* stared back at me. I have been gravitating toward the education section in every bookstore I frequent for as long as I have been a teacher, but this particular visit to the stacks was different. For the first time, it dawned on me that books like these are more focused on *survival* than anything else.

The books that looked back at me—which are often the same books teacher educators cram into their syllabi and rookie teachers flock to bookstores to purchase—blame unruly

children, hard-to-handle parents, unreasonable administrators, unknowing policymakers, or teachers themselves (these were my particular favorites, suggesting hot baths and essential oils, eating out a few times a week, and seeking grants to defray the unbelievably high cost of teaching materials). They offer endless suggestions for how to get from one day to the next, and ultimately, send the message that unless teachers spend their own money on supplies, emotionally juggle the frustrations of classroom and school inconsistencies on their own, and create intricate behavior plans for maintaining order in their classrooms, etc., they will fail as teachers, thus failing the students, families, and schools that depend on them day in and day out. Rather than drawing on the lessons of history and *explicitly* connecting the dots between the schools and the economic, political, and social structures that surround them, these books—along with blockbuster movies about public schooling in America—reinforce the idea of a *pedagogy of one*, the dominant, pervasive idea that teachers need to be their own agents of change—one day, one classroom, one lesson, one child at a time.

Some of these texts offer legitimate and valuable hints to acquire resources and maintain emotional balance while teaching; they also drive a wedge into cracks in the status quo. They offer frames of reference for understanding the challenges faced in urban public schools and communities, as well as celebrate the triumphs and achievements of students and teachers who rise up in the face of adversity. And, I have to admit, I made good use of DonorsChoose.org[5] to acquire materials for my classroom when I was a fifth-grade teacher; and as an adjunct instructor of students in a teacher education program, I showed *Freedom Writers* to my pre-service teachers. Even so, I wanted to find a space to tap into the hidden transcript that James C. Scott so

[5] DonorsChoose is a non-profit organization initiated in the early 2000s that matches public school teachers' grant proposals with individuals interested in funding projects in public education.

helpfully identified. I had investigated doing a research project about the educational policy-practice gap from a number of different perspectives, and finally landed on the blogosphere as a potentially new and exciting mode for conducting research.

Although the blogosphere is not an entirely hidden space, literally or figuratively, James C. Scott's theory of the hidden transcript is not a perfect fit. Put another way, the publicly available nature of teacher blogs on the internet contradicts, in some sense, the idea of a hidden transcript according to Scott, which is not seen or heard in the public discourse. However, the simple idea that Scott puts forth—that there *is* another transcript—helps me strengthen my theoretical framework. Scott's hidden transcript acknowledges, as Howard Zinn (2004) does, that "voices…have mostly been shut out of the orthodox histories, the major media, the standard textbooks, the controlled culture….History, looked at under the surface…tells a different story" (p. 24). Without examining what is omitted from the public discourse, or transcript, the true full story of educational policy is only partially revealed.

2.7 Why Blogs?

I was advised by veteran teacher colleagues that if I just reached "one child" that first year, I would have done my job. I couldn't understand how I could or would ever be satisfied with reaching *one* child in my classroom that year. That sounded like a failure to me. Overall, I seemed to lack the ability to tell the difference between what was genuine advice, and what was just plain reinforcement of how unequal things have historically been in urban public schooling. And in an effort to connect to other teachers and push back against the isolation I felt as a new teacher in incomprehensible working conditions, I eventually turned to the emerging blogosphere in search of current, real-time stories of teachers' lived experiences.

In 2001, blogs were few and far between, and existed mostly as one-sided, tell-all online diaries (Schneider, 2009). I was immediately drawn to the genre on a personal level—I was fascinated (and still am) by the developing capabilities of the world of online communication, and the ability to react and dialogue in an accessible, online forum that "is neither public nor private—it is both" (Waskul & Douglass, 1996, p. 131). For this dissertation, Waskul and Douglass's now infamous quote about online research being both public and private is poignant because it perfectly describes the spaces in which I have been reading teachers' stories: a public-but-private space. Bloggers write openly, on the publicly accessible internet; however, they write anonymously, keeping their true identities hidden behind a digital avatar. Though I only blogged for a few months as a new teacher before growing concerned about the possibility of being discovered and professionally reprimanded—after all, the subject matter is highly sensitive, since it involves, even if only by extension, the lives of children—and have long since lost contact with any fellow teacher bloggers I "met" online during that time, the seed was planted for what would become my doctoral research nearly a decade later.

2.8 Conclusion

Theory is a language, it provides a heuristic, a tool, to see and understand. The lens outlined here—shaped by my teaching experience, the politics of policymaking, the political economy of education, construction of a political spectacle of schooling, and the hidden transcript as a tool for critique and change—provided a foundation upon which to collect, analyze, and make sense of, data reported in this dissertation.

Chapter 3

METHOD/OLOGY: In Context

> "…blogging influences the way you think about thinking…it may change the process of research. To some extent it might even change the method" (Mortensen &Walker, 2002, p. 254).
>
> "the method I have followed aims at communicating theory by analyzing practice" (Castells, 2010, p. 3)

This dissertation research project is primarily grounded in thematic analysis as a methodology, and secondarily, is an experiment in online research method. As technologic capabilities grow, so do the possibilities for research (Friedman & Friedman, 2008), and this study concludes that blogs are particularly rife with data worth studying, especially to the end of informing future educational policymaking. The idea to research blogs is rooted in a personal affinity for the genre—I regularly contribute to four other blogs for which I am the sole author,[6] and the language of blogging is one that I speak frequently; I've found that I can easily store, organize, and sort through information in a blogging format. No one else seemed to be doing it, and I was curious.

What can blogs written by teachers tells us about their daily work? Which obstacles to teaching and learning are avoidable? Which are not? How do contradictions in expectations prevent policies from being carried out as intended? What can be done to close the policy-practice gap? These questions initiate the formation of what Corbin and Strauss (2008) refer to as a paradigm—"a perspective, a set of questions that can be applied to data to help the analyst

[6] 1) gluten-free blog (acitygirleatsdinner.wordpress.com), 2) knitting blog (brookerhollow.com/blog), 3) professional commentary blog (opencuny.org/mediated), 4) vintage photo blog (knotandcable.wordpress.com).

draw out the contextual factors and identify relationships between context and process" (p. 89) This paradigm guided my inquiry from the start, and represents my hope that online communication can help educational researchers fill the gap between policy on paper and practice in the classroom. My experience, and that of my colleagues, and after this research, of many other teachers throughout the New York City public school system, was one of constant change without result. I was able to discover this commonality by researching blogs written by public school classroom teachers in New York City.

3.1 Significance of the Study

Taking place solely online, this study applies thematic analysis to 14 New York City teacher blogs over a four-year period: 2008-2012. What separates this study from others about teacher blogs is its focus on the lives of teachers, as opposed to a new instructional tip or classroom management strategy. This study does not investigate the latest tools of technology in the classroom. It does not report on curriculum specifically, though instruction is examined at times. The study's focus is that of the local knowledge imparted by teachers in personal, public blogs they keep about their daily work. It is one assertion of this study that researchers should consider publicly available narratives in their studies more often. For, "as the technological imperative continually bears down on the various realms of public and private life, the need to better understand how new communication and media technologies are used to mediate and reframe our everyday experiences becomes greater" (Song, 2009, pp. 2-3).

3.2 Sample

Searching for blogs, though rapidly becoming a more sophisticated process, is not linear or unilateral. Blogs for this study were primarily identified via blogrolls and search engines: "A simple way to get insights into a topic is by composing appropriate queries and submitting them to a commercial search engine" (Wilkinson & Thelwall, 2011, p. 389). After starting with a simple Google search, entering terms such as "New York City teacher blog," "teacher blog NYC," or "teacher voice new york and blog," etc., a spreadsheet was used to keep track of websites visited, as well as relevant characteristics obtained in a cursory investigation of each site (see Figure 11). On many of the blogs identified for the study, there exists a blogroll—often on the right-hand side of the website (see Figure 10), which is a list of links to other like blogs. Sometimes the links were to blogs or websites with random associations, and led to dead ends for the purposes of this study; however, more times than not, blogrolls created a snowball effect for gathering potential sites for the study. In sum, 153 blogs were catalogued in the initial stages of this study. The spreadsheet contained the name of the blog, the author, and if available the grade level or subject taught, start

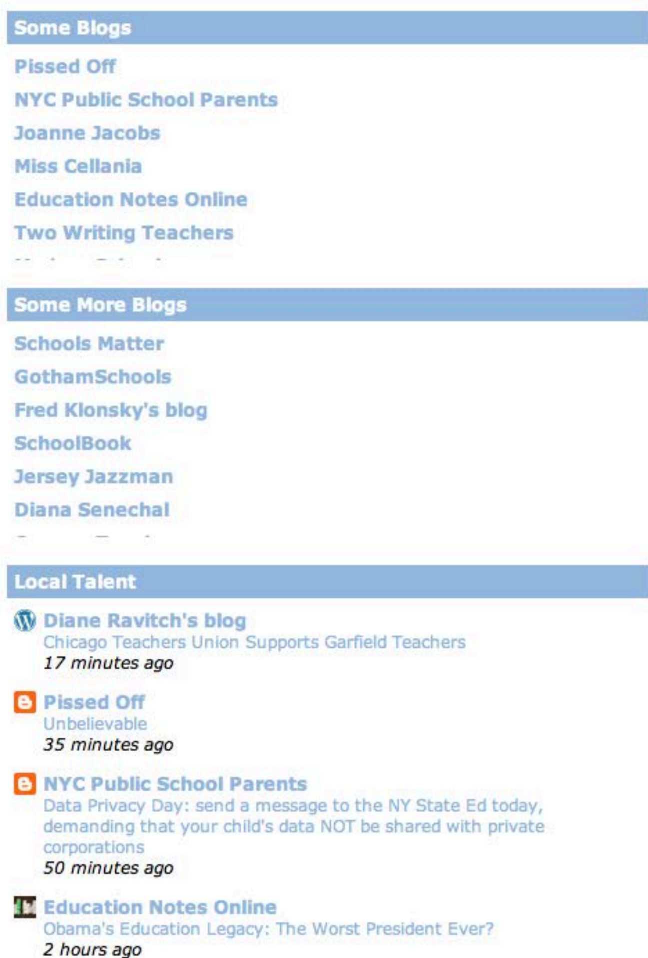

Figure 10. Blogrolls, generally located on the right or left side of a blog, are a helpful navigational tool, as they usually lead to other blogs about a similar subject.

date of the blog, whether or not it was still active, location, links to other blogs, and initial tags that would later lead to identifying analytical themes.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	BLOG TITLE	SHORT NAME	AUTHOR	AUTHOR TYPE	LEVEL / SUBJECT	URL	Start Date	LOCATION	LINKS	TAGS
2	A Blog About Shool	ABS				http://ablogaboutschool.blogsp		Iowa City		not_ny active,
3	A Shrewdness of Apes	ASA	Ms. Cornelius	teacher		http://shrewdnessofapes.blogs	7/28/2005	Midwest		active, not_ny
4	A Year in the Life	AYL	password protected	password protected	password protected	http://en.wordpress.com/typo/ subdomain=ayearinthelifeofate	unknown	password protected	password protected	passw
5	A Year Pursuing We the People	YPWP	schmuel421	teacher	HS, history	http://pursuingwethepeople.bl	11/5/2008	Bronx	none	inactiv yes
6	Accountable Talk	AT	Mr. Talk	teacher		http://www.accountabletalk.co	12/12/2008	Queens	EW, IOCL, JD, WT	active,
7	American Society Today	AST				http://americansocietytoday.bl		Ohio	not_nyc	no
8	An Apple A Day	AAD	Apple	teacher		http://apppleaday.blogspot.cor	1/27/2008	Brooklyn	LMS, NYCE, NIKW, R	inactiv yes
9	A Teacher's Life	ATL				http://jenteacherslife.blogspot.		Indiana	not_nyc	no, no
10	An Urban Teacher's Education	UTE	James Boutin	teacher	HS, global	http://www.anurbanteacherse	3/29/2009	Seattle	POT, EN, GS, NYCE, QT, CIL, GFB, FB, WT, FT, FK, CKFS, AST	active,
11	Assorted Stuff	AS	Tim Stahmer	instructional tec specialist	n/a	http://www.assortedstuff.com/	5/29/2003	DC	not_nyc	active, not_ny
12	Bellringers	BR	bellringers			http://mybellringers.blogspot.c				no
13	Bizzaro World	BW				http://www.blogger.com/blogi blogspotURL=http://averygnei				access denied
14	Black Dahlia Reader	BDR				http://www.blackdahliareader.				no
15	Blogging from the Edge of Democracy	BFED				http://ablogaboutschool.blogsp		North Carolina	not_nyc	active, not_nyc
16	Blogging Through the 4th Dimension	BT4				http://mrspripp.blogspot.com/		Wisconsin	not_nyc	not_nyc
17	Bluebird's Classroom	BC				http://bluebirdsclassroom.blog			not_nyc	active, not_nyc
18	Billionaires for Educational Reform	BFER	Smellington B. Worthington III	parody	n/a	http://smellington.wordpress.c	no archive	NYC	AT, EWK, NYCPSP, POT	active, maybe
19	Bon Mot	BM				http://socalbonmot.blogspot.cc		South Carolina		not_nyc active,
20	Borderland	BL				http://borderland.northernattit		Alaska		
21	Boyle's House of History	BHH	James Boyle	teacher		http://mbjboyle.blogspot.com/		Newton, NJ	not_nyc	no
22	Bridging Differences	BD	Deborah Meier and Diane Ravitch			http://blogs.edweek.org/edwee Differences/		national	no links -- they're only included really in individual posts	maybe

Figure 11. This is a screenshot of my *blogmaster*, a spreadsheet where I catalogued and kept track of each website I visited, identifying characteristics, initial codes, etc.

As is often the case, web searches can "produce pages of results that need a final human filtering stage to remove spurious matches" (Wilkinson & Thelwall, 2011, p. 390) Of the 153 blogs initially identified, on the basis that they 1) were about education, and 2) came up in my initial search, or the blogrolls of sites already potentially identified for the study, 139 were eliminated on the basis of one of the following, leaving 14 blogs available for use in this study:

Reason	Number
The blog focused only on a specific course of study, aspect of technology, or specific phenomenon that was not directly linked to the classroom	57
The blog is password protected: sometimes, links provided on blogrolls do not lead to a public link	10
After closer examination, it became clear that the author is blogging from an urban center that is not New York City	14
The author is the parent of a New York City public school student, but not a teacher	10
The author is an activist, but not a teacher	13
The author is a non-teacher in one of the following groups: retired teacher, school volunteer, or teacher awaiting reassignment	9
The author meets all other criteria but is not anonymous	11
The role of the author is unidentifiable	8
The location is unidentifiable	7
Total:	**139**

The 14 blogs that appear in the study are:

Blog Name	Pseudonym	Grade Level or Subject Taught
A Year Pursuing We the People	shmuel421	11th-grade U.S. History
Accountable Talk	Mr. Talk	unknown[7]
An Apple a Day	Apple	Technology
Is Our Children Learning?	ruben_b	4th-grade
It's Not All Flowers and Sausages	Ms. Mimi	unknown
Life at the Morton School	Miss Eyre	Middle-school English
Miss Brave Teaches New York	Miss Brave	General ed teacher in CTT
Miss Rim's Tales from the Shortbus	Miss Rim	unknown
Muffin Meets the Apple	R	High school
My Life Untranslated	Ms. Flecha	3rd-grade ESL
NYC Educator	NYC Educator	ESL teacher
Pissed Off Teacher	Pissed Off	unknown
South Bronx School	Bronx Teacher	unknown
Unbalanced Literacy	Ms. Malarkey	unknown

[7] Note that any blog labeled "unknown" for "Grade Level or Subject Taught" comes with the caveat that the information may exist within the blog, but I never came across it. Since I only analyzed posts from 2008 to 2012, I may have missed information like this if it was buried within posts from different time periods.

Criteria for the blogs chosen were as follows:

- authored by a K-12 New York City public school teacher
- written about daily work in the classroom (without being focused on a specific aspect of content, instruction, technology, etc.)
- active for at least six months
- active during the time period selected (2008-2012)
- publicly available and anonymous

The identifying characteristics of the bloggers are understandably varied and incomplete; however, 3 of the 14 offer descriptions of their schools:

> The Morton School, circa NYC in 2010, is a lovely school. Our building is kept clean and pleasant by all teachers and by a dedicated custodial staff. We are fortunate to have a very fine arts program that gives students a number of opportunities to pursue visual art, music, and dance. We have a beautiful library cared for by an excellent librarian. The Morton School, circa NYC in 2010, is a lovely school. Our building is kept clean and pleasant by all teachers and by a dedicated custodial staff. We are fortunate to have a very fine arts program that gives students a number of opportunities to pursue visual art, music, and dance. We have a beautiful library cared for by an excellent librarian (Miss Eyre, 2010, March 11).

Two bloggers situate their schools in the context of a statistic for percentage of free lunches served:

> My school seems to have a very high number of special ed students, and something like 89% of the school is ELLs and 73% receive free lunch (Ms. Flecha, 2010, February 5).

> I teach a 4th grade general education class in a high-need community. My school is Title I (roughly 99% of students qualify for free lunch), with a mostly Hispanic student population. Almost a majority are English Language Learners (Ruben B, 2008, October 29)

No two bloggers describe their blogs using the same criteria, and most never discuss their schools much beyond what they encounter on a daily basis in their classroom.

There were a number of considerations taken into account when selecting the blogs, but unless information shared across teacher-authored blogs becomes more universal, or the fear of being discovered lessens for teachers, researchers may always encounter uneven amounts of information in regard to demographic, geographic, economic, social, and political details, etc., of the bloggers they study (Wilkinson & Thelwall, 2011).

3.3 More on Blogs

Initially coined in 1999 by Peter Merholz, the term *blog* refers to a web log, a type of writing genre that raiply developed since access to and capabilities of the internet began to accelerate in the late 1990s (Mortensen & Walker, 2002, p. 254). Over time, it has become increasingly simple to create your own blog, and although there are many no-fee platforms available for anyone to set up a public (or private) blog, the sites in this study are powered by either Blogger (a Google subsidiary) or WordPress, two of the most popular, enduring platforms available. This does not factor into the study for any reason, as the content itself, not the structure of the blog, is the primary focus of this research project. There is no limit to what is acceptable to

write about on a blog, which produces an atmosphere of freedom in the blogosphere (Mortensen & Walker, 2002, p. 258).

Despite the overwhelming accessibility of blogs today, they were not always accessible to the masses—originally, "weblogs could only be created by people who already knew how to make a website….The promise of the web was that everyone could publish, that a thousand voices could flourish, communicate, connect. The truth was that only those people who knew how to code a web page could make their voices heard" (Blood, 2000, February 7). Blogs began as one-sided lists, entries, and links—as passive repositories for information, minus the interaction with an audience (Lin, 2010). But with the introduction of *Web 2.0* circa 2001, they became interactive (Friedman & Friedman, 2008), and quickly evolved from monologues to dialogues that grew in a nonlinear fashion.

The popularity of blogs grew dramatically from 2004 to 2008. Merriam-Webster dubbed *blog* the word of the year in 2004, and reported it the most frequently searched word that year on its site (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2004). Part of what made blogs so popular was that year's presidential race—blogs became the primary mode for quick access to information about the race in the months leading up to the election, and the jump in both their authorship and readership was significant (Munger, 2008). The year 2008 was another landmark year for blogging—it marked another presidential election season, and saw schools more widely embracing and experimenting with blogging and other forms of online communication and instruction (Lacina & Griffith, 2012, p. 316).

Until recently, researchers have studied blogs in education primarily as a means to an end in the classroom—as avenues for self-reflection in teacher education and K-12 classrooms (Redekopp, 2009), or as pedagogy that supports curriculum efforts or instructional methods

(Greenhow, 2009). As of yet, few, if any, researchers have examined blogs about teachers' lives as data. Perhaps the complicated debate regarding online research ethics has prevented more researchers from exploring them further online.

