

THE DISCOURSE OF TEACHER POLICY REFORM: AN ANALYSIS OF POLICY
NARRATIVES SURROUNDING TENURE ELIMINATION, PERFORMANCE PAY,
AND PERFORMANCE-BASED EVALUATION IN THREE STATES

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ABSTRACT

Christopher Harrison: The Discourse of Teacher Policy Reform: An Analysis of Policy Narratives Surrounding Tenure Elimination, Performance Pay, and Performance-Based Evaluation in Three States
(Under the direction of Lora Cohen-Vogel)

This study examines the policy narratives constructed by actors in three states – Florida, Louisiana, and North Carolina - as they debated the adoption of key teacher policy reforms: tenure elimination, performance pay, and performance-based evaluation. Through analysis of video and audio records capturing numerous committee meetings and floor debates, as well as policy actors’ discourse in the print media, it describes the narratives that policy actors constructed around these contentious issues, explores the differences and similarities in narratives between state contexts, and unpacks the underlying assertions about teaching, learning, and the role of schooling that actors’ policy “stories” construct.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Research tells us that public policy tends to be relatively stable over time (Baumgartner & Jones, 1995; Lindblom, 1959). Baumgartner & Jones (1991), for example, assert that seismic changes in policy are rare, and that, once set, “the grand lines of policy may be settled for decades” (p. 1044). Institutions and constituencies take root in these “grand lines”, often acting to slow or derail efforts to alter the status quo (Lindblom, 1959). Even when change does occur, forces of stability – including political resistance, institutional barriers and cost factors – often constrain policy actors within the realm of incremental, slow and evolutionary change (Schulman, 1975; Lindblom, 1959). As such, moments of tidal shift are rare – the product of a fortuitous alignment of systemic factors and the alteration of both individual players and social perspectives (Boushey, 2012; McLendon & Cohen-Vogel, 2008; Wong & Shen, 2002; Mintrom, 2000; Kingdon, 1994; Baumgartner & Jones, 1991).

In spite of these stabilizing forces, however, large scale shifts in the “equilibrium” surrounding policy arenas do occur – albeit infrequently. Within moments of change, or “windows” as Kingdon (1994) terms them, policy entrepreneurs may move to build coalitions, marshal resources, and link problems with solutions as alterations in political and institutional contexts briefly open the way for action (Mintrom, 1997). Even if actors are able to capitalize on the fortuitous alignment of factors that allows for large-scale, systemic change, significant policy shifts require substantial momentum and continuing support to

maintain integrity as changes move from enactment to implementation (Holyoke, et al., 2009; Lacireno-Paquet & Holyoke, 2007; Schulman, 1975).

One important aspect of policy actors' efforts to initiate, propel and sustain such "moments" of change is their ability to frame them through discourse by defining policy problems, constructing logical ties between problems and solutions, and elucidating a vision for change that resonates with potential supporters. To accomplish this, policy actors from a wide variety of backgrounds weave "stories" – or policy narratives – which frame policy issues, define the characters and mechanisms underlying them, define policy problems and distil complex issues and processes into concise frameworks that legitimize certain ideas, values, and positions, and delegitimize others (Stone, 2012; Fischer, 2003; Benford & Snow, 2000; Edelman, 1993; Edelman, 1985).

Through the production and reinforcement of these narratives, policy actors construct "a particular kind of social world" for constituents, allies and opponents, "with specified heroes and villains, deserving and undeserving people, and a set of public policies that are rationalized by the construction of social problems by which they become solutions" (Bennett & Edelman, 1989, p. 159). If successful, these "stories" frame actors' definitions of policy problems and solutions as "obvious" and "logical"; as opponents of change engage in policy debate through the construction of their own counter-narratives, their "stories" compete for legitimacy and attention (Marshall, 2010; Cohen-Vogel & Hunt, 2007; Cochran-Smith & Fries; 2001; Portz, 1996). Ultimately, the dominant narratives in this discursive contest may become the foundation for a "common sense" understanding of how the world should work that undergirds a new, stable policy equilibrium.

In this study, I seek to capitalize on three such “moments” of change, as three U.S. states moved to alter the policy landscape surrounding key elements of the teaching profession: teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting policies. As actors across these three states worked to initiate or oppose change in this historically stable policy arena, they constructed and utilized numerous policy narratives to support their chosen reforms. This work attempts to document and describe those narratives, and to unpack the ways in which they reveal policy actors’ underlying conceptual understandings regarding the educative process, the profession of teaching and the role of schooling in our society. In doing so, I seek to answer three key research questions:

1. What narratives did actors in each state construct as they worked to support or oppose reforms to teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting policies?
2. What underlying understandings regarding education, schooling, and the profession of teaching do these narratives reveal?
3. What similarities and differences can be observed in the policy narratives actors constructed across the three states?

To engage in the work of answering these questions, I begin - in this chapter - by constructing a broad overview of the history and research surrounding teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting policies in the U.S. context. I then briefly describe and review the specific pieces of legislation around which actors in my states of interest – Florida, Louisiana and North Carolina – engaged in debate and narrative construction as they worked to reform the teaching profession in their states. Then, in Chapter 2, I review the existing literature on the roles and importance of policy narratives in the policy process, and adapt a framework – based upon the existing research – for identifying and classifying such narratives in my data.

I follow this, in Chapter 3, by describing the process by which I selected my states of interest, the nature of my data, the methods by which I analyzed them, and my analytic framework. I conclude by describing my findings in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, and by offering conclusions and implications for future research in Chapter 7.

Teacher Contracting, Compensation and Evaluation – A Historical Perspective

Policies surrounding the profession of teaching have, historically, remained fairly stable over time. The boundary lines defining key elements of the profession – compensation, terms of employment and the means by which teachers’ work is evaluated – have, in fact, remained relatively constant for the better part of a century. Young teachers entering the profession in the last few decades could, largely, look forward to a career that would be similar to that of their forebears – salary schedules marked by measured progression according to time in service and credentials, contractual protection from capricious termination after a probationary period, and a system of evaluation largely defined by their local context.

While policy action surrounding the profession of teaching has been relatively stable over the last several decades, researchers have spent considerable time and attention studying the field. Since the publication of James Coleman’s (1966) *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, and its finding that differences between schools accounted for relatively little variance in student achievement, numerous studies have questioned the importance of teachers in driving students’ success. While more recent work has not, by and large, disproven Coleman’s (1966) assertions regarding the relative importance of environmental and contextual factors in explaining differences in students’ performance, findings do

indicate that the quality of teachers plays a significant role in explaining variance attributable to differences between schools (Hanushek, 2010; Kain & Staiger, 2008; Aaronson, Barrow & Sandler, 2007; Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004). Concomitant with the empirical understanding that teachers do make a substantial difference for students has been the development of a significant body of research examining the efficacy of various systems for incentivizing, evaluating, and retaining teachers. The following sections describe this body of research, and chart the general trajectory of policy surrounding these elements of the teaching profession over time.

Teacher Compensation

Compensating teachers based upon some conception of “merit” is nothing new in the context of American educational policy; what has shifted is the popular conception of how “merit” should be defined. As the country’s system of public schools developed around the turn of the century, for example, teachers in systems across the USA were typically paid on the basis of a number of factors perceived to be indicative of “merit” – generally by grade level, with secondary teachers typically earning higher pay than their peers due to the perception that their work required more skill (Springer & Gardner, 2010). Several other factors played a significant role in determining teacher compensation, as well – gender and political patronage being of particular saliency. As a result, white, male teachers tended to enjoy significantly higher pay for their work than their female or non-white colleagues (Springer & Gardner, 2010; Springer, 2009).

As teaching became increasingly professionalized, actors worked to deconstruct this relatively inequitable framework of teacher compensation across the nation. Burgeoning

professional organizations like the National Education Association (NEA) and labor unions like the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) led the push to create a more equitable foundation upon which compensation could be based, and to overturn the system of local patronage that often defined teacher hiring, firing, and pay (Springer, 2010; Murnane & Cohen, 1985). By the 1960's, virtually every public school system in America had adopted a single (or uniform) salary schedule – a compensation framework for teaching that linked increases in base pay to a number of factors deemed to be indicative of professional growth and relative “merit”. In general, these included teachers’ years of experience, in addition to certification status and the acquisition of further education and advanced degrees (Springer, 2010; Springer, 2009; Murnane & Cohen, 1985).

These single salary schedules have, by and large, been the shape of teacher compensation for the last 50 years (Springer, Houck & Guthrie, 2008). While they largely promote and achieve the equitable distribution of compensation that they were formulated to provide, policy actors and researchers have pointed out several potential shortcomings of such systems. First, and foremost, a number of studies indicate that the factors leading to salary increases under these schedules are potentially poor indicators of teacher quality and weak predictors of student achievement (Aaronson, Barrow & Sander, 2007; Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain, 2005; Wayne & Youngs, 2003; Hanushek, 1997). Research, for example, indicates that a teachers’ possession of an advanced academic degree is related to student achievement in only certain circumstances – generally in the case that the teacher’s advanced degree is in the subject area that she teaches (Eide, Goldhaber & Brewer, 2004; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). Time in service and teacher experience share a similarly complex relationship with student achievement. While research (Ronfeldt, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2013;

Darling-Hammond, 1999) does indicate that teachers' experience – particularly within the first few years – matters for achievement, studies (Goe, 2007; Rice, 2003) also indicate a “plateauing” effect of experience, in which teacher effectiveness appears to grow for their first five years, after which gains in student achievement level off.

In response to these perceived shortcomings, policy actors have experimented with numerous attempts to reform teacher compensation policy over the last few decades – with little lasting success (Springer & Gardner, 2010; Springer, 2009; Dee & Keys, 2004; Ballou, 2001; Jacobson, 1998). These alternative compensation systems generally seek to redefine “merit” in a way that more clearly ties teacher compensation to educational outcomes – usually measures of student achievement like standardized tests. This new generation of “pay for performance” systems has typically taken the form of performance-based bonuses, awarded at either the school or individual level (Springer & Gardner, 2010; Springer, 2009; Jacobson, 1998). The theory of action underlying such policies is that performance-based incentive structures will drive teachers to maximize classroom efficiency and instructional quality, with commensurate gains in student achievement.

Research indicates, however, that the returns from such pay-for-performance compensation structures have been modest, at best. Those studies that do find significant effects on student achievement, to date, have largely been conducted in contexts very different from the American public school system (Muralidharan & Sundaraman, 2009; Springer, 2009; Glewwe, Ilias & Kremer, 2004). Several studies examining pay-for-performance policies in U.S. public schools – including a recent, rigorous, randomized control trial conducted by the Project on Incentives in Teaching - indicate that performance incentives have very modest effects on outcomes (Springer, et al., 2011; Dee & Keys, 2004;

Eberts, Hollenbeck & Stone, 2002). Moreover, research indicates that performance-based incentive structures do not, by and large, appear to impact the intermediary forces that might have downstream impact on achievement – namely, teachers’ instructional strategies and practices (Yuan, Marsh, Hamilton & Springer, 2013; Cohen & Murnane, 1985).

A number of studies have investigated the mechanics of “merit” or “performance-pay” systems to understand why they tend to produce relatively weak and ephemeral effects. Such research indicates that many of the experiments in performance pay have failed on a number of fronts. One key weakness – recognized by both proponents and critics of performance-based compensation policies – lies with the tenuous link that many incentive systems make to actual teacher effectiveness or performance (Springer & Gardner, 2010; Springer, 2009; Jacobson, 1998; Hanushek, 1997; Cohen & Murnane, 1985; Murnane & Cohen, 1985). Some research indicates that, given the notorious difficulty that administrators have in separating teachers’ performance from systemic and contextual factors that impact achievement, educators may fail to respond to performance incentives because they do not perceive that they can reliably expect such frameworks to reward their true effort (Yuan, Marsh, Hamilton & Springer, 2013). Similarly, the effects of performance-pay systems may have been blunted by numerous potential design flaws, including inadequate efforts to explain the mechanics of bonus systems to local actors, relatively insignificant rewards for performance, and poor systems of support and capacity building to assist teachers in improving their practice (Clotfelter, Glennie, Ladd & Vigdor, 2008; Jacobson, 1998; Cohen & Murnane, 1985; Murnane & Cohen, 1985). Finally, a number of studies have found that monetary incentives, in general, appear to be a fairly weak lever for adjusting teachers’ behavior – instead, evidence indicates that teachers’ decisions are far more sensitive to a

variety of contextual and environmental factors related to their schools and the students they teach (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007; Hanushek, Kain & Rivkin, 2004; Loeb & Page, 2000; Hanushek, Kain & Rivkin, 1999).

Researchers have, similarly, identified elements of performance-based “merit” pay systems that have proven functional over the years. First, evidence indicates that resistance to performance-pay plans may be less strident when teachers enjoy a relatively high level of base pay (Ballou & Podgursky, 1993; Cohen & Murnane, 1985). Performance incentives may also find greater acceptance when they are awarded discreetly, and in a fashion that recognizes team effort as opposed to individual superiority (Cohen & Murnane, 1985; Murnane & Cohen, 1985). Other strands of research note that, given the mixed evidence regarding pecuniary bonuses’ ability to drive effects, structuring performance incentives to reward teachers with non-pecuniary benefits - like additional professional development time or leadership opportunities – may be an effective alternative to monetary rewards (Firestone, 1991).

Teacher Contracting

Much like policy surrounding teacher compensation, the lines defining the nature of teacher contracting – which set the terms of teacher hiring, dismissal and tenure of employment – largely developed over the course of the early 20th century (Coleman, Schroth, Molinaro & Green, 2006; Sherman, 1973; Betts, 1934; Elsbree, 1934). As teaching developed and grew as a profession, groups like the NEA and AFT fought vigorously to claim employment protections for teachers, in addition to compensation reforms. A key, and hotly debated, policy shift during this period was the extension of academic *tenure*

protections – historically provided to educators in higher education – to teachers in the nation’s rapidly expanding public primary and secondary schools. Tenure systems have largely been defined by two key provisions – first, the granting of continuing or perpetual employment to teachers after some probationary period and, second, the institution of due process systems that shield educators from arbitrary dismissal (Hassel, et al., 2011; Marshall, Baucom & Webb, 1998). It is important to note that neither of these provisions is a guarantee of employment in perpetuity, regardless of employee conduct or performance; virtually all existing tenure systems in the American context allow for the termination of teachers under contract for a variety of terms – extending from poor performance to less easily defined offenses, like “moral turpitude” (Hassel, et al., 2011; Smith & Handler, 1979; Sherman, 1973). Continuing employment, as such, largely refers to the lack of a designated termination point in a teacher’s employment contract.

By the early 1920’s, several states across the U.S. had either full tenure or partial tenure systems in place (Betts, 1934). Despite significant debate around such policies, tenure systems spread across the country in “fits and starts” throughout the middle of the 20th century, until they became largely ubiquitous by the 1970’s (Coleman, Schroth, Molinaro & Green, 2006). In general, the details of these tenure systems are largely similar, with the greatest variability concentrated in the length of the probationary period prior to the granting of tenure – ranging from 1 to 7 years across states, with most awarding tenure at the 3-5 year point. In general, few states hold stipulations regarding the awarding to tenure outside of satisfactory employment for the duration of the probationary period (Hassel, et al., 2011; Marshall, Baucom & Webb, 1998; Smith & Handler, 1979).

Proponents of tenure systems point to several justifications for providing more aggressive employment protections for educators: the need to ensure that educators are able to broach potentially controversial topics with their students without fear of reprisal, the uncertainty surrounding performance evaluation engendered by poorly understood technologies of production in the classroom, the high resource costs associated with training, acclimating and mentoring new hires, and the need to mitigate potential damage to students from high rates of turnover among teachers (Hassel, et al., 2011; Smith & Handler, 1979; Sherman, 1975; Byse, 1959; Beale, 1936). Critics of tenure policies, for their part, tend to assert that tenure protections may unduly constrain administrators from taking necessary personnel action, protecting incompetent or underperforming teachers from dismissal and, by extension, harming students (Weisburg, et al., 2009; Hess & Maranto, 2000; Sherman, 1973).

To date, there is little empirical evidence regarding the relationship between tenure policies and educational outcomes, including student achievement (Jacob, 2010; Smith & Handler, 1979). Some studies (Strunk, 2011; Strunk & Grissom, 2010) do indicate a relationship between stronger collective bargaining agreements – which structure teacher contracting systems in many states – and lower student achievement; they do not, however, directly assess the link between tenure and students’ performance. Dismissal rates for teachers do tend to be higher in private schools, in which educators largely operate without the contractual protections constraining public school administrations. The gap in dismissal rates between the public and private sectors is not significant, however, and the number of teachers dismissed for poor performance is low across both contexts (Jacob, 2007; Ingersoll, 2001). Research, in fact, indicates that the majority of teacher attrition occurs during the probationary period; furthermore, evidence indicates that those teachers that do attrit during

this period appear to be lower performing, and indicates that administrators are largely capable of identifying and “pushing” poor performers out prior to the point at which they would achieve tenured status (Jacob, 2011; Boyd, et al., 2008).

S.M. Johnson (1983), in fact, indicates that many aspects of collective bargaining agreements tend to be mediated by labor relations and cultures in local contexts, leading to variable enforcement and limitations on the ability of school leaders to manage their personnel. A number of recent studies affirm this, finding that contractual constraints upon administrators may be less binding, with regard to personnel actions like transfers, assignment and dismissal, than general narratives dictate (Jacob, 2010; Price, 2009; Hess & Loup, 2008; Cohen-Vogel & Osborne Lampkin, 2007). In those cases where contractual protections have been loosened or eliminated, there is little evidence to indicate that administrators have significantly changed their behavior or engaged in widespread dismissal of teachers – it is unclear, however, if this is a result of poor evaluation systems or contextual factors, like local politics, that constrain administrative action (Jacob, 2011; Jacob, 2010; Coleman, Schroth, Molinaro & Green, 2006; Tucker, 1990). Some evidence, however, indicates that increased perception of risk may impact some teacher behaviors – attendance rates, for example – at least among probationary teachers (Jacob, 2010).

Few scholars suggest the outright elimination of tenure systems as a means to improve student achievement – among those that do, most highlight evidence regarding improvements in the speed of dismissal and reductions in the cost associated with personnel action as positive outcomes of reform, in the absence of evidence regarding gains in student performance (Weisburg, et al., 2009; Hess & Maranto, 2000). More advocate for revisions to existing tenure systems or contracting policies, largely with a focus on toughening the

process for tenure attainment. Some researchers, for instance, advocate for an increase in the length of probationary periods, noting that, in systems with terms as short as a year, there is little opportunity for poor performers to “wash out” of the profession (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010). Other scholars advocate for stricter performance screens prior to the provision of tenure status, or for wider administrative latitude to terminate poor performers once tenure status has been granted (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010; Jacob, 2010; Hanushek, 2009; Smith & Handler, 1979). Goldhaber & Hansen (2010) and Hanushek (2008) both find that termination of the bottom quartile of tenured performers – and their replacement with higher performing teachers – would have significant impact on student achievement. Both studies, however, note that increasing the “risk” inherent to the teaching provision may have unforeseen impacts on the labor market surrounding teaching, and on potential entrants to the profession.

Identifying Effective Teachers

Not only does research indicate that teachers are a singularly important element of school success, findings also indicate that “higher performing” teachers confer substantially greater benefit to their students than those at the bottom of the performance distribution (Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004). Aaronson, Barrow & Sander (2007), for example, find that “over two semesters, a one standard deviation increase in math teacher quality translates into an increase in math achievement equal to 22% of the average annual gain” (Aaronson, Barrow & Sander, 2007, p. 96). Hanushek (1992) finds, similarly, that “the difference in student performance in a single academic year from having a good as opposed to a bad teacher can be more than one full year of standardized achievement” (p. 113). Research also finds, however, that forces of student and teacher sorting may restrict certain students’ access to the kinds of teachers that drive the gains described above, and that the

benefits of learning from a “high quality” teacher are inequitably distributed in the public school system (Boyd, et al., 2008; Cohen-Vogel, Feng & Osborne-Lampkin, 2013; Houck, 2010; Lankford, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2002; Ronfeldt, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2012).

Another significant piece of the puzzle regarding teacher quality – and its impact on driving student achievement – lies with the current lack of consensus on how to recognize those “high quality” teachers that may make a difference. Several studies indicate that traditionally defined indicators of “quality” teachers tend to have weak impacts on student achievement – these include teachers’ years of experience, certification status, and level of education (Phillips, 2010; Goldhaber, 2008; Aaronson, Barrow & Sander, 2007; Goe, 2007). Some researchers have suggested alternate indicators – including the ranking of teachers’ post-secondary institutions and teachers’ own scores on achievement tests – that show some promise for predicting their ability to drive student gains (Goldhaber, 2008; Eide, Goldhaber & Brewer, 2004; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). By and large, however, these elements are only loosely connected (as will be discussed below) to elements of the profession – including compensation, hiring, firing and evaluation.

Moreover, there appears to be significant lack of consensus among researchers regarding how effective teaching practices can and should be evaluated within the school context. Authors indicate, for example, that there is a wide disconnect from the technical evaluations required by personnel policies – dependent on “predetermined” standards of teacher knowledge, competencies and skills – and the formative needs of professional teachers seeking to improve their individual practice (Darling-Hammond, Wise & Pease, 1983; Soar, Medley & Coker, 1983). Compounding the issue, there is significant scholarly debate regarding the productive “technology” underlying classroom practice – there is

relative lack of clarity, for example, regarding the effectiveness of instructional practices, modes of organization within the classroom, and the nature and form of classroom curricula (Darling-Hammond, Wise & Pease, 1983; Hanushek, 1979). That said, evidence does indicate that the evaluative frameworks utilized by school administrations do appear to be capable of identifying teacher “quality” – particularly for those teachers at the top and bottom of the performance distribution – and that teachers’ scores on such evaluations are related to measures of student achievement and growth (Jacobs & Lefgren, 2008; Milanowski, 2004).

In the absence of clearly defined predictors of teachers’ ability, and with the growth of performance monitoring systems across states, several scholars have shifted toward an emphasis on evaluating educators based upon the outcomes of their students – typically, models that attempt to isolate teachers’ “value-added” to students achievement growth across years (Hanushek, 2010; Kain & Staiger, 2008; Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004). Much of this work is econometric in nature, using sophisticated statistical methods – including value-added analyses – to model teachers’ contributions to student learning as part of a “production function” of education. Conceptually, these models serve as useful tools for understanding the connections between inputs and outputs in productive processes; educational production, however, may present significant challenges for such models, given the relative imprecise nature of inputs in the educative process, the highly contested definitions of educational outcomes, and uncertainty surrounding the “technology” of production between them (Hanushek, 2007; (Hanushek, 1979).

A Moment of Change

While movement in the “equilibrium” surrounding teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting policies has been relatively stable over time, the traditional lines delineating the profession of teaching have begun to buckle. Several states – in the name of increasingly stringent accountability motivated by federal policies and perceptions of flagging performance – have taken aggressive action to reshape the ways in which teachers’ work is incentivized and monitored. This moment of change has been facilitated by a number of factors – institutional and political – and represents an interesting and informative moment in the study of education policy.

This study examines one aspect of this “moment” of change surrounding teacher policy reform in three states – Florida, Louisiana, and North Carolina. Each of these states, in the years since 2010, has taken the lead in substantially altering their policies for compensating, contracting, and evaluating teachers. Long-standing institutional elements, like teacher “tenure” and traditional teacher salary schedules, have either been significantly weakened or eliminated entirely in all three states under a tide of legislative action. As noted by several policy frameworks (e.g. Baumgartner & Jones, 1995; Kingdon, 1991), these changes were presaged by significant political realignments in each state. Floridian conservatives, for example, strengthened control over their state legislature in both 2010 and 2012. In 2010, North Carolina’s General Assembly traded party hands for the first time in over a century – similarly, the Louisiana House of Representatives changed hands for the first time since Reconstruction. Finally, executive seats shifted in both Florida and North Carolina, as moderate governors were replaced by more conservative rivals in 2010 and 2012, respectively. In each case, the balance of power between political actors shifted; as

new players moved in, new policy ideas – and, with them, policy narratives – took the stage and competed for dominance.

Florida's Student Success Act

Florida's Student Success Act was the first major piece of legislation to move toward redefining teacher policy in these three states, representing a sweeping change to Florida's policies surrounding teacher evaluation, compensation and contracting. Following a vociferous two year debate, which began with the introduction of Senate Bill (S.B.) 6 – the first iteration of the Student Success Act – in 2010, the Floridian legislature passed the Student Success Act to newly elected conservative governor Rick Scott's desk in 2011. Along the way, the debate over reforms to the teaching profession in Florida engendered strong, vocal resistance from professional groups like the Florida Educator's Association (FEA), nationwide attention in the news media, and, ultimately, played a significant role in the political fortunes of outgoing Governor Charlie Crist, whose veto of the original 2010 Student Success Act delayed its passage until the state's executive seat was filled by a more sympathetic replacement. Following its signature into law in 2011, the provisions of the Student Success Act were challenged by the FEA in state court, but were ultimately upheld.

The first major component of the Student Success Act was the creation of teacher evaluation systems linked closely to educational outcomes – measured, largely, by value-added models of student learning growth. Under the law, “instructional personnel and school administrator performance evaluations must be based upon the performance of students assigned to their classrooms or schools” (Florida State Senate, 2011, p. 7). More specifically, the law requires that “at least 50 percent of a performance evaluation must be based upon

data and indicators of student learning growth assessed annually by statewide assessments or, for subjects and grade levels not measured by statewide assessments, by school district assessments” (Florida State Senate, 2011, p. 8). The remaining proportion of teachers’ evaluations is left largely to district discretion, although the Student Success Act does stipulate that “evaluation criteria used when annually observing classroom teachers...must include indicators based upon each of the Florida Educator Accomplished Practices” (Florida State Senate, 2011, p. 9). In practice, several districts have responded to this stipulation by adopting observation rubrics like the Marzano “iObservation” system.

With this new system of evaluation as a foundation, the Student Success Act implemented new structures for identifying teachers of “quality” and rewarding them in accordance with their performance. Based upon their evaluations, teachers are assigned to a performance category – specifically, teachers are rated as “highly qualified”, “qualified”, “needs improvement” or “developing” (in the case of teachers in their first 3 years of employment), and “unsatisfactory” (Florida State Senate, 2011). Under the law, districts were then required to “adopt a performance salary schedule that provides annual salary adjustments for instructional personnel and school administrators based upon performance” (Florida State Senate, 2011, p. 22). This salary schedule reserves these annual “salary adjustments” for teachers achieving highly effective or effective performance ratings; unlike bonuses or one-time stipends, these “adjustments” are intended to be permanent increases to the educator’s base pay. In addition to these incentives, the law provides for one-time salary supplements to incentivize a number of educator choices or actions, including: assignment to a Title 1 eligible school, assignment to a school in the bottom two categories of the school improvement system, certification and teaching in critical teacher shortage areas, and

assignment of additional academic responsibilities (Florida State Senate, 2011). Notably absent are opportunities for salary increases rewarding greater experience (in terms of years of service), or possession of an advanced degree.

The final major initiative set forth by the bill was a significant reconfiguration of teacher contracting and retention practices. The Student Success Act stipulated that instructors hired after June 1, 2011 were no longer eligible for “continuing contracts”; instead, the bill required that teachers only be hired through the use of annual contracts. The law defines an annual contract as “an employment contract for a period of no longer than 1 school year which the district school board may choose to award or not award without cause” (Florida State Senate, 2011, p. 25). Teachers in their first year of employment with a district are hired under a modified annual contract, identified as a “probationary contract” – under this agreement, the probationary teacher can be relieved of duty, or voluntarily depart their position, without penalty. Full annual contracts may, according to the legislation, be offered to instructional personnel only if the employee: “holds an active professional certification or temporary certificate”, “has been recommended by the district school superintendent for the annual contract based upon the individual’s evaluation”, and “has not received two consecutive annual performance evaluation ratings of unsatisfactory, two annual performance evaluation ratings of unsatisfactory within a 3-year period, or three consecutive annual performance evaluation ratings of needs improvement or a combination of needs improvement and unsatisfactory” (Florida State Senate, 2011, p.26). Ultimately, the annual contracting system structured by S.B. 736 offers significantly greater latitude for districts to make personnel decisions, eliminating “tenure” by allowing the districts to simply choose not

to offer personnel new annual contracts, as well as defining a broad set of “just cause” parameters for the termination of an in-process annual contract.

Louisiana’s H.B. 974

Louisiana’s reconstruction of its systems for compensating, contracting and evaluating teachers encompassed multiple pieces of legislation, spread over the state’s 2010-2013 legislative sessions. Teacher evaluations were reformed first in the state – establishing a strong link between evaluations and student performance – in the late spring of 2010. Two years later, legislators in Louisiana moved to tie this new evaluation framework to other elements of the teaching profession – namely, compensation and contracting – under H.B. 974. The legislation was signed into law in April of 2012, despite staunch opposition by numerous groups. The law – which also constructed a voucher system in the state – was, like the “Student Success Act” - challenged in court, and was ultimately upheld in late 2013.

As noted, the first major reform adopted by policy actors in the state centered on teacher evaluation. Like Florida’s Student Success Act, Louisiana’s legislators took steps to actively tie teacher evaluations to measures of student performance. Under the new law – H.B. 1033 - at least 50% of teacher performance ratings were required to be derived from value-added measures of student growth on state-approved assessments, with the remainder of teachers’ scores accounted for by district-determined observational measures (Louisiana Statute §17:3902, 2013).

Policy actors in Louisiana moved forward with reforming teacher contracting and compensation policies by passing H.B. 974 - which significantly weakened “tenure” in the state and explicitly tied teachers’ pay to their performance. As indicated, the construct of

“tenure” still exists under current law in Louisiana, but it is far from the “ironclad” guarantee of employment that tends to define popular perception. First, H.B 974 constructed a long pre-tenure service period for educators, and directly tied eligibility for tenure to student performance; under the law, only teachers rated “‘highly effective’ for five years within a six-year period pursuant to the performance evaluation program [...] shall be granted tenure” (Louisiana House of Representatives, 2012, p. 10). Once a teacher attains “tenured” status, however, they do not hold that status in perpetuity, regardless of their performance. Rather, the law provides for “tenure” status to be removed from a teacher quickly, stating that “a tenured teacher who receives a performance rating of ‘ineffective’ [...] shall immediately lose his tenure and all rights related thereto (Louisiana House of Representatives, 2012, p. 11). Once a teacher’s tenure is revoked, the law requires him or her to meet the same 5/6-year “highly qualified” performance standard to regain it. Further, the law stipulates that tenured teachers under contract can be released for a variety of reasons, including “written and signed charges of poor performance, willful neglect of duty, or incompetency, dishonesty, or immorality, or of being a member of or contributing to any group, organization, movement, or corporation that is by law or injunction prohibited from operating in the state of Louisiana (Louisiana House of Representatives, 2012, p. 12).

In addition to reforming teacher contracting, H.B. 974 also altered state law surrounding teacher compensation. Under the new law, districts across the state were required to explicitly link any increases in teacher pay to student performance. More specifically, H.B. 974 stipulated that three factors could be linked to pay increases, with “with no one criterion accounting for more than fifty percent of the formula”: “effectiveness”, “demand” and teachers’ “experience” (Louisiana House of Representatives,

2012, p. 8). Effectiveness, here, was defined as teachers' evaluation under the 2010 law – and, as such, is at least partially based upon student growth – while “demand” was defined loosely as being “inclusive of area of certification, particular school need, geographic area, and subject area, which may include advanced degree levels” (Louisiana House of Representatives, 2012, p. 8). As this indicates, the Louisiana's teacher compensation reform is somewhat less far-reaching than Florida's “Student Success Act” – while they both explicitly tie salary increases to student performance, traditional indicators of teacher “quality” remained grounds for potential advancement under H.B. 974.

North Carolina's Excellent Public Schools Act

The latest of the three states to pass significant teacher policy reforms, North Carolina's revisions to structures of teacher evaluation, compensation and contracting – like Louisiana's – took place over multiple years. Also like Louisiana, revision of the state's framework for evaluating teacher performance – again, by clearly linking teacher evaluations to value-added measures of student growth – occurred first, with the addition of a “sixth standard” to the state's system in 2011 (N.C. Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Afterward, a significant shift in the state's political context heralded the beginning of a two-year legislative quest to realign the state's teacher compensation and contracting systems. As in Florida, the North Carolina's initial efforts were frustrated by an unsympathetic executive – teacher contracting reforms were ultimately dropped, with a very broad mandate for performance pay systems passed as an addendum to an appropriations bill. Upon the election of a friendlier, conservative, governor in 2012, the legislature moved to eliminate “tenure” in the state, and was ultimately successful – again, passing contracting reform and stronger language around performance pay through an addendum to the state's budget. As in Florida

and Louisiana, policy actors favoring reform faced opposition by professional groups – including the North Carolina Educator’s Association (NCEA) – and, as legislation moved forward in 2013, a burgeoning grassroots opposition movement which came to be known as “Moral Mondays”.

