

“WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?” TEACHING A GENERATION OF NCLB
STUDENTS IN COLLEGE CLASSROOMS

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Since the passing of No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, the United States’ secondary education system has undergone significant changes. In this study, I discuss the ways in which the law has encouraged the normalization of standardized testing and aim to answer two primary research questions. RQ1: What do college students and their instructors identify as the key challenges that arise as students educated under NCLB begin college coursework, and how does each group address these challenges? RQ2: What strategies do the actors and spect-actors in a Forum Theatre production arrive at for addressing the challenges faced by college instructors and their students who have completed their secondary education under No Child Left Behind? To answer the initial research question, I conducted focus group interviews with instructors and students at the University of North Texas to understand the challenges each faces in the classroom. To answer the second research question, I compiled narratives from the focus group interviews along with other materials into a performance script that concluded with scenarios based in Augusto Boal’s Forum Theatre techniques. In live performance events audience members rehearsed strategies for addressing the challenges that instructors and students face in classrooms through performance. Following descriptions of the performances, I analyze the scenarios through theories of Michel Foucault and Paulo Freire, to understand the productive power of the banking model reflected in the suggestions from the audience.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Study

In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Michel Foucault explained the purpose and effect of the examination as an instrument of surveillance. He argued that the exam, both medical and educational, is an instrument used by those already in positions of power to normalize judgment.

The examination combines the technique of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgment. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify, and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them. That is why, in all the mechanisms of discipline, the examination is highly ritualized. (p. 184)

Federal and state governments qualify its citizens by creating a test that all students must take and all teachers must prepare students to take, and by defining what certifies as passing for both students and the schools in which they are enrolled. The government then classifies by deciding which students pass and which students fail and which schools are good and which schools are bad. Finally, the federal government punishes students and schools classified as failing or bad; students are punished with failing grades and schools are punished through financial withholdings or closures. Foucault (1977) argued that as a way to maintain or obtain control, those in power make the examination a ritual, a rite of passage, and an integral part of a society's self-monitoring process.

As the nation becomes increasingly concerned with standardized testing as an elemental aspect of the United States' educational system (Sacks, 1999), Foucault's perspective on examination can provide a helpful lens for understanding the extraordinary impact of normalizing examinations in American society. Standardized testing has been normalized in our education system for several decades; however, since the implementation of No Child Left

Behind Act (NCLB), the attachment of “high-stakes” to the scores of standardized tests have increased what Foucault described: qualifying, classifying, and punishing (Bernstein, 2004; Foucault, 1977). The accountability system instituted under NCLB has raised the qualifications for good schools (Hayes, 2008), has placed students on “tracks” which classify them into categories of students (Guggenheim, 2010; McCarthy, 2008), and has punished the students, teachers, and schools that do not qualify as “passing” more harshly (Assaf, 2006; Bernstein, 2004; Guggenheim, 2010; Hayes, 2008; Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008; McCarthy, 2008; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan & Heilig, 2008). The results of the examinations integral to NCLB give power to the federal government to allow students to navigate these rites of passage successfully or, contrarily, to deny students the ability to proceed through these same rites of passage. After all, multiple testing points occur in the system. Moreover, examinations give power to governments to punish those in charge of preparing students effectively for those tests, namely teachers and administrators. High school graduation, then, becomes a symbolic movement from childhood to adulthood whereby people acquire the capacity to participate in society as knowledgeable citizens. Furthermore, the educational system’s use of standardized testing to qualify, classify, and punish allows the federal government to maintain control over docile, disciplined bodies (e.g., students, teachers, administrators), making standardized testing an instrument of oppressive systems (Foucault, 1977).

Researchers have focused extensively on the effect of the law and standardized testing since the implementation of NCLB. For example, numerous researchers (Bernstein, 2004; Callet, 2005; Gandara & Baca, 2008; Harper & DeJong, 2009; Harper, DeJong, & Pratt, 2008; Pease-Alvarez, Samway, & Cifka-Herrera, 2010; Wright & Li, 2008) have argued English language learners (ELL) are one of the largest demographics of students negatively affected by

this law. Other researchers (Luft, 2008; Olson & Hoff, 2006; Steffan, 2004) have identified students with disability as a group highly and negatively affected by the higher stakes in standardized tests. However, many questions remain unanswered. Through this research, I examine the effects of this testing culture on students who have successfully navigated high school and completed graduation. In this study I seek to determine what happens when students pass the test and decide to continue their education in a college setting, where students frequently are not evaluated by state mandated standardized testing. Specifically, I examine how students and instructors meet the challenges of a clash of educational cultures, one dominated by multiple-choice testing and the other by critical thinking and writing.

I sought these answers through qualitative research methods; specifically, I interviewed college freshmen through focus groups at a large state university in Texas as well as instructors who teach these students in their classrooms. Given the role of the educational system in Texas in creating NCLB, college students in Texas offer an ideal case study for understanding the effect of NCLB's policy. Students in K-12 instruction in Texas have had longer exposure to the educational strategies later applied in all 50 states through the implementation of NCLB. Further, college freshmen, as opposed to upper-level students, are at a key transitional point between a secondary education system dominated by NCLB, and post-secondary education. As higher education employs vastly different goals than K-12 education, college freshmen thrust themselves into subjects that require skills with which they have little or no experience. However, because of the shift in secondary educational standards introduced by NCLB, instructors educating college freshmen also likely face challenges in their efforts to teach skills and subjects intended to build upon instruction students receive in high school classrooms. If high schools stress standardized testing rather than application of skills and subjects such as

English, history, and science in preparation for college, instructors may face challenges in educating new students entering their classrooms.

Chapter Organization

Chapter 2 is comprised of my literature review. In it, I discuss NCLB law, review the arguments of its proponents and critics, and argue, along with its critics, the negative effects of the law on the American education system. In chapter 3, I discuss my methodology for collecting data by means of focus group interviews. In chapter 4, I investigate the challenges students and instructors face in their classrooms at UNT, by revealing and analyzing the results that emerge in focus group discussions. In chapter 5, I describe the performance methodology and the performance outcomes. I discuss the solutions demonstrated through Forum Theatre during the performances, and discuss further theoretical implications following the results of Forum Theatre implementing theories of Michel Foucault and Paulo Freire. I also discuss limitations of both portions of the study in conducting focus groups and Forum Theatre.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Review

In this chapter, I provide a review of all literature pertinent to this study. I begin with an examination of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) as a law and its effect on American educational institutions through its creation of a culture of standardized testing. This overview is followed by a review of the arguments presented by both proponents and critics of the law to provide additional perspective on the law itself, as well as a detailed examination of its consequences for schools, administrators, teachers, and students. This information serves as the foundation for the first research question. The second section of the literature review is a review of the educational theories of Paolo Friere and the alternative theatrical practices of Augusto Boal. Together, their work provides a foundation for the second research question addressed in this study.

No Child Left Behind Act and the Culture of Standardized Testing

Since the United States mandated free public education through the Northwest Ordinance in 1787, politicians and candidates for state and federal political offices have continued to prioritize educational policy, particularly governmental procedures for improving quality education for future citizens. The nation has several key policies indicating increased federal involvement in education over time, especially during milestones in social progress (Hayes, 2008).

Arguably beginning with the famous Supreme Court decision *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, the federal government has been responsible for imposing

progressive mandates on state-run systems of education. While states maintain the bulk of control in most situations regarding educational policy, the federal government periodically intervenes to push progress at a faster rate. The Supreme Court decision with regard to desegregation of schools serves as a prime example of such intervention (Hayes, 2008). Frequently, federal policy evolves from state policy. The state government creates educational policy the federal government decides is necessary for all 50 states, and subsequently creates policy modeled after the state policy. The federal government either decides that a state's policy is unconstitutional and does not uphold federal policy, or the federal government determines that a state policy is effective policy and should become federal policy (Hayes, 2008). The latter was the case with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. In the sections that follow, I describe the history of NCLB, the controversy surrounding its effectiveness as argued by its proponents and critics, and the consequences for students of its implementation.

Texas Miracle to National Policy: The History of NCLB

As part of his 2000 presidential campaign, George W. Bush vowed to improve the education of the nation's youth, capitalizing on his achievements as governor of Texas as evidence of his ability to deliver (Hayes, 2008). He referred to these achievements as the "Texas Miracle," and cited statistics indicating high levels of improvement among minority students and English language learners (ELL). Specifically as governor of Texas, George W. Bush mandated that high-stakes be applied to existing state wide testing. The standardized test, originally called the Texas Achievement of Academic Skills (TAAS), was later renamed the Texas Achievement of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Based on the results of these statewide tests, he allocated more funding to "deserving" schools that produced higher test scores (Bernstein, 2004; Heilig &

Darling-Hammond, 2008). Bush claimed that schools improved because of the accountability system instituted in connection with high-stakes testing; as the result of his policy, he argued, students were achieving at higher rates (Hayes, 2008). He also reasoned that teachers were more motivated to do their jobs when student success was attached to school funding. The federal government utilized the Texas model as a blueprint for NCLB law, incorporating both an accountability system and high-stakes testing (Hayes, 2008; Kimmelman, 2006; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Heilig, 2008).

NCLB, signed into federal law by former president George W. Bush in 2001, was at its inception designed to accomplish 4 goals. First, the law sought to make schools accountable for teaching all students effectively by creating standardized goals for all schools in the United States. Second, the law pledged to use teaching and testing tools scientifically demonstrated to educate and measure cognition. Third, NCLB promised to ensure that all public school teachers were qualified. Fourth, the law sought to shrink the gap between underprivileged and highly privileged children (Donlevy, 2002; Kimmelman, 2006). In the language of the law, the federal government attempted to achieve these goals by implementing 4 tasks: promoting high standards, assessing students with standardized tests, holding schools accountable for low achievement, and allowing parents the choice to move their children from low achieving schools (Donlevy, 2002).

Congress passed the law out of concern that some schools were not producing acceptable levels of student achievement. During the first few years the law was in effect, schools seemed to improve. Yet despite increased funding at both federal and state levels, an incredible achievement gap remained apparent between suburban area schools and rural and inner city area schools (Donlevy, 2002). Critics of NCLB have questioned this apparent improvement and have

warned of negative effects high-stakes testing may have on teachers and students (Blake, 2008; Byrnes, 2009; Hayes, 2008; Hess & Finn 2007; Meier, Wood, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, & Sizer, 2004; Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield, 2005).

Proponents and Critics: The Controversy

Some scholars (Clark & Cunningham, 2006; Donlevy, 2002; Hayes, 2008; Kimmelman, 2006) have argued that NCLB has had positive effects on students, precisely because of the accountability system. They have argued that NCLB has, for the first time, created a system where schools are held accountable for producing verifiable results. Indeed, NCLB is the first federal law that holds schools accountable for poor test scores from students. It requires that every school meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) to be considered a quality school. AYP is the standard federal law holds schools accountable. Schools that do not have acceptable passing rates must make steady improvement in increasing that passing rate or face consequences affecting students, parents, teachers, and administrators. AYP is the application of a market-based theory to secondary education. According to this theory, if those who are performing poorly face severe consequences, inevitably they will be forced to improve (Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield, 2005). NCLB rationalizes that the only way to identify poorly performing teachers, administrators, and schools is to measure student learning. Standardized tests measure the student learning, and based on the results of these tests, the federal government identifies and delivers consequences to the poor performing workers in the school system, primarily teachers and administrators (Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield, 2005). To assist in this transition between “no accountability” and “high-stakes accountability,” AYP acts as a “warning system” to give teachers and administrators the opportunity to find the best teaching strategies. This “warning

system” operates by placing sanctions designed to assist schools in improving the quality of education, spaced over a number of years (Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield, 2005).

Kimmelman (2006) synthesized the AYP sanctions written in NCLB law. The list below identifies the sanctions placed on schools after they have failed to meet AYP standards for a number of years.

- After 2 years – receive technical assistance, develop school improvement plan, [schools must] offer public school choice
- After 3 years – must provide students with supplemental services
- After 4 years – a corrective action plan, including replacement of some staff, new curriculum, and professional development
- After 5 years – change school governance structure, which may include state takeover, private contractor, and staff restructuring or converting to a charter school (p. 43)

After the fifth year of failing to meet AYP, the change in school governance often means closure of the school (Guggenheim, 2010; Hayes, 2008; Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield, 2005).

Proponents of NCLB claim the foundations of the law are exemplary and, while implementation of the law may contain flaws, it is better to fix individual problems rather than blame the law as a whole. Kimmelman (2006), a senior advisor and CEO of Learning Point Associates, is a key proponent of NCLB. He stated “it is not a simple process to undertake. . . . [T]he law is based on using evidence to support program implementation. It incorporates the 2 critically important tasks for knowledge acquisition – using data and research” (Kimmelman, 2006, p. 29). Essentially, his argument revolves around the well-intentioned core components and primary goals embedded in the law.

Other proponents point to statistics that show improvement in schools, particularly pointing to schools that meet challenges and achieve exemplary status. In 2005, the U.S. Department of Education reported “all-time highs” for math scores in fourth and eighth graders

nation-wide (Sunderman, 2008, p. 76). Many states reported significantly higher results on standardized tests following the implementation of NCLB. For example,

[I]n North Carolina, [a newspaper] claims that 71.2 percent of the state's students met or exceeded academic expectations on state exams in the 2006-2007 school year. This was compared to 54.3 percent during the prior year. A similar story appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* with the headline "Student Test Scores Up Since 2002." This article states that in 9 of 13 states, "gains were faster after No Child Left Behind." (Hayes, 2008, p. 49)

However, as Hayes (2008) later explained, although statistics like these demonstrated improvement in student achievement, there is a lack of consistency between state and federal tests in reported achievement, and states often report higher scores on their tests than results attained on federal tests. The incongruity between state and federal test scores is not necessarily intentional, rather, the difference in scores show the difficulty in achieving consistency in the measurement of student cognition. Hayes (2008) reported that in one year, "Fourth graders in the state of Mississippi have the highest passing rate in the nation on their state test. On the federal test, these same students have the second lowest passing rate in the country" (p. 51). Similar cases were discovered in Tennessee, Oklahoma, and Colorado, showing discrepancies of more than 50% between federal and state tests (Hayes, 2008). In addition, the catalyst for measured improvement on tests may not be learning. While the federal test determines AYP, the inconsistencies between state and federal tests problematize determining whether students are in fact learning, or simply memorizing testing methods (Ravitch, 2010; Sacks, 2000)

In addition, most recently as President Barack Obama moved to make changes to NCLB law, he highlighted that at the current rate, 82% of schools will be considered "failing" according to NCLB standards (Hefling, 2011). Although proponents of the law continue to claim that NCLB has had positive effects in some schools, this statistic demonstrates that the majority of schools have been effected negatively by the law. In concurrence with Obama's argument, many

more researchers have claimed that NCLB has had overall negative effects, particularly because of its accountability system. These scholars have argued that students are held back in school to maintain AYP (Assaf, 2006; Hayes, 2008; Guggenheim, 2010; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Heilig, 2008; Meier, Wood, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, & Sizer, 2004), that the law has resulted in an ever increasing number of student drop outs because of the pressures of testing (Donlevy, 2003; Gandara & Baca, 2008; Guggenheim, 2010; Hayes, 2008; Lipman, 2003; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Heilig, 2008), and that the accountability system attempts to solve the problem by addressing the wrong causes (Gandara & Baca, 2008; Hayes, 2008; Hess & Finn, 2007; Lesch, 2007; Meier, Wood, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, & Sizer, 2004; Ravitch, 2010; Wagner, 2008; Wright & Li, 2008).

McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, and Heilig (2008) addressed the dropout crisis by conducting a case study in a Texas high school. They claimed that high school principals found a legal loophole in NCLB law with regard to accountability. High school principals could hold students back in ninth grade and could prevent them from taking the tenth grade standardized test. This waiver from the test prevented these students' scores from being counted and, therefore, they did not contribute to the overall scores attached to NCLB sanctions. After a number of years of being held behind, students essentially give up and drop out of school. Because schools are not punished by NCLB standards when students drop out of school, schools often make minimal effort to prevent students from dropping out, particularly if the students in question are likely to lower overall test scores.

NCLB's failure to include drop-out rates in the sanctions attached to accountability is one of many faults researchers reported. Lesch (2007) argued that attaching high stakes to standardized tests operates under the assumption that standardized tests measure learning, and

that teachers are directly responsible for those scores. She claimed that the pressures of standardized testing have led schools to create a “testing culture” that deemphasizes student learning and targets the wrong problem. The problem in the educational system, she argued, is not in most cases due to teachers ineffectively teaching; rather, the problem results from a multitude of causes ranging from lack of funding to overly large class sizes to the need for more individualized instruction. In addition, as those within the system attempt to correct existing problems and address new problems, a multitude of complications arise as part of the attempted solutions.

As poignantly depicted in the recent documentary *Waiting for Superman*, a multitude of conflicting powers clash over decisions regarding educational policy (Guggenheim, 2010). The federal and state governments provide both funding and mandates for schools, but school districts wield much of the power in determining curriculum content, graduation requirements, and some teacher qualifications (Hayes, 2008). To further complicate policy, teachers unions place mandates on federal, state, and district policies to assist in affording fair treatment of teachers (Guggenheim, 2010; Hayes, 2008; Hess & Finn, 2007; Kimmelman, 2006). While each of the powers involved in creating policy have good intentions to provide the best education possible, the combination makes implementation of any policy complicated (Hess & Finn, 2007).

In addition to the problem of competing powers, funding exacerbates problems because entities that provide funding, primarily the federal and state governments, assign particular purposes for those funds. For example, a certain amount must be spent on building renovation, while a different amount is allocated for books and materials (Hess & Finn, 2007). When state and federal governments attempt to balance budgets, education funding is often cut, making implementation of other portions of the law difficult at best (Hess & Finn, 2007). For example,

if a school in a given district is normally allocated \$5,000 a year for textbooks, but the budget was cut by 30 percent, the school would have only \$3,500 for textbooks. Since enrollments in schools are increasing rather than decreasing, the school district must choose which subjects will get funds for textbooks. If all subjects need new textbooks, the school cannot simply reallocate funds designated for building renovation or hiring of new administrators because of the state and federal mandates placed on funding. The school must choose which subjects are most important and need textbooks first. Since schools must still achieve AYP despite funding cuts, changes in funding can have serious consequences not only on the quality of teaching, but also on the school's standing (i.e., high performing or low performing).

This hypothetical situation regarding textbooks is grounded in the realities of the nation's school districts. In 2011, Texas Governor Rick Perry refused to accept \$830 million in federal education funds because the money would have been allocated directly to independent school districts. Perry wanted these funds allocated to the state, which would have allowed him to use the funds to balance the state budget (Hinkle, 2011a). Texas schools, then, not only did not benefit from the \$830 million dollars from the federal government, they also suffered additional budget cuts from the state (Hinkle, 2011a). Despite being allocated less funding, school districts were still required to meet the educational mandates of NCLB. Schools in Texas, like those in other states coping with budget cuts, must maintain qualified teachers (Meier, Wood, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, & Sizer, 2004), raise or maintain scores on standardized tests as required to meet standards of AYP (Sunderman, Kim & Orfield, 2005), and accommodate rising numbers of diverse students, including students learning English (Gandara & Baca, 2008; Harper & De Jong, 2009; Harper, De Jong, & Platt, 2008; Wright & Li, 2008) and students with disabilities (Luft, 2008; Steffan, 2004). These challenges in combination with increasingly limited funding have

had devastating effects, especially in Texas schools. Recent reports indicate that Texas, the model state of NCLB, ranks number 43 in the nation for high school graduation rates (Hinkle, 2011b)

Under the “perfect storm” scenario of teaching an ever more diverse student population in increasingly overcrowded facilities, schools struggle to achieve or maintain AYP (Gandara & Baca, 2008; Meier, Wood, Kohn, Darling-Hammond & Sizer, 2004). If a school fails to meet a target for achieving that progress, parents must be notified and those students must be given a choice to move to another school the parents deem to have better quality teaching (Hayes, 2008). If after a number of years the “failing” school does not make sufficient improvement, district superintendents must either fire faculty and/or administrators deemed to have caused this failure or close the school (Hayes, 2008).

NCLB has essentially accomplished 2 things. First, the law has held teachers exclusively responsible for student performance on standardized tests and has ignored any cause attributable to any other source, such as schools and students stricken with poverty, students learning English as a second language, teachers lacking resources, parental involvement, and a list of others (Donlevy, 2003; Hess & Finn, 2007; Ravitch, 2010; Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield, 2005). Second, by providing parents with the opportunity to move their children out of “underperforming” schools, the law has led to overcrowding in “higher performing” schools (Guggenheim, 2010; Hayes, 2008). Furthermore, the law ignores the problems that it creates in low achieving schools. Students in these schools that are unable move to a different school because of transportation issues or financial limitations are doomed to remain in failing schools that simply get worse over time as a consequence of NCLB. Rather than addressing problems with underperforming schools, the law creates circumstances that create unintended

consequences that undermine both high achieving and low achieving schools (Hess & Finn, 2007; Ravitch, 2010). Instead, the federal government attempts to solve all problems in the educational system by relying on school accountability through AYP for low scores on standardized tests.

Consequences: Lowering the Quality of Secondary Education

The federal government evaluates schools and enforces accountability through mandated standardized testing and by attaching “high-stakes” to students’ scores. Researchers have indicated that this pressure on “high-stakes” standardized testing creates 4 main issues regarding the quality of education. First, teachers frequently teach to the test, meaning they teach the strategies to arrive at the right answer rather than teaching practical application (Sacks, 2000; Wagner, 2008). As Dewey (1938) argued, when students have no concrete application, they do not receive an education that prepares them to be knowledgeable, critical thinking citizens. Second, subjects not evaluated through standardized testing, such as art, physical education, and even science, despite their importance in the education of youth, are often cut (Assaf, 2006; Hayes, 2008; Kraehe, 2010). Third, high-stakes testing puts unfair pressure on students, which often forces them to drop out if they are unable to pass, particularly English language learners (ELL) (Gandara & Baca, 2008; Harper & De Jong, 2009), students with disabilities (Luft, 2008), and students of low socio-economic status (Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Heilig, 2008). Fourth and finally, because of the testing pressures, teachers often place students on “tracks,” or different paths based on their projected career abilities, early in their educational careers to achieve the best passing statistics (Guggenheim, 2010; Hess & Finn, 2007; Ravitch, 2010).

Teaching to the test. Teaching to the test is a common practice in schools to prepare students for standardized tests. Students spend the majority of their time in class practicing standardized tests, learning testing strategies, and focusing only on concepts covered in standardized tests. Rosengren (2004) described his experiences teaching math in Texas, and illustrated what he meant by “teaching to the test.”

My mentor began giving the new teachers information about the types of questions on the final test. These were tips that could maintain the exemplary status our school had for the past 7 years. She told us all of the types of questions the test had. We were to teach our children exactly how to answer these questions. To me, it was like working word for word from the test. [...] If the students did not understand or did not pass one of the practice tests, they were given extended day, [an in-school program for students with low test performance,] for extra practice. It started with just 2 days of extended day, then stretched to 3. These students lived, breathed, ate, and probably even dreamed about that test. (p. 72)

Rosengren is one of many researchers (Blake, 2008; Kraehe, 2010; Lamb, 2007; Lesch, 2007; Meier, Wood, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, & Sizer, 2004; Ravitch, 2010) who have described this process as common practice in subjects evaluated by standardized testing. In an ethnographic study in a rural Mississippi school, Lamb (2007) noted that more than half of the time in school was devoted solely to test preparation for state mandated exams, and that 3 weeks before the state exam, teachers devoted the entirety of in-class instruction to drilling test taking skills.

Teachers do not teach to the test because it is the best way to prepare students for life outside of school, but because administrators mandate it (Assaf, 2006; Lamb, 2007; Moses & Nanna, 2007; Rosengren, 2004). Administration creates mandates that encourage teachers to teach to the test because that is what keeps schools running. Unless schools demonstrate AYP, they face lay-offs and closure (Blake, 2008; Byrnes, 2009; Hayes, 2008; Meier, Wood, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, & Sizer, 2004; Ravitch, 2010).