3.4 Privacy and Ethics of Online Research

When I initially pitched my dissertation idea—to study teacher blogs—not everyone I encountered was onboard. Some questioned the validity of blogs, and others wondered if the study would be considered scholarly enough. I soon discovered that scholarship is already being published on blogs (e.g., Ribstein, 2006; Powell, Casey, & Chapman, 2011), and according to some, the publicly available nature of blogs has an embedded system of checks and balances when it comes to accuracy: "vetted by all Americans, blogs are forums in which to correct and speak out. No inaccuracy goes unpunished" (Perlmutter, 2007, p. 45). But, as Morrison (2002) points out, "a host of ethical and methodological questions may arise when we begin to research public, virtual spaces" (p. 5). With the rapid, unprecedented development of online communication, "researchers have been forced to rethink basic issues to practical and ethical sides of collecting material" (Bromseth, 2002, p. 34). The one thing researchers using online methods can agree on is that they do not agree: no consensus has been reached on what is ethical in online research, or where to draw the line between private and public (Hookway, 2010; Mortensen & Walker, 2002; Thelwall, 2010, July 12; Wilkinson & Thelwall, 2011).

As long as there has been online research, there has been a debate about whether or not blogs and other publicly accessible online content should be considered public, and whether or not individuals whose entries, posts, messages, etc., are being used in research need to be notified. Years ago, as pioneer scholars of online research wrestled with protocols and methods,

there were far more concerns about the private nature of online text, and a strong feeling that bloggers and other individuals generating online content being used in research studies needed to be contacted (Waskul & Douglass, 1996; King, 1996). As time went on, the approach to online research became more flexible: "academic researchers should not have any restrictions placed on the kinds of (legal) data that they investigate on the public web. In particular, researchers should be allowed to investigate personal information on the public web, such as social network site profiles, without considerations of informed consent" (Thelwall, 2010, July 12).

For the purpose of this study, the approach used was based largely on my Institutional Review Board process: the initial proposal was turned around within 24 hours, and was marked "exempt." Thus, the approach taken in this study follows the idea that "researching people's personal information does not violate their privacy if the information researched is on the public web" (Thelwall, 2010, July 12). Some researchers even go so far as to say the words in blogs are documents, and though they may represent people they are not people themselves (Wilkinson & Thelwall, 2011): "the object investigated is the publication and not the person" (Thelwall, 2010, July 12). They also draw parallels with the surveillance corporations already have underway of our personal information (ibid). There is also the concern that activities might change once "the possibility is raised that they might be watched by the researcher" (Wilkinson & Thelwall, 2011, p. 395). But the argument most compelling for this study is the publicly available nature of blogs. Put plainly, "research involving such public web documents without contacting their authors is not human subjects research" (ibid).

Whether or not to contact the authors of the blogs was not a decision made lightly. I read widely and drew conclusions based on the arguments encountered in the literature. I also considered, from a personal perspective, if I would want to be contacted if I were the one whose

words were being studied. I believe I would. While the sheer amount of data I gathered from the blogs (see Figure 12) provided more information than I imagined ever capturing, I felt compelled to 1) let the bloggers know about the study, so that they could stay tuned if they were interested, and 2) to ask for feedback on a summary of my findings as a check on my analysis.

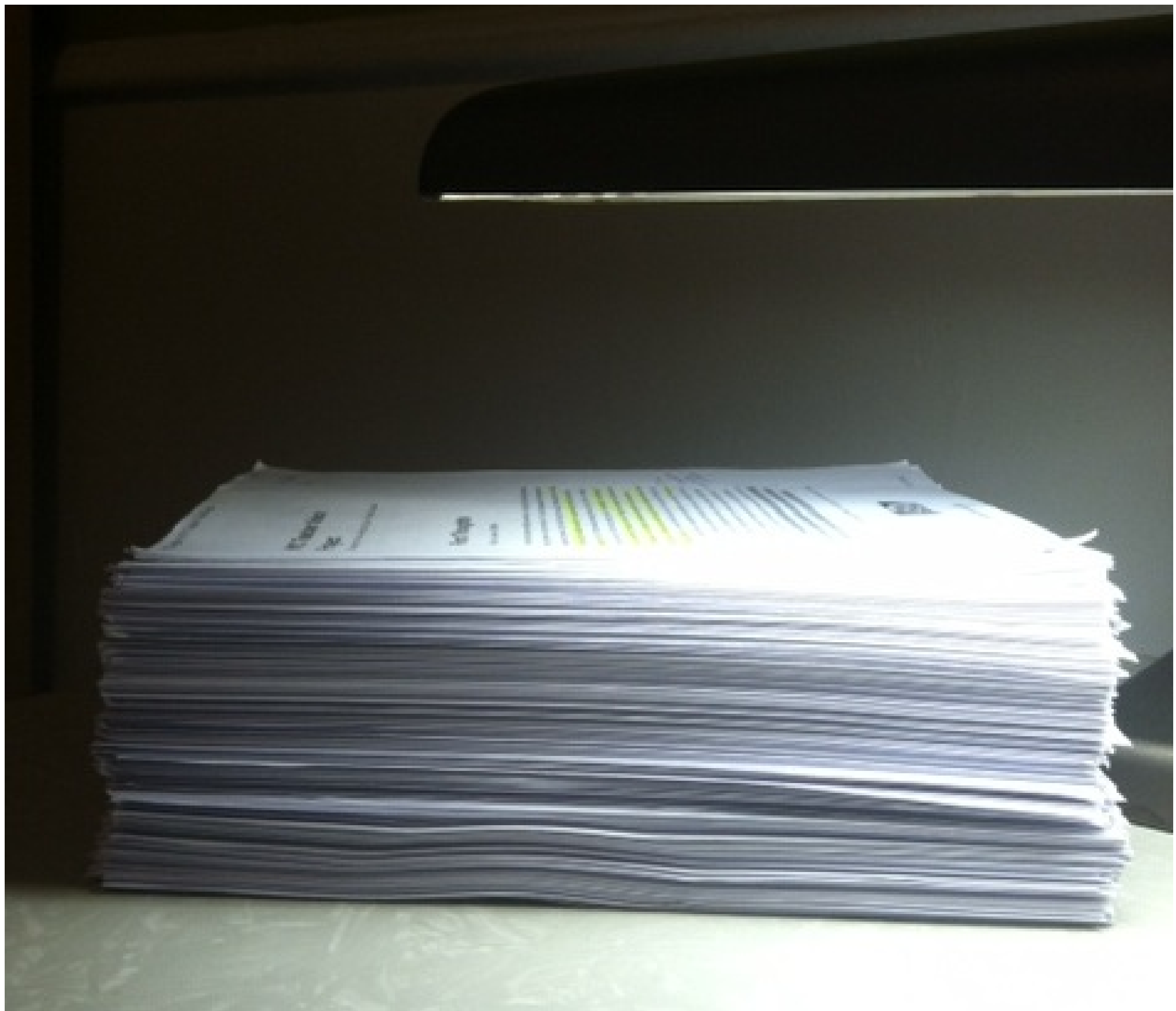

Figure 12 Dissertation data.

Contacting the blog authors proved problematic: I was only able to acquire the email addresses of 7 of the 14 bloggers via their blogs, and I contacted them in the hopes of striking up a dialogue. I created a website for each blogger on which to respond privately—on a voluntary

basis—with the understanding that any comments served as permission to use the commentary in my dissertation. Unfortunately, none of them have responded. And I can see from a plug-in[8] that I installed that only one of them has actually visited the website. I have not yet, at the time of depositing this dissertation, heard back from any of the teacher bloggers I contacted. Although there are a number of variables at play, and several possible explanations for why none of them responded to my emails, I believe their anonymity is at work. Indeed, Miss Brave was interviewed for an article in the *The New York Times*, and the reporter writes:

> Miss Brave teaches third grade in Manhattan, and that is about as much as she is willing to reveal about who she is. Anonymity is a means of self-protection, she said, but also a way to protect the identities of her students, colleagues and school, which happen to be her main sources of material and inspiration alike (Santos, 2011).

Prior to contacting the bloggers, I chose to do a thematic analysis of the narratives encountered. I read over 2,000 posts among the 14 blogs, and eliminated any that did not provide local knowledge of a teacher's daily work. Four hundred thirty-two posts were used for this study, and they were initially identified by 78 different tags (see Figure 13), which ultimately had to be reworked in a more manageable number of themes. I ended up with seven in the end.

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[8] Jetpack, a WordPress plug-in, offers statistics for a website on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. Information provided includes how many hits each page or post of your website gets, tags and categories that are most popular, and other trends that tell the author about readership. These statistics are not available to the public.

Figure 13. Wordle created from the initial series of tags applied to the data in this study.

3.5 Method for Data Collection

The method applied follows the theoretical framework. I was interested in excavating the hidden transcript of teachers' observations of, responses to, and participation in their daily work. The following outlines the process of data collection:

1. Visit the website of one of the blogs identified in the blogmaster (see Figure 11), and read in chronological order from ~September 2008-~June 2012.
2. Decide if the post is appropriate for study (according to criteria outlined on p. 52). If not, move on to the next post. If so, move on to the next step.
3. Copy and paste post into research blog (opencuny.org/teacherblogs), a private, encrypted, manually serviced WordPress site created to hold data.

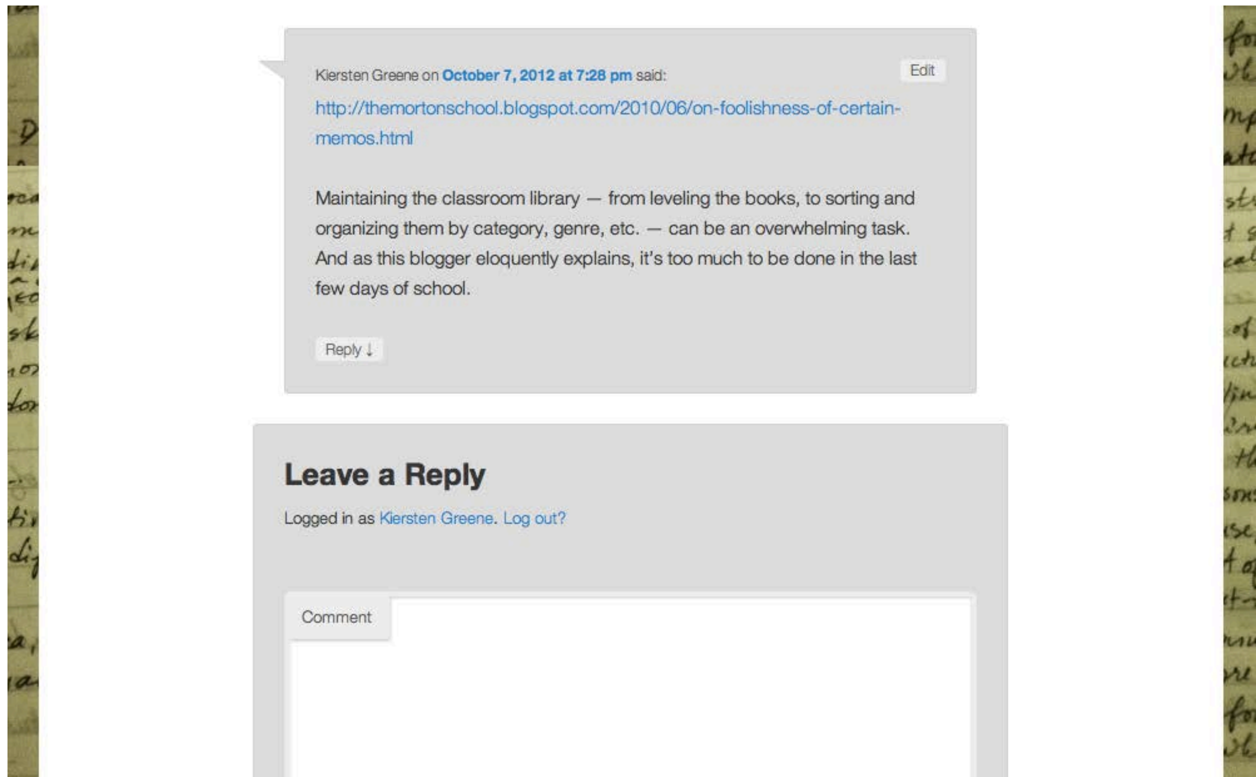

Figure 14 Using the comment function on my private research blog, I was able to collect a first round of fieldnotes on my data, using the tool I had developed on OpenCUNY.org.

4. Read post and tag (See Figure 15).

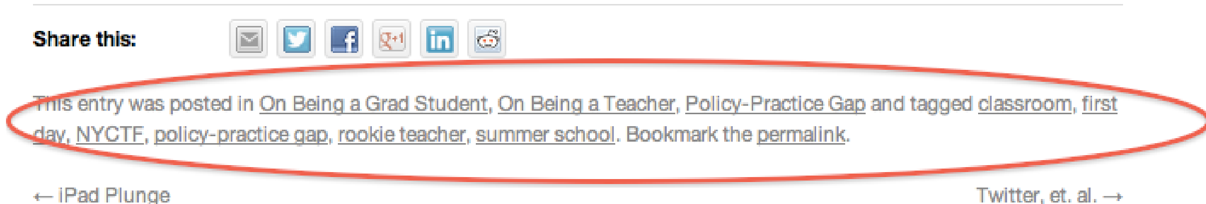

Figure 15 Tags are assigned to blog posts by the author, and are used to aggregate like posts. For instance, if I clicked on "classroom" in the blog pictured in the above screenshot, all of the posts in the blog that have been tagged "classroom" would appear. Tags are similar to categories, but might hold less weight. I personally tend to think of tags as fleeting or momentary, and categories as more permanent.

5. Add original post URL,[9] as well as PDF[10] of original post (you never know when a site might disappear from the web). In the comment section of the blog post, add annotations as necessary (see Figure 14).

Once all posts were identified for the study, they were closely read again in order to narrow possible categories: "the next step to a thematic analysis is to combine and catalogue related patterns into sub-themes" (Aronson, 1994).

6. The 78 original tags were narrowed down to the following codes, which were used to identify themes in the data (See Figure 16):

    - Adaptive Resistance (*light blue*)
    - Administrative Obstacles (*turquoise*)
    - Contradictory Policies (*mint green*)
    - Escalation of Work Load (*orange*)
    - Lack of Resources, Training, and Funding (*green*)
    - Lack of Voice (*yellow*)
    - Surveillance (*purple*)

7. Add any annotations/fieldnotes as necessary; continue until all posts were fully read a second time, and coded.

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[9] A URL, or *uniform resource locator*, is the address for a website, and generally appears in a box at the top of a website in any search engine.
[10] A PDF, or *portable document format*, is a type of document file that can be read independently of operating systems, hardware, applications, etc.

As Bromseth (2002) writes, “Ethics and methodology are…tightly interwoven with and have consequences for each other: a specific ethical standpoint will lay premises for methodological approaches, and choosing a certain way of finding answers to a research question will always imply an ethical perspective” (p. 35). Keeping the bloggers’ anonymity intact is important, and this close reading of their texts offered an opportunity to eliminate any posts that might potentially provide too much personal information. No further searching for identifying factors of any of the bloggers occurred—only the blogs, which were public-facing and readily available, were used as data for this study. Wilkinson and Thelwall (2011) endorse this practice: “revealing clues to the identity of an originator of some data analyzed, such as their profile URL or an identifiable quote, is not breaching their anonymity but merely copying their identity from one public situation (the web) to another (an academic article)” (p. 397).

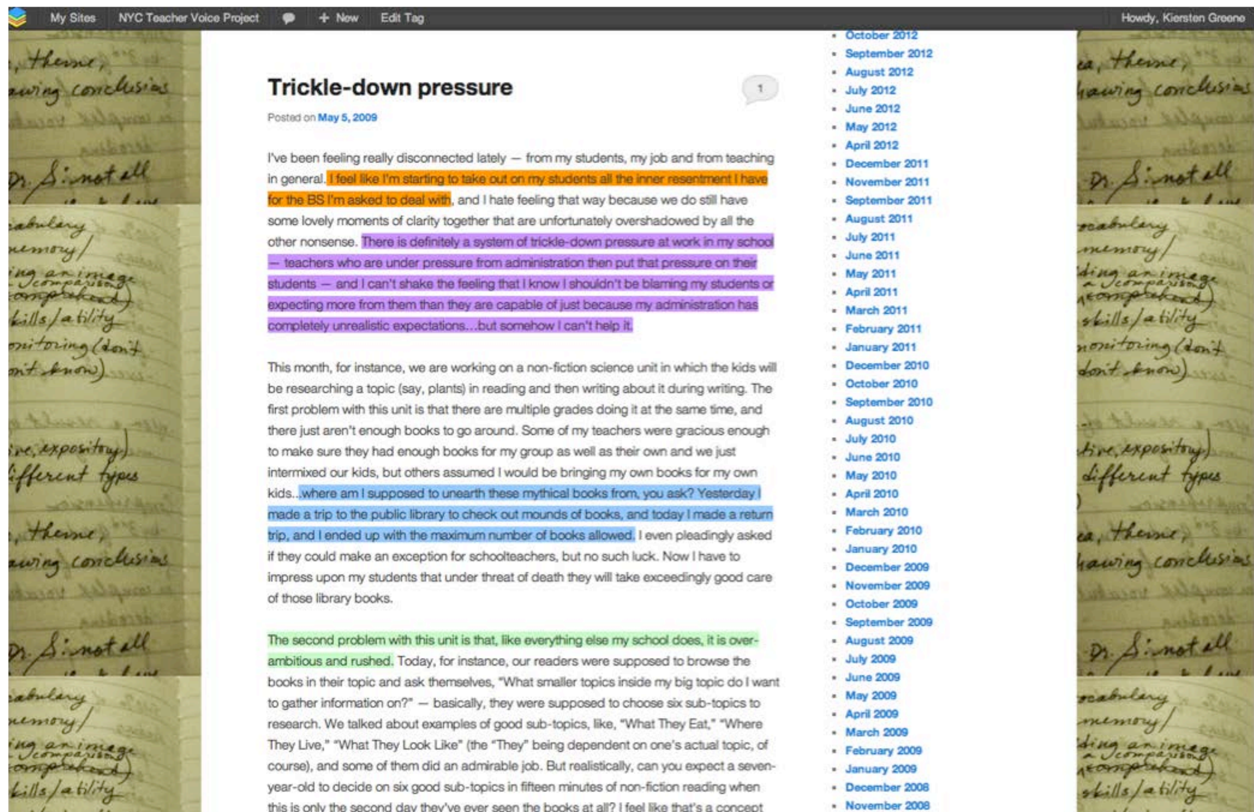

Figure 16. Screenshot of blog post as it is being coded in my metablog research tool.

Blogs "can be an excellent method for developing and sustaining a confident and clear voice of one's own and the ability to formulate and stand by opinions. While private journals may fill with notes, they need not be as clearly formulated as a post in a weblog, which is intended to be read by others, and it is easy to neglect old notes scribbled in the margins of a book or on a notepad" (Mortensen & Walker, 2002, p. 269). The public nature of the blogs in this study imply a desire to be read, seen, and heard: "when you blog, you know that others will read what you have written" (Walker, 2005, p. 114, Chase, 2010).

3.6 Anonymity

Thus we arrive at a crossroads: are blogs public? Are they private? For Waskul and Douglass (1996), who, in their seminal piece on online research, describe online communication as "publicly-private" (p. 129), research involving the internet raises a number of methodological and theoretical debates. Waskul and Douglass (1996) acknowledge a difference between "publicly accessible" and "publicly distributed" (p. 129), raising the point that although bloggers knowingly deposit narratives in the public domain, they may intend to entertain a specific readership—one that does not include researchers. This is why working exclusively with anonymous blogs seemed appropriate. Though more and more subjects are written about openly on the internet, education is sensitive on multiple levels. Blogging about work is a common phenomenon, but there can be a conflict of interest—on the one hand, blogs are seen as a potentially rich channel for communication between employees; on the other hand, there have been instances in which bloggers have been fired for the content of their blogs (Efimova & Grudin, 2007). Not only are teachers at risk of jeopardizing their jobs, they are at risk of

exposing the personal details of the lives of their students. As such, I found it important to use as little identifying data as possible, and steer clear of any blogs that are not anonymous.

