

TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES WITHIN SELECTED  
HIGH PERFORMING AND LOW PERFORMING FLORIDA HIGH SCHOOLS

By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2005

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For their unconditional love and support, to Bonnie, Katy, Mom, Dad, Zary, Paco,  
Zahyra, and Carlos.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my wife Bonnie and our daughter Kathryn for all the love, support, patience and understanding they have given me as I have pursued this project. I would not have been able to come this far without them. I would like to thank my parents for always believing in me, and for having the confidence in me to let me grow at my own pace. I must also thank Michael Thorne, Brad Burklew, Diane Archer-Banks, Mary Louise Wells, Angelina Irizarry, Cristen Krugh, and Meg Deering for giving their support, time, energy, and suggestions, all of which helped me in this endeavor.

I must also thank my committee - Dr. James Doud, Dr. James Button, and Dr. Fran Vandiver - for providing me valuable guidance during this project. Each one of them was a constant source of support and encouragement to me throughout this process. My chair, Dr. Linda Behar-Horenstein, has been a wonderful advisor, mentor, listener, and friend for me these past four years. Her dedication to her students is inspiring.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iv
LIST OF TABLES .....	vii
ABSTRACT .....	viii
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
Theoretical Framework.....	4
Research Questions.....	5
Significance .....	6
Definition of Terms .....	7
Limitations.....	8
2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....	9
FCAT as an Accountability Measure .....	9
Teacher Beliefs and Practices.....	15
Research-Based Literacy Teaching Methods in Secondary Schools.....	20
Teaching Literacy Skills to At-risk Students.....	25
Conclusion .....	30
3 METHODS .....	31
The Setting.....	31
Participants .....	32
Data Collection .....	34
Data Analysis.....	35
Researcher Bias .....	37
Validity and Reliability.....	38
4 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS .....	40
Research Question 1) To What Extent Are FCAT Scores based on Outside Factors such as Race, SES and Size of the School? .....	40

Research Question 2) What Are the Instructional Practices among Teachers of Students in High Performing Schools and among Teachers of Students in Low Performing Schools?.....	40
High-Performing Schools.....	41
Low-Performing Schools.....	48
Research Question 3) What Are the Instructional Beliefs among Teachers at High Performing and Low Performing Schools?.....	58
High Performing Schools.....	58
Low Performing Schools.....	65
Common Themes at Low and High Performing Schools.....	71
Research Question 4) What Is the Correspondence among Teachers' Beliefs and Instructional Practices at the High Performing and Low Performing Schools? ....	75
High Performing Schools.....	77
Low Performing Schools.....	77
Research Question #5) What Is the Correspondence Between Teacher Self-Reported Beliefs, Interview Responses and Instructional Practices at the High and Low Performing High Schools?.....	78
Summary.....	81
<b>5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>83</b>
Summary.....	83
Relationship between FCAT scores and outside factors .....	83
Instructional Practices .....	83
Instructional Beliefs.....	85
Congruence Between Teacher Practices and Teacher Beliefs .....	87
Implications .....	88
Suggestions for Further Study .....	91
Teaching Reading.....	91
Student-Directed Teaching and Learning.....	92
Policy Decisions Aimed at Helping Low Performing Schools .....	92
Other factors impacting FCAT scores.....	92
Summary and Conclusion.....	93
 <b>APPENDIX</b>	
<b>A TEACHER OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT.....</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>B TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>C IRB APPROVAL AND CONSENT FORMS.....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>LIST OF REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH .....</b>	<b>109</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>page</u>
3-1 Percentage of students who passed the 2003 Reading FCAT, percentage of minority students, percentage of low-income students, and school grade at participating schools.....	32
3-2 Number of respondents to the TBPS from each school .....	37
4-1 Amount of time spent engaged in student-directed activities .....	48
4-2 Mean number of reprimands issued by teacher per period observed.....	52
4-3 Emergent themes from analysis of observations and interviews .....	76

Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School  
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2005

Chair: Linda S. Behar-Horenstein

Major Department: Educational Leadership, Policy and Foundations

Student performance on standardized tests correlates with demographic factors such as race and socio-economic status. On standardized tests, minority and low income students often perform below average. Previous analysis of 10<sup>th</sup> grade Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) Reading scores demonstrated that students at some schools with a majority at-risk population perform significantly below the state average, whereas students at other, similar schools perform significantly above the state average on this test. This study examined the differences between classroom factors, such as teacher beliefs and instructional practice, that might help explain these differences in performance among similar students on the 10<sup>th</sup> grade FCAT Reading test. Teachers at four schools with a majority of at-risk students were observed, interviewed and surveyed. This study found that teachers at high performing schools emphasized learner-centered teaching in both belief and practice, de-emphasizing the FCAT and the benchmarks tested. In contrast, teachers at low performing schools emphasized teacher-

centered behaviors, both in belief and practice, and focused specifically on the FCAT as well as specific benchmarks tested.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

For the past 25 years, studies of the SAT and Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) have shown that there is a relationship between test scores and students who are poor or minorities. Cunningham and Sanzo (2002), Howell and Peterson (2002), Kohn (2001), and Port (1979) also found a correlation between race and/or socio-economic status (SES) of students with their performance on state-administered standardized tests. In these studies, performance on state-administered standardized tests has yielded the same result; that students of minority backgrounds, as well as students from low SES backgrounds, perform poorly on these tests, when compared to white, middle and upper income peers.

There are several reasons why poor and/or minority students perform poorly on standardized tests; however, often, the underlying reason relates to literacy. Literacy, according to Lewin (2003), is defined as being able to read and write functionally. The relationship among literacy, poverty, and educational attainment has been well documented by researchers (Denti & Guerin, 2004; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003). Some researchers have pointed to institutional or systemic differences between the poor in America and others. Kozol (1991) provides a striking picture of the differences between students enrolled in poor, inner city schools and those enrolled in wealthy, suburban schools. Examining class differences illustrates that the poor face obstacles in acquiring a public education that most public school students do not face, including high unemployment, drugs, gangs, crime and exposure to acquired immunodeficiency

syndrome (AIDS). Bertrand (1995) argued that many students today are considered “at-risk.” Included among those students that he would classify as “at-risk” are individuals who are of normal intelligence, who come from broken homes, and have witnessed or suffered from parental loss of employment or have experienced undue burdens that are typical for the American underclass.

Another causal factor as to why low SES/minority students perform poorly in school generally is immigration. Bertrand (1995) observed that Hispanic/Latino immigration has made that group the fastest growing minority group in the U.S. since the 1970’s. This growth in Hispanic immigration, coupled with growth in Asian immigration, has increased the need for multi-lingual education because typically these students are not able to speak English fluently when they enter the American public educational system (pp. 8-9). In California, this issue has been controversial between proponents who advocate for providing for native language instruction in public schools, and the “English First” proponents, who seek to limit non-English instruction in the public schools (McQuillan, 1998). As a result, many school districts in states with large numbers of immigrant populations find themselves unable, or unwilling, to provide the resources necessary to provide instruction to immigrant students in their native languages.

At the same time that the number of poor and/or minority students entering public schools has grown (Ross, 2003), many U.S. states have increased their reliance on standardized test scores. If there are not interventions to increase the achievement and pass rates on standardized tests among poor and minority students, public education in America is likely to become more class-based. Concurrently, there is a likelihood that

the number of low SES/minority dropouts will increase. Many of the students at risk will face difficult economic decisions, some of which are likely to be shared with taxpayers. While the problems of poor and minority Americans do not necessarily begin in school, these issues do impact learning and standardized test performance.

In many communities across America, poor and/or minority students face barriers to successful educational attainment from the circumstances of their lives outside of school (Shulman, 2003). The government has tried to intervene in the learning process for poor and/or minority students. For example, since the late 1980's and early 1990's, when the National Governors Conference, and Presidents Bush and Clinton began advocating for standards-based education, other states began to follow this lead. Florida developed and implemented the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) in the mid-1990's. After Jeb Bush was elected Governor in 1998, the FCAT became part of the Governor's "A +" plan for public education. Under this mandate, schools are assigned grades based on the performance of students on the FCAT, making the FCAT a "high-stakes" test. States throughout the nation are beginning to follow Florida's practice, and use standardized test scores to determine funding decisions and students' graduation rates. In 2003, for the first time, students in Florida were required to pass the 10<sup>th</sup> grade Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) in order to graduate.

The FCAT is composed of two criterion-based tests, a math test and a reading test, and a norm-referenced test that is composed of reading and math questions. Statistical analysis of the 2003 FCAT reading scores shows that a significant portion of variance in 10<sup>th</sup> grade FCAT scores was due to student's race and socio-economic status (SES), confirming, at least in part, Popham's thesis. In a study of the relationship between low

SES/minority students and the FCAT using statistical data retrieved from Florida's Department of Education website ([www.fldoe.org/](http://www.fldoe.org/)), the researcher found that 52% of the variance in FCAT reading scores among 10<sup>th</sup> graders in 2003 was due to student race and SES. Using the same statistical data, the researcher found that school size accounts for less than 0.1% of the variance in FCAT scores.

Although race and SES are immutable factors, 48% of the variance in FCAT scores remains unaccounted for in this particular data set. Thus, there appear to be other factors, such as students' and educators' behaviors, that influence FCAT scores. Among Florida high schools that have large numbers of poor and/or minority students, less than 40% of students passed the 10<sup>th</sup> grade reading test. However, in some of these schools, at least two-thirds of the students pass the FCAT. What makes these schools different from other schools that have large numbers of poor/minority students? If variables such as race and SES are held constant, other factors must account for this difference in performance. One factor might be teaching practices; also, the amount of time teachers spend teaching to the test might be critical (Shepard, 1989; Romberg, Zarinnia & Williams, 1989).

### **Theoretical Framework**

How teachers think about and practice teaching has a profound affect on learning among students (Applebee et al., 2003; Fisher, 2001; Greenleaf et al., 2001). Many researchers have noted that the practice of high-stakes testing affects teaching practices (Benson, 2003; Popham, 2001; Stecher, 2002), causing some to "teach to the test." The existence of the FCAT as a high-stakes test has affected the curriculum, but not uniformly. The fact that students from schools with similar demographic backgrounds perform so differently on the FCAT suggests that factors internal to the classroom and/or school are affecting student performance on the 10<sup>th</sup> grade FCAT Reading test. Recent

research into the effects of teaching on learning, notably in the language arts, finds that use of more student-centered or student empowered teaching models produces more effective learning, and is more likely to contribute to higher test scores (Applebee et al. 2003; Cook-Sather, 2002; McCombs and Whisler, 1997; Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University, 2001).

Accordingly, three theories based on this research will be tested in this study:

1. The existence of the FCAT as a high-stakes test has affected teaching beliefs and practices in 10<sup>th</sup> grade English classes,
2. Teachers in high performing schools are more likely to employ learner-centered methods in curriculum design and implementation, than are teachers in low-performing schools, and
3. Teachers in high performing schools are more likely to use the social and/or personal family of teaching models (Joyce and Calhoun, 1996), and are less inclined to “teach to the test,” in comparison with teachers at low performing schools.

The purpose of this study is to examine how teacher beliefs and instructional practice might influence FCAT scores. Classrooms in high performing schools and in low performing schools will be examined in this study to test these theories. This study seeks to understand and interpret how classroom practices affect the performance of students on standardized tests. Contextualization, interpretation and understanding are the domain of the constructivist/interpretivist paradigms of research (Glesne, 1999). Using an interpretivist framework will allow for developing a better understanding of the complexities of classroom practices among teachers that may have an impact on the performance of their students on the FCAT.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions are investigated in this study:

1. To what extent are FCAT scores based on outside factors such as race, SES and size of the school?
2. What are the instructional practices among teachers of students in high performing and low performing schools?
3. What are the instructional beliefs among teachers at high performing and low performing schools?
4. What is the correspondence among teachers' beliefs and instructional practices at the high performing and low performing schools?
5. What is the correspondence between teacher self-reported instructional beliefs, interview responses and instructional practices at the high performing and low performing high schools?

Investigating these questions will require use of quantitative research methods for question number 1, both quantitative and qualitative methods for question number 5, and qualitative research methods for the remaining questions. Utilization of quantitative methods provides evidence of a relationship between demographic factors and FCAT scores. However, in order to develop a further understanding of the factors that influence student performance on the FCAT beyond demographic factors (that are easily tabulated), qualitative methods provide a possible explanation that would otherwise be inaccessible through the use of a strictly empirical study, by providing a rich data set that allows for comparison between high performing and low performing schools.

### **Significance**

The findings from this study will provide educators with information about ways “at-risk” students can succeed on standardized tests such as the FCAT. Educators and educational policy makers are likely to have a better understanding of the kind of instructional practices which distinguish a successful classroom environment that prepares low SES/minority students from less successful classroom environments.

Educational researchers will be able to identify those factors beyond race and SES that impact performance on standardized tests. This study focused on what factors within the control or influence of educators help poor/minority students succeed on the FCAT. This study will illuminate what educators at schools with large numbers of poor/minority students can do to diminish disadvantages that such students face. Additionally, other studies in the field have looked at the impact of teaching styles on student performance in literacy and reading (Antinarella & Salbu, 2003; Bertrand & Stice, 2003; Lewin, 2003; and Olson, 2003). This study will help to determine what educators can do to enhance achievement outcomes for poor and/or minority students by illustrating how techniques used to teach “at-risk” secondary students literacy skills can be applied to helping these students prepare for high-stakes tests such as the FCAT. By looking beyond the relationship between race and SES with standardized test scores, it is hoped that factors unique to certain schools that have positively impacted standardized test scores for poor and/or minority students can be revealed. The unit of analysis within this study will be teachers’ instructional practice.

### **Definition of Terms**

**At-risk schools** – refers to schools with either a majority of students who are of minority descent, receive free/reduced lunch benefits, or both.

**Criterion-referenced test** – refers to a test in which students are expected to perform at a pre-established standard, achieve a passing grade, or demonstrate proficiency.

**FCAT** – Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. A standardized test developed by the state of Florida and administered to students each year from grades 3-10. Students who graduate with a standard diploma in the state of Florida must pass both sections of

the FCAT (reading and math) in order to graduate, regardless of other state/district criteria.

**High-performing schools** – refers to schools in which at least two-thirds of students tested passed the 10<sup>th</sup> grade FCAT reading test.

**High-stakes test** – refers to tests such as the FCAT; in which outcomes guide funding decisions for schools.

**Low-performing schools** – refers to schools in which no more than 40% of students tested passed the 10<sup>th</sup> grade FCAT reading test.

**Minority** – refers to individuals who are African-American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, or Native American.

**Norm-referenced test** – refers to a test in which students' scores are compared with each other and not against some fixed standard.

**Poor/low SES** – refers to the percentage of students at each school who receive free/reduced lunch benefits.

### **Limitations**

6. Only data within Florida at one point in time were examined; only the FCAT and only Florida were examined herein.
7. Only scores on the 2003 10<sup>th</sup> grade reading FCAT test were examined.
8. The generalizability of this study will be restricted to the context where it was performed.
9. Only a sample of the relevant schools was selected for study.
10. Only a small sample of teachers met the criteria for participation.
11. Students' perceptions of instruction were not collected and analyzed although it is likely that they impacted the findings.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of what factors beyond race and SES impact student achievement among “at-risk” students. The purpose of this chapter is to review relevant research studies. An overview of the following topics will be presented: 1) FCAT as an accountability measure, 2) teacher beliefs and practices, 3) research-based practices for teaching literacy in secondary schools, and 4) teaching literacy skills to “at-risk” students.

### **FCAT as an Accountability Measure**

The use of standardized tests in K-12 education in the United States is long standing. Since the 1970’s, there has been a proliferation of standardized tests developed by the states and others. Standardized tests are utilized for a variety of purposes in schools today. Some tests, such as the now defunct Florida High School Competency Test (HSCT), are used as minimal competency tests, to assess whether or not students are learning certain basic skills. Others, such as the SAT, are used for college admission decisions.

How does the presence of high-stakes testing affect literacy development among secondary students? Literacy, according to Lewin (2003), is composed of adequate development of both reading and writing skills so that the learner can communicate effectively.

Accountability in K-12 education has become an emerging trend among policy makers. Florida is among the leaders in this regard, states Greene (2001). Not only has

Florida created its own standardized test (the FCAT), but the results of this test are used to determine a grade for each school. These grades, in turn, carry consequences for funding public schools in the state. The funding aspect of Florida's A Plus accountability plan gives it teeth, notes Greene. Whereas other states have developed their own standardized tests and accountability measures, none include the financial incentives that Florida law currently mandates. Greene describes similar accountability programs in Texas and in North Carolina, in which high-stakes tests are used to determine both student graduation and school-wide evaluation criteria by the state. However, neither of these plans includes the financial incentives of Florida's A Plus plan. The state of Florida gives money to schools based on the letter grade earned. The highest graded schools earn more state money. Schools are financially rewarded if they achieve gains of at least one letter grade. "F" schools are penalized financially, and they are not able to receive the performance-based money. The state's monetary award is used at the discretion of each school's staff. Prestige or embarrassment may be felt by a school's stakeholders depending upon the grade a school receives. As schools are rewarded or penalized based on students' test scores, the intensity of the debate has heightened. Thus, in this capacity the FCAT is viewed as a "high stakes" test.