Eliminating subjects. Administrators and teachers not only practice teaching to the test to ensure AYP, they also focus attention more heavily on subjects measured by standardized tests, primarily reading, writing, and math. Because subjects not measured by standardized testing, such as art and physical education, do not attract funding or help schools achieve high quality status through AYP, they are low priority for teachers and administrators (Hayes, 2008; Kraehe, 2010; McCarthy, 2008). Subjects most often cut are not less important to administrators or teachers, however they are aware that if students do not pass tests for reading, writing, and math, their schools face potential closure (Hayes, 2008). The most frequently cut programs include science, art, theatre, music, social science, and physical education (Hayes, 2008), and when these subjects are not cut, their teachers are encouraged to make connections to subjects that are measured by standardized tests (Hayes, 2008; Kraehe, 2010). Kraehe (2010) argued cuts to these subjects are detrimental to the education of students. Students are expected to graduate high school and enter the workforce with the ability to think creatively and to understand multiculturalism, yet art, the main subject that addresses those topics, is often the first subject cut (Kraehe, 2010). Hayes (2008) argued that those subjects considered core to district curriculum, such as science and history, are readily cut to make room for subjects evaluated by standardized tests, like math and reading (Hayes, 2008).

English language learners and students with disability. Students who struggle because of disabilities or because they are learning English as a second language often experience those difficulties throughout their educational careers. Researchers (Gandara & Baca, 2008; Harper, & De Jong, 2009; Harper, De Jong, & Platt, 2008; Luft, 2008; Steffan, 2004; Wright & Li, 2008) have argued that because English language learners (ELL) and students with disability are not part of the majority, teachers often view them as a waste of time because their scores will never

help the school meet AYP. Frequently these students are held back or decide to drop out of school (McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Heilig, 2008; Ravitch, 2010).

Luft (2008) specifically addressed the issues of deaf students in the classroom. She argued that what students with disabilities need, particularly students who are hearing-impaired, is “individualized education” (p. 431). Before implementation of NCLB, only 29.49% of hearing-impaired students were taught in traditional classroom settings, in contrast to 42.99% today. Although the needs of students with disabilities have not decreased, the restrictions placed on educators have deprived them of the means necessary to provide this individualized instruction.

Among ELLs, individual instruction is even less prevalent. Harper and De Jong (2009) studied this issue in Florida schools and determined that 50% of ELLs received minimal (10 hours a week or less) or no individual instruction, whereas before implementation of NCLB, that number was 32%. This decrease has taken place in spite of the fact that the number of ELLs in public schools is increasing, not decreasing. This situation has also been reported in California (Gandara & Baca, 2008; Pease-Alvarez, Samway, & Cifka-Herrera, 2010) and Texas (Bernstein, 2004; Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Heilig, 2008; Palmer & Lynch, 2008; Wright & Li, 2008). Despite an absence of case studies in other states, many scholars (Hayes, 2008; Hess, & Finn, 2007; Meier, Wood, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, & Sizer, 2004; Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield, 2005) have argued that similar circumstances exist in many, if not all, states.

Tracking. Each of the previously discussed issues, teaching to the test, eliminating subjects, and a declining quality for ELLs and students with disabilities have something in common. All are the result of teachers and administrators contending with federal policy

mandating all schools achieve AYP. The determination to achieve AYP encourages teachers to engage in a practice that some researchers (Guggenheim, 2010; Hess & Finn, 2007; Meier, Wood, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, & Sizer, 2004; Ravitch, 2010) have identified as the most detrimental to the quality of student education: tracking.

Tracking occurs when teachers place students on a path based on how well they are projected to succeed as determined by their performance on standardized tests and practice tests within the classroom. Students that perform exceedingly well on standardized tests are placed on the high track; these students are destined for college. Students who perform poorly on standardized tests are placed on the low track. These students are projected to do poorly on tests despite the best efforts of teachers and, therefore, have low expectations placed on them. Frequently, ELLs and students with disability are assigned to the low track. Students that fall in the middle are placed on the majority track. Students on the majority track receive the most attention from teachers, because those students are most likely to make a difference in AYP. This practice results in a lack of attention to students on the high or low tracks (Guggenheim, 2010; Hayes, 2008). Tracking, more than instruction or teaching to the test, directly affects students' future educational decisions, including students' decisions to drop out, to seek high school diplomas, or to continue their education beyond high school. Low track students often drop out, and those who pursue education beyond high school often lack the skills necessary to succeed. Middle track students generally receive high school diplomas and many pursue higher education. In pursuing higher education, they often do well in subjects tested by standardized testing, but struggle in areas ignored in high school like science and writing. High track students often pursue degrees beyond high school, and typically perform better, but occasionally lack

skills due to inattention in high school (Guggenheim, 2010; Goldrick-Rab & Mazzeo, 2005; Moran, 2010; Swanson, 2004; Trolan & Fouts, 2011).

This past summer, I had the opportunity to teach reading classes to students at a variety of grade levels. I had a first grader that was particularly difficult. He had an incredible amount of energy and seemed to direct all of that energy in 2 places: his legs and his vocal cords. He constantly stood up and tried to run around, and spoke far too loudly without raising his hand. He was also the child that struggled the most in my class. It took me 3 times as long to assess him because most of the time he refused to cooperate, and tried to memorize what he heard me say instead of looking at the words and reading them. He would not even look at the page if he heard the word “read.” Reading terrified him.

I talked to his mother frequently throughout the 5 week class. She was justifiably concerned. She told me what had happened during the 2 years he had been in school. In preschool, he was at the top of his class. His teachers kept saying he was ready for kindergarten and that he would do really well. He attended kindergarten at a different school, and because of his high levels of energy and his forgetfulness of class rules, he was required to sit in the back of the classroom with the other worst performing students. During parent-teacher conferences, his teacher told his mother that he needed medication because he suffered from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). For the rest of the year he was ignored. In kindergarten, teachers had already labeled him as a student that would not succeed.

Desperate for help, she changed his school and signed him up for the reading program with which I taught. Fortunately, his family had the resources to afford the full tuition without scholarship assistance, and the ability to transport him to another school. He was one of the

lucky ones. Most children in this situation are trapped in the school in which they are enrolled and with whatever labels their teachers assign.

As an educator, I was shocked that in kindergarten this child had already acquired a label that would consign him to the bottom of his class throughout his education, simply because he acts like many children do: high energy and playful with a short attention span. Teachers are not rewarded for reaching out to the students who, in their minds, are already pre-destined to underperform. They also derive no benefit from catering to the educational needs of students who are higher performing. To retain their jobs, they have to aim at the students on the majority track and push them to achieve at a level acceptable to AYP standards. Ironically, students on lower and higher tracks are “left behind,” and students on all tracks face learning gaps as they enter a college classroom.

Foundations for Research Question 1

Understanding how NCLB leads teachers to teach to the test, compels schools to cut subjects, lowers the quality of education for ELLs and students with disability, and encourages tracking behavior is crucial to understanding the structure of the American educational system and the challenges it now faces. Based on the above research, I argue that the quality of public education has declined and, because of this decline, students are ill-prepared to engage college level topics and to perform college level tasks.

What happens when students, placed either on the high track or majority track, or in a very rare case a low track, pass the standardized tests and make the choice to pursue a college career? Researchers (Goldrick-Rab & Mazzeo, 2005; Moran, 2010; Swanson, 2004; Trolan & Fouts, 2011) have claimed that the recent changes within the educational system caused by

NCLB affect whether students make the choice to pursue a college education. Goldrick-Rab and Mazzeo (2005) found that not only do students drop out of high school, limiting their qualifications for college, they also experience challenges meeting basic college requirements like writing samples and GPA. Moran (2010) found that students simply lose interest in college following their high school experience.

Trolian and Fouts (2011) argued that NCLB's accountability system and high-stakes testing pressures lead to teaching to the test, which leads to a certain type of learning, and that this type of learning translates poorly to college classrooms.

In their transition from high school to college, many students experience challenges, some of which may be exacerbated by an overemphasis on teaching to the test. Students often become accustomed to being told what to do and what to learn, and that learning is based on demonstrating mastery in solving problems. The responsibility students often feel early in their college career—responsibility for attending class, applying learned skills, and managing their own schedule—leaves many with a sense of transitional shock. (p. 5)

However, a lack of research exists on the experiences of students who make the choice to pursue college, as well as the experiences of their instructors. To determine the effects of NCLB of students in Texas who have been educated in this system and have chosen to pursue a post-secondary education I posed the following research question:

RQ1: What do college students and their instructors identify as the key challenges that arise as students educated under NCLB begin college coursework, and how does each group address these challenges?

To answer this research question, I conducted focus groups for both instructors and students. Based on the data collected from these focus groups, I created a performance based on Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre to answer a second research question.

Foundations for Research Question 2

As a theatre scholar in Brazil, Boal focused his research and writing on how theatre can be used to create change in society. Heavily influenced by pedagogy scholar Freire, who also fought for societal change in South America, Boal wrote his most influential work, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, to mirror the work of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Boal (1995) argued that through performance, actors and spectators can create catharsis in community.

Whatever the form, catharsis means purgation, purification, cleaning out. There lies the one and only major similarity between the different forms [of catharsis]: the individual or group purifies itself of some element or other which is disturbing its internal equilibrium. (pp. 69-70)

Boal argued that when a community comes together to create a performance about a social problem that “disturbs equilibrium,” the community works together to purge itself of the problem; by doing so the community can create the necessary change. Boal considered this type of social purgation as catharsis. Boal’s notion of “catharsis” is much different than the most common understanding of the term. As Aristotle defined it, catharsis occurs within the theatre and is a way to purge oneself of emotion, as therapy to the individual. Boal, in contrast, does not simply argue that performance is a way for individuals to feel better, but rather as a catalyst, a method, and a weapon to bring about social change (Boal, 1979). Catharsis for Boal is a purging of problems to restore equilibrium within the social order, whereas Aristotle’s definition of catharsis remains a release of emotions within the theatre. According to Boal, often the catalyst a society needs to prompt community members to address the problem is an occurrence that draws attention to the problem—like a performance. Once society becomes aware of the problem, dialogue begins that can become a foundation for creating change and ridding society of the problem. This definition is the one I have adopted for this study, catharsis as a means for social change.

As a city council member in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Boal created change in his community by means of a performance technique that he called “Forum Theatre.” Using this technique, he staged performances about a problem, and community members were encouraged to step forward and voice opinions, or take the place of an actor to attempt to perform a solution to the problem. Boal then used the outcomes from these performances, the people’s solutions, to create legislation to submit to council. The sole difference between Forum Theatre and what he defined as Legislative Theatre, was that the solutions provided by performance exercises with the community were written up as legislation, passed, and enforced by city council (Boal 1979).

Boal (1979) illustrated Forum Theatre with an example from his own practice in Lima, Peru. Boal wanted to address the issues of poverty and the division of class in Lima. In response to a question Boal asked in order to understand the conditions of poverty, one man answered,

This child, as all the others who live here, have their lives threatened by the rats that infest the whole bank of the river Rimac. They are protected by dogs that attack the rats and scare them away. But there was a mange epidemic and the city dog-catcher came around here catching lots of dogs and taking them away. This child had a dog who protected him. During the day his parents used to go to work and he was left with his dog. But now he doesn’t have it any more. A few days ago, when you asked me where I lived, the rats had come while the child was sleeping and had eaten part of his nose. This is why there’s so much blood on his face. Look at the picture; it is my answer. I live in a place where things like this still happen. (p. 124)

In response to this and other descriptions of poverty-stricken living conditions in Lima, Boal conducted a series of theatrical activities with the community as a way to forge weapons and rehearse concrete solutions to the challenges they faced. The community used Forum Theatre to challenge authority, to brainstorm ways for improving their living conditions, and to imagine ways the laws could change to benefit the community as a whole. These performance exercises used in Forum Theatre continue to benefit a variety of communities today.

In a case study involving English as a Second Language program, Louis (2005) described his experiences incorporating Forum Theatre techniques as pedagogical resources for students in the community college classroom in the United States. Louis not only highlighted the pedagogical roots of Boal's Forum Theatre, he also argued that Boal's techniques can be used as an embodied practice for discovering oppressed and oppressor identities. In the context of ESL, these techniques encouraged students to tell stories

about seemingly mundane communication obstacles they encountered while interacting with native English speakers. They told stories about landlords who would not respond to their tenants' requests, grocery clerks who relentlessly stared at immigrant customers, and employers who belittled immigrant employees by assuming they were ignorant of basic workplace information. (p. 342)

Louis worked with these ESL students' communication obstacles through Forum Theatre and Image Theatre techniques, to open a space to dialogue and critical thinking, as well as a way for students to challenge social and political worlds of which they were a part. For example, in workshops Louis's students started with a tableaux image based on a cartoon depicting a white police officer denying people of color access to a building. Based on this image, the students projected their own narratives of oppression, such as immigration issues, into the tableaux. By using this technique, Louis opened a space for students to find their own social and political agency.

Boal's larger method, Theatre of the Oppressed, occurs in 4 stages. The first stage is knowing the body, in which the troupe, recruited by a leader wishing to tackle a problem, engage in exercises that helps them understand the "limitations and possibilities" of their own bodies (Boal, 1979, p. 126). The second stage is making the body expressive, in which the troupe members express their identities through theatrical games. The third stage is theatre, which aims to "practice theatre as a language that is living and present, not as a finished product

displaying images from the past” (Boal, 1979, p. 126). This stage has 3 degrees: simultaneous dramaturgy, image theatre, and forum theatre. The fourth stage is theatre as discourse, which are simple theatrical acts that discuss a specific theme the community wishes to address (e.g., invisible theatre and spectacle) (Boal, 1979).

Each of these stages are important, and later stages build on earlier stages. For example, it is not possible for the body to be expressive before first knowing the body, and image theatre in Stage 3 builds upon expressive bodies. I implemented Theatre of the Oppressed through Stage 3, particularly through the third degree of that stage: Forum Theatre. In Forum Theatre, a troupe stages a scene depicting a problem that reflects a larger issue in society. The “spect-actors” are community members who are not part of the original staging of the scene. After they have witnessed the scene, they are encouraged to intervene by taking the place one of the characters within the scene and performing his or her potential solution to the problem.

Boal established 2 rules for spect-actors taking the places of characters in a scene. First, the spect-actors cannot take the place of the antagonist, the character responsible for the problem. If the spect-actor replaced the antagonist, the problem would not be solved, it would simply be removed, which is not a viable solution for social problems. For Boal, this method of avoiding dialogue is counter-productive. For example, if the troupe stages an antagonist shouting racial slurs and the other characters in the scene are either the object of the racial slurs or witnesses to it, spect-actors from the community could take the place of any of the characters except the antagonist in an attempt to open dialogue. Second, magical solutions, ways to solve the problem that could never be enacted in reality, are not allowed. As an extension to the example above, one of the spect-actors playing a witness, for instance, could not pull out a gun and shoot the antagonist. That solution would be “magical” because it did not take into consideration the

consequences of the murder, nor does it address the problem of racism. One of the spect-actors could step in as a witness and attempt to engage the antagonist by discussing the offensiveness of his/her behavior change the behavior. Alternatively, a spect-actor could introduce a new character, like a police officer, to intervene. Another possible solution would be for the spect-actor to take the place of one of the people being targeted by the racist language and have him or her address the antagonist directly rather than suffering the abuse in silence. The process of having spect-actors intervene is repeated until the audience collectively agrees that the staging at hand is a viable method for solving the problem.

As this literature review indicates, NCLB and its considerable reliance on standardized testing reflects Freire's notion of the banking model of education. In writing about the banking model, Freire (1970) stated,

[The teacher's] task is to "fill" the students with the contents of his narration—contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. . . . Worse yet, it turns [students] into "containers," into "receptacles" to be "filled" by the teacher. . . . Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. (pp. 71-72)

Just as NCLB attaches high-stakes to testing, the current public education system reveres the banking model, largely because of its measurability. Furthermore, when examined in light of Foucault's (1971) commentary on the concept of examinations, standardized testing is not only a commercialization of education, but also a mode of societal control. Since NCLB affects individuals who are of low socioeconomic status, learning English, or struggling with disability more than it affects the average population, I argue that NCLB's emphasis on standardized testing may, intentionally or unintentionally, maintain the system of oppression it was designed to fight, largely because of the banking model of education.

Freire (1970) also proposed a method for liberating oppression that decreases the use of this banking model of education, reduces the commercialization of education, and humanizes teachers and students rather than dehumanizing them. This liberating technique is dialogue. Dialogue, Friere (1970) argued, is what makes education truly knowledge creation rather than a mechanism for filing deposits. He also identified another necessary component for the possibility of productive dialogue: critical thinking.

True dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking—thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them—thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity—thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved. (p. 92)

Dialogue is central to the creation of knowledge and critical thinking is a crucial foundation to dialogue. Consequently, these components have been incorporated into each aspect of the study, from focus group interviews to the performance that resulted from them.

Freire and Foucault are key scholars in understanding the relationship between oppressive systems and the challenges they create for education. In analyzing the data I looked at the relation of oppressive systems and examinations, such as the standardized tests mandated by NCLB. Comparing the data from focus groups to the way Freire (1970) and Foucault (1971) described education, I argue, based on the data given in focus groups, NCLB operates as an oppressive system. However, my aim in this study was not only to understand the challenges and the causes, I also sought to find workable solutions to the challenges by using Augusto Boal's performance methods.

Based on the data I collected through the focus groups, I created a performance around the most common and most pressing challenges in classrooms at the university where I collected the data. The cast and their audiences addressed these challenges in an attempt to rehearse

change in the university community. The Forum Theatre performances served as the basis for answering my second research question:

RQ2: What strategies do the actors and spect-actors in a Forum Theatre production arrive at for addressing the challenges faced by college instructors and their students who have completed their secondary education under the No Child Left Behind Act?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGIES

This study utilized a sequential mixed methodology. I begin this chapter by describing the qualitative methodology used to collect data from instructor and student focus groups as well as the particular method used to analyze that data. In the second section, I describe a performance methodology grounded in the work of Augusto Boal. Boal's Forum Theatre uses audience-participation in theatrical events to stage and rehearse change to existing social problems. The results are discussed in subsequent chapters.

Focus Group Methodology

To answer my first research question question, I collected qualitative data through focus groups at a large public university in Texas. Focus groups are an appropriate means for collecting data for this study because of the flexibility they offer. Ideally, focus groups are comprised of 6 to 12 people within a population (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). The moderator of the focus group poses questions, but allows the group discussion to shift to ideas and issues identified by members of the group. Rather than insisting the members stay on target with specific questions, as in an interview, the focus group moderator leads the discussion but allows the group members to discuss topics relevant to their experiences. Because the participants are in groups of people similar to themselves, the focus group format also encourages the emergence of narratives based on shared experiences within the group (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Recognizing that the challenges college freshmen and their instructors face may vary greatly, my study requires the flexibility afforded by this means of qualitative research.

The focus groups in this study were of 2 types. The first population consisted of college freshmen. This group has progressed through the educational system under NCLB for their entire K-12 educational experience, and they have made the decision to pursue a college degree. The second population consisted of instructors who have college freshmen in their classrooms. Because my goal is to understand the challenges from both perspectives, and because my aims are to gather the richest data possible, students and instructors were placed in separate focus groups. This strategy was also pursued in order to foster group cohesion and an uninhibited flow of information (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). In Spring 2012, I conducted a total of 10 focus groups: 4 student focus groups and 6 instructor focus groups. A total of 14 students and 25 instructors participated in focus groups. In all of these focus groups, I served as moderator, asking a series of questions and acting as a facilitator during the open discussion (Appendix A).

All focus groups were videotaped and transcribed, resulting in 108 single-spaced pages of data, 39 pages of data related to the student focus groups and 69 pages of data related to the instructor focus groups. Following transcription, I used grounded theory to conduct thematic analysis of the data. I looked for emergent themes in all student and instructor transcripts by highlighting consistent topics in response to questions pertaining to participants' challenges, their perceptions about the causes to those challenges, and the strategies they use to attempt to meet those challenges. After completing my analysis, I used an independent coder to verify my results. Using the themes that emerged in my analysis of the data (responsibility, apathy, writing skills, critical thinking, and perception of college), I constructed a code sheet with the title of the themes and their definitions. Using the code sheet, I trained the coder by discussing the themes and their definitions, and by providing him with examples. Using that information, the independent coder reviewed the transcripts and assigned quotations to one of the following

themes: responsibility, apathy, writing skills, critical thinking, and perception of college. The independent coder's assignment of themes matched mine with 87.5% accuracy (85% accuracy with student data, and 88% accuracy with instructor data).

After the verification of results, I marked narratives within the transcripts that highlighted the challenges students and instructors collectively faced in their classrooms. These instructor and student narratives became part of a script I created for the second half of the project wherein I used Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre to seek specific strategies to cope with the challenges that instructors and students identified in their focus groups. From the themes that emerged in the analysis of the focus group data, I constructed a base for the second half of the project by conducting Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre, in order to answer the second research question.

Performance Methodology

The method used to answer the second research question was live performance. The performance was divided into 2 "acts." The first act was a traditional, scripted performance informing the audience of the issues associated with the No Child Left Behind Act through material included in my literature review, fictional and nonfictional texts that illustrated specific problems associated with NCLB, and narratives from the focus groups that highlighted the challenges faced by both students and instructors. Taking the form of a traditional performance, the first act utilized traditional distinctions between actors and audience members. The actors presented scenes in front of an audience, whose only participation was as receivers of the information presented by the cast.

In the second act, Boal's Forum Theatre method was used, and actors and audience (now, spect-actors) co-created scripts in performance. Specifically, the cast presented scenarios based

on the information gathered in instructor and student focus groups that illustrated the specific challenges that college freshmen and instructors face at UNT. The scenarios were performed by the original cast one at a time. After the presentation of each scenario, the audience was invited to participate as spect-actors in Forum Theatre by taking the place of antagonists in the scenarios and working with the remaining cast members to perform a potential solution to the problem. The cast and spect-actors performed and re-performed each scenario until the audience could reach a consensus that the solution presented for each scenario was effective in meeting the challenge the cast had introduced. Following this collective agreement, the next challenge was introduced.

These data, the various solutions rehearsed by the spect-actors and the cast, were collected through the recording of contemporaneous field notes that I made during the rehearsed solutions as well as through video-taped recordings of the Forum Theater portions of each production. Unfortunately, because of equipment failure, only one set of solutions was recorded in its entirety; 2 were only partially recorded, and one was not recorded at all. As a result, the data had to be reconstructed through a combination of the field notes and the recordings in order to provide answers to RQ2.

In addition to working through several scenarios, each performance offered an opportunity to start dialogue between the students and instructors in attendance with the hope that the dialogue would continue outside of the performance setting. To further encourage this type of dialogue, a “talk-back” session, in which the audience is invited to engage the director and cast freely in an open forum, took place following each performance. These “talk-back” sessions offered an extension of the dialogue that occurred during Forum Theatre, and were intended to extend the dialogue beyond the performance space.

CHAPTER 4

FOCUS GROUPS RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

In Chapter 2, I reviewed literature on the history of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the perspectives of the law's proponents and critics, and the practical consequences that have resulted from the law's implementation. Based on the challenges the law has created in K-12 education documented in the previous chapter, I proposed research questions and methodologies for answering those questions. This chapter is devoted to answering the first question.

RQ1: What do college students and their instructors identify as the key challenges that arise as students educated under NCLB begin college coursework, and how does each group address these challenges?

To answer the question, I conducted focus groups to determine the challenges that students and instructors perceived as they made the transition from secondary education conducted under NCLB and the accompanying standardized testing guidelines, to post secondary education based in individual pedagogical philosophies that are not measured by standardized testing. The script and the Forum Theatre production that resulted from the data collected in these focus groups served as the basis for the next chapter, in which I address my second research question.

In this chapter, I begin by describing instructor and student focus groups with regard to demographics and the interview process. Second, I explain the method of analysis for the data gathered from focus group interviews. Third, in separate sections for student and instructor focus groups, I report the findings of the 5 emergent themes: writing skills, responsibility, critical thinking, perception of college education, and apathy. Finally, I discuss the implications of

conducting the focus group interview portion of the research, which ultimately served as the basis for the Forum Theatre production. In discussing the implications of the study, I explain how the interviews became a cathartic space to release frustrations for both students and instructors, the connections among the 5 emergent themes, the link between students' high school experiences and the apparent challenges expressed by both students and instructors, and finally, how NCLB is a likely contributing factor to the challenges students and instructors face in current college classrooms.