Prior to the development of online communication, and the existence of blogs authored by teachers, there were few outlets for sharing local knowledge. Aside from interpersonal conversations that occurred spontaneously at lunch time, on the bus, over happy hours, etc., teachers remained essentially voiceless. One blogger wrote about the "Grapevine," a section on the UFT website where teachers could anonymously post their thoughts on their school (Mr. Talk, 2009, February 11); however, it disappeared one day, and there are few places other than on anonymous blogs to candidly and openly share thoughts about teaching without fear of reprimand. Several bloggers that appear in this study write about their feelings on anonymity. Here is some of what they had to say. Several note that protecting their real identity is paramount:

> "No one I know in real life is aware that I blog here, not even my wife. It's like having a secret identity" (Mr. Talk, 2009, May 21)

> "The blog is written anonymously to protect my students' identities and to not misrepresent my school with my opinions on hot button topics" (Ms. Flecha, 2008, January 10).

> "I have to scour each post to see if there are any traces of my identity in them" (Mr. Talk, 2009, May 2).

One blogger comments on more than one occasion on people finding out about her blog, and her identity, as a result:

> “It is getting harder and harder to write on this blog knowing it is being read by so many people and by people in authority. I don’t want to write anything that will incriminate or reflect on anyone” (Pissed Off, 2008, November 4).

> “I guess I am not as anonymous as I thought I was. I’m glad I was warned and have been careful with what I write” (Pissed Off, 2009, January 5)

Another blogger wonders out loud how others handle the issue of anonymity:

> “i am learning that there is a sense of anonymity that seems impenetrable.
> this appears to add to the safety and secrecy of the internet.
> i’m left wondering so many things.
> do bloggers out there make their sites public to their friends?
> do bloggers keep their sites secret and deal with unexpected encounters as they come?
> how much do we reveal?
> how much is fiction?
> where is the line drawn between i know you and i don’t?” (Apple, 2008, April 13).

Finally, one blogger wonders if anyone is listening:

> “…hoping that if enough people read blogs like this…then things might change,” (Mr. Talk, 2009, May 2).

Indeed, one main purpose of this dissertation is to listen. The primary benefit of anonymity from a research perspective is that “bloggers may be relatively unselfconscious about what they write” (Hookway, 2010, p. 93). Several of the bloggers share thoughts on why they blog and what they

blog about—for several, they are “blogging about something that is so important” (Ms. Flecha, 2008, December 10).

They comment on having a voice:

> “I join the blogging community not because I believe my experiences are unique—far from it. I only hope to add my voice to a rich and diverse community of teachers who are fighting the good fight here in NYC, who believe that the dignity of educators and the good futures of children are not mutually exclusive” (Miss Eyre, 2009, January 13).

> “i’ll be posting here about
> things that irk me
> things that delight me
> and recurring random thoughts” (Apple, 2008, January 27)

Seeking connection:

> “please do comment on these posts with any thoughts you have—I want to hear them” (shmuel421, 2008, November 5a).

> “I’m inspired reading about other teachers” (Ms. Flecha, 2009, February 21).

And the process of blogging:

> “I’ve always been one to share more with people I don’t know than people I do know, and so this may very well be a good match for me” (shmuel421, 2008,

November 5b).

Four hundred thirty-two posts—or 25% of the posts read for this study—were catalogued and coded. The others were eliminated on the basis of not containing a description of understanding or response to teachers' work. While the process for collecting data from blogs does not require transcription, as interviews might (Bromseth, 2002, p. 47; Waskul, 1996, p. 37), it is still quite time consuming. The next step, which proved to be the most educative in the process, required extensive analysis, conducted largely by manually reading, rereading, annotating, and identifying networks of themes.

3.7 Analysis

The idea for this study grew out of the desire to investigate ways to close the policy-practice gap in urban public schooling. Some concerns initially faced were two-pronged: 1) as discussed earlier in this chapter, electronic research is still in a beginning phase in the social sciences, and 2) my personal experience with and history of teaching posed a potential risk of creating a study too "mesearchy" to be taken seriously. Regarding the latter, Corbin and Strauss (2008) argue, "analysis is a process of examining something in order to find out what it is and how it works….Without some background, either from immersion in the data or professional/experiential knowledge, the ability to recognize and give meaning is not there" (p. 46). Further, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write, "narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical. Our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines" (p. 121). From this perspective, my experience as a teacher in the New York City public school system, as well as with blogging as a writing medium, provided me with first-hand knowledge that would be additive to the analysis of my data. I was interested in telling the untold and unheard stories of New York City public school teachers, but wanted to do

so in an authentic way. Corbin and Strauss (2008) believe “being immersed in data analysis during data collection provides a sense of direction, promotes greater sensitivity to data, and enables the researcher to redirect and revise” (p. 58). My proximity to and familiarity with the material would potentially help my analysis in the end. As C. Wright Mills wrote years ago, “you must learn to use your life experience in intellectual work: continually to examine and interpret it” (1960, p. 196).

Initially considering a study that follows a virtual ethnography method (Hine, 2000), or that of netnography (Kozinets, 2010), this dissertation project grew from an interest in hearing teachers’ voices. With no one ‘space’ in which to hear such voices regularly, the development of the internet provided such a space, albeit virtual. While some argue that blogs are just online diaries, others argue that they are too social in nature to be as private as diaries (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004). I tend to agree with both camps—the often anonymous nature of blogs, coupled with the content and context, creates an atmosphere akin to “displaying a personal journal in a shop window, for friends and passers-by to read at their leisure (Davies & Merchant, 2007). There is a parallel here with how teachers interact with the world—they are expected, on the one hand, to be super-human actors who take in directives and output knowledge in the public venue of a school; on the other hand, they live nested lives that require private time and space to reflect. Blogs offer a space to mitigate those two worlds, and blend the private and public aspects of teaching by posting historically inaccessible information in a publicly-accessible space.

Some researchers may further contend that blogs are too easy to publish, or informal, to be taken as authentic, or that they are mutable, and anyone can start, stop, or contribute to a blog (Berman, 2006; Nardi, et. al., 2004). There are limitations, as we trudge through the nascent

stages of a new methodology, but I urge the field to question whether or not blogs are that different from what might be shared in a correspondence in an archive, or conversation in an interview. Taking it further, because blogs are unsolicited, how might their authenticity compare to data that *is* solicited? Instead, it is necessary to apply methodological steps that can account for, as Munger (2006) puts it, the distinction between "truth" and "truthiness." During data analysis, which happened recursively, and often, simultaneously, with data collection, it was imperative to discover themes that recurred throughout, in order to uncover the multiple truths of what can be shared via teachers' local knowledge.

Sturken and Cartwright (2009), who write about visual culture theory, assert that "every day, we engage in practices of looking to make sense of the world" (p. 9). As online communication proliferates, so do opportunities to stop, look, and listen, both alone and as part of a community: "we are increasingly invited to experience the mundane routines of our everyday lives through screens or information translated from those screens. Although we perform some of these activities alone, most involve participation with, or simply the presence of, other people" (Sturken & Cartwright, 2009, p. 223). The record of these everyday activities and routines provides a record that is "frequently identical to the 'actual experience' studied" (Waskul, 1996, p. 137), and "narrative researchers need to confidently assert their contributions to, their interventions in, and their transformations of social science scholarship" (Chase, 2010, p. 231). So while some may remain skeptical of digital research, others recognize the potential for data collection and engagement. As Chase (2010) puts it: "Although it is hard to imagine narrative researchers giving up the domain of face-to-face interviewing and on-site gathering of naturally occurring conversation, some researchers have already moved into the domain of virtual research and many others will follow in their footsteps" (p. 229)

Despite "suspicion toward ethnography" in the research world, many believe ethnographers do not receive their due professional courtesy (Becker, 2010, p. 56). While "objective, quantitative, scientific research provides educations with defensible explanations for their failure to deliver on the various and contradictory promises of educators," qualitative methods, and ethnographic methods in particular, provide further, detailed analysis that large-scale quantitative studies cannot (Becker, 2010, p. 59). And while this is not purely ethnographic, there are elements evident of the method throughout. A researcher "must remain flexible in his or her use of procedures" (Corbin & Strauss, 2009, p. 47), in order to meet the needs of the study. Some "Narrative theorists point out that narrative research is embedded in and shaped by broad social and historical currents, particularly the ubiquity of personal narratives in contemporary Western culture and politics—from television talk shows, to politicians' speeches, to self-help groups" (Chase, 2010, p. 229). Indeed, teachers often begin blogging in order to connect with other teachers and share their stories.

The analysis is primarily thematic; however, elements of narrative inquiry, as envisioned by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), are applied as well. Based on Dewey's theory that experience is education, narrative inquiry as a method is about finding a way "to move back and forth between the personal and the social, simultaneously thinking about the past, present, and future, and to do so in ever-expanding social milieus" (p. 3). For Dewey, there had to be a thread strung throughout learning experiences—one scaffolded another, and one experience grew out of another. For Clandinin and Connelly, research projects of a narrative quality need to revolve around a "research puzzle" (p. 124). The puzzle this dissertation is trying to solve is how to fill the policy-practice gap in urban education.

3.8 Conclusion

Without the opportunity to take risks in method, we would not make gains in research. Especially in this day and age, when technology has put its mark on humanity, and is moving at an unstoppable rate, "to study virtual communities is to examine fundamental questions about human solidarity" (Song, 2009, p. 3). Teachers share thoughts, expertise, experience, and local knowledge in their blogs. While some may be suspicious and "be tempted to dismiss virtual communities as a short-lived cultural throwback, we cannot avoid the fact that we, as twenty-first-century people, have so easily taken to the internet and its virtual communities" (p. 4). The purpose of this research is to find a new way of doing things, and it is a work in progress. As Dewey (1934) once said, "If the artist does not perfect a new vision in his process of doing, he acts mechanically and repeats some old model fixed like a blueprint in his mind" (p. 50). Let us avoid doing the fixed blueprint of what we have done before in educational policy, and forge a new path, together.

Chapter 4

DISCOVERIES: Making Room for Teacher Voice

> I was just glad to be asked, to be honest. I was never asked to be part of anything before in a school. I was asked to do stuff, sure, but never asked to be part of *how* things get done and *what* things get done (Miss Eyre, 2009, November 18).

I call this chapter "Discoveries," as opposed to "Data" or "Findings," because to the best of my knowledge, this study is the first of its kind: though there has been a rapid increase in digital research in all disciplines, I am not aware of any studies analyzing blogs written by teachers in the same manner. By thematically analyzing teachers' blogs about their daily work, I discovered tales of strength, courage, best practices, failure, confusion, and the list goes on. This chapter weaves together a narrative of public, anonymous New York City teacher blogs, and tells a story some only hear in a version of Hollywood films or television shows: the story of how some teachers in urban public schools understand and respond to their working conditions in the face of constantly shifting policies.

Teacher bloggers write about not being heard. They use words like "invisible, "absent," and "wish," and talk about how their voices bounce off of walls and empty hallways. Many bloggers point to the deleterious effects of high-stakes testing—not only the emotional effects that living in fear of constant failure has on their students' psyches, but the colossal waste of valuable instructional time created by sending teachers out to grade the ELA and other standardized tests. They write about the burden of absent or lacking faculty and staff on the seams of their classrooms—how extra students, not enough chairs, and shifting schedules creates chaos and an irreparable wave after wave of inconsistency. They write about shifting policies and contradictory administrative expectations, changes in curriculum that happen too frequently

for sufficient training to catch up, and the pressure to bring about the changes they wish to see. Many of the bloggers write about applying for grants and raising funds, borrowing suitcases full of books from the local library to supplement what the classroom lacks, and spending their own money on resources that should be supplied by the school.

After reading through four years' worth of public, anonymous teacher blog posts, I began to see themes emerge. Several of the themes documented are current iterations of those identified by Kate Rousmaniere, and so are adapted from her work in *City Teachers* (1997). As established in Chapter 2, there are shocking similarities between the ways in which teachers understood and responded to their work in the 1920s and today, nearly a century later. Rousmaniere discovered four themes in her research:

1. The first established "a steady increase of demands on teachers' time and energy without concomitant support" (p. 3). Teachers of the 1920s experienced a whirlwind of school reform, which resulted in a spike in the expectations of their daily work.
2. The second theme, noting that teachers "worked in a strangely lonely environment, isolated from their colleague*s* (p. 3), points to the divisions—literal and theoretical—that historically prevented teachers from congregating, connecting, and engaging with one another during the work day.
3. Third, there was a "persistent discrepancy between administrators' and teachers' versions of order" (p. 4), resulting in contrasting expectations of daily work between teachers and their immediate supervisors.
4. Lastly, "teachers responded to their working conditions by alternately accommodating to, adapting to, and resisting certain aspects of their work, surreptitiously claiming some control over their job" (p. 4). Teachers would create their own parameters for what

worked, and would do what needed to be done in order to fulfill the obligations and expectations of their jobs.

Each of Rousmaniere's four themes appeared in the blogs I read in various forms, and I adapted and expanded upon her thematic framework as other themes emerged during my analysis. The resulting seven themes are summarized as follows:

1. *Lack of Resources / Funding / Training*: Based on accounts of teachers raising funds and writing grants for classroom resources, coupled with narratives about a lack of copying capabilities, broken printers, never enough paper or toner, and stories of teachers reaching so deeply into their own pockets that they go into debt as a result, teachers are asked to do work without the appropriate, required materials. It's like asking a gardener to do her job without letting her use a shovel, soil, or water.
2. *Escalation in Work Load*: Building on Rousmaniere's first theme that describes "a steady increase of demands on teachers time," teachers talk about a huge jump in the amount of paperwork required of their jobs. Along with the rise of high-stakes testing, teachers have more and more data collection and individual assessment to conduct as part of the expectations of their work: on top of the already high demands of the job of teaching, they are asked to do unreasonable amounts of work in the time allotted.
3. *Administrative Obstacles*: Building on what Rousmaniere established in regard to a disagreement over versions of order between administrators and teachers, teacher bloggers write about administrators wielding their power to intimidate, harass, and marginalize faculty and staff in schools. Administrators and teachers seem to differ on more than versions of order today, and the stories describe wild ineptitude, unprofessional practices, and under-the-radar nepotism.

4. *Adaptive Resistance*: Similar to Rousmaniere's fourth theme, the discovery of teachers' adaptation to, resistance of, and accommodation of their working conditions in New York City in the 1920s, teacher bloggers write about finding ways to fly under the radar, solving problems they shouldn't be called upon to fix, and closing their doors and teaching however they see fit for their students. They also describe heroic acts of generosity and kindness, and doing whatever it takes, by any means necessary, to get their jobs done.
5. *Contradictory Policies*: Bloggers write about a vast disconnect between educational policies as they appear on paper (or in theory) and how they actually play out in practice in the classroom. They describe receiving a new curriculum without sufficient time to learn how to teach it, or being required to have supplies that aren't maintained by the school (i.e., rugs), schedules that do not accommodate necessary teaching and learning time, and the arbitrary collection of data that rarely ends up affecting instruction or achievement.
6. *Surveillance*: The feeling of being watched is pervasive throughout the blogs. While having the courage to put their stories in the public domain, teacher bloggers describe feelings of worry about being caught or found out, and the potential professional repercussions that might follow. Aside from the blogosphere, teachers also describe feeling watched inside their buildings. They describe silent teams with clipboards anonymously observing and jotting, filtering in and out of classrooms unannounced and uninvited, and feeling like people walk around with targets on their backs.
7. *Lack of Voice*: Several teachers who blog describe blogging as a way to find a voice in an otherwise deafening silence, as well as a way to connect in an otherwise isolating

profession. They describe rarely, if ever, being asked to share their opinions, thoughts, ideas, expertise, or local knowledge. They are not included in the policymaking practice, which appears as more of a monologue than dialogue.

This chapter follows these seven themes through the data, reports on their frequency, and makes meaning of the blog posts analyzed for this study. Each section has its own story to tell. Accounting for all blog posts read between the years 2008 and 2012, the themes are distributed as follows, when looked at the data combined (see Figure 17): lack of resources / funding / training (24%), escalation of work load (20%), administrative obstacles (17%), contradictory policies (12%), lack of voice (12%), adaptive resistance (10%), and surveillance (5%):

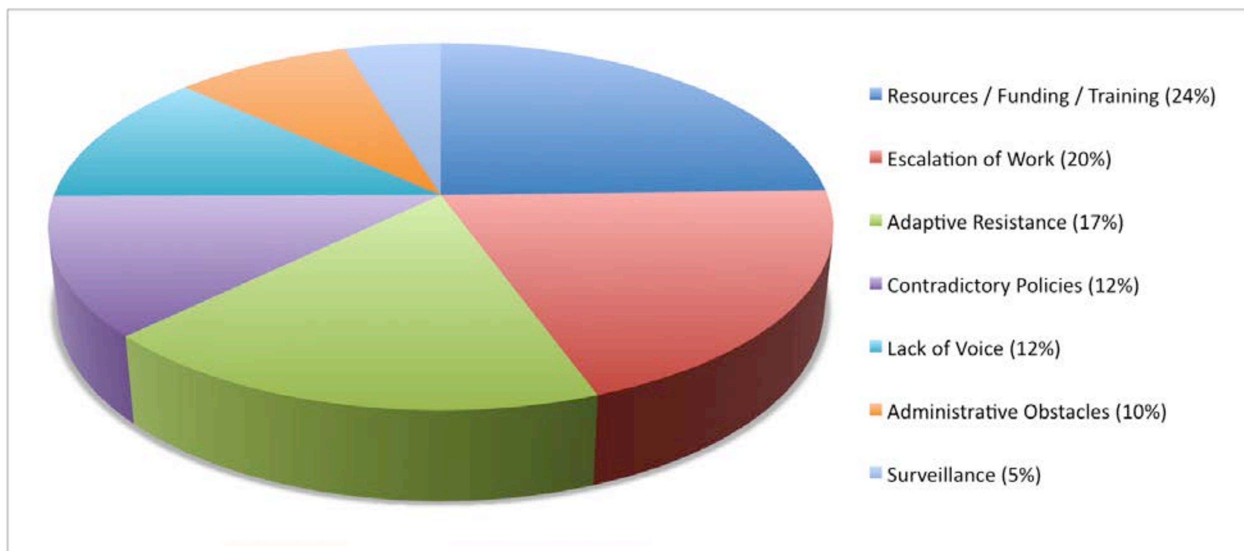

Figure 17. Visual display of the themes *across* all blogs and blog posts analyzed for this study.

Viewed differently in Figure 18, each of the themes appears as follows across the fourteen blogs analyzed, when broken down by blog:

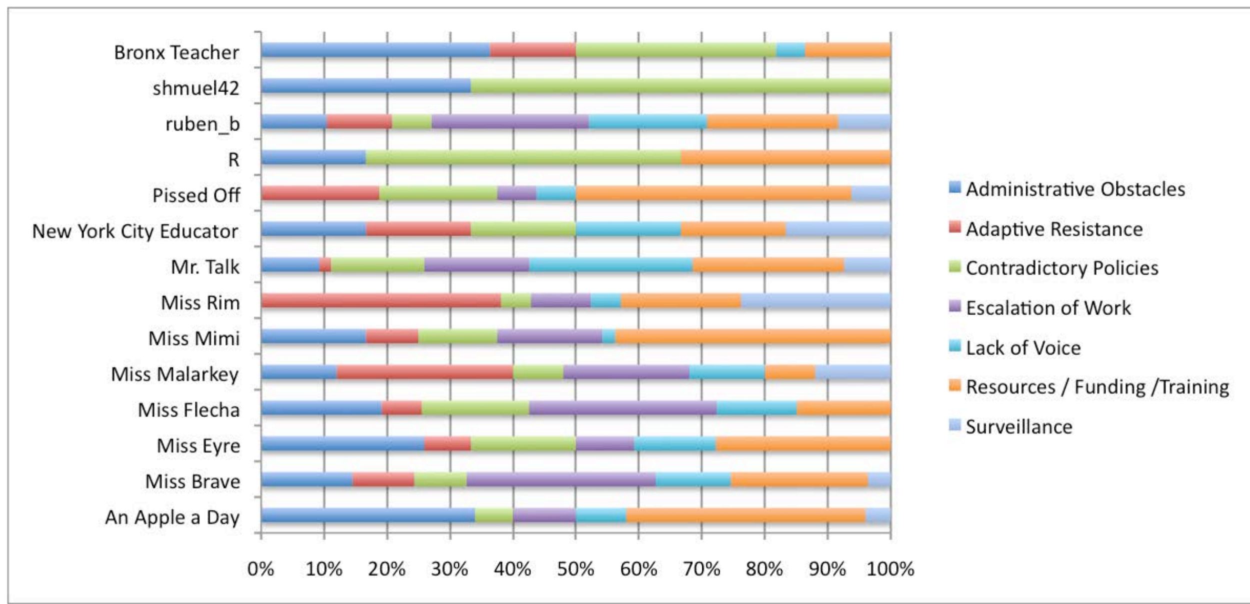

Figure 18. Themes, as distributed *within* blogs. For more detail, see Appendix B.