As noted, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction began utilizing the “sixth standard” of their teacher evaluation system in the 2011-2012 academic year. The previously existing framework – which was comprised of 5 standards, including: “demonstrate leadership”, “establish environment”, “know content”, “facilitate learning” and “reflect on practice” – was expanded to include a standard titled “contribute to academic success”. Teachers are rated under three categories under the “academic success” standard – “does not meet expected growth”, “meets expected growth” and “exceeds expected growth” (N.C. Department of Public Instruction, n.d., p. 1). Teachers’ success under the academic growth standard are assessed using student performance data under three models – first, for courses lacking state-wide assessments, a formula calculating growth based on analysis of student work and progress toward “goals and standards” formulated for the course-work. For teachers of grades without adequate performance data to generate value-added estimates – for example, grades K-3 – a “pre-post test growth model” is utilized; finally, for teachers of grades and courses with state-wide assessments and adequate performance data, the evaluation utilizes a value-added growth model (N.C. Department of Public Instruction, n.d., p. 2-3).

The North Carolina General Assembly’s first effort at restructuring teacher compensation and contracting policies began with the introduction of the first Excellent Public Schools Act (S.B. 795) in the 2011-2012 session. Under the original incarnation of the

bill, districts across North Carolina were instructed to adopt a “system of performance pay”, which tied “bonuses” or “adjustments to base salary” to certain “performance criteria” (N.C. General Assembly, 2011, p. 17). The performance criteria enumerated in the bill included: “annual growth in student achievement” within an individual teacher’s class, or within a teacher’s school, “assignment of additional academic responsibilities”, “assignment to a hard-to-staff school” and “assignment to a hard-to-staff subject area” (N.C. General Assembly, 2011, p. 17). In addition, the bill put forward a significant restructuring of contract systems in the state. The prior system of long-term “career status” contracts was entirely dismantled under the original incarnation of the Excellent Public Schools Act, replaced by a system of annual contracts, as in Florida’s Student Success Act (N.C. General Assembly, 2011). Further, the bill stipulated a wide variety of reasons – 14, in total - under which contracted teachers could be dismissed for cause – including “inadequate performance” under North Carolina’s evaluation system, “immorality”, “insubordination” or “habitual or excessive use of alcohol” (N.C. General Assembly, 2011, p. 19). Facing opposition both within and outside the legislature, the bill’s language around contracting softened somewhat as the session wore on – annual contracts were replaced with a system by which teachers could be contracted, based on performance, for 1-4 years. Similarly, the bill’s reforms to teacher compensation withered under fire, with the legislature’s attempted mandate that districts adopt performance pay systems moderated to strong “encouragement” by the General Assembly. Ultimately, the contracting provisions were scuttled in their entirety, with only the language surrounding performance pay passed into law - embedded within the 2011 budget which, itself, had to be passed by overriding a veto.

As previously noted, the following legislative session – which met under the auspices of a newly elected, conservative, governor – saw the rebirth of the Excellent Public Schools Act in 2012. Under the new version of the bill, reforms to teacher contracting in the state were softened – the refined language allowing contract terms of 1-4 years (based on performance) returned, and a broader window under which currently “tenured” teachers would retain their contracts was introduced, with all existing “career status” contracts phasing out in 2018. In addition, legislators added an additional caveat to the list of “just cause” reasons for teacher contract termination – “a justifiable decrease in the number of positions due to district reorganization, decreased enrollment, or decreased funding” (N.C. General Assembly, 2013, p. 104). Legislators also clarified their intent with regard to teacher compensation, passing an addendum to their previous performance pay reforms; their new language noted that “when a robust evaluation instrument and process that accurately assesses and evaluates the effectiveness of teachers, especially in the area of student growth, is wholly implemented in North Carolina, it is the intent of the General Assembly that the evaluation instrument and process be utilized in the implementation of a plan of performance pay for teachers in this State (N.C. General Assembly, 2013, p. 101). This time, the Excellent Public Schools Act was successfully signed into law – again, however, embedded as an addendum to the state budget.

Rationale for Study

As actors in each of the state contexts described above – North Carolina, Florida and Louisiana – moved to redefine the nature of the teaching profession in their states, they did more than simply advocate for technical changes to systems of payment and contracting. Through their debate on these issues – within legislative chambers, and the print media –

policy actors in all three states constructed rich narratives, asserting their perspectives on educational problems and their models for solving them. These narratives revealed policy actors' beliefs regarding the nature of education, the mechanics of teaching and learning, and the role of schooling in our society; as these narratives clashed, subsumed one another, and vied for greater saliency, they played a key role in establishing new “grand lines” that may define the profession teaching in each state for decades to come.

In order to fully understand the role that such narratives may have played in the policy process surrounding the Student Success Act, Excellent Public Schools Act, and H.B. 974, and what those policy “stories” reveal about the actors who constructed them, the next chapter will review the literature surrounding policy narratives. In doing so, I will synthesize and adapt a framework for recognizing different types of narratives and understanding the role and importance of each in the policy process. This framework will, in turn, guide my analysis of data – in this case, audio/video records of legislative proceedings and print media artifacts (e.g. articles and letters to the editor) - capturing the discourse of policy actors in each state as they discussed, debated, and, ultimately, adopted these reforms. My methods for doing so will, again, be discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2

UNDERSTANDING POLICY NARRATIVES

As noted in the previous chapter, policy theorists like Lindblom (1959) and Schulman (1975) assert perspectives of policy change that recognize both measured, incremental shifts and large-scale, rapid movements in the policy equilibrium. Several other scholars (Baumgartner & Jones, 1991; Berry & Berry, 1990; Kingdon, 1994; Walker, 1969) have explored the mechanisms determining the nature, pace, and contexts in which these changes unfold. Their work provides a framework for understanding the ways in which opportunities for policy change occur, gain traction, and spread among multiple contexts – and the role that policy narratives and “stories” play in bringing such moments of change to fruition.

Baumgartner & Jones (1991), for example, in their attempt to bridge the gap between incremental and non-incremental perspectives on policy change, argue that “[...] a single process can explain both periods of extreme stability and short bursts of rapid change. This process is the interaction of beliefs and values concerning a particular policy [...] with the existing set of political institutions – the venues of policy action” (Baumgartner & Jones, 1991, p. 1045). They assert that as they engage in the political process, actors “try to control the prevailing image of the policy problem through the use of rhetoric, symbols, and policy analysis”; if they find their efforts to do so stymied by entrenched interests or other dominant perspectives, they may seek to surmount these barriers by trying to “alter the roster of participants who are involved in the issue

by seeking out the most favorable venue for the consideration of their issues” (Baumgartner & Jones, 1991, p. 1045).

Understanding the interplay of these processes, Baumgartner & Jones (1991) argue, is key to understanding how the relative equilibrium of policy contexts may abruptly shift; they note that “where the rhetoric begins to change, venue changes become more likely. Where venue changes occur, rhetorical changes are facilitated. Thus, a slight change in either can lead to rapid changes in policy outcomes” (Baumgartner & Jones, 1991, p. 1048). While public perceptions of an issue may remain relatively stable over time, Baumgartner & Jones (1991) argue, events may result in sudden deviations; they note that “often, these changes are the result of new scientific discoveries or research; other times, changes come from dramatic events or more subtle influences” (Baumgartner & Jones, 1991, p. 1046).

Kingdon (1994), like Baumgartner & Jones (1991), constructs a framework for understanding how shifts in policy come to pass. While the latter’s framework focuses on ways in which the equilibrium of existing policies may shift, however, Kingdon’s (1994) model examines the process by which new issues, problems and policies rise to the agenda and gain purchase in the decision-making process. He notes that this process often appears, in retrospect, to be an inevitable confluence of events, arguing that “the phrase ‘an idea whose time has come’ captures a fundamental reality about an irresistible movement that sweeps over our politics and our society, brushing aside everything that might stand in its path” (Kingdon, 1994, p. 1). Kingdon (1994) also asserts, however, that the recognition of problems and adoption of policies is not a foregone conclusion, instead representing the result of an interaction of factors inhabiting multiple “streams” in the process – problems, politics, and policies. At critical times, he argues, “the separate streams come together [...] a

problem is recognized, a solution is available, the political climate makes the time right for change, and the constraints do not prohibit action” (Kingdon, 1994, p. 88).

These three “streams”, Kingdon (1994) asserts, operate in a largely independent fashion; at times, however, opportunities for policy action arise when factors in the three streams favor the alignment of problems, policies, and politics. Kingdon (1994) defines these moments as “windows” of opportunity. When such “windows” open, he notes, actors must move quickly to seize them, and ensure that “solutions come to be coupled with problems, proposals linked with political exigencies, and alternatives introduced when the agenda changes” (Kingdon, 1994, p. 173). He further notes that this confluence of streams is not entirely random – key to the system are policy actors, or entrepreneurs, who actively work to frame and define problems in ways that couple them to particular solutions, and seat them within the realm of public agency.

Common to both of these frameworks is the understanding that, as they engage in the tasks of capitalizing on punctuations and opening windows, actors work to construct or reconstruct prevailing understandings regarding the problems, solutions and players endemic to the policy process. Ingram, Schneider & DeLeon (2007) assert that this process of “social construction” holds considerable implication for the kinds of policy changes that emerge from such moments; focusing specifically on the ways in which “target populations” are constructed by actors, for instance, they assert that “policymakers respond to and manipulate social constructions in building their political base. Manipulating such images in the political process can and usually does result in radically differential treatment of various target groups, even when alternative designs would have achieved the same putative results” (p. 94). As Ingram, Schneider & DeLeon (2007) indicate, this process of “social construction” –

and the constructions which emerge from it – are pivotal facets of policy change. The remainder of this chapter will unpack and explore the research and theory which seek to understand both.

The Role of Policy Narratives in the Change Process

As these models indicate, the processes of policy change are dynamic; as they move forward, a multitude of actors interact, compete and – potentially – struggle for consensus as they attempt to mold decision-making processes. Advocacy groups coalesce and form coalitions as they attempt to bring pressure to bear on policymakers. Financial and political resources are marshaled by actors in support or opposition to change. As these activities occur, policy actors engage in complex processes of discursive construction – through the weaving of policy “narratives”, actors invest the constituent parts of the policy process with meaning, legitimizing certain policy positions by carefully framing perspectives on problems, other actors, and solutions. Fischer (2003) describes this “meaning making” process, noting that

[...] an issue may be a matter of regulation for one group and better understood by another in terms of the redistribution of resources. The implications are that each policy is likely to have different meanings for different participants; that the exact meaning of a policy, then, is by no means self-evident but, rather, is ambiguous and manipulable; and that the policy process is – at least in part – a struggle to get one or another meaning established as the accepted one (p. 65).

These efforts to frame and “make sense” of issues are a critical part of actors’ efforts to link problems and solutions, as Kingdon (1994) notes, and to reframe issues and seize debates during periods of upheaval (Baumgartner & Jones, 1991). Sandlin & Clark (2009) capture

the importance of “storytelling” in the policy process concisely, asserting that “narrative is how we create order of the chaos of experience [...]” (p. 1003).

A significant portion of this discursive process occurs well before the point of actual decision-making; while debate over proposed choices is a vital part of policy change, the task of building and shaping the contours of the decision-making process is also extremely important, and often occurs through actors’ efforts well before the point of consideration and adoption. Benford & Snow (2000), for example, assert that

[...] the pre-political, or at least pre-decisional, processes are often of the most critical importance in determining which issues and alternatives are to be considered by the polity and which choices will probably be made. What happens in the decision-making councils of the formal institutions of government may do little more than recognize, document, and legalize, if not legitimize, the momentary results of a continuing struggle of forces in society at large (p. 603).

As they describe, these “pre-decisional” processes center on shaping and constructing the framework within which decisions around a potential policy change may occur. Policy actors, for example, seek to identify, define, and assert the salience of particular policy problems. Similarly, potential solutions are identified – as Kingdon (1994) asserts – and linked to those problems that successfully rise to agenda status. Finally, complex ideas at the heart of policy issues are simplified and distilled to recognizable categories and “master narratives”.

Through all of these discursive practices, actors attempt to weave policy “stories” that resonate with their audience – be it the public or policymakers – and shape the policy process in ways that reify their chosen positions. Bennett & Edelman (1989) capture this interplay, describing the process of policy “storytelling”. They assert that:

[...] a story about an event's origin, its setting in space and in time, its consequences for actors and spectators, and the future effects of dealing with it in particular ways makes it meaningful. In supplying these often unverifiable and unfalsifiable features of events, narratives create a particular kind of social world, with specified heroes and villains, deserving and undeserving people, and a set of public policies that are rationalized by the construction of social problems by which they become solutions (p. 159).

Two of the primary discursive practices that policy actors engage in as they seek to construct favorable policy-making conditions through such “storytelling” are *framing* and *priming*. Benford & Snow (2000) assert that, as policy actors engage in discourse, they weave “stories” that promote the “production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers” (p. 613). These narratives – which Sandlin & Clark (2009) describe as *framing* actors’ perceptions of problems, solutions and participants in the policy process – engage their audience “at the level of imagination, which is to say in the realm of lived experience”; the authors also note, however, that such stories “are never innocent; they always have a specific purpose, a narrative intent embedded in the telling that is subject to interrogation and interpretation. Most compelling is the fact that stories convey a particular model of the world [...]” (Sandlin & Clark, 2009, p. 1003).

Constructing a framework by which others might understand a policy decision, however, is only part of the struggle; in addition to *framing* a situation, policy actors must endeavor to make that frame understandable and salient for their audience – what Benford & Snow (2000) refer to as “resonance”. Through *priming*, policy actors link their efforts to frame policy decisions to deeply held values on the part of their audience, or other narratives that are closely understood by their peers – in Sandlin & Clark’s (2009) terminology, political “master narratives”. A similar function of *priming* is the effort to render complex framings in ways that are more easily understood, by distilling ideas into simpler frameworks

or through the classification of narrative elements – like actions or characters – into familiar categories.

Constructing Political Realities through Framing

The first of these discursive practices – *framing* – refers to the active construction by policy actors of particular lenses through which decisions and policies might be viewed.

Benford & Snow (2000), for example, define framing as an

[...] active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction. It is active in the sense that something is being done, and processual in the sense of a dynamic, evolving process [...] and it is contentious in the sense that it involves the generation of interpretive frames that not only differ from existing ones but that may also challenge them (Benford & Snow, 2000, p.614).

Edelman (1993; 1988) further emphasizes the active, creative nature of political framing, which he notes centers on “the creation of meaning [and] the construction of beliefs”; he further notes that the social realities constructed through framing serve definite purpose in the policy process, asserting that “[...] the key tactic must always be the evocation and interpretations that legitimize favored courses of action and threaten or reassure people so as to encourage them to be supportive or remain quiescent” (Edelman, 1988, p. 104).

Frames serve the purpose of motivating support and legitimizing certain policy choices by allowing policy actors to tap into certain organizations of experience and understanding, and “[...] by simplifying and condensing aspects of the ‘world out there’, in ways that are ‘intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists’” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614). Benford & Snow (2000) expand on this, explaining that policy actors articulate frames by using language to

construct “the connection and alignment of events and experiences so that they hang together in a relatively unified and compelling fashion. Slices of observed, experienced, and/or recorded ‘reality’ are assembled, collated, and packaged” (p. 623).

These constructions of reality – or, to put it another way, “stories” about particular policy choices – are woven to “make sense of” several aspects key to decision-making processes (Scheufele, 1997; Edelman, 1993; Iyengar & Simon, 1991; Gamson & Modigliana, 1987). Entman (1993) describes several of these elements, explaining that as they construct a particular “story” around a policy choice, framers

[...] define problems – determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values; diagnose causes – identify the forces creating the problem; make moral judgments – evaluate causal agents and their effects; and suggest remedies – offer and justify treatments for the problem and predict their likely effects (p. 52).

Benford & Snow (2000) elaborate on this, asserting that as framers engage in discourse, they interact with their audience in order to “negotiate a shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation they define as in need of change, make attributions regarding who or what is to blame, articulate an alternative set of arrangements, and urge others to act in concert to affect change [...]” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 615).

As Entman (1993) and Benford & Snow (2000) note, there are several key elements to the narrative frames that policy actors construct to reify their arguments – much as with any other story. First, actors identify and define the nature of the *policy problems* that the policy process is meant to respond to. Similarly, policy “stories” identify the major players surrounding these identified problems – the characters in the story who are the heroes, the aggrieved and, often, the villains. Finally, causal narratives are woven as part of the story,

giving it a “plotline” – helping to unite each of the elements into a cohesive perspective on what the problem is, who is to blame, and what the logical remedy for solving it must be. Each of these constituent elements presents a complex set of potential framings as policy actors weave their “stories” – as such, each are described in more detail below.

The Identification and Definition of Problems

A key element of the “pre-decisional” policy process centers on the identification and definition of policy problems. As Kingdon (1994) and others note, a number of potential issues exist at any given time that might be elevated to consideration for response by policy actors; ultimately, however, many potential “problems” languish beneath a level of recognition that might see them targeted for resolution. Cobb & Elder (1971) note that this is not simply a function of chance; they assert that

[...] the range of issues and alternative decisions that will be considered is restricted. This restriction arises from two sources. The first is a systems imperative and is predicated on the fact that the processing and attention capabilities of any human organization are necessarily limited. The second source of restriction is that all forms of political organization have a bias in favor of the exploitation of some kinds of conflict and the suppression of others because organization is the mobilization of bias. Some issues are organized into politics while others are organized out [...] it follows that the range and type of issues and alternatives considered will represent the interests and most salient concerns of previously legitimized political forces (p. 902).

Fischer (2003) describes the process of highlighting an issue and defining it as a “problem” as an active, discursive process on the part of policy actors. He notes that problems “are in significant part constructed in the realm of political discourse [...] politicians and political decision-makers, like the public generally, are engaged in the manipulation of signs and symbols that shape the ways these objects are seen and

understood” (Fischer, 2003, p. 23). Edelman (1988) concurs, noting that through narrative construction, policy actors weave intricate “stories” about problems that have significant impact on how decision-making processes around them will unfold. He asserts that

Problems come into discourse and therefore into existence as reinforcements of ideologies, not simply because they are there or because they are important for wellbeing. They signify who is virtuous and useful and who are dangerous or inadequate, which actions will be rewarded and which will be penalized. They constitute people as subjects with particular kinds of aspirations, self-concepts and fears, and they create beliefs about the relative importance of events and objects. They are critical in determining who exercise authority and who accept it [...] they define the social world, not in the same way for everyone, but in the light of the diverse situations from which people respond to the political spectacle (Edelman, 1988, p. 13).

Rochefort & Cobb (1993) assert that frames seeking to elevate issues to “problem” status construct a narrative around them that emphasizes a number of characteristics - including saliency, severity, and, ultimately, potential for being solved by policy action. Successful framing of policy “problems”, for example, might emphasize that the issue under consideration is of significant concern – or *salience* - for policy actors and the polity they represent. Frames may also emphasize the novelty or unprecedented nature of an issue, in order to manufacture a sense of urgency regarding its consideration. Rochefort & Cobb (1993) further note that policy actors might weave a “story” about a particular policy problem that emphasizes its *proximity*; in doing so, they may “argue that it hits close to home or directly impinges on a person's interest” by highlighting its impact on a particular constituency (p. 65). Gamson (1992) concurs, underscoring the importance of activating an audience’s sense of personal *injustice* in the successful framing of “problems” and, in doing so, tapping into their visceral emotional reactions to perceived unfairness. He asserts that successful frames must “strike” to the core, as “[...] injustice focuses on the righteous anger

that puts fire in the belly and iron in the soul. Injustice [...] is a hot cognition, not merely an abstract intellectual judgment about what is equitable” (p. 32). If a particular problem can be framed as being particularly salient, it may cross the line into a “crisis” framing, demanding intense and prompt action; Rochefort & Cobb (1993) argue, however, that “the dividing line between a mere problem and an actual crisis is indeed a hazy one which issue advocates are prone to cross rhetorically when they see momentum for their cause waning (p. 66).

Another key element of frames defining problems – linked with *saliency* – lies with the construction of narratives that highlight the *severity* of a particular “problem”. These narratives may define the intensity of the harm a problem may be inflicting on a set of actors, for example, or define the number of people impacted by a given issue. Rochefort & Cobb (1993) note that, in general, problems affecting large numbers of people have the greatest chance of being recognized as a priority for the policy making process – although those effecting smaller numbers with greater intensity may also be of particular concern. Relatedly, the extent to which problem conditions are changing over time may impact perception of its severity - “is a problem declining, stable, or growing, and if it is growing, at what rate? Linear or even exponential projections are the most ominous, and when accepted as valid, tend to create the most pressure for quick public intervention” (Rochefort & Cobb, 1993, p. 64).

Framing Causal Narratives

In addition to framing the nature of an issue or problem, a critical aspect of telling effective policy “stories” lies with the construction of a narrative establishing *how problems came to be* – and, in turn, how they can be undone. Iyengar & Simon (1991) note the importance of doing so, asserting that:

Attributions of responsibility for political issues are of interest for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that the concept of responsibility embodies an especially powerful psychological cue [...] Attributions of responsibility are generally divided into causal and treatment dimensions. Causal responsibility focuses on the origin of the issue or problem, whereas treatment responsibility focuses on who or what has the power either to alleviate or forestall alleviation of the issue (p. 369).

Stone (2002) focuses on elaborating the “causal” dimension of policy narratives, asserting that “causal stories” have significant impact on the ways in which problems interact with the policy making process. She notes that “causal theories [...] do more than convincingly demonstrate the possibility of human control over bad conditions...they can assign responsibility to particular political actors so that someone will have to stop an activity, do it differently, compensate the victims, or possibly face punishment” (Stone, 2002, p. 204). Stone (2002; 1989) also defines several discrete types of “causal stories” - the “accidental,” “mechanical,” “inadvertent,” and “intentional” – noting that as the causes of a problem become more clearly defined, with discrete victims and perpetrators, “causal stories” become more compelling and powerful. Stone (2002; 1989) notes that “stories” like the “intentional” narrative – which clearly seat the locus of control over a given problem within the realm of human control – provide the most support for policy intervention. Such narratives, she asserts, construct relatively direct and simple causal processes – in which a clear “villain” maliciously and directly harms a clear “victim”. Conversely, “accidental” frames – which weave stories of natural disaster and events gone awry – dramatically limit their audiences’ perceptions of the efficacy of policy to adequately intervene in problem situations.

Finally, Rochefort & Cobb (1993), as well as Stone (2002; 1989), note the relative *complexity* of “causal stories” may significantly mediate their impact on the policy making

process. More complex “stories”, they note, may lack clear targets and avenues for policy action; Rochefort & Cobb (1993), for instance, assert that, “overwhelmed with the poorly understood interaction of many causes, policymakers may simply throw up their hands and claim the foolishness of intervention at the present time. They may recommend deeper study instead” (p. 64). Stone (2002; 1989) offers “causal stories” that lay blame at large, systemic causes for social ills as an example of such a complex narratives – these tend, she notes, to center on broad issues like poverty, or institutionalized discrimination.

As pointed out numerous times, above, the ways in which policy problems come to be constructed, identified and defined through discourse is pivotal in shaping the ensuing contours of the policy making process. Benson & Snow (2000) assert, for example – and others (Stone, 2002; Edelman, 1998) agree – that “the identification of specific problems and causes tends to constrain the range of possible ‘reasonable’ solutions and strategies advocated” (p. 616). Edelman (1998) expands on this, arguing that “the language that constructs a problem and provides an origin for it is also a rationale for vesting authority in people who claim some kind of competence [...] the definition of the problem generates authority, status, profits, and financial support while denying those benefits to compelling claimants” (p. 20). As with any story, however, weaving a compelling plot line isn’t enough. Effective policy narratives also require the construction of a host of characters, including heroes, villains, and, ultimately, the framing of the audience itself as a fundamental part of the story.

The Construction of Characters through Political Discourse

Along with constructing narratives regarding policy problems, political actors also work to highlight and define the “characters” that operate around and within their chosen issues. Policy actors actively select, for instance, which “characters” to focus the spotlight of the narrative upon, with significant implications for the decisional processes that may follow. Rochefort & Cobb (1993) highlight this element of “character” framing, asserting that “in a picture of many possible influences, selecting certain actors to the exclusion of others is an act of explanation that aggressively promotes a particular vision of reality” (p. 60). In addition to selectively underscoring the role of certain characters in the unfolding of a policy problem, a critical aspect of “character” framing actors lies with the construction of “heroes”, “victims” and, of course, “villains” (Soreide, 2007; Rochefort & Cobb, 1993; Gamson, 1992; Edelman, 1988).

Schneider & Ingram (1993) emphasize the importance of defining “characters” within policy “stories”, arguing in particular that the “social construction of target populations is an important, albeit overlooked, political phenomenon [...]” (p. 334). They assert, for instance, that efforts to frame the actors receiving the benefits – or punishments – of policy action have significant implications for how those policy decisions are received by the public at large, and for the future of the policy equilibrium surrounding a particular issue. Schneider & Ingram (1993) note that

There are strong pressures for public officials to provide beneficial policy to powerful, positively constructed target populations and to devise punitive, punishment-oriented policy for negatively constructed groups. Social constructions become embedded in policy as messages that are absorbed by citizens and affect their orientations and participation patterns [...] (p. 334).

These “messages”, they argue, have significant implications for the power dynamics within a given policy situation; “characters” – even those with seemingly strong political capital –

who are successfully captured within a negative frame may find themselves on the losing side of the war for public perception, with significant impact on their future fortunes.

Gamson (1992) also emphasizes the importance of framing “characters” in policy “stories”, underscoring the utility of frames that identify clear “heroes” and “villains” through narrative construction. He asserts that

The critical dimension is the abstractness of the target. Vague, abstract sources of unfairness diffuse indignation and make it seem foolish. We may think it dreadfully unfair when it rains on our parade, but bad luck or nature is a poor target for an injustice frame. When we see impersonal, abstract forces as responsible for our suffering, we are taught to accept what cannot be changed and make the best of it (p. 32).

Counter to this, of course, is the power of clearly constructed blame – and victimization – within a causal narrative. Gamson (1992) asserts that – as previously noted – such narratives trigger powerful responses from their audiences by triggering perceptions of injustice and unfairness. Again, however, he notes that this requires “[...] concreteness in the target, even when it is misplaced and directed away from the real causes of hardship, is a necessary condition for an injustice frame [...] These actors may be corporations, government agencies, or specifiable groups rather than individuals. They may be presented as malicious, but selfishness, greed and indifference may be sufficient to produce indignation” (p. 32).

In addition to framing which “characters” interact as part of the “plot” of a given policy narrative, policy actors also work to draw their audiences into the narrative itself – establishing a “call to action”. Gamson (1992) asserts that this critical aspect of framing centers on the creation of “identity” frames, noting that “being a collective agent implies being part of a ‘we’ who can do something. The identity component of collective action frames is about the process of defining this ‘we’, typically in opposition to some ‘they’ who

have different interests or values” (p. 84). Further, Gamson (1992) underscores the importance of creating this “us” versus “them” mentality through narrative construction. He emphasizes that “a collective action frame must be adversarial [wherein] we stand in opposition to or conflict with some they. They are responsible for some objectionable situation and have the power to change it by acting different in some fashion. We and they are differentiated rather than conflated” (Gamson, 1992, p. 85).

Finally, through the process of narrative construction, authors of frames, themselves, are often reconstructed as elements of the policy narrative. Rochefort & Cobb (1993), for example, notes that narrative construction “directs attention to those who are defining the problem, in particular, a person, group or interest who manages to claim the situation as their just province and to keep competing definitions out of bounds” (Rochefort & Cobb, 1993, p. 59). Through such framing of policy actors as “owners” of particular problems, they note, narratives lend legitimacy to the constructor’s assertions regarding potential decisions as the process moves forward.

Edelman (1998) expands on this, asserting that the act of narrative “storytelling” becomes a recursive process, in which the actor and the story are constructed concurrently. He shares, for instance, that “[...] I treat people who engage in political actions as constructions in two senses. First, their actions and their language create their subjectivity, their sense of who they are. Second, people involved in politics are symbols to other observers: they stand for ideologies, values or moral stances and they become role models, benchmarks, or symbols of threat and evil” (Edelman, 1998, p. 2). He elaborates further by underscoring the recursive nature of narrative construction:

[...] the language that interprets objects and action also constitutes the subject. Political leaders, like all other subjects, act and speak as reflections of the situations they serially confront; their diversities and inconsistencies are statements of those situations, not a persistent 'self', for the kind of stability in action that transcends situations with varying political inducements has never existed (Edelman, 1988, p. 9).

Framing Solutions as Natural Outcomes of Problems

Finally, a critical element of constructing an effective policy narrative lies with the framing of potential solutions. Rochefort & Cobb (1993) note this, asserting that "the literature emphasizes how problem definition depends not on the problem itself so much as what is to be done about it. Thus, some believe that solutions determine how problems will be defined" (Rochefort & Cobb, 1993, p. 58). Gamson (1992) agrees, noting that the framing of solutions as part of policy narratives is critical to motivating collective action; without a sense that problems are, indeed, solvable, he notes, actors lack the critical understanding that they have agency over an issue.

As previously noted, problems and solutions share a powerful, recursive relationship in the policy process – and, as such, the frames regarding solutions and frames constructing problems often work to legitimate and reify each other (Kingdon, 1994; Stone, 2002; Edelman, 1998). Edelman (1988) elaborates on this, asserting that

[...] the striking characteristic of the link between political problems and solutions in everyday life is that the solution typically comes first, chronologically and psychologically. Those who favor a particular course of governmental action are likely to cast about for a widely feared problem to which to attach it in order to maximize its support [...] the link between problems and preferred solutions is itself a construction that transforms an ideological preference into rational government action (p. 22).

As Edelman (1988) implies, a critical element of solution framing, then, lies in the logical connection between problems and proposed solution. Through the effective pairing of problem framing, and the introduction of well-framed solutions, the outcomes of decisional processes become perceived as *fait accompli*.

Research (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984; Riker, 1986; Tversky & Kahneman, 1986) provides empirical support for the power of narratives that frame perceptions of particular solutions or outcomes in having such impacts on actors' decision-making processes. Kahneman & Tversky (1984), for example, find that

The framing of outcomes often induces decision values that have no counterpart in actual experience. For example, the framing of outcomes of therapies for lung cancer in terms of mortality or survival is unlikely to affect experience, although it can have a pronounced influence on choice. In other cases, however, the framing of decisions affects not only decision but experience as well. For example, the framing of an expenditure as an uncompensated loss or as the price of insurance can probably influence the experience of that outcome. In such cases, the evaluation of outcomes in the context of decisions not only anticipates experience but also molds it (p. 350).

These findings indicate that logical connection, in and of itself, may not be enough; in addition, effective narratives must frame important normative aspects of proposed solutions and outcomes of decisional processes, as well.

Empowering Policy Narratives through Rhetoric

While constructing an effective “story” about the connection between particular policy problems, actors and solutions through *framing* is a vital part of shaping the policy-making process, several authors (Shenhav, 2005; Benford & Snow, 2000; Scheufele, 2000; Edelman, 1993; Gamson, 1992; Iyengar & Simon, 1991; Goffman, 1974) note that pulling together the right narrative elements may not be enough. “Storytellers” must also find ways

in which to make their frames “resonate”, as Gamson (1992) terms it; he argues, for instance, that

Not all symbols are equally potent. Some metaphors soar, others fall flat; some visual images linger in the mind, others are quickly forgotten. Some frames have a natural advantage because their ideas and language resonate with a broader political culture. Resonance increases the appeal of a frame by making it appear natural and familiar. Those who respond to the larger cultural theme will find it easier to respond to a frame with the same sonorities (p. 135).

The notion of increasing the resonance of particular frames is often referred to in the literature, as Scheufele (2000) notes, as *priming*.