Focus Groups

Instructor Focus Groups

The participants in instructor focus groups consisted of teachers of college freshmen. The teachers who participated in the focus groups represented a variety of disciplines including English, communication, foreign language, technical writing, and linguistics. A total of 25 instructors, 18 females and 7 males, participated in 6 focus groups. They ranged in terms of their amount of teaching experience from one semester to 30 years. To secure faculty participants, I identified potential subjects on departmental websites based on the courses they taught, thereby ensuring I would reach instructors that taught college freshmen. Next, I sent the identified faculty an email explaining the goals of my research, the questions I was attempting to address through focus group interviews, incentives to participate, which included free food and drink at the focus group and a chance to win a \$50 Barnes and Noble gift card, and a list of several dates and times I had already established for conducting instructor focus groups so that they could choose a time that worked best for their schedules. Instructors replied with a time from that list they were willing and able to participate. To find faculty participants, I used criterion sampling,

in which you select participants based on certain criteria such as an activity, occupation, geographical location, event, etc. (Lindlof & Taylor, 2001). Since only faculty who teach college freshmen were appropriate for the study, criterion sampling was the most appropriate method.

Each faculty focus group lasted approximately 45 minutes. In these meetings instructors answered a series of questions in a free-flowing discussion format (Appendix A). Instructors began by describing the structure of their classes, their assignments, their grading practices, their strategies for eliciting student participation, and their perceptions of overall classroom atmosphere. Instructors then addressed the challenges they faced in conducting their classes, in leading students to complete assignments, in eliciting student participation, and in achieving desired student learning outcomes. In discussing those challenges, instructors speculated about the causes of those challenges and provided examples of how they attempted to address the challenges they encountered in their classrooms. The moderator video-recorded the focus groups for transcription purposes.

Student Focus Groups

The participants in the student focus groups consisted only of college freshmen who graduated from high school in May or June of 2011; consequently, the student participants ranged in age from 18 and 19 years old. A total of 14 individuals participated in 4 focus groups, 5 females, and 9 males. In finding student participants, I once again used criterion sampling (Lindlof & Taylor, 2001) to select only students classified as freshmen for the study. Since I wanted to understand the effect of NCLB on college learning, college freshmen were the most appropriate for the study because these students had never experienced an education system

other than NCLB, and they were currently experiencing the process of transitioning from high school to their first non-NCLB educational experience.

Students were recruited using a variety of venues, including on-campus organizations, dormitories, and classes. Students transitioning from high school to college were particularly difficult to recruit because with the multitude of life changes that come with entering college, they had very little motivation to participate in a volunteer activity with minimal incentive or return.

The primary source for students was an introductory communication course targeted at incoming first year students that fulfilled a core curriculum requirement for the university. Each instructor for the course received a letter explaining the study as well as copies of a focus group informational form (Appendix B) that provided a brief overview of the study and requested demographic and contact information from students interested in participating in the study. The instructor letters included the goals of the study, research questions, a list of times students could participate as well as a description of incentives for participants, including free food and drink at the focus group, and registration for a chance to win a \$50 iTunes gift card. The student informational form was distributed by the instructor. In addition to seeking the information described above, the form also included my contact information in case the students wanted additional information about the study. Students were instructed to return the forms to their instructors.

The Introduction to Communication course enrolled 650 students in the spring 2012 semester, a majority of whom received the recruitment forms from their instructors. Of the 650 students in the course, 250 were freshmen; 42 returned forms indicating their interest in participating in the study. However, only 7 of the 42 responded to an email inviting them to

participate in a focus group. Of the freshmen in the course, approximately 3% (2.8%) participated in the study. Given these circumstances, other means of recruitment were necessary, and proved equally difficult. Recruitment through English classes and a philosophy class on campus resulted in zero participants; recruitment through dormitories and sororities also produced zero participants. A Student Government Association leader procured 5 participants, and an instructor for an interpersonal communication class identified the remaining 2 participants.

Each student focus group meeting lasted approximately 30 minutes. In these meetings students responded to a series of questions in a free-flowing discussion format [Appendix A]. Students described their high school experiences in relation to assignments, teachers, and expectations, and then compared those experiences to assignments, teachers, and expectations they encountered as freshmen in college. Students also described what they believed to be the greatest challenge in college, and how they met that challenge. Overall, student responses were short, averaging one sentence to 4 sentences in length. Single word responses received a follow up question from the focus group moderator to seek richer descriptions. The moderator video-recorded the focus groups for transcription purposes.

Analysis of Data

Data Set

In faculty focus groups, a total of 4 hours and 20 minutes of discussion was recorded. When transcribed, the instructor focus groups yielded 69 pages of single-spaced data. The student focus groups, which were substantially shorter, resulted in 2 hours and 36 minutes of tape that, when transcribed, yielded 39 pages of single-spaced data.

Method of Analysis

Focus group interviews were the most beneficial methodology to collect data for this study for a variety of reasons. Because these interviews were part of a mixed-method study, focus groups were utilized to provide the rich responses to open-ended interview questions. Focus groups are comprised of multiple individuals, which allow for multiple perspectives and discussion to arise, allowing the best results possible for the research questions.

The ideal group number for focus groups is between 6 and 12 people. The average length of time for each focus group ranges from 30 minutes to an hour and a half. Diversity within groups varies on the study, and can have an effect on the results of the study. Some of the groups were notably mixed, whereas others were largely homogenous, characterizing the data differently for each group. “A mixed group has the potential for creating interactions of an argumentative type [...] A homogenous group is usually more willing to speak openly” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2001, 186). This may affect the richness of the description, the type of answers given, and the attitude toward the interview.

Following the collection of data, I conducted thematic analysis using grounded theory. “Emergent theory is ‘grounded in’ the relationships between data and the categories into which they are coded. Categories develop through an ongoing process of comparing units of data with each other (a process known as the constant-comparative method)” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2001, 250). A unit of data is defined as any significant instance of discourse within a transcribed interview. Some responses were not relevant to the research questions in the study and therefore not coded into one of the 5 emergent themes. In some instances, a participant would transition into a new theme in the middle of an answer. These answers were coded as 2 separate instances of discourse, and categorized into different themes.

The themes that emerged through this process were writing skills, responsibility, critical thinking, perception of college, and apathy. During the coding process, other themes emerged, but were eventually collapsed into one of the 5 finalized categories due to similarities.

“Writing skills” is a theme including any narratives by instructors describing deficiencies in grammar, spelling, outlining, researching, or other skills related to language construction. For example, “I see that carrying over a lot into their actual papers too as far as not being able to organize a paper, not putting any sort of, you know, intro, even one sentence, or even one sentence of some sort of preview or sense of closure. They’ll just ramble for a couple pages and then abruptly stop. I mean really, that’s what it is, and it’s like a stream of consciousness, there’s no organization whatsoever. It’s kind of like a blog entry.” From students, the theme included narratives describing personal challenges writing papers or getting desired grades, as well as high school experiences describing the writing process. For example, “She would like, my teacher would base like part of the points you got on the grammar you use, and then how long it was and how planned it was, and then put it up against the others.”

“Responsibility” included narratives from both instructors and students describing their opinions on who primarily takes initiative or responsibility for students’ learning and grades. For example, from instructors, “That’s something that I’ve noticed as one of my biggest problems. I don’t know what it is, it seems like this generation of kids they need their hand held a lot. I almost want to write on their papers, ‘I’m not here to wipe your ass for you.’ I’m like, I’m not your babysitter, I’m not your mom, you know? And I get that a lot where, especially my early evaluation feedback from my students was like ‘she doesn’t explain the assignments well enough.’” And from students, “It’s really taught me to be more responsible because it’s all in my control, and like in high school they tell you no late work. In college when they tell you no late

work. And it forces you to really understand the way contracts work. Like this is our syllabus, this is our contract. This is what you have to follow.”

“Critical thinking” included narratives from instructors that describe their perceived students’ ability to critically think, and whatever they link to a deficiency in critical thinking. For example, “The students you get who think there’s a right or a wrong answer and they’re a little more advanced so they’ll try to feed you the answer. I always tell them that’s a beauty queen response. Because they’re trying to feed you that sort of what they think you want and I’m like ‘come on, you need to push a little farther and critically engage with it.’ I’m like, I already know the standard response, like, yes, racism is bad.” This theme also included narratives from students that described their experiences with critical thinking both in high school and in college, as well as their perceived causes to their struggles in this particular skill. For example, “I don’t wanna say I’m not a thinker but like I’m just so used to like, looking at a paper and like the answer’s right there, like, they give me a question and I go straight to the paper and find it. So for them to like give me something where we like here’s a sentence, what does this sentence really mean?”

“Perception of college” included narratives from instructors describing discrepancies between students and instructor for the goals and responsibilities of college. For example, “That kind of mentality. No. You have to come to class, because if you don’t come you’re not learning anything. ‘Well I’ll turn in all the assignments.’ But you’re not learning anything. There’s more to the education system than the assignments. There is. It’s almost more, it’s less about the assignments and more about their process and if your cheapen the process by saying well you pay for it, so you should get what you pay for, then everything, everything about the whole degree is cheapened.” The theme also included narratives from students that displayed

this disparity described by instructors. For example, “And the college, honestly I don’t really care about education, honestly speaking. But I really want to be a filmmaker and I really want a degree. So I want to be a big icon in film making.”

“Apathy” included narratives from instructors that described a lack of desire and overwhelming indifference to learning and achievement. For example, “These kids getting out of high school they’re already burned out. And I think that’s the thing. You come right out of high school and even if you try or not you’re already apathetic and you’re already burned out in your first year of college.” From students, this theme included narratives that displayed this indifference or lack of desire about learning or achievement. “My school was like, I didn’t really try at all. So when I came up here, first semester, I kinda had the same attitude, and it didn’t turn out good at all. I failed 3 out of 5. Yeah. I got 2 C’s and 3 F’s.”

To determine reliability, I hired an independent coder to review quotes from transcripts and sort them into one of the 5 emergent themes (writing skills, responsibility, critical thinking, perception of college, and apathy) that I had already identified from transcribed interviews. The coder was provided with a codebook of a list of themes, their definition, and examples for each of the themes. The coder was asked to categorize quotes from the interview into each of the 5 themes. The independent coder coded a total of 75 instances of student discourse and 106 instances of instructor discourse. After calculating the coded data, my data resulted in a high degree of reliability, which means independent coder agreed with my thematic analysis 87.5% of the time. In the instances of disagreement, we discussed the categories in which each of us placed the instance of discourse, and generally agreed that the instance could reasonably be placed in either category. Thus, those instances were not reliably part of one solid category.

Emergent Themes

Writing Skills

In quotations identified as writing skills, instructors described and/or identified deficiencies in areas such as grammar, research, content, outlining, punctuation, and sentence construction by students. These instances of discourse frequently included narratives about students that illustrated student deficiencies in both content and form in regards to writing skills. Students, on the other hand, did not describe or explicitly identify writing deficiencies; rather, they discussed their difficulties with writing as they struggled to earn a grade or as they worked to understand directions on writing assignments. Both instructors and students spent more time in focus groups discussing writing skills than any of the other emergent categories.

Instructors

Instructors described assignments in their courses as a combination of writing assignments, smaller online or in-class assignments, and tests that combined multiple choice, true/false, and essay questions. A number of instructors expressed dislike for using “objective” tests, and stated they “avoid them whenever possible,” or that they “almost never have tests.” Some of the smaller assignments, like quizzes, reflection essays, discussion posts, which were often based on readings, were administered online through Blackboard, while some of the larger written assignments were completed and submitted during class. Instructors described grading as structured, based on rubrics that included consideration of a variety of component areas such as grammar, content, style, and organization.

The first topic of challenge in freshmen classrooms that instructors in every focus group identified and discussed was the lack of writing skills among students. They noted, in particular,

student difficulties with grammar, the use of language appropriate for text messages in formal papers, and their lack of research skills. As one instructor stated, “I feel like they’re starting over with everything. They don’t know grammar, they don’t know simple language skills, they don’t know current events.” Grammar was always one of the first subjects related to writing skills the instructors referenced. One instructor, attempting to understand why her students struggled so much with grammar explained,

I have students who can barely put a sentence together, and some of them have made very good grades in high school and do not understand why they’re making C’s in my class. But then they tell me that the last time they actually studied grammar was in middle school.

Another instructor was more specific in describing her students’ struggles with grammar.

They have a lot of not understanding what a proper punctuation mark is. And having entire paragraphs with no periods, or question marks, or completely run on sentences without adding commas and making it longer, and they don’t understand that it has to have breaks.

The next subject instructors arrived at was the difficulty in teaching formatting. Some instructors talked about their struggles in teaching APA or MLA format, some talked about formatting struggles more broadly in relation to outlines and basic paper formatting. One instructor discussed both.

If they don’t have a concrete example to follow, I notice there’s a big problem, whether it’s in formatting papers or whether it’s in delivering a speech because we do a lot of speeches, whatever the assignment is I found if they don’t have an actual example in front of them, of “this is precisely what I want, to look exactly like this,” they can’t come up with the like, in writing in APA, and go use the MLA handbook or APA handbook to figure out how to do this doesn’t work. The abstractness of that doesn’t click or the “make sure to format your speech with an introduction body and conclusion,” is apparently too abstract and it doesn’t work and otherwise you just get a bunch of rambles if they haven’t seen you have to put a thesis statement and then this statement here and then this statement here. Put them in that order and don’t change it.’

In addressing deficiencies in grammar and formatting, the topic of text language also arose. Instructors raised concerns about text language appearing in formal papers and emails,

such as “lol,” “cuz,” “u,” “y,” and other abbreviations. Instructors also speculated that punctuation and capitalization errors were the result of normalized Internet text behavior. One instructor, frustrated with this issue, stated, “In a college level, granted a freshmen level, but college level research paper: ‘cuz.’ I didn’t know ‘cuz’ *Really?*” Instructors also acknowledged a deficiency in content in regards to writing skills, noting that students have a limited understanding of the world. One instructor stated, “I also find that freshmen, I do not think are very well versed in just general things that are going on in the world. They seem to have no knowledge of current events, politics, social issues.”

In addition to their general lack of knowledge about the world, students also enter college with a limited set of research skills. Instructors described students as having the ability to do Internet research, but not much else. One instructor stated, “They look things up on Wikipedia, or they think that Wikipedia is as good as it can get.” Another instructor elaborated on this notion, “No, they don’t know how to use the library. They know how to use the Internet.”

After instructors described the challenges they face in teaching college freshmen, the moderator asked each focus group to identify the causes for the challenges students face. With regard to writing skills, instructors speculated the problems came from an increase in technology or from deficiencies in the secondary education system. With regard to technology, one instructor stated,

I think a lot of that does come from the technologies because when they text or they write on Facebook they don’t put in punctuation and capitalization and I’m shocked even in our senior level classes their final papers I had to cross out commas and put in a period and capitalize the next letter so many times it was amazing. And this was for seniors. And so, 1010 students do it too, but I mean, the fact that seniors do it too I mean it’s like, shocking. And that was days before they graduated from our department.

Instructors also identified secondary school education as an influence on students’ challenges with writing skills. One instructor specifically linked the deficiencies in her students’ writing

skills to high school English teachers,

I wish that more senior English teachers had taught outline writing because they're getting here and they don't know how to write an outline and I don't know if it's because if they're not having to do them in high schools or if it's because they're not really having them write papers in high schools. I'm not a hundred percent sure where the disconnect comes from, but it's most certain that they don't know what a regular outline is or a bulleted outline or a numbered outline.

Another instructor discussed the amount of reading instruction and its effect on students' success after high school.

The number of class hours that have been spent teaching reading has gone up monotonically since then and interestingly the reading scores measured by the army. The army wants their soldiers to be good enough readers so they point the bazooka in the right direction. And has been going down. So as reading has been taught more and more, reading skills has been going down. So it's not, our education system is not merely not working, it's doing the opposite.

After instructors identified and described the causes of the challenges they face teaching college freshmen, the moderator asked instructors how they attempted to address these challenges in their courses. Instructors identified 3 distinct instructional strategies to help their students. The first strategy they identified was the attempt to begin working with students at their current level of understanding by providing additional resources and changing their expectations. In describing their attempts to provide additional resources, the instructors' answers varied from being more explicit with providing instructions, to creating additional materials for students. One instructor stated,

I want them to do research, I teach them how to do research. So they find journal articles and they learn to read them, they break them down, I give them explicit instructions and these are seniors. But it's challenging for them and I can tell they've never done it before and it makes them uncomfortable.

Another instructor described the additional materials he provided for students.

Well we do require them to do a couple of outlines and we're finding they don't necessarily know how to do them so we've provided them templates, and they're good at

most of the time following the template, hopefully when they plug their own information into it.

Other instructors discussed changing their expectations or their grading scale to meet the students at their level. One instructor was unhappy about having to compromise her standards.

I have to remind myself that... I have to find myself having to do this constantly that I have to remind myself where they're coming from. And grade accordingly which breaks my heart sometimes. But you have to remember that they probably didn't get this, before they got here, which takes a lot of time recovering, which takes a lot of time from content, which also breaks my heart. If I have to spend 2 days teaching them how to use EBSCO, that's 2 days that I'm not teaching the stuff that we're supposed to be doing with our classroom. It's sort of a fact about our fact now. There's no choice, you have to sort of have to build that in, like if you're going to have to have these days to cover things that you would assume a college freshman would already know.

Overall, instructors agreed that students struggled in grammar, research, formatting, and some content, and largely concluded that technology and the secondary education system was to blame for these challenges. Strategies for addressing these challenges in classrooms included providing additional materials and changing expectations. Instructors' classroom experiences proved to be vastly different than the lived experiences of students. The next section summarizes the key ideas disclosed in the students' responses during the focus group sessions.

Students

With student groups, the focus group interviewer asked participants to begin by describing high school experiences, ranging from the topics covered in high school, to the assignments teachers gave and how they were graded on those assignments, to the goals they had in high school and what expectations teachers and administrators placed on them. Students gave similar descriptions in each focus group of their high school experiences. Students listed core topics such as English, history or social studies, math, and science classes including biology, chemistry, and physics. In English classes, students described writing papers based on books

assigned for class. Students mentioned some titles, including Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and a modern young adult novel, *Speak*, by Laurie Halse Anderson. Students described the papers as structured, a few stated that they wrote "5 paragraph essays," others noted that grading incorporated elements of grammar, but teachers based grades primarily on content and structure.

In history and social studies classes, students described classroom settings as repetitious and test based. Students explained that teachers reviewed material from previous years, and that they spent the remainder of time in class watching videos and filling out worksheets from the course textbook. Students described very few experiences from math and science courses. In these brief mentions, they mentioned only showing up to class, taking notes, and taking tests. In characterizing math and science tests, students described them as partially multiple choice and partially word problems that they were required to solve. Students' experiences in high school were embodiments of the experiences described by instructors. Instructors, who explained that the secondary education system was a cause for the problems students face in college, did not live the experience in the same way students lived the experience. Some students described negative experiences with their high school teachers, particularly in writing. One student reflected on his English teacher.

I don't know there was just something about her, I don't think she liked me and she was just a really rough grader. Like I felt like I was in college, and I wrote these essays and I was stressed out. And she would just pound my papers. Yeah. I just don't feel like she instead of telling me what I should do, so that she wouldn't pound my paper. I think she got a kick out of pounding my paper.

Most students simply described what they did in high school with regard to their assignments.

Some students in advanced classes described rigorous high school assignments. One student who received college credit and high school credit in her senior year described her assignments.

I just remember writing a lot of papers, like English, a lot of papers. When I got to junior year, we had to write a short story, so that was like 21 pages long, and it's whatever you

came up with. And when I got to Richland where I did dual credit, they combined history and English, so you would write papers about the history so that was even more papers. And then so really, a lot of papers.

Another student in Advanced Placement courses described assignments targeted towards understanding current events and formatting papers, both areas that instructors identified as problem areas for students.

I remember I think it was sophomore year in AP English we did a lot of current event or I think it might have even been freshman year we did a lot of current event stuff. That's what pops in my head when I think of projects and assignments cause I remember freshman year we had like tons of them to do, like reports and stuff like that, just to keep up with the times I guess and like to learn how to write in like MLA and APA and like boring stuff like that. I mean I vaguely remember high school though.

Another student mentioned a focus on grammar and formatting, a second area the instructors referenced as specifically problematic and a site of student deficiencies, “[In English classes we] write papers. Grammar. Punctuation. A certain font and heading. Sometimes we had like a page requirement.”

Some students, in contrast to many of the negative experiences, described positive high school experiences. One student said several times in the focus group interview that his favorite class was English.

[English] was my favorite class. I'm...English is my thing. I like English. I was cool with English. It was fun I mean like I think it was maybe better depending on who my teacher was and if they made the subjects like fun and easy to talk about but if it was like a dry teacher then it was like kind of like . . . counting the time. But if it was a cool teacher then it was maybe better.

Other students, who described their experiences in regular (non-advanced) classes were less enthusiastic, and had much less to say about their experiences. Many of these responses required follow-up questions. One student described his classes in high school as difficult and strictly limited to 5 paragraph essays.

S: Man, my English class was a trip. Sometimes it would be over like . . . a certain person in history or a place or something.

M: And how did you have to write those?

S: 5 paragraphs.

M: And how were they graded?

S: On a rubric. They had they own little rubric. Like what they wanted.

Another student, also in a regular class, explained that in his high school classes, he was able to get out of writing assignments entirely through alternative means.

S: [Our assignments included] reading, essays. Poems . Since I do videos I always try to find the alternate, like I always ask the teacher can I do videos instead of an essay.

M: And she allowed you to do that?

S: Yeah.

One student, in reflecting on her high school experience from the position of a college student, described it as having “handicapped” her.

I think some of my high school teachers like really like handicapped me. By giving we like, the easy way out. Like I know at academic, not AP classes, I feel like I should have taken more AP classes because they prepare you for college, but like the regular classes where a teacher just be like, everybody pass. That don’t prepare you for college.

After describing their experiences in high school, students were asked to compare those experiences to their college experiences, and to talk about any challenges they faced as new college students. With regard to writing skills, students described challenges in understanding requirements, meeting those requirements, interpreting feedback, and exposure to more challenging material. One student described the difficulty in understanding the different requirements of different professors.

Each teacher is different. Like because this one teacher, my Poli Sci teacher, came yesterday talking about she read feedback that students give at the end of each semester, and she was like, really took it to heart and was like, well you need to change this, and I’m going to change this, so like some professors do care, but then you got them that

don't care. They'll tell you in class, you don't have to come, you don't have to study, I don't want to see you, like, different professors are different. Then I had one I really didn't do nothing like for my English 2 class. And I made an A. Like my only A. And I didn't do nothing. One of my assignments was to look on YouTube and post a video. Any random video. And I got an A in that class. And I didn't do anything.

Other students described the difficulty in adjusting to different expectations in college. One student simply stated, "They expect a lot more out of you." These students illustrate students' difficulty to effectively write for different audiences. Another student talked about different expectations with regard to censorship in the classroom, and how instructors expect students to respond to material.

There's less censorship. Like, Do you know what the Alyssa Straunda Bryans thing is? It's a play and it's all like, it's about this sex strike that these women have to prevent the war between . . . Sparta? And that's just not something you would ever get to read in high school. And so my teacher's like, this isn't something you've ever read in high school so we're going to do it in this class, and it was a really good experience to have the mature content that was funny. And then also learn some really in depth details about plays.

Another student described a difference in expectations, but her experiences related to a difference in content. "I think that some classes have been harder, like my biology class is a lot harder, and other classes like history classes are like way easier." In contrast, some students described college classes as equally or less difficult than high school classes.

I mean, compared to, compared to the English class that I had my senior year, like he was on some . . . some rigorous type of stuff so like, he was going over like you know . . . books you ain't ever heard of, like talking about Iliad and Paradise Lost and all of that and when I got up here like my first semester we were just doing like random prose and we were just free form writing and it wasn't like to a specific type of standard or format, so I was like . . . shit I ain't had to do anything for my English class here.

As described in this section, students' perspectives on college classrooms are vastly different than the perspectives of their instructors. The students participating in this research often had difficulty articulating the challenges they experienced in understanding expectations and requirements in college classrooms. Students expressed these challenges by describing the

differences in high school assignments and college assignments and their ability to complete these assignments. Some students described a significant challenge in comparison to high school, while others found college classes equally or less difficult than high school classes, depending on the preparation students' had in high school.