Greene contends that the FCAT, combined with the school grading formula in Florida, has led to "catching up" by poor and minority students, noting that FCAT scores among poor and minority students are improving from year to year at a faster rate than they are among other groups of students. According to the state Department of Education, the FCAT assesses high and low order thinking skills by posing challenging questions that require students to think, not just memorize answers. Additionally, the

state argues that one benefit of the FCAT is that it indicates when a school needs more resources and teacher training. Another benefit of the FCAT, according to the state, is that it clearly outlines expectations for teaching and learning (Florida Department of Education online, 2005).

Two significant changes were recently made to the FCAT. In 1999, a writing test was added. Also, students' performance on the FCAT was used to determine a letter grade for each school. Any school that receives an F grade during two consecutive years is now managed by the state Department of Education. Students are given options about which school they attend. They are free to take "vouchers" and seek enrollment in any public or private school. The dollar amount of the voucher is equivalent to the state contribution to the district for educating these students. By 2002, every public school student in grades 3-10 was required to take the FCAT.

Two important steps took place in the development of the FCAT in 2003; all high school seniors were required to pass the 10<sup>th</sup> grade FCAT in order to graduate, and all 3<sup>rd</sup> graders were required to pass the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading FCAT in order to be promoted to 4<sup>th</sup> grade. FCAT scores, then, have become the primary mechanism that is used to measure success within Florida's schools.

Policymakers in Tallahassee and in Washington argue that the FCAT makes educators focus on teaching the skills students need to succeed. Indeed, since 1999, when school grading became a reality, many schools around the state managed to achieve and maintain high (A-B) grades. Now that school grades are public knowledge, the public can acquire a better picture of which schools are and are not meeting these

standards. In this way, it is believed that the FCAT has made schools more accountable to the public.

However, there are serious problems in using the FCAT as an accountability tool. FCAT scores correlate strongly with race and SES, which suggest that the instrument is racially biased. Also, there is a high potential for using less effective teaching practices, especially teaching to the test in schools that struggle to achieve satisfactory grades. Basing FCAT scores on the Sunshine State Standards, a system of benchmarks devised by the state has lead to the development of a top-down model of curriculum, in which the state's needs take precedence over those of individual students. As Popham (2000) pointed out, the FCAT is not a valid or reliable measure of student learning. For example, the criteria used to determine a school's grade have been inconsistently applied since the grading system began in 1999. Popham argued that it should not be the single factor that determines a school's grade because it is not a fair representation of what students have learned.

Accountability seems to be a relatively recent phenomenon. However, the debate over the merits and pitfalls of standardized testing predates discussions of accountability. Finn (2002) identified three kinds of accountability related to the school improvement: 1) trust the experts, 2) trust, but verify, and 3) market-based reforms. Florida's emerging system seems to be a combination of "trust, but verify" and market-based reforms. Grading the public schools is a top-down, government-based reform program, coupled with penalizing poorly performing schools. Market-based competition is illustrated by controlling the disbursement of state monies. Lam (2001) argued that many of the current

reform efforts are driven by competitiveness, and states that such reforms could have consequences for racial, ethnic and socio-economic segregation.

Raywid (2001) cautions us to watch how we use the term “accountability.” She states that this term is often confused with the “standards based” movement. For example, Florida uses the term “standards based” education. The Sunshine State Standards provides goals and benchmarks, while the FCAT is the tool that assesses students and schools. Yet, performance is not going to be accessible simply through a single observation of a school. She advocates the use of formative evaluations. In her view, paper and pencil tests are only capable of measuring selected school goals.

Ravitch (1984) asserted that standardized tests can be useful for educators, students, and parents. In particular, they can serve as an early warning for subject areas (such as reading comprehensions, or math skills) and provide evidence that some students may need improvement before they progress too far in the K-12 system. Yet, Ravitch argues that standardized testing, as used by policymakers, negatively impacts the curriculum in schools.

Borman (1992) argues that the emphasis on standardized testing in public schools negatively impacts teaching math and science skills, because low-level skills are emphasized rather than high-level skills. Tallahassee policymakers assert that the FCAT was designed to assess lower order and higher order skills. The notion that educators are “teaching to the test” causes angst among educators and policy makers. Popham (2004) distinguished between “item teaching” and “curriculum teaching” as alternative definitions of teaching to the test. “Item teaching” refers to teaching specific items as a way to prepare students for tests. Such teaching does not allow students to master the

curricular aims represented on the test. “Curriculum teaching” refers to a broader conception of “teaching to the test” in which teaching does target the larger curricular aims. Popham stated that curriculum teaching is desirable, while item teaching is not. “Item teaching” to the test shortchanges students by not teaching them how to process, analyze or synthesize information, and by promoting test taking skills and strategies over content mastery (Haney, 2000; Klein et al., 2000). Students’ critical thinking skills are neglected. Posner (2004) warned that an obsession with testing simply promotes the acquisition of trivial knowledge, rather than those skills that students need in order to function in a global society. Using test data exclusively to assess student learning provides an incomplete picture of what teachers teach and what students learn. Behar-Horenstein and Seabert (2002) argued that quality instruction is a necessary factor in quality learning. They noted that: “Unless quality instruction can be documented, goals and mandates cannot be evaluated. Factors that are not and cannot be measured are the nature of instruction. The validity of testing is grounded in a positivist paradigm, in which reality is objective and measurable” (p.23). The quality of teaching and learning becomes hard to gauge when the processes of teaching and learning involve the construction of knowledge. This argument reinforces the need to employ qualitative methods in studying classroom factors that impact student performance.

Another issue regarding standardized testing concerns comparing schools and test data against each other. Black (1998) cautioned that comparing schools’ performance on standardized tests against each other can generate “unfair and misleading” comparisons. This practice can be harmful, Black added, if policymakers do not factor in considerations of a school’s resources. In other words, test scores alone are not a

sufficient indicator of performance within a school; other, more context-specific factors should be considered.

The FCAT has been criticized as a valid measure of what students learn (or should learn) in school. Popham (2000) argued that the FCAT is biased in favor of white, upper/middle class students. According to Popham, the FCAT is a measure of SES, not achievement. He claimed that basing a school's grade largely on FCAT scores results in rewarding or punishing schools based on the SES of their students. Behar-Horenstein and Seabert (2002) added that accurate assessments of teaching and learning must focus on factors inherent to the classroom. They argued, "Before educators can propose a plan aimed at improving educational effectiveness, they must obtain an accurate picture of the quality of classroom teaching that takes place across all classrooms within school sites" (p.25).

### **Teacher Beliefs and Practices**

If the quality of classroom teaching is a factor in educational effectiveness, then research should focus on this factor as an influence in student performance. Behar-Horenstein and Seabert (2002) noted that research on school improvement largely has focused on school-level factors, with little emphasis on pedagogy. They argued that examining instructional practices as a central element in teacher development would help students achieve more and standards would rise (p.22). Teachers vary in their approach to teaching, and these individual differences should not be discounted in analyzing student performance.

What teachers believe and the decisions they make in class are not necessarily congruent (Raymond, 1997). In a year-long study of one math teacher, Raymond found that the teacher's practices were more closely related to her beliefs about content, and

tied to her own experiences as a student, rather than to her beliefs about pedagogy. Raymond also concluded that this teachers' pre-service program had a negligible effect on her beliefs as a teacher. In another study of math teachers, Liljedahl (2005) concurred, noting that teachers' beliefs about mathematics teaching and learning come from their own experiences as a learner of mathematics. Liljedahl noted that if a math teacher believes that learning mathematics is "all about learning algorithms," then that teacher is likely to perceive that teaching math is "all about teaching algorithms." If a teacher believes that "all problems have one solution," then this teacher is likely to approach teaching math with the attitude that "all problems must have one solution." Liljedahl concluded that pre-service teachers' beliefs about what mathematics is, and what it means to teach and learn mathematics, varied depending on the environment within classrooms, and the extent to which problem solving was important to that classroom environment in the pre-service setting. Liljedahl reported that through their own experiences with mathematics, pre-service math teachers came to believe, in the value of teaching mathematics through "doing", and through "thinking," suggesting a hands-on approach to teaching and learning.

Albion (1999) reported that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs are critical in determining the extent to which teachers incorporate instructional technology into decisions related to curriculum. Minchew (2004), in an in-depth study of two high school science teachers, argued that how teachers view their own effectiveness as teachers, or their self-efficacy, as a key variable in their effectiveness as teachers. Minchew argued that pre-service and in-service teachers bring to the classroom experiences and beliefs about their abilities to handle both their classroom environment as well as their career

responsibilities. What teachers believe about teaching generally, as well as their ability to teach, affects approach different situations and issues that arise in the classroom, from classroom management to curriculum-related issues, according to Minchew. A teacher's beliefs are extremely important to that teacher's ability to effectively implement classroom management. If teachers have a positive image of themselves as teachers, then they will develop more effective classroom management skills, and are more likely to create an enriched and active learning environment, Minchew added. She goes on to note that many teachers feel overwhelmed by what teachers perceive to be extensive responsibilities that are mandated by school boards and state governments. Minchew argued that this increasing workload can affect the success and attrition rate of teachers. She reported that participants in her study began their careers as teachers believing that their goal as a teacher was to be an advocate for science. They became teachers so that they could positively influence students. This belief and many of their other outlooks on teaching have slightly changed during their teaching career, Minchew reported. After several years in the profession, Minchew notes that they still believe in influencing students and helping them take their science knowledge and use it outside of the classroom, regardless of whether or not that influence is used strictly for scientific issues, or to broader social and/or life issues. Minchew added that teachers perceive society's image of teaching as quite different from the reality of teaching, especially related to issues of student ownership in education. She noted that the participants in her study give their students ownership in certain classroom responsibilities while keeping final authority for themselves.

Other researchers found that teacher beliefs and how they construct their classroom environments are interrelated and direct their pedagogical actions as teachers.

(Salamanca, 2005). While Minchew focused on teacher efficacy, Salamanca added that teacher beliefs, principal beliefs, and teacher efficacy are factors in the nature of classroom instruction provided by teachers. Salamanca argued that skilled teachers who manipulate their classroom environments can affect the quality and variety of students oral language use, engagement in literacy behaviors and story composition.

While teacher beliefs clearly are a factor affecting teacher attitude and performance, it is one of three such critical factors, according to Taylor, Dirkx, and Pratt (2001). These researchers noted that as teachers gain experience in the classroom, their attitudes and beliefs change. Over time, they argued, teachers, develop a kind of personal compass which helps them make decisions and reflect effective actions and practices, as well as the reasons behind why a practice is effective or ineffective in the classroom. Additionally, they noted that this compass is what distinguishes those who persist and flourish as teachers from less successful teachers. Taylor, Dirkx and Pratt elaborated that teachers who do not create a cohesive pedagogical system often are subject to the whims and influences of others. When such 'compass-less' teachers are challenged by students, colleagues, or administrators, these teachers experience difficulty explaining or defending their approach to teaching.

Having a pedagogical system is an essential aspect in the development of effective teaching, they concluded. Teacher beliefs are only one of three factors inherent in the development of this teacher 'compass.' The other two factors are foundational knowledge and informal theories of teaching. Together, these three factors helped

support these teachers in the pursuit of their work. Each of the three factors was dependent upon the other two for its meaning and activation. When all three were in agreement, the teacher had a coherent personal pedagogical system by which to conduct and govern the work of teaching, concluded these researchers.

Moje (1996) argued that the relationship established between teachers and students is a critical factor in getting secondary students to engage in literacy-based activities. She concluded that teachers' beliefs about literacy, their content areas, their students, and the contexts in which they teach all have an impact on how students learn reading and writing. Errington (2004) argued that teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning are key factors in what they manage to achieve as teachers. In other words, if teachers do not believe that students can read, write or achieve, then, according to Errington, this belief, whether expressed or not, is likely to impede student learning in the classroom. Dieker and Little (2005) advocated a more interdisciplinary approach to teaching reading and writing. They argued that in order to better prepare secondary students for the challenges inherent in standardized testing, more cooperation between and among teachers is necessary in developing curriculum, so that reading and writing are taught throughout the day, not just in English class.

The National Council of Teachers of English, (NCTE) offered its perspective on what teacher beliefs are necessary in order to effectively teach writing (NCTE, 2004).

Eleven core beliefs were offered. Those are:

1. Everyone has the capacity to write, writing can be taught, and teachers can help students become better writers.
2. People learn to write by writing.
3. Writing is a process.
4. Writing is a tool for thinking.
5. Writing grows out of many different purposes.

6. Conventions of finished and edited texts are important to readers and therefore to writers.
7. Writing and reading are related.
8. Writing has a complex relationship to talk.
9. Literate practices are embedded in complicated social relationships.
10. Composing occurs in different modalities and technologies.
11. Assessment of writing involves complex, informed, human judgment.

Together, these beliefs suggest that English teachers, at least in the area of teaching writing, should provide a variety of opportunities for students to develop and sharpen their writing skills, that they should realize the complex aspects of teaching writing, and that they should realize that opportunities to teach writing skills are embedded in literacy skills as a whole and should be included in efforts to teach reading as well.

Other researchers advocate that the substance of pre-service teacher training may need to be evaluated to ensure that graduates can teach critical thinking skills. Behar-Horenstein and Seabert (2002) found that more thoughtful curriculum planning may be needed at the graduate level of education. They found an emphasis of teacher-directed instruction was normative in a situation where students were preparing for a high-stakes test. In a study of elementary teachers, Seabert et al. (2002) found that pre-service instruction in health education teaching methods resulted in significant differences among learner comprehension. In a study of bilingual teachers, Flores (2001) found that participants held certain beliefs about how bilingual students learn, and that the teachers' prior experiences affected their beliefs about learning. Flores argued for the need to develop philosophically grounded pre-service teacher education programs in order to produce effective teachers.

### **Research-Based Literacy Teaching Methods in Secondary Schools**

Lewin (2003) observed that secondary teachers feel intense pressure to meet state standards or benchmarks in curriculum, although many teachers know that a significant

number of their students have reading comprehension difficulties. Lewin stated that reading and writing are the “twin pillars of literacy.” Building them into the secondary curriculum is vital.

Lewin (2003) outlined a four step plan that he suggested was essential to building literacy skills among struggling secondary students. He suggested to prepare, first dare, repair and share. Each step applies whether the teacher is teaching writing or reading skills. Prepare means getting ready to read or write by making a conscious effort. Suggested activities involve brainstorming or interviewing. First dare means to attempt the task at hand. For writing, it means to write a first draft. Repair involves correcting mistakes that occur during the first effort. Share involves higher order thinking skills and application of one’s work to some larger purpose.

To build literacy among secondary students, Lewin (2003) argues that teachers need to work together among subject areas. To be truly successful, reading and writing instruction must be interdisciplinary and cross-curricular. Developing the confidence of struggling readers and writers is important, as well as building students’ self-efficacy. Lewin proposed the use of instructional strategies that are common in secondary education, such as KWL (Know, Want to know, Learn), stop signs, sticky notes, and scaffolding.

To “repair,” Lewin (2003) recommended that students critically reevaluate their own work. Lewin also advocated using literary texts and activities such as Story Webs, Open Mind, Character Analysis Sheets, Interpretive Cards and visualization activities to develop literacy among struggling adolescents.

Finally, Lewin (2003) recommended an increased emphasis in teaching writing skills across the curriculum. When students write about a topic within social studies, science, math, language arts, or any other subject area, they process the relevant content more deeply and apply that knowledge in ways beyond what is necessary. A concerted, school-wide effort at developing writing skills among adolescents provides benefits to students that extend well beyond their schooling.

Olson (2003), like Lewin, also stressed the need for secondary teachers to provide scaffolding to students struggling. He described five components of effective instructional scaffolding: ownership, appropriateness, structure, collaboration, and internalization. Use of scaffolding in reading and writing provides students with a variety of cognitive strategies that give them the freedom to approach texts in ways that make sense to them. Creating a climate within the classroom that values students as individuals is essential in building a sense of student ownership. Olson suggested “getting to know you” activities to promote a feeling of belonging; setting the tone of learning, while getting students to develop self-efficacy.