As they engage in priming, narrative constructors utilize a number of rhetorical strategies to increase the resonance of their narrative with target audiences by making it more *accessible*, and bolstering the *narrative fidelity* of their chosen policy “story” (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Benford & Snow, 2000; Scheufele, 2000). Policy actors may, for example, seek to increase the resonance and fidelity of their narratives by constructing solid bases of legitimacy for their chosen position – supporting their “stories” by claiming their foundation in empirical fact, outcome-based accountability, or the public good (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001). Similarly, policy “storytellers” make use of powerful rhetorical “tropes” as they construct their policy narratives. These tropes include linguistic tools like metonymy, synecdoche, metaphor, and irony; these methods of framing speech and constructing discourse work to condition the response of a narrator’s audience by tapping into deeply held, and often collective, ways of thinking about and understanding the world (Thogmorton, 1993).

Additionally, effective narrators bolster the resonance of their policy “stories” through what John Riker (1996) terms “heresthetic” – the careful emphasis, or exclusion, of certain information or points of view by participants in the discursive process. Scheufele (2000) notes that cognitive science has long asserted that “human beings cannot understand the world in all its complexity”; as such, particularly powerful narrative constructions may be rendered more accessible – and more resonate – by carefully distilling the complex web of data, information and perspectives surrounding a given policy issue in ways advantageous to the narrator (p. 300). Finally, as scholars like Edelman (1995) and Sandlin & Clark (2009) assert, policy actors often work to underscore the fidelity of their chosen narratives by building bridges to deeply held cultural understandings, images and powerful “master narratives” through the use of symbolism and imagery.

Constructing Legitimacy

One key strategy used by policy actors to empower their chosen narratives focuses on constructing a foundation of legitimacy for their policy positions, and for themselves as trustworthy narrators. Cochran-Smith & Fries (2001) assert that a principle means for doing so lies with claiming three *warrants* of legitimacy – the evidentiary warrant, the accountability warrant, and the political warrant. They note that, in doing so, narrators are able to “signify justification, authority, or ‘reasonable grounds’, particularly those that are established for some act, course of action, statement or belief” (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001, p. 4). Further, Cochran-Smith & Fries (2001) argue that, if policy actors are successful in claiming these warrants, their chosen position may become accepted as “common sense” regarding how to solve a given policy problem.

Each of the warrants defined by Cochran-Smith & Fries (2001) claims a different kind of legitimacy for a policy actor's given position. The *evidentiary warrant*, for example, relates to the "set of justifications and grounds that are offered for conclusions and policy recommendations based 'entirely' (or at least purported to rest entirely) on empirical data, evidence and facts (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001, p. 6). By brandishing sources of data and appealing to empirical research, policy actors attempt to assert that their narrative reflects simple, "objective" truth. As Cochran-Smith & Fries (2001) note, "each side constructs its own case as if it were neutral, a-political, and value-free, based solely on the empirical and certified facts of the matter and not embedded within or related to a particular agenda that is political or ideological" (p. 6). Dunn (1993) expands on this, noting that as policy actors attempt to claim the evidentiary warrant, they often use data strategically – selectively highlighting data that supports their position, for example, or suppressing data that may undercut their chosen narrative.

In addition to claiming legitimacy based on empirics and data, policy actors may also seek to assert that their given position is "right" on the basis of expediency. By claiming the *accountability warrant*, Cochran-Smith & Fries (2001) argue, policy actors attempt to "demonstrate that recommended policies are justifiable and justified by the outcomes and results they produce" (p. 7). In essence, by grounding their narrative in this warrant, policy actors work to convince their audience that they are more focused on delivering results than their opposition – and, indeed, that their given solution is the most likely to deliver those results. Naturally, the space surrounding the accountability warrant is highly contested. Cochran-Smith & Fries (2001) note that opponents may argue vehemently "[...] over which

side gets to call itself the most accountable, reasonable, and attentive to responsible outcomes” (p. 10).

Finally, Cochran-Smith & Fries (2001) argue that narrators may seek to legitimize their position by claiming the *political warrant*, through which they assert that they – and, by extension, their chosen policy position – are primarily concerned with the promotion of civil society and the good of the public. This is painted in sharp contrast to their opponents, who are framed as possessing more selfish motives – advocating “a private agenda for the good of a privileged few” (Cochran-Smith, 2001, p. 10). As with each of the other warrants, the political warrant is sharply contested by actors on both sides of the line as they seek to claim the “moral high ground” of the public debate, while undercutting their opponent’s attempts to do so, as well.

The Power of Rhetorical Tropes

In addition to claiming legitimacy through establishing warrants, policy actors utilize a number of rhetorical tropes to reinforce the accessibility and fidelity of their narratives. Throgmorton (1993) emphasizes several of these strategies, which he refers to as “rhetorical tropes”. He asserts that “[...] at the heart of persuasion is the use of tropes, literary or rhetorical devices – such as metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony – that involve using words in other than their literal sense. As a word, trope implies a turn on or toward something, a turn induced by the device itself” (Throgmorton, 1993, p. 120). In essence, Throgmorton (1993) argues, narrators utilize these rhetorical tropes to create a “constitutive” relationship, in which the storyteller shapes his or her narrative in response to the audience, whose responses are, in turn, conditioned by the narrator’s use of rhetorical tropes. As such, these tropes become invaluable tools of persuasion for policy-makers as they attempt to

construct narratives that are eminently graspable by their audience, and which resonate strongly with their existing beliefs, values and understandings.

In order to render their narratives more accessible, for instance, policy actors may utilize *synecdoche* and *metonymy* to frame important concepts. Synecdoche refers to the practice of referring to part of something to represent the whole – for example, referring to a car as a “set of wheels”. Relatedly, metonymy characterizes the strategy of referring to something by substituting a separate, but related, concept; an example of would be referring to teachers, administrators, and support staff collectively as “the school”. In both cases, the narrator renders the concept more accessible to the audience through aggregation or disaggregation, and establishes connections to related constructs that may be more understandable or evocative for members of the audience.

Similarly, policy actors may strive to bolster the fidelity of their policy “stories” through the use of rhetorical “tropes” like *metaphor*, or *irony*. Metaphor refers to the linking of two separate things through comparison or identification – for example, asserting that a particularly smart person is a “walking encyclopedia”. Irony indicates the often facetious use a phrase which conveys a meaning that is opposite to, or otherwise undercutting, the literal meaning of a particular point, in order to emphasize certain ideas through contrast. An example of this might be referring to a particularly difficult task as being “simple”. Each of these “tropes” bridges potentially unrelated constructs in strategic ways – tactically aligning or contrasting the audience’s understanding of certain ideas in ways that may advance the position of the policy storyteller by inducing the audience into drawing certain inferences.

Strategically Structuring Narratives through Heresthetic

Another key rhetorical strategy utilized by policy actors as they seek to construct effective narratives is *heresthetic* – or the manipulative selection and presentation of information. Riker (1996) describes heresthetic as “the art of setting up situations – composing the alternatives among which political actors must choose – in such a way that even those who do not wish to do so are compelled by the structure of the situation to support the heresthetician’s purpose [...] this is what heresthetic is about: structuring the world so you can win” (p. 9). In many ways, heresthetic represents the mechanical technique of narrative framing – the strategic process through which policy actors choose from the many building blocks that make up policy “stories” in order to build a pathway for their audience, leading to their preferred outcome or perspective on the world.

In using such a strategy, Jerit (2008) notes that herestheticians on opposite sides of a debate often construct narratives that become, effectively, mutually exclusive – creating a situation in which debate becomes more about “talking past one another” than engaging on substantive issues. She provides an example of heresthetic in action, noting that in debates over shifts in the status quo:

[...] those who seek to make policy change (i.e. those who oppose the status quo) can highlight the drawbacks of the current state of affairs. But because they need to convince the public that their proposal is worthy of its support, proponents must emphasize the specific benefits it provides. Proponents of change (i.e. those who support the status quo), have a much simpler task: they need only bring attention to the shortcomings of the proposed policy” (Jerit, 2008, p. 4).

While the use of heresthetic may dampen the likelihood of substantive debate on an issue, as Jerit (2008) argues, it does potentially serve to drive the resonance of actors’ narratives by streamlining their structure – delivering only those points of information relevant to the

narrator's purpose, while unburdening their audience of the need to consider points that may undercut their position.

Achieving Fidelity through Symbolism

Finally, another important practice in bolstering the fidelity of policy narratives centers on actors' efforts to link policy "stories" to powerful cultural symbols and narratives, recognized on an intrinsic level by the audience. Edelman (1985) describes such symbols, noting that – within the structure of the narrative - "every symbol stands for something other than itself, and it also evokes an attitude, a set of impressions, or a pattern of events associated through time, through space, through logic, or through imagination with the symbol" (p. 5). He goes on to discuss two primary types of symbols – "referential" symbols, and "condensation" symbols.

"Referential" symbols, Edelman (1985) asserts, "are economical ways of referring to the objective elements in objects or situations: the elements identified in the same way by different people. Such symbols are useful because they help in logical thinking about the situation and in manipulating it" (p. 6). Through such symbols, novel or poorly understood concepts are clarified by reference to the familiar. Similarly, he notes that "condensation" symbols

[...] evoke the emotions associated with the situation. They condense into one symbolic event, sign, or act patriotic pride, anxieties, remembrances of past glories or humiliations, promises of future greatness: some one of these or all of them [...] practically every political act that is controversial or regarded as really important is bound to serve in part as a condensation symbol. It evokes a quiescent or aroused mass response because it symbolizes a threat or reassurance (Edelman, 1985, p. 7).

Sandlin & Clark (2009) note that some narratives, in and of themselves, can become powerful symbols, should they become part of the fabric of a given society or group. They refer to these pivotal “stories” as “master narratives”, asserting that they capture storylines or events that are particularly definitive for an audience. Shenhav (2005) expands on this, sharing that “master” narratives “[...] contain national, historical, and cultural materials known and acknowledged by most of the audience” (p. 319). Sandlin & Clark (2009) note that the power of such narratives “derives from their internalization. Wittingly or unwittingly, we become the stories we know, and the master narrative is reproduced”. As such, “master narratives” become “[...] constitutive, in the sense that they both imply an ideal audience and commit that audience to behave in accordance with the narrative logic inherent in the depictions” (p. 1002). Further, they argue, political and cultural “master narratives” “[...] help shape people’s views of rationality, of objectivity, of morality, and of their conceptions of themselves and others. In short, these narratives help construct our subjectivities, that is, how we understand who we are” (Sandlin & Clark, 2009, p. 1002).

The Contested Nature of Narrative Construction

A critical part of understanding the role of narrative construction in the policy process is the recognition that actors do not engage in the process of “storytelling” in a vacuum. Even if a narrator constructs a clear framework for understanding a particular issue, and it achieves resonance with a polity, Benford & Snow (2003) note that they “are not able to construct and impose on their intended targets any version of reality they would like; rather there are a variety of challenges confronting all those who engage in movement framing activities” (p. 625). Key among these challenges are the framing efforts of opponents. Fischer (2003) recognizes this, asserting that, “basic to the politics of policymaking [...] must be an

understanding of the discursive struggle to create and control systems of shared social meanings” (p. 13). Rochefort & Cobb (1993) expand on this, asserting that “since there is no one fixed definition of an issue, it is subject to the interpretative maneuvers of the protagonists. In this light, social conflict becomes a process of successive, competitive problem definitions by opposing sides angling for advantage and issue expansion” (p. 57). Gamson (1992) goes so far as to assert that this basic interplay – narrative and counter-narrative, theme and counter-theme, is endemic to the fabric of social understanding. He argues that

[...] there is no theme without a counter-theme. Themes are safe, conventional, and normative; one can invoke them as pieties on ceremonial occasions with the assumption of general social approval, albeit private cynicism. Counter-themes typically share many of the same taken-for-granted assumptions but challenge some specific aspect of the mainstream culture; they are adversarial, contentious and oppositional. Themes and counter-themes are paired with each other so that whenever one is invoked, the other is always present in latent form, ready to be activated with the proper cue (Gamson, 1992, p. 135).

As they engage in competing efforts to construct policy “stories”, actors use a variety of tools to gain the advantage. As previously noted, for example, Cochran-Smith & Fries (2001) argue that the evidentiary, accountability, and political warrants are significant weapons in the discursive struggle surrounding policy issues. They note that, “taken together, these three warrants are used to add up to “common sense” about what should be done [...]”, with each side “attempting to persuade others that the ‘solution’ is obvious and logical, based on simple common sense and clearly intended for the common good of the public and of American society” (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001, p. 12). Cohen-Vogel & Hunt (2007) expand on this, noting that some political actors – particularly “policy advocates” - “strive to construct warrants in favor of their policy preferences and/or larger worldview [while] also

work[ing] actively to undermine the legitimacy of their opponents. (Cohen-Vogel & Hunt, 2007, p. 157).

Related to the use of “warrants”, Schon & Rein (2004) assert that another key strategy in discursive contest lies with the selective valuing of certain “facts” and evidence. They note, for instance, that “parties to a controversy employ different strategies of selective attention. Depending on their views of an issue, they differ as to what facts are relevant [...] second, even when the parties to a controversy focus their attention on the same facts, they tend to give them different interpretations” (Schon & Rein, 1994, p. 4-5). They expand by noting that the selective acceptance of evidence is a fairly natural part of social understanding, arguing that

[...] by focusing our attention on different facts and by interpreting the same facts in different ways, we have a remarkable ability, when we are embroiled in controversy, to dismiss the evidence adduced by our antagonists. We display an astonishing virtuosity in ‘patching’ our arguments so as to assimilate counterevidence and refute countervailing arguments (Schon & Rein, 1994, p.5).

This tendency, however, may come at a cost – Schon & Rein (2004) argue that “when policy controversies are enduring and invulnerable to evidence, what tends to result is institutionalized political contention, leading either to stalemate or to pendulum swings from one extreme position to another, as one side or another comes to political power” (p. 8).

What can narratives tell us about the policy process?

While the above sections indicate the importance of policy “stories” in the policy process, a question still remains – what can we learn from the narratives constructed by policy actors? The question of whether or not actors’ narrative constructions provide insight into “reality”, in an objective way, is complicated. Shenhav (2005), for example, notes that

Scholars from various fields have debated the potential of narratives to represent “life” or “reality.” This issue can also be seen as a specific instance of a larger question that has preoccupied generations of philosophers and thinkers: the relationship between language and reality. At the heart of the issue is the essential question of whether narrative is created by imposing a pattern on reality or whether life is inherently patterned as narrative (p. 249).

The root of this potential dissonance lies with narrators’ inclination to frame policy “stories” in a way that suits their goals and purposes, in the name of expedience; in doing so, they may express perceptions of reality that may or may not be grounded in anything approximating empirical “fact”. Policy “stories” are not, as Shenhav (2006) notes, an “innocent mirror image of life”, but an effort to construct collective understandings of reality which promote or undermine policy action (p. 254). Edelman (1988), in wrestling with this understanding, concludes that

In short, it is not ‘reality’ in any testable or observable sense that matters in shaping political consciousness and behavior, but rather the beliefs that language helps evoke about the causes of discontents and satisfactions, about policies that will bring about a future closer to the heart’s desire, and about other unobservables (Edelman, 1988, p. 105).

Even though there is questionable utility in attempting to distil the “facts” of a given policy problem from the narratives constructed by actors in the process, several authors (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001; Fischer, 2003; Noblit, Berry & Dempsey, 1991; Sandlin & Clark, 2009; Shenhav, 2005) agree that unpacking political language and narratives can reveal a significant amount of information regarding the beliefs, values and logic – both individually and collectively held – underlying actors’ efforts to sway policy decisions. Sandlin & Clark (2009) assert, for example, that

[...] although policy makers often rely on narrative depictions in policy-making decisions, narratives are adopted by policy makers not because of their logic or empirical verifiability but when they match what legislators

already know and believe about the way the world works [...] What policy makers look for, then, in the narratives they ultimately choose to subscribe to, is a high degree of verisimilitude between the narratives provided by those attempting to influence policy, and the beliefs they already hold (Sandlin & Clark, 2009, p. 1024).

Fischer (2003) agrees, noting that through the active construction of policy narratives, actors bring their ideas, values, and ideologies to the fore, making them manifest through the “stories” they weave. He asserts that

The potency of political language does not stem from its mere descriptions of a real world, as empiricists have maintained. Rather, it comes from its reconstruction of the world – its interpretations of past experiences, its evocation of the unobservable aspects in the present, and constructions of possibilities and expectations for the future. These features make language a powerful constitutive force within politics (Fischer, 2003, p. 57).

Ultimately, then, the true benefit of exploring and understanding the policy narratives at play in any given moment of change lies not with understanding the world as it “is”, in an empirical sense, but rather in coming to an understanding of the world as policy actors *perceive it to be*, and, potentially, how they *would like it to be*. Understanding these perspectives – as manifested through the construction of policy “stories”, holds significant potential for informing our understanding of why certain moments of change unfolded as they did, and potentially how dominant perspectives may shape future policies and reforms.

Bringing it all together

Looking across the assembled literature presented in this chapter, a broad framework for understanding the nature of policy narratives can be synthesized. It begins with the recognition that policy “stories” are comprised of several basic *narrative elements*. First, every good “story” includes a host of *characters* (e.g. protagonists, antagonists, victims and heroes). Those characters are, generally, faced with some problem that needs to be solved; as

such, policy “stories” construct a *problem definition* which frames a particular problem’s proximity, magnitude and severity. Finally, policy narratives articulate a “plot” which frames the interaction of the various characters with each other, and the policy problem at hand. This is encapsulated by the idea of *causal narratives* (e.g. *intentional*, *inadvertent*, *mechanical*, *accidental* and *complex* narratives) described in this chapter.

Further, as the work presented in this chapter also asserts, the unification of these narrative elements may not be sufficient, in and of itself, to craft policy “stories” that capture the attention of the public and policy makers, and to promote the interests of the narrator. Policy “stories” must also be crafted so that they are accessible to their intended audience, and so that they resonate with their beliefs, values, and perspectives. To do so, narrators use a variety of rhetorical strategies – including *claims of legitimacy*, *rhetorical tropes*, and references to powerful cultural or national *symbols* – which reinforce their chosen narrative. The relationships between the various elements of this framework are presented in graphical form in Figure 1, below.

Moving forward, this study will build upon the ideas presented in this chapter – including the framework for understanding policy narratives presented above – through the exploration of policy narratives constructed around key teacher policy reforms in three states. Through this analysis – the methods of which will be discussed in Chapter 3 – I hope to unpack the beliefs and ideas that shaped actors’ understanding of the teaching profession and, potentially, to provide a description of the ways in which the policy “stories” constructed in those contexts helped to shape the highly political, and hotly contested, policy-making processes around these reforms in each state.

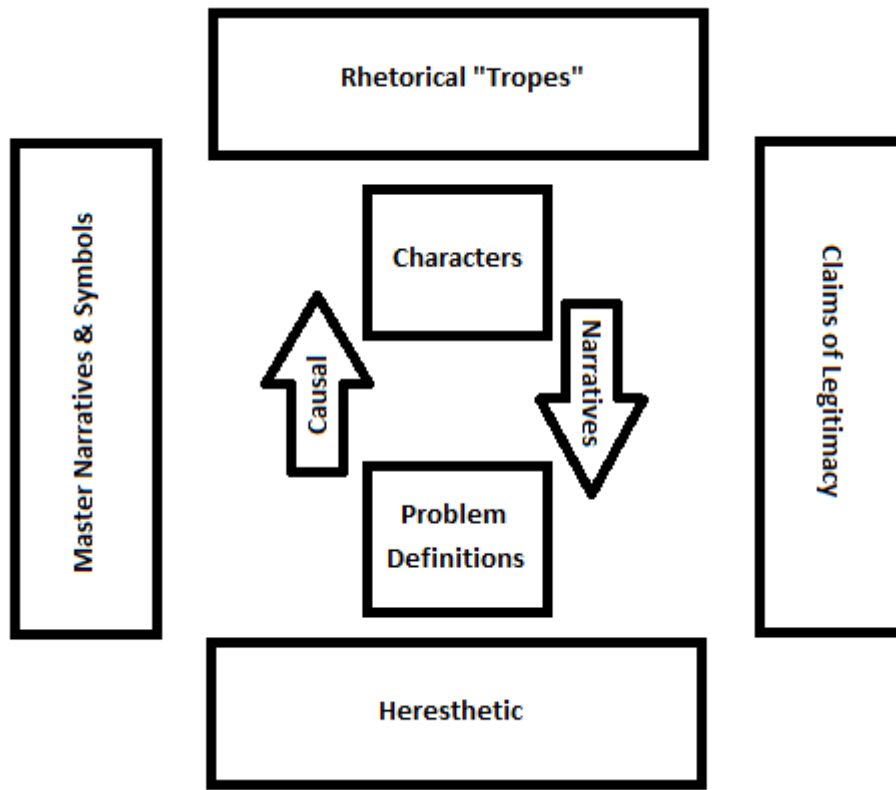


Figure 1. *Graphical Representation of Policy Narrative*

Chapter 3

METHODS

Having framed an understanding of the nature of policy narratives and their role in the policy process in the preceding chapter, I now move forward by describing the methods used in this study to answer the research questions presented in Chapter 1. To do so, I first outline the process by which I selected the states, and specific policies and “moments of change” within those states, investigated in this work. I then describe the data which form the basis of each of my case studies, and the process by which I sampled and selected those data for inclusion in the analysis. Finally, I describe my analytic strategy, outline the coding framework that I used to explore my data, and introduce the processes by which I synthesized my findings.

Selection of Sample States

Policy discourse and narrative construction surrounding compelling issues like teacher policy reform occurs across a wide variety of state and local arenas, and among a dizzying array of potential policy actors within those contexts. Miles & Huberman (1994) note that a key step in beginning to systematically explore phenomena occurring in such complex systems is delimiting the boundaries of the case (or cases) under investigation. As such, in order to more deeply explore the nature of policy narratives surrounding teacher compensation, contracting, and evaluation policies, I’ve chosen to narrow my gaze to a particular sub-section of this rich tapestry. In this section, I will identify the boundaries that

I've placed around my analysis, and the rationale for restricting this study in the ways that I have.

First, I delimit my analysis of narratives surrounding these teacher policy reforms to a certain temporal "window". As noted previously, consideration of alternative compensation, evaluation, and contracting systems for teachers is not, in and of itself, novel. In 2010, however, a number of "triggering" events may have opened a new policy "window" – as Kingdon (1994) conceptualizes – prompting a surge in policy action and discourse surrounding these issues. First, the creation of the Race to the Top grant competition by the Obama administration heralded a new focus among state administrations on systemic education reform along a number of vectors – including policies governing states' efforts to recruit, develop, reward and retain effective teachers (Duncan, 2009). In addition to policy pressure from the Federal level, 2010 marked the advent of a period of significant political upheaval, as the particularly charged 2010 and 2012 election cycles resulted in significant perturbation of the political equilibrium in several states, including shifts in legislative majorities and the inauguration of new executives. This combination of shifting actors, political dynamism and policy pressure may have – as Baumgartner & Jones (1991) and Kingdon (1994) articulate – created an environment ripe for policy change and the redefinition of long-standing issues related to teacher policy.

Having established a temporal boundary around the analysis, I have also restricted the scope of my study by focusing on a select number of state contexts. In this case, I narrow my gaze to three states in the southeastern region of the United States. Since 2010, only three

states in the region¹ have seen the introduction of omnibus legislation proposing alterations to teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting policies – Florida, Louisiana, and North Carolina. Narrowing the scope of my work to these three states yielded a number of benefits; physical proximity, for example, allowed me to collect data in person from legislative proceedings in two of the states. In addition, all three states have robust “sunshine” laws in place, requiring that their state governments aggressively capture and archive raw audio and video from committee meetings and floor debates. More importantly, the policy context of each of these states appears to have been shaped by the forces contributing to the “policy window” described above. Each state, for example, applied for and received funds through the Race to the Top grant program. Additionally, each of these three state contexts saw significant shifts in their political equilibria during the delimited time-frame.

In Florida, for example, proposals to eliminate tenure and to link teachers’ employment and individual compensation to student performance became the subject of prominent debate in 2010. These proposals took the form of the hotly contested Student Success Act (Senate Bills 6 and 736) – legislation intended, according to policy makers, to bolster Florida’s chances for victory in the second round of the Race to the Top grant competition. As will be outlined more fully later in this study, efforts to pass S.B. 6 were frustrated by the opposition of then governor Charlie Crist, who sided with the numerous and vocal opponents of the bill. Crist’s subsequent choice to pursue an independent run for the U.S. Senate in the mid-term election opened the door for the ascendancy of the more conservative Rick Scott to the governor’s seat. As Scott took office in 2011, the emboldened Republican legislature resurrected the push for contracting, compensation and evaluation

¹ Nationwide, only two other states passed similar legislation altering teacher contracting, compensation, and evaluation: Indiana, and Ohio.

reform as S.B. 736 – ultimately sending the bill to the governor’s desk for signature after a renewed debate.

Similarly, in North Carolina, the state’s competition in the second round of the Race to the Top competition coincided with a massive shift in the state’s political environment. Following the 2010 mid-term election, the state’s legislature changed hands for the first time since Reconstruction, as the Republican Party took control of both legislative chambers. In the ensuing legislative session, Senate President Phil Berger sponsored the Excellent Public Schools Act – S.B. 795 – which brought proposals to eliminate tenure and to tie teachers’ pay and continued employment to students’ performance. As in Florida, a veto threat from then governor Bev Purdue derailed the legislation. Again, as in Florida, the subsequent election of a more conservative governor – in this case, the state’s first Republican governor in 30 years, Pat McCrory – galvanized support for teacher policy reform. A weaker form of the Excellent Public Schools Act – which deconstructed teacher tenure, tied teacher’s employment to evaluation results, and established an exploratory commission around performance pay – passed as part of the state’s budget in 2013.

Finally, in Louisiana, movement in both the policy and politics “streams” seemed to herald the advance of teacher policy reforms. As in North Carolina, Louisiana’s majority Democrat legislature changed hands for the first time since the late 1800’s in 2010, as a result of party defections and special elections. Republican gains were cemented in the state’s formal legislative elections in 2011; this shift in political tides, further, presaged a strong push from Republican governor Bobby Jindal for teacher policy reform. Finally, as in the other two states, the initiation of a renewed press for contracting, compensation and evaluation reform coincided with the state’s receipt of funds through the Race to the Top

competition. Despite sharp opposition from numerous groups in the state, House Bill (H.B.) 974 – which significantly weakened tenure rights in the state, and mandated that teachers’ continuing employment and compensation be tied to student achievement – passed through the state legislature and was signed into law in 2012.

Table 1. Description of State Cases

State	Reform Legislation	Teacher Policy Reforms	Year Introduced	Year Adopted
Florida	The Student Success Act	Tenure Elimination Compensation Reform Coupling of Job Status/Compensation to Student Performance	2010	2011
Louisiana	H.B. 974	Weakened Tenure Compensation Reform Coupling of Job Status/Compensation to Student Performance	2012	2012
North Carolina	The Excellent Public Schools Act	Tenure Elimination Limited Compensation Reform Coupling of Job Status/Compensation to Student Performance	2012	2013

Even having narrowed my gaze by focusing on three key state contexts – Florida, North Carolina and Louisiana – and the pieces of legislation that made teacher policy reforms manifest in those states, some additional decisions are necessary to responsibly constrain the scope of my analysis. Given that the debate around these issues was highly contentious in each state – occurring across a variety of contexts, and among numerous and varied participants – careful consideration must be given to the sampling and selection strategy used to identify a manageable pool of data for each state case study.

Description of Data

In order to best answer my research questions – which seek to describe both the nature of the policy narratives that emerged from debate over reforms to teacher contracting and compensation in each state, and to unpack the deeper understandings held by policy actors regarding education that these narratives reveal – I have chosen to focus on the discourse in each state as it occurred across two venues. First, I capture the discourse of policy actors as they grappled with these reforms in each state’s legislature through testimony and debate - within committee meetings and on the floor of each legislative chamber. In addition, I capture the narratives constructed by policy actors as they sought to argue in support or opposition to teacher reform policies through comments and editorial contributions to major print media sources in each state.

Description of Audio Data Sources

As noted above, teacher policy reform proposals were made manifest by key pieces of legislation in each state – the Student Success Act in Florida, H.B. 974 in Louisiana, and the Excellent Public Schools Act in North Carolina. To capture much of the “official” discourse surrounding these bills, I have collected audio recordings – through state audio archives, when available, or through in-person recording – for those committee meetings and floor sessions in which debate around each bill occurred. Table 2 describes this audio data – identifying the source meeting from which it was collected, the date of the meeting, and its length.

Audio records were selected for inclusion in the study through review of legislative tracking systems in each state, which identified the committee meetings and legislative floor

sessions in which each piece of legislation was considered. When possible, audio/video recordings were captured in their entirety for each of these meetings – either through download of state produced archives, or through in-person recording. Audio and video records of these meetings capture the discourse of a number of key policy actors – including legislators, administrative officials, school leaders, teachers and interested members of the public – as they argued in support or opposition of each piece of legislation, constructing policy narratives in the process. Constraining my analysis to those portions of the legislative debate surrounding these bills that occurred in the “public square”, of course, may limit my ability to capture the totality of the discourse which occurred within each state legislature. This danger is mitigated, somewhat, by the aforementioned sunshine policies in each state, which require that substantive debate surrounding bills occur in publically available meetings – still, it is reasonable to expect that some important aspects of the “story” may remain locked in conversations and meetings that occurred outside of those portions of the debate to which I had access. As Table 2 describes, however, the substantial amount of data recovered in each context should offer extensive coverage of the discourse surrounding each of these bills in each state legislature.

Table 2. Description of Audio Data in Each State

State	Meeting Title	Date
FL	House of Representatives: Pre K-12 Policy Subcommittee	03/25/2010
	House of Representatives: Education Policy Council	04/05/2010
	Senate: Education Pre K-12 Committee	02/09/2011
	Senate: Education Pre K-12 Committee	02/10/2011

State	Meeting Title	Date
	House of Representatives: K-20 Competitiveness Subcommittee	02/23/2011
	Senate: Floor Debate	03/10/2011
	House of Representatives: Floor Debate	03/16/2011
NC	Senate: Education Committee	05/29/2012
	Senate: Appropriations Subcommittee on Education	05/30/2012
	Senate: Floor Debate	05/31/2012
	Senate: Floor Debate	06/04/2012
	House of Representatives: Education Committee	06/05/2012
	House of Representatives: Education Committee	06/18/2012
	House of Representatives: Floor Debate	06/21/2012
	Senate: Education Committee	04/10/2013
	House of Representatives: Floor Debate	06/12/2013
	House of Representatives: Floor Debate	06/13/2013
LA	House of Representatives: Education Committee	03/14/12
	House of Representatives: Floor Debate	03/22/12
	House of Representatives: Floor Debate	03/23/12
	Senate: Education Committee	03/29/12
	Senate: Education Committee	04/02/12
	Senate: Floor Debate	04/04/12
	House of Representatives: Floor Debate	04/05/12

Description of Print Media Sources

In addition to the debate unfolding in the halls of each state’s legislature, a significant amount of the discourse surrounding these teacher policy reforms – and the rich narrative construction that accompanied that discourse – occurred across the pages of major print media sources in each state. Through their comments to reporters, as well as editorial contributions and letters to the editor, numerous actors in each state wove policy “stories” to support their arguments for or against teacher policy reform. These actors included many of the same legislators and activists whose discourse was captured in the audio data described above; in addition, however, a number of actors unable to penetrate the barriers surrounding the legislative debate around these issues were able to exercise voice, and contribute their own arguments and narratives to the discussion.

Table 3 describes the data culled from print media sources in each state. In order to identify relevant articles and opinion pieces in each context, I conducted several online searches. First, I selected several major newspapers in each state; in doing so, I chose media sources that served large population centers in geographically disparate parts of each state, in an attempt to achieve as comprehensive a coverage of each context as possible. In Florida, I chose four newspapers, covering the northern and southern portions of the state, as well as both coasts – the Tallahassee Democrat, the Orlando Sentinel, the Tampa Bay Times, and the Palm Beach Post. Similarly, in North Carolina, four papers offered wide coverage of the state – the Raleigh News & Observer, the Charlotte Observer, the Asheville Citizen Times, and the Daily Reflector. Finally, in Louisiana, I chose 5 major newspapers – the New Orleans Times-Picayune, the Shreveport Times, the Lafayette Advertiser, the Monroe News-Star, and the Baton Rouge Advocate.