Both instructors and students acknowledged a link between the level of preparation at the secondary education level and success at the college level. Instructors identified this link explicitly, while students described their experiences within the secondary education system as having prepared them or not having prepared them for their college experiences. Students often had difficulty explaining or were reluctant to articulate explicitly the challenges they faced with writing in college classrooms, whereas instructors described students' deficiencies directly and in detail.

Responsibility

In quotations coded as responsibility, instructors identified or described actions on the part of students that demonstrated a lack of initiative in taking responsibility for their own education, learning, and keeping track of assignments or due dates. Although students did not frequently mention responsibility in their focus group responses, if their statements reflected struggles in managing issues such as due dates, attendance, taking initiative, they were included in this category.

Instructors

In addition to writing skills, instructors noted that students do not take responsibility for their own education. They expressed frustrations with students who show up late to class,

attempt to turn assignments in late, do not read the textbook or pay attention in class, yet maintaining an expectation that they will earn a high grade. Instructors' frustration was compounded because students frequently placed blame on the instructor when the expectation of earning a high grade is not met. One instructor became almost angry in a focus group while discussing this topic.

That's something that I've noticed as one of my biggest problems. I don't know what it is it seems like this generation of kids they need their hand held a lot. I almost like want to write on their papers, 'I'm not here to wipe your ass for you.' Seriously, like I'm not your babysitter, I'm not your mom. You know and I get that a lot where, especially my early evaluation feedback from my students was like 'she doesn't explain the assignments well enough.'

Another instructor echoed this tone of frustration,

I really try to explain to them, you are 21st century students. You need to learn how to read directions and I think that's where it comes with the specifics. They expect me to read the directions and hold their hand through it, but I say, 'The directions are online. Look it up, do the assignment, come to class Wednesday.' And I got some feedback. And one of my frustrations was that a lot of students 'didn't know how to do it' so they didn't do it.

In response to instructors expressing frustrations for students' lack of responsibility, the moderator inquired about the instructors' perceptions about the reasons for students' lack of responsibility. Often the instructors linked the students' lack of responsibility with the causes they noted with regard to the challenges noted with students' writing skills. Specifically, the instructors identified secondary education and technology as part of the cause. However, another cause the instructors identified explicitly with a lack of responsibility on the part of students was a "consumer model" of a college education as well as apathy.

As one instructor noted,

The customer model keeps students from having to take responsibility for their own learning so they think, 'Well, I paid for this class or mom and dad paid for this class, and so I should get an A.' I mean students now, they don't even want a B. I mean when I was a student I was like, 'Okay! Got a B! Wow! Alright!' They don't take responsibility for

their learning, they don't think they have to meet you halfway. And it's not all students, but it's enough, that it's prevalent enough that it's really . . . it's gross.

Another instructor, connected the challenge of students' failure to assume responsibility with both the secondary education system and to student apathy.

I think part of it is just kids are just getting behind early on, and once you are behind you get more behind every year. And if you're not identified as an advanced student, you're never pushed into being an advanced student. You know maybe they weren't great readers or writers in third grade. I get so many students who come in and they have been told for so long that they're bad writers that they think that that's all they can be. So I feel like they've got these predefined categories that they're not really trying to break out of. They think 'I'm bad at math,' 'I'm bad at English,' you know. This semester I have probably, 40 no, not 40, I have 40 students total, but a majority of students who think that they're lazy. And I was like, 'You guys signed up for TAMS program. I'll give you that you're procrastinators, I'll give you that you've terrible time management skills. But do you really fit into the lazy category? Do you really fit into the bad writer or the bad student category?' So I think that getting behind early on and then defining themselves based on that leads them to not trying for more.

In response to instructors' narratives like those cited above, the moderator asked instructors to identify strategies they used to help students act more responsibly with regard to coursework. The instructors consistently identified similar strategies, primarily negotiating the amount of detail they should provide in the instructions they provide to students as well as the number of reminders they provided about impending due dates. As one instructor noted,

I think it's also hard to negotiate too. Like how much is fair to expect of a college student, how much should you be able to read your syllabus and know, you know this is going to be coming. I've told you this is going to be coming up. You should be able to figure this out, and how much should I be reminding you in the classroom, because I'm keeping track of what's coming up, and so how much should I be reminding you that this is coming up and where is the balance between 'am I going to tell you all of the time when every assignment is due when you have all of that information available to you, am I going to give you every assignment' or, 'are you going to take some personal ownership of that assignment after I've given it to you.' There's a balance there that's hard to find.

Another instructor echoed this sentiment. "I've talked about trying to negotiate different areas of reminders and how many times enough is and you know still having to be the nice teacher who says 'you know there were 7 reminders in the past week, so . . .'"

In discussing responsibility, instructors expressed frustration with students who would not take responsibility for their own learning and grades and, instead assumed that it is an instructor's responsibility to insure student learning. Moreover, they explicitly identified 2 factors as causes for this phenomenon: the current state of secondary education, and the increasing prevalence of technology in culture. Finally, in spite of their frustrations with students' lack of responsibility, instructors discussed strategies they had evolved in their attempts to guide students in accepting more responsibility for their own learning. The students' take on this issue, detailed in the next section, in some instances echoed what instructors had revealed and in other instances acknowledged the need for greater personal accountability.

Students

Students identified a shift in instructor expectations between high school and college. Students explained that in high school, the responsibility for student success falls on the teachers. In contrast, in college, the students acknowledged that responsibility falls on the student. One student who referenced this experience in the shift between high school and college confirmed, "Yeah because you're viewed as an adult when you get to college. You're still a kid in high school basically. So it's like, they get their hand on your shoulder and you just get pushed off the deep end in college." In this statement, the student both acknowledges the need to take responsibility as an adult, as well as the desire to retain the same level of support he received as a child.

Students connected accepting responsibility with 2 significant challenges; first, finding the motivation to go to class regularly and get work done, which students also described as time management and procrastination; and, second, coming to terms with negotiating different

expectations from different instructors. Students discussed these challenges extensively in focus groups, often describing the most difficult challenge to overcome as learning time management skills and overcoming motivation problems. When the moderator asked one student what he had learned about how college is different from high school, he responded, “I’ve learned a lesson, and it’s go to class.” Another student identified the challenge of time management when completing assignments in college as compared to completing assignments in high school.

Because like worksheets you know do I really want to do this right now? Like nah, I’ll do it at lunch tomorrow. And like here, if you procrastinate long enough you’re going to be squeezing in like a 3 page paper at midnight and you’ve got a 9:00 class the next day.

Students clearly felt some pressure to take on more responsibility than they did in high school and expressed these feelings in their focus group responses. “I think it should be my [responsibility] because the teacher’s not at my dorm when I’m doing my homework. I have to find a way to make this entertaining.” Another student partially agreed, but added that some responsibility rested with the instructor as well, “I think it’s a little bit of both [my responsibility and my teacher’s responsibility]. I think if the teacher doesn’t make the class interesting then naturally I’m not going to like the subject, so.”

Students did not discuss responsibility as much as instructors did during focus groups. When students did reference this theme, they acknowledged difficulty in transitioning between high school and college, particularly with regard to the amount of responsibility expected of them. The students acknowledged a shift in responsibility as they transitioned from childhood to adulthood. Having recently made the shift to college, and presumably adulthood, they acknowledged the need to assume responsibility for their own learning and grades, but they also noted a lack of desire for and a struggle to meet these expectations. Students identified a need to develop new or more refined skill sets in their transition from high school to college, including

time management, budgeting, and self-motivation. Yet many acknowledged limited success in these areas.

Both students and instructors recognized the need for improvement on the part of students, and both groups discussed this need. Significantly, members of each group expressed frustration with regard to this perceived need. Not surprisingly, instructors described responsibility from a different point of view than students. They frequently expressed frustration with students' lack of initiative in the classroom and with regard to completing assignments, occasionally without consideration for students' circumstances outside the classroom, including student-identified struggles to manage money, time, and learning to on their own for the first time. Instructors, nevertheless, identified strategies they had incorporated to help students' become more accountable for learning. The students, in contrast, who were still in the midst of the transition from high school to college, explicitly acknowledged the negotiation of that transition and implicitly suggested the struggles of transitioning from childhood to adulthood through their discussions of issues like self-discipline and time management. Because the transition to college involves transitions in multiple aspects of their lives, freshmen are struggling with much more than shifts in teaching and learning styles. Moreover, because they are in the first stages of these transitions and are developing an awareness of these issues, they are much less articulate than the instructors in identifying and articulating their frustrations.

Critical Thinking

In statements coded as critical thinking, instructors described and/or identified deficiencies in critical thinking, analytical thinking, or an inability to examine and apply evidence in a variety of contexts. For example, an instructor may describe a student's inability to

apply a course concept to current events, pop culture, or other texts. These statements often included narratives about students that demonstrated these deficiencies. Instructor responses also included negative statements about the practice of “teaching to the test,” or the practice of standardized testing in general. Since teaching to the test and standardized testing are inversely related to critical thinking, all quotations related to teaching to the test, the banking model of education, regurgitating information, multiple choice exams, and other similar ideas were also included in this category. In student quotations coded as critical thinking, the respondents explicitly addressed issues of critical thinking wherein they described experiences with this skill, both in their high school experiences as well as in their transitional experiences to college.

Instructors

Instructors argued that students have difficulty understanding concepts in classes because they lack skills in critical thinking. One instructor explained that she became aware of this problem when grading essays, “Critical thinking and analytical thinking. They have no idea what it is. One of the major problems I have with people is summarizing things. Summary summary summary, and I’m like ‘you’re not telling me anything you’re just summarizing things.’” Instructors also claimed that students are so accustomed to finding “the right answer” in multiple choice format that they struggle in college when they are told that there is no right or wrong answer.

The students you get who think that there’s a right or a wrong answer and they’re a little bit more advanced so they’ll try to feed you the answer. I always tell them that’s a beauty queen response, because they’re trying to feed you that sort of what they think you want and I’m like “come on, you need to push a little farther and critically engage with it.” I’m like, I already know the standard response, like yes, racism is bad.

Other instructors echoed this sentiment, noting that students either refused or were unable to engage critically with course material, or possibly a combination of both. One instructor noted what she perceived as the reason for students' inability to engage with course material critically.

I think it's a combination of the focus on testing and I think it's also a lot of apathy in students. They come to college because they want to have the college experience and they want to be partying or doing the like having the life situation stuff. But as far as learning they are not as interested and it's not that they have chosen to take. I think that's even harder. I think that they might be used to having things spoon-fed to them too, and so for them to have to take an active role in learning, sometimes they don't expect that. Like, "Oh, I have to do something?" You know, it's not just, "Oh I can memorize something and move on"; it's the fact of having to do something I think. To really be active and if you don't understand something to seek it out even further.

When asked about perceived causes for the deficiency in critical thinking, instructors reflected on standardized testing and teaching to the test within the secondary education system.

Instructors noted that practicing the habit of memorization and regurgitation in multiple choice testing formats inhibits growth in critical thinking skills. As one instructor noted,

I find students, especially at the beginning, are hooked [on multiple choice], which is not surprising. They are looking for the right answers, and I think it is unhelpful to imagine that there are always "right" answers and to provide an education [with] only these set of fake questions which have "right" answers and so... [...] So what you need to do to become a good syntactician [or teacher] is to find a very deep question. [...] Every time you find an answer to part of the question, the floor will drop away and there will be a whole lot of other, tougher questions underneath it. So what you want is an unanswerable, enticing, unforgettable question. And coming out of high school or even the early years of college, always the idea is there are answers and you've got to know them by December 11th, otherwise I'm going to ruin your life, I'm going to give you an F, and you're going to have to take this course again, and I'm going to kick you out of school.

Another instructor echoed the concern about high-stakes standardized test and connected the testing to a lack of funding associated with the No Child Left Behind Act.

Teaching to the test I think directly correlates to the No Child Left Behind Act, in the high school education system where schools are forced to have the students test, and that testing correlates directly to funding and teachers' jobs. Their work becomes less about

the experience of education and more about the money. Yeah, the money. And making sure that students can regurgitate the information that gets the money.

An instructor who had spent a short period of time teaching high school described the experience of teaching to the test.

I think that teaching to the test thing was something that was really poignant that was brought up because, having taught high school Communication Applications, I had a great fun class. I taught them how to do arguments, they had to give speeches using the Toulman model, and all these things, but they had to take a state wide standardized test of communication application. None of that I taught them because it was common sense B.S. So about a week before the test it is like, alright, we're gonna start studying for this test, which I should have been doing the whole semester, but the test is so base, and like, not going to benefit them whatsoever, that about a week before the test, it's like, these are the questions that are going to be on it, and they have to get a 90% or better to get credit for communication application. Like, high school wide. So you know, I taught to the test, I had to.

Some instructors insisted that the solution to the deficiencies in critical thinking in college classrooms rested in secondary education. One instructor provided an example of a high school class that addresses the issue of critical thinking,

Well, and I think there's probably, I think you have high school Lit classes that are trying this sort of engagement. They may be just launching the students into it, instead of setting up what it means to do that in the first place, and then you just have to kind of feel your way through it, because I even had the experience in AP classes that we had to, we were doing this kind of engagement, that it wasn't just summarizing, but we weren't just necessarily taught like what it meant to critically engage, we just had to fill it in with grading and get stuff back.

Other instructors discussed a variety of strategies they used in class discussions to encourage students to think critically.

So in communication, we ask for their opinion, we ask for their abstract thought and their own experience, because I like to get their own experiences in the classroom. They have a hard time of being like "this doesn't connect with me" or "this is so simple, why do we need to be thinking about this?" Like teaching nonverbal, they were like constantly over and over and over "this stuff is simple, I already know this." And I'm like, "Well, that's why it's important because it does seem so simple, because it does take you know, when you pull it apart, you find out how complex it is."

Another instructor noted that one way he meets these challenges by eliminating exams from his courses entirely, and offered an explanation for why he has done so.

I am a leading hater of exams. Not only of making them up and giving them and taking them, but more than anything of marking them. Actually, I think possibly taking them is the worst. And I think that what you learn on exams is, it doesn't necessarily go very deep. I like what Carl Rogers says, that the only kind of learning he's interested in is what he calls self-appropriated learning; learning that makes a difference to you, and I find that exams have next to nothing to do with that.

Instructors agreed that students, overall, had deficiencies in critical and analytical thinking. In most cases, instructors linked students' struggles to the secondary education system's tendency to teach to the test, as well the system's emphasis on standardized testing in general. Instructors offered a variety of options for overcoming critical thinking challenges in college classrooms, including a deferment of the solution back to the secondary education system, engaging students at their level in the classroom, encouraging student opinions, and eliminating examinations.

Students

Students also described critical thinking as a challenge in college classrooms, and as a component in more assignments than in high school. They also characterized critical thinking as a struggle and a larger component in college level assignments. One student, who was quite frustrated by the time this topic came up in the focus group, said,

I don't want to say I'm not a thinker, but like I'm just so used to like, looking at a paper and like the answer's right there, like they give me a question and I go straight to the paper and find it. So for them to give me something where we have like here's a sentence, and like, what does this sentence really mean?

Another student echoed this struggle with critical thinking, "I'm just not good at it [critical thinking]." Some students noted that the struggle with critical thinking started in high school.

One student described his experiences in a high school English class.

Like, when my English class in high school we had those assignments when we had to like read the lines and think about something you read. And I'm not good at it. I suck. I cannot do that. People in my class were like, smart people. And people that were like AP, I'd ask them for help. I'd do that.

Other students countered by arguing the importance of critical thinking in college, and by implying that college is a more conducive environment for learning the skill.

As we get older we go through college we all become better critical thinkers, I think it's just one of those as you get older you become wiser. You just learn more. It's kind of a required trait if you will.

Less frequently, and usually in response to students who struggled with critical thinking, some students described this skill as their "strong point," or what they liked best about college. When asked how they became to be good critical thinkers, one student said, "Writing music. I write music. Like meaningful write music. It makes you want to make something. You hear something that's so amazing it makes you wanna make something that amazing." Another student echoed this response.

Same. Same thing. I been here doing poetry and rapping since like 7th grade. [...] My English teacher was like we didn't have to do things that had to do with like rap music or anything but when you look like types of literature...it's kind of like rap. It come at you like 'how you use words.' And it was just like cling to me. I love that kind of stuff and I'm always looking at like how do you say things like in a different way instead of just saying it like straight up, like so simplistic.

Students in other focus groups pointed to other creative outlets like design, art classes, and theatre, as ways that they became strong critical thinkers.

In response to questions regarding high school experiences with critical thinking, many students explained that other than English classes, high school was largely focused on tests and worksheets. One student explained, "So basically, [in high school], they tell you what the answer is as opposed to [in college], finding it yourself. It's breaking that style of thinking that

you're not used to." Another student echoed the previous student, explaining that high school assignments were largely comprised of worksheets, "In high school, I guess, they'd give you this worksheet and just tell you to go find the answers in the book. And then it was powerpoints. Powerpoints and videos like every day or every other day." Students in every focus group described similar experiences, claiming their high school classroom experiences were comprised primarily of worksheets, "Yeah, so like, they'd give you a sheet, and you'd have to go find it in the book." One student explained why he thought teachers in high school focused on worksheets rather than teaching critical thinking by empathizing with his teachers,

They hate having to teach that stuff. I had a few teachers who were really good and really wanted to break out of that mold, but the high school held them back because you know, they have to make sure the test scores are high. And that you're teaching the specific components of the TEKS, I guess.

In general, students described similar experiences in high school with regard to critical thinking, having engaged with some critical thinking in English classes but not in other classes. With few exceptions, students frequently expressed similar struggles with critical thinking as they entered college. Some of these students linked their struggles in critical thinking to their experiences in high school, particularly to the instructional strategies used by their high school teachers and with the emphasis on standardized testing.

Both instructors and students acknowledged a need for improvement in critical thinking skills, and both expressed frustrations in encountering these challenges in college classrooms. In addition, both instructors and students linked a deficiency in critical thinking skills to the secondary education system and testing. The difference in instructors' and students' descriptions were grounded in the differences in their lived experiences that have resulted from the prevalence of standardized testing. Students described experiences that were based in their immersion in a system that only emphasizes standardized testing and inhibits critical thinking,

whereas instructors spoke out of their experiences in attempting to solve the problems that have resulted from the current state of the secondary educational system.

Perception of College

In quotations coded as perception of college, both instructor and student respondents described, identified, or provided examples of the stigma associated with making any choice other than college once a student has completed high school. In comparison to other themes, perception of college had relatively fewer responses than writing skills, responsibility, and critical thinking, but roughly the same number of responses as apathy. The statements in this category included parental pressure to attend college, reasons for attending college, budget and costs associated with college, and the level of involvement of teachers and parents in a student's education. These statements also included responses related to how third parties, such as friends, roommates, and media are involved in perpetuating this stigma.

Instructors

Instructors identified a misperception of goals, assignments, and level of difficulty and agency. Instructors indicated that incoming students have a perception that attending college is mandatory, and that students believe they are paying for college to earn a grade, not to acquire an education. One instructor expressed frustration with this mindset.

It used to be that you couldn't get a job unless you graduated high school. Now you can't get a job unless you graduate with a bachelor's degree. And very, very soon, it's going to be unless you have a master's. Because they're cheapening the education system all the way up, and it's not enough. So employers are like, I'm not going to hire people with just bachelor's degrees because they're coming out of college not knowing what they're doing. So now we're only gonna hire people with master's degrees.

Other instructors discussed students' misperceptions of expectations regarding what occurs when students get to college. Specifically, they discussed students' perceptions that they must already have their futures planned before entering college

You're already forced into this box of what you're supposed to be and what you're supposed to do and you know, pick out what you want, what you're supposed to study, so pick your career and that's such a hard thing to do, and I can't imagine. I mean, I'm not ready to do it now, and then, especially at 18.

Another instructor echoed this issue in regards to expectations concerning extracurricular activities.

Well, and they come here and they get so wrapped up in they're told you have to do this extracurricular activity and you gotta do this and you gotta do this. I had a student last semester who was in my office crying and she was like, "I'm taking 15 hours and I'm rushing for this and I'm the chair of this and I'm on this and this," and I'm like you don't have time to do any of this, you've taken on way too many.

Some instructors believed the cause of these misperceptions was systemic, both from secondary education systems and from higher education systems.

Well, and I think our college systems are encouraging this behavior of "you just need to get in and get it done, and get out," because now they're giving discounts to students for taking extra hours a semester. The more classes you take, the lower your costs of tuition. So students are taking 18 and 21 hours a semester and to get through 18 to 21 hours a semester, you cannot be reading theory and writing 10 page papers every class, you're looking for assignments that you can . . . it's a check box.

Instructors also discussed ways to address this misperception, although the solutions identified remained at the parental or secondary education level. Significantly, the members of the instructor focus groups did not discuss the ways they could help students address these misperceptions.

There should be fewer stigmas placed on students who choose not to go to college. College is not an extension of high school. It's not where you go when you can't think of anything else better to do with your time. Parents shouldn't force their children to go to college, when they really don't want to be there. It wastes our time, it wastes their time, it wastes everybody's time. Not everybody is meant for a college education. I really hate that it's just sort of become accepted "what do you do when you graduate high school?"

“Well, you go to college.” “Well, do you want to go to college?” “No. . . .” “Well, then why are you going?.” “Well, because you go to college.”

Instructors in various focus groups echoed the idea that not everyone should go to college. As one respondent put it, “a lot of 18 year olds just aren’t ready.” Another explained, “I think so many students throughout their whole life are being told ‘you have to go to college, there’s no other option,’ and to be honest, kinda mean, but some people don’t need to be here.”

Overall, instructors claimed that students entered college with misguided perceptions about what to expect because they have been enculturated into a consumer model of education. Instructors believed these perceptions derived from parents and secondary education, and in most cases, believed the solution should come from that source. Instructors reasoned that students feel pressure to attend college immediately and that they choose to do so in spite of the fact that they may be better served by pursuing a different option. Unfortunately, many only realize this after spending time and money in college. Instructors bemoaned the fact that students who do attend college have little time for enriching their college experiences by participating in co-curricular activities to supplement the college experience.

Students

The responses from individuals in the student focus groups provided illustrations of the issues the instructors discussed in their focus groups. For example, when asked why they came to college, students offered little reasoning to support their decisions to attend college; or, if they provided a reason, they identified earning a degree as opposed to getting an education as their reason for being enrolled in college. A student’s response that illustrates this thinking remarked, “The reason why I’m here, is, I’m not all that sure. I just knew I had to go to college.” Another explained, “I didn’t really want to go too far, and a couple of the other schools I got accepted to,

this one's a little cheaper, and close to home, so, and because I need a degree." Another echoed these sentiments, but added, "Honestly, I don't really care about my education, honestly speaking, but I really want to be a film maker and I really want a degree, so I can be a big icon in film making." Some students indicated the choice to college was not theirs. One student whose response was indicative of these sentiments noted, "I just went to college because that's what I was told I was always supposed to do I guess. But I'm here now, I guess."

Students also expressed the misperception that the members of the instructors' focus groups identified as a characteristic of students. That is, students actually have the perception that they need to have college and career plans in place by the time when they first arrive at college.

I think like once you, when you're younger and stuff like, up through elementary school and middle school you don't necessarily know what you, I mean ask a kid what they want to be when they grow up they'll say a firefighter or a police officer or a veterinarian or something you know, but once you get older and into high school, that's when you actually know like you get an idea of what you like what you like learning about what you remember more. That's the stuff that you're more interested in. So like especially in college once you get to college you really want to get over with the first to years of like the basics because you want to get into your major.

When asked why they were attending college, students offered minimal responses and little reasoning to support their decisions to enroll. In spite of this apparent lack of direction, students indicated that they felt great pressure to continue on to college after completing their high school educations as well as pressure to know their life and career plans upon entering college. Furthermore, in order to make their college educations count, they felt the added burden to feel confident in these choices. Overwhelmingly, students could describe what they wanted to do as a career; however, they seemed to have little awareness of the significance of college in relation to those career goals.

Student responses were an acute reflection of the instructors' descriptions about students' perceptions of college. The instructors claimed that students had little understanding of why they were attending college other than pressure exerted on them by their parents and by the secondary education system. The students' responses confirmed these perceptions. However, instructors also describe a pressure for students to complete their degrees efficiently, which provided them with little opportunity to engage in co-curricular activities that enrich the college experience. Although the students were not as articulate as the instructors in describing perceptions about college, both were evoking a consumer model of education. The instructors were able to do so explicitly; the students confirmed these perceptions even though they did not have the sophistication to describe it as such.