Teachers who blog about their daily work find a disconnect between what they are expected to do, and the available time, skill, space, and resources required to carry out those expectations.

4.1 Lack of Resources / Funding / Training

Though the demographic information of teachers' schools in this study was largely unavailable, due to the high level of anonymity, the implication is that most teach or taught in schools that lack the appropriate resources, funding, or training. Indeed, it is the theme written about the most among the fourteen blogs. One blogger writes, "the schools we're sending our nation's poorest children into are often bleak, joyless places" (ruben_b, 2009, June 4), and another writes that her school is "plagued by poverty" (Mrs. Mimi, 2010, February 26). Another describes the economic circumstances of her students:

> I don't want to get caught up in a trap that says my students can't succeed because of their backgrounds. But I do believe that they are already at a disadvantage—not

> because they have ‘bad’ parents, but because there is a cultural gap between their backgrounds and the backgrounds of those of use who are in the positions of power in the educational system (Miss Brave, 2008, December 14).

And another writes about the learning levels of her students: “I have 13 year olds in my class whose math skills are on the second grade level, and they’re being passed on to high school because there’s no room for them in the middle school” (R, 2009, July 9).

Nine of the fourteen bloggers, or 64%, openly talk about poverty and its effects on the morale and logistical comfort of their students. It is acknowledged throughout the teacher blogging community that teachers are required to do their jobs without the necessary supports of resources, funding, and training, and it is widely accepted as commonplace that teachers will fill the gaps. They do this by acquiring their own supplies and seeking out their own professional development. Teachers are expected to adapt, no matter what the circumstances, and in some cases, they end up playing game a game of survival rather than getting the chance to teach.

4.1.1 Filling the Supply Gap

In Article 7R of the United Federation of Teachers contract while I was in the classroom, I found the following passage: "schools should provide appropriate and sufficient basic instructional supplies and books to deliver an effective educational program. Basic instructional supplies and books are those that must be provided for use by students without which classroom instruction will be impaired" (UFT-Board of Education, 2000, p. 51). This document, one that represents a binding agreement between the City and the schools, has little to no effect for most public schools in New York City: the sheer amount of supplies teachers have to provide to their classrooms is shocking. Let us examine copying and printing alone.

While digital technology is increasing our opportunities to circumvent the use of paper, handouts are still an essential mechanism for the successful K-12 classroom. It's just a given: classrooms need multiple class sets of worksheets, homework sheets, assignments, etc. On a routine basis, the copying machine in my school would break and take at least a day or two to be repaired. The policy was to submit your copies a week before you needed them, providing ample time to the school aide who took care of the copying. The only problem was, some of us—particularly those of us who were new—didn't always know what we were going to teach a week prio. To troubleshoot the problem with inaccessibility to a reliable copier, we were able to purchase a new copy machine with UFT funds, for the sole us of the teachers in the school. This was a brilliant solution to the problem for a while, but over time, the UFT copier would break and become unreliable, too. As an alternative, I would print out copies on the classroom printer, but that only lasted until toner ran out, since replacement cartridges were not readily available to teachers. One year, I acquired a desk-top printer/copier and made many of my own copies at home. The toner for the machine was in the $150 range, so I don't think I ever replaced it, but it was a luxury to have while it lasted. I was not surprised to hear similar stories hidden within the posts of the blogs I read for this study.

Six of the bloggers, or forty-three percent, write about problems with printing or copying from 2008 to 2012, and their stories are rife with implications for policy. For instance, reading and math assessments, which are often administered at least once a month, could be designed and mandated to bypass having copies made, which would free up some of the copy availability. It is as if the supplies, resources, and training required of some of the expectations of teachers' work are never considered when policy changes are made.

Multiple bloggers report having no toner in the school, or having no access to a working copier, and going to get copies done at Staples or Kinko's. One teacher blogger describes how ludicrous the cycle of copying can be:

> I couldn't print in my own classroom, because the printer is broken. (And bolted to a huge table. And taking up valuable classroom space. But apparently I'm not allowed to ask to have the giant broken printer removed, because we're supposed to be using technology in our classrooms and it would look bad if I requested to have a giant broken piece of technology taken away.) I couldn't print in the library, because the printer was broken. I couldn't print in the other section of the library, because the printer wasn't hooked up yet. I couldn't print in my old office, because that printer wasn't hooked up yet. I couldn't make copies in the office across the hall, because the copier was broken. I couldn't print in my colleague's classroom, because she successfully petitioned to have her broken printer taken away. I couldn't print in my other colleague's classroom, because even though she has a printer, she can't get into her laptop cart (Miss Brave, 2009, September 12).

The same story is told over and over again throughout the blogs: there aren't enough supplies for copying needs in New York City public schools. Teachers write about inaccessibility to the internet, Department of Education usernames and passwords that do not work, and computers that do not turn on. Teacher bloggers describe schools as decaying wastelands for old, useless technology and outdated or missing textbooks: "Perhaps your school has textbooks or workbooks for health? Mine does not" (Miss Eyre, 2009, January 18).

Teachers blog about purchasing endless bins and caddies for their classrooms—to hold supplies at student tables; to hold and organize books in the library; to act as cubbies for student belongings; to organize math manipulatives, etc. Many of them purchase sets of pencils, erasers, pencil sharpeners, stacks of post-it notes, and even tiny staplers for each table. They know exactly what is on sale at any given time at Staples, where the closest 99-cent store is, and what household items to save for art projects and additional storage—empty toilet paper rolls, shoe boxes, the Styrofoam from meat packaging, yogurt containers, empty cans, etc. They write about being savvy about reusing copy paper: printing on both sides, using smaller font to reduce the amount of paper required of their classrooms, and asking friends and family members who work in offices for donations. One blogger writes, "most teachers I know buy a case or two of paper every year, not to mention printer ink" (Mr. Talk, 2010, August 6). One blogger reports the cost of a replacement toner cartridge for her printer as $400.

When I was in the classroom, Teachers Choice, the program that historically helped defray the cost of additional teaching supplies, provided each New York City public school teacher with $200 to spend however they saw fit. Teacher bloggers report a dwindling, and then canceling of, Teachers Choice. One blogger writes reminiscently of a time when the Teachers Choice allotment was $260; during the time of this study, 2008-2012, it dwindled to $110, and then disappeared completely. Despite the article in the teachers' contract that places responsibility for supplies instructional materials on the school, in reality, the absence of Teachers Choice often leaves teachers solely responsible for providing any additional supplies required of their instructional programs.

Three, or twenty percent, of the bloggers wrote about proposals they had written on DonorsChoose.org, a non-profit that links teachers in search of funding for supplies with

individuals interested in making a philanthropic donation for an educational cause. Though twenty percent may not seem impressive enough to note, it demonstrates that, in terms of this study, one in five blogging teachers has enough of a supply gap in their classroom to write a proposal for a grant. Speaking from personal experience, I was able to acquire a television, set of VHS cassettes of National Geographic science specials, class sets of several chapter books, an advanced digital camera, table copier, art supplies, and a Mac laptop through this program. You will find proposals on DonorsChoose.org that run the gamut from trips to France that cost tens of thousands of dollars to tiny projects or requests for supplies that cost only fifty. Bloggers successfully ask for funding for instructional supplies and materials in science, books, and other general materials. But it isn't just supplies that teachers lack in the classroom—schools do not have enough personnel, and it affects the quality of teaching and learning taking place.

4.1.2 The Body Shuffle

Though I would often arrive at work too early to tell what the final count would be, I always noticed the absentee board in the main office, located above the time clock, when I moved my time card in the morning. We had absences nearly every day, which inevitably meant a shift in schedule, and possibly a missed prep.[11] There was a period of time at my school during which new schedules would be delivered to classroom teachers every day, depending on how absences were shuffled around. For instance, one day, a class with an absent teacher might be assigned to an out-of-classroom or "prep" teacher: "my school is no longer hiring subs, which means that whenever a classroom teacher dares to call in sick, we out-of-classroom teachers get

[11] "Prep" is short for "preparation period," a 45-minute period contractually provided to teachers every day for the purpose of instructional preparation. On occasion, absent personnel lead to a waterfall of changes in staffing for the day, or teachers lose their prep all together. Principals try to avoid the latter, as teachers can apply for additional pay if they miss a prep.

pulled to cover their classes" (Miss Brave, 2009, March 15). Or, the students might be broken down among the remaining classes on the grade. I always wondered about this practice of distributing students from the absent teacher's class among other classes, and more specifically, why we did not get subs when funding was available. Not only was there a lack of money to hire subs, there was an insufficient pool of qualified individuals from whom to choose as subs. Several bloggers write about similar strain placed on available faculty and staff. A technology teacher writes about her experience being responsible for all things related to technology within her building: "18 classes a week. The entire school. Nearly 500 students a week. 25 teaching periods…the mandate to fix all technology. What about the teachers who have new equipment this year and have no idea how to use it? No collaboration periods, training time, or push-in periods. We're all on our own" (Apple, 2009, September 22).

While she spent time at a meeting over the span of several days, one blogger's class was scheduled to be in the auditorium instead of being assigned a substitute. Another writes about being shuffled around as a substitute—meaning she doesn't get to teach and her students don't see her for as long as she acts as a sub—and another describes the practice of mass preps. A mass prep is a measure that saves a school money by providing preps to teachers who did not receive one yet that day and preventing them from applying for missed prep pay. Mass preps are generally held in the auditorium or cafeteria of a school, and involve four or five classes (give or take) being supervised simultaneously by one or two out-of-classroom personnel (prep teachers, pull-in/push-out services teachers, and school aides). Sometimes videos are shown, in an attempt to keep students occupied, but mass preps tend to be chaotic, high-tension, educationless experiences for students and staff, no matter the circumstances: "I was offered a 'mass prep' (i.e., the kids watch a movie in the auditorium)" (ruben_b, 2008, December 11) writes one

classroom teacher. And another blogger, a prep teacher, writes about what it was like to be in charge of a mass prep: "I wrangled entire grades in the auditorium all by myself during mass preps," and the experience of being called to cover other people's jobs more than getting to do her own: "I survived weeks (months, even) when it felt like I was testing more than teaching and other weeks (other months, even) when it felt like I was covering other teachers' classes more than teaching" (Miss Brave, 2010, June 25).

Teacher bloggers also write about being placed in positions out of their licensing area, insufficient training during which trainers waste time, and being pulled out of the building for weeks at a time to grade standardized tests. One blogger suggests:

> Why aren't schools given money to do a different form of differentiation— hiring data analysts, or more teaching assistants? Having more team-teacher scenarios? Or allowing for even 30 minutes a day where kids are working truly independently so their teacher can reflect on the day or analyze her own data? Rather than expecting her to, once again, add to the list of hints [sic] being done at home or on her own time? (from Ms. Flecha, 2011, December 3)

They write about collaborative team teaching classes being out of compliance,[12] bathrooms—staff and student alike—without toilet paper or hand soap, and unwanted vermin. Nearly half of the bloggers mention sludge leaking from the ceiling, infestations of cockroaches, mice, or other unwanted creatures: "I occasionally have to stomp my feet while peeing (to scare the mice away)" (Mrs. Mimi, 2008, September 22).

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[12] Collaborative team teaching (CTT) classes were initiated as an inclusion pedagogical model to include students with IEPs in general education environments. There are not to be more than 40% of students with IEPs in any CTT class. In urban public schools, CTT classes often become dumping grounds for children who misbehave, and in schools that are understaffed, they are often found to be out of compliance (i.e., more than 40% of the students have IEPs).

Whether it is the physical plant of the building, getting enough people in classrooms so that teaching and learning can happen as policied and planned, or obtaining the necessary resources and supplies with which to teach, the lack of funding is a pervasive theme in connecting policy and practice. As one blogger sums it up well: "Education can't be done on the cheap. Let's admit that. Let's admit that cutting corners results in kids left behind" (Miss Eyre, 2009, November 15).

4.2 Escalation of Work Load

Hardly a new trend in the history of teaching, bloggers report ever-increasing expectations of their daily work. This increase comes in many forms, and at the start of the 21st century, according to the blogs analyzed for this study, the trending cause of increased work is data. Bloggers write about preparation time spent on paperwork, filling out data sheets, averaging numbers, bubbling in forms, only to receive little to no feedback or training on what the numbers mean collectively or individually, or how to aggregate them. One blogger writes about feeling like they are running a business, instead of teaching:

> Each individual teacher is kept in the position of the new businessman. Enterprising, dedicated, passionate, and hardworking even to the point of working twice the hours you are actually paid for. Doing the job of multiple people: decorator, data analyst, data collector, teacher…parent….Many good teachers keep their mouths shut and their heads down, consistently taking on the new burden (Ms. Flecha, 2011, December 3).

The latest wave of standardized testing calls for higher “rigor” and “accountability” in instruction, and the result of these rhetorical terms on the tenor of activity in classrooms is reflected in the blogs analyzed for this study.

4.2.1 Paperwork

Teachers have always had a fair amount of paperwork to complete—from the attendance sheet first thing in the morning and writing out lesson plans to crafting narrative comments on report cards and annotating running records, teachers’ hands never stop moving. In an age when technology sometimes provides more data than we know what to do with, teachers in New York City today are required to keep track of more than their fair share. Teacher bloggers write about taking binders full of assessment materials home with them over weekends and vacations, poring over numbers and entering digits into tables and matrices. They write about doing this without any feedback, guidance, or mentorship. One blogger puts it in simple terms: “There seems to be an endless supply of paper work and no matter how much or little diligence I show, there’s always another item on the to-do list” (ruben_b, 2010, March 8). Another blogger describes the impact of paperwork and data collection on instruction: “It takes so much time to collect all this data that there is precious little time left to do the real work of teaching” (Mr. Talk, 2009, January 1). I am not advocating *no* data collection—I believe knowing our students can only help with instruction; however, when the amount of time being spent on assessment interferes with valuable teaching and learning time, it is necessary to take stock of the policies that dictate those practices.

Teachers have checklists, multiple goals for each student to keep track of, bubble sheets, data binders, portfolios, rubrics, running records, math, science, language arts, and social studies

assessments, and scheduling to address on top of actually teaching. Physically, there isn't enough time in the day to do the work required of teachers today. Moreover, instead of paying teachers more, money is spent on complex database systems like ARIS that lack the ability to dovetail with established modes of assessment (i.e., teachers cannot access results of running records and other classroom generated assessments from the database). ARIS cost the Department of Education $80 million,[13] and the benefits are as yet unclear: "Aris, Acuity, report cards, personal goals—I don't want to know anymore. I don't need an $80 million computer system to know which way the wind blows" (Mr. Talk, 2009, March 21). Several bloggers write about difficulties accessing the system, and a lack of training to help them make sense of it once they were able to gain access.

4.2.2 In the Name of Assessment

Since the authorization of No Child Left Behind in 2001, the increase in high-stakes testing has been felt in schools throughout the nation, but perhaps nowhere as hard as in urban communities (Anyon & Greene, 2007). In cities, and particularly in schools that are labeled failing, children are labeled and sorted by their test score values,[14] and become groups of "1s," "3s," and so on. Teacher bloggers write about the effort to keep track of whose goal is whose during guided reading time, or whether or not it's okay to pair a level-1 reader with a level-3 reader during shared reading time. Bloggers write about high-stakes testing as toxic, actively

[13] When I presented the preliminary data for this study at the 2012 InfoSocial Conference, I did a calculation to compare how many new teachers could have been hired in lieu of purchasing ARIS, to demonstrate the economic impact of such a purchase. At a starting salary of $45,530, $80 million could pay for 1,757 new teachers.
[14] Students are scored on a 1-4 scale: 1=far below grade level; 2=approaching grade level; 3=at grade level; 4=exceeding grade level.

eating away the hopes and dreams of students and teachers: "I have been angered by an over emphasis on testing" (ruben_b, 2011, August 10).

Teachers write about the elimination of music, art, physical education, and even science and social studies from curriculum plans, and describe added learning periods for assessment and testing practice. They write about students as automatons who get through one practice assessment only in time to turn around and take another, and tools purchased by schools and districts to measure success, progress, and student achievement. Sometimes mistakes are made, and once an assessment has been administered, a retest is necessary—usually because the wrong materials were used. Expectations for reports come from all directions, and little time is left over to actually teach:

> I do have a problem with the fact that we seem to spend a few days a month giving the kids test upon test, administered by the city, which takes away time from teaching. There's also not enough time to really look at the results of these assessments and figure out how to use the data, which is time consuming (Miss Malarkey, 2008, September 1).

Beyond the obvious ways in which preparation, paperwork, and assessment create more work for teachers, their work also accelerates when it comes to managing the classroom.

One teacher blogger refers to her school as "Throwing Chairs," and describes a student as "*off the wall and out of control*." Teachers deal with daily outbreaks of fights in the classroom and hallway, and since they are taught not to physically intervene, students often get injured on their watch. And if they do intervene, the teachers themselves often walk away injured as well. Violence among and between students, in whatever form, creates more work for teachers, and detracts from time designated for teaching and learning.

As learning becomes both easier and more complex with the development of technology and modes of collecting data, the nature of teachers' jobs is going to shift; the beginning of that movement is evident in the blogs analyzed for this study. As one blogger explains, it's not about collecting information—it is about the fact that the data does not get used, is conducted in a time-consuming way, or has constantly changing expectations:

> I have no problem with collecting data from my students. I have no problem with worthwhile paperwork. Some paperwork is necessary. I get it. But these portfolios—oh these portfolios!! How can I explain to you these mechanisms of dust collection? Let's see. We've been using them for the last five years. In those five years, the format has changed approximately three times. Each change came complete with hours of recreating labels and tabs and switching out old tables of contents for new table of contents. Each year I have spent HOURS filing student work into these big blank space wasters as they rained buttons, gumballs and pipecleaners from old pre-K projects all over my floor. My Super Colleagues and I have spent HOURS choosing pieces that should be added to the portfolio and creating projects for the sole purpose of eventually putting them in said portfolio (Mrs. Mimi, 2009, April 9).

With each new standardization and high-stakes testing initiative, teachers' paperwork expectations have sky-rocketed, and so have the increasingly demanding conditions of their work.

4.3 Administrative Obstacles

The purpose of this chapter is not to bash principals and assistant principals, or anyone else who may play an administrative role in the life of a school. Instead, the purpose is to highlight realities shared in the blogs analyzed in this study that point to behaviors, characteristics, and practices of some administrators that need to be examined in future policymaking efforts. Whether it's stonewalling an attempt to go to a professional development conference or workshop, preventing materials from being distributed out of fear of teachers wasting them, changing schedules on a daily basis, or interrupting instruction over the loud speaker multiple times a day, administrators provide a number of obstacles to teachers and their daily work.

Teachers write about policies for student feedback changing on a rotating basis—i.e., whether or not it can be provided on a post-it, an index card, in public or privately, in writing or electronically, etc. Administrators appear to prefer quantity over quality, and play a continuous game of catch-up-and-cover-up. They walk around with clipboards, commenting on the neatness of bulletin board displays over the content of the work. Some administrators do not answer emails, rarely check voicemail, and routinely cancel appointments. One blogger writes about waiting for twenty minutes before realizing the principal is not going to show up for her observation: " [the] [p]rincipal nearly came to me yesterday—the secretary even called to tell me to not start my lesson right away—but she apparently had me confused with another new teacher about to be observed, cuz she never came!" (Ms. Flecha, 2009, February 5). The principal comes in, unannounced, another day, and observes the teacher without warning.