Having identified print media sources in each state context, I then conducted online searches to identify relevant articles, letters, and opinion pieces for collection. Each of the papers selected maintains robust online archives of their content. Several searches were conducted for each paper, using a series of terms; terms included searches for the target bill number and/or bill title in each state (e.g. S.B. 736, or the Student Success Act), as well as key words like “teacher tenure”, and “teacher performance pay”. These searches returned several hits in each context – these results were then read in their entirety. Those articles deemed to be relevant – as determined by discussion of the specific pieces of legislation identified above, or the teacher policy issues of interest to this study – were retained as part of the sample.

Table 3. Description of Print Media Sources in Each State

State	Source	# of Articles
FL	<i>Orlando Sentinel</i>	15
	<i>Palm Beach Post</i>	23
	<i>Tampa Bay Times</i>	16
	<i>Tallahassee Democrat</i>	11
FL Total: 65		
NC	<i>Raleigh News & Observer</i>	27
	<i>Charlotte Observer</i>	12
	<i>Ashville Citizen-Times</i>	10
	<i>The Daily Reflector</i>	12
NC Total: 61		
LA	<i>New Orleans Times Picayune</i>	27
	<i>The Shreveport Times</i>	18
	<i>The Advertiser</i>	4
	<i>The News-Star</i>	10
	<i>The Advocate</i>	5
LA Total: 64		

Conceptual issues with sampling and selection of data

While I believe the sample of data that I've gathered is robust, and well-aligned toward answering my research questions, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of my sampling and selection strategy and the potential impact of those limitations on my analysis. The principle limitation of the way in which I've bounded my pool of data lies with

the potential for missing those elements of the discourse – portions of the “multitude of voices” that Roe (1994) notes are vital to the reconstruction of policy narratives – falling outside of the limited arenas to which I’ve narrowed my analytic gaze. Of particular note, in this case, is the fact that I’ve gathered a substantial amount of data from sites – state legislatures and major print media sources – which have significant barriers to entry that may serve to restrict many voices from joining in the process of narrative construction and conflict which occurred within them (Marshall, 2010). As a result, the way in which I’ve constrained my study may over-represent the policy “stories” of certain groups and actors – particularly, in this case, the policy “elite” in each state – while under-representing or excluding the perspectives and narratives of more disadvantaged populations.

In the case of data gathered from state legislatures, particularly, institutional and political forces could conceivably (and, as will be discussed in the following case studies, often did) work to limit the capacity of oppositional or marginalized voices from participating in the debate around teacher policy reform. The sheer distance that actors would have to travel to exercise voice in committee meetings, for example, might constrain the ability of certain groups to add their narrative voice to the policy discourse. Further, institutional rules in each state legislature empower elite actors to constrain the voice of non-elites – by limiting the length of actors’ testimony, for example, or outright disallowing certain actors from offering testimony at all. As a result, these data have the potential to significantly privilege the discourse and narrative constructions of a certain subset of actors – policy elites like legislators – while marginalizing others. This potential bias was not – as will be discussed – uniform between state contexts; in Florida, for example, the rise of a particularly vocal grassroots opposition to the Student Success Act saw the infiltration of

several committee meetings by actors – primarily teachers – who might normally not have expressed significant voice in that setting. Conversely, the relatively closed nature of committee meetings in North Carolina presented a starkly different case.

Barriers to discursive participation are, conceivably, less restrictive in the case of the print media. Across state contexts, non-elite actors expressed their opinions – and the policy narratives undergirding them – regarding teacher contracting, compensation and evaluation reform in letters to the editor of their local papers. Additionally, vocal opposition movements in Florida, Louisiana and North Carolina drew significant media attention, allowing actors outside of the realm of policy elites to exercise their voice through quotes and interviews captured as part of the media’s coverage of each piece of legislation. As such, this portion of the data that I’ve collected widens my analytic net substantially, capturing additional discourse generated by policy elites, in addition to the perspectives and narratives of policy actors that may have been restricted from the “official” discourse within the legislative assemblies of each state.

The point remains, however, that this analysis – by nature of its design – does not consider a potentially significant portion of the total discourse surrounding these teacher reforms in my state contexts of choice. While my data do allow me to capture some voices representing groups like teachers, school administrators and parents, I only capture the voices of those who were able to negotiate the barriers surrounding the discursive arenas that I’ve described above. Those, for example, who made the trek to state capitols to testify before legislative committees, or who were able to take the time to compose letters expressing their opinions and policy “stories” to their regional paper. It is very possible that additional narratives and stories – very different from the kind that I will catalogue in this study - exist

among members of these groups who could not navigate the obstacles to participation at this level of the policy discourse. Additionally, other potential sources of discourse surrounding teacher policy reform – including, for example, prepared speeches by legislators, press releases by governmental and non-governmental organizations, blog and internet posts by non-elites, and the profundity of other arenas in which debate surrounding these issues might have occurred – remain unmined by this study. Finally, it is likely that my bounding of the data will leave out a key stakeholder in the realm of teacher policy – students. By and large, students’ voices are not represented in this pool of data – except for when they are spoken for by adult actors. These elements of the discourse surrounding teacher policy reform are equally important to the “stories” that I center this analysis on, and should be the focus of further work in this area.

Analytic Strategy

To make sense of this mass of data, and find answers to my research questions, I employ an analytic method closely tied to the form of narrative analysis described by Polkinghorne (1995) and others (Creswell, 2007; Bruner, 1985) as *paradigmatic analysis of narrative data*. In this type of analysis – described by Polkinghorne (1995) as *analysis of narratives*, rather than *narrative analysis* – the researcher’s focus is on producing “descriptions of themes that hold across [...] stories, or in taxonomies of types of stories, characters, or settings” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 10). This, of course, first requires that narrative constructions be recognized and isolated in each piece of data described above.

To do so, I consider each source (listening and/or reading) in full. In the case of audio/video recordings of legislative meetings, the transitional step of transcribing data into

textual format was necessary prior to analyzing it. Given the extensive length of many of these recordings, full transcription represented a daunting logistical task. Instead, only those utterances by actors that fell within the boundaries of three narrative constructions were translated in full – *stories*, *counter-stories*, and *nonstories* (Roe, 1994). Stories are defined as narrative constructions that possess beginnings, middles, and ends and, if they forward an argument, premises and conclusions (Polkinghorne, 1995; Roe, 1994; Reissman, 1993). Roe (1994) defines counter-stories as those narratives that “run counter to the controversy’s dominant policy narratives” (p. 3). Finally, non-stories are defined as “those other narratives in the issue that do not conform to the definition of story”, such as “a circular argument [which] has no beginning, middle, and end of its own” (Roe, 1994, p. 3). Such constructions may contain elements of story – settings, characters and the like, while lacking the temporal structure and plotlines of stories (Polkinghorne, 1995; Roe, 1994). While this “filter” still captured a significant amount of discourse in each setting, it did allow a substantial amount of non-related participant utterances – for example, the wealth of discourse relating to administrative matters in each meeting – to fall by the wayside.

Having identified a subset of discourse in my data sources to analyze, the next step of my paradigmatic analysis of narrative data calls for the systematic identification of “common themes or conceptual manifestations among the stories collected as data” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 13). To do so, I imported the full text of each print media artifact, and each partial transcript, into an NVivo 10 project file. I then reviewed each source, using directed content analysis to assign excerpts of each transcript – and the narratives contained within – to conceptual and descriptive categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Patton, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The majority of these conceptual codes were drawn

from the broad literature on narrative construction and policy “stories” presented in the preceding chapter, and are described below, and in Table 4.

Each element of the coding framework used to guide my analysis of these data is targeted toward answering my key research questions – described in the first chapter of this study. First, I seek to describe the types of narratives that policy actors constructed around these teacher policy reforms. To do so, I first construct codes describing the *narrator* constructing each story (e.g. legislator, teacher, parent, other). There are then several aspects of each policy actor’s narrative that are of critical interest to understanding potential themes and commonalities between them. These include the *characters* (e.g. protagonists, antagonists, and victims) framed by narrators, the *problem definitions* (including factors like *proximity*, *magnitude*, and *severity*) contained within each “story”, and their *causal narratives* – captured using Stone’s (2002; 1989) framework. Together, these codes attempt to capture the narrative elements underlying each policy “story” that I may encounter in the data. Finally, I construct codes capturing the *rhetorical strategies* employed by policy actors – including *claims of legitimacy*, *rhetorical tropes*, and *symbols and master narratives*.

Second, a major question of my study lies with unpacking the understandings regarding education, learning and the profession of teaching that the narratives constructed by policy actors in these three contexts reveal – in essence, the *meanings* and *themes* underlying their policy “stories”. Rather than rely on *a priori* codes to attempt to categorize and capture these understandings, I will allow potential categories to rise out of interaction with the data – a process commonly referred to as emergent or “grounded” coding (Creswell, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This strategy is, of course, not isolated to this portion of my coding framework – potential codes emerging from the data assistive in understanding

the nature of policy narratives in each state context will also be incorporated alongside the *a priori* codes described above. A summary of my planned coding framework is provided below, in Table 4.

Table 4. *Summary of Coding Framework*

Coding Framework
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Narrators <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Legislators <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Republican ii. Democrat B. Teachers C. Parents D. Advocacy groups E. Other 2. Narrative Elements <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Characters <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Protagonists ii. Antagonists iii. Victims iv. Heroes B. Problem Definition <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Proximity ii. Magnitude iii. Severity C. Causal Narrative <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Intentional ii. Inadvertent iii. Mechanical iv. Accidental v. Complex 3. Rhetorical Strategies <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Establishing Legitimacy <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Evidentiary Warrant ii. Accountability Warrant iii. Political Warrant B. Rhetorical Tropes <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Metonymy ii. Synecdoche iii. Metaphor iv. Irony C. Symbols and Master Narratives 4. Narrative Themes

After coding each source of data using the aforementioned strategy, I engaged in the process of synthesizing findings from my analysis through the construction of detailed case

studies for each state (Creswell, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994). To do so, I conducted a variety of coding queries on each node of my framework, including standard node queries and matrix queries – allowing me to isolate, for example, certain participants’ responses within each analytic node – for each transcript and article analyzed in each state. The node reports resulting from those queries were then read in their entirety. In the course of reading, I took detailed notes regarding emergent themes and patterns in the data, identified exemplar quotes and excerpts demonstrating such findings, and identified points of potentially disconfirming evidence – or utterances from participants which signaled important breaks from dominant patterns and themes identified in the data. Emergent codes – resulting from those patterns not captured in my *a priori* coding framework – were added to the node structure, and previously coded transcripts and articles recoded to account for any additions. These notes served as intermediate analytic products, similar to Miles & Huberman’s (1994) *analytic memos*. Such documents are intended to “tie together different pieces of data into a recognizable cluster”, functioning as a “useful and powerful sense-making tool” allowing the analyst to better understand the interplay between patterns and themes among the individual elements of their analytic framework (p. 72).

These limited analytic memos – capturing themes and patterns within each element of my analytic framework in each state – became the foundation for the production of the detailed state case studies that follow in chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this report. Further, they served as the foundation of the cross-case comparison intended to answer the study’s third primary research question. To construct this cross-case comparison, the limited analytic memos constructed for each element of the framework across all three states were analyzed

together, to identify broad patterns of commonality and difference between contexts; this cross-case comparison is presented in chapter 7.

Chapter 4

TEACHER REFORM IN FLORIDA: THE STUDENT SUCCESS ACT

Teacher reforms in the first of my case study states – Florida – emerged from an intensely contested, multi-year policy debate which saw participation by a variety of stakeholders. As the fracas ensued, Republicans, Democrats, advocacy groups, teachers, parents, administrators, students and concerned citizens squared off across battle lines as they sought to define the future of the teaching profession in Florida. This intense discursive contest played host to a number of dramatic moments, as teachers from across the state mobilized and traveled to the capitol to protest and testify, and teacher policy became a central issue to intense competitions for Florida’s senatorial and gubernatorial seats.

As this chapter will show, the discourse generated as these actors debated reform to teacher compensation, contracting and evaluation policies was defined by several policy “stories”, which reveal very different underlying understandings regarding the nature of education, teaching and learning on the part of both supporters and opponents of reform. The findings presented emerged from analysis of several committee meetings in both the Florida House and Senate, in addition to hours of debate on the floor of both houses of the legislature, and 65 print media artifacts. These sources are identified in detail in Appendix A; explicit references from each source, throughout the chapter, are cited using the document identification numbers provided therein. Prior to delving into these findings, however, a

brief overview of the policy process surrounding the particular legislation under investigation by this case – The Student Success Act – is provided below.

Setting the Stage

Given a number of contextual factors, it is, perhaps, unsurprising that Florida proved to be a fertile environment for substantial reform surrounding teacher evaluation, contracting and compensation policies. First, the state possesses a number of characteristics – or internal determinants – indicated by research to be predictive of policy dynamism and innovation. These factors include the relative size, wealth, urbanicity and professional structure of the state’s legislature when compared to its regional neighbors; as a fairly large, wealthy, influential state with a dynamic legislative assembly, Florida has a demonstrated history as a leader in policy innovation among the southeastern states (Berry & Berry, 1990; Mintrom & Vergari, 1998; Cohen-Vogel, et al., 2008; McLendon & Cohen-Vogel, 2008).

In addition to these factors, the history of policy change in Florida over the last few decades reflects a particular emphasis on acting as a regional and national leader in the realm of education. Under the leadership of former governor Jeb Bush, for example – still a policy actor within the realm of education today – the state took a lead position in the standards and accountability movement in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s. The state’s system of standards and assessments – including several revisions of the Sunshine State Standards and the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test – have served as national models, alongside its systems for grading schools. Similarly, the Bush years saw efforts to more directly tie teacher compensation to student performance in the state; these efforts took the form of bonus plans – the Special Teachers are Rewarded (STAR) and Merit Award Programs (MAP) – which were innovative, in the sense that they were new modes of compensation for the state, but

also beset by implementation challenges (Buddin, McCaffrey, Kirby & Xia, 2007). Most recently, Florida has again been recognized as an innovator in the region, winning federal funds through the Obama administration's Race to the Top grant competition – as part of which the state agreed to continue to develop its already impressive infrastructure for collecting and sharing achievement data. The state's application also indicated its intention to pursue efforts to recruit, retain and reward highly effective teachers – a point which, as will be shown, became a selling point for reforms to teacher evaluation, compensation and contracting policies.

The Student Success Act

These factors – the state's fertile ground for policy innovation, history as an educational leader, and successful bid for Race to the Top funds – set the stage for the contest to redefine the profession of teaching in Florida. Over the course of the 2010 and 2011 legislative sessions, this contest centered on two critical pieces of legislation: Senate Bills (S.B.) 6 and 736, the latter of which would eventually be titled the "Student Success Act". SB 6 was introduced early in the 2010 legislative session, heralding a strong push for reform by the state's dominant Republican Party. The bill was sponsored by state Senator John Thrasher – who became the leader of the Republican Party of Florida following the embattled departure of former chair Jim Greer – and seemed poised for swift passage into law. The Republican majority in Florida was, after all, solid and well entrenched. Unlike North Carolina and Louisiana, Florida's legislature had been relatively stable for over a decade; the Republican Party took control of both houses of the state's legislature in 1997, and maintains its hold today. The state's executive seemed similarly amenable to the cause of reform – the

state's gubernatorial seat had been held by the Republicans since 1999, and then Governor Charlie Crist had expressed support for the GOP's educational agenda.

As noted, SB 6 proposed sweeping and – at the time – revolutionary changes to the policy structure governing the profession of teaching in Florida. These proposals included alterations to three critical areas of existing law – the process for evaluating teachers across the state, the process through which teacher salaries should be determined and rules outlining the broad parameters governing teacher contracts. In the first of these areas – teacher evaluation – SB 6 took steps to tie teachers' evaluations much more directly to student performance. Under the bill, at least 50% of teachers' evaluations would be determined by their performance on a statistical model estimating their “value-added” to students' growth on state mandated assessments – at the time, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), although the state's adoption of the Common Core heralded a pending shift to new standardized tests and end-of-course examinations. The remaining portion of the evaluation formula was largely left to local determination, and could include a variety of measures including qualitative principal evaluations or portfolio assessments.

The bill's alterations to teacher compensation policy were strongly linked to this new approach to evaluation – under SB6, districts would be required to link all increases in teacher pay to performance on the new evaluation system. Only teachers receiving ratings of highly effective or effective would be eligible for raises, when district budgets allowed for such increases, with those teachers in the highly effective category receiving priority. Further, SB6 expressly forbade LEAs from using time-in-service or possession of an advanced degree – key components of traditional salary scales – in determining teacher compensation. These performance-based increases were not bonuses, differentiating SB 6

from former programs in the state; raises under the new plan would be permanent increases to teachers' base salary.

Finally, one of SB6's most contentious (as will be shown) components would alter the contractual terms under which teachers would be hired and fired in Florida. Under the legislation, the state's existing contracting structure – in which teachers received auto-renewing “professional service” contracts upon recommendation after a three-year probationary period – would be dismantled. In its place, teachers hired after July 1, 2010 would undergo a year-long probationary period, during which time they could be terminated without cause. Successful completion of this probationary contract would grant eligibility for re-hire under a new system of “annual contracts”; these contracts, unlike the old professional service contracts, would not renew automatically at the end of the contract period – rather, teachers' annual contracts would lapse, and districts would be free to offer or not offer a new contract in the next year at their discretion. Further, after a teacher's fourth annual contract, districts could only offer a new contract to that teacher if they had received an “effective” or “highly effective” rating in two out of three of their last performance evaluations. To the extent that the state's existing system of “professional service” contracts represented tenure, SB 6 proposed eliminating it.

SB 6's journey through Florida's Senate and, later, the state House of Representatives seemed to confirm the theory that reform would move swiftly under the state's unified government. The bill moved rapidly through the Senate, passing through Committee by mid-March, and achieving final passage through the Senate on March 24, 2010 with 21 yeas and 17 nays. While the vote wasn't strictly party line – 4 Republicans crossed the aisle to oppose passage of the bill – no members of the opposition party rose in support of the

legislation. Moreover, as description of the policy discourse surrounding SB 6 will show, while the bill's progress through the Senate was swift, it was also hotly debated. Several meetings of the Senate's education committee stretched into long hours as actors from across the state journeyed to the capitol, Tallahassee, to express their support or opposition. This intense debate followed the bill as it moved to the Florida House, and marked the building of political pressure that would upend the progress of teacher reform in Florida in a few short weeks.

Following passage in the Florida Senate, SB 6 moved to the state House of Representatives. The bill moved past its first reading in early April and – as in the Senate – moved through the legislative process quickly. Following a similarly contested committee process surrounding the House's version of the bill, SB 6 came to a final vote on April 09, 2010, passing with a 65-55 margin after a heated debate that extended from the late afternoon into the early morning hours. With the approval of the House, SB 6 – and the sweeping reforms to teacher compensation, contracting and evaluation which it heralded – seemed poised for enactment. The attention of both proponents and opponents – and the intense political debate surrounding the issue of teacher policy reform – shifted to a new focus: outgoing Florida Governor Charlie Crist.

As SB6 moved to the Governor's desk for signature, actors on both sides of the debate waited for indication of his ultimate decision. Complicating the situation was Crist's recent – and relatively dramatic – split from the Republican Party. The moderate Crist declared his intention to seek the Senate seat being vacated by long-standing Floridian legislator Bob Graham, placing him at odds with many in the party; ultimately, he declared his intention to run as an independent candidate in May 2010, after falling behind more

conservative challenger Marco Rubio in the Republican primary race. While there was substantial reason to believe that the Governor might still support SB 6 – he had, after all, played a large part in the state’s history as a frontrunner in education reform as Commissioner of Education during the Bush years – opponents expressed hope that the pressures of his Senatorial campaign might make him amenable to their cause. The Governor’s initial response to the passage of SB 6 was fairly lukewarm – he opined, in an interview, that "there are things about it that I like and things about it that give me some concern [...] I'm listening to the people of Florida" (21). Opponents of the bill seemed to take this to heart, and a substantial public campaign to sway the Governor’s decision began. Crist’s office received over 120,000 messages regarding SB6, with the vast majority urging him to strike it down. Janet Clark, a member of the Pinellas School Board, expressed her confidence that the campaign would have an effect, sharing in an interview that "Charlie Crist knows which side his bread is buttered on [...] if he doesn't veto this, he will have lost teachers, he will have lost a lot of parents" (7).

After several days of anticipation, the Governor rendered his decision, striking down SB 6 and preventing its proposed reforms to teacher contracting, compensation and evaluation policy from becoming law. The Governor’s reflection on his veto seemed to indicate that the substantial public pressure applied in the wake of SB 6’s legislative passage had made a significant impact. Crist asserted, in explaining his decision, that "this bill has deeply and negatively affected the morale of our teachers, our parents and our students [...] they are not confident in our system because they do not believe their voices were heard" (9). A teacher shared her feelings more simply, noting that – upon hearing about the veto - "we just cheered and cried [...] thankfully, the governor was listening" (9). While a number of the

bill's opponents moved into the summer of 2010 breathing more easily, however, events over the next several months would prove that the fight over teacher policy in Florida was far from over. The forthcoming election, and 2011 legislative session which followed, would see debate over teacher policy reignite as S.B. 736 – the “son of six” – began its own legislative journey.

As the summer of 2010 drew to a close, the political ground in Florida began to shift, helping to create an opening for renewed debate over teacher policy reform in the state. Governor Crist's bid for the Senate opened the door for a substantial alteration in the state's executive branch, and the race – between Democratic candidate Alex Sink and conservative Republican Rick Scott – was heavily contested and close. Scott noted, in the course of the campaign, that he would have signed SB 6 if he had been governor at the time and when the electoral results were tallied in November, he was given his chance to prove it. Scott's ascendency to the Governor's chair was accompanied by the Republican Party's further entrenchment in the legislature; the GOP gained an additional seat in the Florida Senate, and increased their majority in the Florida House of Representatives by five seats. As 2011 dawned and the legislative session began, momentum certainly appeared to, again, be solidly behind the Republican educational agenda – as such, it was little surprise when Senate Bill 736, the Student Success Act, was filed in late January.

In virtually all respects, SB 736 was nearly identical to its predecessor, SB 6. It retained the same reforms to performance evaluation – again, districts would be required to base at least 50% of teachers' evaluations on value-added estimates of their impact on student growth. Additionally, it carried forward SB 6's revisions to teacher compensation, dismantling traditional salary schedules by requiring that increases in teacher salary be tied to

their performance evaluations, rather than seniority or advanced degree status. Finally, SB 736 retained SB 6's proposed contract revisions, eliminating auto-renewing "professional service" contracts and placing all teachers hired after July 1, 2011 on probationary or annual contracts. The only major change to these policies – perhaps reflective of negotiations between groups like the FEA and the legislature between sessions – was an added provision that allowed teachers operating under the existing salary schedule to remain on it. As such, SB 736 attempted to skirt some controversy by restricting most of its reforms to newer teachers in the profession, while allowing those with seniority to retain the existing salary structure and system of "professional service" contracts.

As with SB 6, SB 736's passage through the legislature was swift, albeit less contentious than its forbear. From the outset, the bill's sponsor – Florida Senator Stephen Wise, a former teacher and co-sponsor of SB 6 – attempted to strike a more conciliatory tone toward opponents of the bill. At several points in the debate over the SB 736, Wise asserted that "we're not here to punish teachers. I will assure you of that [...] it is not Senate Bill 6" (28). Indeed, while there was still a substantial amount of debate surrounding the bill as it moved through committee in the Senate and the House, the discourse surrounding the Republican bid for teacher policy reform lacked much of the furor that surrounded SB 6. A variety of actors – including teachers, advocacy groups like the Florida Educator's Association (FEA), and parents – testified before the legislature and within the public sphere; that said, several participants in the discourse surrounding SB 736 expressed a sense of satisfaction around the more transparent and inclusive process. Andy Ford, president of the FEA, expressed this succinctly, noting that "you've given people an opportunity to at least express their concerns, and that's extremely important" (28).

By early February, S.B. 736 passed through the Senate Education committee and shortly thereafter achieved the approval of the Senate. As with its predecessor, the voting record indicated a strong partisan divide, despite the apparently more open and congenial process surrounding the bill; again, no member of the opposition party voted in favor of SB 736, and a handful of more moderate Republicans crossed party lines to oppose it after a lengthy debate on the Senate floor. The bill moved with a similar pace through committee in the House, and came to a final vote on March 16th, 2011. After a tense floor debate, which extended over several hours, SB 736 achieved final legislative approval on a strictly party-line vote – 80-39. Unlike SB6, the Student Success Act moved forward with a less uncertain fate – true to his word, Governor Rick Scott signed SB 736 into law on March 24, 2011. Reflecting on one of his first major acts as governor, Scott noted that "I am proud that the first bill I sign is this important legislation that will give Florida the best-educated work force to compete in the 21st century economy [...] we must recruit and retain the best people to make sure every classroom in Florida has a highly effective teacher" (14).

Policy Narratives Surrounding Teacher Reform in Florida

While SB 6 and SB 736 each moved rapidly through the legislative process during the two year struggle over teacher policy in Florida, their journeys were not without considerable controversy, debate and fervent discourse on the part of both supporters and opponents of reform. As the bills moved through committee, onto the floor of the Senate and the House and even to the Governor's desk, a wide variety of actors from across Florida came forward to express their opinion in testimony before the legislature and through the media. As they did so, they wove complex narratives – constructing articulations of how characters, problems, and causal processes interacted – in order to justify their particular vision for how

the issue of teacher policy reform should be resolved. Moreover, they shaped these policy “stories” through the use of rhetoric – in particular, girding their narratives within illustrative metaphor, and grounding them in references to deeper cultural symbols and narratives.

The remainder of this chapter unpacks these elements – describing the “storytellers” that took part in the discursive battle over teacher policy in Florida, and then exploring the stories that they told. As will be shown, two general narratives came to define the debate surrounding the Student Success Act in Florida. Supporters, for their part, told a policy “story” which firmly situated teachers as the driving force in student learning. Given the relative importance of teachers, they argued that finding more effective and efficient ways of dealing with the minority of ineffective teachers in the state was a reasonable, and likely fruitful, course of action. Opponents, on the other hand, constructed a narrative which envisioned a far more complex understanding of how teaching and learning functioned. This more complex narrative, they argued, challenged supporters’ assertions regarding the efficacy of reforming teacher contracting, evaluation and compensation policies. Further, they framed supporters’ intentions as being focused more on “punishing” teachers, rather than on real improvement for the state’s students.

Storytellers

As reforms to teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting were debated in committee meetings, on the floor of Florida’s legislature and outside the boundaries of the capitol, a variety of stakeholders contributed to the wealth of policy narratives surrounding the process. Analysis of committee meeting transcripts, transcripts of legislative floor debate and contributions to print media stories about the bills in several of the state’s major newspapers reveals several broad categories of stakeholders that took part in the process –

including practitioners, legislators, advocacy groups, and a variety of other stakeholders, like parents and concerned citizens. A general summary of these narrators, and their position in support or opposition to S.B. 6 and 736, is provided in Table 5, below.

Table 5. Summary of Narrators – Florida

Supporters	Opponents
<u><i>Practitioners</i></u> Small minority of current teachers Prospective teachers Former teachers Superintendents <u><i>Legislators</i></u> Majority of Republican legislators <u><i>Advocacy groups</i></u> Florida Chamber of Commerce US Chamber of Commerce Associated Industries of Florida Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Florida’s Council of 100. The New Teacher Project Students First Foundation for Florida’s Future <u><i>Others</i></u> Individual business owners Students (secondary and post-secondary) Florida’s Commissioner of Education Governor Rick Scott	<u><i>Practitioners</i></u> Majority of current teachers School board members Superintendents <u><i>Legislators</i></u> Majority of Democratic legislators Small minority of Republican Legislators <u><i>Advocacy groups</i></u> The Florida Education Association Local teachers’ unions The American Federation of Teachers The Center for Education Policy The Center for Teaching Quality The Civic Concern Organization <u><i>Others</i></u> Florida Tea Party Chairman (local branch) University faculty Governor Charlie Crist

Practitioners

Unsurprisingly, a key stakeholder group in the contest surrounding teacher policy reform in Florida were educational practitioners – including teachers, themselves, along with a number of other educational professionals. Teachers were, by far, the most prevalent group of practitioners taking part in the policy discussion surrounding SB 6 and 736. The vast

majority of teachers who entered the conversation surrounding the bills, through legislative testimony and contribution to print media stories, spoke in opposition to the compensation, evaluation and contracting reforms proposed by the incarnations of the Student Success Act. Only a handful teachers vocalized their support for reform.

An important note regarding teacher participation in the debate surrounding these bills centers on the work of the Florida Teachers Association in motivating teacher participation – particularly during the debate surrounding SB 6. The organization made an express effort to mobilize teachers and ensure their representation in several committee meetings surrounding the bill – which may have acted to amplify the voice of teachers standing in opposition to reform, while constraining (or at least not aiding) the voice of teachers in support.

In addition to practicing teachers, a variety of other practitioners, former practitioners, and prospective practitioners rose in opposition and support of SB 6 and SB 736 as they contributed to the committee meetings, floor debate and media pieces captured in this study. Several district administrators, for example – including several school board members – testified in opposition to the bill, while the supporters included at least one superintendent. Interestingly, a number of prospective and former teachers rendered their opinions on the various incarnations of the Student Success Act, as well – sharing their perceptions of how teacher policy reform altered their perspective on joining or leaving the profession. Several prospective teachers – 2 of which professed to be students in university teacher preparation programs – weighed in on discourse surrounding the bills; most of these future teachers testified in support of reform. A few former teachers weighed in as well – again, the majority

voicing support for SB 6 and 736, asserting that the existing structure of the profession contributed strongly to their decision to depart for greener pastures.

Legislators

In addition to practitioners, another particularly vocal group of participants represented in these data were state legislators. Florida's state legislature is similar to most states in that it is bicameral, with a state Senate and House of Representatives. The legislative houses of the state were divided firmly along party lines, with Republican majorities, Democratic minorities, and no independent members. Given their majority, it comes as little surprise that Republicans contributed the majority of discourse among the legislative participants, although their Democratic colleagues were only slightly less vociferous in their contribution to the debate. Analysis of Republican and Democratic discourse reveals a sharp partisan divide around the issue of teacher reform, which was also apparent in the voting records for SB 6 and SB 736. Among Republicans, only a handful of references by Republicans indicate opposition to the Student Success Act; similarly, among Democrats, only one coded example indicated support for reform to teacher evaluation, compensation and contracting.

Advocacy groups

In addition to practitioners and members of the legislature, a wide variety of governmental and non-governmental groups sent representatives to the capitol to support or oppose SB 6 and 736 and contributed to the discourse surrounding teacher policy reform in the print media. The majority of these groups indicated their support for teacher policy reform. Groups speaking in support of the bills included a number of organizations

representing business and industry – speakers from the Florida Chamber of Commerce, US Chamber of Commerce, Associated Industries of Florida, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and Florida’s Council of 100 rose to offer their own narratives in support of teacher policy reform during several committee meetings, for example. Business interests weren’t the sole supporters of SB 6 and 736, however – advocacy groups focused on education, like the New Teacher Project and Michelle Rhee’s Students First organization rendered their opinions, as well. One advocacy group that was particularly prolific in the discourse surrounding teacher policy reform in Florida was the Foundation for Florida’s Future – a non-profit organization founded by former Florida Governor Jeb Bush; unsurprisingly, given the governor’s strong advocacy for education reform in the past, Bush and several Foundation representatives were aggressive in promoting policy narratives asserting the importance of dramatic reform to teacher evaluation, compensation and contracting policy in driving student outcomes in Florida.

As noted, some advocacy groups also rose in opposition to SB 6 & 736 as they proceeded through the legislative process. By far, the most vocal among these organizations were labor interests. Principal among these was the Florida Education Association – representatives of the organization, including FEA president Andy Ford, weighed in frequently over the course of the process through both legislative testimony and contributions to print media. Other groups contributing to the discourse surrounding teacher policy reform included local teacher’s organizations – like the Hillsborough Teacher’s Union and Volusia Teacher’s Organization – as well as national organizations like the American Federation of Teachers. In addition to labor interests, a number of organizations focused on education policy – like the Center for Education Policy, North Carolina’s Center for Teaching Quality,

and the Civic Concern Organization – also contributed to the chorus of voices rising in opposition to SB 6 and 736.

Other Storytellers

Finally, in addition to practitioners, legislators and advocacy groups, a variety of other actors participated in the discourse surrounding teacher policy reform in Florida. Business owners, for example, joined participants like high school students, individual citizens, and newly elected Governor Rick Scott to declare their support for SB 6 and 736. Similarly, students (both university students, and students in the state’s P-12 public schools) joined the parents and friends of teachers to oppose alterations to teacher contracting, evaluation and compensation policies. Oppositional narratives were also forwarded by other interesting individuals – the chair of a central Floridian Tea Party branch, for example, as well as faculty members from various institutions in the state’s university system and Florida’s former Governor, Charlie Crist.