Apathy

In this study, burnout and apathy appeared separately in instances of discourse. While each term is defined differently, burnout and apathy are connected behaviors and I coded these instances of discourse together. Maroco (2012) explained burnout for college students as "exhaustion and disengagement" as a result of either "physical or psychological" activities (p. 814). Apathy, in comparison, "reflects a lack of interests and emotions, as opposed to the negative emotional components typical of depression" (Bjornsen, Scepanky, & Suzuki, 2007, p. 668). Whereas instructors used the terms "burnout" and "apathy" explicitly, students displayed and described the behavior associated with these terms. Fewer instances of discourse appeared in this theme relative to writing skills, responsibility, and critical thinking, but this theme had roughly the same number of responses as perception. In addition, in several instances of instructor discourse, the independent coder and I disagreed on the categorization between apathy

and responsibility and apathy and perception, and therefore, these instances of discourses were discarded.

Instructors

In instances of discourse coded as apathy, instructors identified or provided examples of apathy or burnout in students, and described how these characteristics manifest as behaviors in students' classroom performance. Instructors explained that students often refused to engage with material, and explicitly connected this problem with burnout and apathy. One instructor noted, "These kids getting out of high school, they're already burned out. You come out of high school and even if you try or not, you're already apathetic and you're already burned out in your first year of college." Many instructors wondered if apathy was the problem or the cause of problems. In 4 of the 6 focus groups, instructors' discussions of apathy led to discussions about whether college freshmen's misperceptions about college were the cause or the result of the problem. One instructor told a story about a student she had in class during a previous semester who had struggled from apathy to the extent that the student could not think of a paper topic. She offered the following example as an illustration of how apathy affected the student's coursework.

I had one student last semester who tried, she told me she made A's in high school and was clearly a C student. So since I've had some extra time this semester, I said I'd be willing to tutor her once a week. We had our first meeting last week and to get her started I asked her to give me a list of things she had strong feelings about. Nothing. And it's hard to find a topic if students aren't interested in anything. It's hard to find something they want to write about. So we found *something* we could write about, school uniforms. I asked her to write a paragraph on the side she was in support of. It was like *this* long. And then it was like twice as much on the *opposing* side. So that's interesting.

Another instructor discussed widespread student apathy as a contributing factor to attendance issues, a lack of appreciation for the education they are paying for, and a decreased quality in classroom atmosphere.

I think they have such an apathetic attitude in this generation. That, and you know I think it's so easy to get lost as a freshman. A lot of your classes are big and large. They don't take attendance. You don't have to go to class. It's so much easier to sit in bed and party the night before, and so I think they don't really take into consideration their parents are paying for school or that they, you know, they don't have to be here, so it's easy for them to get lost and they take for granted what is offered here. So I think it's a much different student and it's unfair because it does ruin it for those students who want to be here and want to get an education and are thankful for what they have to work for as opposed to what I've been handed.

Instructors identified apathy and burnout as factors affecting student performance in their classrooms in relation to motivation, content in coursework, attendance, and classroom atmosphere. Instructors speculated about whether apathy and burnout were problems in their own right or whether apathy and burnout were the causes of other problems; however, they arrived at no conclusions on the subject.

Students

Students' instances of discourse coded as apathy fell into 2 major categories. The first category of student quotations were coded as apathy or burnout if they illustrated a lack of interest in college or their coursework. The second category was based primarily on nonverbal behaviors; specifically, the code was used to identify students' inability or refusal to answer questions within focus group discussions. In addition, student quotations were also coded as apathy or burnout if they described feelings of burnout or apathy, although none explicitly articulated the terms "apathy" or "burnout."

Apathy and burnout was visibly evident in students participating in focus groups based on their responses. Their reluctance to respond to the moderator's questions as well as their nonverbal behavior for the duration of the sessions was indicative of a significant amount of apathy. The nonverbal behaviors among students participating in focus group included arms folded across chests, leaning back in chairs, staring down at the floor rather than engaging with the moderator or their peers, shrugging their shoulders in response to direct questions, using monotone voices when responding to questions, sighing, and occasionally rolling their eyes in response to the moderator's questions. In many instances, the moderator was forced to ask follow-up questions because of the lack of detail provided by the students or because of their evident reluctance to discuss the topics. The following exchange between the moderator (M) and the students participating in the focus group (A, B, C) was not atypical in student focus groups.

M: So I'm going to move into an open discussion. I'm going to ask you first about your high school experience. What kind of topics did you cover in high school? What kind of classes did you take?

A: English classes

B: And woodshop. That was a good class, woodshop.

[Long silence]

M: So lots of English, what else did you take?

C: I was in Band.

[Long silence]

M: Did you take history classes? Math classes?

All: Yeah.

[Long silence]

M: What kind of things did you talk about in your history classes?

B: History.

During this discussion, the student participants looked down, 3 had their arms folded across their chests, and many punctuated their responses with sighs. One student described the consequences of his own apathetic attitude, “I failed 3 out of 5 [classes]. Yeah, I got 2 C’s and 3 F’s. So yeah, it didn’t work. It was more effort than the actual work.”

Other students simply described a disinterest in classes. Another described his difficulty paying attention to lectures in class, “Sometimes they put like 5 bullets you know and then they go so in depth verbally. So you not paying attention, you just write down stuff, you not gonna get everything.” Another student echoed this disinterest, “Oh lectures kill me too, lectures. I can’t stay up in class sometimes. If I’m not interested I’m like, dozing off.” As instructors discussed, apathy and burnout are possible causes to other problems like responsibility and writing skills. This student’s comment on lectures characterizes the ways in which a fine line exists between apathy as a problem on its own and a cause to responsibility. The student’s disinterest is a problem as a whole, but contributes to the problem of responsibility, which on its own is a separate but related problem.

Students displayed a noticeable level of apathy during focus groups, as characterized by nonverbal behavior and reluctant responses. Students’ reluctant responses were limited and required follow up questions by the moderator, and illustrated a lack of interest in participating. Students also described feelings of apathy by their levels of disinterest in their classes, which further emphasized the level of apathy in student respondents.

As with the perception of college theme, students accurately demonstrated the descriptions of apathy by instructors. Whereas instructors named the issue explicitly, students described the feelings of apathy and exhibited the behaviors firsthand. Students, however, were not necessarily self-aware of their own apathy. They recognized a disinterest in certain subjects,

but they did not necessarily recognize their apathy as it occurred, or if they did, they did not actively attempt to change, or draw attention to, the behavior.

Discussion

In this section, I discuss the implications of my analysis the 5 themes reported in the results section. First, I explain how the focus group interviews became an outlet for both instructors and students to express frustrations associated with the students' transition from high school to college, both in the classroom as well as other areas of student life. Second, I discuss how each of the 5 themes is connected. Third, I connect students' experiences in high school to struggles in college classrooms. Finally, I link the increase in standardized testing associated with the enactment of NCLB to responses from instructors and students. The data indicates that standardized testing is a significant cause for challenges identified by instructors and students, though by no means the only cause.

Focus Groups as Therapeutic Outlets

Many instructors and students openly expressed their frustrations in focus groups and, in some ways, these focus groups threatened to evolve primarily into fora for them to give voice to their frustrations. Instructors used the focus groups for this purpose much more than students did, likely because of the apathy evidenced by students in both their answers and in their behavior; however, students did take advantage of focus groups as a platform to express frustrations on occasion. During instructor focus groups, because of time limitations, I would intentionally interrupt ongoing discussions as they evolved into cataloging frustrations with students and ask questions to move the groups forward. Instructors were very willing to talk

about their challenges with students. After the camera was off, many instructors and a few students thanked me for creating a space for this discussion, and instructors in particular, left the discussion smiling and visibly relieved. As one student told me, “I was a little nervous, and I thought this would be really boring, but I think this was really helpful for me to talk about this actually.” Many instructors also discussed the value of this research because they believed it addresses pragmatic matters that affect their everyday work lives. Instructors also asked to be contacted about the results of the research upon completion of the project.

Petronio (2002) argued that when people self-disclose challenging life circumstances to a third party outsider, the disclosure becomes part of the coping process, part of a therapy process. The disclosure by instructors and students indicates that both groups felt a need to talk about challenges students experience as they transition between high school and college, and the focus groups provided an outlet to meet that need.

Association Between and Among Themes

The 5 themes that emerged from focus group interviews are associated. During the coding process, when a disagreement occurred between the independent coder and me, it was inevitably because of a connection that existed between 2 themes and, in fact, we frequently arrived at the conclusion that the instance of discourse could logically belong in either or both categories. For example, instructors discussed apathy as a potential cause for other challenges, such as students not taking responsibility for their education. Instructors also identified a lack of responsibility and apathy as the causes for poor skills in areas such as writing and critical thinking. In many cases the instructors described student performance as more of a refusal to participate than an inability. Instructors also connected a lack of critical thinking on the part of

students to their inability to write effectively. One instructor who taught the introductory Freshman English class made this connection by describing the difference between teaching freshmen and sophomores in composition.

I certainly feel like this past semester I have 1320 which is the second half [of composition], and because it was in the fall, unless they were AP students, it was necessarily sophomores and above. And they did a great job, and the difference between that and teaching actual freshmen in the course really showed me how sometimes how much I have to dumb it down. I spend ages going over the same material because they just can't get it, don't get it, won't get it. . . . Now we're teaching rhetoric, you know, like classical rhetoric, and I was *tough* on them, and I mean, I really feel like by the fourth one, you know, it started off so easy, but the skills built better, they accumulated better, and then by the end their final research analytical papers were fantastic. I think now we're teaching more thinking than writing.

In turn, both students and instructors connected students' inability to write effectively as a contributing factor to apathy. One instructor connected writing skills and critical thinking to a lack of confidence, which inevitably drives a student to stop caring about his or her work. This instructor provided one specific example with a student that visited during office hours.

A lot of the time the major problem I have with people is just summarizing things. Summary, summary summary. And I'm like, you're not telling me anything, you're not thinking critically about this, and I had, I remember, I had one student who was very quiet, and I think he was just shy, and I think he lacked confidence, and he finally came to me toward the end of the semester and he's like, "I'm having a hard time with my final paper." And so I'm trying, like talking to him in my office hours trying to tell him, like this is how you analyze something, and he just doesn't get it. He just didn't get it, no matter what I did, it's like, how do you not understand this? And I think that affects their confidence. If they come into a college classroom and if they know that they know how to do this, that they know how to analyze something, that they know how to think critically, that they're more willing to raise their hand and be like, "I have an answer to this question." If they feel like they don't know how to do that, they lack confidence, and they don't want to say anything, they're afraid it's going to be wrong. And in a lit class or in an English class, there is no right answer, it's not a math class.

Essentially, when a participant mentioned a theme as a challenge, the participant would often link another theme as a potential or probable cause. Despite clear connections between and among themes, I coded each separately, since each theme represented a unique challenge.

Instructors and students seemed to have some difficulty in identifying a single absolute cause for the challenges they faced in their classrooms. Consequently, they often placed the blame on other challenges, creating circular arguments. The participants did occasionally identify causes other than those that emerged as themes, such as technology, standardized testing, teachers, NCLB, and the secondary education system. However, instructors overwhelmingly identified challenges from among the 5 themes (writing skills, critical thinking, responsibility, perception of college, and apathy) as the cause for another of the 5 themes. This inability to pinpoint a cause indicates that these problems are interrelated. Since each of these problems are connected to one other, addressing challenges in the classroom ultimately becomes more difficult. If an instructor attempts to address writing skills, he or she must also address critical thinking skills. If an instructor attempts to address critical thinking skills or writing skills, he or she must also take into account students' apathy or burnout, ability to take responsibility for their education, and even their perception of a college education. Instructors and students both have strategies for meeting these challenges, yet they remain frustrated by the problems. Instructors expressed a desire for the problems to be addressed at the source, rather than for them to get worse progressively until they reach college, where they finally must be addressed if students are to be successful.

Standardized Testing and Challenges in College Classrooms

Instructor and student responses were both highly complex in that they were interrelated. However, both students and instructors revealed their convictions that the challenges they faced in college classrooms were associated with the testing culture precipitated by NCLB. In some instances of discourse, the link was made quite explicit.

Teaching to the test I think directly correlates to No Child Left Behind, in the high school education system where schools are forced to have their students test, and that testing correlates directly to funding and teachers' jobs. Their work becomes less about the experience of education and more about the money. Yeah. The money. And making sure that the students can regurgitate the information that gets the money.

In most instances of discourse from both instructors and students the link with NCLB was subtler. For example, respondents discussed the problems with a testing culture (e.g., "We're way too test driven. I'm not a proponent of the TAKS test, which is now replaced with something called the STAAR that my son just got to be one of the guinea pigs for. Too much of that sort of testing"), a dislike of standardized tests (e.g., "I think [standardized testing] is probably not the best thing. I know coming to college . . . you get a variety of stuff but you're not held to like one specific standard"), or a lack of engagement or learning that results in standardized testing culture (e.g., "I think that it hurts students, these tests. The fact that they have to take it only helps them get the very basics down. I doesn't really show them how to ask good questions."). One student explicitly described his dislike of the high school format, but admitted that teachers did not choose the style of teaching that has evolved as the result standardized testing culture; rather, the culture has evolved to meet administrators' needs for students to perform well on standardized tests.

They hate having to teach that stuff. I had a few teachers who were really good and really wanted to break out of that mold, but the high school held them back because you know, they have to make sure the test scores are high. And that you're teaching the specific components of the TEKS, I guess.

This student focus group participant echoed many of the instructors' thoughts regarding teaching to the test and its effect on education.

Many instructors expressed the pressures they experienced with regard to the increase in standardized testing in the past few years. Instructors also noted that the increase in standardized

testing had an effect on how students approach learning, and the skills they retain. One instructor shared a personal experience about the effects of teaching to the test on students.

I think that teaching to the test thing was something that was really poignant that was brought up because, having taught high school Communication Application, I had a great fun class. I taught them how to do arguments, they had to give speeches using the Toulman model, and all these things, but they had to take a state-wide standardized test of Communication Application. None of that I taught them, because it was common sense B.S. So about a week before the test it was like, alright, we're gonna start studying for this test, which I should have been doing the whole semester, but the test is so base, and like, not going to benefit them whatsoever, that about a week before the test, it's like, these are the questions that are going to be on it, and they have to get a 90% or better to get credit for communication application. Like, high school wide. So you know, I taught to the test, I had to.

These instructors are not alone in their frustrations, as other scholars have documented in the past ten years publishing on NCLB and the law's effects on education. Some scholars (Blake, 2008; Byrnes, 2009) have captured the narratives of teachers in secondary education since NCLB. Other scholars (Lesch, 2007; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Heilig, 2008; Meier, Wood, Kohn, et al. 2004; Moran, 2010) have focused on student narratives. Many other scholars (Assaf, 2006; Callet; 2005; Goldrick-Rab & Mazzeo, 2005; Hess & Finn, 2007; Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield; 2005; Wagner, 2008) have used both teacher and student narratives to create arguments about educational reform post NCLB.

As explained in Chapter 2, the implementation of NCLB has placed the importance of performing well on standardized testing above all measures of success, and the law mandates the linking of funding to these measures through adequate yearly progress (AYP) (Kimmelman, 2006; Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield, 2005). With the ever-increasing pressure to raise scores on standardized tests through NCLB, other aspects of education become lost. Scholars have identified 4 primary areas in which education has suffered, were outlined in Chapter 2: teaching to the test, eliminating subjects, disadvantages to English language learners and students with

disabilities, and the practice of tracking. 2 of these 4 issues, teaching to the test and tracking, became clearly visible in focus groups. Both instructors and students felt the effects of these common practices in the secondary education system once students entered college.

As explained in Chapter 2, secondary school teachers have no incentive to reach out to students on lower tracks because they will likely underperform, nor to students on higher tracks because they will likely perform well despite any effort from teachers. Students on low tracks face severe learning gaps, and although less common, students on high tracks occasionally face minor learning gaps as well. Students on high tracks receive little attention, since these students are expected to perform well on standardized tests without assistance from teachers and, therefore, occasionally experience gaps in knowledge from a lack of attention. However, students on low tracks face much larger learning gaps, since these students receive little attention and are already behind in achievement. The most common learning gaps occur in writing, critical thinking, science, math, and reading. Coincidentally, I had one focus group comprised entirely of higher and middle track students, and one focus group comprised only of lower track students. Higher track students described their experiences in Advanced Placement (AP) classes, as part of the International Baccalaureate program (IB), or in taking dual credit college and high school classes. Lower track students described their experience in regular classes and sometimes asking for help from the AP students. One of the lower track students explained her felt learning gap as she entered college explicitly.

I think some of my high school teachers like really handicapped me. By giving we [sic] like, the easy way out. Like I know like regular, not AP classes. I feel like I should have taken more AP classes because they prepare you for college, but like the regular classes where a teacher just be like everybody pass. That don't prepare you for college.

With a single exception, all of the students in this focus group described high school as being laughably easy and, consequently, how they had struggled to pass classes in college. One

student, who described college as “a whole different ball game,” also described one of his high school English classes.

For me, high school was just so easy. Like, I got maybe 2 C’s in high school. And I didn’t do nothing. I had a teacher, Mrs. Fisher, start senior year, crazy woman. But I don’t do nothing but just get kicked out every day and I came out with like a 89 average.

Advanced Placement (AP) classes are designed for high track students and are intended to prepare students for college, whereas regular classes are designed for low and middle track students and are focused on pushing students along through the secondary school system. Low and middle track students described their high school experiences as focused on graduating from high school. None of these students were sure whether they would pass and, therefore, graduate, and all of them expressed the sentiment that they were lucky to get into college. All of the students in this group were ethnic minorities, and all but one student came from a lower socioeconomic, “under-performing” district. These students were attending college because of pressure from parents and high schools, or reasoned that it was the logical next step. They all struggled with the motivation to attend and succeed in class, and 2 of the students in the focus group admitted to failing multiple classes in their first semester. “I didn’t really try very hard in high school and when I first got here I had that same attitude and it didn’t turn out so good. I got 2 C’s and 3 F’s.” These responses support my contention in Chapter 2 that under NCLB, students’ experiences in K-12 education affect their performance in college classrooms. The students in this particular focus group admitted to struggling with writing assignments and with critical thinking, and all expressed difficulty in adjusting to college life. In addition, the members of this group were the only participants in my research that mentioned budgeting as a struggle, which may be associated to their experiences in a lower socioeconomic class.

Another focus group, which I would characterize primarily as “high track” stood out in stark contrast to the “low track” focus group. All of the students came from a freshman internship program administered through the university’s Student Government Association. These students were clearly on high tracks: one student was participating in International Baccalaureate (IB), another was enrolled in a dual credit program taking college courses and high school courses simultaneously, and all of the others were enrolled in AP courses; by their own admission, each of these students were educated in wealthier school districts. Their high school experiences included an assumption that they would attend college. As one student reflected on her senior year,

Yeah playing off of that I think that towards the end of your high school career your teachers are trying to like prepare you for college and so they don't want just stuff in the paper they want to see that you're able to write and that you understand what it means to write a good paper and that you put thought into it, you know the body, the introduction, you have the body paragraphs and the conclusion and then you keep to that template, and that it's not just fluffy stuff that you just throw in there that you actually know what you're talking about that you've researched it that you have sources at the end that you cite it properly. That you have all of the Modern Language Association style (MLA) format or American Psychological Association style (APA) or Chicago Style and that it's correctly in there.

These students expressed positive outlooks on their high school experiences. Their challenges in college were not based in skills, but rather in areas like procrastination and time management.

These 2 focus groups illustrate the effect track placement in high school has on students’ experiences and success when they enter college. Students on high tracks are more prepared for a college classroom than students on low and medium tracks. However, even students in the high track are not necessarily prepared adequately for college classrooms. As one instructor noted, “Some come in with very strong writing skills, some come in with very weak writing skills. Oddly enough, the students whether or not they came out of a senior English or an AP English doesn’t always correlate with how strong their skills are.”

Students that related successful experiences with writing and critical thinking skills credited these skills to becoming interested in a subject like art, theatre, or music. These subjects are often the first to be cut when the pressure to increase scores on standardized tests exceeds the school's resources to maintain instruction in these subjects (Hayes, 2008; Kraehe, 2010; McCarthy, 2008). Notably, one of the students in the low track focus group who claimed that he excelled at critical thinking skills in college, credited his interest in writing music for the ability to think critically. Frequently students in the focus groups, whether they were on low, middle or high tracks, identified creative outlets, such as theatre, band, and art, as reasons why they performed well in areas like critical thinking and writing. Responses like these suggest that students who do not have access to these creative outlets may be at a disadvantage, as these courses provide ways for students to foster critical skills that are necessary for success in college classrooms.

In talking with students, 2 effects of testing became abundantly clear. Students participating in focus groups were burned out and unresponsive, and they were satisfied with providing minimal answers to the questions of the moderator. As noted in the results, acquiring freshmen participants proved to be an extremely difficult task, largely because of their apathy or burnout. In visiting classrooms during the recruitment process, sophomores, juniors, and seniors were frustrated that they were not allowed participate. They expressed that they genuinely wanted to contribute their opinions about their education to my research. Some instructors offered extra credit, and even that was not enough incentive to induce freshman to participate. When students did participate, answers were often one word or one small phrase, and a lot of follow up questions were necessary. One focus group demonstrated both apathetic nature, and

the desire of these students simply to answer the question and be done. In one focus group, this occurred in a discussion on assignments in students' English classes.

M: How about reading? What kind of things did you read in your English classes?

A: *Tale of Two Cities*. Hated that book.

B: Yeah.

C: *To Kill A Mockingbird*.

A: Oh yeah, that one was a good one.

B: We read a book and wrote a paper on "Speak." I don't know.

M: Okay, talk about that one.

B: It was like a girl, it was good, I just don't remember.

M: So is "Speak" more of a modern one then, or?

B: Speak? It's like a newer . . . and they made a movie of it too.

M: Okay, how about math classes, what did you do in those?

C: Homework every day.

A: Pretty much.

Instructors noticed the students' reluctance to participate in their classes as well.

Students wanted to find the answer to the question and simply move on. Students' attitudes toward questions are a result of testing culture, where students are enculturated into memorizing and regurgitating information. As Freire (1970) described in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, responding to questions in this way is an example of the banking model of education, in which students simply memorize information and forget the material later. Teaching to the test, a practice that has become emphasized through NCLB, creates that expectation and often a preference among students for the banking model.

Overall, the results from both the instructor and student focus groups illustrate that the themes that emerged in my analysis of the data are interrelated. I argue that a complex problem exists which encompasses these 5 connected issues of writing skills, responsibility, critical thinking, apathy, and perception of college. Instructors and students also expressed their frustrations in their attempts to meet challenges in college classrooms, and were convinced of the connections between NCLB and standardized testing and the causes of their struggles in college. Exploring the connections between the emergent themes and the frustrations of both instructors and students became foundational to the Boalian production that is described and analyzed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5
EXPERIMENTS IN FORUM THEATRE TESTING THE CULTURE
OF NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

Introduction

In Chapter 4 of this study, I analyzed the results of the focus groups, which were instrumental in the creation of the performance described in this chapter. A cast of 4 performers embodied the challenges within the themes identified in Chapter 4 (writing skills, responsibility, critical thinking, perception of college, and apathy) using the techniques of Boal's Forum Theatre. The first half of the performance was scripted, implementing material directly from both the instructor and student focus group interviews. The second half of the performance modeled Forum Theatre, which included scenarios created by cast members during rehearsals depicting challenges in the 5 themes from chapter 4. At the conclusion of Forum Theatre scenes, the audience was invited to rehearse change in the themes that emerged from the focus groups by actively participating with the actors in the performance. In this chapter, I describe the performance, both the scripted portion and the forum theatre portion; next, I discuss the audience's proposed solutions, reactions, and participation in each of the 4 shows; finally, I provide analysis by applying the theories of Foucault and Freire to 2 specific instances which reflect the results in Forum Theatre, followed by the limitations in both focus groups and forum theatre data collection. In that analysis I discuss the results from Forum Theatre as a reflection of the banking model existing within hegemonic power structures. In this chapter I address the following research question:

RQ2: What strategies do the actors and spect-actors in a Forum Theatre production arrive at for addressing the challenges for college students who completed their secondary education under the No Child Left Behind Act?