Olson (2003) suggested that secondary teachers use a multiple intelligences (MI) approach to teaching and learning, in addition to traditional linguistic approaches. She recommended a method whereby students write reactive first drafts to a text read in class. Getting students to interpret texts required teachers to teach literature in such a way that helps students see reading and writing as an aesthetic experience, not a chore. Olson suggested exposing students to a wide variety of texts to help students develop their thematizing skills. She recommended using multicultural perspectives to teach reading and writing. As the percentage of students becomes less white, incorporating literature

from other cultural perspectives becomes imperative. The use of multicultural literature promotes ownership among struggling minority students (Gay, 1994).

The efforts of educators notwithstanding, many of the problems at-risk students face in school, and particularly in development of literacy-based skills, stem from a lack of encouragement to read and write at home. Researchers (Mahler, 1968; Winnicott, 1988;) have shown that the developmental characteristics needed to produce literate students begin at a very early age. Often, at-risk students come from backgrounds where they are not given the support or encouragement needed, even before starting school, to become effective readers and writers.

“Effective writing teachers apply what they know, make cognitive strategies visible, and encourage students to practice different types of writing. They balance the use of teacher-prompted and student-selected writing tasks, they foster internalization, and finally, focus on process and products,” argues Olson (2003) (pp. 225-226).

Effective writing teachers utilize small group assignments that give students opportunities to collaborate. This type of teacher considers the audience, provides peer-generated feedback, and helps students develop the commitment to refine their writing abilities.

Olson (2003) also recommended the use of rubrics that clearly outline what is necessary to achieve success in reading and writing. These criteria become a teaching tool because it helps students recognize what standards are used to assess their work. Also, he recommended that teachers involve students in self-evaluation.

Antinarella and Salbu (2003) stressed the importance of creating an environment conducive to learning, like identifying student and teacher roles and responsibilities. They also advocated cooperative learning activities, and use of heterogeneous groupings.

Many of the activities suggested by Antinarella and Salbu are designed to give students an opportunity to foster their own creative skills and develop a sense of ownership in the process of acquiring the skills of literacy. They recommend using autobiographical poems, writing memoirs, and first-person narratives to promote student ownership for their own literacy skills. Antinarella and Salbu, as well as Olson (2003), advised teachers to arrange lessons into “workshop” formats to encourage students to write and read regularly on their own during class time.

Effectively teaching reading and writing involves personalizing learning, and getting students actively involved (Antinarella & Salbu, 2003; Curtis & Longo, 1999, D’Arcangelo, 2002; Lewin, 2003; Olson, 2003). Students must have a strategy to approach reading and what they want to get out of it. To do that, teachers need to build background knowledge and vocabulary among students, so that class texts are more likely to have some connection or meaning to students.

Allington (2004) asserted that policymakers’ actions make teachers’ efforts to build literacy skills more difficult. Rather than relying on scripted programs, he claimed that if legislators are serious about building literacy skills, then they must provide more one-on-one teaching in the schools. Elsewhere, Allington (2002) has argued that current policy trends, such as the No Child Left Behind Act, favor a federalization of teaching and curricular methodologies. The danger in such an approach is that Washington policymakers neglect relying on a professional consensus in developing methodologies. He cited the differences between the research-based Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children Report (PRD) and the recommendations of the National Reading Panel

(NRP). Allington argued that the NRP's recommendations for reading instruction ignore or contradict many of the research-based findings in the PRD.

### **Teaching Literacy Skills to At-risk Students**

Cunningham and Sanzo (2002) argued that “education is more highly prioritized...in high-income homes, and they...see school as the means by which qualification, acquisition, and socialization are achieved...school is not an essential vehicle for working class life” (p. 360). They asserted that testing adds pressure without addressing educational inequities. As a result, the gap between what poor students and non-poor students get out of schooling continues to compound.

Luker, Cobb and Luker (2001) observed many poor children are deprived of the basic requirements for success in a competitive society, such as intellectual deprivation. Intellectual deprivation, as these authors define it, is a result of:

“The absence of minimal verbal and quantitative educational resources, commitments and stimulants such as books, periodicals, encyclopedia and computers. All of these conditions affect the motivation, performance and success of poor children in school...they often come to school with large academic deficits that place them far behind their more privileged schoolmates” (p. 989).

This idea of intellectual deprivation has been addressed by others, and might help explain why poor students do not perform as well in school generally, and on standardized tests specifically. Bertrand (1995) noted that students from poor and/or minority backgrounds are especially “at-risk” for many of the same reasons which Luker, Cobb and Luker mention. Ayers (2000) concurred and argued that the standards movement itself is fraudulent and renders the poor victims.

Ayers (2000) also argued that American schools are in a crisis that selectively impacts the poor, inner city and minority students. These schools, he pointed out, struggled to educate children who were at risk with fewer human and material resources than other schools. Burns (1979) stated these same concerns over 20 years earlier. Several researchers have raised questions about the physical, social and economic differences between rich and poor schools in the United States, and about whether standardized testing, accountability, and standards-based education exacerbates differences between the poor and everyone else (Ayers, 2000; Burns, 1979; Kozol, 1991). Allington (2002) argued that since the 1970's, federal mandates have placed a greater impact of standardized testing on poor children, as a condition for their eligibility for federal education dollars.

In *Savage Inequalities*, Kozol (1991) vividly described the physical differences between affluent, suburban public schools and poor, inner-city schools, noting the funding disparities. Nonetheless, the standards-based education movement, despite much room for improvement, has received widespread approval from the public (Johnson & Duffett, 1999).

Corley (2003) argued that race and poverty are linked. He also stated that African-Americans and Hispanic/Latino Americans are much more likely to be classified as poor than white Americans. She pointed out that the cycle of poverty is tied explicitly to lower levels of literacy. Additionally, minority students coupled with majority teachers results in cultural dissonance.

Perhaps the most significant factor in this discussion is that self-efficacy among the poor and/or minority students is somewhat lower than it is for other students. Pajares

(2003) reported that studies of student efficacy and race produce mixed results, but that there was ample evidence to suggest that Hispanic/Latino students had lower self-efficacy about writing skills, a key element of literacy. This same skill was a key element tested on the FCAT as well as other standardized tests (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003). In a review of empirically-based research, Linnenbrink and Pintrich argued that there was an important link between students' self-efficacy and their motivation to learn in school. Walker (2003) concurred. He pointed out that student self-efficacy promoted student's desires to engage in literary activities, which translated into increased performance. If students do not see themselves as worthy learners, then they will not actively pursue an education. He concluded that the research on student motivation has provided evidence that self-efficacy is the key to promoting students' engagement and learning in the classroom.

Some researchers have argued that students' attitude towards testing also is important to consider. Stiggins (2002) asserted that policymakers do not realize that not all students face the challenge of state assessment efforts with the same degree of confidence. Thus, states risk damage to a significant percentage of their students. Stiggins concluded that this may, in fact, cause students to learn less, not more.

Kordalewski (2000) found that poor, urban high school students were more likely to resist state-mandated assessments than other students. Davis and Weber (1998) reported that some students viewed some subject matter as irrelevant to their future career needs. This can be especially true among lower SES students, whom, as Luker, Cobb and Luker (2001) illustrate, often come to school less 'equipped' for the rigors of school, standards, and testing, compared to other students. When students lack particular

experiences outside of school, they may be unable to see the relevance of what they are learning. Teachers of low income students may have to do more to convince their students that there is relevance to what they are learning in school.

The issues of poverty, student self-efficacy and lack of adequate materials each influence how teachers teach and students learn. Once students have a stake in learning, they are more apt to apply themselves to the fullest of their abilities. In looking at the questions surrounding teaching “at risk” students, Stice (1995) advocated using a whole language curriculum. Whole language instruction is not without its critics, either. McQuillan (1998) suggested that whole language instruction has been identified as the scapegoat for lower student test scores in California. Also, students in classrooms utilizing whole language instruction did not perform differently from their peers on standardized tests of reading in California.

Childress and Stice (1995) argued that literacy is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty. They reported that a program which is learner-centered, literature-based and integrated across the curriculum helps students move beyond the minimal levels that so few “at-risk” students achieve. Others, such as DeStephan (1995), and Miller and Stice (1995), claimed that at-risk students thrive in environments in which they are able to develop a sense of community and ownership.

Corley (2003) stressed that teachers must teach critical literacy skills to their students in order to break the cycle of poverty. He asserted that teachers must connect learning to learners' lived experiences; give voice to learners and create forums in which they can tell their stories, help learners view knowledge as something that they can

produce; and give learners the tools to critique frames of reference, ideas, and information (p. 2).

In order to reach at-risk students, we first must embrace the growing diversity in our schools, argued Gay (1994). Educators should ask themselves how they plan to reconcile the growing cultural pluralism inherent in American schools. She advocated a multicultural focus, a way of thinking and acting in the classroom that accepts cultural differences among students and places value in these differences. Multicultural thinking has a profound effect on the developing and implementing curricular objectives, and if embraced by teachers, can lead to greater learning generally by at-risk students. Gay pointed out that: 1) basic literacy skills should be learned within the context of cultural diversity, 2) learning requires the application of critical thinking and problem solving to ethnic and cultural diversity issues, 3) education content and processes should incorporate culturally pluralistic contributions, 4) equity and excellence are impossible without sensitivity to cultural diversity, 5) teaching styles should be accepting of different cultural learning styles, 6) understanding cultural traits of students makes teaching more effective, 7) ethnic and cultural factors should be used in determining students' readiness for learning, and 8) some motivation for learning is culture-specific.

While many of the same teaching techniques are successful in teaching literacy skills to at-risk students, teachers must be able to recognize the special needs of at-risk students. The typical "below basic level" reader in high school does his/her best to hide from teachers, avoids eye contact, conveniently "forgets" classroom materials, and seeks help from friends, not the teacher (Denti & Guerin, 2004). Often, teachers aggravate the problems of at-risk learners by sitting them farther away and expecting less from them.

The needs of at-risk adolescent readers include physically well-organized classrooms, firm schedules, clearly expected behaviors, required participation in class, risk-free environments, respect for students, and problems addressed as they occur. Hasselbring and Goin (2004) advocate using video and audio programs associated with the Peabody Learning Laboratory at Vanderbilt University, a program which was used with much success by the Orange County Public School system in Florida.

### **Conclusion**

Standardized testing and accountability have become commonplace in American public education. Most states utilize standardized test scores to determine student progress in school. More states are following Florida's example. A significant body of research cautions that a single measure, such as standardized test scores, cannot adequately measure performance. The correlation between standardized test scores and students' race and SES has been well documented.

Research demonstrates that students from low SES backgrounds face significant challenges in their acquisition of an education in public schools that differ from other peer groups. Many low SES students perceive themselves as less "worthy" learners, and act accordingly in the classroom. As a result, literacy rates for poor and minority students are often significantly below average for the population as a whole.

There are a variety of strategies that can be used to teach reading and writing in the secondary classroom. All of them are designed to build a sense of community and ownership among secondary students, and to develop students' desire to become better readers, writers and learners.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODS

An overview of the following topics will be presented in this chapter: 1) the setting, 2) participants, 3) data collection, 4) data analysis, 5) researcher bias, and 6) reliability and validity.

### **The Setting**

The population for this study is 148 high schools that administer the 10<sup>th</sup> grade FCAT reading test for a majority of its students who are considered to be “at-risk.” In order to be classified as “at-risk,” a simple majority of students at these schools must be classified as of a minority background, from a low SES background, or both. Of the 148 “at risk” schools the mean percentage of students who passed this test was 49%. However, within these 148 schools there are great disparities in performance. In 2003, 65% or more of their students passed the 10<sup>th</sup> grade Reading FCAT in 10% (N=15) of these schools, compared to 25% (N=37) of the schools where 40% or fewer of the students passed the same test.

The 148 at-risk high schools are scattered throughout the state, in urban and rural areas from Miami to the Panhandle. A significant number of these schools are found in south Florida; 45% (N=67) of these schools, are in Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties, the three largest metropolitan counties in Florida. The disparity between the 15 high-performing, at-risk schools and the 37 lowest performing, at-risk schools is of interest. Four of these schools were selected and teachers were interviewed and observed to gain a better understanding of how educators teach literacy skills and prepare students

for the FCAT. The passage rates of students on the 2003 FCAT Reading test for each of the four participating schools, the percentages of students who receive free/reduced lunch benefits, the percentage of students reported as minority and school grades assigned by the state for 2003 are presented below in table 3.1:

Table 3-1. Percentage of students who passed the 2003 Reading FCAT, percentage of minority students, percentage of low-income students, and school grade at participating schools

	Athens HS	Hamilton HS	Jackson HS	Pine Crest HS
Passing %	66	72	21	40
Minority %	51	71	99	81
Free Lunch %	19	46	50	37
School Grade	B	B	F	D

Due to logistical constraints only schools in the north or central part of Florida were selected for study. Schools selected for this study met the following criteria: (a) each is classified as a public high school, (b) student population is comprised by a majority who are non-Caucasian, low SES, or both, and (c) the school is located in the central part of Florida.

### **Participants**

Two of the “high performing schools” and two of the “low performing schools” were selected for this study. One English and/or language arts teacher at each of the participating high schools was observed and interviewed. Additionally, all English/Language Arts teachers at each of the four schools were asked to complete the Teacher Behavior Preferences Survey (TBPS). This survey is a research-based instrument that assesses teacher attitudes and efficacy. At each school, one 10<sup>th</sup> grade

English/language arts classroom was observed on five separate days for a minimum of 50 minutes per observation. Interviews of each teacher occurred after all five observations had been completed.

Before contacting schools, the researcher contacted the district director of research and evaluation to request permission to conduct this study in the district. Next, the researcher contacted the principals of the selected high and low performing at-risk school and asked for permission to observe 10<sup>th</sup> grade English/language arts classes. Once the principal of each school gave permission to participate in this study, individual teachers at each school were contacted and informed about the purpose of this study. After their permission was obtained, interviews and observations were scheduled.

Only teachers who teach English or Language Arts classes to tenth graders were observed and interviewed in this study. Efforts were exercised to select teachers for observation who shared certain demographic characteristics, such as race and gender. Each of the four participants in this study is a Caucasian female, whose ages ranged from early 30's to early 60's. The participants' experience teaching ranged from four to 35 years. One of the four participants is in her first year of teaching in Florida; each of the others had at least four years experience teaching at their respective schools. Two of the four were teaching tenth grade English/Language Arts for the first time this year, whereas each of the other two had four years experience teaching tenth grade English/Language Arts.

Interview questions focused on curriculum planning, design, development and implementation decisions made by each teacher, and the influence of the FCAT in these

decisions. Teachers' instructional practices were observed to better understand if there were differences in the nature of teaching at the high and low performing schools.

### **Data Collection**

Participant teachers were interviewed, observed and surveyed. Data from observations was gathered through extensive field notes taken using a teacher observation protocol developed by Anusavice (1999) and modified for this study. Field notes were typed and submitted to each participant for review. Portions of a teacher interview protocol relevant to curriculum design, development and implementation questions used by Gonzales (2002) guided interviews. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Running notes were documented while teachers provided instruction in reading and writing.

A semi-structural observation protocol based on Joyce and Weil's (1996) instructional models framework and used by Anusavice (1999) guided observations. Notes that describe what the teacher said or did across the following dimensions were recorded: 1) The sequential tasks students are asked to do (syntax), 2) Student/teacher roles and their respective involvement in the lesson (social systems), 3) Teacher responses to students' answers and questions (principles of reaction), 4) Methods for using instructional supports (support system), 5) Social interaction among students as well as between students and the teacher (social interaction). A total of 20 observation sessions, five at each school, were conducted. Four interviews were conducted, one with each participant. Field notes were recorded to document interactions in each observation among students as well as between students and teachers.

Participating teachers were observed in February 2005, before the FCAT Reading Test was administered, and interviewed after the FCAT in March 2005. Each interview

was conducted on March 15, 2005 at the participant's school. These interviews lasted from 30 to 50 minutes in length. To provide member checks, interviews and running notes were transcribed and sent to the teacher. Participating teachers were asked to read the transcript to ensure its accuracy and to mark any necessary changes. Two of the four participants returned observation notes with few, if any, comments. None of the four participants returned interview transcripts to the researcher with any comments, or provided the researcher with any other feedback subsequent to the interviews.

Additionally, the Teacher Behavior Preference Survey (TBPS), developed by Behar-Horenstein, was given to English/Language Arts teachers (including the four participants named above) at each of the four schools. Each participant volunteered to coordinate administration of the TBPS to their fellow teachers. Teachers from all four schools responded to the survey. Using a five point scale, the TBPS measures the range of teacher preferences on 60 items. These items are arranged in 30 pairs; where one item assesses agreement from a student-centered perspective and the other assesses agreement from a teacher-centered perspective. The items comprise four subscales including: methods of instruction, classroom milieu, assessment techniques, and use of questions.