Ultimately, this panoply of participants – practitioners, lawmakers, representatives of advocacy organizations and a host of other actors – formed a chorus of narrators that converged to shape a lively debate over teacher policy reform in Florida during the two-year legislative process surrounding SB 6 and 736. As they did so, members of each of these groups constructed narratives that conveyed complex understandings about the characters, problems, and causal processes. The next section of this study unpacks the ways in which these *narrative elements* emerged from the data, and interacted to build the policy stories that came to define the debate over teacher contracting, evaluation and compensation policy in Florida.

Constructing Policy Stories: Characters, Problems and Causal Processes

As they worked to assert their chosen position, supporters and opponents of teacher policy reform in Florida tied together the constituent parts of their policy “stories” – characters, problems, and causal narratives – in order to construct understandings regarding the state of education in Florida that supported their arguments. As they did so, they framed competing perspectives regarding who the principal actors in the “story” of teaching and learning were, and their role in the policy issue at hand. Further, the clashing policy narratives put forward by narrators in the process painted very different pictures regarding exactly which problems teacher policy reform would solve, along with how severe and salient those problems might be. Finally, the policy “stories” constructed by practitioners, lawmakers, advocacy groups, and other players in the policy discourse surrounding SB 6 and 736 articulated disparate perspectives regarding the mechanisms underlying these policy problems, and the ways in which they might be solved.

Characters

As they constructed policy “stories” surrounding teacher policy reform, it comes as no surprise that one of the pivotal “characters” that both supporters and opponents of SB 6 and 736 worked diligently to frame were teachers. Supporters of change to teacher contracting, evaluation and compensation policy, in particular, wove a very complex framing of who, exactly, the teachers at the heart of the policy debate were. In almost all cases, supporters were careful to maintain a certain degree of veneration for the “heroes” that exemplified the virtues classically associated with teaching – at the same time, however, they also built a case for the notion that there was a subset of teachers who were not worthy of the adoration and loyalty that their effective peers deserved. One teacher from Deltona, Florida

described this, sharing that "I've seen teachers work the contract hours, no more, no less...they receive the same pay as the teachers who come in early and stay until nightfall" (11). A concerned citizen, writing a letter to the *Palm Beach Post*, echoed this divided perspective on teachers; she noted that

Having had four children and nine grandchildren attend schools in two South Florida counties, I observed, as I am sure many other parents and grandparents have, that there are very good and very poor teachers. The competent ones are self-motivated, dedicated professionals, and the others are hangers-on until pension time (63).

For many supporters of teacher policy reform, this group of ineffective teachers became the general “antagonist” of their policy narratives. As such, they wove a “story” in which this group of teachers – through their negligence and incompetence – were exacerbating the state’s educational woes and, ultimately, the target of needed reform. One Republican senator, for example, asserted that "I don't want a teacher remaining in the classroom because she has tenure, and she's sleeping half the time” (32). In her testimony before the Senate Education Committee, Michelle Rhee asserted that these ineffective teachers were damaging to the profession and frustrating to the “good” teachers in the state, stating that

I will say also that the people who are most frustrated by ineffective teachers being in the classroom are effective teachers. It drives effective teachers crazy when there's somebody working next to them that is not pulling their own weight and then one day inherit a group of kids the following year that are several grade levels behind because somebody didn't do their job (67).

A Republican representative expressed a similar sentiment more personally, telling the story of his mother, an effective teacher, and her frustrations with ineffective peers. He went on to assert that

Folks, there is something fundamentally wrong when they exert the effort, like my mother did, and they get paid the same thing as those that were in the system, they popped in a film strip, they said answer the questions at the end of the chapter. Folks, there's something fundamentally flawed when we can't reward people that are exemplary in their teaching practice (71).

Again, however, despite their efforts to assert the culpability of this group of ineffective teacher antagonists, supporters of teacher policy reform were, in general, careful to maintain a sense of reverence for the state's population of "effective" teachers – who were, at least in part, often the protagonists of their narratives. Further, these "effective" teachers were framed as the majority in the state; the antagonistic population of "ineffective" teachers was, by and large, always portrayed as a minority. The chair of the House education committee captured this characterization, of the "effective" majority, asserting that

We have fantastic teachers at every level in our elementary, in our middle school and in our high school. They teach their hearts out, their students are learning. These teachers can be found in Title I schools. They could be found in the inner city. They could be found in urban areas and in rural areas. They teach students with severe learning disabilities. They teach our gifted students. They teach students that are both going to college and that are going directly into our workforce. These students are both from affluent families and poor families alike. These teachers seek tirelessly to make a difference. These teachers should be encouraged, they should be honored and more importantly they should be rewarded. What I mean by rewarded is I mean financially. They do the heavy lifting; they should be compensated for that (66).

Opponents of teacher policy reform, for their part, generally told a policy "story" that situated teachers within two spaces – as selfless protagonists, as well as victims of unfair policies and scapegoating. In the eyes of most oppositional narrators, teachers were heroes – men and women who undertook a thankless job day after day, in the name of serving children and maximizing the potential of their students. One concerned citizen, for example, shared in a letter to the Palm Beach Post that

For almost 20 years my daughter has taught "special education" in the Orange County School District. She has been beaten and battered (one girl who struck her was 6 feet tall and weighed over 200 pounds) and suffered other indignities that many of the "regular" teachers wouldn't tolerate. My daughter doesn't complain because, often, she sees progress in her students and feels that there is no other job that she would rather have. Now, the Legislature is talking about merit pay, with all pay raises based on student performance and progress determined by the results of a standardized test. Many of my daughter's students never will be able to pass any kind of standardized test. Does that mean that she will not ever receive a merit pay increase (46)?

Several other participants shared similar stories – characterizing teachers as protagonists and heroes, often in personal ways. A teacher – who was recognized as Teacher of the Year in her county – shared another such story, telling the House education policy committee that

I was a young African-American female having...grown up into poor living conditions, bouts of poverty, homelessness, but thanks to a public education classroom, I was embraced, heart and mind, by the kind and caring public education teacher who didn't accept halves from me. She accepted wholes. Who taught me to look beyond my circumstances and grab hold of my potential. She didn't just teach the elite, she taught us all. All of my successes can be attributed to that public education teacher and that public education classroom, but sadly I fear, and this is in my humble opinion that if this bill passes in its current form, teachers like myself who have the ability to inspire, to motivate, mentor and ignite that flame in those children's lives who are experiencing darkness will leave the profession if this bill passes (65).

This framing of the “hero” teacher was all the more powerful when paired with another common characterization of teachers among opponents of SB 6 and 736 – as victims. As debate moved forward, teachers were often framed by opponents as victims of a number of different things – lawmakers’ efforts to find a scapegoat for the state’s problems, poor policy decisions, parents’ own negligence and student’s lack of responsibility and motivation. One teacher, for example, shared his personal feeling of dissatisfaction, sharing that

I knew I would never become "rich" as a teacher. I teach because I love my children. I love the smiles that I get from little faces each day. I love the hugs that greet me in the morning and I love the 'aha!' moments when a struggling child finally gets it, but I never thought I would be treated with such disregard, disrespect and disdain. In the next election, I will vote against any member of the Florida Legislature who votes yes on SB 6 (52).

Another teacher shared her concern to members of Senate that her coworkers would be unfairly treated under reform, sharing that "This year is going to hurt not only myself but also my first year teachers, because especially with the middle school population, they have a lot more difficulties than I do...They are darn good teachers, but are first year teachers and it's not their fault" (68). Facing the perceived disrespect and harm promised by reforms to compensation, evaluation and contracting reform, another teacher bluntly stated her fears and disappointment, sharing that "I think about potentially leaving my school, which makes me very upset because I want to teach my students, and my babies" (11).

In addition to teachers, supporters and opponents of teacher reforms in Florida spent time characterizing several other actors. In the case of supporters, two other groups of "characters" rose to the fore of policy narratives – students and teachers' unions. Supporters of teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting reform characterized students as victims – generally of the negligence or incompetence of ineffective teachers. A Republican senator, debating the bill, captured this perspective most succinctly when he asserted that "There's a moral issue here", and that failure to leverage greater accountability upon teachers would afflict students with "the soft bigotry of lowered expectations" (24). Another Senator agreed, arguing that opponents of reform, by focusing on the needs of teachers – were

[...] missing a point – a drastic point. We have doctors, we have lawyers, we have teachers, we have everybody on this floor but one element – the struggling student. Everybody else here has talked about one thing, except

for that struggling student. Guess what? I am that struggling student. It's not a game, we're not having fun. We're trying to fix a system that is going to help people like me. You'll look on my records and you'll see on there where it says G.E.D. The reason I support this bill is that this bill is to help students like me. To ensure the teachers who are here that have done well, get properly paid for what you did to help students like me (71).

Another key character framed by supporters of reform were teachers unions. As with “ineffective” teachers, teachers’ organizations played the role of an antagonists in supporters’ narrative; supporters asserted that unions – including the Florida Education Association – de-emphasized the interests of students in order to protect ineffective teachers. In her testimony before the Florida House, for example, Michelle Rhee argued that

Union leaders are legally obligated to represent the interest of all of their members, including ineffective members. If the majority of rank and file teachers deeply value having strong colleagues and an excellent culture, their ethic of high standards becomes lost in the process when the union dedicates time, effort, and money fighting for the lowest performing teachers, according to their contract. Simply put, labor leadership has a conflict of interest when it comes to evaluation of their members and it does not lead to a rigorous evaluation that promotes reflection and improvement (67).

As such, teachers’ organizations were, at worst, actively abetting the harm to students inflicted by ineffective teachers. At best, as the president of the Florida Chamber of Commerce asserted, they were guilty of placing the interests of their organization, and its members, ahead of the greater good; he argued that “they are most concerned about their union bargaining and their union negotiating, so they are saying whatever misinformation they can to convince teachers that this bill is something it is not” (6).

Opponents of SB 6 and 736 highlighted very different characters in their narratives. As many opponents worked to construct teachers as victims, they also identified characters that served as victimizers within their policy “stories”. The first – and principal – of the

characters acting in this role, according to the opposition, was the Republican majority working to advance the cause of teacher policy reform. Opponents often asserted that SB 6 and 736 were, in fact, bills focused more on political goals, rather than the needs of students. One FEA spokesman, for example, asserted that "This has nothing to do with education and everything to do with politics [...] It's coming from the head of the Republican Party who has a lot of power over campaign contributions. Few members are going to vote against him" (19). Another argued that "This is political payback for a long, long time [...] Republicans are on the attack, not just in this state, but across the country" (56). A teacher, writing to the Palm Beach Post, similarly argued that the Republican-dominated legislature was, in fact, the true antagonist of the "story" in Florida; she argued that "They have stripped us of precious funding for materials, textbooks and technology, yet they demand higher test scores and better performance from our students. I think it is time we demand more from our elected officials" (46). A Democratic representative, debating the bill on the floor of the House, summed up the argument directly to the Republican majority, asserting that "[...] by your actions, during this session, you are not only demeaning and devaluing our teachers, you are also, by extension, doing great harm to Florida's children and their future" (71).

Finally, opponents of teacher reform in Florida argued that teachers were also victims of the uncontrollable elements of a complex process – namely, the process of teaching and learning. Chief among these elements were the parents and students at the heart of the educational process; while narrators were apparently unwilling to frame parents and students as malign antagonists, they were willing to argue that they complicated and often challenged teachers' efforts to motivate student outcomes. A teacher testifying before the House Education Policy Council, for example, asserted that

I've been hearing a lot today about holding teachers accountable for student scores. I haven't heard anything about holding student accountable [...] I have two regular classes and in each of those classes, I have a few students who are motivated and want to do well. The others are in middle school for the social scene. This is what I see happening. Every year, I proctor the FCAT and some of my students [...] just glance at the reading passages and then just mark any old answer. Some of them take a guess but too many of them do not care about this test that I am going to be evaluated on. You ask them, "I notice you didn't take much time on the test. You sat there for 10 minutes and then put your head down for the next hour." They'll say, "Well, it was boring." I have some of these student in my classes. I know they can read but they just don't want to. I just don't see how I am going to survive in a career where I'm being evaluated for students who don't care. Thank you (66).

Parents were, similarly, held up as potentially culpable actors in the policy story underlying teacher reforms in the state that were being ignored by the legislature. Another practitioner argued, for instance, that

I have seen firsthand the lack of parental involvement at the high school level. As a teacher, I had an average of only two parents per class attend our open house each year. As a guidance counselor, almost every day I speak with parents who have no idea that report cards had ever been issued this school year. So, legislators, here is a novel idea: Why not give parents a tax credit if their child meets the performance levels on their end-of-course tests or meets the requirements to earn one of the Bright Futures scholarships? Maybe that would encourage parents, and teachers would have the support from home that they so desperately need to do their job (46).

In both of these cases, parents and students were framed as actors whose choices impeded the work of teachers, and whose actions were at least equally – and perhaps more – important as teachers' in the "story" surrounding educational outcomes in Florida.

Problem Definitions

As they worked to frame the characters central to their policy narratives, "storytellers" in the process surrounding SB 6 and 736 also constructed understandings

regarding the underlying problems that reforms to teacher evaluation, compensation and contracting policies were intended to solve. This was a particular focus for supporters of reform, presumably given the onus placed upon them to make a case for change.

Supporters, in general, told a fairly comprehensive “story” about the state’s educational woes that focused on the calamity presented by persistent deficits in achievement among the state’s students. Further, they argued that the danger presented by this issue was immediate, severe, and widespread – marking it as a particularly salient problem in need of urgent attention. Former governor of Florida, Jeb Bush, asserted the peril facing the state by declaring that “closing the achievement gap for poor and minority students is the moral imperative of our nation” (8). The chairman of the House Education Policy Council, Representative John Legg, further reinforced the importance of solving the state’s achievement problem, noting that

[...] we have folks in India, in China, in Germany, and other countries, and Singapore that I'm afraid are outperforming us on all standardized tests throughout the world. I'm afraid being fourth isn't good enough. We not only need to be number one in the United States, we need to be number one in the world (66).

Finally, Senator Steven Wise, sponsor of SB 736, summed the issue up by arguing that “the stakes for our children have never been higher. If we hope to compete in the global economy, we must be willing to reward great teachers and further incentivize our educators” (55).

Supporters further underscored the proximity, magnitude and severity of the state’s achievement problem by linking educational outcomes to other critical issues facing the state – namely, economic crises. A spokesman for Florida’s Council of 100, a non-profit organization of Floridian business leaders, argued, for example, before the House Education

Policy Council that the state's inability to promote student success was contributing to a critical "talent gap" among Floridian laborers. He stated that

[...] Florida faces an emerging talent gap and urgent shortage of a resource critical to success in an innovative economy. By innovation, I mean not only an economy that attracts and develops the business of the future but also creates innovative ways of strengthening and growing the traditional business that are the backbone of Florida. The talent gap represents a vast and growing unmet need for the highly skilled and educated or educatable workforce, our state's most important resource for driving sustainable economic development and diversified economy. [...] as just one example of the interdependence of these zones, we estimate that the need to provide remedial education and training in Florida businesses, it costs Florida businesses \$3,500,000,000 annually. That's billion with a B. That's an incredible leakage from the talent supply chain. You see the magnitude of the quest before us (66).

Michelle Rhee went even further, linking the problem of student achievement deficits not only to economic issues facing Florida, but wider social ills. She asserted, in her testimony, that she was "absolutely convinced that everything leaders hope to accomplish for their states in the coming years - flourishing job markets, competitive business, low crime rates, higher quality of life, and vibrant communities - will all depend on the quality of education they provide for children" (67).

Finally, supporters supported this problem definition – which framed poor student achievement as a widespread, severe and salient issue driving numerous other social and economic ills in Florida – by asserting that the issues faced by the state were an outcome of a "broken" system for evaluating, compensating and contracting teachers. Senator John Thrasher, for example, argued in a letter to the editor that "opponents say the current system for teacher evaluation is fine. Last year, 99.7 percent of teachers earned a 'satisfactory' evaluation, yet 50 percent of our high school students, 35 percent of our middle school

students and 30 percent of our elementary students didn't make a year's worth of progress in reading. That's fine?" (45). Another Republican representative underscored this argument – that the existing structure of the profession in Florida was fundamentally linked to the problems facing the state – arguing that

I had many people from administration that came to me and said the problem was not, the system was just too difficult to work through. Clearly, there's a disconnect because we have 237,868 teachers in the State of Florida and only 625 were evaluated as unsatisfactory. At the same time we have 60% of our high school students, 40% of our middle schools students and 30% of our elementary students who are not reading on grade level. Clearly, there's a little bit of a disconnect and there's a problem (66).

Several other supporters underscored this critical link, building the case that the key to solving the persistent, widespread and severe deficits in student achievement faced by the state was intrinsically tied to ensuring that districts could distinguish among teachers, rewarding those that propelled students to greater achievement while removing those that couldn't from the classroom.

In general, opponents of teacher policy reform spent far less time and effort in framing problem definitions as part of their policy narratives. As with supporters, however, this may make sense given their relative position within the debate – opponents of reform, after all, are not faced with the task of making a case for change. As such, actors standing in opposition to teacher evaluation, compensation and contracting reform focused on undermining the foundation of supporters' problem definitions – essentially arguing that the problems identified by supporters were not salient, severe and widespread enough to demand urgent policy action. One Democratic senator, for example, shared during debate over SB 736 that

I'm a former educator for 40 years, as a teacher and principal in schools at that time. One of the things that had been somewhat confusing among educators and, quite frankly, to the public, I think, is, on one hand, we hear how inept our public school system is. We've got bad teachers that we wouldn't fire. We've got this horrible public school system. On the other hand, we're rated at number 5. Florida rated 5th in the nation. Those teachers in the field and others, when I'm there, they ask me, "How do you explain that? How can we be such an inept public school system and still rank so high?" That's one question (67).

He went on, arguing that “I would suggest to you that the vast, vast majority of teachers in Florida would fall into that category [effective] and school districts [...] have the ability to remove teachers. If they’re not effective then you’re not stuck with them. You can remove them” (67). Another Democratic Representative agreed, underscoring these points; he noted in his debate that

This is my only question. I'm just curious whether it's true or false [...] Quality Counts ranked Florida as number eight in the whole country when it comes to education, and it did so mostly because of the teaching profession which ranked as number four out of all fifty states. My question is, if we're number four out of all fifty states, and the system really is working because of our hard-working teachers, why are you trying to fix something that's not broken? Thank you (66).

As noted, in both of these cases, opponents argued that poor student achievement, and related problems facing the state, were less dire, less urgent and less widespread than advertised by supporters of teacher policy reform.

Framing Causal Processes

Finally, in addition to framing the nature of the characters and problems at the heart of their policy narratives, “storytellers” in the debate surrounding SB 6 and 736 constructed causal frameworks articulating the ways in which their policy problems came to pass – in

essence, articulating the “plotline” for their policy “stories”. In the Florida case, Harrison & Cohen-Vogel (2012) explored the nature of the causal frameworks constructed by policy actors in the debate over teacher reforms in a previous study. Applying Stone’s (1989; 2002) framework, they found that supporters of teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting reform told a story that framed teachers as the primary causal driver in the process of producing student achievement – in essence, arguing that it was primarily the actions of the teacher, at the front of the classroom, that determined whether or not students learned. As such, they noted, the state’s woes regarding achievement gaps could and should be laid at the feet of the sub-set of ineffective teachers in the state’s classrooms being abetted by broken systems for evaluating, compensating and contracting educators. Harrison & Cohen-Vogel (2012) found that supporters did not articulate this causal relationship in a way that implied intention on the part of ineffective teachers – supporters were not, by and large, willing to argue that “bad” teachers were actively seeking to harm students. Rather, they argued that the ineptness and negligence of ineffective teachers was causing inadvertent harm – not as direct a relationship, perhaps, but still a considerable problem, amenable to policy action.

Analyzing the narratives spun by opponents of reform, Harrison & Cohen-Vogel (2012) found that they constructed a very different causal framework regarding the process of teaching and learning. While they conceded that teachers were an important part of student learning, opponents argued that the educational process was complex, involving a multitude of factors. Further, they argued that many of the determinants of student achievement – which they noted included students’ home lives, parental involvement and socio-economic factors – were well outside of teachers’ locus of control. As such, opponents of teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting reform argued that SB 6 and 736 were misguided

policies. At best, reform would target only a part of the potential problem and – given that myriad other issues in the process of learning would go unaddressed – likely have little effect. At worst, they asserted, the legislature would be unfairly punishing well-meaning teachers who simply weren't to blame for the state's educational issues.

This study's analysis of the process in Florida confirms Harrison & Cohen-Vogel (2012)'s initial findings. As in their study, this analysis shows that supporters of teacher reforms – particularly legislators and members of advocacy organizations like the Foundation for Florida's Future – articulated a very direct relationship between the actions of teachers and their students' outcomes. One Republican representative framed this succinctly, noting that

Now, irrespective of the side of the aisle that you sit on, and no matter what kind of data or studies that you read, this is one thing that is conclusive on all sides about all educational research – and that is that teacher effectiveness is the most influential school level variable that determines student learning. A student's growth - a student's success - is directly tied in to a teacher's effectiveness (71).

A former teacher, testifying before the House, constructed a similar argument, noting further that the direct relationship between teachers' efforts and students learning made greater accountability a matter of common sense:

Imagine the next time you went to your mechanic that they messed up, faulty work had been done. Your car's performance suffered because of it, because of this one person and their one service on your car has now caused you to spend more to bring in someone else to fix the mistakes, spend thousands of dollars on your car, fixing the damages. Would you go back to that mechanic? Of course not. Would you recommend that any of your friends take their car to that mechanic? Of course not. That's because you evaluate that person's ability to do their job and you decide I'm not going to send my car there. As a matter fact, you might even try and get your money back from that mechanic or the person who hired or employed that mechanic. You would be rational for making that decision. That would be a responsible, rational

thing to do. Why then if you would take such actions over your car and get so upset over your car, why then do we not take the same actions for our children? If we hold mechanics responsible and accountable for your car's performance, why do we not hold a teacher is responsible or accountable for your students' performance? (69)

As with Harrison & Cohen-Vogel (2012)'s study, this analysis finds that supporters did not – by and large – assert that teachers were actively seeking to harm students; rather, they argued that the population of ineffective teachers framed as the antagonists in their policy narratives were inadvertently harming students through negligence, lack of skill or laziness. As such, addressing the issue was a simple matter of adjusting incentives and consequences – as one legislator noted, for example, ensuring that “[...] if you do a good job, you make more money” (34).

Again, similarly to Harrison & Cohen-Vogel (2012)'s findings, this analysis indicates that opponents of reform focused their efforts on undermining the direct relationship between teachers' actions and student achievement framed by supporters. In doing so, opponents – particularly teachers – framed participants, like legislators, as being out of touch with the realities of the classroom. One teacher argued, for example, that “this piece of legislation is mandating things but the people writing it have no clue about what's going on in the classroom [...]” (22). Another echoed this, arguing that “a lot of lawmakers up here who think they know how to improve education haven't been in the classroom for 20 or 30 years [...] a lot of our schools are battle zones” (19).

If lawmakers did understand the realities of the teaching process, opponents argued, they would know that the process through which student achievement was “produced” was complex and often chaotic and – even if teachers were admittedly important – they were far

from the only causal driver. One letter-writer articulated this in the Palm Beach Post, asserting that

[...] any so-called good teacher who is given a class of unruly, frequently absent students who are unmotivated and whose parents do not care will probably have low scores on any standardized testing metric, and will be terminated. Yet a so-called poor teacher, given an above average class of bright, highly motivated students, will have his or her students do well on the metric and be deemed a good teacher. Where is the accountability for the myriad factors totally out of the teacher's control? Nowhere in any metric that has ever been tried, which is why, to date, no merit-pay system in the United States has ever been deemed a success (64).

One Democratic representative agreed, further articulating the futility of The Student Success Act in the face of this complex relationship. During floor debate on S.B. 736, he argued that

[...] while we all agree that a critical component of the learning environment is the teacher, we must look at Florida's educational system holistically and unfortunately with this dysfunctional son of Senate Bill 6, we're not doing that. This bill is akin to a surgeon who is treating a patient with a fractured skull, a punctured lung, two broken legs, and a burst spleen by just removing the spleen and still expecting a successful outcome. The problems with the learning environment are much more than just bad teachers – and many of them are solvable by us (71).

Empowering Narratives through Rhetoric

As they tied together the constituent elements of their policy narratives – framing characters, defining problems, and articulating causal frameworks – policy “storytellers” in Florida made use of some rhetorical strategies to strengthen the fidelity and resonance of their policy “stories”. As will be shown, in the Florida case, these strategies largely fell within two elements of the analytic framework framed in Chapter 2. First, throughout the debate, narrators on both sides of the battle over teacher reform fought to claim legitimacy through establishing warrants, as described by authors like Cohen-Vogel & Hunt (2007) and

Cochran-Smith & Fries (2001). Second, analysis of the Florida data reveals numerous examples of narrators bolstering the resonance of their “stories” by connecting their narratives to powerful images – making use of metaphors, for instance, to make their arguments relevant and relatable. Additionally, the evidence indicates that actors worked to strengthen their “stories” by linking them to powerful political and cultural symbols.

Apart from these two framework components, analyses of the Florida data do not, by and large, provide significant evidence of the rhetorical strategies included in the analytic framework. There were very few examples, for instance, of policy “storytellers” using rhetorical tropes like synecdoche and metonymy. My principal hypotheses for why these strategies seem to have been relatively absent in the Floridian discourse centers on the nature of the debate from which I drew my data. It seems likely that – given so much of the data analyzed in this study are drawn from oral testimony and debate – participants may have been less likely to employ tropes like synecdoche and metonymy while speaking off the cuff, rather than in a written format wherein they would have more time to compose their words.

Finally, another key element of rhetorical strategy bears mentioning – *heresthetic*. As Riker (1996) notes, *heresthetic*, as a strategy, focuses as much on what policy actors *don’t say* as much as what they do – making it challenging to draw examples from transcripts and articles. Analysis of the discourse in Florida does indicate that each side of debate selectively employed information and arguments to strengthen their particular narratives. As Jerit (2008) asserts, this often manifested as narrators talking past one another – citing different and contradictory points of evidence regarding student achievement in the state, for example – without engaging directly with the arguments of their opponents. There were, however, some isolated examples of what Jerit (2008) terms “engagement”. These generally occurred in

terse exchanges between legislators wherein members dueled over each other's assertions regarding Cochran-Smith & Fries' (2001) "political warrant", as will be described below. Aside from these moments of direct discursive conflict, however, participants in the debate surrounding teacher reforms in Florida seemed to be well entrenched behind their respective lines, lobbing their arguments at each other from afar while avoiding direct engagement.

Contesting Legitimacy

As noted above, one of the key rhetorical strategies employed by narrators as they engaged in debate over teacher reform in Florida was the construction – or deconstruction – of legitimacy. Cohen-Vogel & Hunt (2007) argue that attempts to claim legitimacy by policy actors in debates surrounding teacher preparation policies centered on three "warrants" – the evidentiary, accountability and political warrants. By and large, analysis of data from the Florida case indicates that these "warrants" were also pivotal in the discourse surrounding teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting policy reform. As they constructed their policy "stories", for example, several supporters of reform attempted to bolster the fidelity of their narratives by asserting the grounding of their particular view of the world in empirical "truth". In general, supporters' claims regarding the evidentiary warrant centered on broad appeals to generalized "research"; in almost no case, however, did they cite specific research in their arguments and – in keeping with the spirit of *heresthetic* – "findings" from "research" were rarely presented in a way that acknowledged their nuances or limitations. One Republican Senator, speaking on the floor of the Senate, for example, serves as an example of this generalized appeal regarding evidentiary legitimacy; he argued that his colleagues should pass SB 736 because "[...] everybody knows, either statistically, which I'm sure I could find you a thousand studies, but instinctually, that in order for a student to

achieve learning growth, you need to have an effective teacher in front of that student. So we all recognize that premise and we'll start from there" (71). Another Republican legislator – this time in the House – made a similar argument, declaring that

I would challenge each and every one of you to make your vote today based on logic, and on research. So what does research say? Research indicates that classroom teachers, and their effectiveness, is the most important school-level variable that influences student learning. Students who are taught by ineffective teachers perform at much lower levels than students demonstrating comparable skills than students taught by high performing teachers. Students taught by ineffective teachers for simply one year experience long-term negative impacts on their achievement. Research also suggests that student performance should be the centerpiece of student evaluations. Research suggests that employment decisions should be linked to teacher evaluations. And, research suggests that we should have a system that enables dismissal of chronically ineffective teachers (72).

For their part, opponents of teacher reform approached the battle for evidentiary legitimacy in a different fashion. In general, opponents endeavored to undermine any empirical legitimacy that supporters might muster by soundly declaring that there was no empirical support for policies like tenure elimination, performance pay or the inclusion of value-added methods in teacher evaluation. As with supporters, however, these claims were made in very general fashion – appealing to a broad construction of “research”, while almost never citing specific studies that disproved supporters’ claims. Several Democratic legislators argued that SB 6 & 736 largely amounted to costly “experiments” for the state, devoid of supporting research. One Senator, for example, asserted that “there is no conclusive evidence, whatsoever, that merit pay will lead to any increase in student performance [...] we should not spend our limited student dollars on experimental programs” (56). A Democratic Representative agreed, stating that “I rise in opposition of this particular bill – I rise because this is an unproven scientific experiment with our children’s education. There’s no data to

support implementing something such as this – no pilot programs. We are moving down uncharted territory” (72). The president of the FEA agreed with these sentiments, as well, asserting as he testified before the House that "there's no research evidence that this legislation will help our children in public schools [...] we've looked closely at plenty of scientifically sound, peer-reviewed research out there that shows this is the wrong approach to take to implement performance pay and to revamp evaluations" (26).

A few additional points regarding the contest for the evidentiary warrant should be noted in the Florida case. First, actual *engagement* – in Jerit’s (2008) sense – between “storytellers” over the issue of evidentiary legitimacy was very rare. Again, by and large, participants appeared to be hurling their facts and assertions regarding the empirical foundation of teacher reforms past one another. In part, some participants appeared to legitimize this behavior by asserting that empirical research may not, in fact, provide the kind of objective support for one side or another that one might assume. The Chair of the Education Policy Council, for example, encapsulated this view by arguing that “[...] I can’t tell you how many studies here...that empirical studies from major universities and outside basically go the opposite route and I know all research is argumentative and you may have your research as well. It shows the exact opposite: that years of experience does not directly correlate to more student learning gains” (66). As such, there seemed to be some sense among policy actors in the debate that one could find studies to support either side of the argument, substantially reducing the cache held by empirical research.

Second, there was one example of more nuanced and specific conversation surrounding the research on teachers’ impact on student achievement, as well as performance pay and performance-based evaluation. A representative from North Carolina’s Center for

Education Policy broke from the general pattern, in his testimony, by citing specific studies. Again, however, this manner of integrating research into the debate – by referencing specific studies, rather than broad assertions regarding what “research says” or citing unsourced statistics – was extremely rare.

In addition to contesting the evidentiary warrant, participants in the discourse surrounding teacher reform in Florida also battled to underscore the legitimacy of their narratives by asserting the *accountability warrant*; in essence, arguing that their proposed policy solutions were, in fact, the most likely to solve the problem at hand. Supporters, for example, argued that reforms to teacher evaluation, compensation, and contracting policies were the natural remedy for the state’s educational woes. One Republican representative stated this strongly, asserting that

Florida is fortunate to be one of only three states that have been recognized in closing this achievement gap and we must not go backwards in this effort. As a former school board member and a mother of two children in public education schools, I strongly support this bill. I support this bill because it refocuses education on the student and not the system. For too long we have endured an educational system that is focused on the adults. Members, this bill realigns many of the problems that I have noticed first hand in our education system and I ask you to join me in supporting this good bill (72).

Another of her colleagues agreed, stating succinctly that “this bill will move Florida forward, it will recreate our education system as we know it, and for the first time, our administrators, our state, our parents and more importantly our children, will be closer to the point of having a highly effective teacher in front of every child” (72).

Additionally, some supporters argued that the reforms packaged in SB 6 & 736 would drive student outcomes by bringing the state’s educational system in line with both national

education reform initiatives, as well as best practices from outside of the public sector.