Mounting the Production

Multiple Choices: Description of the Scripted Performance

The scripted portion of the performance, which was a compiled script containing narratives from focus group interviews, poems, blogs on education, and other various texts related to NCLB, lasted approximately twenty minutes. The ensemble cast consisted of 4 performers, 2 males, Ricky and Daniel, and 2 females, Flora and Rebecca, all dressed in black and white, semi-professional attire. Ricky and Daniel both wore dark jeans and shirts with button-down collars. Ricky wore a white shirt with a black suit jacket, while Daniel wore a black shirt without a coat. Flora wore a black pencil skirt and a white shirt with a button-down collar, while Rebecca wore black slacks and a white shirt with a button-down collar.

The set was minimal to allow the cast to suggest a variety of locales. A black flat was located upstage right to allow students to make entrances and exits as necessary. 5 blocks 1 of which opened at the top and, thus, could be used to store props, were used for a variety of functions. Temporary set pieces that were moved on and off the stage as needed included a desk and a podium. Props that could be produced and removed were used in the performance, but were also minimal: a Scantron, an apple, manila folders, paper money, neon colored notecards, and posters. Lighting included washes and spots in white, with an occasional red filter.

The scripted portion of this performance had 9 scenes, which progressed during the production from a general explanation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and standardized testing to the problems identified by instructors and students in the focus groups. The show began with the cast making staggered entrances while “Black and White” by Three Dog Night played over the sound system. The song references the tensions related to the desegregation in schools from the 1950s through the early 1970s. During this upbeat song, Flora,

posed as a “student” sitting at a desk taking a test using a Scantron, while the other 3 performers entered solemnly and slowly from behind the flat, and froze in position until the audience was seated and the door closed. Daniel entered first assuming the role of a politician and stood at a podium upstage left; he was followed by Rebecca and then Ricky as teachers, who took up positions upstage center.

Scene 1 began with performers presenting the background of the law and how NCLB, whose general provisions were initially only operational in Texas, became a national law. This portion of the script was informed by the research reported in Chapter 2 of this study. Daniel embodied George W. Bush during the State of the Union address in 2004, while Ricky and Rebecca explained NCLB and its effects. Unlike most of the script, which came from other sources, I wrote the explanation of NCLB in this portion of the performance. During this explanation of the law, Flora remained seated at the desk up stage right, filling in bubbles on a Scantron, alternately holding her head in her hands and frantically bubbling in the circles on her Scantron.

To begin Scene 2, Daniel and Flora move 2 blocks downstage left and downstage right, stand atop them, and began shouting multiple choice questions from the SAT at the audience. After Daniel and Flora ceased, they froze in position, and Ricky and Rebecca relayed the experience of a school board member who took the standardized tests designed for a tenth grader and described his experiences taking the test in an interview to a newspaper. This half of the scene illustrated the experience of standardized testing culture by demonstrating the rigor and arbitrariness of multiple choice questions, and by a description of the high stakes attached to these tests. This illustration of testing culture set up the second half of the scene.

As the light shifted to a darker red, all 4 performers enacted a metaphor based on a selection from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) describing the banking model of education. Flora stepped off the block on which she was standing, took a bite of an apple, and moved into red light slightly downstage, stage left as she recited Freire's description of the banking model of education (Freire, 1970, p. 91-92). Meanwhile, Ricky, Rebecca, and Daniel, upstage, slightly stage right, busied themselves filing notecards and paper money into manila folders. In this scene Ricky acted as an instructor and Rebecca and Daniel acted as students in order to represent visually "banking" and "filing and storing deposits" on stage as a metaphor for education. Ricky stood over Rebecca and Daniel, nonverbally instructing them how to file the notecards and paper money, and correcting them when they made mistakes.

In Scene 3, lights shifted back to white, and Ricky and Rebecca moved center stage on blocks facing each other, Flora sat on a block downstage right and faced Ricky and Rebecca, while the Daniel hid behind the flat, upstage right. This scene featured text from student focus group interviews during which students talked about their high school experiences. Ricky and Rebecca portrayed students as they talked about experiences that included descriptions of being taught to a test, accounts of bad experiences with teachers, and impressions about their perceptions of teachers' experiences in the classroom. During this dialogue, Flora acted as an observer, watching the scene from the sidelines until the end when she remarked that changing the law does not matter for these students, because they are already in college and the damage has already been done. After this scene, the performance transitioned from high school experiences into college experiences.

In Scene 4, with lights dimmed, the performers move 4 blocks downstage and placed them in a straight line across the front of the stage, and exited the stage. As lights came up,

performers entered one by one from behind a flat as they recited narratives from instructors, and while completing their narratives, sat on 1 of the 4 blocks down-stage. Flora entered first, followed by Daniel, Ricky, and finally Rebecca. Performing teachers, they described various deficiencies in the skills of college freshmen that inhabit their classrooms, mostly with regard to writing and research skills. As each performer delivered his or her narrative, the other performers maintained off-stage focus, occasionally responding nonverbally or with minimal verbal feedback in agreement with what they were hearing.

In Scene 5, Ricky sat on a block slightly downstage-left while the rest of the performers exited the stage. Ricky delivered a humorous monologue, “The Impotence of Proofreading” (Mali, 2002), by slam poet Taylor Mali, which illustrates mistakes in writing that result from a lack of proofreading. The poem features intentional spelling and grammatical errors in a humorous narrative, explaining the importance of proofreading papers. My intent in using this text was to offer the audience a humorous but critical way to understand instructors’ perspectives on grading and students’ deficiencies in writing skills without implicating or accusing student members of the audience. The sometimes harsh tone of the instructor narratives, had I used them, may well have alienated student members of the audience.

In Scene 6, another humorous monologue introduced the idea of critical thinking through the staging of an opinion article in which the author responds to a research study in education, in which researchers provided middle school students with a fake website regarding a mythical creature, the tree octopus (Dykes, 2011), to test students’ abilities to think critical about information on the Internet. Daniel, standing center stage, performed a cross between a lecturer and a comedian, and explained to the audience how the students in a middle school class fell for the hoax research study. The other 3 performers portraying middle school students marched onto

the stage carrying protest signs, stating “save the tree octopus,” and “Charlie is my friend.” Daniel becomes annoyed at the protesters, for their inability to see past the hoax, and for their determination to save an imaginary creature from extinction. Daniel explained the researcher’s study and his argument that the education system is still not adequately teaching the current generation to think critically, particularly in regards to the Internet.

The monologue set the tone for Scene 7, another section drawn from a student focus group, in which the students discussed their thoughts on critical thinking. In this scene, Flora Ricky and Rebecca sit on 3 blocks upstage center. Flora and Ricky, acted as though they were obviously in a relationship with one another, sat very closely and held hands, while Rebecca, clearly uncomfortable with this relationship sat across from them. Rebecca and Flora discussed their struggles with critical thinking, and their strategies for managing their deficiencies. Ricky, however, talked of his astute critical thinking skills that he attributed to his interest in writing and analyzing music. Trying to impress Flora, Ricky describes the ways in which writing music has assisted his development in critical thinking skills. At the end of the scene, Flora in the relationship claimed Ricky assisted her in learning critical thinking skills using music as an example. She then snuggles in his arms, to which Rebecca, who clearly has had enough of the romance, responds by storming off irritably.

Scene 8 featured more narratives from instructor focus groups, and mirrored the stage blocking in scene 4, with 4 blocks in a line downstage. Lights come up with performers already seated on blocks. In these narratives, the instructors focused on student deficiencies in critical thinking, and their perceptions of the links between critical thinking, teaching to the test, and the No Child Left Behind Act. As in Scene 4, Scene 8 incorporated information from instructor focus groups. The performers portrayed teachers and sat on 4 blocks in a row facing the audience

downstage. Performers maintained off-stage focus and occasionally responded nonverbally to other performers' narratives.

The final scene features Flora, Rebecca, and Daniel as students sitting downstage center, and Ricky as a teacher standing up-stage left. This scene focuses on the issues of the student perception of college and student apathy. The scene is a combination of my writing and selections from student focus groups and instructor focus groups. This is the only instance in the script when instructors and students are in dialogue with each other, and they are intentionally in conflict. The scene opens with Ricky asking students questions about classes they took in high school, to which the students reluctantly respond with one-word answers while staring at the floor. This particular segment was designed to imitate an instance of apathy evident within the student focus groups. By the end of the scene, the teachers and students are verbally, emotionally, and physically in conflict, summarizing frustrations expressed in the show and in focus groups. Once the audience became visibly uncomfortable with this conflict, Flora interrupted the conflict and pointed out that this type of conflict never solved anything, and that something else must be done. After a blackout, she then gave an introduction into Forum Theatre, and transformed into the Joker.

In the next section, I describe the 5 scenes my cast prepared for Forum Theatre, based on the 5 themes that emerged from my analysis of the transcripts of the focus groups: writing skills, responsibility, critical thinking, apathy, and perception of college. These scenes were created by the cast in rehearsal and were presented following the scripted performance. Following the conclusion of each scenario members of the audience were invited to come on stage to participate in rehearsing solutions to the problems the cast presented.

Multiple Choices: Description of Forum Theatre Scenarios

Brazilian theatre scholar Augusto Boal developed Forum Theatre (1979) as a method for rehearsing change in a community. In Forum Theatre, a troupe of actors develops scenarios based on problems the community faces on an everyday basis. The troupe performs this scenario, and community members are invited to take the place of one of the protagonists or to create a new character within the scenario and the troupe plays the scene again. The troupe and community work together to find ways to enact positive change towards problem presented. The Joker character acts as the facilitator during Forum Theatre scenarios. “The outlook of the Joker-actor must be that of the author or adaptor which is assumed to be above and beyond that of the other characters in time and space” (Boal, 1979, 182). She encourages participation from the community, facilitates dialogue following each scenario, and ensures that all actors and spect-actors follow the rules of Forum Theatre. Forum Theatre has only 2 rules: first, no magic solutions (a spect-actor cannot set an impossible premise or take the place of an antagonist); second, an audience member cannot dictate directions from his or her seat. He or she must participate on stage with the actors. Once the audience has played a scenario a number of times or reached a workable solution, the Joker instructs the actors to move to the next scenario.

Boal (1979) does not make a distinction between audience and cast, instead he calls the whole community “spect-actors,” as no member is idly watching; all are actively participating. However, as only half of my performance implemented the method of Forum Theatre, I include the distinction of audience and cast to avoid confusion.

During focus groups, 5 themes emerged as challenges in both student and instructor focus groups: writing skills, student responsibility, critical thinking, apathy and perception of college.

My cast created 5 scenarios during rehearsal based on these 5 themes from focus groups, and following the scripted performance invited the audience to participate.

After each showing of the scripted performance, my Joker, Flora, explained the rules, the cast set the stage for the first scenario. For the performance of the scenarios, the stage set included a white board upon which the Joker wrote a question before the cast performed each scenario. The question was related to the theme explored in the scenario about to be performed as an aid to guide the audience to creating solutions for the specific problem.

Each time before the writing skills scenario was performed, Flora wrote the following question on the white board: How do we best help our students that need serious help catching up in writing skills? Flora then directed the audience's attention to the performers. The writing skills scene was staged in an instructor's office with Rebecca portraying the instructor and Ricky playing a student. Rebecca sat on a block located slightly upstage center facing another block. Ricky walked into her office with a paper that had just been returned to him and upon which he had received a failing grade. He began the scenario by stating he did not understand why he received a failing grade and requested Rebecca's help. Ricky sat on the block facing Rebecca as she pointed out blatant spelling and grammatical errors; Ricky's deficiencies in writing skills eventually became clear. After several examples of mistakes, Flora stepped downstage center, ended the scenario, and invited the audience to participate in rehearsing a solution by replacing as either Rebecca, the teacher, or by creating a new character. Replacing, since Ricky, the student, was not an option since he was the antagonist in the scenario.

Before the responsibility scene, Flora wrote the following question on the board: How do we get college freshmen to take responsibility for their own education? The responsibility scene was staged as a classroom scene, with Rebecca performing the role of instructor and Ricky and

Daniel playing students. Rebecca stood at a podium center stage left and reminded the students about the research paper due the next class period. Daniel and Ricky, sitting on blocks facing the podium center stage, became upset, claiming that there had been no reminders about the paper or the due date. Meanwhile, the instructor insisted that the due date was on the syllabus that she needed to move on to the material the class was scheduled to cover that day. Once the instructor told the students she needed to move on, Flora stepped forward, downstage center, ending the scenario, and invited the audience to participate as either Rebecca or a new character, since both students were antagonists in the scenario.

Before the critical thinking scene, Flora wrote the corresponding question on the white board: How do we best teach critical thinking to freshmen in a college classroom? The critical thinking scene was also staged like a classroom with Ricky portraying the instructor at a podium center stage left and Rebecca and Daniel as students, sitting on blocks facing the podium center stage. Daniel performed an eager student who always does all the readings for the class and was an eager participant; Rebecca portrayed an indifferent student who played with her phone, was unresponsive to instructor questions, and clearly has not done the reading prior to class. Taken together, the 2 students demonstrated the reality that not all students in college classrooms, and will not engage equally. The instructor asked the students about a concept in the textbook, rhetoric. Daniel, the eager student gave the definition in the book from memory and immediately readied himself to take notes. The instructor attempted to engage the students in analytical and critical thinking by asking them to apply rhetoric to their own lives and to come up with their own personal definition. However, despite the instructor's best efforts, they repeatedly gave him the definition from the textbook. After the instructor made 2 or 3 attempts to get a critical response, the Joker stepped downstage center, ending the scene, and invited the

audience to participate in the scenario by replacing either the instructor or by introducing a new character, as both students were antagonists.

Before the perception of college scene, the Joker wrote the following question on the board: How do we change the perception that college is the only option and that students need to enter college right after high school? During the perception of college scene, the performers attempted to draw attention to the stigma of making choices other than going to college. Rebecca and Daniel perform a mother and her son at home during high school. Daniel sat at a block working on homework, while Rebecca made cookies. As each worked on their own activities, the mother insisted that her son make a decision about college. Reluctant to answer the mother's questions, the son eventually gave in to mother's persistence, and agreed to apply for college. Once the son agreed to apply for college, the Joker intervened, stepping downstage center, ending the scene, and inviting the audience to participate as either the son or a new character; in this scenario, the mother was the antagonist.

Prior to the beginning of the apathy scene, the Joker used the board to pose the questions: How do we motivate college freshmen to take initiative? How do we reduce student apathy? The apathy scene was set in a dorm room with Ricky and Daniel portraying student roommates. Daniel sat on a block slightly downstage center and mimed playing video games in his room on his bed. Ricky entered from stage left and attempted to get Daniel to go to the library to work on a paper that is due in a few days. Daniel responded by telling Ricky that "it doesn't matter," that he "doesn't care" about that class or that paper, and that Ricky should go to the library without him. Despite numerous attempts that used tactics ranging from cajoling to shaming, Daniel adamantly refused. When Ricky finally gives up, the Joker stepped downstage center, ending the

scene and invited the audience to participate as either Ricky or a new character, since Daniel, the apathetic student, was the antagonist in the scenario.

In the next section, I describe the audience's participation in these scenarios in each of the 4 shows. Since I wanted to gather suggestions for addressing challenges for all 5 themes using the Forum Theatre methodology, but did not have for all of them in every show, I decided to present 3 scenarios at each performance. In the first show, the cast performed scenarios related to student responsibility, apathy, and writing skills. In the second show the cast performed scenarios that illustrated student responsibility, apathy, and critical thinking. In the third and fourth show, the cast presented writing skills, critical thinking, and perception of college scenarios. Each scenario was presented in at least 2 performances, with the exception of the 2 most prominent themes, critical thinking and writing skills, which were presented 3 times.

Rehearsing Solutions

Performance 1

In the first show, the cast performed the scenarios on student responsibility, apathy, and writing skills. The scenario for student responsibility, in which 2 actors portrayed students who were upset with a teacher who had not provided sufficient reminders regarding a due date for a term paper, had 2 volunteers attempt to rehearse change in the scene. The first volunteer created a new character, a fellow student that tried to change the minds of his peers. As the scene was repeated and the original students grew increasingly agitated with the teacher, the spectator responded, "Really guys, it's no big deal." He attempted to persuade them that they could complete the assignment by the deadline. The audience did not believe that this solution was workable because they did not think that this reasoning would persuade the original students to

take responsibility for their own education. The audience members also argued that this response would make them resent the new student played by the volunteer rather than encouraging them to assume responsibility.

Another audience member volunteered to take the place of the instructor in the scene. This volunteer's initial gambit was to point out that, as an instructor, she had a clause in her syllabus that allows an automatic extension of 48 hours on any assignment without penalty. An audience member called this change in the scenario a "magic solution" because it was an uncommon policy and students rarely accept late work. Rather than retiring to the audience, this volunteer offered a different solution. Stepping out from behind the podium, she talked with Daniel and Ricky individually, asking them how far along they were on their papers and reminding them about the policies in the syllabus. She prompted them to remember that the assignments had been in the syllabus all semester and that they need to take responsibility for their work. She reiterated for them that it was not her responsibility to remind students on a class by class basis about upcoming due dates. The audience liked this solution because of the instructor's directness in dealing with the problem as well as the fact that the instructor stepped out from behind the podium, which created immediacy between the instructor and students.

In the second scene, apathy, in which 2 actors portrayed a scene in which one roommate ineffectively attempts to persuade another roommate to work on a paper at the library, 2 volunteers participated, and both took the place of the Daniel's roommate, Ricky. The first volunteer, who took the place of Ricky as the roommate, ridiculed the antagonist, telling him that by not caring about his work and his classes that he will never get a good job, that he will be stuck in debt, that he'll work at McDonald's, he'll never get a girlfriend, and will not even be able to play video games. The audience liked the scene, but thought the situation could have

been handled more effectively. At the Joker's invitation, another volunteer assumed the role of a third roommate, in addition to Ricky, in the scenario to rehearse a different solution.

This volunteer took a less abrasive approach asking for a cause behind the apathetic attitude. He asked what was wrong, to which Daniel told him harshly to mind his own business. The volunteer playing the roommate continued to inquire, repeating the same questions as the first volunteer, but in a kinder way ("You know you are paying for this right? Don't you want to get your degree?"). The volunteer, who made no progress in changing Daniel's mind, visibly began to get frustrated. The Joker cut the scene, and apologized on behalf of Daniel, who is a good antagonist but had a habit of getting carried away. The audience discussed both of the approaches, and decided that perhaps a combination of the 2 would be a good way to cope with an apathetic student. One audience member claimed that either approach would be good as long as the roommate was persistent. Another audience member argued that neither approach would work, that work on the apathetic attitude had to begin within the antagonist rather than coming from some external force.

The third scene, writing skills, in which 2 actors portrayed a scene in an instructor's office in which a student asks for guidance on a failing paper, proceeded quickly because of the quality of the volunteer's solution and the audience's agreement that it would work. The volunteer took the place of the instructor in the scenario. When she asked the student about the other issues going on in his life, she looked around the computer screen, and reached for the box of tissues. She took a holistic approach to assessing the student's situation when he sought help by asking about other issues in his life, his background skills, what work he had done in preparation for the paper, and how much time he spent writing the paper. The volunteer's multiple questions allowed her to attempt to get a holistic view of what was going on in the

student's life and how those factors may have affected his performance on the assignment. The audience liked the scenario because it demonstrated concern for the student in a way that illustrated that she wanted to get to the real cause of the problem—which may have been a lack of training or a personal issue in his life. After listening to the student and determining the root of the problem was that he had take on too many activities, the instructor outlined all of the options available, such as the writing center, to help him improve his writing.

Performance 2

In the second show, the cast performed scenarios on student responsibility, apathy, and critical thinking. The student responsibility scenario, in which 2 actors portrayed students who were upset with a teacher who had not provided sufficient reminders regarding a due date for a term paper, had 3 volunteers. Each of these volunteers presented similar solutions with slight differences. The first volunteer took the place of the instructor, and addressed the students in a slightly patronizing tone, but also let the students know he cared about education and teaching. He said to the students, "You're paying for this education, you just give me whatever you have and I will help you learn. That's my job." The audience was not satisfied with this solution, based on the volunteer's tone towards the students.

The second volunteer decided to create a new student character. The new character acted just as surprised about the due date as the other 2 students. However, instead of reacting negatively to the instructor, she said to the other students, "Okay guys, it's alright. There's that coffee shop in the union that has wi-fi and is open late. We can just go there and it should only take a couple of hours. We can go there together and get it done." The audience thought this

solution was stronger, and that it might work if the classroom had a cohesive atmosphere, but the audience agreed this solution would not work in all classrooms.

The third volunteer also created a new student character and based his scene on the assumption that the classroom was not as cohesive as depicted in the previous scene. Using dialogue, he stopped the other students from complaining and repeated what the first volunteer said, “You’re paying for this education.” However, he made this observation from the perspective of a student rather than the perspective of an instructor. The audience argued that the message was more persuasive. In the final discussion, the audience concluded that any of these scenarios had the potential to work; the success of any strategy, the audience agreed, would depend on the classroom atmosphere.

In the apathy scenario 2 actors performed a scene in which one roommate ineffectively attempted to persuade another roommate to work on a paper at the library. 2 individuals volunteered to participate. The first volunteer took the place of the antagonist’s roommate, Ricky, and did not take the scenario very seriously. After a short dialogue with the antagonist, he walked away from the scene yelling, “College isn’t for everyone! Good luck paying back your loans!” The audience laughed and cheered, but agreed that the solution did not rehearse a positive change in the situation. The next volunteer performed a “girl next door” character as a hall-mate. She tried to use charm to persuade the apathetic student to go to the library. The audience did not like either approach but argued that this problem could not be changed externally, that the change in attitude must happen with Daniel, no matter how much persuasion comes from others.

In the critical thinking scenario 1 actor portrayed a teacher struggling to elicit critical engagement from 2 students. 2 volunteers participated in rehearsing a change. The first

volunteer took the place of the instructor and used a lot of humor to try and engage Daniel and Rebecca as students in critical thinking. He said, “Come on, did you grow up in a crack den? Prove to me you didn’t grow up in a crack den.” When Daniel finally applied rhetoric to his own life, the volunteer replied, “Oh! Good! You didn’t grow up in a crack den. I was beginning to get worried.” The audience liked his humorous approach, but provided some criticism; they thought his students might report him for making inappropriate comments. They also criticized him for ignoring Rebecca, and devoting all of his attention to Daniel, the engaged student. The second volunteer focused on Rebecca, the reluctant student participant, because she was confident that Daniel would be willing to participate anyway. She approached Rebecca, shrinking the distance between them until only a foot remained between student and teacher, and continually asked her questions in attempt to get Rebecca to connect rhetoric to her own life. Once the volunteer got what she wanted from Rebecca, she related this answer to the engaged student. Turning to Daniel, she asked, “So what do you think? How does rhetoric apply to your life? Do you have a similar experience?” The audience agreed that the second rehearsal of change was better, since both Daniel and Rebecca ultimately participated.

Performance 3

In the third show the cast performed scenarios on writing skills, critical thinking, and student perception of college. In the first scene, writing skills, 2 actors performed the scene in the instructor’s office in which a student asks for guidance on a failing paper from an instructor. 2 volunteers participated, both as additional characters in the scene. The first volunteer, became a teaching assistant to the instructor, Rebecca, and talked to Ricky, the student, about writing as “stealing” or “plagiarizing” ideas from other writers first and then writing them with original

words. He reasoned that good writers learn skills by reading good writing. The audience did not like this solution because they claimed the only thing the student would remember from the lesson would be “go plagiarize your paper.” The second volunteer took a similar approach, assuming the role of the instructor’s teaching assistant, and talked about the student’s need to improve writing skills as a whole. The key difference, however was that the second volunteer encouraged the student to go to the writing lab, pointing the student toward this free resource with staff who would be willing to help him improve his writing skills as a whole. The audience agreed with this solution, as it was less ethically sketchy and provided a more realistic solution for the student.