### **Data Analysis**

Transcribed interviews and observations were analyzed inductively, guided by Spradley's (1980) domain analysis method, and Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic networks method. After all observations had been completed, the field notes were typed and coded using an open coding system based on methods of participant observation described by Spradley. Emergent themes were coded along the margins of each set of typed field notes. Afterwards, these codes were listed in a separate document chronologically. Next, codes were tabulated for frequency of appearance and listed

accordingly for each set of observational notes. Finally, themes among the codes were identified based on the categories of codes listed, as well as the frequency of each code in the notes.

Emergent themes were identified from each set of teacher observations and then compared with themes and trends observed across the four teachers. In order to assess the differences in instructional beliefs among the four participants in this study, interviews of each were conducted and tape recorded. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher, who then sent copies of each transcript to each participant for review. The transcripts were each coded and analyzed using the same methods regarding analysis of field notes taken from the twenty observations conducted. Using these methods of analysis, several themes emerged from each interview. Differences in attitudes and beliefs between the participants from high performing schools and low performing schools were recorded.

In order to analyze the results of the TBPS, mean scores for each item were calculated. In order to assess reliability, alpha coefficients were calculated for the teacher-centered questions as well as the student-centered questions. Additionally, alpha coefficients were calculated for each of the four subscales: methods of instruction, classroom milieu, assessment techniques and use of questions. An item analysis of results from the TBPS was conducted in order to determine statistically significant differences among items while controlling for school site. Forty-four percent (N=31) of teachers responded to this survey, from a population of approximately 70 teachers. The number of respondents representing each school is shown here in Table 3.2.

Table 3-2. Number of respondents to the TBPS from each school

	Athens HS	Hamilton HS	Jackson HS	Pine Crest HS
N	10	5	12	4

Each of the 60 items measured by the TBPS was sorted by school in order to determine the extent to which answers varied by school, as well as between high performing and low performing schools. For each variable, a Pearson's R correlation coefficient was calculated.

### **Researcher Bias**

The researcher is in his ninth year of teaching secondary social studies to public school students in Alachua County, Florida. Each school year he has taught large numbers of students who are at-risk. He has participated in a variety of school and district level initiatives that have been aimed at improving high school FCAT reading scores. Based on his experiences as a teacher, this researcher is acquainted with the struggles and efforts among at-risk students to achieve literacy skills, and their efforts (and feelings) regarding the FCAT.

Monitoring researcher subjectivity is a constant process, and one that must be pursued consciously by qualitative researchers in order to present more valid findings (Glesne, 1999). To monitor subjectivity properly requires that researchers "see what you are not seeing" and "be aware of instances in which a researcher might make less of something than could be made" (p. 109). Since the researcher is a high school teacher who has had substantial experience working with students who are at-risk in reading and writing, his experience is likely to impact his interpretation of the data. Thus, several

steps were taken to ensure that the interpretation of data was not a reflection of the researcher as instrument. Use of the selected protocols helped minimize researcher bias, as did field testing use of the protocols. Awareness of his role as a participant-observer helped minimize the impact of researcher bias in this study. In his graduate coursework, the researcher has learned and practiced many of the relevant skills needed to conduct qualitative research, including: observation, domain analysis, designing and conducting interviews, and transcription of interview data. Additionally, applying the research protocols, and lessons learned from their usage prior to commencing this study, helped the researcher use the protocols systematically during the observations and interviews. Finally, a dependability audit was conducted by another graduate student in order to further minimize researcher bias. This student viewed one of the four interview transcripts, and 4 of 20 sets of observation notes. Considerable agreement existed between the researcher and the graduate student regarding analysis of this data.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Several steps were undertaken to help establish validity in this study. First, the selection of participants was stratified to minimize the potential effect of confounding variables such as race and SES. To the extent possible, teacher participants were selected and matched across several variables including race, experience level, gender and age. Second, by including two schools each that were “high performing” and “low performing,” different sources of data were used, and different groups (high and low performing) were sampled, each with more than one source of data. Third, because this study was designed to gather data through a series of observations, multiple observations establishes triangulation by giving the researcher enough data to observe similarities and differences in observations over time (Patton, 2002). Fourth, conducting interviews and

observations, as well as collecting survey data from other teachers at the same schools, provided multiple sources of data. Fifth, before selecting schools to study, each of the four schools selected met a pre-established criterion level of “high performing” or “low performing” characteristics (with respect to percentage of 10<sup>th</sup> grade students passing the reading FCAT) for more than one year. The criteria selected for “high performing” was that at least 65% of students had to have passed the 10<sup>th</sup> grade FCAT reading test. The criteria selected for “low performing” was that no more than 40% of students could have passed this same test. Sixth, the TBPS, a research-based study, was administered to each of the four participants as well as to other language arts teachers at each of the four schools. This provided an additional data set corresponding to each school, yet beyond just the experiences of one teacher in each school. Alpha coefficients of reliability were calculated and reported among the different subsets of questions on the TBPS; each of the alpha scores showed moderate to strong reliability. Use of the TBPS further establishes triangulation, as data was gathered through observation, interview and by survey.

To further insure reliability, the researcher used observation, interview, and survey protocols that are research-based, and that have been used (teacher observations and interviews) on multiple occasions. The researcher pilot tested use of the protocols by observing a teacher who is not a part of this study. A transcription of the observation session was provided to this teacher. Feedback was solicited from the teacher in order to ensure that the researcher has generated an accurate portrait of this classroom session.

## CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings related to each research question.

### **Research Question 1) To What Extent Are FCAT Scores based on Outside Factors such as Race, SES and Size of the School?**

Analysis of 2003 10<sup>th</sup> grade FCAT Reading (Peabody, 2004, unpublished) showed that race and SES of students accounted for 52% of the variance in the scores, and an insignificant relationship between size of the school and FCAT scores. Subsequently, that data was used to identify high performing and low performing schools on the FCAT, for the purposes of conducting this study. Students' performance on the 2004 FCAT Reading test at each of the four participating schools is consistent with the level of performance measured and utilized with the 2003 FCAT data. Fewer than 40% of students at Jackson HS and at Pine Crest HS, low performing schools, passed the 2004 FCAT Reading test, while over 65% of students at Athens HS and at Hamilton HS, high performing schools, passed this same test. Analysis of 2004 10th grade FCAT Reading scores confirmed the relationship between race, SES and FCAT Reading scores.

### **Research Question 2) What Are the Instructional Practices among Teachers of Students in High Performing Schools and among Teachers of Students in Low Performing Schools?**

Data gathered from each of the four selected schools illustrate characteristic instructional strategies that were observed at the low performing and high performing

schools. (Italicized material contained in this text is taken directly from field notes or interviews.)

### **High-Performing Schools**

At both of the classrooms in high performing schools, the researcher observed several instances of student-led activities, the provision of student choice in the curriculum, and an emphasis on reading-related activities and assignments, both in and out of the classroom. In both settings, higher order thinking skills were emphasized. Talking specifically about the FCAT was rare among the teacher or the students.

Student-directed learning was part of the normal daily routine in these classrooms. For example, notes from an observation in Ms. Kelly's class at Athens High School illustrate this point: *The class begins with student presentations using PowerPoint and a projector. Two to three students are working together on their presentation. One student from the first group conducts the PowerPoint presentation. She is talking about phrases. The teacher is sitting at a student desk, listening to the presentation. The rest of the class is listening to the presentation silently. Their attention seems to be focused on the dry erase board in the front of the room, where the projector is projecting the slide show. The presentation lasts about five minutes.*

Book talk activities were common in Ms. Kelly's class at Athens HS, as well as Ms. Davis' class at Hamilton HS. During Ms. Kelly's 10<sup>th</sup> grade Honors English class: *The teacher announces that it is time to resume "Book Talks." After she goes to her desk at the back of the room and sits down, one student walks to the front of the room, stands next to the overhead. First, he briefly summarizes the book "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy." He discussed the setting of the book, along with literary concepts such as allusions and foreshadowing. Other students remain quiet during the student's*

*presentation, and they ask him questions about the book. Several students are observed writing down information about the book in their notebooks.*

Both teachers provided rubrics, as a means to assess students' work and provided them with a framework for conducting student-led activities within class. Ms. Davis' rubric for the "Book Talk" assignment was straightforward: *One student walks up to the front of the room to present his "Book talk" on "Secrets of the Shadow." He stands next to the overhead talking about the book. Meanwhile, the teacher is seated at her desk in the back of the room. She is sorting materials, as well as asking the presenter questions about his book. The rest of the class listens quietly to the presentation, some of them are writing. The teacher asks the student presenter information about the author. Next, the teacher instructs him to pick a passage and read it to the class. He opens the book and reads aloud for about two or three minutes. The class listens. When he concludes, they applaud. Several students in the class, along with the teacher, talk about where this book is in relation to a series of books. The student presenter sits down. The teacher calls on several students and asks them specific questions about the book just presented, such as the title, the setting, and literary terms discussed by the presenter. The teacher's use of questioning during and after this presentation demonstrated what information she expected students to convey through these presentations.*

Scaffolding and providing opportunities for students to engage in active learning were present in work assigned in Ms. Davis' class: *The teacher, standing by the overhead at the front of the room, tells students to get out their Caesar folders and six sheets of blank paper, as she turns off the overhead quiz. The teacher explains that the six pieces of paper will be used as foldables. She tells the students that they will be*

*responsible for 30 vocabulary terms from Julius Caesar by the end of the unit. Next, she turns the overhead back on, and on a blank transparency, begins writing words from the play down in groups of five. She writes down six groups, for a total of 30 words. She tells students to draw four lines on their six pieces of paper, creating five columns on each piece. Students begin doing so amidst chatter.*

*The teacher announces to the class that she will determine when the class is done with this by looking at who can be done first. The class works faster at finishing. Students write the terms down in their notebooks. As both teacher and students write, the teacher asks the class to state the meanings of these words, and/or gives them clues as to the definitions of these terms. She tells students that each student will be responsible for presenting a word to the class from the list. Several hands go up at once, as students volunteer to choose words they would like to present. The teacher tells them to pick words they do not already know well. The teacher writes down in her folder which student is presenting each word.*

*After each student has been assigned one word, the teacher tells the class that the remaining words will be extra credit, but that she won't give any extra credit to students that don't need it. There is substantial chatter in the room during this activity, most of it revolving around who will choose what terms. All of the students are writing, some of the students are teasing each other or joking about the vocabulary terms, using them out of context or in funny sounding ways. The teacher calls on several students by name, and tells them that they are going to be responsible for presenting their words on Thursday to the class. She gently teases them, saying, "We're counting on you." This activity lasts about 25 minutes.*

Students in both settings appeared knowledgeable regarding their student-led activities. They often went beyond the boundaries of an assignment in the preparation of student-directed activities, as evidenced in Ms. Kelly's class: *The next group begins setting up. The chatter resumes as they set up their presentation. Two students conduct this presentation; they are wearing matching red shirts. One shirt says "Upper case S," the other, "lower case s." They point this out to the class, when they announce that their presentation is about capitalization. The teacher is sitting at the same student desk as before, listening to the presentation. The class audience is attentive and listening to this PowerPoint presentation. One student asks a question about capitalization, which the presenters answer.*

*The presenters explain that their game will involve correcting capitalization errors in a PowerPoint presentation, using one of two "magic wands" they created. The function of one wand is to fix errors that need capital letters, while the other wand will fix errors in words that are capitalized when they should not be. Volunteers come up two at a time to play the game. Players point with their wand at the error on the board. Once they have spotted all the errors, one of the presenters changes the slide to reveal the corrected (and highlighted) errors. Each of the slides they use contains a quote from, and a scene from a movie.*

Making learning fun was emphasized in both settings. A representative example from Ms. Kelly's class follows:

*A second student from the group sets up a game for the class to play. Using masking tape, he taped folded pieces of paper across an open doorway in the back of the room. The teacher helps the student presenters explain the concept of "extended*

*phrases" as the rest of the class listens, and the second student set up for the game. While he was setting up for the game, there was a lot of chatter in the room. Once the taping was finished, he explained that students were to use a plastic toy dart gun to shoot darts at the hanging papers. Students volunteered to play. As students were called on by the student running the game, they came, one at a time, to the middle of the room a few feet away from the targets in the back of the room. Students were attentive and seemed to enjoy playing the game or watching others play. The entire class seemed to be engaged in the activity. A total of four students played as they grabbed the gun and shot the targets. When one was hit, the student running the game would grab the paper that was hit by the player, read aloud a phrase and asked the class to identify the type of phrase read. Students would raise their hand to give the answer. One student played a noisemaker when other students answered questions correctly. The student running the game called on other students to answer these questions. The teacher was sitting on a counter on the side of the room during this game while the students took turns playing the game. The class laughed when each student aimed at the targets. The teacher was heard telling one student, jokingly, "Don't go to the police academy." After 20 minutes, the teacher instructed the class, "Give these two applause."*

Students in Ms. Davis' class seemed to have fun as well, while engaged in literature-based activities: *After assigning students to read Acts 3-5 of Julius Caesar, Ms. Davis told her students that the class would divide parts of the play by group and that they will be responsible for putting scenes from the play in students' own language. "Turn to page 776," the teacher says. She conducted a "walk through" of selected scenes from the play. After getting a student to volunteer to be Julius Caesar, she handed him a*

*laminated piece of notebook size paper that says "Caesar." She walked across the room to a storage area, pulled out a purple sheet, and handed it to Caesar for his toga. The student puts the "toga" on as the class laughs. Next, she handed him a purple bike helmet, and explained that Caesar should also have a purple crown. Next, the teacher asked students to volunteer for the roles of Calpurnia and the soothsayer. She gave Calpurnia a purple sheet and bike helmet. She handed the soothsayer an orange sheet. She explains that the soothsayer should be somewhat "creepy." The student acted the part. The class laughed. She assigned the role of Brutus to another student and handed him a blue sheet. She assigned the role of Marc Antony to another student and gave him a cap to wear. She assigned other students to serve as some of the other conspirators against Caesar. They received sheets or towels which the students served as togas. Students laughed at each other as the actors tried on their costumes. One student actor said "Ay Carramba!" when he looked at his costume. Each of the actors has a script card in hand, similar to the one that was given to "Caesar."*

Both teachers consistently displayed a high level of rapport with their students. Technological innovations, such as PowerPoint presentations, or other, more traditional props, were utilized by both teachers to foster learning and interest in language arts.

Both classrooms were positive learning environments. Students were generally attentive to, and participated in, the lesson or activity, regardless of whether such activities were student-led or teacher-led, as evidenced by the above excerpts. Both teachers planned creative and entertaining lessons for their students on a regular basis, activities that gave students ample opportunities to develop their reading and writing skills, such as "Music Journals:" *At the beginning of class, Ms. Kelly instructed students*

to get their journals out. The teacher and one student joke about how the teacher almost tripped and fell. Next, the teacher walked over to the stereo and put in a CD, "Loveshack" by the B-52's. As the students listen to the song they remain silent. A few students are writing. The teacher remained at the front of the room during this time. She took roll silently, and then got a small book off of her desk. The entire song played. At the end of the song, the teacher told the students to start writing. She played the song a second time, yet she turned the volume down slightly. Students began writing in their journals.

The teacher walked over to a student desk, sat down, and began writing in her book. The class remained quiet. Most of the students continued to write in their journal while the song is played for the second time. Towards the end of this activity, a few students begin quietly mouthing the words of the song. As the second playing of the song ends, two students raise their hands. The teacher calls on one of them. The student reads aloud what she wrote in her journal as the music played. The class listens quietly. The teacher gets up, goes over to the stereo and takes the CD out. She hands it to another student seated at her desk. The student called upon by the teacher talks about going to a "Mega Com" convention. The teacher calls on the second student volunteer. This student talks about the beat of the song and quotes lines from it. Several hands go up. The teacher calls on three more students. The first student jokes about how another student has a girlfriend. The class laughs. The next student tells the class that she remembers "Loveshack" as the first song she ever danced to.

The teacher tells the student who brought in the CD that this song was a good choice for their Music Journal activity on that day. The class applauds. The next student

*talks about whales and how he remembered another story. The class laughs. More students volunteer to speak. The teacher calls on a few more. One student talks about the song how he free associated thoughts and ideas during the song. Another student talks about how the song seems to always be played at weddings. The class is attentive; occasionally there are comments on what students said in relation to their music journals. The topic of school dances comes up, and the teacher jokes with the class about how students act at school dances. While standing at the front of the classroom, the teacher reads from her music journal. Meanwhile, the class listens quietly. This activity lasted about twenty five minutes.*

Classroom management or discipline-related issues were rare in both classes, and never consisted of more than a few minutes of chatter. In both classes, students were easily redirected towards the class activity by the teacher.

### **Low-Performing Schools**

In the low performing schools, there was a high level of teacher-directed activity. Students were given no opportunity to lead the class or to conduct any significant, curriculum-related activities in class. Table 4.1 shows the difference between high and low performing schools with respect to the amount of time spent in teacher-directed vs. student-directed activities.