Children with behavioral problems are bumped around between classrooms and schools. One teacher blogger writes about her frustration with a student she had a number of disciplinary difficulties with, who has returned to her classroom after leaving the school earlier that year:

> Julio has severe behavior problems at my school since kindergarten [sic]. By the time he gets to me, in second grade, his mother has decided that it's probably the school's fault, so she transfers him to another school. On his first day at his new school, Julio gets suspended. New school pesters and badgers Julio's mother until she finally agrees to have him evaluated. The evaluation recommends that Julio go to a self-contained, 12:1:1 classroom. Julio's mother loses it, refuses the IEP, and dumps him back in my school, where for reasons that are completely beyond me, they decide to put him back in my class (Miss Brave, 2010, February 4).

In some schools, classroom rosters change until well into the winter months. In January of 2010, five months into the school year, another teacher blogger writes:

> In a matter of minutes, I had gotten a new student, jumping my class size to 30 (the largest fifth grade in the school I think, and the only ESL class), and then four of my advanced ELLs were moved out of my class and into general ed classrooms. Two of them went to a class in a different building on "campus," which means we're likely to never see them, and their teacher told me that "Lisa" had been crying the whole first day. I felt horrible, like I had let her down and hadn't fought hard enough for her. It's so unfair to these students to have to leave in the middle of the year, leaving their friends behind. But there was no other option (Ms. Flecha, 2010, January 31).

Teachers are asked to make curriculum maps and calendars, only to find out they will be expected to teach a new, mandated curriculum a week before school begins:

> Now is not the time to tell me this. June was the time to tell me this. June was the time to tell me that the curriculum calendar I *completed and submitted for this school year in June* would not be acceptable. June was the time to hand me a pacing calendar or a binder or something and explain to me what to do with it, send me to some training, give me a book, *something*. June was the time to make it crystal-clear that there was one right way to do things and here is that way (Miss Eyre, 2009, September 22).

Teachers are blamed for changes in schedules for which there was no memo, IEPs to which they have no access, and hoarding materials they desperately need; they face expectations that are moving targets. Schools are experienced as inconsistent places with unpredictable schedules, rosters, and spaces, largely due to obstacles presented by administrators. Based on the blogs analyzed for this study, there are a number of incompetent administrators in the New York City public school system on the one hand; and on the other, there are a number of talented, skilled administrators whose hands are tied by a system set up to fail.

4.4 Adaptive Resistance

In order to mitigate the exhausting and complex effects of the constant uptick in work expectations, teachers adapt to their surroundings in an effort to get their jobs done. As Clandinin & Connelly (2000) put it, "Continuity results because people improvise and adapt, that is, they learn" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 7). Teachers find ways to raise funds for their classrooms, resist change as necessary, and adapt to the circumstances of their daily work in

order to keep moving forward. Sometimes adaptive resistance can appear to be complacency, and in the reverse, can be seen as a site for future change.

Teaching is one of the least predictable jobs—unexpected changes and events occur without a moment's notice—and educators have to be able to respond to whatever may arise. Teacher bloggers write about quietly resisting change for the sake of the children: with new curricular mandates that focus on testing and do not meet the needs of their students, they might close their doors and continue to teach as they had prior to the new mandates: "I refuse to partake in anything that I don't think will be useful" (Miss Malarkey, 2008, August 29). They point to "change for the sake of change" spontaneous reinvention; the analogy that comes to mind is that of a hamster wheel.

Teachers download YouTube videos to sharpen their teaching practice and supplement science and social studies lessons, and they buy carts with wheels when they have to travel up several flights of stairs and between buildings multiple times a day. They make weekly trips to the local public library when the books in their classroom library prove insufficient: "Yesterday I made a trip to the public library to check out mounds of books, and today I made a return trip, and I ended up with the maximum number of books allowed" (Miss Brave, 2009, May 5). As a classroom teacher, I received many new books when New York City implemented a citywide curriculum change in literacy in 2003; however, the books were too difficult for my students. We ended up devising a plan with other teachers to swap books efficiently, because none of us had enough books on low enough levels, and sharing was the only option. Of course, this was a very time-consuming project. Teacher bloggers write about similar circumstances, where they manipulate and create situations to the best of their ability, to push back at the often

unreasonable expectations of their work. The same blogger as above writes the following, in the same post:

> The first problem with this unit is that there are multiple grades doing it at the same time, and there just aren't enough books to go around. Some of my teachers were gracious enough to make sure they had enough books for my group as well as their own and we just intermixed our kids….The second problem with this unit is that, like everything else my school does, it is overambitious and rushed (ibid).

Classroom organization appears as a sub-theme throughout the posts identified under "adaptive resistance." Teachers spend time organizing and architecting their classrooms, largely with materials they provide on their own. I had an artist friend create benches out of planks of wood and milk crates for students to sit on in our meeting area. It was a simple, low-cost assemblage project that took an afternoon and created a better use of space in my classroom, which was full of fifth-graders on the brink of puberty who did not always want to sit on the rug. Throughout the blogs analyzed for this study, there are similar tales of adaptation—teachers bringing in their own furniture, rugs, computers, software, art supplies, and any other material that might enhance instruction.

One blogger reflects on feeling lucky for access to supplementary materials for his classroom: "Today two boxes of books arrived from home. I continue to feel so grateful to have a network of support that stretches all the way back to California. I can always count on books, a little extra money and lots of advice whenever I need it" (ruben_b, 2008, November 12). What about teachers who cannot supply these additional materials? How is the system of public education relying on the cultural and/or material capital of the teachers to keep the system going?

Teachers write about surviving—about keeping their heads up no matter what, flying

under the radar, and CYA[15]-ing as much as possible: “Education be dammed! Make your school look good. That is all that matters” (Pissed Off, 2008, December 2). Stories of being relieved about making it to lunch time without a fight breaking out, jumping through hoops to get students to follow directions, and devising complex systems of classroom rewards and consequences to motivate students are shared throughout the blogs analyzed for this study: “I went to Borders and bought third grade reading workbooks, and tracked down every high interest/low level book I could find (Miss Malarkey, 2008, November 3); and “the reality is that no one really does it during Word Work because no one has time. But no one wants to admit that they don’t have time to do it, because no one wants to get in trouble for not doing it, so no one said anything” (Miss Brave, 2008, November 4). It is overwhelmingly clear from the analysis in this study that despite the public “personal responsibility” discourse that looks to parents and students as part of the problem in public education, that students and parents are *not* to blame for the paradoxical environments in which teachers work: “As I said to a colleague yesterday, the children are always the least of my problems” (Miss Eyre, 2010, January 5). Therefore, the policies that dictate the terms of teachers’ work must be examined and reworked so that teachers can have a chance to do their jobs—they can have a chance to teach.

4.5 Contradictory Policies

Much of the confusion in a school building comes in the form of contradictory policies. While this theme overlaps at times with “administrative obstacles” and “adaptive resistance,” it felt necessary to have it stand alone. Policies that allow for constant interruptions from the loud

[15] To CYA means to *cover your ass*.

speaker and unannounced personnel, an unpredictable schedule, and being placed in teaching assignments outside of license area need to be re-examined.

Teacher bloggers write about policies that contradict instructional approaches. For instance, teachers are often taught as teacher education students to develop "child-centered," "inquiry-based" curricula, and even go to professional development sessions on sharpening these kills once they are teachers, only to be asked to teach scripted, prescribed lessons as part of a packaged curriculum. This may not be the most devastating contradiction when it comes to the educational policy gap—the lack of funds for education is—but it might be the one most easily fixed, if only policymakers would incorporate teachers' expertise in their policymaking processes. One teacher blogger suggests, "Create a meaningful curriculum with the input of teachers (this is done at my school, and you'd be amazed how much teachers want to do justice to the curriculum when they have a hand in creating it)" (Mr. Talk, 2009, June 17).

The anomaly of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is discussed in teachers' blogs, and often remains mysterious. Teachers describe being unable to view the IEPs for their students, which are private but mandated to be seen by the classroom teacher, due to being under a lock to which no one can find the key: "for some reason teachers who have students with IEP's do not have their IEP's. Why is this? Is it some kind of state secret?" (Bronx Teacher, 2008, September 20). Special education policies in general are wild contradictions. For instance, there is little professional development provided for special education teachers on how to provide differentiation to students with varied learning abilities and skills. Students who receive pull-out services often receive them at the same time of day, thus missing the same portion of classroom instructional time each day. Further, students are expected to learn more, but instructional schedules are being pared back to just math and literacy: "Between 30 minutes of SSR, 20

minutes of work study, 90 minutes of literacy, 75 minutes of math, two periods for lunch and prep, that leaves approximately 45 minutes in my day for social studies AND science. Hm [sic]" (ruben_b, 2008, October 2).

The confusion over reporting of data is a major contradiction in and of itself. I recall sitting in faculty meetings as a fifth-grade teacher, poring over charts of numbers, being implored to compare the fourth-grade data of last year's class to the fourth-grade data of this year's class. I understood that the comparison would help us figure out how we're doing according to the state's measure, guided by a standardized test, but it wouldn't help us figure out if students were improving from year to year. And wasn't that the goal? Similarly, a teacher blogger writes about the frustration with data:

> What's frustrating is how little the numbers tell me. We're talking about a test that was taken in January. So the data doesn't really even speak to the students I'm currently teaching. The data doesn't really speak to anything at all, because it isn't dissected in any way to show strengths in needs in specific areas such as vocabulary, drawing conclusions or writing. All I have are numbers, numbers that in many ways contradict what I know to be true about the reading and writing abilities of my students (ruben_b, 2009, May 13).

Finally, the most mind-numbing contradictory sub-theme of contradictory policies I encountered during the analysis of this data was the insistence on keeping up appearances. In other words, schools do whatever they can to score well on School Quality Reviews (SQR), keep numbers of suspensions low, and keep the number of "unsatisfactory"-rated teachers at a bare minimum—all of these actions are accompanied by dollar signs when it comes to funding. However, this act—of flying under the radar by pretending everything is working as it should,

this "serious dog and pony show" (Mrs. Mimi, 2008, November 19), as one blogger puts it—negates the very purpose of things like SQRs:

> I wonder how much time is spent (wasted?) on prepping for a quality review so explicitly. It's sort of like doing full-time test prep with kids: All we're learning is how to talk to quality reviewers, not actually how to improve our teaching. None of what I've learned about the SQR so far, this year or possibly ever, has helped me reach one child more effectively—just like, I suspect, the state ELA exam never actually helped a kid become a better reader or writer (Miss Eyre, 2009, December 21).

The unfortunate and direct result of covering up for the SQR, is that schools are not realistically analyzed, and the system of school evaluation fails as intended: "75% of what we do is a sham to make us look good for Quality Review and does not actually benefit our students" (Miss Brave, 2009, March 27). I am not opposed to standards—I believe there should be benchmarks toward which all schools and classrooms should strive, but if the system is only punitive and not supportive, and negates opportunities to get help, there is no hope for successful future school reform. This issue is a perfect segue into surveillance, and the purpose of observation in sites of teaching and learning.

4.6 Surveillance

The teacher bloggers whose writing was analyzed for this study write about being watched, evaluated, and assessed in punitive ways. Little of this watching gives way to future professional development sessions or workshops, or enhances teachers' professional practice in any way; instead, teachers walk around on invisible egg shells all day, worried about making a

wrong move: “I don’t mind if an administrator wants to come by my classroom and look around and see what we’re doing—I have nothing to hide. What I DO hate is when they come around in a pack with someone or several someones from outside the school, look around the whole room, take a bunch of notes, and leave without talking to me. Tell me that’s not enough to rattle anyone?” (Miss Eyre, 2010, January 5).

Teachers share multiple reports of not only random individuals walking in and out of their classrooms, but feeling watched, feeling surveilled, and feeling inspected, not supported, by administrators:

> I’m sorry to say that at my school, each and every checklist, label and outline is actually scrutinized by administration. And I am even more sorry to say that it sometimes seems they’re looking for quantity over quality—because if you do a really quality lesson that happens to take a little longer so that you don’t meet with a second group that day, you’re not seeing enough kids during one period and it’s curtains for you (Miss Brave, 2008, November 4).

They write about being worried about information getting back to supervisors: “The teacher’s lounge used to be a hub of social activity. Today, it’s a place where you had better watch your words because there’s bound to be someone around who’ll report any negative comments to the administration” (Mr. Talk, 2009, January 15).

Teacher bloggers report a lack of support with student discipline, and tell stories of students ending right back in their classrooms after sending them to administration for assistance after a violent act of misbehavior. If the policy in a school building is to report any student acts requiring discipline to the administration—and it usually is—how can so many acts of disruption go unpunished? One teacher blogger reports, after unsuccessfully seeking disciplinary support

from administration on multiple occasions, and having heard from multiple sources that the principal said: “why should I care what goes on in her classroom? If the child is being a problem only to her, the problem must be her” (Apple, 2010, March 18). Or, in the case of Miss Brave, whose story of Julio was quoted earlier, had a student successfully removed from her classroom—to another school—because of such inappropriate behavior, only to return to her room as if nothing happened. There should be clear-cut policies that make it less difficult to follow protocol when it comes to discipline in a school building. Without a doubt, surveillance of teachers’ work, and the overwhelming feeling that teachers are being watched to get caught, not watched to be supported, pervades the blogs analyzed for this study.

4.7 Lack of Voice

In her ethnography of public school teachers in 1920s New York City, Kate Rousmaniere (1997) found that “nobody” had asked the participants in her study “what it was really like to be a teacher” (p. 8). Today, nearly a century later, the posts of teachers in New York City who write about their experiences in public blogs echo a similar sentiment:

> It was the first time since I’ve started teaching that an administrator asked my professional opinion and then took it into account. Normally, I either (a) do exactly as I’m told because I’m afraid I’ll get into trouble or (b) do certain things sort of in secret so I won’t get in trouble. Because nobody says, “Miss Brave, what do you think most benefits your kids?” (Miss Brave, 2008, November 4).

Lack of voice as a theme reverberated through the digital walls of this study. Though some teacher bloggers use their real-world identity (not in this study—in general), the trend is toward

adopting pseudonyms and carefully leaving little evidence of their "real" lives outside of the classroom. One blogger writes:

> I have to scour each post to see if there are any traces of identity in them….I remain the invisible teacher, nipping at the heels of the higher-ups, hoping that if enough people read blogs like this (and the many fine blogs you'll find on my blogroll) then things might change (Mr. Talk, 2009, May 2).

Based on the blogs in this study, there is an overwhelming lack of voice in New York City K-12 schools. Though Mr. Talk writes about the "Grapevine," a part of the United Federation of Teachers website where teachers used to be able to share anonymous, honest opinions about their schools (Mr. Talk, 2009, February 11), there were no other mentions of opportunities for teachers to express their local knowledge in the blogs that I read. And to add insult to injury, the Grapevine was short-lived, and no longer exists. As a result, teachers find themselves in a bit of a quandary—they are eager to share their expertise and opinions about their daily work, and thus their take on the policies that dictate the terms of their work, but have few spaces in which to share. Whether they live in fear of reprimand of their real-world, teaching identity being linked with their blog, or do not take measures to conceal their identity, it is evident from the growing number of blogs by teachers about their daily work that they need a space in which to talk, engage, and connect. One teacher blogger asks the blogosphere, "Is it worth getting fired for a blog? Is it still possible?....If you blog about your job, have you struggled with this also and how do you see this issue?" (Ms. Flecha, 2008, December 10). And another writes that whenever he writes on his blog, his posts represent his truth—the anonymity of the internet, and blogging in particular, allows a space to find a voice: "when I voice opinions, they are genuine and my own" (Mr. Talk, 2009, May 2).

Bloggers express a feeling of lack of voice on a global level, as demonstrated by Ms. Brave's words above, but also on a local level, from the view of the classroom. The topics of posts depend on the day-to-day experiences of the authors, and thus diverge from one another from blog to blog, but were brought together by notable themes that arose from the stories shared. Woven together according to those themes, the following sections tells the story of how teachers make sense of the often confusing, contradictory, and obstacle-ridden working conditions they navigate on a daily basis, particularly in regard to curriculum.

4.7.1 Curriculum

Bloggers whose posts were analyzed for this study express an overwhelming frustration with a lack of voice around curriculum. Teachers write about policy-enforced curricula that do not meet the needs of their students; scripted curricula that prescribe what and how teachers teach; and inflexible day-to-day instructional goals that are often unrealistic or unobtainable. One blogger writes about the psychological and emotional effect of these practices on her as an educator: "It makes me feel a little under-valued as a professional, like I can't be trusted to plan anything using my own discretion and judgement about what my students need" (Miss Brave, 2008, September 25). Another blogger writes about the difficulty in responding to seemingly arbitrary change:

> A question worth asking, when your supervisor wants to change something that you're not sure needs changing, is why this change might be happening and if the change is happening towards the latest fad….swapping one fad for another as a matter of ongoing policy is not good for anyone (NYC Educator, 2011, July 14).

In my experience as a teacher, the constant change was the most difficult aspect of my job. On a daily basis, the schedule changed, I was given extra students from absent colleagues' classes because the school was unable to hire subs, and teaching and learning was interrupted without warning by announcements, visitors, and violence. No two days were exactly alike, and while this spontaneity was part of what drew me to the teaching profession, it also provided an unstable foundation upon which to build a classroom community of open, honest, and respectful students. I wrote the following of a particularly harrowing day in the spring of 2005:

> Today was a total twilight zone day. I had seven extra students. *SEVEN*. And of course all of my own students were present today. Some were sharing chairs, and every ledge was occupied. Luckily, our school is very old and has enormous rooms, so we didn't suffer from lack of floor space—we just didn't fit in the furniture available. And to make matters worse, our guest students weren't able to get into their classroom for their notebooks and workbooks and other materials that would have alleviated a lot of stress for everyone. But of course nothing ever quite goes according to plan (my journal, 2005, March 21).

The unpredictable nature of schools is one thing, but the absurdity of policies like the one I describe in this entry, which calls for the breaking down of students from absent teachers' classes among those who are present, transform classrooms from potential centers of knowledge production to obstacle-ridden spaces that resemble jungle gyms more than they do places of teaching and learning. Trying to teach is difficult, period. Trying to teach with constant change is nearly impossible.

When it comes to teaching math, New York City public school classroom teachers in the elementary grades use a curriculum called Everyday Mathematics, which is a progressive,

inquiry-based curriculum. In theory, it sounds amazing, but in practice there are problems. I want to add on a personal level that Everyday Math was superior to the run-of-the-mill math textbooks we used prior to the curriculum switch: students in my classroom began thinking about the function of math in smart, inquisitive ways, rather than memorizing math facts by rote. But as several bloggers point out, Everyday Mathematics is not without its logistical and ideological challenges: "We use the Everyday Mathematics curriculum, and while I appreciate its methodology, it can be a little overwhelming to follow. It's like some mad mathematician outlined every single thing that second graders need to know in math and dumped it all together in no discernable order whatsoever. Like, one day we'll do temperature, and the next day, estimating costs" (Miss Brave, 2010, January 5). Indeed, the Everyday Math curriculum spirals rather than builds in a linear fashion, and if you have not received effective professional development, are not accustomed to teaching non-linearly, or need further time to prepare for such involved lessons, it is a difficult program at which to succeed. Another blogger writes that the curriculum is not a good fit for his students: "I have been angered by an over emphasis on testing, and at times frustrated by a curriculum (Everyday Math in particular) that seemed ill-fitted for my students" (ruben_b, 2011, August 10). As Susan Ohanian and other opponents of the one-size-fits-all approach to education policy point out, there needs to be variation, according to the needs of your students. According to this blogger, imposed programs like Everyday Math do not allow enough flexibility for students who require differentiated instruction.

While math and other instructional areas occupy some bloggers' posts, literacy curriculum is the most written-about content area in the blog posts analyzed for this study. A recurring theme around logistical arrangements for the teaching of literacy exists; in other words, bloggers write about their confusion for when and how they are supposed to teach or engage with

certain components of balanced literacy because of time, space, scheduling, and students' needs. For instance, "our coach told me that the kids should not be reading the whole book on the first day of guided reading, but honestly, how do you split a 6-page book with one sentence on each page into three days of guided reading?" (Miss Brave, 2008, September 25). The same blogger points out that the prescription for their lessons do not align with the materials for their practice: "I've been saying for months that the TC[16] units don't align with the lower-level books my students are reading—you can't really practice 'noticing when your characters go on an internal journey' when you're reading D or E or F books and there's one character who's obviously not going on any kind of journey" (Miss Brave, 2008, December 26).