Several supporters highlighted the importance of passing teacher reforms to ensuring the state's success and compliance with the Race to the Top grant competition, for example. The sponsor of the House version of SB 736 noted that

[...] it was the charge of the President, from the moment that he got into the White House, [...] that the best way to tackle educational reform, and the best way to move forward in educational reform, is to ensure that what teachers are doing, and the methodologies that teachers are using, are actually working. In order to know that, we must measure and assess that. That's what this bill does (71).

In addition, several members of the business community asserted that bringing the profession of teaching into greater alignment with private sector practices would ensure that the state's educational apparatus would be well positioned to ensure productivity and efficiency. One such actor, for instance, argued in a letter to the Palm Beach Post that

Recognizing and rewarding achievement is inherent in everything American. We are constantly in an evaluating mode, such as how employees are rated for raises to perhaps judging the quality of the cup of coffee produced by the one Starbucks we might choose to frequent vs. another. Having been involved as a business consultant in creating some complex company remuneration plans based on reaching goals and objectives, I saw individual successes make for collective excellence. There are means to apply performance metrics to any task. It is illogical to continue a system that believes individuals cannot be held accountable for mediocrity or failure (63).

Finally, as they asserted their surety that reforms to teacher evaluation, compensation and contracting would drive greater student achievement, supporters took aim at the validity of their opponents' position. Several supporters argued that opponents of reform were standing in the way of progress – some, potentially, out of self-interest, and some out of fear. One member of the House Education Policy Council argued this, asserting that

I think what we've heard today is that people are afraid. They're afraid of the unknown and I just think that we as a legislature as the department of education should be taken to task that teachers in the classroom, not teachers out of the classroom, need to be a part of this process. I am excited and you might say, no you're just drinking the cool aid. I'm not drinking the cool aid. I'm not. I read an article on myself that said I was towing the party line. I believe in this. I truly do. Are there parts of it that make me nervous? You bet. But at the end of the day [...] I see this as a way for our profession to get the respect and so you can be paid fairly [...]" (66).

As with their efforts surrounding the evidentiary warrant, opponents of teacher reform in Florida largely focused on undermining the supporters' claims regarding their grounding in accountability and results. As such, several opponents argued that reforms to teacher evaluation, compensation and contracting quite simply would not have the positive impacts on student achievement that supporters claimed. Some, like one teacher writing to the Palm Beach Post, argued that this was because SB 6 & 736 ignored some basic realities about teachers; she noted that

Mark Wilson, president of the Florida Chamber of Commerce, claims that teachers who are given incentives will work harder than if they are not encouraged monetarily. Every teacher I know, in addition to myself, works hard, but not for monetary incentives. The goal in teaching is not money. It is to pass on to others the important lessons of your subject. If Mr. Wilson gets his way, teachers who work extremely hard to motivate disinterested students will be punished monetarily because their students will not perform well on standardized tests. Perhaps in business, financial incentives work. In the teaching profession, financial gain, while it would be appreciated, has nothing to do with the level of commitment teachers make to help their students (46).

Others tied their arguments to their narratives regarding the complexity of the learning process; one senior teacher, for example, wrote in an editorial for the Tallahassee Democrat that

The writers of Senate Bill 6 would have you believe it will benefit education, but quite the opposite is true. This micromanagement of education

is a real insult to good teachers. Every profession has a few bad apples, but to try to use our own paychecks as a "carrot" to encourage us to actually do our jobs is crazy. And have lawmakers considered the additional testing pressure for students who will know that their test performance will affect their teachers' pay? You would think that, as an educator who aspires to excellence every day, I would have nothing to fear from this legislation. I might even earn additional income under such a plan. But I have no such delusion. The "ingredients" of my class each year are not under my control. I am very fortunate that most of my students come ready and willing to learn. But not all (16).

One teacher went further; she argued that not only were the proposed teacher reforms unlikely to work, they would, in fact, make the state's educational problems worse. She asserted in her letter to the editor of the Palm Beach Post that

Senate Bill 736, for teacher merit pay, is not going to help our students; it will just pose other problems. Studies show that merit pay doesn't work. If our livelihood is dependent on one test, we will be forced to teach only to the test. That is basically what we are doing now, so that our schools will achieve an "A." It will get much worse if we have to depend on students' test score to see whether we will be able to pay our bills, save for retirement and send our own children to college (60).

Ultimately, according to opponents of reform, supporters of SB 6 & 736 were simply wrong in their assertions that altering the ways in which teachers were evaluated, paid, hired and fired would fix the state's student achievement "problems" – as such, the Student Success Act was, at best, pointless and, at worst, potentially harmful.

Finally, participants on both sides of the debate over teacher reform in Florida spent considerable time contesting the political legitimacy of their opponents' position. Supporters of teacher reform asserted, for their part, that their interests in altering teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting policy lay with serving the state's children. When introducing SB 736, for example, the legislation's Republican sponsor asserted clearly that, contrary to the

assertions of the bill's detractors, "We're not here to beat up the teachers, we're not here to beat up the administrators, we're here for student success" (36). Another Senator, reflecting on the bill's passing, agreed, arguing that "in this information age we live in, a quality education equals power, the power to learn and grow, the power to transform and achieve. It is the responsibility of every generation to harness that power and pass it on to future generations. The Florida Senate has passed reforms to make certain Florida's children have access to the power of that quality education" (47).

Given their avowed dedication to the interests of the state's children, it comes as little surprise that the other side of supporters' arguments regarding political legitimacy in the debate over teacher reform focused on asserting opponents' own misplaced values. Several supporters argued that actors standing in the way of teacher reforms were guilty of placing the values of adult actors – principally ineffective teachers – over that of vulnerable children. One Senator, debating SB 736 on the floor, asserted, for example, that

There's a moral issue here, too...having observed so many outstanding teachers with whom I've had the opportunity to work with in my county. You know, they'd say that it's a moral issue when you say that "we shall take a teacher whom we know is marginally effective or ineffective – we know it from years of data, we know it from the principal's observations, we know it from what the teachers from across the hall know and say about that teacher – and we will take that marginally effective or ineffective teacher, and place that teacher into a classroom with children who have a right to learn, a right to an education guaranteed by the Florida constitution. When we do that, when we place that teacher in that classroom, then we are saying that that teacher's property right to a job is more important than those students' constitutional right to an education. That is morally wrong, and we cannot do it anymore (70).

As noted previously, some supporters – in particular, Michelle Rhee and a handful of Republican legislators – took particular aim at teachers' organizations like the FEA, arguing

that such groups possessed a “conflict of interest” and that they held the interests of their members to be more important than those of students. In general, however, most of these assertions were made more generally, without calling out individuals or specific organizations.

Conversely, aside from general protestations that all parties involved in the debate were concerned with the rights and outcomes of students, opponents of teacher reform focused, in general, on attacking the altruistic claims of supporters. In particular, representatives of the FEA led the charge in asserting that supporters of reform were not, contrary to their claims – solely on the side of children; rather, opponents argued, SB 6 and 736 were partially targeted toward scoring political victories. The president of the FEA, for example, asserted that “we all have the same end goals, and that's improving education, but this bill doesn't do that [...] this is political payback for a long, long time. Republicans are on the attack, not just in this state, but across the country” (56). Another representative of the FEA emphasized this point, arguing that “this has nothing to do with education and everything to do with politics [...] it's coming from the head of the Republican Party who has a lot of power over campaign contributions. Few members are going to vote against him” (17). The FEA was, of course, not the only opponent of teacher reform to assert the political agenda of supporters. One Democratic representative, for example, shared with her colleagues that

Over the past few days, I have received hundreds to thousands of emails from teachers and educators opposing this bill. I’ve received hundreds of phone calls from teachers and educators in opposition to this bill. I have here something from Civic Concern which is [comprised of] 8,012 Floridians, most of whom are educators and teachers, who are opposed to this bill. Everybody that came to speak to me today, the vast majority of people are educators and teachers who are opposed to this bill. The people that have

spoken in favor of it except for a few teachers, has truthfully been somebody with a political agenda and I believe that the group that truly understands how to educate our children the best are teachers (66).

A teacher, testifying before the House Pre-K-12 Policy Subcommittee, agreed, stating that

Listen, education isn't about business, it's about educating children. I have three children living in my home right now that do not belong to me. They're homeless guys. Their parents live up by the post office. I'm sure you probably know where I'm talking about, in the woods, right up on Highway 19. These children were not worried about where or how they were going to do in a test, they were worried about how they could live. Are we taking care of that? I don't see it. I see instead we're taking care of ways to make political agendas be pushed forward (65).

In addition to asserting that supporters were more interested in settling political scores than helping children, some opponents of reform also attacked the political legitimacy of their opponents by arguing that they might possess conflicts of interest. One teacher, for example, argued in a letter to the editor that

The beneficiaries of SB 6 will not be Florida's children but members of the multi-million dollar educational testing cartel. Pesky unions and teachers with unsolicited opinions will become quaint relics of a time before the advent of profit driven, high-stakes data surveillance. Just follow the money and it will point you to the vultures masquerading as noble facilitators circling to get a piece of Race to the Top money. The school improvement industry will determine the fate of Florida's children and the livelihoods of educators (50).

Another teacher agreed, testifying that SB 6 and 736 represented nothing less than an avenue for the eventual destruction of the state's public school system, and a mechanism for further enhancing the status of privileged Floridians. She argued that

[...] this is the demise of education in Florida. This is about teachers losing certification and education being privatized and the rich being able to get a private education and the poor people and poor kids being left in a public

school with no role models. It will totally destroy education in Florida. That is why I'm against the bill. Thank you (66).

Integrating Metaphors and Symbols

In addition to making claims to warrants of legitimacy, actors taking part in the policy discourse surrounding teacher reforms in Florida also sought to bolster the resonance of their “stories” by girding them with evocative metaphors and by linking them to deeper cultural symbols and narratives. Supporters of reforms to teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting policy, for example, frequently attempted to bolster their narratives regarding the direct link between teachers and student achievement - and the concomitant importance of strong accountability and incentives for the profession – by tying their “stories” to business, industry and the market. A former teacher, testifying before the House, for instance, noted that teaching was out of touch with the realities of business and labor in the private sector, arguing that

[...] Business owners are paid based on how successful their business is. A waiter will be paid based on the quality of the service they perform. A lawyer is paid based on his success in the courtroom or at the negotiation table. An author will be paid based on the quality of the work that he writes. Yet teachers, the people who educated and inspired every person in this room, are paid not based on their success, on their hard work in the classroom but based on how long they've been in a classroom (69).

A representative of the Florida Chamber of commerce, similarly, asserted that

Just like in the private sector, you have to assess and evaluate achievement to truly gauge if you are operating at peak performance. The Florida chamber applauds efforts to introduce common sense, market based principles to how we evaluate and compensate teachers and administrators. This bill empowers principals and gives the much more control over teachers that are allowed to teach in our schools (69).

Examples like these were, further, coupled with language that framed characters in supporters' policy "stories" as parts of a process of production – referring, for example, to teachers as vital "resources", the state's education system as vital "infrastructure", and students as "products".

In addition to making metaphorical connections to business and the private sector, supporters of SB 6 and 736 frequently worked to strengthen their narratives by tying their position to a deeper narrative about Florida's – and more broadly, America's – history of educational progress. Multiple narrators, speaking in support of teacher reforms, referred to SB 6 and 736 as the natural next step in the state's long history of educational leadership in the region. One Republican Senator, for example, referred to the bills as the first act in "the second decade of true education reform in Florida", fixing "fundamental structural problems" with the state's education system (38). Michelle Rhee, similarly, noted that

I don't have to tell you that Florida is a leader already in education reform. You won the coveted Race to the Top grants and created a model school accountability system for the rest of the nation through your A through F Grading System. Florida is one of the only states in which all taxpayers can see how well their schools are performing. You put data systems in place that most states are just now thinking about. I am here today to ask you to keep being a leader in this most urgent area of need for our country. There's so much more to do.

Finally, another Republican Senator stretched this appeal further, appealing to his audience's reverence for the American spirit. He argued that "[as] Americans, we've never shied away from a task, we've never shied away from the hard things that are before us. I have to tell you, teacher quality reform is a hard task and we simply cannot shy away from it because it's difficult, because is unpleasant. We have to keep the reform on the front burner" (66).

Members of the opposition to SB 6 and 736 made similar use of metaphor and imagery in their arguments. Of particular interest was the repeated use of violent and frightening imagery by narrators as they worked to strengthen their assertions regarding the potential harm that reforms to teacher evaluation, compensation and contracting policy might present to the profession. The president of the FEA, for example, referred to SB 6 as "a nuclear bomb" for the profession, while a Democratic representative asserted that "[...] just like Dr. Frankenstein, the problem behind this is hubris [...] don't unleash Frankenstein's monster on the state of Florida" (21). A teacher, testifying before the House, evoked similarly frightening imagery by asserting that "we're using hand grenade mentality. We throw in a hand grenade. It goes off. We clean up the mess and then we figure out how we're going to deal with all the collateral damage" (66).

Further, opponents of SB 6 and 736 made frequent use of metaphors as they explicated their narratives regarding the complex nature of teaching and learning. One teacher, writing to the Palm Beach Post, appropriated the production-focused language used by supporters, for example, asserting that

Teaching is the only profession where those who determine the final product (teachers) have no control over the raw material (students). We cannot control our students' home environment; we have no control over parental involvement. We teach students with mental, emotional and physical disabilities. We teach students who come from abusive or neglectful home situations. We teach students who come to school hungry, tired, sad. We have limited resources and limited time to reach students, our "raw material," and turn them into scholars of the first degree. I can share my enthusiasm for my subject; I can do my very best to motivate, but if parents are not involved, if my students are not encouraged to do homework, if my students are not supervised after school or in the evenings, then I cannot make them "care." That interest and involvement comes from within, nurtured by parents and a structured home life. And these are all elements beyond my control (42).

A Democratic senator drew similar conclusions regarding the limited agency teachers held over student outcomes, while comparing the learning process to a game of chance. He said that

It occurred to me – the whole bill is like a game of Black Jack. You know? The card game where you want to have a value that's closer to 21, and you want to beat the dealer and you don't want to go over 21? We find the teachers at the Black Jack table – bets are down on their profession. They've done 4 years – or more – of university education, paid tens of thousands of dollars. They're sitting at the table, they paid their buy-in, they have no choice but to play. As the teachers sit nervously at the table, they expect to be handed two cards, the value of which they can't control. Just like the card could be a deuce, it could be an ace, their students in the classroom could be gifted or underprivileged; driven or apathetic. They have minimal control over what kind of students they're going to be handed. With years and years of training the teachers are now faced with having to create a strategy. How can these two cards, which were randomly dealt and over which the teachers have no control – how can they measure up to 21? In fact, how can these cards beat a standard set by the dealer? A standard which should be 21, but you know what? They could be 15, they could be 18, they could be 13. It's a standard that is just as randomly selected as the hand that is dealt to the teachers. The teachers have to deal, and they have to play with their cards – like it or not (72).

These vivid images helped to cement the opposition's assertions that reform focused on teachers was both unfair and unlikely to achieve the legislature's desired outcomes. Another Democratic representative made this broader point, in addition to drawing comparisons between teaching and other professions – another common tactic on both sides of the debate. Comparing the decisions made by students and parents to those made by irresponsible patients, he asked his colleagues

Will the doctors in the house take responsibility right now for the 97% of activities that his patients engage in outside of his office? Will he refuse payment if his patient decides to eat hamburgers, smoke and drink even though the doctor told him not to. It could be that some things, no matter how good of a doctor that he is, are simply out of his control. Let's take lawyers. I have a client, I explain to them what's legal and illegal. When they walk out

of my office, they're still free to do what they want, and I am not held accountable for what the actions of my clients are. In fact, ironically, the only lawyers who get paid for their performance are the lawyers that this chamber attacks every year. Yet we're telling the teachers that they are only as good as the random student that walks in their classroom door (72).

Summary of Narratives Surrounding Teacher Reforms in Florida

A few broad narratives in the Florida case can be generalized from the multitude of individual “stories” emerging from the committee meetings, floor debate and print media artifacts captured as part of this case study. Findings regarding the common ways in which the elements of my analytic framework manifested across these narratives in the Florida case are summarized below, in Table 6.

Table 6. Summary of Florida Findings

Construct	Supporters	Opponents
Characters	Framed the majority of teachers as well-meaning and hard-working protagonists, hampered by a minority population of lower-performing teachers who were either inept, negligent, or potentially lazy. Framed students as victims of lower-performing teachers' inadequacy, and a system which protected those teachers. Framed teachers unions as antagonistic barriers to reform.	Framed teachers as hard-working, self-sacrificing protagonists working to serve children in often difficult circumstances. Further framed teachers as victims of unfair and poorly conceived policies, as well as uncooperative or unmotivated students/parents. Framed the Republican majority as antagonists, seeking political reprisal against teachers and teachers' unions.
Problem Definitions	Framed the core policy problem targeted by SB 6 and 736 as gaps in student achievement. Framed this problem as severe, wide-spread and salient – often by linking the problem of student achievement to broader economic and social issues in Florida. Highlighted existing frameworks for evaluating, compensating and contracting teachers as a contributing factor to the core problem of poor student achievement.	Attempted to counter the problem definition forwarded by supporters by asserting that the state's issues with student achievement were not as salient, severe or wide-spread as their counterparts claimed. Framed Florida as a relative success with regard to student achievement and growth compared to other states.

Construct	Supporters	Opponents
Causal Frameworks	Framed an <i>inadvertent</i> causal narrative in which the primary driver of student achievement was the teacher at the front of the classroom. As such, poor student achievement resulted from the inattention, inadequacy or ineptitude of poorly performing teachers. These teachers were not, however, framed as acting with ill-intent toward students.	Constructed a <i>complex</i> causal framework for understanding the learning process, in which teachers were framed as only one of several causal drivers in the process of student learning. Within this complex framework, teachers were framed as having relatively little control over students' outcomes, while the influence of factors like parents, students and policies were emphasized.
Claiming Legitimacy	Supporters attempted to claim evidentiary legitimacy for their arguments by referencing statistics – often unsourced. They made very few references to empirical research, however. Supporters also attempted to claim the political and accountability “warrants” by framing themselves as reformers focused on protecting the interests of the state’s children, with a plan that would drive results and place the state at the forefront of broader national initiatives. Supporters, further, framed opponents of SB 6 & 736 as being more focused on protecting the interests of adults within the system and defending an ineffective status quo.	Attempted to counter the claims to evidentiary legitimacy asserted by supporters by arguing that there was no empirical support for teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting reform – although very generally. Argued further that supporters’ plans for reforming teacher policy were not grounded in effective practice and were not likely to drive desired outcomes. Framed supporters as being more interested in pursuing political retribution and individual interests than in serving the state’s children.
Rhetorical Tropes	Very little evidence of participants utilizing rhetorical tropes – e.g. synecdoche or metonymy – as they constructed their policy “stories”. Supporters did, however, vest their narratives with metaphors – in particular connecting to images of business, the free market and production.	As with supporters, very little evidence of rhetorical tropes aside from infusion of metaphors. Opponents of SB 6 & 736 drew comparison between teaching and production, as supporters had, as well as other images which bolstered their complex causal framework.
Cultural Symbols/ Narratives	Several supporters worked to increase the fidelity and resonance of their narratives by trading upon deeper cultural narratives regarding Florida’s history of educational reform, and more general symbols of innovation and progress.	Opponents of SB 6 & 736 drew upon often violent imagery as they argued against teacher policy reforms – comparing alterations to contracting, compensation and evaluation policies to “bombs” and “hand grenades” to bolster their assertions that such policies were not in the best interest of the state.

As they worked to propel reforms to teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting through the legislative process, supporters of SB 6 and 736 wove policy narratives that clearly articulated the centrality of teachers to the learning process. In doing so, they framed teachers as complex “characters” in their policy “story”. This complexity manifested in the “dual nature” of teachers in supporters’ narratives; on one hand, they framed the majority of teachers as hard working, self-sacrificing “heroes” of the classroom. These protagonists were, in turn, victims of a professional structure that protected a relatively smaller population of “ineffective teachers”.

Supporters argued that these teachers, who served as the antagonists of their narratives, were the primary causal driver in the process through which students learned and, as such, student achievement was “produced”. Acceptance of teachers’ direct role in student outcomes allowed supporters to draw a direct link between teachers, as actors, and what they saw as a critical policy “problem” – gaps in student achievement, both generally and between subgroups. Supporters framed this problem as urgent and salient, and further argued its severity by linking educational outcomes to the economic and social well-being of the state of Florida.

Given this story – in which a population of “ineffective teachers” was directly responsible for limiting student outcomes and, as a result, placing the economic and social status of the state in jeopardy – supporters of SB 6 and 736 argued that a natural and logical policy solution lay with tightening the structure of the teaching profession in the state. By more effectively identifying and incentivizing “effective” teachers, they asserted, the state would more ably recruit high caliber candidates, retain master teachers, and compel performance from the existing teaching force. In addition, they noted, easing restrictions on

eliminating those teachers who continued to act as a drag on the system would further elevate the state's educational efforts. Moreover, as they forwarded this policy narrative, they worked to increase the fidelity and resonance of their "stories" by arguing that they were grounded in empirical research and by girding them in evocative metaphors – particularly by appealing to deeper narratives regarding Florida's eminence as a leader in education reform and the power of the market in driving efficiency and effectiveness.

Conversely, opponents of SB 6 and 736 constructed a policy narrative that framed teachers as just one cog in a complex and often chaotic educational machine. While they acknowledged the importance of teachers in the learning process – and frequently characterized all teachers in the same glowing terms that supporters of reform reserved for "effective" teachers – they also asserted that student outcomes resulted from a far more complicated process than reformers believed. Within this process, other actors and forces – including legislators, parents, students, and social conditions like poverty – bore significant responsibility for the state's educational issues. Moreover, they asserted the lack of agency that teachers held over the actions of these various players and forces – rendering teachers, along with students, victims of often difficult and unfair circumstances.

Given this complicated framing of the educational process, opponents of teacher reforms argued that teachers were, further, victims of undue blame by a variety of actors – including legislators and educational profiteers. They argued that such actors were, in fact, guilty of pursuing reform not out of concern for students' well-being, but instead out of wanton self-interest and a desire for political gamesmanship and, potentially, retribution. As such, opponents asserted, SB 6 and 736 represented, at best, a set of policies that were unlikely to meaningfully benefit students or the state and, at worst, were an unjustifiable

attack on teachers – a group of altruistic and self-sacrificing people undeserving of such ill treatment.

As they wove this counter-narrative, opponents of reform engaged in a number of strategies to undermine the legitimacy of the policy “stories” constructed by supporters of SB 6 and 736. First, they attacked supporters’ claims of evidentiary legitimacy, arguing that the supporters claims regarding the support of research for their chosen policies was exaggerated and largely void. Second, as noted, they asserted that the political legitimacy of supporters was highly suspect; in doing so, they argued that proponents of reform were more interested in advancing their own agendas, rather than pursuing the well-being of the state and its students. Finally, those standing in opposition to SB 6 & 736 attempted to undermine supporters’ articulation of the basic policy problem that reform to teacher evaluation, compensation and contracting policies purported to solve. They argued that the deficits in student achievement and outcomes were not as salient and severe as supporters of reform argued – instead, opponents argued that the state had made great strides in closing long-standing achievement gaps. Moreover, they argued, this progress – often in the face of poor policy-making and long odds - had occurred on the backs of the very teachers for which supporters of SB 6 and 736 were demanding greater accountability, uncertain rewards and, ultimately, less secure employment.

Chapter 5
TEACHER REFORM IN NORTH CAROLINA: THE EXCELLENT PUBLIC
SCHOOLS ACT

The next case study state to tackle the issue of teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting reform was North Carolina. Like Florida, North Carolina stood as a fairly dynamic state with regard to education policy, with a strong track record – particularly over the last few decades – of policy action as it iterated upon and made efforts to improve its public school system. In another similarity to the Florida case, the debate surrounding teacher policy in North Carolina emerged as substantial movement occurred in the political bedrock of the state; as the balance of power in its legislature shifted in 2010 and 2012, the changing tides heralded a multi-year debate regarding the new majority’s efforts to alter the legal structures surrounding the profession of teaching. As supporters and opponents of reform debated – both within the halls of the General Assembly, and in protests on its steps – a number of policy actors rose to offer competing “stories” regarding the nature of teaching, learning and education in North Carolina.

As this chapter will show, the policy “stories” which emerged in the North Carolina case bore a number of similarities to those found in Florida. Opponents of the Excellent Public Schools Act, for example, constructed “stories” which framed a complex understanding of teaching and learning which disfavored policy action targeting teachers,

much as their analogues in Florida had. Differences in the institutional and political contexts of the state, however, contributed to some important differences in the nature of the policy narratives framing the debate. Supporters, for instance, were less direct in their framing of ineffective teachers as “antagonists” in North Carolina than those in Florida had been. As before, the findings presented by this case have been derived from analysis of numerous hours of discourse rising from legislative committee meetings, floor debates and numerous print media artifacts. These data sources are catalogued in Appendix B; direct references to these sources are cited throughout this chapter using the identification number referenced in that appendix.

Setting the Stage

A number of factors seem to have converged in North Carolina to pave the way for substantial debate surrounding teacher reforms in recent years. As noted, North Carolina has developed a reputation as an education reformer – stretching further, even, than Florida’s. North Carolina, for example, boasts the first public state university, founded in 1795. More recently, North Carolina saw a substantial push for reform – particularly surrounding issues related to the profession of teaching – under its own “education governor”, former Democratic Governor Jim Hunt. Under Hunt’s administration, the state saw the 1997 passage of the Excellence in Schools Act, which initiated a new wave of standards and accountability for educators in the state. Moreover, Hunt earned a reputation as a champion for the state’s teachers by pushing for substantial increases to teacher compensation, resulting in North Carolina’s eventual climb to the national median in teacher pay – a distinction which it has lost in recent years. Maintaining the quality and integrity of the state’s teacher corps remained an apparent policy concern in the state beyond the Hunt years, as well – epitomized

by state initiatives like the North Carolina Teacher Corps and the introduction of additional accountability measures targeting the profession in 2008. In that year, the introduction of “standard 6” to the state’s existing framework for evaluating teachers partially tied teachers’ performance ratings to that of their students through estimates of their “value added” to achievement growth – much as SB 6 and 736 eventually would in Florida. Also like Florida, North Carolina launched its own bid for federal Race to the Top funding, which it eventually received – promising, as part of its application, to take additional steps to recruit and retain highly effective teachers.

Ultimately, however, while North Carolina’s history as an educational leader, like Florida’s, is an important consideration in understanding the state’s pursuit of dramatic teacher reforms, the tremendous political upheaval in the state between 2010 and 2013 may be an even more vital part of the story. As noted in Chapter 1, the 2010 election brought significant and swift change to the state’s political environment. Unlike Florida, which has seen relatively stable Republican control at the state level for a lengthy period of time, North Carolina’s state government had been either controlled by Democrats or split between the parties for the better part of the last century. Since 1992, in fact, Democrats were in total control of the legislature nearly 75% of the time, with only a brief span (from 1995 – 1998) in which Republicans controlled the state’s House of Representatives – although Democrats still controlled the state Senate and executive. In 2010, however, the state GOP took total control of the North Carolina general assembly for the first time since 1898. It should be noted that this shift in relative party strength in the state’s General Assembly was not minor. In the Senate, for example, the party composition shifted from a 10 seat Democratic majority to an 11 seat Republican majority. Similarly, Democrats lost 16 seats in the House of

Representatives, with 15 of those seats moving to the Republican caucus and one to an independent candidate – who later joined the ranks of the GOP.

This moment of perturbation – in which the balance of power in the state shifted dramatically after a long period of relative stability – opened the door to new policy dialogues regarding a number of issues. The outgoing Senate president captured this sentiment, noting that “in serving the people, you understand that a day like this might come [...] you are hopeful that the change is beneficial, new ideas, different thoughts. This is only what the people want, so that means it is good” (Bonner & Biesecker, 2010). The Republican House minority leader heralded the coming change by noting simply that “we are going to govern in a different way” (Bonner & Biesecker, 2010).

The Excellent Public Schools Act

It was in the context of this upheaval that a vigorous policy debate surrounding changes to policies structuring the profession of teaching in North Carolina arose, in addition to debate surrounding a number of other educational issues, like alterations to the state’s policies regarding school calendars, teacher certification pathways, curricular content, and school vouchers. Phil Berger – president pro tem of the state Senate – captured the newly dominant party’s desire for deep change to the state’s existing educational apparatus as he introduced one of the key pieces in their reform strategy: the Excellent Public Schools Act. He stated that

[...] teachers’ unions and misguided politicians must stop pretending higher taxes and more spending are silver bullets. Democrats tried it, spending more and more over the past decade. The result: the education bureaucracy grew. Student achievement didn’t. We must fundamentally reform the system. Embracing this challenge, the General Assembly’s leadership this past week filed the Excellent Public Schools Act (28).

The Republican plan for systemic teacher policy reform was made manifest through the Excellent Public Schools Act, introduced in the North Carolina Senate in April, 2012. As with SB 6 and 736 in Florida, the Excellent Public Schools Act proposed significant changes to teacher compensation and contracting policies in North Carolina. Under the original version of the bill, teachers would move to a system of annual contracts, dismantling the state's existing practice of granting "career status" – under which teachers received recurring employment contracts unless terminated for cause – to teachers after a three-year probationary period. The bill also mandated that local districts establish a system of "performance pay" for teachers, under which salary increases would have to be, in part, tied to measures of student achievement growth – the infrastructure for which had been partially laid by the introduction of "standard 6" to the state's evaluation system in 2008. Unlike the Student Success Act, the original iteration of the Excellent Public Schools Act did not, however, eliminate consideration of teachers' years of experience or degree status in determining salary increases. Finally, the bill introduced an "A-F" school grading system, similar to Florida's, which rated schools' effectiveness, and that of the educators within them, using students' performance on state standardized tests.

As in Florida, the Excellent Public Schools act proceeded quickly through the legislature after its introduction. The legislative process surrounding the bill, however, was qualitatively different than the one that surrounded SB 6 and 736. While there were a number of actors testifying on both sides of the debate, there was a marked absence of teachers, students, and individual citizens exercising their voice during committee meetings. This was, in part, reflective of a different legislative culture between the states. North Carolina's

committee meetings were, by and large, far shorter, more limited in their participation, and much more strictly moderated by committee chairs than they had been in the Floridian context. In addition, organizations like the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE) did not engage in the kind of extensive mobilization during the legislative process surrounding the Excellent Public Schools Act that the FEA had in Florida; there were, for example, no apparent efforts to bus teachers to the capitol – at least not in the first year of the debate. Moreover, it must again be emphasized that the debate surrounding teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting reform was occurring within the context of a “wave” of education policy change in the state. Unlike the Student Success Act, the Excellent Public Schools Act also encompassed a variety of additional education initiatives beyond teacher policy reforms – including school calendar changes and an extensive shift in policy surrounding K-3 literacy requirements. The debate surrounding these policies competed with – and, potentially, drowned out – discourse surrounding teacher compensation, contracting and evaluation reforms.

Further, as the Excellent Public Schools Act moved through the legislative process, it underwent several key changes. As the bill emerged from the Senate Education Committee in late May, its provisions regarding teacher contracting were substantially altered. Rather than restricting districts to a system of annual contracts, the revised bill allowed districts to award teachers deemed to be effective contracts ranging from 1-4 years, upon the recommendation of their local superintendent. While this still dismantled the state’s existing system of “career status”, it provided districts with the option to award multi-year contracts to teachers, and represented a small concession to those protesting the proposed annual contract system. Afterward, this amended version – which passed through the Senate on a party line 31-15

vote – entered the House, where its legislative journey abruptly halted. The Excellent Public Schools Act, as an independent bill, never came to a vote in the North Carolina House of Representatives. Instead, the provisions of the Excellent Public Schools Act were inserted into the Senate’s version of the bill amending the 2011 Appropriations Act, alongside a number of equally contentious proposals. As such, teacher reforms were further enmeshed in – and partially subsumed by – the wider discourse surrounding the “wave” of conservative change moving forward under the new Republican majority.

As 2012’s version of the Excellent Public Schools Act moved forward under the umbrella of the appropriations process, further amendments altered the nature of the bill. Democratic Governor Bev Perdue, the last remaining firewall for the opposition in Raleigh, signaled her intent to veto the appropriations act. In explaining her decision, the Governor’s office cited the both the budgetary cuts to the state’s public schools, as well as the proposed reforms ensconced within the appropriations bill. Purdue argued that the legislature was “merely paying lip service to reform” and “trying to distract attention from their harmful cuts by calling for ‘education reform,’ rather than restoring the state’s investments” (1).