Table 4-1. Amount of time spent engaged in student-directed activities

	High Performing Schools		Low Performing Schools	
	Athens HS	Hamilton HS	Jackson HS	Pine Crest HS
Minutes in student-directed activities	150	80	0	0
Percentage of class time in student-directed activities	60%	32%	0%	0%

At the low performing schools, none of the instructional time was student-directed.

About 60% and 32% of the instructional time at the high performing schools consisted of student-directed activities. *Ms. Wallace announces to her students that the benchmark for this week is inferencing. She asks the students to explain how the plot of a story is like a roller coaster. She draws a bell curve on the board at the front of the room as she explains. She writes the different parts of a plot in corresponding places along the curve, and then she returns to the middle of the room. She explains the different elements of a plot, and compares it to a Lifetime movie. Next, she asks students what it is called when they learn about characters and the setting. One student replies, "exposition." Next, she talks about conflict and climax. She hands out a worksheet to the students, and tells them to draw a graphic organizer before reading. Students listen, give out answers, and write graphic organizers during this time.*

*Next, the teacher reads the story "Bedtime Story" aloud (on the worksheets she just handed out to the class). She reads the story aloud while the students listen and read along silently. The teacher asks the students about the story. She asks them, "Where do you picture the story?" A discussion of the story begins, led by the teacher. Students continue to listen, and answer questions. The teacher is breaking down the elements of a story generally and this story specifically. She asks them when the climax of this story occurs. When no one provides a correct answer the teacher talks about the movie Halloween as an example of another horror story. One half of the class remains attentive while they try to figure out the elements of this story. One student is wearing headphones and a hood on. Another has his head down on the desk while the teacher is talking. The teacher tells students to answer questions about the story (characters, setting, the*

*problem and the resolution) in their journals. She directs them to get out their Holt Readers when they have finished writing. The teacher circulates around the room and collects worksheets from students. One at a time, students finish writing, close their journals, and then get out a textbook.*

Reading activities unrelated to the FCAT were not stressed in either setting, the FCAT itself was mentioned frequently by both teachers as well as the students.

*As Ms. Wallace walked around the room, at one point she asked students, “How long until the FCAT?” In response, several students began talking about the FCAT. During this discussion, the teacher explained what a norm-referenced test is, and described the relationship between testing and the No Child Left Behind Act. She told her students when the FCAT was going to be administered. She also told her students that their last benchmark activity will be on Friday. Students begin getting their journals and start writing. One student hands out snacks to a couple other students. One student asks the teacher what to do if he has lost his journal. One student who is listening to headphones does not appear to be working. Next, she hands out to students copies of an article (with questions) titled “When Teachers are Cheaters.” The article is about teachers helping students cheat on standardized tests. She divides the class into groups of three or four students and assigns each group part of the reading and related questions. The teacher tells them she will read the first paragraph aloud to get them started and begins reading.*

*Although most of the students in Ms. Fernandez’ class have already left, the remaining students begin to talk with one another. One student says that she hates school. Others say that they hate preparing for the FCAT. The teacher returns to the*

*front of the room after hanging up the phone. Students begin talking to her in a mix of Spanish and English. One student talks about the stress of getting ready for the FCAT in Spanish.*

Many of the classroom learning activities stressed lower order thinking and learning skills. In both settings, there was a low level of interest or participation in the learning process by students.

*Ms. Wallace reviews the T chart created last week as well as the story and the questions that were placed in the margin. She asks students to discuss the significance of the story's elements. The students are quiet and some remain attentive. However, two students are looking at CD's. Another student (different than above) has his head down. Another student is looking at a magazine. The teacher begins by reading questions out of the Holt textbook and tries to get students to talk about or relate to themes in the story. She uses the example of laughing at a funeral. One student describes similar examples of having laughed at church.*

Low student interest in learning was apparent. *Ms. Fernandez re-reads the passage to the class about stew. She asks the students if they know what stew is. Students laugh as the teacher is talking; much of the laughter does not seem to involve the lesson. Two or three students are pounding on their desks, simulating a drum beat. Several students are playing with their locks. The teacher continues to stand at the overhead in the front of the room. She tells the class that the setting of the story is a kitchen. Next, she asks the students to determine what season the story was set in. The teacher asks the class to identify words in the passage that point out the story is set in the winter. Chatter and the beating on desks continue throughout this discussion.*

*The teacher reads the questions on the overhead regarding the setting of the story. Next, she puts a second transparency on, and tells the class how to determine the characters in a story. Chatter continues. Some students begin yawning loudly. The teacher asks the class generally what characters are in a story. One student answers that characters are people. Another says they could be animals. The teacher says that characters could be animals, people, monsters, etc. The teacher states that all characters have feelings. At this point, five students have their heads down. Chatter continues. The teacher goes to the five students with their heads down one at a time, taps them on their shoulders, and says, "guys." Two of them pick up their heads. The teacher reads a second passage. There is a lot of chatter in the room as the teacher reads. This passage is about moving and the feelings it generates. The teacher circulates, talks to individual students, and reads questions regarding the passage. The teacher gets some of the students to describe the characters' emotions based on the reading.*

*The teacher reads and re-reads questions on the overhead transparency about the story. Laughter among students continues. The teacher stops talking and looks at one of the students that have been laughing intermittently throughout this portion of the class. She does not say anything to him. "Sorry, Miss" he says, as the laughter continues. Seven students have their heads down. One student raises his hand and talks about mixed feelings he has had about moving. The teacher talks about inferring information from a passage. She turns the lights on and hands out a worksheet. Chatter, yawning and the beating on desks continue.*

Table 4-2. Mean number of reprimands issued by teacher per period observed

	Athens HS	Hamilton HS	Jackson HS	Pine Crest HS
N	0.8	1.8	2.6	2.0

Table 4.2 above shows that in low performing schools teachers were more likely to reprimand their students than were teachers in high performing schools. Students in high performing settings seemed to be more engaged than the students observed in low performing school settings. Classroom management issues impeded instruction frequently during Ms. Fernandez' Pine Crest High School classes: *Throughout this discussion, several students listened silently, while others talked among themselves. About four students had their heads down early in this activity while later there were as many as six heads down. Another student yawned. Other students displayed off-task and inattentive behavior while the teacher reads from the book. When one of the three students volunteering answers said, "It's on page 193." Another student, who had not been paying attention up to that point, said loudly, "Who said that?" Many students appear to tune out the discussion of the reading. One or two were seen listening to portable CD players while another was looking through his CD's. One checks her hair in a small mirror. Another student plays with a hair brush. Another one quietly rearranges books on a shelf next to his seat. Two or three students wrote and passed notes back and forth. Another student looked at some of the cash in his hands. On at least six occasions during this activity, the teacher announced that there was too much noise in the room. Ms. Fernandez stopped and talked with one student at length about his inattentive behavior.*

As demonstrated by the vignettes above, students frequently were off-task. Acts of defiance towards the teacher were commonplace. For example, *Ms. Fernandez asks students general questions about setting in stories. One student began talking about the teacher and she stated that the teacher "is getting on my case." The teacher looks at her,*

*but did not say anything. A minute later, the same student again stated that the teacher was getting on her case. The teacher calls this student outside. "Bye guys; I'll see you later," the student stated as she was leaving the room.*

In another instance, students banded together in an act of group defiance, fostered by a sense of confusion on campus that morning: *The teacher then reads the directions contained in the overhead aloud. She asks students what words will identify the setting of a story. Students chatted and some began hissing. Two students shout out for passes, one of them for the fourth time. The teacher re-states that students are to be called to their lockers. Students argued with the teacher and stated that they need to go to their lockers. Next, an announcement came on again, telling teachers that they could send as many as five or six students at a time to their lockers, if they have lockers in building 100. Before the announcement was finished, about 20 students stood up and left the room without a word from the teacher.*

Student outbursts, usually unrelated to the lesson, were frequent in number, as reflected by the number of teacher reprimands listed in Table 4.2. Several students came to class late on each of the five days when observation occurred. Participation in these lessons frequently consisted of students randomly shouting out answers to questions posed by the teacher. *After reading a sentence, Ms. Fernandez asks the class what the sentence means. Then she begins to read again. After reading a passage for approximately three or four minutes, she reads a question in the booklet based on that reading and the multiple choice answers. Several students offer answers A, B, C, and D aloud. The teacher asks, "How many agree on A?" A few hands go up. "Is that what it says?" asks the teacher, "B?" Next, she calls on a particular student for the second*

*question. She re-reads the question. Students (including the one called upon) give two different answers. "Let's look back at the reading," the teacher says. The teacher re-reads that portion of the text. The passage is about the growth of photocopying and the environmental hazards associated with photocopying.*

In both settings students acted as passive recipients of knowledge. Student interest in learning, and in the classroom activities, was observed to be very low. Students often were inattentive. The teacher frequently had to redirect students' off-task behavior. In Ms. Wallace's class at Jackson High School *chatter continued over the teacher's verbal directions. The teacher called one off-task student by name and said "Alright." She pointed to another student and motioned for her to sit down. She told another student to "concentrate and turn around." The teacher distributed a packet and a separate worksheet to each of the students. One student asks the meaning of the bell work quote. The teacher read and explained it. The chatter continues among several students. The teacher said, "One, two, three, four, five, six people talking. Stop." On another occasion, she spoke to a student who had not begun working several times. Students were instructed to read the packet and answer the questions based on the reading.*

In classrooms, at least one student, and often more than one, was observed with his/her head down for substantial amounts of time during instruction. This activity was often overlooked by both teachers. Students in both classrooms frequently were seen playing with cell phones, CD players, and other gadgets, rather than completing assigned work. Student chatter, unrelated to the content or lesson, was commonplace in both settings. Ms. Wallace redirected off-task behavior more frequently than Ms. Fernandez.

In Ms. Fernandez' ESOL class, students often appeared frustrated with the learning process: *Ms. Fernandez asks students what the conflict in the story is. Students guess. Next, she asks them when the turning point occurs in the story, and what is the resolution. Students pass notes during this discussion. One student replies that, "...the bears were smoking weed." Students laugh. Other students yawn loudly. One states, "This is boring." One of the students asks loudly, "What's the whole point of this?" At this point, the teacher has already told the students to listen twice. She tells another student, "You can't continue talking." He replies, "whatever."*

*The teacher removes the first overhead and replaces it with another that showed a graphic outline of the elements of a plot. Next, she leads a discussion about a poem that appears on the second page of the packet. She asks the class what a eulogy is. Several students guess at once, out loud. None of them are correct. The chatter continues. "Let her teach!" one student says. One student tells another, "Stop talking, idiot!"*

*The teacher tells the class to read the poem silently to themselves, and underline any words in the poem that they do not recognize. Some of the students read the poem while others do not. The chatter continues. The teacher asks the class to tell her what words they underlined. One student says "shrunk." Another student says, "You don't know what shrunk means?!?" The teacher tells them it's based on the word "shrink." Several students identify "sphinx" as an unfamiliar word. The teacher asks the class if they know what it means. Several students guess a variety of answers and blurt them out loud. The teacher tells them to visualize something.*

*The teacher asks the class what the poem means. One student raises his hand, asks what sphinx means. The teacher says again, just visualize something. She asks the class*

*what the poem is about. Chatter and laughter among the students continues. Among the chatter, one student asks another who the main character is in the poem. Students guess out loud about the meaning of the poem. The teacher reads the poem out loud. Some students do not read along with her. One student says, "I still don't know what sphinx means." Two students in the back of the classroom begin to playfully slap one another. The other student tells the first one to leave her alone. Students tell each other to "shut up" several times during this activity.*

Teaching and learning activities in the low performing school classrooms were mostly teacher-directed. However, the teachers tried to engage their students in the lesson or activity by posing questions that were designed to encourage their participation. Ms. Wallace frequently connected elements of the curriculum to things the students could relate to.

*Ms. Wallace tells students that they will read an article from their text and answer questions based on it just like they will do on the FCAT. She tells them to turn to page nine of their workbooks, rip out the page, and then get their textbooks from the shelf. She tells them to turn to page 105 in their texts. As students complete these tasks, she asks them if any of them have lived in New York. She asks them if any of them know what PS stands for in New York. With a few hints from the teacher, students eventually figure out that it stands for "public school."*

*The teacher rings the bell on her desk a total of three times during this activity when students provide correct answers. The teacher is setting the context for the story the class is about to read. She explains what PS and IS mean. She tells students about the New York middle school that is the subject of the story they are about to read. She*

*discusses the concept of a “melting pot” and its significance in American culture. She contrasts the melting pot idea with the idea that America is a “salad.” Students listen to the teacher and guess answers to questions she asks them.*

*The teacher asks them if they know anyone whose parents or grandparents came here from another country, and how the parents or grandparents speak their ancestral language, while their kids speak English. A few students nodded in agreement. She explained how the middle school they will read about might be considered a “melting pot.” She talked about how students moving to Florida from the Midwest might find a friend in their new school and how they might get that friend to show them what kinds of clothing styles to wear. At one point during this discussion, the teacher said, “I know, I’m old and slow.” A student responded, “No, you’re not.”*

Frequently students in the low performing classroom settings did not actively, or appropriately, participate in the lesson. Assignments in both classrooms consisted often of seatwork that explicitly related to the Sunshine State Standards benchmarks and the FCAT.

### **Research Question 3) What Are the Instructional Beliefs among Teachers at High Performing and Low Performing Schools?**

#### **High Performing Schools**

The interviews revealed that Ms. Kelly, at Athens High School, and Ms. Davis, at Hamilton High School, each hold an open and dynamic view of the curriculum and believe that curriculum is a reciprocal rather than a linear process. Both teachers stressed their belief that the curriculum should be tailored to the students’ needs. They also mentioned that the curriculum decisions they make do not consider the FCAT specifically. They also asserted that they do not “teach to the test.” Ms. Davis states, “I

*want them to have attached language, again for themselves, have those basic skills, so they can attack any piece of literature, (whatever) anybody decides all of a sudden is the tenth grade book. I think right now, a lot of teachers are getting bogged down thinking that language arts is all about FCAT, and it's not, that's just a basic myth. Um, my biggest compliment, now I've heard a second student tell another teacher, that I don't teach FCAT, I teach. And, they've really enjoyed that this year, because they're not doing drills."*

*Ms. Kelly stated that, "Teachers sometimes lose sight of the fact that it's skills we're teaching, it's not necessarily teaching to a test. I think this is a misconception. We're teaching them the skills they should be able to do in any situation, if it's the SAT or the FCAT or just a test in their class, or some type of assessment in chorus, there are certain skills that they need to be successful."*

*Both teachers emphasized that teaching and learning in the language arts classroom should be student-centered. According to Ms. Kelly, "Students... are my biggest influence. What are they interested in? What do they watch? What do they listen to? What do they read? They are my number one influence because I can take what they need to know, and apply it to what they want to know, and therefore they're going to remember it a lot better."*

*The teachers reported that their learning did not remain static over time and that they made adjustments as needed on an annual, monthly, or even daily basis. Ms. Kelly states that, "Here's this lump of clay that Florida gave me, and I'm going to mold it into something that's going to work for the kids I have this year. Every year, you get a different set of kids, I don't know that I've ever, even the years that I taught ninth grade*

*English four years in a row, I never taught it the same way twice. You don't know what you're going to get, and so I think, in terms of influencing curriculum, I think it's the teacher's individual willingness to be an active part of creating that curriculum, molding it to fit their needs."*

These teachers reported that they were proponents of giving students real choices, decision-making power, and ownership over aspects of curriculum planning. Ms. Kelly had a "Novel of the Month" assignment for her students. She explained that: *"I have them read a novel of the month outside of class, to foster independent reading, [and] hopefully a love of reading, I give them a genre, but I let them pick [the actual title] in that genre. Usually, like right now they're doing poetry, so they have to read ten poems by the same poet, or ten poets about the same subject, or theme. I've had [topics such as] published from 2000 or newer, science fiction fantasy month, children's books, I actually have them read a number of children's books and talk about the lessons you can learn. Projects range from making a movie poster about your book, to actual analysis of literary elements: character, plot, conflict, setting, and those types of things.*

*The projects that I got for the last one, they had to read a self-help book, or a cookbook, or a how-to book, or something like that, so I got lots of food items that I think that, for the self-help books, they connected with whatever it was they were assigned to get help on, whether it was ADD, um, Linda, the noisemaker (laughs), she read a book about, almost a Seven Habits kind of book, but a little bit different, she created two photo essays of this is when you're doing all the positive things that it tells you to do, and she used it as a model, and when you turned the poster over, her sister did all of the opposite things...her being able to put that much creativity and thought into it, she really liked*

*being able to express herself that way, so I may try that next year, also letting them have a month, 'OK, you pick the topic, whatever.' In retrospect, I want some type of proposal, in writing, from them, because it's almost a little scary, to not know what I was going to get from someone, but I want to say, 90 percent of them were appropriate."*

Ms. Davis requires students to read outside of class every week. The benefits of this assignment are many. She explained that: *"Every child is required to read 50 pages a week for regular, 75 pages a week for honors, a book of their choice, and every Friday in my classroom, they write me about it and I bring in literary terms...they might write a paragraph about whatever they read that week. And then, I bring in some fun things like, illustrate a book cover, or add a symbol to the cover, um, I'll ask about the author. I try to give them a couple of questions they can choose between that are open-ended, and I'll have a pretty good idea, by the time they've finished answering it, whether or not they're really reading. [After] they finish the three pages of writing, which is expository writing, they do a summary of what they read that week. And, they get pretty excited about it, so that they go from thinking that they can't write three pages to thinking that they can't read 50, to coming in and finding out that they sometimes have read a couple of novels during the week. They've found one author that they really love, it spreads like wildfire through the classroom that 'this guy is really cool, read him.' So, they get very excited about it, and it's all based on their choice, because I don't read fantasy anymore, but there's a whole group that's into fantasy, a whole group that's into action, a whole group that's into realistic, whole groups that are into what they call pimp books, which are a little bit on the racy side, but as long as their parents approve, they go for it. So, they're reading what are really 350 to 400 page adult novels, happen to have maybe a bit of a*

*teenage, maybe college flair to them. Lots of sex, lots of relationships, but it's a beginning. Because you can lead them from that very easily to Grisham and on to something else that has maybe a little less sex (laughs), and they have to use their imagination a little bit more. So, they take all these skills and that's where I basically see most of my growth. That's what I attribute to most of the growth in their reading, because they've been duped into reading, and then moving into a higher level with the writing, so the literature that we do in class is where I teach the strategies."* During their interviews Ms. Davis and Ms. Kelly reported that an emphasis on teaching and learning literacy skills weighed heavily in their curriculum planning.