As I was trying to comprehend how to run my reading workshop with the then-brand-new balanced literacy curriculum in New York City in 2004, I wrote the following in my journal about juggling the components of literacy instruction:

> So we are supposed to get around to every student once a week to have a conference, while doing running records, facilitating guided reading, *and* having book clubs? There is only one of me! And I'm lucky if I get to three student conferences in a thirty-minute independent work period. That means in a best-case scenario, 3 students x 5 weekdays = 15 student conferences per week. Who ever decided that 30 conferences per week, on top of all the other expectations teachers have, would be an appropriate number!? Seems pretty arbitrary to me, and it definitely can't work in my classroom. I've been freaking out about the numbers, but other teachers say no one has come around to look at their

[16] "TC" refers to the Teachers College balanced literacy curriculum, based largely on the pedagogy of Lucy Calkins, that was implemented in many schools throughout New York City in the early 2000s as part of the Children First initiative.

> conference books, and some say they straight-up lie. I can't believe I'm more worried about this than what I'm actually teaching (my journal, 2004, October 16).

Together, the above excerpts tell a story about the disconnect between the expectations of carrying out the components of reading in balanced literacy—a daily mini lesson, in which students learn a new skill; independent work, during which students practice their new skill; and guided reading groups, book clubs, and one-on-one conferences with the teacher, which all occur simultaneously during independent work time—and the logistical limitations when you account for changes in schedule, mismatched activities to time and supervision requirements, and inadequate materials leave little time to meet the instructional expectations of the school.

Several bloggers write about the rigidity of the curriculum, and how counterintuitive it feels to have no say in what they teach. Referring to the guidelines of the Teachers College balanced literacy curriculum, one blogger puts it plainly: "This method of doing things means we have approximately zero say in what we're actually teaching our students. (Miss Brave, 2009, March 27)." They also comment on the limitations of a scripted, test-driven curriculum:

> Many schools, including mine, use scripted, remedial programs….The problem with some of these programs, as I've experienced them, is that while they offer some suggestions for differentiation, they're still more or less one size fits all (ruben_b, 2009, October 25.)

> A nearby high school has instructed its English teachers to toss out the literature books and teach only from packets provided by a well known test preparation company (Pissed Off, 2008, December 2).

Another writes about wanting to engage in an online professional conversation with other practitioners, while simultaneously feeling conflicted because of her lack of input in her own curriculum:

> I always enjoy reading about the lessons other teachers share online and wish I could reciprocate but we're given such little latitude in deciding what we teach that I feel like my lessons aren't worth sharing (Ms. Flecha, 2010, April 3).

One blogger writes about asking permission to alter the curriculum schedule slightly:

> One of my colleagues suggested that we ask permission to carry the lesson over to tomorrow as well, and I thought: Why should we need to ask permission to make a judgment call on a lesson that we didn't think went as well as it could have? (Miss Brave, 2009, May 5)

These reflections on the contradictions that arise with the orthodox following of any curriculum beg the question of what and how teachers teach in public schools. Curriculum researchers have long analyzed and examined the successes and failures of various approaches to curriculum, and it is one of the most active areas of education research. Though I cannot speak to the across-the-board quality, ongoing workshops are offered on pedagogy and curriculum in New York City through schools, districts, regions, and the United Federation of Teachers. Further, the development of curriculum is part of most teacher education programs. Why then, at the classroom level, do many teachers—especially those whose lives in the classroom seem driven by policy—end up having no chance to weigh in on how the curriculum is developed? Why

bother teaching how to create and plan curricula in teacher certification programs if that skill is not required at the classroom level? If teachers are not teaching to the needs of the students, what school reform progress has been made?

4.8 Conclusion

The stories shared by teachers in blogs they write about their daily work are not limited to the seven themes identified here; however, the seven discussed help identify intersections within which to suggest future policymaking decisions.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS: Policy Recommendations and Next Steps

> What should policymakers do? How about stop trying to squeeze the life out of education? (Ms. Flecha, 2011, March 3).

As I reflect on the last eight years of graduate school, and the path that led me to this research, I can see many places where I could have chosen another route. And despite the challenges I met along the way, I believe this research is the start of something worth studying. Although the full impact of digital communication on public education and educational research will not be known for years to come, there is something percolating now that I have a feeling we will all look back on and be able to point to with sincerity as a moment when technology changed many things about education, research, and communication. I appreciate the ease with which teaching bloggers bring their audience(s) to the classroom, as well as the messiness with which blogs are architected and connected. Both aspects of this study—order and chaos—worked equally to produce the start of a dialogue that I hope will continue for years to come. In this last chapter, I plan to draw together some loose ends around themes that emerged from the study, make theoretical sense of them, and make recommendations for policy and next steps for research.

One main observation I had as I entered and "hung out" in the teacher blogosphere as a researcher has not yet found its home in this dissertation: that of the evolution of the blog. It seems appropriate to include thoughts on the evolution of a New York City teacher blog—both anatomical and theoretical—in the conclusion. As I read through the blogs, I noticed that most

teacher bloggers would start off timidly, easing their way into the blogosphere gently, with lots of minute, classroom-focused observation and less critical analysis. Over time, many of the bloggers expanded their analysis of daily work from the perspective of the classroom to that of the global political economy. Over time, teacher bloggers seem to become more critical, and as their blogs age, move gradually from making statements, primarily about their own classroom and school, to drawing connections between larger social, economic, political, and economic structures in society and the system of public education. It would be interesting to see if this is a result of their interaction with each other, of the political-historical moment, or if the phenomenon is caused by another unidentified variable. I argue that the ability of blogs to publicize the hidden transcript increases the opportunity for teacher bloggers to make connections—between each other, as well as between the daily obstacles they encounter in the classroom and the forces in society that cause those obstacles. Their ability to make these connections in the blogosphere help teachers' voices—which, with a hidden transcript analysis, have the ability to bring about change in educational policymaking—grow in visibility and audibility.

This dissertation argues that without this hidden transcript, sustainable, systemic, long-lasting policy changes in education will never be possible; teachers' input in educational policymaking is crucial to its success. Considering practitioner input in policymaking within the theoretical framework outlined in the second chapter, it becomes clear how the current paradigm for policymaking might shift and become more relevant and useful. Given that we have more ways to see and hear now than ever before, it is our responsibility as researchers, educators, and activists to make connections in new, innovative, and essential ways.

5.1 Policy Recommendations

Public school policy is a complex web of forces that act undemocratically on what is valued as a democratic system. It provides neoliberalism with a project: the privatization of public schooling. By citing public schools as failures—particularly those in poor, urban areas—and building alternatives (namely, charter schools) under the guise of "school choice," while reforming the public schools to no avail, the neoliberal project creates a political spectacle in education that absolves policymakers from creating public educational policy that achieves its goals. By creating consistent policy change that results in little improvement in student achievement, teachers' working conditions, or school quality, policymakers are not attending to the true conditions of teacher practice in which their policies are enacted. As this dissertation has demonstrated, teachers' expertise and local knowledge are more readily available than ever, and scholars, practitioners, and policymakers are able to connect, engage, and learn via blogs in ways our counterparts a century ago could not. Making the hidden transcript of teaching in an urban school public by publishing their stories in the blogosphere, teacher bloggers have created a method for speaking truth back to the neoliberal project in a pragmatic way. With that in mind, the following sections address each theme by suggesting ways to include teachers' local knowledge, expertise, and daily working conditions in future educational policymaking efforts.

5.1.1 Lack of Resources / Funding / Training

Viewing a lack of funding, resources, and training in urban public schools through a political economy of education lens, it becomes clear that no matter the amount of education policy reform, change is unlikely. Unless public policies around education—wage and earnings policies, transportation policies, etc.—change, too, educational policy changes will have little

effect on the educational policy-practice gap. In the meantime, considering the following suggestions might make better use of the resources currently available:

- Create a system of checks and balances that works. In other words, if the UFT contract, that calls on schools to provide instructional materials, is not enforced, and materials that arrive at classrooms' doors are not appropriate for the learning needs of the students inside, the system should not accept it as "the way things are," but rather, initiate a protocol to enforce policies in a fair, appropriate manner. For the lucky few public school teachers who receive resources in abundance, it is not enough to just send materials to classrooms—the materials need to be matched with the learners who will be using them.
- Align the allocation of funds and resources for copying purposes with a more appropriate capacity, and/or consider copies required of a specific policy when it trickles down to the classroom. If all 3rd-grade general education students are required to do running records once a month, consider, as part of the creation of that requirement, how teachers might conduct running records without hundreds of sheets of copying. The phenomenal amount of paper and ink wasted inside the walls of school buildings is something policymakers likely never consider.

5.1.2 Escalation of Work Load

The neoliberal forces acting on public education undergird the escalation of teachers' work load. With constant innovation and policy change—which in turn creates more work for teachers—public education has become a political spectacle. In order to counteract the further increase in work expectations, we can start with the following:

- Take stock of the instructional policies already in place before making a grand-sweeping

change that follows orthodox rules. For instance, if an instructional model for literacy calls for guided reading to occur simultaneously with book clubs, then consider the purpose of both before creating mandates. In reality, doing both guided reading and book clubs at the same time can be redundant and chaotic. There needs to be purpose with every new innovation or practice implementation: "heaping more on an already over-burdened workforce is not the smartest solution. It's simply the easiest" (Ms. Flecha, 2011, December 3).

- Avoid anything that takes a one-size-fits-all approach; the ideology is antiquated and the antithesis of what is being taught in many teacher education courses. Most importantly, it creates more work with fewer results and teachers.

5.1.3 Administrative Obstacles

Administrative obstacles, created in large part by the political economy of education, pose a challenge to teachers, standing directly between them and their work. Though administrative obstacles will continue to occur as long as education is viewed as its own system of public policy, the following logistical adaptations can be implemented via local policy:

- Make a practice of not placing people out of their license area—for teaching assignments *and* for emergency substitutes.
- Come up with a long-term plan that avoids splitting the students of absent teachers' classes among those who are present.
- Create a system of scheduling and personnel that meets the needs of individual schools. No school should be required to implement mass preps on a routine basis.

5.1.4 Adaptive Resistance

The hidden transcript of teachers' work lies in adaptive resistance. By resisting, adapting to, rejecting, and avoiding policy, teachers find a way to survive increasingly demanding working conditions. If teachers' hidden transcript becomes public, perhaps we can hope for sustainable policy changes:

- Invite teachers' input when creating policies like extended time as part of the collective bargaining agreement. Though a potentially well-intentioned policy, extended time was created as a way to 1) extend the school year, and 2) provide additional small-group instruction to students. The idea sounds great on paper but in reality is chaotic and does very little to enhance instruction.
- Investigate beneath the surface of schools: don't just base how they're doing on the School Quality Review, which does not provide a full picture of the inner workings of a school, what is working and what is not. Ideally, the entire culture of school assessment would change, and neither students nor schools would be graded on performance under pressure.

5.1.5 Contradictory Policies

Contradictory policies abound throughout public schools systems, many serving as part of the political spectacle of schooling. Part of what we can do as teacher educators, scholars, and practitioners is work toward linking institutions of teacher certification with policymakers and schools, in an effort to align, for instance, curriculum policy with teacher education:

- Align teacher education programs with spaces of teaching and learning—particularly for students in alternative certification programs, such as Teacher for America and the New

York City Teaching Fellows.

- Adopt a center-of-pedagogy approach to teacher education and professional development, offering opportunities for renewed education, knowledge, and understanding at various points throughout the teaching career: “a center of pedagogy can be expected to unite the tripartite—the faculty in education, faculty in the arts and sciences, and teaching and administrative faculty in the schools—in accepting as their shared work the simultaneous renewal of teacher education and public schooling” (Patterson, Michelli, & Pacheco, 1999, p.71).

5.1.6 Surveillance

Teacher bloggers’ reports of feeling watched with little positive outcome conveys an unwelcoming evaluative atmosphere. Teachers have the sense they are being surveilled—not to help and support them professionally, but to prey on what they are doing wrong. Indeed, this, too, is part of the neoliberal project: if teachers succeeded at helping their students achieve across the board, public education, too, would succeed. If the rhetoric of evaluation in public education began to shift toward a more supportive environment, perhaps teachers would feel more supported and less punished:

- One blogger suggests, “How about we create ‘observation teams’ of highly qualified teachers to observe teachers outside their own schools instead of admins?” (Mr. Talk, 2009, June 17). What a great idea! The observations inside schools are often one-sided, and top-down. What about having “learning walks” or observations of neighbor teachers at other schools, of administrators teaching lessons, etc.?
- There is nothing wrong with watching what is happening inside classrooms. Indeed, they

are spaces of learning, and teachers learn by doing. However, teachers seldom know why they are being watched, or what the purpose of an observation team or drop-in group of administrators with clipboards might be. Cluing teachers in, and supporting them, instead of playing "gotcha," would be a reasonable shift in the expectations of evaluative policy in education.

5.1.7 Lack of Voice

Teachers' lack of voice has been historically caused by various forces acting on the institution of public education—namely, the isolation of the teaching profession, and a lack of forums in which to connect. The stories of teachers' lives inside their classrooms that have emerged on the internet are worth listening to. Prior to online communication, these narratives appeared in letters, journal entries, on the phone, or during in-person conversations; they were ephemeral and fleeting, and harder for researchers to capture. Today, the inability to hear teacher input no longer exists. Within schools, policies that would help facilitate the incorporation of teachers' voices in policymaking could include:

- Establishing a clear system of communication between all individuals who service the same student is necessary, particularly for students who receive push-in or pull-out services. If a student is being pulled out of math every day to receive speech services, the solution to another problem is creating a problem in and of itself.
- "Create a meaningful curriculum with the input of teachers" (Mr. Talk, 2009, June 17). By having a say in what is being taught, teachers demonstrate ownership, care, and respect of the curriculum. Though it is many years ago now, and I have long since lost the periodical that described the program, I once read about a school in the Midwest that

has teachers teach students four days a week, and plan one day per week. On the day when teachers plan, students receive further enrichment activities. That sounds like an amazing planning model to this former teacher!

There are many policy implications of this research—at the federal, state, *and* local levels, although the majority of what teacher bloggers write about from the view of the classroom involves school-based policies. As a rule of thumb, schools are not run as democracies, but perhaps it is time we started thinking of them as such. The move toward schooling as a business, and thus following the business model, will not serve public education well in the long run. As this teacher blogger puts it simply, we know what we need to do: "We need to be smart, which means doing what we know will work. We need to reduce class size, pay teachers well, involve parents, and create safe, nurturing school communities" (Mr. Talk, 2009, February 15).

5.2 Next Steps

At the conclusion of this study, there are many new questions that have begun to percolate about online research, and what we can learn about teachers lives and working conditions by investigating in digital spaces. Future research considerations would include replicating, amending, and expanding upon this study, as well as investigating further into online research in educational policy. The following ideas and questions for future research have come up in the course of writing this dissertation:

- Would it be feasible to replicate this study in multiple urban centers throughout the United States, and perhaps the world? What might be gained from a longitudinal

investigation of teachers' online blogs about their daily work? What policy implications could there be from following the lives of teachers online across geographic regions?

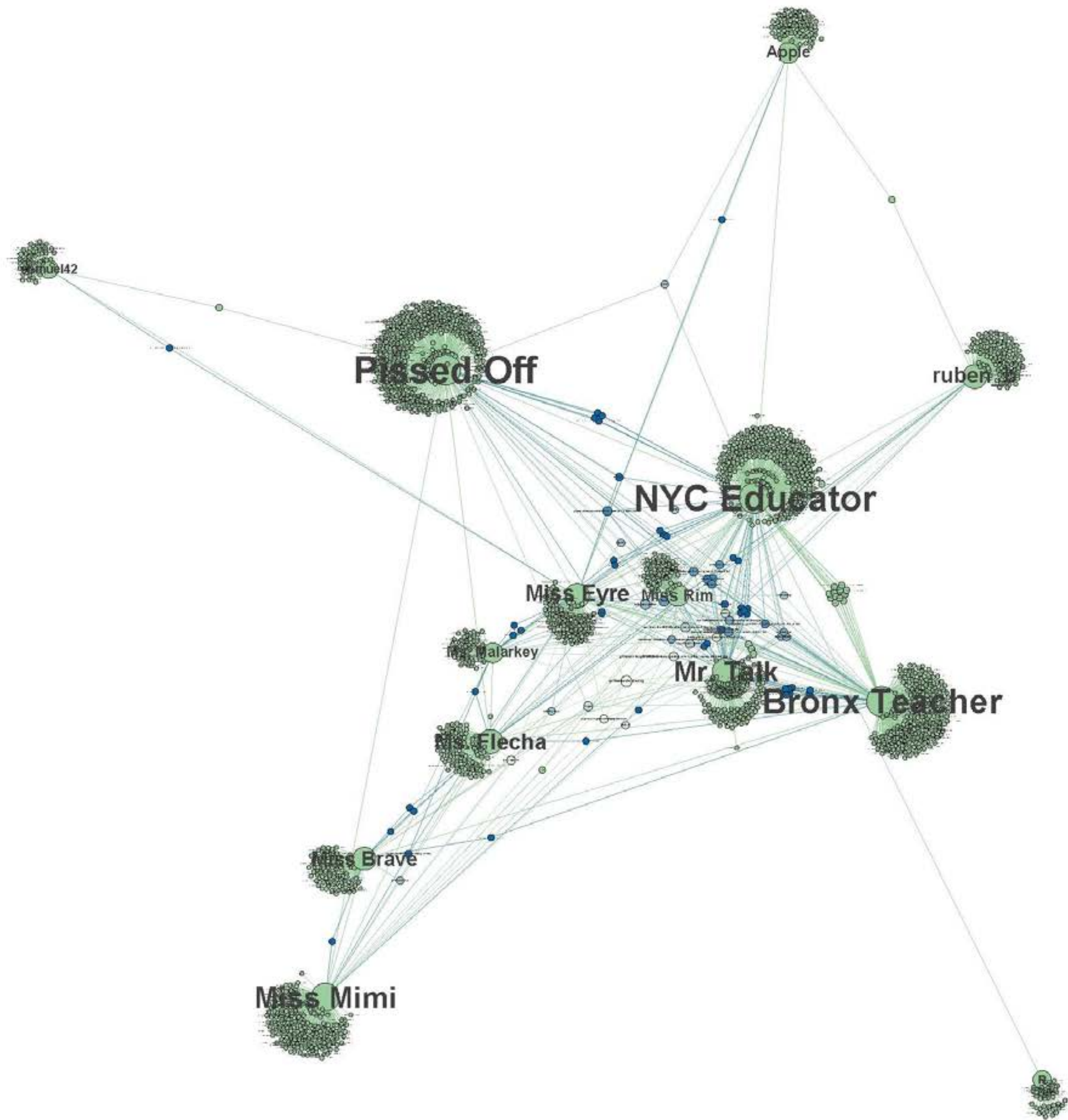
- What technological considerations might need to be made for future research of this kind? I met a number of time-consuming obstacles along the way, due to my lack of digital database knowledge and aggregation skills. I was able to construct and utilize a simple tool for the purposes of this study, but building a program to aggregate information in a less time-consuming manner would be ideal.
- Since none of the bloggers responded to contact, how might I amend my approach next time? What does their collective lack of response say about blogging as a communication medium when you are a researcher, not necessarily a participant "in the field" (even if you once were)?
- How might a research study like this be applied to Facebook updates or in the Twitterverse? What other digital spaces could reveal the hidden transcript of teachers, in an effort to effect future policymaking decisions?

Sandra Stein suggests that "the culture of policy is best examined through systematic attention to the language and behaviors of those individuals performing the policy process….For the study of education policies, two important sites are worthy of consideration: Congress and classrooms" (Stein, p. 6). Plenty of attention has been paid toward governmental legislation of education; let us now turn our attention as researchers to the classroom. I believe by staying in touch with what teachers do every day will yield the most successful changes in future educational policymaking. Blogs and other online communication makes that possible.