At this point – likely under pressure from having to whip enough votes in the House to overcome the Governor’s veto – the General Assembly’s joint conference committee made a number of amendments to the appropriations bill. Among these amendments was the removal of a number of proposals related to teacher reforms, including the language altering rules regarding teacher contracting and the school grading proposal. In addition, the language surrounding performance pay was substantially altered in the final appropriations act – shifting from a mandate upon districts that they adopt new compensation systems to language establishing a state commission to explore the potential for doing so. In addition, the bill

extended express encouragement to LEAs to explore the option of moving to alternate compensation systems. Ultimately, Governor Perdue vetoed the final appropriations act, although the General Assembly swiftly responded by overturning her decision and casting it into law.

As with SB 6 in Florida, however, the initial defeat of the Excellent Public Schools Act was not the end of its story. The next election, in November 2012, brought further entrenchment of Republican control over North Carolina's state government. While the GOP's gains in the state Senate were marginal – a mere 1 seat – the party grew its lead in the House of Representatives by an additional 9 seats, providing them with a veto-proof majority. Ultimately, this victory was rendered somewhat moot by a further shift in the state's political balance. Governor Bev Purdue lost her bid for re-election to conservative Pat McCrory – the former mayor of Charlotte and Purdue's opponent in the state's previous gubernatorial election. With McCrory's victory, as with Rick Scott's in Florida, the moment seemed opportune for a second round of debate surrounding teacher policy reform.

Phil Berger – along with other sponsors, including fellow Republican Senator Jerry Tillman – moved quickly to capitalize on this renewed momentum. A new 2013 version of the Excellent Public Schools Act was introduced in March, during the General Assembly's short session. This version of the bill was, by and large, identical to the amended version of the Excellent Public Schools Act that passed the Senate in 2012. The bill again proposed the elimination of "career status" for teachers, although it retained the language allowing districts to award teachers deemed to be effective under the state's evaluation system with 1-4 year contracts. The proposed school grading system, likewise, returned, although the 2013 version of the bill included a provision for consideration of student achievement growth in the grade

calculations, rather than just proficiency on state tests. Finally, performance pay – or “pay for excellence” as the Excellent Public Schools Act termed it – made a brief return in the 2013 bill. Rather than reinstating the mandate that districts develop performance pay systems, however, the 2013 Excellent Public Schools Act simply included language which reiterated that the General Assembly intended to pursue such a mandate in the future.

Despite the stronger position that the Republican majority held in the 2013 legislative session, the process surrounding the new Excellent Public Schools Act – and, indeed, much of the General Assembly’s agenda – was far more contentious than it had been in the previous year. While the atmosphere within the legislature remained relatively controlled, the policy discourse became far more inclusive and robust outside of the halls of the General Assembly. This was largely thanks to the growth of a vocal opposition movement in the state, which came to be known as the Moral Monday protests. These protests expanded in size and visibility throughout the course of the year, eventually growing to include as many as ten thousand participants, and receiving national attention through such venues as The Daily Show.

These Moral Mondays – which brought religious leaders, teachers, and a variety of other activists and concerned citizens to the steps of the General Assembly in Raleigh – gave voice to actors in the state standing in protest against what they saw as a dramatic reversal of North Carolina’s progressive legacy. The Republican majority – and their supporters – held a very different perspective on the protests, of course. Claude Pope, leader of North Carolina’s Republican party, argued, for example, that the legislature was pursuing exactly the kinds of reform that their constituents desired; he noted that “the demonstrations are typical of

Democrats that have been soundly defeated not only in 2010, but in 2012 [...] you have a Republican majority that is doing exactly what they were elected to do” (21).

Despite the efforts of the Moral Monday community, the 2013 Excellent Public Schools Act – along with a number of other key Republican initiatives, including school voucher (or, as the legislature termed them, “opportunity scholarships”) and tax proposal – moved through the legislature rapidly. As in 2012, the provisions of the Excellent Public Schools Act were ultimately merged into the 2013 appropriations bill. By and large, there were few major changes to the proposed reforms to contracting, or school grades. The language involving compensation drawn from the Excellent Public Schools Act also remained unchanged – again, simply reiterating the General Assembly’s intent to eventually move districts in the state toward performance pay systems – although independent language was added to the appropriations act that discontinued the provision of pay increases to teachers for attaining advanced degrees. Unlike in 2012, however, the appropriations bill did not face a hostile executive. It passed through both houses of the General Assembly along party lines, with the exception of some Republican defectors in the House, and was signed into law by Governor Pat McCrory on July 26, 2013.

Policy Narratives Surrounding the Excellent Public Schools Act

As in Florida, the debate surrounding reforms to teacher compensation, contracting and evaluation policies in North Carolina prompted a wide variety of “storytellers” to construct rich narratives as they engaged in the task of expressing their support or opposition for the Excellent Public Schools Act. The tone of these narratives, and the venues in which they emerged, often differed from the Florida case, however. Unlike Florida, the narratives of teachers, practitioners and other citizens were often restricted within the rigidly controlled

confines of the General Assembly, which strongly privileged the voices of legislators and those allowed to offer testimony. The pages of the print media, however, provided a space for a broader array of participants to express themselves, particularly as part of the Moral Monday protest movement. This chapter unpacks the policy “stories” that emerged within these contexts – first discussing the kinds of narrators that were represented in the data drawn from the state, then examining the patterns and themes that emerged from analysis of the narrative elements and rhetorical strategies employed by participants in the discourse.

Storytellers

In the course of its legislative journey, the Excellent Public Schools Act prompted numerous policy actors to engage in discourse surrounding teacher policy reforms. As in the Florida case, these actors hailed from a variety of backgrounds – ranging from teachers, to legislators, to concerned citizens. Unlike the Florida case, the relatively closed legislative culture in North Carolina limited the extent to which many of these actors were able to participate in the “official” discourse within the halls of the General Assembly. In many cases, however, teachers, advocacy groups, and others were able to find voice through the print media – chiefly through contributions to editorial pages and letters to the editor. The following section describes these “storytellers” in more detail, while Table 7 provides a summary of narrators in the discourse surrounding the Excellent Public Schools Act, below.

Table 7. Summary of Narrators – North Carolina

Supporters	Opponents
<u>Legislators</u> Republican legislators Small minority of Democratic legislators <u>Advocacy groups</u> Parents for Educational Choice The John Locke Foundation <u>Others</u> Former N.C. State Treasurer Editorial staff writers	<u>Practitioners</u> Teachers Principals Superintendents School board members Former NC Superintendent of Schools <u>Legislators</u> Majority of Democratic legislators <u>Advocacy groups</u> The North Carolina Association of Educators Professional Educators of North Carolina Public Schools First N.C. Fundededucationnow.org <u>Others</u> Members of the community Diane Ravitch Editorial staff writers University faculty members

Practitioners

As noted above, the potential for the policy “stories” of practitioners to emerge from the data capturing the policy process in the North Carolina case was potentially limited by the fairly restrictive nature of the legislative culture in the state. That said, practitioners did find voice through other means; principally, through the “loudspeaker” of the print media. Several practitioners composed letters to their local papers, for example. Others were quoted in articles covering the “Moral Monday” protests. In each of these venues, practitioners constructed narratives that helped to assert their chosen stance on teacher policy reform.

Unlike in Florida, the data from the North Carolina case reveal no instances of practitioners standing in support of the Excellent Public Schools Act. There were several examples of teachers rising in opposition, however – again, all captured through print media coverage or letters to the editor. Practitioners other than teachers were represented in the data, as well, including: principals, the former Superintendent of Schools for North Carolina, district superintendents, and a few local school board members. Of these, only one – the superintendent of one of the highest performing districts in the state – testified in legislative committee. As with teachers, each of these actors constructed policy “stories” which supported their opposition to the contracting, compensation and evaluation proposals contained within the Excellent Public Schools Act.

Legislators

Legislators were, by far, the most well-represented group of actors in the North Carolina data. This over-representation likely resulted from their privileged position during debate around the Excellent Public Schools Act within the General Assembly. As in Florida, the data indicate a sharp partisan divide among members of the legislature on the issue of teacher policy reform. There were no instances, for example, of Republicans crossing the line and joining their voices to those standing in opposition to the Excellent Public Schools Act. Similarly, analysis of the data resulted in only a few references to Democrats speaking in support of the bill. Finally, analysis shows that Republican legislators took up a relatively greater share of the discourse than their Democratic colleagues – again, likely resulting from their majority within both chambers and control of the debate in both committee and floor contexts.

Advocacy groups

In addition to practitioners and legislators, a number of advocacy groups contributed to the discourse surrounding teacher policy reforms in North Carolina. Analysis of the data indicates that only a handful of these actors rose in support of the Excellent Public Schools Act. These included the president of Parents for Educational Choice – a North Carolinian organization advocating for school choice policies – and the president of the John Locke Foundation, a conservative think-tank native to the state. More advocacy groups, however, stood in opposition to the Excellent Public Schools Act over the course of the debate. Among the advocacy groups constructing policy “stories” opposing teacher contracting, evaluation and compensation reform were several representatives of the North Carolina Association of Educators, representatives of Public Schools First N.C. and a representative of “Fundededucationnow.org” – a group based in Florida who, as will be shown below, constructed an interesting “story” bridging the two state cases.

Other Storytellers

Finally, a number of actors other than legislators, practitioners and advocacy groups lent their voices to the debate surrounding the Excellent Public Schools Act. As with many of the other “narrators” in the North Carolina case, these actors found venue for their policy “stories” outside of the legislature, on the pages of print media sources in the state. Several actors, for example – including a former North Carolina state treasurer and an editorial writer for the Capitol Press Association – penned editorials supporting the Excellent Public Schools Act. More, however, wrote in opposition to the bill’s proposals. These opponents ranged from national figures like Diane Ravitch, to a host of concerned citizens and community members who took the time to write letters to the editors of the state’s newspapers in order to make their stories heard. Interestingly, the editorial staff of a number of these print sources,

themselves, penned opinion pieces articulating their own policy narratives regarding teacher reforms – much more frequently than in the Florida case. The most prolific example was the primary paper serving the state’s capitol, the *Raleigh News and Observer*, although staff members of other papers joined the discourse, as well.

Narrative Elements in the Discourse Surrounding the Excellent Public Schools Act

As they debated the merits of teacher compensation, contracting and evaluations reforms in North Carolina, these actors tied together a number of narrative elements to construct coherent policy “stories” capable of pushing their chosen agenda forward. In doing so, policy “storytellers” on both sides of the debate made efforts to frame perceptions of the *characters* at the heart of the policy issues in play, the nature and severity of the policy *problems* that they faced, and the *causal narratives* that explained how and why those policy problems came to be. The following sections investigate the ways in which each of these elements manifested in the North Carolina data, and unpack the different ways that policy “storytellers” in the state brought them together forge their narratives regarding the Excellent Public Schools Act.

Characters

Like their Floridian counterparts, policy “storytellers” in North Carolina constructed complex characterizations of various actors as they wove them into their narratives regarding teacher policy reforms. In doing so, they framed understandings about the roles of teachers, legislators, advocacy groups, and other players in the process of teaching, learning, and education. This section unpacks these characterizations, and describes the ways in which they manifested in the North Carolina data.

As in Florida, teachers were important characters in the policy narratives surrounding the Excellent Public Schools Act in North Carolina – at least for some policy “storytellers”. Supporters of teacher policy reform, for their part, tended to steer away from incorporating teachers into their “stories”. By and large, when supporters did directly refer to teachers in their narratives, their characterizations were similar to those found in Florida. Supporters tended to speak of the vast majority of teachers in laudatory fashion; if there was any impetus for their efforts to “target” them as a means of addressing educational problems, they asserted, it lay with a small minority of poor performers. One Republican Senator, for example, rejected the assertion that the General Assembly was attacking the state’s teachers, arguing that “[...] never once did we say that teachers weren’t doing their job, or that they were bad. Never once was that said. So let’s get that perfectly clear. We’re supportive of teachers, especially the ones that give their heart and soul and try to educate in a very challenging system” (64). Senator Phil Berger, the sponsor of both versions of the Excellent Public Schools Act, agreed, stating that

[...] the single-most important factor in enhancing student achievement is a high-quality teacher. The overwhelming majority of our educators are top-notch, and they’re invaluable to children’s success. Those teachers should be recognized and rewarded. Unfortunately there are some bad teachers out there – and if you’re counting on one to educate your child, then you understand it’s a real problem (22).

Opponents of the Excellent Public Schools Act were, generally, far more willing to include teachers as characters in their policy “stories”. As they did so, they also largely mirrored their counterparts in Florida, framing teachers as selfless, hardworking heroes being unjustly targeted by lawmakers. A retired professor, for example, wrote to the News & Observer, asserting that “most teachers are hardworking, underpaid, and exploited in the worst manner. Underappreciated souls committed to their responsibilities...why hurt these

highly trained and committed teachers while removing a minority of poor teachers” (11)? A member of the *News & Observer*’s editorial board agreed, noting in an opinion piece that

[...] we here in the editorial shop draw more response to editorials and columns about teachers than on any other subject. People feel strongly about teachers, their own and their kids’, and they don’t like it when these noble centurions of the classroom, underpaid and overworked, are turned into political pawns by politicians who know better and [who] ought to get a few disciplinary whacks up in front of the bulleting board, if you know what we mean” (25).

Finally, a teacher captured this characterization – of the long-suffering victim of a potentially ungrateful state – in a letter to her representative, shared during debate on bill. She explained that

Teaching is a rewarding, life-changing job, but I will be leaving North Carolina schools next year. I do not feel that I could recommend for anybody to enter this profession in North Carolina. Please listen to the teachers that are still going to be here. Please treat them, and compensate them, as professionals. As people who spend more waking hours with the children than parents do. As people who instill morals, values, etiquette, and manners, as well as academic skills, to other peoples’ children every day. Pay them appropriately for truly shaping the state’s future (71).

If the protagonists of opponents’ narratives were teachers in the North Carolina case, the antagonists were, without a doubt, the members of the Republican majority in the General Assembly. Several opponents of reform to teacher compensation, contracting and evaluation policies told “stories” that characterized members of the newly dominant Republican party as villains bent on “attacking” the state’s teachers and public schools. As in Florida, they argued that this “attack” was motivated, at least in part, by a desire to settle past political scores. This narrative theme was stronger in North Carolina than in Florida, however – likely magnified as a result of the general wave of opposition against the state’s conservative turn being pushed forward by groups like the Moral Monday protestors. In a letter to the

Asheville *Citizen Times*, one concerned citizen asserted that “the General Assembly is setting our public school system up for failure; and, they are doing it by systematically making laws that will harm the students in our public schools” (47). Similarly, a professor from East Carolina University, in his letter, stated simply that “the Republicans in the N.C. Legislature are ruining public education” (57). A Democratic senator, debating the bill, carried this further, arguing that the intent of the majority was, in fact, retaliation; he noted that

[...] context is one of the skills that I believe Sen. Berger wants, and we all desire our children to learn, to be able to read – that you understand the meaning of something through the context in which that word appears. Well, you have to look at this bill and how it treats teachers, in the context of recent history. Now, you know last year it was highly controversial...the deep cuts that the majority made in public education. Cutting thousands of teachers, and thousands of teachers’ assistants. And when those teachers rose up and were critical of this body, this body passed legislation that said that the organization that you’re a member of, you cannot have dues deduction. And we know that was a retaliatory measure, because we know that Speaker Tillis said that the intent of this body was to do to those that were critics of public education. We know it was retaliatory [...] (64).

A teacher, for her part, noted that, if legislators’ intentions were to hurt teachers, they were successful; she shared that recent policy actions in the state had left her feeling “disrespected and disliked by the Republican Senate” (6).

For their part, Republican legislators countered this narrative by framing themselves as bold reformers, succeeding in the mission set for them by an electorate thirsty for change. Sen. Phil Berger, for example, in a letter to the *News & Observer*, asserted that “Last fall, voters overwhelmingly re-elected a Republican legislature to strengthen our schools so students can succeed. And that’s a responsibility that we take seriously” (22). Later, in another letter to the *Charlotte Observer*, he articulated some of the ways – primarily financial – in which the Republican majority had supported the state’s schools:

Let's set the record straight: This year, Republican lawmakers voted to spend the most money on K-12 public education in state history. We appropriated \$360 million more for our schools – a 5 percent increase over last year's budget. The state spends close to \$5 billion to provide our state's teachers a package of salary and benefits worth an average of \$55,264 for 10 months of employment (38).

Another member of the Republican caucus went further, asserting that not only had the new majority carried out the will of the electorate, but they were also responsible for ushering in a new era of true progress in the state; he argued that

I think that for the first time in a long time in this body, [that] somebody is finally willing to take on change in education. You know, for many, many, years – and this is my eighth – we sit up here and we look at education, and we say “you know, if we just give it a little bit more money, I think it'll work. Just fund it just a little bit more, we can get over the hump and things will be just a little bit better”. So what we do is we take money and we just throw a little bit more at it. And we got the same system – the system never changes, it's the same system – and we're going to say “we'll just spend a little bit more money, and things are going to happen...things will be just a touch better”. You know, for the first time, Sen. Berger has said “you know, maybe it's not about the money. Maybe it's the system. Maybe it's time we started to do something a little different to see if things will change”. And I think some of these changes are bold – they're controversial. We've heard some opinions today. Some of you don't like some of the changes, and I can understand that. To be quite honest, I have some questions about some of them. But at least – at least, for the first time – somebody is saying “let's just don't throw money at something, let's see if we can change something and start a new direction on how we attack and fix education”. And that takes a bold step (64).

While teachers and legislators often appeared as characters in the narratives surrounding teacher policy reform in North Carolina, other actors also played a role, albeit less frequently. Advocacy organizations, for example, were touched upon by some actors, although far less frequently than in the Florida case. This may, hypothetically, reflect the lesser degree of influence such organizations had over the process in North Carolina. As noted above, for example, the NCAE was less aggressive in many ways than the FEA had

been in Florida. Despite this, some supporters – again, principally legislators – did take swipes at the teacher organization. Senator Phil Berger, for instance, in a letter to the *Charlotte Observer*, argued that the NCAE, and organizations like it, were guilty of blocking reform in the name of self-interest. He wrote that

There are some dishonest but powerful special interests in Raleigh who are forgetting what our public schools are all about. Instead of focusing on the kids, they're focusing on one thing: money for their members. The way they talk, you'd think N.C. schools are not going to open this year because there is no money and all the teachers have been fired (38).

When the organization later allied with the Moral Monday movement, the Republican caucus went further, asserting that the NCAE was pushing teachers to act against the best interests of their students. Another Republican senator argued that “schools have a duty to educate and protect our children, not serve as marching grounds for political protests orchestrated by unions. We are deeply disturbed that the NCAE is encouraging teachers to turn their backs on their classrooms and leave their students in the care of strangers who may lack formal training and background checks” (26).

Opponents of reform, similarly, rarely incorporated advocacy groups as characters in their policy stories. When they did, however, they painted a picture which portrayed conservative groups, from both within and outside the state, as a primary motivator of the political “wave” motivating shifts in state policy – including teacher policy reforms. North Carolinian business magnate Art Pope, and the conservative groups he funded, became a villain for some, for example. One faculty member at Duke University asserted this in a letter to the *News & Observer*, sharing that

I've taught for almost 50 years at Duke University, which picks its students carefully, and I have never known anyone who could claim “superior

academic outcomes” for all students. How much more unlikely is it at schools that must accept all students in a given age range? This falsehood is designed, like many of the efforts of Pope-supported think-tanks, to undermine respect and support for state-run education, primarily by maligning teachers. These groups have no expertise in education that is worth space in your paper. What they do have is an agenda and lots of money (12).

Out of state groups were also a target of some “storytellers”. In a similar letter, the founder of advocacy group FundEducationNow.org stated that the Republican agenda for education was little more than a fraud perpetrated by national conservative groups. She argued that

Raleigh has signed on with powerful outsiders who travel state to state, pitching the “Florida Miracle” like so much snake oil. A few graphs and percentages persuaded North Carolina politicians to subject every public school child to a flawed experiment. It is the same in 20 other states. Lobbyists, virtual vendors, chamber types, and politicians all sound the same frightening public school crisis alarm while scheming to divert public tax dollars meant for our neighborhood schools straight into private pockets (13).

Unlike in the Florida case, “storytellers” in North Carolina integrated parents and students into their stories fairly rarely. With regard to students, supporters tended to characterize them in the same way as their Floridian counterparts – as victims. In general, however, they were not framed as victims of poorly-performing teachers. Rather, they were victims of a “broken system” that was dangerously inadequate for serving their needs. One Republican Senator, for example, argued before the Senate that

[...] it’s a shame that we’ve tolerated the fact that these children are allowed to get through a system with social promotion instead of making sure they can at least read. Again, I applaud you for that, and also for the students who are in that class – each of them, if you add competent [teachers] to children in that class, then every child has the opportunity to reach their full academic potential, and that should be the goal of education, which is excellence [...] (62).

Parents, similarly, were mentioned only rarely, and generally by opponents of teacher policy reform. As in Florida, some participants portrayed parents as a sometimes complicating factor in the “equation” of student learning. One citizen, writing to the *Asheville Citizen Times*, for example, noted that “[...] factors such as a discordant home life may also impact a student’s motivation. We have all heard about the parents who never attend PTA meetings” (44). Others, interestingly, characterized parents as actors with great potential for championing the public school system, which they viewed as being under siege. Diane Ravitch, for example, shared that “parents are the sleeping giant [...]” (35). The president of “Fundededucationnow.org”, similarly, asserted in her letter to the *News & Observer* that “parents have the power to stop politicians from breaking public schools and selling them to the highest bidder. Your children are watching, and innocently waiting. Demand something better for them” (13).

Finally, one last “character” that emerged from the data in the North Carolina case bears mentioning. As noted, supporters of reform to teacher evaluation, compensation and contracting policies rarely went so far as to frame teachers as the primary antagonists of their policy “stories”, aside from a few references to a minority of poor performers. They did, however, occasionally refer to another “villain”: the “broken system” that defined the status quo of the state’s schools. Republican legislators, in particular, pointed to this system as the “character” responsible for robbing children of their future, and for wasting precious state resources. One Republican senator captured this in his testimony before his colleagues, arguing that

What Sen. Berger is trying to do is actually do something novel. Make sure they can read before they graduate. It doesn’t make any difference if you graduate and you can’t read – it doesn’t do you any good. You don’t have a

chance to be a productive citizen. And I get very frustrated listening to that kind of rhetoric, and defending the status quo about this system. It's broken, it doesn't do you any good to put money into a system that's broken [...] We failed them - it's evident by the product that comes out. Those kids are being cheated by this system (65).

Problem Definitions

In addition to framing characters through their policy narratives, “storytellers” in North Carolina also worked to carefully define the policy problems at the heart of their “stories” – or to counter the problem definitions of their opponents. Supporters of teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting policy reform, for example, constructed stories which – much as supporters of reform had in Florida – situated flagging performance among the state’s students as a clear and pressing problem. In the North Carolinian case, reading performance was targeted as a key facet of this more general problem. One Republican senator, for example, framed the problem targeted by the Excellent Public Schools Act by sharing that

My children go to school now with other kids that basically can't read. They're doomed to failure in their academic career, and probably in their personal life, because they can't read. My wife started a program in a low wealth school – in Wilson – is was a community program called 'Hand in Hand'. She works with children every single day that can't read. That can't do the math that they're very good at because they can't read the problems. They can't do well on the test because they can't read the instructions. It is time that we change the mold. And as Sen. Brown said, this may not be a perfect bill; this is actually the beginning of what we need to be doing to change our school system [...] (63).

Another Senator also emphasized reading performance as a key problem for the state, and tied it to downstream issues in students’ post-secondary outcomes:

I also want to talk about the performance – for example, on the NAEP examination, according to a brochure at the Hunt foundation during our retreat. The NAEP exam in 2011 demonstrated a snapshot of where the 4th

graders were. And when you had 66% percent of the students not achieving grade level, that's an embarrassment. And that's been accepted policy for a number of years, apparently, because it's continued very seriously. Therefore I applaud you on trying to correct that problem. Secondly, probably 70% of the community college students that are entering are requiring reading and math remediation. Recent graduates from our high schools, along with others – it's a shame that we've tolerated the fact that these children are allowed to get through a system with social promotion instead of making sure they can at least read (62).

In both of these problem definitions, the “system” stood as a critical component of the challenges facing the state – challenges which were framed as both severe and widespread in their impact. Senator Phil Berger – sponsor of the Excellent Public Schools Act – continued to hammer those qualities of the problem, while invoking a personal story in order to make the issue more salient for his audience; he shared that

It pains me to see so many defending an education system that, in so many ways, fails our children. It graduates too few from high school – nearly one in four students don't finish. It prepares too few for higher education – one in five high school graduates take remedial courses at community colleges, costing taxpayers nearly \$100 million annually. And it teaches too few the basics – nearly 66 percent of our children can't read proficiently by fourth grade, the critical point when reading becomes essential for learning. Many never catch up [...] Getting an education changed my life. Now, as a father and grandfather, I'm determined to ensure every child in North Carolina has the same opportunities I had. The Excellent Public Schools Act is the education reform our children deserve, our parents expect, and our state desperately needs (28).

Finally, some supporters of the Excellent Public Schools Act articulated a few secondary problem definitions, in addition to the core “problem” of poor student achievement. First, as noted by Phil Berger, above, several “storytellers” in the North Carolina case underscored the economic implications of the student achievement problem, and the “broken system” at its heart. Second, several supporters underscored the state's existing system of teacher “tenure” as a key part of the broken system. More specifically,

they argued that a key policy problem lay with the difficulty of eliminating underperforming teachers within the existing structure. One Republican senator, for example, stated succinctly that “I also think the current law is an impediment for removing those bad teachers from the classrooms” (36). Another agreed, asserting that these impediments must, assuredly, be protecting teachers incapable of meeting students’ needs: “there are 90,000 teachers in North Carolina and less than 50 let go for cause. You can’t tell me we have 90,000 outstanding teachers. We may have 89,000. We may have 88,000 [...]” (42).

For their part, as in Florida, most opponents of the Excellent Public Schools Act focused on countering the problem definitions forwarded by supporters. This counter narrative centered on diffusing supporters’ arguments regarding the severity, magnitude and saliency of student achievement deficits in the state. More specifically, they argued that North Carolina’s system was, in fact, making great strides in addressing the state’s historical issues regarding educational outcomes. One teacher, for example, argued in her letter to the Asheville *Citizen Times* that

There has been considerable dialogue of late regarding North Carolina’s public schools: specifically, how they are failing us [...] I would like to offer some perspective. Ninety-nine percent of Americans are literate. Schools across the United States provide a remarkable range of services tuition-free to all children: basic academic skills and content taught by qualified, trained teachers; vocational training; enriched environments for talented students [...] Schools feed poor children and provide after-school day care. Schools transport children to and from school and extracurricular events. Schools provide access to technology, libraries full of books, art programs, music programs, drama programs, and physical education/health facilities... In short, public schools are a bargain. There is no problem facing our state or our nation today that will be solved by gutting public education” (45).

Several other actors shared this sentiment: that the state's system was, in fact, functioning well, and that the state's teachers were a central component of its success. One Democratic representative, for instance, argued before the House that

One thing too, I'd like to challenge you on – in Sampson County, I think we have a good school system. In the last few years, we have built three new high schools. Those schools are second to none. We have a good program there. We've had a North Carolina teacher of the year, we've had a principal of the year, getting ready to have another one pretty soon, all of that – and we're doing real good. I think if you talk to the people back home, you'll find out that they feel like the public schools are doing pretty good [...] We aren't doing anything – anything at all – for the teachers in this state, who work so hard, except blaming them when they can't do everything we want them to do. We have the highest graduation rate that North Carolina has ever had in its history. We have been performing very well (71).

A Democratic senator also embraced the perspective that the state's teachers had, in fact, been propelling students forward, rather than allowing them to lag behind. He noted that

We started half a decade ago, re-writing the curriculums, working to test ourselves against the world, and it culminated in Race to the Top last year. We have all kinds of innovative things going on there, including school report cards. And I got to thinking back – the teachers we have here in this state will do whatever they're asked to do. They always have. I mean you can go back to the beginning when we integrated the schools. And they integrated the schools for this nation – that's how we solved that problem, is through the public schools. We asked them to get the graduation rate up – remember that? That's what we were all upset about at one time. One year we were all upset about SAT scores [...] When we've asked them to concentrate on something, they can do it. And when you look at these comparisons to other states, we're not at the bottom. Sen. Apodoca, the only thing we're at the bottom of is what we pay them, and what we spend on the schools. We're in the 40's in teacher's pay. Well, it'll be a surprise to them, if you think they're 20th – so be it, but there's not a teacher out there that thinks they're 20th in the country. Now the last thing we told them we wanted them to get busy on was Math and Science, and they're doing that. Those scores – I read 'em off to you here, they're going up, up, up. And if you decide that you want to do reading, and you take away additional personnel, you're going to force them to abandon something else to do this. And I can't help but think that we're heading into a situation where when they fail at some point to be able to do what we tell them to, we blame them [again] (65).

Finally, opponents of teacher policy reform argued that, not only was the state's school system doing better than it ever had, but that the processes for dealing with underperforming teachers were similarly functional – particularly in light of previous efforts in the state to more collaboratively improve the removal process. As such, they argued that eliminating career status was both hasty and, likely, unnecessary. The director of another of the state's teachers' groups, the Professional Educators of North Carolina, argued this point, stating that

[...] we understand that many folks are operating under the assumption that bad teachers cannot be fired in North Carolina. This is simply not true. In fact, last year, in Senate Bill 466, it modified career status, or tenure, so that we now have mandatory improvement plans that can be used as substantial evidence of inadequate performance, which is one of the ways a teacher can be dismissed. This is a significant change. Coupled with the new teacher evaluations, we believe that administrators do have the tools that they need to eliminate ineffective teachers. We hope that you will allow time for these tools to work before modifying tenure again (62).

Similarly, a teacher captured the point in his letter to the *Citizen Times*, arguing that “tenured teachers are not untouchable. If they are not doing a great job, there is a process in place to address that” (42).

At least one supporter of the Excellent Public Schools Act acknowledged this counter-narrative and recognized that the state had, in fact, made substantial progress in improving the lot of students over the last several decades. Still, the president of the John Locke Foundation asserted that some progress did not obviate the need to address issues within the system in the name of continuing improvement. He wrote, in an op-ed for *The Daily Reflector*, that

If you say that North Carolina's public schools are better than they used to be, you'll get no argument from me. A generation ago, educational attainment and quality in North Carolina ranked low by national standards. Today, North Carolina's public schools look better by nearly all measures. In short, public education in our state used to be abysmal. Now it is mediocre. This is progress – but we have a long way to go if our goal is to lead the nation and compete with other countries (52).

Framing Causal Narratives

Finally, as they constructed their policy “stories”, actors in North Carolina articulated causal narratives explicating the mechanisms at the heart of the policy problems they defined. Unlike supporters in the Florida case, supporters of teacher policy reforms in North Carolina constructed causal narratives that were somewhat muddled. On one hand, supporters were clear in their belief that teachers played a direct role in determining the outcomes of their students. Senator Phil Berger, as he explained the Excellent Public Schools Act, highlighted the importance of teachers in multiple venues. He asserted, for example, that “[...] the single-most important factor in enhancing student achievement is a high-quality teacher” (38). Moreover, he noted in an op-ed for the *Charlotte Observer* that the state need only “combine hard-working students with top-notch teachers, and education’s capacity to overcome even the poorest circumstances [would be] unmatched and unmistakable [...] We know students with the best teachers do more” (28).

Similarly, in another letter to the *Observer*, the state’s former treasurer affirmed the importance of teachers to students’ learning, arguing that “aside from the parent, the classroom teacher is the most important element in learning, so we need a way to measure accountability and reward performance” (29). Given this direct relationship between teachers’ efforts and their students’ outcomes, it made sense to supporters to link incentives for teachers to their evaluations. As one Republican senator noted, it boiled down to a simple

equation: “if you’re a good teacher, you’re going to get recognition and more money. If you’re not, you’re going to get a career change” (5).