These teachers made statements that suggested they had a high level of efficacy. Ms. Kelly stated that: *"I believe that I can teach any subject that needed to be taught. Because really, I teach life skills. I use English as my vehicle to help them think. I create, no I foster, thinking. And, being lifelong learners, and always going back out there and retraining yourself, and I always tell them that even at my age, I'm still learning new things, and you know, I could teach math and still have the same philosophy about wanting them to be lifelong learners and I can tell them they're going to use any class that they take in life, they think that they're not. When am I ever going to use this, but, they do, they just, it's not a literal translation of the Odyssey into my regular job at Burger King."*

Ms. Davis had a practical perspective on teaching and learning in her class. She stated that she wanted students to be able to use and develop literacy skills that would serve them in the marketplace. *"I think I'm a very practical teacher, I'm finding that out more as I talk with other teachers who are really into teaching literature. Having been in*

*the business world, I know that no one will ever ask you to write a Haiku, so all those lessons were lost. I could have given them a great Haiku, but no, they never asked me for it, nor wanted to pay me for it. So my stress is always on can you effectively communicate. So, every lesson is geared towards that. If I can't justify the lesson in terms of if he's going to end up being a mechanic, why they need it, then I usually don't teach it, so I won't teach in the abstract. I teach pretty concrete, how to write, how to communicate, how to make sure you're reading at a level that will be appropriate."*

Neither teacher plans their curriculum around texts, although both utilize texts to suit their needs. Ms. Davis suggested that: *"The whole guidance here is away from textbooks, away from 'everybody in ninth grade has to read ninth, everybody in tenth grade has to read,' I don't even know what you have to read in tenth grade. I guess you have to read Julius Caesar. That's as close as my 'have to.' So, I'm allowed to bring in a lot of practices I've seen work in other places. I'm able to incorporate a lot."*

Ms. Kelly communicated genuine affection for her students, and stated that she loves teenagers. Both teachers mentioned the importance of getting to know their students, and doing so as early as possible. Ms. Kelly stated that: *"I've spent a lot of time getting to know my students and really it ties back to what... motivates my curriculum planning, the students do. Whatever they are interested in; I know what I have to cover. I'm point blank honest with them, 'We have to do this. I know that there are things you want to do, and I'll try to make them mesh together as well as I can,' Being able to have a certain level of sarcasm and fun with them goes so far. They sometimes say, 'I wish all my teachers were like you.' And then I remind them that if all their teachers were like me, then I wouldn't be so special. And I think that I've spent a lot of time, since I started*

*teaching, becoming that person that I'm always available to them, they can email me, because that's where my teachers were for me. I had great teachers like that, and so I just think I try to emulate them a lot. And they're fun. I love teenagers. I really do. All the potential is right there. Some of them haven't been trained in how to use it, so sometimes you have to manipulate that a little bit, but I really I think they're great kids."*

She stressed that she remained available to students outside of class time to help them with research projects and homework.

Both teachers reported that their school-based administrators are supportive of their efforts, but they added that administrators still keep a close eye on teachers because of the importance that FCAT scores hold. Ms. Davis and Ms. Kelly reported that inherently tenth grade language arts teachers feel pressure from this high stakes test. Despite the success her school has had with students passing the FCAT, Ms. Davis shared that there was a new emphasis this year on teaching to the test and utilizing district-generated assessments. Ms. Davis asserted that these assessments are more of a hindrance than a help and pointed out that they do not necessarily correspond to the FCAT or the benchmarks assessed on the FCAT. *"Because of the failing schools, it's supposed to be a requirement that as of August, but then it got blown out of the water. We were supposed to do monthly assessments, and then teachers complained because, they were like, OK, monthly assessments, how do you know they're the same as that assessment and they wanted us to be breaking it down by, so it looked very much FCATish, so we could say words and phrases go here, comparison and contrast go there, reference and research go there, and we could analyze every student by their four categories. So most teachers freaked out, the county decided that they would provide the test, don't worry, but then we*

*had more to worry about, because as I mentioned, they (the district) never could do it. They never did it.”*

### **Low Performing Schools**

The FCAT itself received much more consideration from Ms. Fernandez at Pine Crest High School and Ms. Wallace at Jackson High School, the two participants from low performing schools. Both of these teachers discussed the pressure they felt from the FCAT, coupled with the historically low scores associated with their students. In 2004, both schools received F grades from the state. As a result, the state and district had gotten involved in curriculum decisions made for language arts classes at their schools. Ms. Fernandez reported that: *“They (the district) have to analyze the data, the data that we have from all the testing, analyzing the data, you can use that data to develop activities, and it’s a lot, it’s so much for us, at least I, maybe because I’m new here, but I heard other teachers say, ‘Wow, this is too much.’ I don’t know if it’s the same in other schools, I guess it’s not that, I guess it’s the pressure of the test, because we have the F grade. I think it has a lot to do with it.”*

Ms. Wallace characterized the extent to which the FCAT, and the state, are involved in the language arts curriculum at Jackson High School as: *“working at Jackson, the FCAT has had a direct influence on what we are asked/required to do in a language arts class. It was, ‘you will do this small focus thing to work specifically on FCAT because that is how, you the school, will be judged. You will do it this way.’ And it was put very nicely, but these messages, you will do it this way. In that case, FCAT has had a direct effect on what we do here and how we teach.”* Perhaps as a result of this outside involvement, both of the low performing school teachers viewed curriculum as being more linear, or top-down, than did Ms. Kelly or Ms. Davis.

Both Ms. Wallace and Ms. Fernandez stressed the importance of teaching the benchmarks. For Ms. Fernandez, the benchmarks were the key factor in lesson planning, *“The benchmarks that we have to teach to, we have to teach that in order to, it follows that. Anything else, you’re wasting you’re time, because they’re going to be tested on that. You know, the FCAT, it puts a lot of pressure. Bilingual standards, state standards. Well, it (the benchmarks) keeps you on track. It influences you, and you have to keep track of what you’ve done, and what needs to be done still, and where you are. (You) cover them in the lessons you teach the students. No matter what you’re teaching, that has to be covered. It keeps you on track, as what needs to be done.”*

Ms. Wallace reported that other teachers, professional development workshops, and the students are the biggest influences on her regarding curriculum. *“Well I like to steal from other people, who are doing things that I think work with students that help them, things that are really solid lessons, different teachers that teach different courses than mine, and some of that is student knowledge, if I were, the coursework that I’ve taken is so far in the past, that I think I have, all the coursework is your foundational stuff, that you have to grow beyond that or, you’re not going to be at the student’s level, so I do belong to the NCTE.”* Ms. Wallace stated that she believed it was important to account for individual differences among students when planning curriculum. Her teaching philosophy incorporated personality theory. She stated that she gave students a personality inventory and considered student personalities when designing lessons.

Ms. Wallace and Ms. Fernandez both discussed the importance of the Assistance Plus Plan, and/or the mini-lessons associated with this state-based plan for failing schools. Ms. Wallace lamented about the amount of instructional time lost to Assistance

Plus, noting that teachers must incorporate it into their curriculum somehow, “*Jackson in particular, because of the multiple F grades, is basically under mandate from the state to perform under the Assistance Plus program. And so, because we are a school that has adopted Assistance Plus, school wide, there are curricular mini-lessons that go with the benchmarks that we have to do everyday. So there’s a mini lesson at the beginning of each period, so that’s something you have to incorporate into whatever you’re doing. And so, you also have to be cognizant of that, and you don’t want it to be a ten minute vacuum at the beginning of class, you have to be able to connect it with other things that you’ve planned, so that they can see how it all works together. So, specifically, at Jackson, at this time and place, that’s something that we’re having to work consciously at, integrating that... in order to teach the mini lesson, it’s supposed to be ten minutes at the beginning of class, so what that leaves me is ten minutes, 180 days, OK, that’s 1800 minutes of instruction are specifically on the benchmark lessons, and that is time I do not have to do other stuff. Now, I’m not saying it’s not valuable time, but it does impact how you have to arrange the rest of what you plan. So, you may have to cut out a short story, or sometimes the benchmark assessment will bring up questions the students don’t understand and you have to go beyond your ten minutes, especially if you’re trying to integrate those mini lessons, trying to make them meaningful with what you’re doing everyday, so there’s going to be a lot of cross talk between here’s what we do the first ten minutes, and then here’s what we’re doing now, as opposed to just slicing off ten minutes at the beginning of class, and saying that’s for this program, and the rest of it is for what we do, I don’t think that’s very smart teaching”*

Because of the state's and district's emphasis on the Assistance Plus program, Ms. Wallace uses assessment data to motivate her students, *"With the mini lessons, the benchmarks, we, in fact, I was showing them before they took the (FCAT), 'Look here are the results from the benchmark test you took the beginning of the year, here are the benchmarks, the first marking period, here they are at the second marking period, and here you are now. Look how high some of these have gotten,' and so sending them off, feeling at least that they, you know, asking them after the test, how did you feel about it, and a lot of them, a couple of kids said, 'Well I probably didn't pass, but I think I did much better than I did last year.' So, they weren't coming in all gloom and doom thinking that they were going to die, I won't graduate high school, and some just felt really confident."*

One recurrent theme in Ms. Fernandez' interview was the pressure and frustration experienced by both students and teachers. Some of the frustration related to the language barrier many of Ms. Fernandez' students faced: *"And the problem was, that we didn't get enough time for us to master the skills, and they were tested on it. So, they were tested before they were ready, and as a result, they aren't getting passing scores, because they didn't have enough time to really get it, and that touches a little bit, that ESOL teachers are not satisfied, because you have to cover things so rapidly, it was like, boom! In a week, sometimes, and to test ESOL students on that after a semester, no way. And we're supposed to do those mini lessons to go parallel with the FCAT, but it's so hard, but now, after the FCAT, we're not just doing mini lessons, we're going to incorporate everything in the reading, going to do the literature readings, and in the*

*tenth grade it's easier to do that than in the ninth grade, because there's a lot of pressure."*

Both teachers stressed the challenging nature of their school environments. They focused on the need to understand and accommodate students of different cultural backgrounds. Both schools have experienced a growth in recent years in the number of students from a Haitian Creole background, while Pine Crest also has a large Hispanic student population. Ms. Wallace argues that prejudice at Jackson High School is not based on race, but on ethnicity, *"This is a school that has a very large Haitian Creole population, where we went from one ESOL teacher to two who teach all day long, and both of them have to be Creole speakers. We do not have a large ESOL group that speaks Spanish; they all speak Creole, which is different. That has brought some interesting kind of dynamics to the kids here... So when you see prejudice at Jackson, it's native versus islander prejudice, more than it is any racial, black/white or Hispanic. That has changed the way that you approach certain things because you've got kids coming from different countries, their context is completely different than what these kids are from."* Jackson High School has a long and proud tradition in its community, however, as it has been a fixture in the city for over 80 years. Race itself was an important topic for Ms. Wallace, as a Caucasian teacher in a largely African American school setting.

Ms. Fernandez, a 35 year teaching veteran in her first year teaching at Pine Ridge, emphasized the need to focus on how to work with low level learners. Ms. Wallace also discussed strategies for working with low level learners. Ms. Wallace, a 17 year teaching veteran at Jackson discussed her role in what she termed the 'mama factor' at length.

*“Well, many of our [students] are below grade level. So, several things. One is personality. Sometimes kids below grade level have self-confidence issues. They’ve been plowed over by their classmates. Some of it is the Mama factor. We have access in this county to all kinds of testing information, so test score information is something I try to look at before I start a class. What does this class of students look like? There are distinct personalities in classes. That particular tenth grade class is very low. Most of them are level one, a lot of kids came in as very low level ones. Many of them came in way below grade level. It takes more, if you have to, if you’re building context, you may have to go three or steps further than a class that has more high level, two level students. You have to build more contexts for them. You have to break down more stuff for them. They will say, you need to break it down for us... So, in classes that are low level, I’ve developed that habit over having years of low level performers, and so I try to break stuff down, not to, ‘Here’s all the information you need,’ but asking a lot of open, leading questions that will get, if one of them will come through the door, because a lot of the time, they’re very reticent to talk. Low level learners don’t talk a lot in class, especially in this class, because then you’re stupid, so they’ve learned to shut up and be quiet. They just don’t talk, so you have to break it down and give them an opening, and once you get one of them through the opening, then more of them are likely to jump in and say, OK that’s not a scary place, I can do that.”*

Getting to know her students is important to Ms. Wallace. She explained that: *“A lot of it is bedrock stuff that I always try to do with classes. Get to know them as individuals, let them see me as an individual, who wants to help them, and someone that is trying to grow them, and basically to feeding them, and kicking them out of the nest.*

*When they do this, it's not my job to fly them. You've got to fly on your own. I'll show you what you need to do to help develop your wings, but those are your wings. I'm not, I can't be with you. Your parents can't be with you. You have to do some things on your own."* Additionally, her teaching philosophy emphasizes visual learning, consistent with the preferred learning styles of her students.