The critical thinking scenario, in which 1 actor portrayed a teacher struggling to elicit critical engagement from 2 students, produced 2 volunteers. Both volunteers took the place of the instructor in the scenario, however, both offered different approaches to solving the problem. The first volunteer, asked the reluctant students, played by Daniel and Rebecca, to form discuss the topic as a group before talking about it as part of the larger group. The audience acknowledged some benefits to this approach. For example, they argued that this approach motivated students to participate who may not otherwise readily speak up in class. However, the audience also listed a number of potential negative consequences to this approach as well. For example, because the instructor cannot listen to all conversations simultaneously, his ability to monitor the levels of critical thinking would prove difficult. In addition, many students who have not read the material assigned for class would affect the participation in each group. The audience did not accept this as a solution, despite being the only suggestion from all 4 shows in which the instructor shared power with the students. The second volunteer, who also took the place of the instructor, implemented humor extensively, and asked each student individually,

“What does the definition of rhetoric mean to you?” This volunteer used a personable and engaging approach, which created immediacy between students and instructor. The audience preferred the second solution, but many said that a combination of the 2 could prove more effective. The audience agreed that being personable and stepping away from the podium to engage students directly was crucial to eliciting participation from students.

In the final scenario, perception of college, in which 1 actor portrayed a mother insistent on her son attending college and another actor portrayed a son resistant to attending college, 2 volunteers participated. The first volunteer took the place of the son in high school and attempted to start a dialogue with the mother about why he should not have to go to college right away. He provided several examples of people that dropped out of college and still achieved success, like Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, to which the mother responded, “Well, honey, you aren’t Bill Gates.” The Joker stopped the scene here and another volunteer stepped in. This volunteer provided a sophisticated and eloquent response as to why it is impractical and expensive to waste a lot of money on an education if she does not know have a clear sense of what she wants to choose as a career path. She reasoned that it makes more financial sense to work for awhile on her own and decide later if she wants to get an education. The mother’s response to this argument was, “Wow you are really grown up for your age. I must have raised you well.” The audience recognized from the mother’s response that the volunteer was not portraying a teenager realistically and, while she presented an ideal way to respond to a mother’s pressure to go to college, that this sophisticated perspective would not likely be articulated by a high school student. In the end, the audience determined that this solution was magic. By this time, the performance had reached the time limit and were not explored further in this venue. They were, however, the subject of dialogue during the talk-back following the Forum Theatre session.

Performance 4

In the fourth show the cast performed scenarios on writing skills, critical thinking, and perception of college. In previous shows, a mix of graduate students, undergraduate students, and instructors participated in Forum Theatre scenarios. This show was unique in that all but 1 of the volunteer participants were undergraduate students, many of them attending for extra credit.

The first scenario, writing skills, features 2 actors. The first, a student, seeks guidance from an instructor on a paper on which he has received a failing grade. The audience members volunteered to participate in the scenario. The first volunteer misunderstood directions and created an additional antagonist—another student who accompanied the first to the office to confront the teacher and complain about the failing grades they received on their papers. The volunteer student attempted to get the instructor to admit fault and give both of them better grades. The Joker intervened, reiterated the rules of Forum Theatre, and explained why this solution was not a workable within the framework of Forum Theatre.

The second volunteer also created a new character, but unlike the first participant, he did not create an antagonist. Instead, his character was the father of the student who accompanied his son on his visit to the instructor's office. The father talked about where they came and described their high school education in a rural community. The father asked what resources were available for the student to use at the university, and the instructor discussed the writing lab on campus, which had been announced on Blackboard at the start of term. The audience agreed that the proposed solution would have helped the student improve the student's writing skills, but was not a feasible solution. One audience member reasoned that an instructor would not be willing to hold a meeting with a parent and student; many parents would not come to campus to

have this meeting, and many students would not want their parents involved. This audience determined that this solution was not realistic.

The third volunteer took a different approach, replacing the instructor, and explaining the resources of the university directly to the student. The instructor reasoned that the student should take this paper and use it to help him on his next paper, which she agreed to help him with during office hours. The audience accepted this solution as the most practical.

In the critical thinking scenario, in which 1 actor portrayed a teacher struggling to elicit critical engagement from 2 students, there were 2 volunteers, both of whom adopted similar approaches. The first volunteer took the place of the instructor, and asked personal and specific questions about how rhetoric was relevant within these students' lives. The eager student, played by Daniel, raised his hand and engaged in discussion with the instructor, although the student displayed little critical thinking. The instructor asked the student if he had a job, to which he replied he had a job in sales. The instructor then connected critical thinking in rhetoric to working in sales; specifically, he addressed the ways the student used rhetoric on a daily basis by persuading customers to buy products. In critiquing this volunteer's approach, the audience noted that the student that was not already willing to participate, did not engage in discussion at all.

A second volunteer, also taking the place of the instructor, attempted to solve this problem by asking the class, "Do you want to move on and talk about performance instead? Then use rhetoric to persuade me to move on." She walked up to Rebecca, the reluctant student, instead of Daniel, the eager student, and asked, "How would you get me to stop talking about rhetoric?" to which Rebecca replied with a variety of questions like "Leave?" and "Give you the definition?" After several minutes of banter, the volunteer became visibly frustrated, and the

Joker stopped the scene. The audience liked the creative approach and liked that both students were involved in the scene.

In the perception of college scene 1 actor portrayed a mother insistent on her son attending college and another actor portrayed a son resistant to attending college. 3 volunteers participated. The first volunteer—a female—took the place of the high school aged son. She tried to explain to her mother that she did not want to go to college because her career as an exotic dancer did not require a college education. She reasoned that instead of going to college, she could make much more money dancing, or she could marry rich. The audience did not like this solution because they argued that it reinforced the perception that college is necessary rather than changing this ingrained perception. They also noted that exotic dancing is not a career choice that a mother wants her daughter to pursue.

The second volunteer also took the place of the high school student, but changed the student's reasoning for not going to college. She argued that she wanted to try a career as an artist before going on to college. She turned the questions back to the mother and asked her who would be paying for her college education. The audience thought this was a good solution, but argued that the mother still won the argument by noting that colleges have art classes, that a degree would aid in securing a good job, and that getting a degree is the only way to get a good job in the status quo.

The third volunteer added a third dynamic to the second volunteer's approach, by claiming that she is not opposed to college, and that she may try it in the future if she finds she does in fact need the degree. She argued that she wanted to try art as a career first before wasting money on a degree she may or may not need. The audience thought this was an

argument a high school student could conceive and could potentially use to persuade a parent, and thus, they deemed it a workable solution.

Discussion

After staging, presenting, and analyzing the outcomes of Forum Theatre, I have arrived at 2 topics of discussion outlined in this section. First, I respond to RQ2 and explain the non-unique strategies presented in the Forum Theatre project associated with this study. Second, I apply Paulo Freire's theory of the banking model of education and Michel Foucault's theories on the examination and productive power to 2 key instances in the Forum Theatre scenarios from my production. Finally, I address the limitations of Forum Theatre in this context.

Power and Liberation in Forum Theatre

Through the run of the production, instructors and students proposed solutions already practiced in college classrooms; audience members of both types refrained from climbing out of their comfort zones in proposing creative solutions. Instructors often participated as instructors in the scenarios, engaging in strategies they already implement in their classrooms. Students often participated as students during the scenarios. Neither instructors nor students were willing to take the perspective of the other. My experiment in Forum Theatre did not succeed in rehearsing change, as modeled by Boal. However, the forum did provide a platform for helpful dialogue and raised thoughtful questions. I will be limiting this discussion to 2 scenarios, critical thinking and student responsibility. These 2 scenarios were the most significant in that the audience's solutions were the most similar, and in their resemblance to the issues that currently exist in the American education system. The other 3 scenarios that were part of my Forum

Theatre experiment, writing skills, apathy, and perception of college, were staged as well. However, whereas student critical thinking and student responsibility emerged as community problems, the other 3 ultimately identified problems that occurring individually, rather than as systematic problems. Consequently, the solutions rehearsed in the Forum Theatre scenarios were aimed at change within the individual, rather than change within the community. Since, in this study, I am interested in strategies that could address challenges for many students and instructors, rather than just the individual, these scenarios were excluded from the discussion.

RQ2: What strategies do the actors and spect-actors in a Forum Theatre production arrive at for addressing the challenges for college students who completed their secondary education under the No Child Left Behind Act?

In response to the research question, actors and spect-actors provided a variety of non-unique strategies already in practice in classrooms and, therefore, this experiment in Forum Theatre was unsuccessful at providing workable solutions for implementation in college classrooms. However, during discussion, which often went over the time limit, audience members asked thoughtful questions and provided narratives about their own experiences, adding to the conversation about standardized testing and secondary education. Dialogue, for both Freire and Boal, is foundational for creating change, and therefore an important result from Forum Theatre. However, since the strategies presented and accepted as workable solutions from the audience were already strategies currently practiced by instructors and students, Freire and Foucault provide helpful insight to understand the reasons why the strategies proposed in the experiment were not unique.

Since college students have been educated using the banking model (Freire, 1970), engaging in the practice of memorizing and regurgitating information since they entered the

school system, that behavior was natural and inevitable for the audiences of my production. Therefore, when asked to rehearse solutions to a problem related to the banking model, the audience—particularly the students who are thoroughly enmeshed in a system that has actively promoted the banking model of education—is naturally inclined to operate within the confines of banking model to attempt to solve the problem. They do so because they have internalized the idea that this system is not only natural and normal, it is good.

During rehearsal, the cast of undergraduates created the scenarios based on the themes with minimal direction outside of an explanation of the challenges faced by students and instructors. In 2 of the Forum Theatre scenarios, student responsibility and critical thinking, 1 of which produced the only unique example presented by a volunteer, the cast set up similar scenes in which an instructor stood behind a podium and students sat in front of the teacher in desks awaiting instructions. These scenes intentionally represented standard classroom settings in which the teacher exercises power over students in ways that are manifest in behaviors such as delivering lecture material in front of the classroom, taking attendance, and restricting certain behaviors like limiting the use of student-owned technology, to name a few. Our goal in creating the scenarios was to have the audience recognize the traditional power structure that operates in classrooms and to have spect-actors rehearse scenes in which students took ownership of their own education. For example, had students changed the scene in critical thinking to a study group in which a student who excels at critical thinking helps the 2 who struggle, this would show a shift in power and students taking accountability in a creative solution. The results, however, did not reflect either an understanding of that power structure, nor student ownership of their own education. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1979), Freire argued that it is the task of the oppressed “to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well”

(44). Liberation for Freire can only be co-created between the oppressed and the oppressors. Similarly, knowledge in a classroom should be co-created between educator and student.

As Freire's notion of co-creation of knowledge was influential on Boal's evolution of Forum Theatre, the co-creation of scenes by the actors and the spect-actors that illustrated this concept were a natural goal of the Forum Theatre scenarios, particularly those that targeted critical thinking and student responsibility, since these scenarios aligned closely with the issues of the American education system. We hoped for creative suggestions that challenged the traditional power structure and would motivate students to be accountable to themselves in college. However, in every solution proposed in Forum Theatre, the power dynamics appeared far more hierarchical than we had hoped. Over the run of the production, 5 volunteers rehearsed change in student responsibility scenarios, and 6 volunteers rehearsed change for critical thinking scenarios. In these scenarios, only 1 of the volunteers rehearsed a solution in which she chose a strategy that illustrated shared power between instructor and students. In a critical thinking scenario, 1 volunteer, who took the place of the instructor, asked the students to form groups in an attempt to get them to collaborate on a definition of rhetoric before discussing the topic as part of the larger group. After witnessing this solution enacted, the audience rejected it because of the teacher's inability to monitor each student's level of critical thinking when they split in groups. In short, the audience was committed to a teaching model in which the instructor needs to oversee every aspect of learning; in their minds, her surveillance of the students during every step of the process was essential. In fact, every solution the audience accepted for both the student responsibility and critical thinking scenarios that worked, of which there were 5, reinscribed the traditional power structure in the classroom by incorporating an instructor asserting power over students. The only real change in the rehearsed solutions was that the instructor

decreased the amount of space between him- or herself and the students. In every case, the volunteer maintained the desks in the familiar spatial pattern (instructor standing up front, while the students sit in desks in a line facing the instructor), which directs power to the teacher. The proclivity to embrace the spatial pattern which directs power to the teacher reflects the positive perception of teachers holding the power within the social system (Foucault, 1984). The audience's actions in Forum Theatre reflected a preference for teachers in front of the classroom, with students in desks facing the teacher as "docile bodies," ready to take in information in a traditional lecture format. This type of power is "productive," according to Foucault (1984), in that it has the capability to create ideas, move bodies, and control discourse.

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (Foucault, 1984, p. 61)

The spatial pattern of the classroom is productive in that it produces a certain type of discourse. When the instructor is standing in front of the classroom and students sit in desks in rows facing him or her, all of the attention flows from the students toward the teacher. The teacher, therefore, holds all of the power. If the classroom was structured in a circle instead, and the instructor sat as 1 member of the circle, the attention would not be focused solely on the teacher. The instructor is willing to share power through the transfer of knowledge. If students worked in groups as the teacher walked around the classroom, the instructor would still maintain power, but the students' attention would be focused on each other, and thus, the power of knowledge would be shared. The spatial pattern preferred by the audience directs power to the teacher, and lends itself to a traditional lecture format, that undergirds the banking model of education.

As discussed in chapters 1 and 2, standardized testing is strongly associated to student struggles in critical thinking. Under NCLB, with the increase in standardized testing, teachers in secondary schools have fallen into the practice of “teaching to the test,” creating deficiencies in critical thinking skills. In a monologue highlighted in the scripted portion of the show, Freire (1970) is quoted: “Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (p. 72). Freire (1970) argued that the banking model is detrimental and does not lead to knowledge or humanity. Essentially, humans become robotic cataloguers of information rather than thinking people, and the only way to make them truly human is to teach them to engage critically with each other, to co-create knowledge and to escape the banking model of education. Standardized testing is a symptom of the banking model in that multiple choice tests are a way of quantitatively measuring a teacher’s ability to deposit information in the students’ minds. The normalization of the banking model through standardized testing has allowed the nation to continue traveling deeper into the rabbit hole of national education policy, with little to no success.

Foucault (1979) does not focus on pedagogy, but discusses the rise of the examination as a method of surveillance, as a way of normalizing judgment to gain and maintain power. He described the student-teacher relationship as one of power through the acquisition of knowledge. Thus, the school, a place with an existing hierarchical structure, implemented the exam as a method of discipline through observation. The exam, which is not inherently disciplinary, disciplines by observing the behavior of students (the amount of knowledge a student is able to retain, or the amount he or she has studied). The teacher can choose to use the exam as a form of

discipline, for example, if the exam is worth a high percentage of a student's grade or if the student must pass the exam for graduation, but on its own the exam is simply a tool of surveillance. In addition, the exam normalizes judgment, in that it is acceptable and good for a teacher to place judgment on a student based on the examination.

The examination did not simply mark the end of an apprenticeship; it was one of its permanent factors; it was woven into it through a constantly repeated ritual of power. The examination enabled the teacher, while transmitting his knowledge, to transform his pupils into a whole field of knowledge. Whereas the examination with which an apprenticeship ended in the guild tradition validated an acquired aptitude - the 'master-work' authenticated a transmission of knowledge that had already been accomplished - the examination in the school was a constant exchanger of knowledge; it guaranteed the movement of knowledge from the teacher to the pupil, but it extracted from the pupil a knowledge destined and reserved for the teacher. The school became the place of elaboration for pedagogy. (Foucault, 1979, 186-187)

Foucault's notion of the examination exhibits some similarity to Freire's banking model.

Foucault explains that knowledge is a "transfer" between teacher and student, which is "extracted" from a student during the examination. This particular terminology is reminiscent of Freire's banking concept of education; Freire and Foucault describe the same relationship between teacher and student.

Both Freire and Foucault described the examination as product of the transfer of knowledge between teacher and student; the examination is a symptom of the banking model. While Freire and Foucault are not in direct conversation, their work reflects similar ideas on the examination as it relates to the American educational system. Standardized testing is currently used as a tool of observation and discipline for both teachers and students based on a teacher's ability to effectively deposit knowledge into student's minds. Just as instructors monitor students through the examination, administrations, and by extension local, state, and national governments, monitor instructors' success in depositing the required information in students. Significantly, all of these transactions are economic in nature. Students earn grades, whereas

successful teachers earn the right to keep their positions, and administrations earn their continued funding from the various levels of government.

The majority of the students, both the members of my cast and as the audience, have been socialized into this system. Students expect and desire the banking model and the hierarchical structure of students in desks with the teacher at the front of the classroom. They have been led to accept through their socialization that this system of power, manifested through standardized testing and spatial patterns, is both positive and productive.

Since the students both in the cast and in the audience operate within a productive system of power, they rejected solutions outside of the normalized banking model. In discussion on critical thinking scenarios, 1 audience member illustrated a lack of understanding of critical. Following 1 of the proposed solutions, an audience member praised a volunteer for a portion of his solution on critical thinking and stated, “Right, because all we really need is a teacher to make us realize that we are actually critically thinking all the time. I mean, you critically think without even realizing it. You just have to be aware of it.” Not only was his understanding of critical thinking completely incorrect, no audience member or cast member attempted to correct him. 2 factors likely contributed to a lack of intervention at the audience member’s response. First, our culture has conventions about performance and politeness that likely kept audience and cast from challenging the respondent and opening dialogue. Second, American audiences are not accustomed to audience members participating in and commenting on performances.

The difficulty of Forum Theatre in this context, is that I have asked an audience, the majority of whom have been working their way through an educational system that relies on a banking model of education, to—on the basis of 1 production—immediately overcome their struggles with mastering *critical thinking*, to engage in *critical thinking* to arrive at solutions

about how to teach students about *critical thinking*. Simply stated, I asked my audience to solve a problem, which a majority of them have no means to address.

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations

Generalizability

The number of student participants did not meet initial expectations due to the difficulty in getting students to participate in focus group sessions. Although I achieved saturation in collecting data, an increased number of participants would have made the study stronger, and additional information may have been provided with a greater number of participants. In addition, as this study was conducted at a single university and was, therefore, limited to instructors and students at a single institution in 1 metropolitan area, generalizability of the results is limited.

Subjectivity

As an instructor empathizing with the frustrations expressed by faculty participants in focus groups, I must acknowledge that I was not a disinterested researcher. Since I am an instructor with experience teaching college freshmen, and with experience teaching students in the secondary education system in reading classes, I shared many of the frustrations expressed by instructors who participated in focus group discussions. In fact, these frustrations served as an impetus for the subject of the study as well as its final design. This personal investment in the topic likely influenced the construction of the interview protocol, the follow up questions during the focus groups, the reading of the data, as well as the analysis of the data for both instructor

and student focus groups. Despite efforts to maintain objectivity, it is important to acknowledge my own positionality within the secondary school system as a summer reading teacher and the higher education system as a graduate teaching assistant during the time that I was conducting the research that served as the basis for this thesis.

Forum Theatre Limitations

Because this performance had a limited run, 4 showings in the Department of Communication Studies' black box theatre, time was a significant limitation. Ideally, the cast and I would have been able to test all 5 themes in every show. In the interest of time, we were only able to run 3 scenarios per show, which limited the number of possible solutions to each of the 5 major themes.

In addition, the size of the theatre was a limitation. The theatre could only hold 40 audience members per showing. While a small audience was helpful in persuading audience members to participate, it also limited the overall number of individuals who could participate in rehearsing solutions to the problems posed.

A related matter had to do with the composition of the audience. Students attended in larger numbers than did instructors, many of them to earn extra credit in 1 of their communication studies courses. This circumstance raises 2 related issues. First, an audience balanced between instructors and students would have been productive to the Forum Theatre experiment. The focus groups demonstrated that the 2 groups have vastly different, often contradictory perspectives on the themes that emerged. Had the audiences been more mixed, the dialogue they produced might have led to more creative solutions. Second, students attending for extra credit are not a voluntary audience. While some of the students who attended for this

purpose participated, I am confident that many others who were there for the same reason did not. Ideally, the audience would attend a production of this type because they were interested in the subject matter.

I had also intended to record the Forum Theatre scenarios after all 4 shows for the sake of accuracy in analyzing the solutions the audience presented. I had hoped to use this data, in addition to the notes I took contemporaneously during the scenarios in order to have a richer body of data. Unfortunately, because of equipment failure, only 1 show was recorded in its entirety, another was not recorded at all, and 2 shows were only partially recorded. This failure to capture a rich data set resulted in an analysis that had to be based on observation, notes and memory. Admittedly, the analysis would be stronger with additional support material.

Future Research

I have several recommendations for additional research that would, in my opinion, aid instructors, students, and legislators in their ongoing efforts to solve the problems in secondary and higher education that are identified in this study. First, I recommend a replication of this study at other universities to discover whether the results are similar elsewhere. Since the program that ultimately evolved into NCLB began in Texas and, therefore, has had longer to become more deeply ingrained in Texas schools than elsewhere in the nation, it is important to determine whether the results of this study are consistent with results elsewhere in the country. Second, I suggest a study similar to the current study in which researchers analyze students of other classifications levels within universities (sophomore, junior, senior), to determine whether the effects continue unabated or become less evident as students become acclimated to the different demands of a college education. During focus group interviews, there were some

indications that upper level students suffer from the same deficiencies and challenges as freshmen. However, there were other indications, particularly among instructors, that the circumstances described with regard to freshman students change. Thus the question is worth pursuing. Third, I propose a study on students in the secondary education system to understand the relationships among the interrelated problems and their causes as they are developing.

In addition, I suggest additional study implementing Boal's Forum Theatre methods. A study in which the audience is provided the opportunity to propose and stage problems as well as potential solutions would provide the spect-actors additional agency. By selecting the problems myself that served as the basis of the scenarios, I may not have engaged my audience in the most effective means possible. If the spect-actors were made a more integral part of the process, the processes employed here may have produced different results.

While my Forum Theatre was unable to rehearse the change I sought to inspire in the participants during the productions, changes to several aspects of the structure might yield different results. For example, the audience was populated largely with students who attended the production to earn extra credit. Finding a way to populate the audience with stakeholders who had an active interest in the problems addressed in this study, might result in the rehearsal of stronger solutions and better dialogue among the participant-stakeholders. A second change that might help produce different results is a matter as simple as altering the stage set up to produce different physical and spatial relationships among the actors and audience. In the production as originally mounted, the stage set-up established traditional power relationships between the actors and the audience. Specifically, the audience space was set above and apart from the "playing space" of the actors. Such traditional power relationships between audience and actors

make it difficult to cross boundaries. When the ultimate goal of the production is cooperation, the configuration of the theatre should be taken into account.

To conclude, while this study yielded some important information, that information is of extremely limited generalizability due to the small number of participants. My own personal investment in the issues I investigated may have influenced my data collection and analysis and, as a result, may serve as another limitation in this study. I have suggested 4 recommendations for future research, including a replication of the study at other universities, a similar study focusing on sophomores, juniors, and seniors, similar study at the secondary education level, and re-creating Forum Theatre in a different context. Future research would help create a better understanding of the problems within secondary education and higher education, the causes of these issues, and more accurate strategies to address the challenges in secondary and college classrooms.

Conclusion

We live in an age of continuous change with regard to educational policy. Of the numerous changes in recent years, NCLB has been one of the most prominent and most controversial, not only because of its goals but also because of its consequences. In this study, I have attempted to analyze a few of the consequences of this policy, particularly as they relate to college freshmen and their instructors. Based on previous scholarship regarding educational policy associated with NCLB, I developed a research question targeted at college freshmen and instructors who teach college freshmen.

RQ1: What do college students and their instructors identify as the key challenges that arise as students educated under NCLB begin college coursework, and how does each group address these challenges?

To answer this research question, I conducted focus group interviews with freshmen college students and their instructors and, as a result, identified themes related to 5 issues: writing skills, responsibility, critical thinking, perception of college, and apathy. After analyzing the interviews, I concluded that the themes were interrelated and that the problems faced by college freshmen and their instructors are highly complex. Although instructors and students did not agree on challenges and causes, both seemed equally convinced that the challenges were in some ways linked to NCLB and the standardized testing culture that has evolved in the country since its enactment.

Using the interview transcripts, I compiled a performance script including narratives from instructors and students, along with other texts regarding education. After the scripted portion of the performance, my cast presented scenarios based on Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre, and invited the audience to participate in rehearsing solutions to the 5 problems that emerged as significant during the focus group interviews.