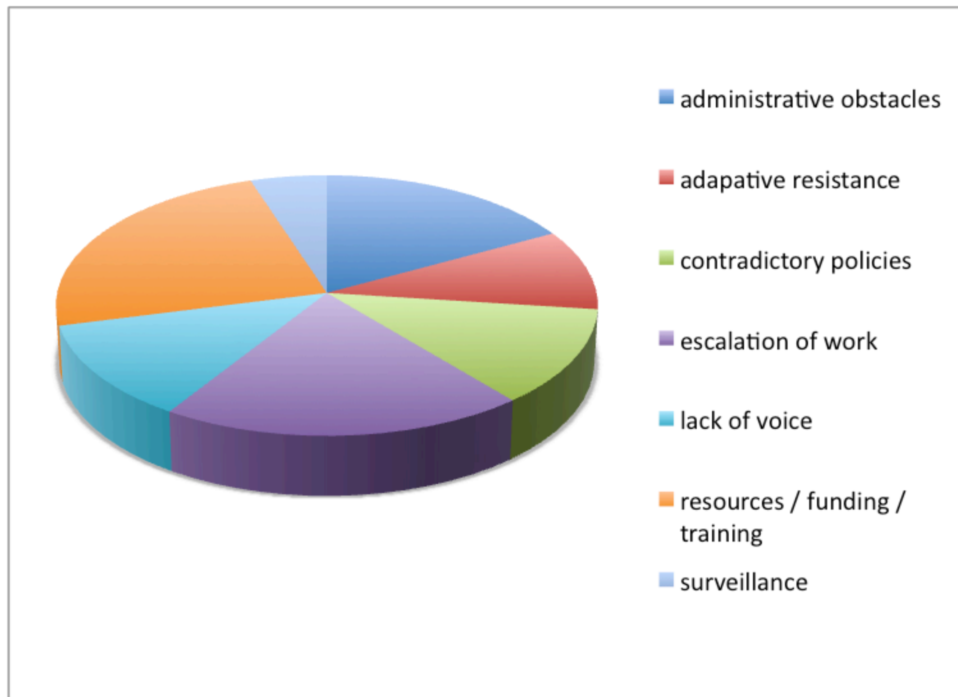
5.3 Conclusion

This dissertation project began as a method for examining the gap between educational policy and practice in urban public schools, and concludes with suggestions for how to do so via blogs written by teachers. As I stated in the Introduction, the story told in this dissertation is only the beginning of the journey. I believe that in years to come, we will see more and more attention paid toward research in online spaces, and though the power of blogs may someday be usurped by another digital genre, just as Friendster and Myspace gave way to Facebook in the social networking world, the foundation has been laid upon which to grow future research and inquiry. As one teacher blogger wisely writes, "the system is broken. The only ones who can save it are the union and the teachers" (Bronx Teacher, 2008, August 29). I would amend this only by adding that educational researchers, teacher educators, parents, and students, too, can also take part in the project of saving public education, and together, we might be able to effect long-lasting change that honors, respects, and supports the hard work of teachers.

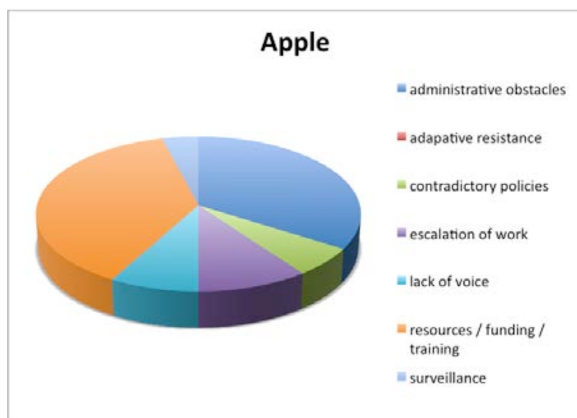
Appendix A: Visual Display of Blogs as a Network

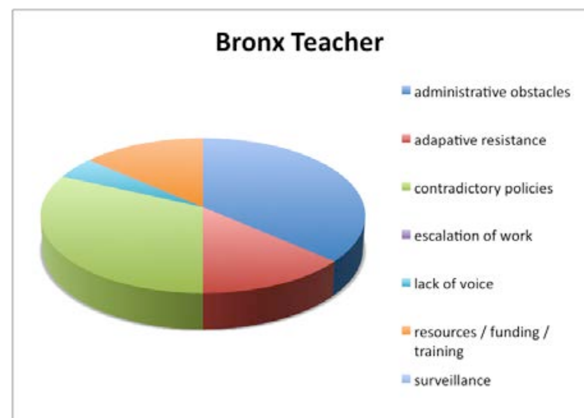


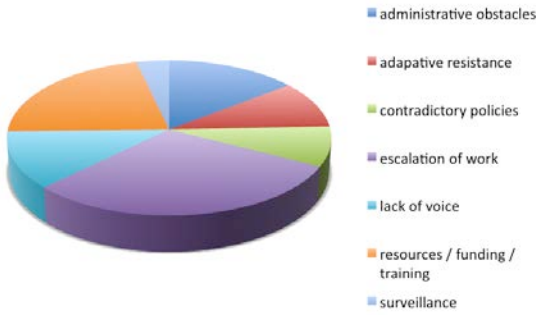
Appendix B: Visual Display of Data by Blog

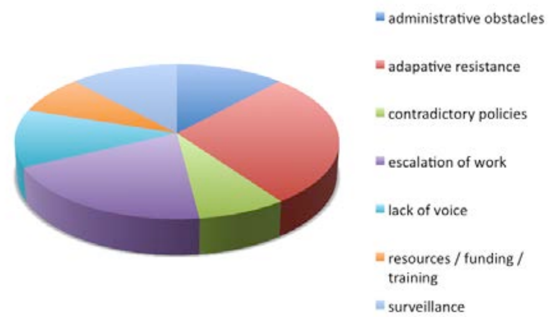


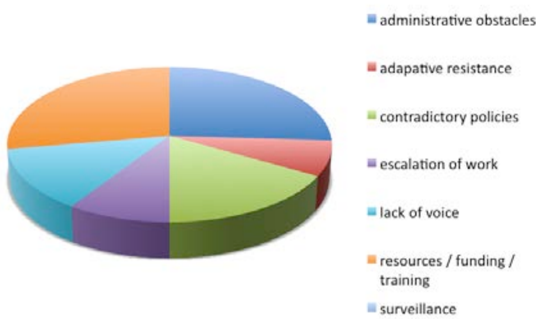
Broken down *across* all fourteen blogs, the seven emergent themes distribute as above (same chart as appears in the fourth chapter). Comparatively, the following fourteen pie charts display how the same seven themes distribute *within* each blog.

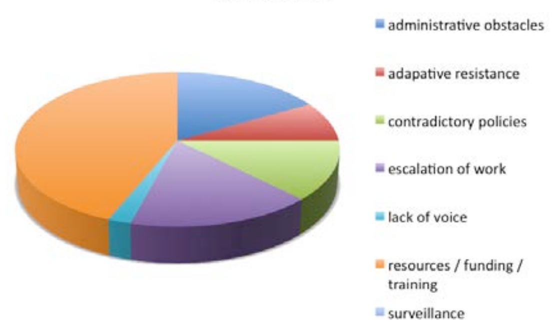


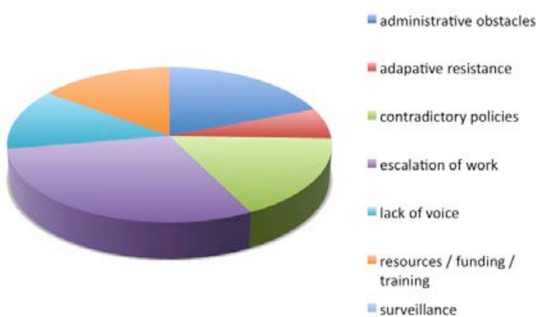


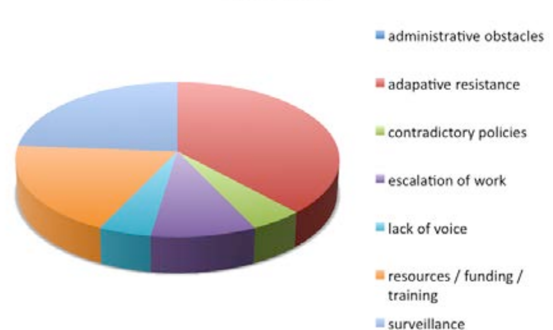

Miss Brave
administrative obstacles
adapative resistance
contradictory policies
escalation of work
lack of voice
resources / funding / training
surveillance

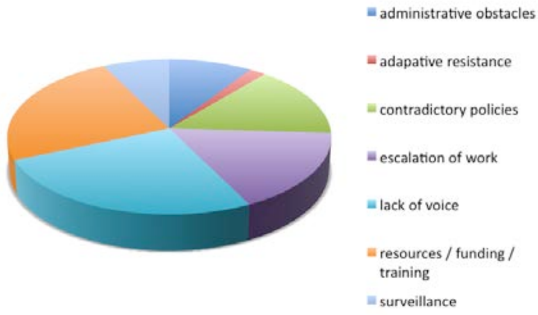

Miss Malarkey
administrative obstacles
adapative resistance
contradictory policies
escalation of work
lack of voice
resources / funding / training
surveillance

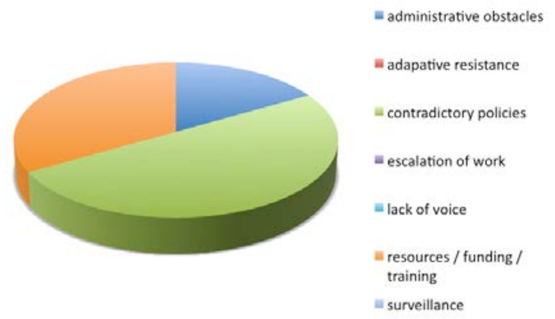

Miss Eyre
administrative obstacles
adapative resistance
contradictory policies
escalation of work
lack of voice
resources / funding / training
surveillance

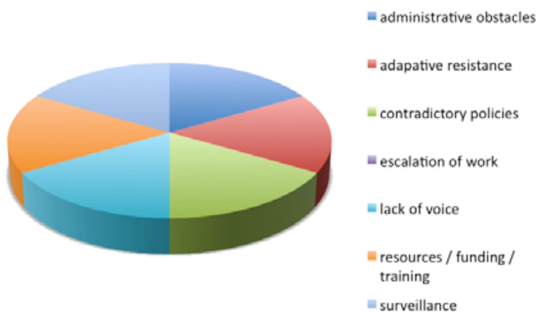

Mrs. Mimi
administrative obstacles
adapative resistance
contradictory policies
escalation of work
lack of voice
resources / funding / training
surveillance

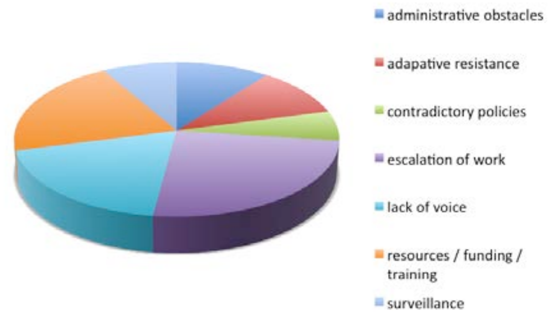

Ms. Flecha
administrative obstacles
adapative resistance
contradictory policies
escalation of work
lack of voice
resources / funding / training
surveillance

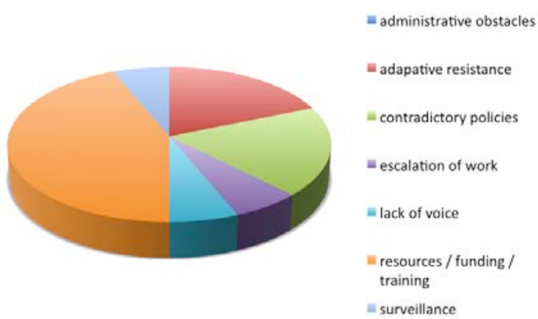

Miss Rim
administrative obstacles
adapative resistance
contradictory policies
escalation of work
lack of voice
resources / funding / training
surveillance

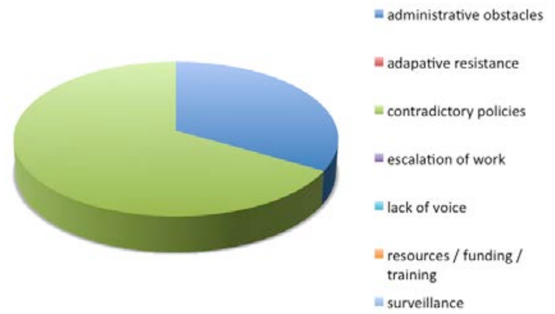

Mr. Talk
administrative obstacles
adapative resistance
contradictory policies
escalation of work
lack of voice
resources / funding / training
surveillance


R
administrative obstacles
adapative resistance
contradictory policies
escalation of work
lack of voice
resources / funding / training
surveillance


New York City Educator
administrative obstacles
adapative resistance
contradictory policies
escalation of work
lack of voice
resources / funding / training
surveillance


ruben_b
administrative obstacles
adapative resistance
contradictory policies
escalation of work
lack of voice
resources / funding / training
surveillance


Pissed Off
administrative obstacles
adapative resistance
contradictory policies
escalation of work
lack of voice
resources / funding / training
surveillance


shmuel42
administrative obstacles
adapative resistance
contradictory policies
escalation of work
lack of voice
resources / funding / training
surveillance

Appendix C: Additional Thematic Narratives

As part of my analysis, I coded sections of blogs according to the seven themes that emerged from my data. The following contains select additional text from my data collection that was not included in the narrative of my dissertation, but offers further insight.

ADMINISTRATIVE OBSTACLES

Over the past four years I've gained a greater appreciation for the importance of school leaders in interpreting education policy and carrying it out effectively. With different supervisors during those formative years, I'm not sure I would have experienced those frustrations as acutely (Is Our Children Learning, http://www.bronxteach.com/2011/08/my-new-classroom.html)

To add insult to injury, the literacy coach (who has never watched either of us teach a lesson) has been bringing us to other classrooms to observe the "structure of the mini lesson," which is something we both know we can recite in our sleep. (Miss Brave, http://missbrave.blogspot.com/2011/01/friends-i-am-having-rough-year.html)

You put your students' names on everything in your room only to find out that some of them are spelled wrong on your class list. Or some of them moved away and you're getting three more instead (Miss Brave, http://missbrave.blogspot.com/2010/09/10-things-i-wish-teacher-had-told-me.html)

It is also difficult when you are the teacher held up as the example for others to follow (My Life Untranslated, http://leafturned.wordpress.com/2010/03/14/torture-devices/)

And then, yesterday morning, I got a letter in my box thanking me for the great workshop I gave, signed by the principal. I just keep wondering–does he know that whoever was supposed to run the workshop never showed? Who was that person anyway? Does he realize I just winged it, with no plan and no idea of what I was going to do? (NYC Educator, http://nyceducator.com/2010/02/in-which-your-humble-correspondent.html)

In my itty-bitty classroom, which is already overcrowded as it is with 27 students, you would like to invite me to invite 27 more students? And you would like to invite me and these 54 students, who are now crammed into my teeny-tiny overheated classroom, to play some sort of "math game/activity"? (Miss Brave, http://missbrave.blogspot.com/2010/02/100-days.html)

Then there's the frustration with my administration's seeming desire to want to just dump all these kids in my class without any thought as to the effect it will have on them or me. They expect me to be able to do all this and I don't know if I should feel appreciated, used, or unimportant (aka "these kids won't score high on the tests, so who cares what class they are in"). (My Life Untranslated, http://leafturned.wordpress.com/2009/11/18/what-i-like-to-call-the-biggest-conundrum-that-will-never-be-solved/)

During the last week of school I asked my principal if she had any idea how many classes I might be teaching next year and whether or not she would need me teaching full time or if she

would leave technology administrative periods in my schedule. Since scheduling was not yet (started) complete, she screamed at me to expect 12 classes twice a week. Ok, so 24 teaching periods, approximately 350 students. Good to know. (An Apple A Day, http://apppleaday.blogspot.com/2009/09/kickoff-to-0910.html)

I looked up and saw an assistant principal standing a few feet away in the hall, watching the whole thing. Oh good, I thought with some relief, she'll help me handle the situation, since this is a student she's very familiar with and I've never dealt with him before. She watched the entire situation unfold, did nothing, said nothing, and walked away. (Miss Brave, http://missbrave.blogspot.com/2009/06/in-past-8-days-of-school.html)

He was placed in my self-contained ESL class because, as I was told, "he hasn't been tested yet." This meant he had not yet been given an English proficiency test called the LAB-R. This test is only given – excuse me is *supposed to only be given* to students who speak a different language at home. There is a sheet the parents fill out to figure this out. And my new student only speaks English at home, as listed on this paper! They teach school in English in Saipan and are a US Commonwealth. (My Life Untranslated, http://leafturned.wordpress.com/2009/03/31/brown-skin-foreign-birth-automatically-means-ell)

Last I checked these IEP's are federally mandated and there is no wriggle room for interpretation of what an IEP mandate (South Bronx School, http://www.southbronxschool.com/2008/09/federal-law-being-broken.html)

The whole PD-component felt thrown together for convenience, not purpose (Unbalanced Literacy, http://missmalarkey.blogspot.com/2008/08/staph-development-its-catching.html)

ADAPTIVE RESISTANCE

Unfortunately, I often call parents from my cell phone, just because it's more convenient to make a call from the privacy of my classroom, where I don't have a phone (Miss Brave, http://missbrave.blogspot.com/2011/01/i-hate-calling-parents.html).

This year I managed to get the student to the nurse as soon as he told me he wasn't feeling well. When he came back because the nurse couldn't get his mom on the phone, I sat him down with a plastic bag. By the time things erupted, the damage was minimal (Is Our Children Learning, http://www.bronxteach.com/2011/01/unfortunate-tradition.html).

I also like to download YouTube videos as a way to get around the fact that NYC schools block it. I use the Firefox Add-On, Better YouTube. I then save them to my iPod and just hook it up to a TV. If you save the videos to a thumb drive instead, you can then save them onto the school computers, allowing students to watch them independently (My Life Untranslated, http://leafturned.wordpress.com/2010/02/21/understanding-video-in-classroom-made-easier/).

Many years ago I had a similar problem with a teacher who would not give my class chairs. I solved that problem also. I made sure I arrived much earlier than he did and emptied the room before he arrived! He never even knew the chairs were missing. (http://pissedoffteeacher.blogspot.com/2008/11/its-mine.html)

My students need 18 sets of leveled readers. The cost of this proposal is $645, which includes shipping for any materials requested and fulfillment (Is Our Children Learning, http://www.bronxteach.com/2008/10/help-upgrade-my-classroom-library.html).

Halfway through last year I also began using an online grading program, a huge time-saver. No more number-crunching at report card time- it was all done for me (Unbalanced Literacy, http://missmalarkey.blogspot.com/2008/08/advice-for-new-teachers.html)

Mr. Brave has helped me grade math tests, hang backing paper in my classroom and transport school supplies (Miss Brave, http://missbrave.blogspot.com/2010/02/what-about-mr-brave.html]).

I'm set for the year in terms of almost every classroom need, and it's because of my students' parents (Is Our Children Learning, http://www.bronxteach.com/2008/09/school-supplies.html)

I'm out for PD one day this week, which is nice, even if setting up for a substitute is a hassle. I know what work I plan to leave for the kids already, anyway. And then next week we have a three-day weekend. I think I can make it to winter recess. Maybe. (Miss Eyre, http://themortonschool.blogspot.com/2010/01/another-perfectly-good-sunday-ruined.html)

You were right. I changed. The job forces you to do things you wouldn't ordinarily do (Pissed Off Teacher, http://pissedoffteeacher.blogspot.com/2008/12/hula-reads-this-blog.html).

I know a woman who taught in a bathroom for years, and who was pictured doing so in the New York Times (NYC Educator, http://nyceducator.com/2008/09/this-child-was-left-behind.html).