Ms. Fernandez stated that she could only do fun and interesting, student-centered activities after the FCAT was done: *"I would say it's [planning] different. We're going to do more (laughs). You want to do all these literature related activities, we want to be able to have the students participate more, more hands-on activities, they can present a play, or write something, that you have not had the chance to do so, because you were getting them ready for the FCAT. There is a lot of stress there."*

According to Ms. Fernandez, the FCAT drives the curriculum; *"I would say it [the FCAT] has the most influence. There's a lot of pressure on tenth grade teachers, you need to be prepared for that test, you want to make sure, they know that this is going to be on the test, but yeah, I think it has a big influence. I think it's the most important one when you're developing curriculum."*

### **Common Themes at Low and High Performing Schools**

While there are many significant differences in teaching beliefs and perspectives among these two groups of teachers, there were notable similarities between Ms. Wallace, Ms. Kelly and Ms. Davis. For example, Ms. Wallace, like Ms. Kelly and Ms. Davis, views the textbook as just one tool available to teachers. *"And, I use a lot of things from Sports Illustrated, from newspapers, so they can see things in their environment, so it's nice to have a textbook as a resource, it's just one tool, and so looking for other things that will help make things fresh. I also like to use... the Alpha*

*Smart keyboard, which they have responded to beautifully, and in fact, watching them work with them, since I've kind of leaned on them hard, knowing that they had FCAT writing coming up, and I saw how positively they responded to it... And so, I found that letting go of the death grip of the textbook is helpful, letting go, the kind of, at least for English teachers, 'Thou shall start at the front of the chronology of whatever literature you're doing and proceed towards the end,' you know, getting rid of that and saying, screw that, let's look at it thematically, so thematic stuff is just very helpful. So again, there are changes in practice and changes in philosophy." Like Ms. Kelly, she incorporated technology into the classroom. She expressed a strong confidence, or efficacy, in her abilities as a teacher, whereas Ms. Fernandez expressed very moderate confidence in her abilities as a teacher, "You can always help [students learn]. How much you help, it's hard to tell. There are a lot of students [who] are passive, but they are gaining a lot of knowledge, they just don't feel comfortable in participating, so it's hard for you to tell how much you have influence, but you do, I think you get through to a certain level."*

Ms. Wallace stressed the need for teachers to make the curriculum relevant to students' needs. In order to do this, she ties every lesson or activity she can into some context that her students can relate to. *"There are some things that they [students] don't have. In many cases, they don't have a context for what we're discussing, especially when we get into literature, and sometimes as they come in from other places, and so, if there's dead air there, I can't make the assumption that whatever I present to them is something they can immediately connect to. So, I'm often having to do a lot of analogies,*

*I teach a great deal by analogy, trying to relate what we're reading, what we're discussing, with things that will be familiar to them in their regular, everyday context."*

Each of the four participants referred to the pressure placed on teachers and students because of the FCAT. Each of the participants described the extent of school administrators' involvement with curriculum, annual evaluations, and the FCAT. Ms. Wallace, at Jackson, characterized her administration and others at the school as very involved in curriculum decisions, *"As principal, (he) is one of the first principals I've worked with who is very clear about instruction being job one, and having that be the focus of what we talk about at faculty meetings, which is a different flavor in a principal, because I know a lot of principals, you go to a faculty meeting, and it's all about discipline, stuff you got to do, he, he's in a difficult position because of the multiple F grades, and so, unfortunately, he has to do, he gets called off campus a lot, which is one of the great ironies of being an F school, is that it's vital to have a strong instructional leader, but they spend most of the time taking your instructional leader off campus to go to meetings, so OK, this makes sense in what universe, please? So, um, as far as curriculum goes, he sets the overall tone and expectations. The API (Assistant Principal for Instruction) is the person who puts a lot of that stuff to work in how the classes are scheduled, which teachers are assigned which groups based on assessment of strengths, etc, as far as what goes on in the actual classroom, there's discussions all up and down, with that group, with input from people, like the learning resource specialist, and we also have a reading coach, a math coach, and so the reading specialists are there to put out information about reading... Expectations are set out from the principal and that's verbal. You'll see a lot coming from Betty, the API, about we're going to do this, she and*

*I have conversations, I go in there as department chair asking questions, how do you want to look at how we do X,Y, and Z, in terms of a group of students or a particular course? Sometimes, teachers have discussed who is the strongest to help develop this particular kind of thing with the students. So, a lot of conversations, but some of it is informal, some of it is actual planning.”*

Ms. Fernandez referred to pressure coming from the school’s administration, “*It’s the school, the administration. Because they have responsibilities to do that, and they pass it to us, and we are the ones who have to carry it out with the students, and then the pressure is, OK, what if they don’t do well, they can blame me (laughs). You know, you feel kind of, trapped, but we do the best we can.*”

Ms. Davis, at a high performing school, echoed these sentiments, adding the threat of job loss for another teacher at her school, “*We try at our school, each department is responsible for one benchmark area that would tie nicely into what they teach, so that social studies is responsible for the kids in reference and research, science is responsible for reasoning and the main idea, so we have more of that push here, and again, I’m not sure if it will be evaluated, but um, a very stern look came across the principal a couple weeks ago with an English teacher, explaining to this person that if they didn’t show improvement in FCAT, no matter how much they disagree with the test, no matter how much they thought standardized tests are baloney, no matter how much they were irritated by the fact that they have to have students [who] cannot read, um, when springtime comes, they will not find a job anywhere in the county. So, that was kind of an eye opener.*”

Ms. Kelly characterizes administrative involvement in the curriculum at her school as based on: *“a lot of teamwork, and a lot of trust to make sure that, I think that’s how it all trickles down. The department head will translate it down to us, but they rely a lot on him to have the same expectations for curriculum that they have as well. It works for us.”* At the same time, administrative expectations at Athens High School are not completely devoid of FCAT influence, *“Do I think that it’s (teacher evaluations) solely based on FCAT scores? No, but I think what they’re looking at is the teacher’s performance throughout that entire year, and then here’s where their FCAT scores are, and then maybe they need to change something up for next year. In that respect, I know that we have a teacher here whose students performed well on the FCAT, and so they wanted him to teach all tenth grade regular this year because he would do the same thing with them. And you wouldn’t be making me feel great, by asking me to teach five classes a day of tenth grade regular students who are unmotivated. It’s scary... I think if you ask administration, they would tell you, not very much. I think from my own personal, wanting to have done well, and feeling as though I reached them in a way that I need to reach them, I think it does (make) a big deal.”*

**Research Question 4) What Is the Correspondence among Teachers’ Beliefs and Instructional Practices at the High Performing and Low Performing Schools?**

Emergent codes generated from analysis of observations corresponded with the attitudes, beliefs and perspectives that emerged during interviews with the teachers at the high performing schools, as reflected in transcripts of these interviews. Among these four participants, teacher beliefs and instructional practices generally corresponded (Table 4.3). However, there were differences between the emergent themes among high and low performing school teachers. Both high performing school teachers believed in,

and modeled student-centered teaching and learning than teacher centered approaches. Both low performing school teachers believed in, and modeled more teacher-centered teaching and learning styles more often than student-centered practices.

Additionally, the emphasis on the FCAT evident, both in belief and practice, among both participants from low performing schools, stands in contrast to the lack of emphasis on the FCAT, again both in belief and practice, among both participants from high performing schools.

Table 4-3. Emergent themes from analysis of observations and interviews

	Observations	Interviews
Athens HS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student-directed activities</li> <li>*Positive environment</li> <li>*Student choice</li> <li>*Emphasis on reading</li> <li>*High teacher efficacy</li> <li>*Use of technology</li> <li>*Rapport with students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Open view of curriculum</li> <li>*Student-centered teaching and learning</li> <li>*Little focus on FCAT</li> </ul>
Hamilton HS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student-directed activities</li> <li>*Positive environment</li> <li>*Student choices</li> <li>*Emphasis on reading</li> <li>*Teacher provides guidance, scaffolding</li> <li>*Rapport</li> <li>*Little discussion of FCAT</li> </ul> Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Practical teaching</li> <li>*Literacy and language skills emphasized</li> <li>*Student influence on curriculum</li> <li>*Move away from texts</li> <li>*County assessments seen as a hindrance</li> </ul>
Jackson HS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Teacher-directed activities</li> <li>*Emphasis on FCAT</li> <li>*High efficacy</li> <li>*Low level of student participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Mama factor</li> <li>*Nature of, and changes to, the school environment</li> <li>*FCAT</li> <li>*Assistance Plus Program</li> </ul>
Pine Crest HS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Teacher-directed activities</li> <li>*Emphasis on FCAT</li> <li>*Low level learning activities</li> <li>*Negative classroom environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Emphasis on low level learners</li> <li>*Cultural differences</li> <li>*Top-down curriculum</li> <li>*F grade for the school</li> </ul>

**High Performing Schools**

Both Ms. Davis at Hamilton HS and Ms. Kelly at Athens HS frequently included students into the curriculum design and implementation process, as noted in the number of minutes engaged in student-directed activities in Table 4.1 earlier. During their interviews, these teachers described why it was important to incorporate students' interests and needs in the curriculum decisions they make. Another theme that emerged during observations and their interviews was a practice and a belief that reading skills should be emphasized during classroom instruction but that the FCAT should be de-emphasized.

**Low Performing Schools**

There was a correspondence among low performing school teachers'. Both of the teachers reported and practiced teacher-centered teaching and learning. As indicated in Table 4.1, there was no time spent in student-directed activities. Teaching and learning were exclusively teacher-directed. This practice was reflected in their beliefs, as Ms. Wallace referred often in her interview to what she termed the "Mama factor," the need to guide and direct teaching and learning based on what she perceived to be her students' needs. During the interview, Ms. Fernandez reported that she believed in using a top-down curriculum. Her belief was consistent with her lesson planning activities.

Additionally, the FCAT, as well as the school grading formula, were significant influences on both beliefs and practices among both teachers at low performing schools. Both mentioned the FCAT, the Assistance Plus Program, and/or its mini lessons, frequently during interviews. Much of their classroom activities centered on planning for the FCAT, focusing on the benchmarks, and discussing the FCAT itself with students somewhat regularly.

**Research Question #5) What Is the Correspondence Between Teacher Self-Reported Beliefs, Interview Responses and Instructional Practices at the High and Low Performing High Schools?**

By incorporating the TBPS in this study, the attitudes and beliefs of other teachers at each school, apart from the four participants, were measured. Survey findings from the TBPS helped establish the extent to which certain attitudes and beliefs regarding teaching and learning are present within schools.

Reliability measures for each of the four subsets of questions on the TBPS yielded moderately strong alpha scores, ranging from .50 to .75. The reliability coefficient for the 30 teacher-centered items yielded  $\alpha = .83$ ; for the 30 student-centered items, the alpha score was .80. The range of mean scores reported for the teacher centered items was 3.28; with a minimum of 1.22 and a maximum score of 4.5. For the student-centered items, the mean score was 1.71. The minimum score was 3.08 and the maximum score was 4.79.

The item analysis revealed four questions which yielded statistically significant differences in scores, when controlling for school. For each of these measures, a Pearson's R correlation coefficient was calculated. These correlation coefficients ranged from 0.36 to 0.54. Those four questions are: 17) "I assess student learning because teaching and assessing are intertwined." 25) "I believe that my expectations for learner outcomes are implicit." 35) "When I ask learners questions, their responses typically require a short, factual answer." and 42) "My teaching is guided by instructional strategies that emphasize what learners should know." The R scores for each of these questions are shown here in Table 4.4:

Table 4-4. Pearson's R correlation coefficient scores for statistically significant items between respondents from different schools on the TBPS

	Pearson's R	Significance
Item 17	0.434	0.05
Item 25	0.408	0.05
Item 35	0.406	0.05
Item 42	0.542	0.05

Examination of respondents scores to each of these five questions broken, sorted by school illustrates the nature of differences. Item 17, "I assess student learning because teaching and assessing are intertwined" reveals teacher attitudes towards the relationship between teaching and assessment. On the TBPS, this was one of the student-centered questions. All of the respondents from Hamilton HS, a high performing school, and Pine Crest HS, a low performing school, answered this item "highly agree." The respondents from Jackson HS and Athens HS were less cohesive in their answers, all of them ranging from "neutral" to "highly agree." This suggests that the relationship between teaching and assessing is more strongly perceived among language arts teachers at Hamilton HS and Pine Crest HS than it is perceived among language arts teachers who teach at Jackson HS and Athens HS.

Item 25, "I believe that my expectations for learner outcomes are implicit," was indicative of significant differences between respondents from high and low performing schools. This teacher-centered item was rated by 79% of the respondents from the high performing schools as somewhere between "highly disagree" and "neutral." Whereas, 80% of respondents from low performing schools rated this item either "agree" or "highly agree." This suggests that language arts teachers at high performing schools do

not believe in making learning expectations implicit, but rather that they believe in explicitly stating their expectations for student learning.

For item 35, “When I ask learners questions, their responses typically require a short, factual answer,” there was a slight difference between high performing and low performing schools. This teacher-centered question was rated as “highly disagree” by 71% of respondents from high performing schools, whereas only 25% of respondents from low performing schools rated it the same. A majority of respondents from low performing schools, however, did rate this item “disagree.” Given the low number of responses to this survey, especially from Athens HS and Pine Crest HS, this anomaly may not be meaningful, although it is statistically significant. Yet, it does suggest that language arts teachers at high performing schools place greater emphasis on generating higher order thinking skills among their students.

Item 42, “My teaching is guided by instructional strategies that emphasize what learners should know,” showed significant differences in responses among teachers from high and low performing schools. For this teacher-centered question, 71% of respondents at high performing schools rated this item either “disagree” or “neutral.” In contrast, 93% of respondents from low performing schools rated this item either “agree” or “highly agree.” Given differences based on observation and interview data, this type of disagreement between teachers at high and low performing schools is consistent, in that teachers at low performing schools were more heavily influenced by outside factors (notably, the State) with respect to curriculum and instructional decisions.

For the vast majority of TBPS items, there were not statistically significant differences between teachers at high and low performing schools, suggesting that teacher

attitudes and beliefs were not significantly different. With few exceptions, the teachers' ratings of TBPS items did not seem to be indicative of the differences observed in instructional practices or expressed during the interviews among teachers in high performing and low performing schools.

### **Summary**

Classroom observations, teacher interviews, and selected results of the TBPS showed that the practices and beliefs of teachers at high performing schools differ from the practices and beliefs of teachers at low performing schools. Classroom observations showed that participants at high performing schools utilized more student-centered instructional practices and learning methods, and emphasized outside reading among their students. Teacher interviews showed that these practices were reflected in teacher beliefs among high performing schools. Analysis of emergent themes from both observations and interviews showed that teacher beliefs and practices among participants from both high performing and low performing schools held somewhat consistent, although there were significant differences between these two groups of teachers, both in teacher beliefs and teacher practices. Additionally, teacher interviews showed that teachers at low performing schools consider the FCAT much more heavily in curriculum-related issues than their counterparts at high performing schools.

Results of the TBPS were less conclusive, in that teachers from all four schools responded similarly across most items on this questionnaire. However, two items on this survey did generate statistically significant differences in responses that fell along the lines of high and low performing school. These two items were, "I believe that my expectations for learner outcomes are explicit" and "My teaching is guided by instructional strategies that emphasize what learners should know." These differences

indicate that teachers at high performing schools are more explicit in stating their learning expectations for their students, and that teachers at high performing schools might be less driven by outside influences regarding curriculum in their classrooms. This last finding is consistent with data gathered from both observations and interviews, in that teachers at high performing schools emphasized practical teaching and learning, and de-emphasized testing, the FCAT, the Sunshine State Standards, and other assessments..

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to understand how teachers' instructional beliefs and practices differed among at-risk students in high and low performing schools. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a summary of the findings, to describe the implications of this study, and to provide suggestions for further study.

### **Summary**

#### **Relationship between FCAT scores and outside factors**

An analysis of data from the 2003 tenth grade FCAT Reading scores shows that student race and SES account for 52% of the variance in these scores statewide (Peabody, 2004, unpublished). This analysis also revealed that there were wide variances in FCAT performance among schools with large numbers of low income and/or minority students. In 2004 this performance gap between low performing schools and high performing schools was similar among the four schools that participated in this study.

#### **Instructional Practices**

Student-led activities were common during the observations in classrooms at high performing schools. Overall, student-led activities were observed on average 46% of the time in the high performing schools. In contrast, observations of learning activities in low performing school classrooms revealed that instruction was exclusively teacher-led.

In the student-directed activities at the high-performing schools outside reading assignments were emphasized. At the low performing schools there was a heavy emphasis on FCAT-related learning activities. At high performing schools the FCAT was

rarely mentioned by teachers or by students. Learning activities stressed teaching and learning higher order thinking skills. Also, students frequently appeared to be having fun while learning in high performing schools. Students in low performing schools appeared to be passive recipients of knowledge. Most of the assigned work that was observed in low performing schools consisted of seat work that was explicitly tied to the FCAT and its benchmarks. Teachers in low performing schools attempted to engage their students in the lessons and activities by asking thought-provoking questions or by trying to relate the lesson materials to some context of interest to students. Their efforts were met with mixed success, because several students were tuned out and/or did not participate in the lesson.

In high performing schools, students remained attentive. As show in Table 4.2 on page 52, the average number of teacher reprimands was 1.3 per observed period, across the two high performing schools. Off-task behavior was more pervasive in low performing schools; the average number of teacher reprimands was 2.3 per observed period. Teachers in high performing schools demonstrated more rapport with their students when compared to teachers in low performing schools. Students in high performing schools were demonstrably more involved in the day to day operations of the class. Many of them had opportunities to speak before the class or lead the class in some other meaningful way. Similar opportunities did not occur in low performing classrooms.

Student behavior in low performing schools alternated between quiet and passive and loud and disruptive. Inattentive or other off-task behavior, such as putting one's head down occurred with greater frequency among students in low performing schools than among students in high performing schools. Cell phones, CD players, and other

electronic devices were utilized with greater frequency for non-instructional purposes among students in the low performing schools. However, these devices were not used among students in high performing school classrooms.

Teaching beyond the textbook was a normative practice in high performing schools. The teachers utilized resources, such as computer technology, and/or outside props, to relate the content in ways that catered to students' interests and/or made learning more fun and interesting.

### **Instructional Beliefs**

The TBPS was given to all English/Language Arts or ESOL teachers at each of the four participating schools. Almost half (n=31) of the eligible respondents completed the survey. Across many of the TBPS items there were no statistically significant differences between high performing and low performing school teachers. However, a majority of teachers in high performing schools held some significantly different attitudes in comparison with teachers at low performing schools. These findings showed that teachers at high performing schools are (a) more likely to eschew abstract and/or outside forces when making curriculum decisions for their students and instead focus on practical teaching and learning, and (b) more likely to make their expectations for student learning explicit, rather than implicit.