In analyzing the results from Forum Theatre, I asked a second research question.

RQ2: What strategies do the actors and spect-actors in a Forum Theatre production arrive at for addressing the challenges for college students who completed their secondary education under the No Child Left Behind Act?

My analysis of the results of the Forum Theatre experiment revealed that the audience did not provide unique strategies for meeting the challenges faced by instructors and students in college classrooms. Instead, the solutions they provided operated within the standard hierarchical framework that is already prevalent in the American secondary educational system. To explain the solutions rehearsed by participants in 2 key scenarios that targeted systemic problems, student responsibility and critical thinking, I used Paulo Freire's theory of the banking model of education and Michel Foucault's theories on the examination and productive power. I

determined that the solutions rehearsed by the audience ultimately were not productive because the solutions operated within the traditional hierarchical power structure that is characteristic of the banking model of education.

APPENDIX A
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW SCRIPTS

Student Group Interview Script:

Hi everyone, welcome, and thank you for participating in this focus group. As you are aware from the consent form, this study is aimed at finding out what challenges college freshmen face as they enter college. The public education system has undergone significant changes in the last 10 years, and I'm trying to determine the affects of those changes on students and instructors.

- 1) First, I would like us to go around the room and state the year you graduated high school, where you attended high school, and what your intentions are for going to college.
- 2) Now I'd like to move into a more open discussion. I'd like to begin a discussion on the English classes you took in high school. What topics did you cover in your high school English classes? Describe the writing assignments you did in school. Did you have research projects or term papers? Describe them. What was the format of the tests you took in your English classes? What kinds of essays did you have to write for English tests? How long? Describe how they were graded. Were they graded for ideas only or were they also graded for spelling and grammar? What kind of assistance did you get from your teachers for completing your assignments? What kind of assistance did you get from your teachers in understanding course concepts?
- 3) Now I would like to compare those high school experiences to your experience so far in your college classrooms. How do the topics in your college classrooms compare to the topics in your high school classrooms? How do the assignments in your college classrooms compare to the assignments you completed in high school? Earlier we talked about assistance you received on completing assignments and understanding course concepts. How does that experience compare to assistance you receive in college? What would you describe as the differences in course goals? Describe differences in instructor

expectations of you as a student? What challenges do these differences create for you as a student?

- 4) What do you think the cause of these differences and subsequent challenges are?

Instructor Group Interview Script:

Hi everyone, welcome, and thank you for participating in this focus group. As you are aware from the consent form, this study is aimed at finding out what challenges instructors and college freshmen face as they enter college. The public education system has undergone significant changes in the last 10 years, and I'm trying to determine the affects of those changes on students and instructors.

- 1) First, I would like us to go around the room and state what classes you teach and how long you have been teaching college.
- 2) Now I'd like to move into a more open discussion. What kinds of assignments do you make for your students? What challenges do your students appear to face as they transition from high school to college? What skills do you think they should have on entering a college English class? In which skills are they proficient? In which skills are they deficient? Based on the work they provide, particularly early in the semester, what is your impression of the differences in the kinds of assignments they had in high school and your assignments? Describe the format of your examinations. Do students appear to be familiar with these types of examinations? Describe the format of your writing assignments. Do they appear to be familiar with these types of writing assignments? Has your experience teaching college freshmen changed over the past few years? If so, how? Those of you that have been teaching for longer than 5 years, describe any differences in your students then in comparison to your students now.
- 3) What challenges do you face in the classroom in your efforts to engage your students? (Follow up questions if necessary: What kind of challenges do you experience in preparing them to complete assignments? When you try to elicit in-class participation,

what outcomes are most common? What type of preparation do you believe your students complete prior to class? What is the attitude of your students in your classroom?)

- 4) What do you think the causes of these challenges are?

APPENDIX B
FOCUS GROUP INFORMATION FORM

This form is to express interest in participating in a focus group on campus aimed at understanding the challenges that college freshmen and instructors face in their classrooms. Researchers have argued that the No Child Left Behind Act has had a profound impact on the way students learn, and creates a variety of challenges for both students and instructors. Focus group discussions will be a helpful tool to understand what these challenges are, how these challenges arose, and possibilities for meeting these challenges. The research question for these focus groups is: How do students and instructors meet the challenges of a clash of educational cultures, one dominated by multiple-choice testing and the other by critical thinking and writing? Following these focus group discussions, the challenges identified by students and instructors will be compiled and staged in a performance imploring audience participation. Filling out this form does not officially sign you up to participate in this study. Please fill out the information below, and if you qualify for the study, you will be contacted with the time and date to attend.

Name: _____ E-Mail: _____

Phone: _____

Age: _____ Sex: _____

Classification (circle) Freshman | Sophomore | Junior | Senior

Major: _____ Minor: _____

Year of High School Graduation: _____

Thanks for your interest!

If you have any questions, please email: AndreaLovoll@my.unt.edu

APPENDIX C
PERFORMANCE SCRIPT

Multiple Choices

[Scene 1]

Daniel: All skills begin with the basics of reading and math, which are supposed to be learned in the early grades of our schools. Yet for too long, for too many children, those skills were never mastered. By passing the No Child Left Behind Act, you, the people, have made the expectation of literacy the law of our country. Testing is the only way to identify and help students who are falling behind.

Rebecca: As part of his 2000 presidential campaign, George W. Bush vowed to improve the education of the nation's youth, capitalizing on his achievements as governor of Texas. He referred to these achievements as the "Texas Miracle," and cited impressive statistics showing improvement among minority students and English language learners. In Texas, he mandated high-stakes testing with the TAAS, the Texas Achievement of Academic Skills later to be named the TAKS, the Texas Achievement of Knowledge and Skills, which became the blueprint for the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the first federal law to mandate high-stakes to standardized testing.

Ricky: Although standardized testing was not a "new" idea before NCLB, "high stakes" testing was. With high stakes testing, failing standardized testing scores mean that teachers lose jobs, students don't graduate high school and miss college opportunities. Schools close down, and other schools become overcrowded.

[Scene 2]

Flora: Because King Philip's desire to make Spain the dominant power in sixteenth-century Europe ran counter to Queen Elizabeth's insistence on autonomy for England, _____ was _____.

- a. Reconciliation, assured
- b. Warfare, avoidance
- c. Ruination, impossible
- d. Conflict, inevitable
- e. Diplomacy, Simple

Daniel: The projected sales volume of a video game cartridge is given by the function $s(p) = 3000/2p + a$ where s is the number of cartridges sold, in thousands; p is the price per cartridge, in dollars; and a is a constant. If according to the projections, 100,000 cartridges are sold at \$10 per cartridge, how many cartridges will be sold at \$20 per cartridge?

- a. 20,000
- b. 50,000
- c. 60,000
- d. 150,000
- e. 200,000

Rebecca: A longtime friend on the school board of one of the largest school systems in America did something few public servants are willing to do. He took versions of his state's high-stakes standardized math and reading tests for 10th graders, and he made his scores public. By any reasonable measure, my friend is a success. His now-grown kids are well-educated. He has a big house in a good part of town.

He called me the morning he took the test to say he was sure he hadn't done well, but he had to wait for the results. I asked him about what he thought about the test he'd taken.

Ricky: I won't beat around the bush. The math section had 60 questions. I knew the answer to none of them, but managed to guess ten out of 60 correctly. On the reading test I got 62%. In our system, that's a D and would get me mandatory assignment to a double block of reading instruction. Something is seriously wrong. I have a bachelor of science degree, 2 masters degrees, and 15 credit hours toward a doctorate. If I'd been required to take those 2 tests when I was a 10th grader, my life would almost certainly have been very different. I'd have been told I wasn't "college material," would probably have believed it, and looked for work appropriate for the level of ability that the test said I had.

Rebecca: It makes no sense to me that a test with the potential for shaping a student's entire future has so little apparent relevance to adult, real-world functioning. Who decides the kind of questions and their level of difficulty? Using what criteria? To whom did they have to defend their decisions? I can't escape the conclusion that decisions about the state test in particular and standardized tests in general are being made by individuals who lack perspective and aren't really accountable to anyone.

Flora: The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His task is to "fill" the students with the contents of his narration—contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the

totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity. Worse yet, it turns students into “containers,” into “receptacles” to be “filled” by the teacher. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better the teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are. Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the “banking” model of education, in which the only action allowed to the students consists of receiving, filling, and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away. From apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.

[Scene 3]

Ricky: High school. Hmm. In history I guess, they just seemed like they were, we hit like the high points every single year over and over again. It was like the stuff that would be on a standardized test. No in depth detail about any of them just, re-learning what you learned last year and then we ran out of time. We always ran out of time.

Rebecca: Yeah so then they'd give you a sheet and you'd have to go find the answers in the book. And then we'd watch videos, like every day or every other day.

Ricky: I could do almost nothing and pass. You don't have to do nothing. For me high school was just so easy like, I got maybe 2 C's in high school and I didn't do nothing. I had a teacher, Mrs. James start senior year. Crazy woman. But I didn't do nothing but just get kicked out every day, and I came out with like an 89 average.

Rebecca: Because teachers don't care

Ricky: I mean I feel like they care that's why they pass you honestly

Rebecca: I think they care to get you out of their face. I didn't like my English teacher. She was mean. I mean I don't know if that counts but, I don't know I think there was something about her. I don't think she liked me and she was a really rough grader. I felt like I was in college and I wrote these essays and I was stressed out and she would just pound my papers. I think she got a kick out of pounding my paper.

Ricky: Did she tell you what you did wrong?

Rebecca: No she just told me that it was wrong, and I mean I would ask, well can I do this? And she just handed my paper and was like "Get out of my face."

Ricky: I mean I feel like they told you what they wanted. Well not much of a backstory on why just, oh well you're supposed to do this. They have a pretty tough time, and it's not completely up to them what they teach. It is though I guess up to them how they teach it. Like the school and stuff, they give them a certain curriculum that they have to teach the students. My teachers complained about it,

that they have to teach that stuff. They wanted to break out of the mold but the high school held them back because they have to make sure the test scores were high and whatever. Maybe that's a good thing. I don't know.

Rebecca: I think some of my high school teachers like really handicapped me. By giving us like, the easy way out. Like I know like regular, not AP classes. I feel like I should have taken more AP classes because they prepare you for college, but like the regular classes where a teacher just be like everybody passes. That don't prepare you for college.

Flora: Whether or not we do something about NCLB *now* doesn't matter for *everyone*. It's been making its mark for more than 10 years, *longer* than that in Texas- the blueprint for NCLB. The question now is, what the hell do we do now that these students are in college?

[Scene 4]

Flora: I'm not teaching this semester, but I had one student last semester who tried, she told me she made A's in high school and was clearly a C student. So since I've had some extra time this semester I said I'd be willing to tutor her once a week. We had our first meeting last week and to get her started I asked her to give me a list of things she had strong feelings about. Nothing. And it's hard to find a topic if students aren't interested in anything. It's hard to find something they want to write about. So we found *something* we could write about, school uniforms. I asked her to write a paragraph on the side she was in support of. It was like *this* long. And then it was like twice as much on the *opposing* side. So that's

interesting. It seems like they aren't taught any sort of argumentation to the point where they don't even have basic opinions.

Daniel: I think kids are just getting behind early on and once you are behind you get more behind each year and if you're not identified as an advanced student, you're never pushed into being an advanced student. You know maybe they weren't great readers or writers in 3rd grade. I get so many students that come in and say they have been told for so long that they are bad writers that they think that's all they can be. So I feel like they've got these predefined categories that they're not really trying to break out of, they think "I'm bad at math" or "I'm bad at English" you know, This semester I'm teaching TAMS. And a majority of them think that they are lazy and I'm like... YOU GUYS ARE SIGNED UP FOR TAMS. I'll give you that you're procrastinators. I'll give you that you've terrible time management skills. But do you really fit into the lazy category? So I think that getting behind early on and then defining themselves based on that lead them to not trying for more.

Ricky: I have to remind myself where they're coming from constantly, and grade accordingly which breaks my heart sometimes. But you have to remember that they probably didn't get this before they got here which takes a lot of time recovering. If I have to spend 2 days teaching them how to use EBSCO, that's 2 days I'm not teaching the stuff we're supposed to be doing with our classroom. It's sort of a fact about our situation now. There's no choice, you have to build it in now to cover these things that college freshmen should already know.

Rebecca: Yeah I feel like they're starting over with everything. They don't know grammar, they don't know simple language skills, they don't know current events, they have a really hard time analyzing things in detail, picking out pieces of evidence and interpreting them. I mean I have to walk them step by step through that process, over and over. And then at the end they'll get it but honestly I feel like that you could, you could probably take middle schoolers and put them in my class and they'd be just as prepared. That sounds really harsh but I teach TAMS too, and they're only 16, and sometimes they're way more prepared than the normal freshmen I get.

[Scene 6]

Ricky: Has this ever happened to you?
You work very hard on a paper for English class
And then get a very low grade (like a D or even a D-)
and all because you are the word's liverwurst spoiler.
Proofreading your papers is a matter of the utmost importance.
This is a problem that affects many, many students.
I myself was such a bed spiller once upon a term
that my English teacher in my sophomore year,
Mrs. Myth, said I would never get into a good college.
And that's all I wanted, just to get into a good college.
Not just any community college,
because I wouldn't be happy at any community college.
I needed a place that would offer me intellectual stimulation,

I really need to be challenged, challenged dentally.
I know this makes me sound like a stereo,
but I really wanted to go to an ivory legal colleague.
So I needed to improvement
or gone would be my dream of going to Harvard, Jail, or Prison
(in Prison, New Jersey).
So I got myself a spell checker
and figured I was on Sleazy Street.
But there are several missed aches
that a spell chukker can't can't catch catch.
For instant, if you accidentally leave a word
your spell exchequer won't put it in you.
And God for billing purposes only
you should have serial problems with Tori Spelling
your spell Chekhov might replace a word
with one you had absolutely no detention of using.
Because what do you want it to douch?
It only does what you tell it to douche.
You're the one with your hand on the mouth going clip, clip, clip.
It just goes to show you how embargo
one careless clip of the mouth can be.
Which reminds me of this one time during my Junior Mint.
The teacher read my entire paper on *A Sale of Two Titties*

out loud to all of my assmates.

I'm not joking, I'm totally cereal.

It was the most humidifying experience of my life,
being laughed at pubically.

So do yourself a flavor and follow these two Pisces of advice:

One: There is no prostitute for careful editing.

And three: When it comes to proofreading,
the red pen is your friend.

[Scene 7]

Daniel: Every few months, almost like clockwork, an alarming report comes along purporting to show that the internet is turning everyone's brains, particularly the brains of this generation's children, into mush. Apparently it's that time again. A few days ago, Pearson, a leading educational publishing company, sent out a press release touting a new study. Its title was attention-grabbing. "Schools Facing Learning Crisis Spawned by Internet." It's opening line read: "Schools around the nation are facing learning crisis caused by the Internet...." OOOOOO Tell me more!!!

Pearson's release explained that Department of Education funded the study and that it was administered by Dr. Donald Leu, a former teacher and "national authority on integrating technology into instruction." Leu's study highlighted fallacious reports on the fate of the "tree octopus"- an allegedly endangered species roaming the treetops of the Pacific Northwest. It gets better.

Researchers on Leu's team asked a group of students to hunt down information on the critter, which of course does not exist. But the same researchers pulled a bit of trickery on the students. They directed them to a website dedicated to saving the mythical tree octopus from extinction. And PRESTO, the kids taking part in the study fell for the hoax and even continued to believe in the tree octopus AFTER THE STUDY'S LEADERS EXPLAINED THAT THERE WAS NO SUCH THING.

According to Leu, the founder and director of the New Literacy's Research Lab at the University of Connecticut, the moral of the exercise is simple: "anyone can publish anything on the Internet and today's students are not prepared to critically evaluate the information they find there." It's not about the internet making us stupid, it's just making the point that we're still not teaching our generation to be critical about the Internet.

Flora: Critical thinking? I'm just not good at it. Like when my English class in high school had those assignments where we had to read the lines and think about those lines....I'm not good at that.

Rebecca: You mean like that poetry stuff?

Flora: Yeah.

Rebecca: I suck, I cannot do that. People in my class, the smart AP people, I'd ask them for help. That's what I'd do.

Flora: I don't want to say I'm not a thinker but like, I'm just not used to like, looking at a paper and like the answer's right there, like, they give me a question and I go

straight to the paper and find it. So for them to give me something where we like, have a sentence, what does that sentence really mean?

Ricky: I like the kind of stuff like that. That's my strength. I love that stuff, it's intriguing.

Flora: How did you get good at it?

Ricky: Writing music. I write music. Like meaningful writing music. It makes you want to make something. You hear something that's so amazing it makes you wanna make something that amazing. I've been doing poetry and rapping since 7th grade. I think that's why I like English, even when you're looking at literature, I mean, I know it's not rap but, rap is like art. It comes at you like "how do you use words" and it clings to me like, I love that stuff and I'm always looking for how you say things in a different way instead of saying it straight up, or simply. I mean, not making it complex but sounding like a simple sentence. I don't know I just love it. Every song I hear now I'm looking for something that means something else, like a twist ending, a double meaning.

Flora: I feel like I'm getting better at it. He [to Ricky] helps me a lot because he is into this music thing. I'd be listening to music and I don't get it

Ricky: yeah I try to make her get it too.

Flora: I do and I mean, I get it, I have to sit down and look at the lyrics, and sometimes he'll have to explain it and then I'll get it. It'll only take him like a minute though and he'll get it right off the bat. Now he's got me to where I see the lyrics and I can at least try to analyze the songs myself.

[Scene 8]

Rebecca: Critical thinking and analytical thinking. They don't have any idea what that is. A lot of the time the major problem I have with people is mostly summarizing things. Summary summary summary. And I'm like, you're not telling me anything, you're not thinking critically about this, and I had, I remember I had one student who he was very quiet, and I think he was just shy, and I think he lacked confidence. And he finally came to me toward the end of the semester and he's like, I'm having a really hard time with my final paper, and he's been summarizing the whole semester. So I'm trying to explain to him that this is how you analyze something. And he just doesn't get it. And I think that affects their confidence. If they come to a college classroom and they don't know how to do to that, they lack the confidence and they don't want to say anything. They're afraid it's going to be wrong. And in a lit class or an English class there is no right answer. It's *not* a math class.

Daniel: Or the students you get who think there's a right or a wrong answer and they're a little more advanced so they'll try to feed you the answer. I always tell them that's a beauty queen response. Because they're trying to feed you what they think you want and I'm like come on, push a little farther, critically engage a bit. I already know the standard response, like yes, racism is bad.

Ricky: And if they're taking a test they know how to do multiple choice, they know how to do true false, they're really good at that, they get an essay question...no idea what to do. And I think...I think they are being taught to a test.

Daniel: They ARE being taught to a test and critical thinking is not conducive to rote memorization and regurgitation. In fact if you're critically thinking, you're

getting closer and closer to saying “this is bullshit” but even the writing they are required to do in high school is in history which is reporting the facts or in English which is book reports. So really, I don’t think there’s a lot of place in the public school system that requires students to make a formal argument.

Flora: Teaching to the test I think directly correlates to No Child Left Behind, in the high school education system where schools are forced to have their students test, in that testing correlates directly to funding and teachers jobs. Their work becomes less about the experience of education and more about the money. Yeah, the money. And making sure the students can regurgitate the information that gets the money.

Rebecca: I am a leading hater of exams. Not only in making them up and giving them and taking them but more than anything of marking them. I think possibly taking them is the worst. I think that what you learn on exams doesn’t necessarily go very deep. I like what Carl Rogers says that the only kind of learning that he’s interested in is what he calls self-appropriated learning. Learning that makes a difference to you. And I find that exams have next to nothing to do with that.

[Scene 9]

Ricky: I think one of the things that has made college so difficult for so many is this idea that it’s mandatory- that it’s just the thing you do when you graduate high school. I took a year off, so many people figure out the hard way by wasting time and money that 18 is just too fucking young. There should be less stigma around making different choices. A college education is not meant for everyone.

[To Audience] Why are you here?

Daniel: Honestly, I don't really care about education. Honestly speaking. But I really want to be a film maker and I really want a degree so I can be a big icon in film making.

Rebecca: The reason why I'm here, is, I'm not all that sure actually. I just knew I had to go to college.

Flora: I'm here because I'm the first one to go to college and I didn't want to go far and this college was cheaper so....and I suppose I need a degree.

Ricky: You know it's just the wrong reason to get an education. And maybe you *know* you want one but you don't know why or what in. Great! Take some time off and figure that out. You've been in school for TWELVE years. Aren't you tired?

Daniel: My school was like, I didn't really try at all, so when I came up here, first semester, I had that same attitude and it didn't turn out good.

Ricky: Not good?

Daniel: I failed 3 out of 5. Yeah. I got 2 C's and 3 F's.

Ricky: Hi everyone, thanks for coming to my focus group. I want to start today by talking a little about your high school experience. What kind of classes did you take in high school?

Rebecca: English classes.

Daniel: And woodshop. That was a good class, woodshop.

Ricky: Okay, lots of English, what else did you take?

Flora: I was in band. [long silence]

Ricky: Did you take history classes? Math classes

Everyone: Yeah

Ricky: Okay, what kind of things did you talk about in your history classes?

Daniel: *[sigh]* History.

Ricky: You know what? You don't want to be here, fine.

[Flora gets up and walks away]

Ricky: You know what your problem is? You guys just don't give a shit about your education. I don't want to waste my time on someone that isn't going to pay attention. I'm not here to wipe your ass I'm not your dad. I'm not your babysitter. Take some responsibility or get out of my face.

Daniel: Well maybe it's because you don't bother to do your fucking job. You get tenure and then you sit on your ass because you get paid whether or not I pass. You don't care about me I'm just a fucking number to you, just a way to get a fucking paycheck. If you did your job and taught me what I need to know in a way that makes me pay attention maybe I would give a shit.

Ricky: See that's your problem. It's all about you isn't it. It's my responsibility to make you do something. I have to make YOU pay attention? That's your business dude.

Rebecca: Well maybe if you would come down off of your big ivory tower you could see down here that we're BORED OUT OF OUR MINDS. I DON'T CARE ABOUT RHETORIC.

Ricky: WELL I HATE TO BREAK IT TO YOU BUT THAT'S LIFE SWEETHEART. THE PROBLEM IS YOU'VE NEVER AHD TO THINK CRITICALLY IN YOUR LIFE

Daniel: Excuse me? What did you just say? “Think critically” Oh real original. Such a teacher thing. Like that will ever make a difference when I get a job.

Ricky: Actually it will. Maybe you should drop out try to get a job, then you’ll be BEGGING me to teach you rhetoric and critical thinking

[Absolute Chaos Screaming]

Flora: STOP IT! *This* doesn’t help us learn anything. Ivan Illyich says in the medical system, if a certain treatment doesn’t cure a disease, that’s one kind of failure. However, if a kind of treatment causes a disease, that’s called iatrogenic. And apparently it’s the 3rd largest cause of death in America. Diseases which are caused by the physicians. So we have, I think, the same kind of problem in education. Iatrogenic failure. We are doing damage.

[Scene 10/Intro into Forum Theatre]

Flora: This performance was scripted based on focus groups conducted here at UNT with both college freshmen and instructors that teach college freshmen. These challenges are real and should not be ignored. The second half of this performance is based in the work of performance scholar Augusto Boal, who developed the method of Forum Theatre. In Forum Theatre, we the cast of the show will perform short scenarios in which you already have some background from this performance. Once you have seen that scenario, you the audience will be invited to solve the problem in that scenario by either taking the place of a character or creating a new character. I will be here to help you along should you need it as well as the cast. There are 3 rules

- 1) No magic solutions. For example, you can't set a premise like "NCLB never existed" and you can't take the place of the character that is causing the problem. If you do this, I will simply tell you that it is a magic solution, and that you must think of something else.
- 2) No talky talky. If you would like to propose a solution, you or a friend must come on stage, no dictation from your seat. Again, the cast and I are here to help you, we want to solve the problem as much as you do.
- 3) Once the audience collectively agrees the solution is a good one, we will move onto the next.

[Transitional music: Acoustic cover of "Another Brick in the Wall" by Keller Williams]

Scenarios

- 1) Student Responsibility
- 2) Apathy
- 3) Writing Skills
- 4) Critical Thinking
- 5) Student Perception of College

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