I give them $6.00 a day (fake money) and they can use it to go to the bathroom or use the electric sharpener, but if they save $15.00 a week they get a sticker, and if they save $16.00 and more, they get to go to my treasure box, etc… (My Life Untranslated, http://leafturned.wordpress.com/2008/09/26/loving-my-supervisor-right-now/).

CONTRADICTORY POLICIES

Tweed has known since NOVEMBER that this class has been out of compliance! Up until February 13th, the class had 13 special ed. students and 9 general ed. students. Since February 23rd, the class has 14 general ed. students, and 13 special ed. students. And, now get this, is two over the limit for 2nd grade. But you ask, what about a class size grievance? Can't be done because the five students that were added have not been put on the official class roster (South Bronx School, http://www.southbronxschool.com/2009/04/does-sci-believe-in-children-first.html)

We have no word on how to grade our latest TC assessments (which are piling up like hotcakes in my office) (Miss Brave, http://missbrave.blogspot.com/2008/10/bugging-out.html)

Yesterday, a boy in the second grade was moved from his class to the second grade CTT class that has previously been mentioned in this blog as being out of compliance. For those who forget, this CTT class must have a 60/40 ratio of general ed to special ed. The class as of this past

Monday was still 15 special ed. and 6 general ed. The reasoning is if they keep the fifteen special ed. kids in the CTT class all they have to do is fill it up with general ed. kids until they are in compliance. Makes sense, right? (South Bronx School, http://www.southbronxschool.com/2009/01/first-ever-children-first-contest-win.html)

Is it any wonder that principals, who receive significant merit pay, urge us to pass everyone no matter what? (NYC Educator, http://nyceducator.com/2008/09/feeling-nostalgic-bring-back-merit-pay.html)

It is borderline criminal that the school I am co located with places 4, 5, 6 year old students with mental retardation (intellectual disability, whatever they're calling it these days) who need PT to walk up and down 4 flights of stairs several times daily. I noticed it before, but hobbling around after surgery really made me empathize. And I had a dr.'s note excusing me from walking my kids to lunch/gym and fire drills (Miss Rim, http://missrimbus.blogspot.com/2011/12/miscellany-of-comments-before-i-get.html)

Teaching a room full of kids of various levels and believing in a constructivist, social-learning approach sounds awesome on paper and I'm sure there are teachers who have mastered the balance between order/chaos, and freedom/control (and who wouldn't characterize the dichotomy that way) but I often feel like someone has unleashed 29 spinning tops all over my room and I have to keep them going (My Life Untranslated, http://leafturned.wordpress.com/2009/12/05/29-spinning-tops/)

There was an onslaught of commentary from them about a particularly dispiriting day at work. What a shame, coming from such wonderful people and teachers. I can only hope that they, too, are able to resist the crushes to self-efficacy that unwarranted, baseless, and continuous change can bring. (NYC Educator, http://nyceducator.com/2011/06/sometimes-there-are-good-reasons-for.html)

What's most frustrating is how little the numbers tell me. We're talking about a test that was taken in January. So the data doesn't really even speak to the students I'm currently teaching. The data doesn't really speak to anything at all, because it isn't dissected in any way to show strengths in needs in specific areas such as vocabulary, drawing conclusions or writing. All I have are numbers, numbers that in many ways contradict what I know to be true about the reading and writing abilities of my students. (Is Our Children Learning, http://www.bronxteach.com/2009/05/and-results-are.html)

Those of us teaching with classroom libraries constituting several hundred volumes have a daunting task: sorting and storing books for the new school year. If your school, like mine, is used for summer school, all of these materials must be secured so that they aren't "borrowed" during the summer. If you don't want to spend September in any more pain than you have to, you want to assure that things are put away with some sense of rhyme and reason so that unpacking is not terribly daunting when you come back for the fall (Miss Eyre, http://themortonschool.blogspot.com/2010/06/on-foolishness-of-certain-memos.html)

And the data comes in booklets that are supposed to be re-used with each student so I can't assess anyone because I don't have those booklets. (Miss Brave, http://missbrave.blogspot.com/2008/11/confirmed-testing-teaching.html)

How bad does it need to be, Sir Bloomberg? (My Life Untranslated, http://leafturned.wordpress.com/2010/02/25/this-isnt-snow-day-worthy/)

I have a beef with morning announcements. They are tedious, repetitive, rarely informative, and waste valuable instructional time. You may as well cut your 45-minute first period lesson plan down to 40 minutes or less because of morning announcements. I pride myself on starting first period precisely on time, and it irks me that I'm usually well into my lesson when I have to stop myself and the kids to listen to a bunch of prattle. (Miss Eyre, http://themortonschool.blogspot.com/2009/12/good-morning-boys-and-girls.html)

ESCALATION OF WORK

Not more than a week later, everything was broken, missing, or defaced. My fellow second grade teachers and I made a mutual decision to stop giving our students post-its to jot on, because inevitably we would find post-its scattered all over the floor, ripped up into pieces, inscribed with inappropriate language or being made into flip books. Some of my students used markers to draw on pencils, on our desk caddies, on the floor. (Miss Brave, http://missbrave.blogspot.com/2010/12/if-you-read-this-blog-regularly-you.html)

My first class had taken me two hours, and I ended up with wildly disparate goals for all my students and began to freak out. I figured that at that rate, it would take me ten hours to do all my

classes and I would end up with 150 goals, and that was just for the month of January. But once I got rolling, it took about three and a half hours to do all my classes (plus that first class, which I re-did), and although there are a lot of different goals, at least some of them do overlap. (Miss Brave, http://missbrave.blogspot.com/2008/12/accomplishing-my-goals.html)

I do tend to be more like a trauma doctor in an ER, trying to stop sudden bleeds and breaks without a long-term approach or plan… "Oh *more* paperwork? And now I need to access the Acuity website and plan and differentiate from *that* information? Ok. Oh, I have to teach my kids all about Historical Non Fiction, Poetry, Biography, Main Idea and details, etc, in a matter of weeks so they are ready for the ELA? Even though most did not know the meaning of 'main'? Okaaaay." (My Life Untranslated, http://leafturned.wordpress.com/2008/12/11/milk-shingles-and-nightmares/)

A recurring theme of this school year has been the large gaps in fundamentals. Whether it's students who don't know the sounds of the alphabet or how to quickly solve single digit addition and subtraction problems (Is Our Children Learning, http://www.bronxteach.com/2009/10/boiling-point.html)

And while I know there does have to be a standard for each grade that each child needs to meet, but these standards simply do not take into account that these students are learning entirely in their second language and are, literally, having to work twice as hard — learning not just the content or reading strategies and approaches of "good readers", but they're learning new language every day so they even can learn that content fully and deeply. How do you fairly and objectively assess and grade those students that gives recognition to this, as opposed to ignoring it? (My Life Untranslated, http://leafturned.wordpress.com/2008/11/15/the-straight-jacket-of-report-cards/)

In one class, I had sixth graders whose reading levels ranged from second grade (barely) to seventh grade. I had the equivalent of an entire special needs class in a regular ed class, without the benefit of a para. Fortunately, another teacher who works with the class is wonderful and began the referral process. (Unbalanced Literacy, http://missmalarkey.blogspot.com/2008/11/too-much-of-nothing.html)

I spent the afternoon readying my classroom for tomorrow's ELA exam. That meant covering or taking down a dozen or so charts for strategies like making predictions, using non-fiction text features and understanding cause and effect. I couldn't stop there however. I needed to eliminate any thing that could be used for help on the ELA exam. So, next came down the class rules, the writing process, my science, social studies and math word walls, directions for early finishers, and how to make an "I statement" (Is Our Children Learning, http://www.bronxteach.com/2009/01/cover-up.html)

There are now 24 days left until the NYS ELA exam. We had a practice test last week and we have three days of practice exams this week. It's a little hard not to feel the crunch, and it's even tougher to keep the kids from feeling it. (Is Our Children Learning, http://www.bronxteach.com/2008/11/test-anxiety.html)

Since the beginning of June, Julio has been *off the wall out of control*. I'm talking throwing chairs, throwing his shoes across the room, emptying the garbage can all over the floor, showing

all of us the middle finger, running around the room hitting kids on the head, excessive swearing, jumping off tables, chewing on paper towels, and did I mention *throwing chairs*?! Actual chairs, people. Not pushing them, but picking them up off the floor and tossing them (Miss Brave, http://missbrave.blogspot.com/2010/06/first-and-last.html)

i feel badly for the teachers coming to me for help setting up their wireless, their email, their printers, and to sign out equipment. i keep turning them away, telling them i'm not responsible for that stuff this year, and they keep coming back. (An Apple A Day, http://apppleaday.blogspot.com/2009/09/18.html)

I told one of my colleagues that I think our administrators think our time is like those cars and tents in the Harry Potter books that look normal on the outside but magically expand on the inside to fit, like, a palatial suite (Miss Brave, http://missbrave.blogspot.com/2008/11/confirmed-testing-teaching.html)

The phone rang at least 3 times in the course of my first two lessons. I spent the afternoon scrambling to finish assessing my students on ECLAS (using the Palm I thankfully found!), during which a car alarm went off and didn't stop for a solid hour and 20 minutes. I finally left the building at 6:30, came home to finish entering all my ECLAS data and then lesson plan. (Is Our Children Learning, http://www.bronxteach.com/2009/10/eclasless.html)

I really don't want to imagine what it would be like if we didn't have a union to fight on behalf of teachers. School administrators basically require teachers to work for free, on their own time, spending their own money on often basic resources, and constantly doubt and question nearly every move and approach teachers make, trying to turn us into obedient automatons*. All that WITH a union behind us. Imagine what things would be like without it (My Life Untranslated, http://leafturned.wordpress.com/2009/12/03/one-note-about-having-the-uft/)

As a teacher, I give even more information than I get. We have to post assignments online, and communicate with parents through DOE email. (Accountable Talk, http://www.accountabletalk.com/2009/03/tmi.html)

LACK OF VOICE

Let's face it–charter schools suck. They are an educational gimmick that work only on a small scale by syphoning off the best students with the most motivated parents. They then claim success without ever having to show that they can achieve the same results when they have to accept students with disabilities, behavior problems, and parents who don't give a damn. Of course, politicians generally love charters because they give them a chance to say that they are doing something and weaken support for unionism at the same time (Accountable Talk, 2009, April 12) http://www.accountabletalk.com/2009/04/riddle-me-this.html

I keep waiting for that letter from Randi that will urge me to walk a picket line on behalf of ATRs, fax the mayor demanding the abolition of rubber rooms, or informing me that the UFT intends to sue the state and city for utterly failing to implement the CFE funds to reduce class size. (Accountable Talk, 2009, January 17) http://www.accountabletalk.com/2009/01/letter-to-

randi.html

it has yet to be explained to me how this data is going to be used to help us drive our instruction, because our school is like a crazy funhouse where we're constantly being asked to do things without anyone bothering to explain to us why they're necessary, as if administration has some secret master plan that can only be revealed to us a little at a time, so I don't think anyone is exactly feeling doubly motivated to get it done. (Miss Brave, 2008, November 22) http://missbrave.blogspot.com/2008/11/losing-it.html

It's funny though that this "home stretch" begins around the same time as our last state test happens. We'll be taking the NYS science exam this Thursday. Ironically as the school year winds down, I'll finally be freed to teach how I want. (ruben_b, 2009, April 27) http://www.bronxteach.com/2009/04/momentum.html

Second of all, this method of doing things means we have approximately zero say in what we're actually teaching our students. And I have to tell you, lately there's been a bigger and bigger discrepancy between what I (remember me? their reading teacher?) think they need to learn and what Teachers College thinks they need to learn (Miss Brave, 2009, March 27) http://missbrave.blogspot.com/2009/03/march-in-like-lion-out-like-even-bigger.html

A nearby high school has instructed its English teachers to toss out the literature books and teach only from packets provided by a well known test preparation company. (Pissed Off, 2008, December 2) http://pissedoffteeacher.blogspot.com/2008/12/just-when-you-think-standards-cant-get.html

Stop playing on our good intentions and altruistic dedication to the future and treat us like the professionals you so desperately claim you want us to be. It just seems at times as if this job teeters on the brink of being inhumane. (It's Not All Flowers, http://itsnotallflowersandsausages.blogspot.com/2008/09/my-kingdom-for-parking-space.html)

LACK OF RESOURCES / FUNDING / TRAINING

No one outside education acknowledges that we go to work knowing that students verbally and physically abuse each other and the staff (Miss Rim, http://missrimbus.blogspot.com/2012/05/ps-kids-hit-us-when-are-we-going-top.html)

The culture of poverty can be subtle, but it is powerful. If we are serious about using education to change communities, we need to also change the way we view these communities. (Is Our Children Learning, http://www.bronxteach.com/2011/11/teaching-down-culture-of-poverty-and.html)

While I agree that low SES children absolutely need more academic, cultural, and physical enrichment over the summer, I do not agree that more plain old school is what's needed. They need the kind of summer camps, sports teams, arts programs, and the like that middle- and upper-class children have access to for free or very low cost. There is also the issue of time for simple rest and play that all children–I would venture to say all adults, even–need. My non-teacher friends often complain that teachers should not be "special" among working

professionals in the amount of time we get off, but to me, this is a reductivist race to the bottom. Why not work for more vacation time for ALL workers, not less for teachers? Tell me, if you're not a teacher, that you wouldn't like more than 2 weeks and a handful of holidays off year. Of course you would (Muffin, http://themortonschool.blogspot.com/2009/06/yo-later-to-all-that-why-i-love-summer.html)

No printer, toner, copier. limited internet access for at least another week (Miss Rim, http://missrimbus.blogspot.com/2011/09/and-im-literally-doing-it-with-one-hand.html)

Well, friends, I have pushed the envelope too far, and I am officially not low on toner, I'm OUT of toner. Two weeks ago, sensing the end of an era (I have had this toner cartridge for at least three years…sigh, the good old days…), I sent a preemptive email to our tech guy. No answer. A few days later, I tried again. Still no answer. Last week, I sent out another cry for help. Nothing (It's Not All Flowers, http://itsnotallflowersandsausages.blogspot.com/2009/02/somehow-it-doesnt-feel-like-choice.html)

I'm feeding the parking meter at the school supply store and blowing my entire Teacher's Choice allotment (this year clocking in at a grand $110) in a single hour. (Miss Brave, http://missbrave.blogspot.com/2010/09/its-end-of-summer-when-you-send-your.html)

I also bought some five-cent pocket folders, one-cent notebook paper, #2 pencils, and dry-erase markers. These are the kinds of things your school should supply, but we all know that that does not always happen. Those are some good basics to get you started (Miss Eyre, http://themortonschool.blogspot.com/2010/08/back-to-school-shopping-and-reading.html)

The lack of AC is more than just uncomfortable, it's nonsensical and borders on inhumane. When I think of the disparity between my students and their peers in the "haves" bracket, our AC-less classroom strikes me as one of the most simply profound examples of what its like in the classrooms filled with young "have-nots". Schools like mine have to stretch every dollar, and most dollars find their way going toward technology and essential materials. AC is a luxury most high-need schools literally cannot afford. (Is Our Children Learning, http://www.bronxteach.com/2011/05/if-you-cant-stand-heattoo-bad.html)

Layoffs of school aides. Threats of budget cuts. More students crowding into our classrooms. Many of them new to the school or country, thus needing to learn brand new routines and languages. (My Life Untranslated, http://leafturned.wordpress.com/2009/11/20/what-are-we-in-for/)

Um, on Wednesday I lost my prep (a.k.a. desperately necessary free period). Which always sucks, but somehow it sucks even more when you line the class up, walk them to the prep teacher's classroom and THEN find out that that person is absent. Evidently sometimes it is far too taxing upon the office staff to be thorough in reporting the day's absences. So we stood there for a few minutes as I silently prayed for patience and then I turned my friends around and we marched back downstairs where I pulled forty minutes of genius out of my behind because, you know, the prep teacher didn't leave any subplans. I mean, why would we all be held to high standards? (It's Not All Flowers, http://itsnotallflowersandsausages.blogspot.com/2009/05/i-was-mere-seconds-from-poking-myself.html)

Apparently they are living in our chart paper, and when our custodian visited our office (mostly to laugh at us silly, roach-averse women), he offered to throw it away. I practically lunged at him and pried it from his hands, since we've already been told that because of budget cuts, we won't be seeing any more chart paper for a while. "It's a school!" I screeched. "We need paper! We can't just throw all the paper away!" (Miss Brave, http://missbrave.blogspot.com/2008/10/bugging-out.html)

Now, I am all about the lists and charts and organizational tools, but I'm already frustrated by ARIS. Maybe it's because I've got second graders, so there's not exactly that much data to go on, but almost every single data field on my students was blank, and the ones that were there are cryptic. My new student from another school has an IEP, but I can't tell what's on it. Several of my students have "health alerts," but I don't know what they are. And a handful have "closed 407s," which (because I am a huge dork) I had to research to find out what exactly that meant. (As far as I can tell, it means they were absent a lot, and the DOE investigated.) This is my third year in the system, and I don't see how I'll ever keep pace with all the acronyms and numbered abbreviations (Miss Brave, http://missbrave.blogspot.com/2009/08/aris-this.html)

SURVEILLANCE

She was standing there with a 4 men in suits and two women in business casuals. I invited them in. They gave me a blank look. The principal said, "We'll be in in a second." I just KNEW it – some sort of mock Quality Review. I was in for it. I went back to work for 15 minutes, they entered. I extended my hand, "Hi, I'm Miss RIm." They gave me a blank look. No one said anything. I had no idea who they were. They came into the room, stared at the students' coat cubby, calculated how many hooks were there, had a debate over whether or not students could or should have a hook for a coat AND a bookbag, or what. They opened closets. They turned the water in the sink on and off. They muttered and whispered. Then someone said, "Well, we can always add another row of coat hooks. Or probably 2 more." (Miss Rim, 2012, May 18) http://missrimbus.blogspot.com/2012/05/men-who-stare-at-coat-hooks.html

If you can't make a bulletin board about it, it never happened (Miss Rim, 2011, September 16) http://missrimbus.blogspot.com/2011/09/and-im-literally-doing-it-with-one-hand.html

It used to be that you were judged by how many of your students went from 2s to 3s, or 3s to 4s. These days, it's all about AYP (Accountable Talk, 2009, September 1) http://www.accountabletalk.com/2009/09/mr-chips-vs-buffalo-chips.html

Seriously, they did everything but stand over us with a #2 pencil and whisper "strongly agree!" in our ears. "Last year, some teachers claimed they didn't have frequent contact with parents, but don't forget, you send home a homework sheet every week!" "Last year, some teachers said we didn't offer a wide enough variety of courses, but don't forget, some of the third grade classes are getting a theater course!" Come on, a homework sheet? That counts as contact with parents? And that "theater course"? Is offered to an extremely limited number of classes, once a week for about six weeks. That's supposed to count? It's like we were scrabbling around for anything we could pat ourselves on the back for. (Miss Brave, 2009, March 27) http://missbrave.blogspot.com/2009/03/march-in-like-lion-out-like-even-bigger.html

People don’t dare talk about the plusses and minuses of their schools even in the teacher’s lounge anymore because virtually all admins have spies scurrying to and fro. (Accountable Talk, 2009, February 11) http://www.accountabletalk.com/2009/02/i-didnt-hear-it-through-grapevine.html

I am sorry to say that at my school, each and every checklist, label and outline is actually scrutinized by administration. And I am even more sorry to say that it sometimes seems they’re looking for quantity over quality — because if you do a really quality lesson that happens to take a little longer so that you don’t meet with a second group that day, you’re not seeing enough kids during one period and it’s curtains for you (Miss Brave, 2008, November 4) http://missbrave.blogspot.com/2008/11/please-may-i-have-some-more.html

all I ever hear about at my school is covering myself — making sure I have enough labels on each kid once they come looking at my binders, making sure I’m planning my strategy lessons based off our reading checklist so that I can show evidence of why I decided to teach the lesson in the first place, making sure I’m checking everything off and filling everything out the right way. It makes me feel a little under-valued as a professional, like I can’t be trusted to plan anything using my own discretion and judgement about what my students need. (Miss Brave, 2008. September 15) http://missbrave.blogspot.com/2008/09/guidance-for-guided-reading.html

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