The interview data revealed that teachers in high performing schools viewed their role as more inclusive than preparing students for the FCAT. These teachers and their students rarely mentioned the FCAT in class. During their interviews the teachers reported that the FCAT was not a focal point of their curriculum. In contrast, the FCAT was a common topic during classroom instruction and in interviews among the teacher participants at low performing schools. These teachers talked about how they used the

state-developed Assistance Plus Plan and the mini-lessons. These participants emphasized the importance of standardized testing, Assistance Plus assessments and related topics. Additionally, teachers reported a high level of frustration in dealing with these extra mandates. Low performing school teacher participants also discussed the concerns they held about their schools having received an F grade in 2004.

Teachers at the high performing schools emphasized the importance of providing students with choices in the teaching and learning process and giving students opportunities to lead classroom learning activities. These teachers saw the curriculum as a flexible, reciprocal entity. They made changes when students' learning needs required accommodations. Consistent with the state oversight in the low performing school curriculum, both teachers in this study viewed the curriculum as more top-down.

Teachers at high performing schools asserted that students were the biggest influence in their curriculum planning. In contrast, students' needs were not mentioned as an important factor in curriculum planning by low performing school teachers. One of the low performing school teachers mentioned the FCAT benchmarks were a driving force in the curriculum.

Teachers at high performing schools had a high degree of efficacy. They believed that they were effective teachers and capable of teaching whatever skills are needed. One of the teachers at low performing schools expressed similar sentiments; however the other teacher suggested that her effectiveness was limited.

Teachers at the high performing schools held a practical view of teaching and learning. They hoped to make the curriculum student-friendly, as well useful to students' present and future needs. Three of the four participants emphasized getting to know their

students as quickly as possible, including both teachers at high performing schools. In contrast, both low performing school teachers described the cultural differences among their student body and how cultural diversity made it difficult to overcome having received a failing grade. Additionally, teachers at the low performing schools talked about the specialized instruction needed to reach low level learners.

Two themes were shared by all four teachers in their interviews. All of the participants mentioned the pressure that the tenth grade FCAT placed on students and teachers. Additionally, they discussed the nature of administrative involvement in classroom curriculum, although each teacher characterized the extent and nature of this involvement differently.

### **Congruence Between Teacher Practices and Teacher Beliefs**

Emergent themes from both the interviews and the observations showed a consistency between teachers' belief and practices among each of the participants. However, teachers at high performing and low performing schools demonstrated particularistic differences in their beliefs and practices. Teachers at high performing schools stated they placed importance on student-centered instruction and learning. Their actions in the classroom reflect these beliefs. In contrast, teachers at low performing schools indicated more of a preference for teacher-centered teaching and learning. Their classroom instructional actions were consistent with these beliefs.

Participant teachers at high performing schools also emphasized the need to teach reading and writing skills for their intrinsic value. Their classroom instructional practices were consistent with these beliefs. Low performing school teachers described the importance of teaching to ensure improved FCAT outcomes. Their classroom instructional practices reflected this emphasis.

### **Implications**

In the current environment of high-stakes testing in Florida, teaching tenth grade English in a public high school in Florida is rife with pressure and opportunity for teacher and student alike. Using the information obtained through interviews, observations, and surveys there were clear differences in instructional practices between teachers in the high performing schools and the low performing schools. The wide range of instructional practice may shed light on why there were widely different levels of performance on the same test, by students from similar racial and socio-economic backgrounds, in the same district.

In the high performing schools, teachers emphasized the use of outside reading activities in the curriculum. Teachers in these settings reported little direct, outside influence into their classroom curricular decisions. These teachers found ways to involve students in curriculum design and implementation, arguably making reading more enjoyable and fun for students, without losing sight on developing their literacy skills. These activities were not developed with the FCAT in mind, nonetheless students achieved the benchmarks set by the state and measured on the FCAT. Students are held accountable for completing these reading assignments. The findings suggest that in both high performing school classrooms that the outside reading assignments and other projects related to language arts are significant factors in determining student grades.

The findings in this study confirm the theory that the presence of the FCAT has affected the curriculum. Low performing school teachers demonstrated the impact of the FCAT and its benchmarks in their daily teaching in the interviews and classroom observations. Some influence was probably due to outside pressure placed on these schools to increase performance. Additionally, both the state and the school district had

taken some control of the curriculum away from classroom teachers and mandated them to focus on assessments and mini-lessons. This practice might have been counter-productive because of limited teacher freedom to engender student interest. In essence, as state-imposed mandates increased, students at low performing schools were less likely to develop literacy skills based upon their intrinsic value. External mandates do not help students internalize the motivation to learn to read and write or develop literacy skills as fully or successfully as students who can enjoy reading and writing for its own intrinsic value (Davis & Weber, 1998).

The observations confirmed the second and third theories presented in Chapter 1. First, teachers in high performing schools are more likely to utilize learner-centered teaching models. In both of the high performing schools, the teachers gave students opportunities to plan and carry out lesson plans related to the curriculum. These assignments fostered higher order thinking skills among students because they were required to analyze, interpret and synthesize information on their own before presenting it to the class. Second, the methods of teaching utilized by high performing school teachers corresponded with the social and personal models of teaching described by Joyce and Calhoun (1996), unlike the behavioral methods of teaching utilized by low performing school teachers. The curriculum in the high performing schools was co-constructed with the students. In the low performing schools, the curriculum was teacher-directed and explicitly tied to the benchmarks measured by the FCAT.

The findings suggest that the state and school district would be better served if they focused their efforts on developing the literacy skills of low performing school students. This is not to say that teachers and students in low performing schools should not be held

accountable for their test scores. The implication is that the state's decision making authority, with regards to classroom lesson planning, is more likely to produce the improvements in literacy among low performing schools if the schools themselves had greater freedom to plan and develop curriculum, as exists in the high performing schools. This suggestion is consistent with Ross' (2003) finding that an emphasis on testing results actually lowers student academic performance and increases dropout rates.

Teachers at low performing schools should emphasize outside reading activities to develop student literacy. Teachers in such settings should strive to get students more involved in lesson planning and curriculum activities. Generating interest in reading and writing on their own, without emphasizing the FCAT would engender student-centered instruction and learning in low performing schools. This practice would likely lead to more developed literacy skills and improved standardized test scores (Davis and Weber, 1998; Gay, 1994; Kordalewski, 2000; Luker, Cobb and Luker, 2001; Stiggins, 2002). Teachers at low performing schools should be given access to, and training in instructional strategies that focus on ways to get students motivated and excited about reading and writing. Perhaps it is ironic that the classes which have the history of better performance on the FCAT are those classes in which instruction is less focused on the benchmarks or the test itself. The pressure of the FCAT, a recurring theme of this study, might be alleviated in the low performing schools if all stakeholders in low performing schools, including students, teachers, administrators, and policymakers, placed less emphasis on the test and more emphasis on teaching and learning literacy skills (Allington, 2004; Lewin, 2003).

### **Suggestions for Further Study**

The results of this study suggest that in part, student performance on the FCAT Reading test can be explained partially by the amount and nature of reading assignments given to students, the amount of attention students and teachers spend directly focused on the FCAT, and student input on teaching and learning decisions made in their classrooms.

Recommendations for further study include:

1. Examining the amount and nature of reading assignments given to tenth graders by their teachers in a variety of classroom settings in Florida,
2. Examining the relationship between student-directed teaching and learning and student literacy,
3. Examining the efficacy of policy decisions made by states with low performing schools, with an eye towards increasing the success rates at “turning those schools around,” and
4. Examining what factors, apart from outside factors such as race and SES, and classroom teaching and learning, impact FCAT scores.

### **Teaching Reading**

The results of this study suggest that the methods teachers use to teach reading and writing have a great impact on students’ FCAT scores. Further investigation of the teaching practices specifically related to teaching literacy skills is recommended. This study focused exclusively on tenth grade classrooms because of the weight of the tenth grade FCAT. Further studies in Florida could examine teaching methods of teachers from grades 3 through 10, and correlate these methods with the performance of students on the FCAT. Further studies should include a correlation of these teaching methods with performance on other standardized measures such as the SAT.

### **Student-Directed Teaching and Learning**

Findings of this study suggested that students in classroom environments where student-led activities were normative were more likely to perform better on the tenth grade FCAT reading test. Further research should examine the relationship between classroom teaching and learning practices that emphasize student-led activities and performance on the standardized tests. Further studies should look beyond the tenth grade FCAT Reading test, to other standardized tests, including the FCAT math test, other grade levels, and other tests.

### **Policy Decisions Aimed at Helping Low Performing Schools**

In this era of educational accountability, many states are making funding decisions for schools based on test scores just like Florida does. States have different methods for holding low performing schools accountable. What measures do other states take to approach the problems faced by schools like Jackson High School and Pine Crest High School in Florida? What kinds of results are these states having with their reform efforts? These kinds of questions could guide policy level analysis studies as to the extent to which states get involved in curriculum decisions at struggling schools.

### **Other factors impacting FCAT scores**

In this study, factors outside the classroom (SES and race) were controlled for, and factors inside the classroom were examined. Aside from the differences in instructional practices observed in this study there may be other factors which impact FCAT scores of students on the tenth grade FCAT Reading test. Further studies could examine school and district level factors to determine what influence, if any, these variables hold on FCAT scores of these students. Organizational culture and climate are other factors that impact the success of any group including schools (Deal & Peterson, 1998; Ouchi, 1993;

Peters & Waterman, 1993; Sashkin & Walberg, 1993). Further studies that explore the same questions raised in this study should examine the nature and influence of school culture and climate, and explore what differences exist between the cultures and climates of high performing and low performing schools.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

In this chapter, a review of the findings of this study was provided. The implications of the results of this study were discussed, specifically related to classroom teaching and learning. Suggestions for further research, at various levels, including the classroom, school, community, and policy level, were given.

Based on the results of this study, there were differences between the extent and nature of reading activities in the language arts classroom at high performing and low performing schools, notably with respect to student-led vs. teacher-led activities. Although the findings were not correlated with FCAT outcomes, it is likely that differences in instruction might result in the variance of outcomes, when race and SES are held constant. Better communication between high and low performing schools can be established. Teachers of students who perform poorly on the FCAT Reading test can be given opportunities to develop and implement curricula that focus on teaching literacy skills with an emphasis on getting students enthused about reading and writing.





b. What are the characteristics of teacher discipline?

4. *Describe how instructional supports are used throughout the lesson.*

a. What are the instructional supports for the lesson?

b. What is the source of the instructional supports?

c. Describe how the instructional supports are used in the lesson.

*Other observations/notes*

APPENDIX B  
TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How long have you been teaching? How long have you taught at this school? How long have you taught 10<sup>th</sup> grade English/language arts?
2. Describe your present beliefs about teaching and learning. What are the factors that influence how you teach? How do you work with students who are below grade level? (Probe for type of strategies used or learning activities, recognition of learning styles) How do you work with students who are at or above grade level? (Probe for type of strategies used or learning activities, recognition of learning styles) Do you believe that you can help all of your students learn whether they are below, at, or above grade level? (Probe for self-efficacy beliefs or educational philosophy).
3. How have your beliefs about teaching and learning changed since you began teaching at this school?
4. Just to clarify our terms, what do you mean when we talk about curriculum? (Probe for some subdivision of curriculum that makes sense to the informant. Ways to talk about curriculum or subdivide the conversation into domains of curriculum knowledge. For example: philosophy, theory, history, research, change, development, design, implementation, evaluation, policy, and field of study.)
5. Using the description of the informant, how do teachers effectively influence curriculum? (Probe for process that may be linear or reciprocal)
6. What resources have the greatest influence on your thinking when it comes to curriculum? (Probe for a variety of resources like: college courses, research reading, popular texts, other teachers, professional development specific training, beliefs, and mentors that may link to the informant's definition curriculum and its subdivisions or domains of knowledge. The objective is to identify the relative importance of these resources to acts of curriculum development, design, and implementation)
7. Describe the extent to which others at your school, such as the principal, assistant principal(s), department chairperson, etc., are involved in curriculum decisions made for 10<sup>th</sup> grade English/language arts. Probe to determine if this includes regular meetings, memos, observations, and other informal discussions about curriculum.
8. Describe the extent to which district level personnel are involved in curriculum decisions made for 10<sup>th</sup> grade English/language arts. Probe to determine whether this includes meetings, memos, training, and workshops.
9. Describe any school-wide, district-wide, or state-wide mandates related to the curriculum you teach. Explain how these mandates influence teaching and learning in your classes. Probe to determine if supplementary materials are provided, and if guidelines for teaching are provided.

10. Describe the extent to which the FCAT influences curriculum decisions you make for 10<sup>th</sup> grade English/language arts classes. Has it had a positive or negative impact on teaching and learning in your classes? Explain.
11. Describe the extent to which FCAT scores of your students impact your annual evaluations..

APPENDIX C  
IRB APPROVAL AND CONSENT FORMS

My name is Dayle Peabody. I am a doctoral student at the University of Florida. I am conducting research involving classroom teaching practices and the FCAT. I would like to observe 10<sup>th</sup> grade English/Language Arts classes you teach, as well as interview you and have you complete a survey. These observations will occur five times, for an entire period each time. The interview will occur after the observations are completed, and will last for approximately 45 minutes. Each interview will occur privately, and interviews will be taped. The survey is brief and should only take 20 minutes to complete. If you choose to participate, you will be observed five times, interviewed once, and surveyed. You can refuse to answer any question you do not choose to answer, and ask that the tape recorder be turned off at any time during the interview. Please be assured that any notes or observations I make as a part of this study will be recorded in such a way that you cannot be identified specifically as a participant in this study. There are no immediate risks or benefits to you as a result of participating in this study. If you have any questions about this study please contact me at the following address and/or phone number:

Dayle Peabody, Doctoral Student  
Department of Educational Leadership, Policy and Foundations  
University of Florida  
258 Norman Hall, PO Box 117049  
Gainesville, FL 32611-7049  
(352) 392-2391, (352) 392-0038 (fax)

Additionally, you may also contact my supervisor:

Linda Behar-Horenstein, Ph.D.  
Professor, Department of Educational Leadership, Policy and Foundations  
University of Florida  
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Gainesville, FL 32611-7046  
(352) 392-0731, ext. 230, [lsbhoren@ufl.edu](mailto:lsbhoren@ufl.edu), (352) 392-0038 (fax)

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, please direct them to:  
UFIRB office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611-2250.

Please know that you are free to withdraw from participating in this study at any time without consequence. I expect to spend a total of five class periods observing you teach and an additional 45 minutes interviewing you. The survey can be completed at your convenience. I will not interact with you, or the students, in any way during my observations. You will not be compensated for participating in this study. Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Approved By University of Florida Institutional Review Board 02 Protocol # 2004-U-0819 (Revised) For Use Through 10/18/2005
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**Institutional Review Board**

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DATE: October 21, 2004

TO: Dayle Peabody  
4511 NW 37<sup>th</sup> Terrace  
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FROM: Ira S. Fischler, PhD, Chair *ISF/TF*  
University of Florida  
Institutional Review Board 02

SUBJECT: **Approval of Protocol #2004-U-819**

TITLE: Minority and low SES students and the FCAT: Does teaching make a difference?.

SPONSOR: Unfunded

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I am pleased to advise you that the University of Florida Institutional Review Board has recommended approval of this protocol. Based on its review, the UFIRB determined that this research presents no more than minimal risk to participants. Given your protocol, it is essential that you obtain signed documentation of informed consent from each participant. Enclosed is the dated, IRB-approved informed consent to be used when recruiting participants for the research.

It is essential that each of your participants sign a copy of your approved informed consent that bears the IRB stamp and expiration date.

If you wish to make any changes to this protocol, including the need to increase the number of participants authorized, you must disclose your plans before you implement them so that the Board can assess their impact on your protocol. In addition, you must report to the Board any unexpected complications that affect your participants.

If you have not completed this protocol by October 18, 2005, please telephone our office (392-0433), and we will discuss the renewal process with you. It is important that you keep your Department Chair informed about the status of this research protocol.

ISF:dl/tf

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Dayle Scott Peabody was born in Melbourne, Florida. Dayle lived in the Washington, D.C., area and in Germany for three years as a child before his father retired, and the family returned to Florida. Dayle received a bachelor's degree in political science with honors from the University of Florida in 1990. Dayle then moved to Tampa, where he worked for the National Labor Relations Board as a labor relations examiner for two years. In 1992, he married Bonnie McBride, and the couple moved to Arizona. He received a master's degree in political science from Arizona State University in 1994, and an educational specialist degree from the University of Florida in 1997. He has nine years experience teaching secondary social studies in the Alachua County, Florida schools. Currently, he is employed by the Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Florida. He plans to continue his career in educational administration in central Florida with his wife Bonnie and their daughter Kathryn.