While supporters of teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting reform in North Carolina were clear in situating teachers as a pivotal causal driver in the process of producing student outcomes, they often appeared less willing to connect them directly to the problems purportedly targeted by the Excellent Public Schools Act. Rather, supporters situated North Carolina’s student achievement deficits as an outcome of the state’s “broken” system of public schools. Instead of directly linking underperforming teachers to the state’s problems with poor academic performance, these “storytellers” pointed to a web of poorly functioning systems – including compensation, evaluation and contracting systems, alongside issues like social promotion and limited choice – as the main perpetrators. This frequently brought supporters of reform in North Carolina into greater alignment with Stone’s (1989; 2002) articulation of a *mechanical* causal narrative – in which poorly designed structures were causing harm by accomplishing their functions (e.g. slowing the process of terminating teachers, in the case of career status protections) – than the more direct *inadvertent* narrative often presented by supporters of SB 6 and 736 in Florida.

Opponents of the Excellent Public Schools Act, in general, constructed two differing causal frameworks within their policy “stories”. First, a number of “storytellers” standing in opposition to teacher policy reforms constructed a *complex* narrative similar to the one articulated by their counterparts in Florida. In that complex narrative, they pushed the locus of control over student outcomes away from teachers and schools by asserting the importance of many other variables in the educational process. One principal, for example, captured this by asserting that

Public education is a tough business that requires ongoing efforts toward improvement. We are dealing with adults and children who have a wide array of needs and expectations. Our problem with education policy over the years is that attempts to improve achievement have followed a “one size fits all” approach that does not provide for the myriad of learning deficits that schools face. The Excellent Public Schools Act before the N.C. General Assembly is a continuation of that failed approach (32).

Similarly, a Democratic representative argued before the House that

I feel that what we need to do is to look at some of the other things that effect a child’s education, and we need to use a holistic approach to solving the problems, instead of just talking about measuring the kid after they get to 6 and 7 years old. There are things that impact our schools, like the changing demographics that we haven’t mentioned here. The drug culture. Home and family life, especially your single parent homes. Changing moral and spiritual values. All of these make a difference in how children learn. The goals and objectives set out in this bill are great – as long as we realize that we are dealing with human beings and not inanimate objects. We can make a product and guarantee the same outcome as long as we use the same ingredients and techniques, but every student comes to the school with different DNA. Some will come ready to learn, and others will not. The maturity levels of these students will be different. These schools will have different ethnic backgrounds, and parents with different educational levels and economic levels and all of these things will have an impact on what goes on in your schools. The schools are just a microcosm of your community [...] I am a firm believer that all children can learn, but am realistic enough to know that not all students will reach the same goal at the same time – not even horse races and car races, they don’t reach the same goal at the same time, because we have winners and we have losers [...]” (68).

In addition to this complex causal narrative regarding student achievement, some opponents of the Excellent Public Schools Act told stories that attempted to turn the tables on their discursive adversaries. In doing so, they painted the new Republican majority and their policy decisions as the true culprits behind the state’s educational issues – complicating the work of schools and beggaring the budget for public education. One Democratic senator, for example, argued to his colleagues that

I can't let the bill pass without taking note – I looked at the money that we're putting into this bill: \$23 million for diagnostic reading assessments, \$9 million for Kindergarten assessments, a little bit here and there [...] but no money in here for anybody to help these children. And yet we know that we have taken a half a billion dollars out of the public school systems in the form of a negative reserve, or whatever you want to call it – it ends up being money they don't get. That's resulted in the loss of positions in the schools, by anybody's definition. It's not necessarily people fired, but you can't replace people so you again lose teachers' aides and teachers (62).

A fellow Democratic senator agreed, asserting that not only where the General Assembly's ill-advised policies contributing to the state's problems, they might also be exacerbating them. He argued that

[...] it's not fair to come along and change what we're directing them to do, and then put blame on 'em, take away all their rights, declare them all so bad we need to just get rid of a bunch of them [as if] that'll solve everything. That is not your problem, and you're going to mess around and run off these good ones. And I've got good teachers. I've got good superintendents and I've got good principals. And I don't want you runnin' mine off. And if you all have bad ones, then you need to go sit down with them, like I do with mine when we have a problem. We have a problem in the city of Asheville, with minority males. We sit down once a year and talk about that. But my folks put in a \$0.15 supplemental tax in the city school system. We dedicated a half penny sales tax to build schools since 1983. You may need to do the same thing. But don't just keep pulling resources out and blaming your people for failure and destroy this system. You need it every much as bad as I do. With that, Mr. President and members of the Senate – talking about going backwards. This bill, at its essence – we watered down just about everything in it – at its essence, it's taking another slap at teachers, and we don't need to be doing that (65).

As these examples indicate, this causal “story” underlying the policy narratives put forward by these opponents of the Excellent Public Schools Act never went so far as to declare that the Republican majority was motivated by malevolence. Instead, the general implication was that the harm being afflicted upon the state and its school system by the GOP was the result of poor decision-making and misplaced priorities.

Rhetoric in the Discourse Surrounding the Excellent Public Schools Act

As they did in Florida, policy actors in North Carolina utilized a number of rhetorical strategies as they wove their arguments and narratives from the constituent elements described above. In doing so, they made and contested claims to legitimacy, infused their policy “stories” with metaphors, and tied their discursive constructions to evocative images and cultural narratives. This section describes the ways in which these rhetorical strategies manifested in the North Carolina case, and the ways in which supporters and opponents of teacher policy reform used them to enhance the resonance and accessibility of their policy “stories”.

Contesting Legitimacy

Like those in the Florida case, some participants in the discourse surrounding teacher policy reforms in North Carolina worked to strengthen their arguments through the *evidentiary warrant* – although, in North Carolina, relatively few participants in the debate attempted to hinge their “stories” on empirics. When they did attempt to claim evidentiary legitimacy, supporters generally did so in the same way that their Floridian counterparts did: by drawing upon unsourced statistics and figures to validate their arguments.

In general, supporters did not attempt to invoke the authority of scholarly research as they constructed their narratives. The sole exception emerging from the data was the president of the John Locke Foundation, a North Carolinian policy think-tank. In a letter to *The Daily Reflector*, he argued that the key to improving the state’s schools was

[...] better teachers. Many high-achieving states and countries hire and pay their teachers according to demonstrated performance. According to a 2011 study of international test scores, countries where public schools routinely pay teachers according to performance outscore the others by the

equivalent of an entire grade in math and reading, and by half a grade level in science. We should junk our current salary schedules, restrict or abolish teacher tenure, give principals more tools with which to manage their employees, and hold everyone accountable for results (52).

Opponents of the Excellent Public Schools Act, for their part, also invoked the evidentiary warrant rarely, and – as with supporters – did not, generally, appeal to research. Instead, they asserted that supporters of teacher policy reform were “woefully short on knowledge and comprehension” regarding what worked in education (61). Moreover, they worked to counter supporters’ appeals to evidentiary legitimacy by presenting their own, often conflicting statistics regarding teacher dismissal and student achievement. This clash of statistics was, in fact, one of the interesting differences between the North Carolina and Florida cases. While participants in the latter case rarely broke from a pattern of non-engagement and *heresthetic*, North Carolinian actors – particularly members of the General Assembly – seemed far less shy about directly contesting each other’s statistical claims. Both sides of the debate, for example, asserted conflicting statistical “stories” regarding the trend of achievement in the state. Opponents of reform presented numbers indicating the relative progress made in the state over the last several years. Supporters, however, challenged the narrative presented by those statistics. One Republican Senator, for instance, argued that

I don’t know if the statistics that we just heard are correct – I’ve seen different figures...Here in the talk, just – I don’t know, goodness gracious. I’ve been here 10 years, and you would have thought that we had the number one education system in the country [...] we’re just destroying everything. But, folks, it ain’t been nothing to brag about, and we’ve done a lot of talking and not much action (65).

One of his colleagues agreed, stating that

We’re supportive of teachers, especially the ones that give their heart and soul and try to educate in a very challenging system. What I can’t believe

is when you come up with statistics – and they aren't our statistics. I mentioned this the other day during the debate, and Sen. Purcell and a number of folks and I sat in that place in Pinehurst talking about education. The NAEP scores didn't reflect what you're saying. They said that 66% of the fourth graders in that NAEP test did not read at grade level. And in 8th grade, 68% weren't reading at grade level. That's the group of people that you've been going through the system with (65).

Opponents of the Excellent Public Schools Act, similarly, challenged supporters' statistical claims. A key example of this lay with assertions regarding the number of teachers dismissed for cause in the state. A few Democratic members of the General Assembly pursued this argument, asserting that supporters' statistics underrepresented the extent to which ineffective teachers could be dealt with within the current system. One Democratic senator captured this argument, arguing to the chair of the Senate Education Committee that

Sen. Tillman, this is about taking away teachers' rights – and you, yourself, you and I had a conversation last year, because I came and talked to you about what reforms do we need to ensure that good teachers can teach. We can get rid of bad teachers. And you told me – I had not known, in all the years that I've served with you – you shared with me, that you, professionally, that was your job. To go in under the existing rules and get rid of bad teachers. And you told me, it can be done. And you did it. You did it many times. I want to point out that it's misleading to say – and I learned this from you, Sen. Tillman – I know when Sen. Berger spoke on this bill he said there are 90,000 teachers in this state, and only 15 were dismissed last year. But you explained to me that when you have a good, solid case that a teacher isn't worthy of being in the classroom, that they end up resigning once you make that case against them, before you have to force a dismissal. And you told me that you did that many times, and I know you did it more than 15 times. Take this out of this bill (63).

Both opponents and supporters of reform made efforts to pursue the *accountability warrant* more frequently than they did the *evidentiary*. In both cases, the story was much the same as it had been in Florida. Supporters, by and large, sought to frame themselves as the sole party willing to pursue real results by pushing for true reform and improvement; opponents, they asserted, were more concerned with pursuing old tactics unlikely to bear

fruit. Senator Phil Berger, for example, argued that supporters had the true objectives of education in mind as they pursued reform, opining in a letter to the *News and Observer*: “So, what is public education all about? Is it just about spending money? Is it about growing bureaucracy or guaranteeing employment and generous benefits regardless of performance? We believe it’s about teaching our children and empowering them to be productive, successful members of society (22)”. The chair of the Senate’s Education Committee agreed, further asserting that only significant reforms would drive results. He noted that

A lot of my friends in the schools – superintendents, teachers, librarians and counselors – I talk to them daily, and a lot of them have said “why are you doin’ all this reform right now, why are you doin’ this?”. And I simply say: “are you happy with what you’ve got?” Parents tell me they’re not happy. Many of them are going to charter schools, and many of them are on waiting lists all over the place for charter schools. Why do we have that, folks? They’re not happy and they see something that – and educators a lot of the time hate for me to use the word broken – but if we have something that is not working, and we’ve had 140 years of attempting to throw money at the same old thing, and it’s still broken, why would we continue to do that? Why don’t you give us an opportunity to reform things? We don’t have a perfect piece of work, here, but everybody has had their chance to give me input, and all of you all have. And we’ve had good input. Will it be refined? Sure it will be. But if you don’t think we need a different course, ask the people in the schools: “are you truly happy with where you are right now?” Don’t you think we ought to pay teachers on being effective, and their students making progress? Cannot – for God’s sake – cannot we measure that? Well, yes we can, if we got the guts to do it [...] we can have that in place, and the other things can and will work. But if you’re telling me that the answer to this is to continue to throw money into education, and to not ask for any reform and to expect a different result, we have our heads in the sand. That’s why we have this reform package (63).

Opponents of the Excellent Public Schools Act took a different tact, arguing that the changes sought by supporters of teacher policy reform were decidedly unlikely to produce outcomes of value to the state. If anything, many opponents argued, they would make matters worse. One teacher, for example, shared in a letter to the Asheville *Citizen Times* that

Teacher pay has declined to 48th in the nation and per-pupil spending to 47th, valuable programs have been lost, and needed resources curtailed. Vouchers will weaken public schools and give your tax dollars to the owners of private institutions. The elimination of teacher tenure (in the Excellent Public Schools Act of 2013) will encourage intimidation and tempt school districts to dismiss experienced teachers to save money (45).

Several other actors concurred with this assessment, arguing that the new status quo sought by supporters of teacher policy reform would represent a step backward for the state, rather than progress. A former superintendent of schools in the state, for example, wrote to the *Daily Reflector* that the General Assembly was “sending us backward. They’re adding more mandates, but providing less resources to meet the needs of the students in the classroom...education reform is just another code word for cut, slash and burn” (55). A Democratic representative agreed, arguing before the House that

This is a bill that takes us backward on jobs, and I’m going to tell you that I think that the best jobs plan is a good education plan. That the best education for our kids in our schools results from the time and attention of a caring, a dedicated, a well-trained education professional. And you can put them in there in the classroom, or you can take them away. This budget takes them away [...] that represents a retreat, a going backward, for North Carolina (68).

The Senate minority leader stated the argument more succinctly, asserting that

Simply put, this legislation adds insult to injury for teachers and will harm public education in North Carolina. The Republicans have already cut average teacher salaries to 48th in the nation; now they want to be able to fire good teaches at will? Communities across this state are already struggling to recruit and retain quality teaches, and now Republicans in Raleigh are making that task even tougher (34).

Finally, both supporters and opponents focused most intently on asserting their legitimacy through the *political warrant* as they sought to support their policy “stories” regarding teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting reform. Supporters of the

Excellent Public Schools Act pursued political legitimacy in much the same way that their analogues in Florida had: by presenting themselves and their policies as intent on serving North Carolina's children, in addition to other important constituents. While defending the appropriations act – of which teacher reforms were a part – one Republican representative captured this by sharing that

[...] I want to speak, also, for the parents, teachers and students of this state that are tired of being used as pawns by people pushing a political agenda. People that seem to think that education is all about a system. This budget recognizes that education is about people, and often about children in particular” (71).

Sen. Phil Berger, sponsor of the bill, agreed, further emphasizing the point that reform of the system was, simply, the right thing to do for the state of North Carolina. He argued that

I would urge every member of this body to support this bill. It is the right thing for us to do for our kids. It's the right thing for us to do for the future of our state. It's clearly the right thing for us to do to send a strong message that we support public education and we support making our public education system the best that it can be [...] (63).

Opponents – also like their Floridian counterparts – challenged the idea that supporters of teacher policy reforms truly had the needs of children in mind as they pursued their objectives. Several participants in the discourse surrounding the Excellent Public Schools Act, for example, characterized the General Assembly's pursuit of compensation, evaluation and contracting reform as “yet another Republican slap in the face to teachers” (3). A member of the Buncombe County Board of Education asserted this forcefully in a letter to the Asheville *Citizen Times*, arguing that

The North Carolina legislature's attack on teacher tenure is an additional retaliatory response to public school employees' efforts to ensure public school remains public [...] Teacher tenure is being demonized for

political purposes. In reality, teacher tenure provides a professional educator rights to due process under our state's laws. Protection of due-process rights for education professionals should not be maligned for political purposes, and the well-being of our children's education should not be a pawn in political retribution (61).

A Democratic senator agreed that the majority's motivations seemingly lay with revenge against teachers and teachers' organizations; he noted that

In this bill [...] we have teachers' due process rights being taken away. We're not doing that with every public employee. When you drove here today to this body, you may have seen a state worker standing out there with a sign, directing traffic. That state worker has due process rights, and under this bill, that worker and all other state employees will have more due process rights than teachers. So, within that context and that history, it's clear that this is to punish teachers (63).

In another example of direct engagement between parties, members of the Republican majority occasionally challenged this assertion directly, refuting claims that they were interested in attacking teachers. One Republican senator took particular umbrage against assertions that the majority wanted to "attack" teachers, arguing on the floor that

I believe in our public school system. All this talk about how there's certainly people with motivations to destroy the public school system – that's nonsense, that's the boogeyman coming to get you. My kids go to public school. I want them to go to public school. I want the schools in Wilson County, and every other county in this state, to be successful. Because we cannot continue as we are. We must change the dynamic; we must change the direction, and this bill is the way to begin [...] (63).

Finally, in addition to framing the Republican majority as vengeful politicians, some opponents of the Excellent Public Schools Act – primarily legislators – also attacked the political legitimacy of supporters by arguing that they were not pursuing the process in good faith, and cutting the minority out of the decision-making process. A Democratic senator captured this in his arguments, sharing that

I think we've had a lost opportunity here to work together collectively for the best interests of the students and teachers in this state. Because we don't need to pit one against the other. We're all part of a big team. We're all here together, collectively, trying to do what we can to give our students the best education that they can. And we want to comply with Judge Manning's orders when he says 'the students in the state, by the constitution, are entitled to a good basic education. And we shouldn't ever shortchange them. I think we've shortchanged ourselves, when we don't come together on these things, and perhaps, put party aside to come up with what we can do in the best interests of our teachers, our students and for education in this state. To make sure that we will continue to make strides forward, and progress, so that our state will be the envy of this country. Not just because of the research triangle park. Not just because of what we're doing in medicine. Not just because we have a great environment. But because of what we're doing in the school system (63).

Some Republicans rebutted this argument as well, asserting that they had allowed for plenty of feedback and input into the bill – particularly in the interim between the first iteration of the Excellent Public Schools Act in 2012, and the second in 2013.

In addition to claiming various kinds of legitimacy, policy actors taking part in the discourse surrounding the Excellent Public Schools Act in North Carolina also made use of some additional rhetorical strategies: in particular, the use of metaphors, symbolism and connections to deeper cultural narratives. As in Florida, the use of some of the rhetorical tropes described in Chapter 2 – for example, synecdoche and metonymy – was, in general, not strongly represented in the data. Again, the nature and content of the discourse analyzed in the study may have played a factor in the limited use of such strategies, as the data were comprised of predominantly in-the-moment exchanges, in the case of legislative interactions, and shorter written pieces in the case of letters to the editor. One exception to this, found primarily among supporters in the North Carolina case, was the use of the word “system” to stand in place of the complex and varied factors – in particular, the teachers, classrooms and students – operating within public schools. As noted above, this seemed to be an effort to de-

personalize their policies, and to distance the motives of supporters from the “attack on teachers” narrative asserted by opponents. In doing so, supporters argued that, rather than “assaulting” teachers, they were simply attempting to repair a mechanistic system that had gone awry.

There were, however, more frequent attempts to infuse policy “stories” with metaphors on both sides of the debate. In the North Carolina case, the most frequent example of this was – as in Florida – the comparison of schools and classrooms to business, industry, and production. In the case of supporters, this sometimes emerged as a tool in their arguments against career status contracts, which they framed as a system of “guaranteed lifetime employment” that would be anathema in the private sector (38). Senator Phil Berger, for example, argued before the Senate education committee that

With reference to the contracts, we heard the concerns about one year contracts. And it would be my understanding, and I’ll defer to staff on this, that if a teacher has been teaching for three years or more, the local board can offer that teacher a two year contract, a three year contract, or a four year contract. I would say that that’s very much like what you see in the business community, in terms of hiring. I don’t know of any company that hires somebody for a lifetime. I think if they’re going to hire someone, they’re going to hire them for a period of time or at least they’re going to have the option of making a reassessment at some point (62).

Interestingly, opponents of the Excellent Public Schools Act adopted similar metaphors in their arguments at times, although apparently with different intent than supporters. In some cases, they did so by arguing that the teacher policy reforms embraced by the Excellent Public Schools Act were, in fact, anything but good business. One Democratic senator, for example, argued that “I think that if we were in a business trying to compete to hire some very important businessman from another company and offered them a one year contract, they would probably laugh at you – why do we expect teachers to accept

that and yet we can't do that in business" (62)? Another, arguing that the bill did not do enough to match investments in training and capacity building to new evaluations and incentives, used the language of production and infrastructure to make his point; he asserted that

One thing I'd first like to point out is that our teachers in our school system are really one of our most valuable assets, and we want to make sure that they have the skill sets that are necessary to help our kids learn to read. To help them really reach their highest potential. Because when we provide our children to our school systems, we're investing in the potential of those children. We're going to make sure – the same way that we provide roads, water and sewer – we're investing in the intellectual infrastructure of our population and our kids. One of the things I want to make sure of is that these teachers that we are entrusting our students with indeed have that skill set (63).

Finally, one concerned teacher, writing to the *Daily Reflector*, utilized the business/productive metaphor in a very different way – framing the policies of the Republican majority as impersonal and antithetical to the true purposes of education. She argued that the bill “views classes as factories, teachers as foremen and students as low-wage workers. They're placing too much focus on test-taking and not enough on the love of learning” (55).

As they constructed their policy “narratives”, supporters and opponents of the Excellent Public Schools Act also endeavored to connect their “stories” to deeper cultural symbols and “master narratives”. Supporters of teacher policy reform, for example, frequently traded upon themes of progress, innovation, and standing against a harmful “status quo”. One Republican senator do so, for instance, by arguing before his colleagues that

I think this is a tough bill, and it's an emotional bill [...] but at least we're taking a step to change the status quo, try something different, and move forward, and try and make North Carolina the best state in this nation in

education. I think that's what we all want. You know we get beat up on what we do in education sometimes, but at least this is something different. I don't mind getting beat up for trying to make a change. You know, I tell my managers at work sometimes that the worst thing you can do is do nothing – that's the quickest way for me to fire one of them, to be quite honest. I'd rather them make a mistake that costs me money, but at least try something different, than to sit still. This is doing something different. This is making a change that hopefully will make a difference in North Carolina on education. I think it's a good start, and I hope we'll support the bill" (63).

Through appeal to these broader narratives, supporters of teacher policy reforms in North Carolina seemed to be undergirding a vision of themselves as daring reformers, with the courage to challenge long standing systems that others refused to tackle.

Opponents, on the other hand, attempted to invoke cultural symbols and narratives that framed the objectives of the Excellent Public Schools Act as antithetical to the “core values” at the heart of North Carolinians. One retired educator expressed these concerns, sharing in a letter to the editor that

Recently, Thomas Barth of UNCW wrote about our need for core values, including sacrifice for the common good and self-reliance. As our culture becomes more diverse, it seems harder for policymakers to act on these core values. Other commentators wonder about the consequences of changes in our education system. One writer wonders how our actions are aligned with Christian values [...] Education is the best hope we have for bringing people together, for preparing all citizens for productive lives, for teaching all to care for the common good, for teaching core values, for teaching thinking and creativity. But we can't teach those values unless we believe and live them (48).

A retired member of the faculty at UNC Asheville, similarly, tapped into this sentiment, arguing that the reforms espoused by the bill would, in fact, represent an impingement upon liberty. She argued that “the removal of tenure is an invitation for political control of the minds of future generations. That would be a disaster for all” (11). A concerned citizen, writing to the *Daily Reflector*, went further, arguing that

Now that the N.C. Legislature is considering ending teacher tenure and establishing merit pay, it will be a whole new ballgame in the schools. Science teachers had better start teaching creation along with evolution, and surely do not give credence to global warming. At all levels, do not read stories that talk about diversity, especially those that include a suggestion about sexual orientation. Of course, if you say the Bible condemns it, you will be OK. The history texts you use should not seem liberal in any sense; conservative is all right. Health teachers, birth control is out, for contraceptives kill babies. Abstinence is the preferable method. Remember, *Row [sic] v. Wade* is a no-no (53).

He elaborated, strengthening his argument by linking this narrative to images of a dark period in American History:

The emphasis from now on will not be how you teach, but what you teach. Conforming to the community's values will now be a serious consideration if you want to get merit pay. You certainly do not want to upset those who pay you. If you do, a pink slip awaits you. Anyone who has lived through the McCarthy period of the 1950's may have some understanding of that which I am writing about Better yet, see Woody Allen's movie "The Front" or "The Way We Were" with Robert Redford and Barbara Streisand. I thank President Dwight Eisenhower for ending it (53).

Finally, opponents of the Excellent Public Schools Act in North Carolina wreathed many of their policy "stories" regarding the "attack" launched by members of the General Assembly upon teachers and public schooling in symbols of violence – much as opponents of the Student Success Act in Florida had. A member of the Buncombe County Board of Education asserted, for example, that

Rallies throughout the state shed a bright light on the potential back-room decimation of our public schools [...] the "leadership" retaliated with a Jan. 4 midnight raid on professional educators, voting to hamper professional educator association dues collection. The legislative majority is continuing its assault on public educators with the currently proposed legislation attacking teacher due-process rights (61).

A concerned citizen invoked similar imagery, asserting in a letter to the *News & Observer* that "The question now is: How devastating will the consequences be once this horrendous

rampage is over? The General Assembly needs to get it together and fast. Because right now, what we're getting is not quality education. It's a horror show" (20). This framing – of teacher policy reforms as an “attack” or “assault” upon teachers and the public school system – was a common refrain throughout the debate.

Summary of Narratives Surrounding Teacher Reforms in North Carolina

These findings presented in this chapter, regarding the ways in which both supporters and opponents of teacher policy reform in North Carolina constructed policy “stories” from various narrative elements and rhetorical strategies, allow for the distillation of a few general narratives, which emerged from the discourse surrounding the Excellent Public Schools Act. This section presents these more general “stories”; in addition, findings from each section of the preceding chapter are presented in summarized form below, in Table 8.

Table 8. Summary of North Carolina Findings

Construct	Supporters	Opponents
Characters	Framed the majority of teachers as heroic protagonists, with a minority of poor performers. Main antagonist was the “broken system”, defended by advocacy groups like teachers’ organizations/unions. Legislators in support of reform framed as progressive reformers.	Framed teachers as selfless, hardworking protagonists, unfairly targeted by a new Republican legislative majority who served as antagonists in their policy narratives. Some assertions that conservative advocacy organizations pushing anti-public school agenda.
Problem Definitions	Framed lagging student achievement – particularly in reading – as a salient, severe and wide-ranging problem in the state. Linked this problem to broader economic and social ills faced by North Carolina. Emphasis in some cases on the role of “tenure” in exacerbating these issues.	Countered supporters’ problem definition by chipping away at the proximity and severity of student achievement issues. Recognized that ground still needed to be gained, but asserted that progress had been steady in the state, largely thanks to the teaching force. Similarly, framed existing contracting system as open to removing poor performers.

Construct	Supporters	Opponents
Causal Frameworks	Constructed quasi-mechanical causal framework which situated the problem of student achievement as a result of a broken system which was not capable of driving greater student achievement. Within this system, noted the importance of teachers as a causal driver in student learning, and a potential part of the system worth targeting for improvement.	Constructed a complex causal framework for understanding the production of student achievement which limited the agency that teachers held over student outcomes. Side-narrative which situated many of the public system's problems as caused by poor policymaking on the part of the General Assembly.
Claiming Legitimacy	Efforts to claim evidentiary legitimacy by citing statistics, although often unsourced. Very few attempts to appeal to empirical research. Framed themselves as holding the accountability warrant, and as focused on results and achievement. Positioned supporters as focused on the needs of children and other constituents, and asserted that some opponents of reform – namely professional organizations – were simply concerned with protecting the interests of their members.	Cited counter-statistics, challenging supporters' efforts to gain the evidentiary warrant in a relatively rare display of engagement. Very few attempts to appeal to empirical research. Countered supporters' efforts to claim the accountability warrant by asserting that the policies sought by the Excellent Public Schools Act were unlikely to produce results and – likely – would actually harm public schools. Asserted that rather than championing the interests of children, supporters were actually out for political retribution against teachers.
Rhetorical Tropes	Few examples of rhetorical tropes – e.g. the use of metonymy or synecdoche – with the exception of the substitution of “the system” to stand in for complex networks of classroom, schools, districts, etc. Potentially used as a means for “depersonalizing” narratives. Focus on the use of metaphor to increase narrative fidelity and resonance – particularly the use of language linking education to business, industry and production.	Primary use of linguistic strategy focused on the infusion of policy “stories” with metaphor and imagery. Countered supporters' use of business comparison by using images of production and industry to frame teacher reforms as counter-productive.
Cultural Symbols / Narratives	Worked to link their policy “stories” to broader narratives of progress, innovation, and resistance to harmful “status quo”. Framed themselves as daring progressives, challenging a system that others would not.	Asserted that the reforms proposed by the Excellent Public Schools Act stood in opposition to “core values” of North Carolina – often trading upon symbols of control. Strengthened their counter-narratives by incorporating symbols of troubling historical narratives, like McCarthyism. Also made use of more violent language to underscore the narrative of the “assault” upon teachers perpetrated by the Republican majority.

Supporters of reform to teacher evaluation, contracting and compensation policies in North Carolina – including the newly ascendant members of the Republican majority in the General Assembly – wove a policy “story” that focused on the need to fix a “broken system”. Within this narrative, supporters of the Excellent Public School Act characterized the majority of teachers as protagonists, working hard to serve the state’s children. They also noted, however, that there were a minority of lower performing teachers operating as part of the “broken system” of public education in the state. This “broken” system, they argued, was the principle driver in the state’s severe and wide-ranging issues with student outcomes and achievement – particularly reading achievement. Supporters argued that fixing the malfunctioning parts of this system – such as a career status structure that protected the small number of lower-performing teachers in the state, or poorly designed incentive systems – was the most effective means for achieving the efficient and productive schools that North Carolina desperately needed.

As they wove this policy “story”, supporters of the Excellent Public Schools Act often relied on statistics – regarding student achievement, for example, or the number of teachers dismissed for cause in the state – to claim evidentiary legitimacy for their arguments. Further, they attempted to bolster the fidelity and resonance of their narratives by presenting themselves as bold reformers, interested in achieving results and protecting the interests of children, parents, and other constituents in the state that had, thus far, been let down by a system more interested in protecting the rights of teachers and other adults.

Actors standing in opposition to the Excellent Public Schools Act in North Carolina told a markedly different policy “story”. In their narrative, teachers were characterized as

selfless, hard-working protagonists, often working against policies and priorities set by the General Assembly that complicated their work. This characterization was coupled with a causal narrative which situated the process of learning as a complex system, over which teachers had limited control. As such, opponents of teacher reforms argued, attempting to reform compensation and contracting policies in the way that supporters of the Excellent Public Schools Act intended was, in fact, more likely to harm matters in the state than help them. Opponents of the bill, further, emphasized that student performance in North Carolina had been on an upward trajectory over the last several years – again, thanks to the hard work of a dedicated population of practitioners. Further meddling by the General Assembly threatened this progress and, moreover, would likely impact the morale and quality of teachers in the state.

As they constructed this story, opponents of the Excellent Public Schools Act cited their own counter-statistics to challenge supporters' efforts to assert the evidentiary warrant. In addition, they attacked the political legitimacy of their counterparts, arguing that political expedience and retribution lay at the heart of their intentions, rather than the interests of the state's children. In doing so, they supported their arguments by utilizing often violent language to sell the narrative of an "attack" or "assault" upon the teachers of the state, and the system of public education more widely. Moreover, they linked their policy "stories" regarding the Excellent Public Schools Act to other cultural and national "master narratives" – for example, McCarthyism – to bolster their charges regarding the true intentions of the Act's supporters.

Chapter 6

TEACHER REFORM IN LOUISIANA: HOUSE BILL 974

The last of the case study states explored by this study – but certainly not the least – is Louisiana. The last several years of the state’s history have been characterized, as in Florida and North Carolina, by substantial shifts in education policy. From the advent of significant experimentation with charter networks and privatized education management in New Orleans following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, to the adoption of value-added models for teacher evaluation and pursuit of Race to the Top reforms, the state’s schools have seen significant change. These currents combined, as in the other case study states, with substantial perturbation in the state’s political equilibrium after 2010, heralding the inception of a robust policy discourse surrounding the nature the teaching profession in Louisiana, and how it should it be shaped moving forward.

As this chapter will show, participants in the discourse surrounding teacher policy reforms in Louisiana crafted “stories” – using the narrative elements and rhetorical strategies described in previous chapters – as they engaged in debate. While these “stories” were in large part similar to those found in the Florida and North Carolina cases, differing dynamics in the context, including a far more activist governor and greater focus by some participants on the role of “outsider” groups, resulted in interesting differences in the details of the policy narratives constructed by supporters and opponents. As in previous chapters, the data from

which these “stories” emerge are drawn from numerous sources – including transcripts of legislative meetings, floor debates, and print media artifacts – detailed in Appendix C. References to specific sources, throughout the chapter, are cited using the document identifiers catalogued in that appendix.

Setting the Stage

As noted, events over the last several years set the stage for the debate surrounding teacher policy reforms documented in this study. Of particular note in the Louisiana case, of course, is the tragic aftermath of the devastating hurricane Katrina, which caused immense damage to one of the state’s most important and dynamic urban communities, displaced innumerable people and families, and irrevocably marked the state’s history. It also initiated a unique and sweeping period of educational change, as policy actors in Louisiana – in addition to numerous actors from outside of the state – considered the task of not just rebuilding the New Orleans school system, but potentially transforming it.

In response to this catastrophe, the state’s legislature took the unprecedented step in 2005 of transitioning control of the city’s schools to the state school board, which placed them within the newly created “Recovery School District” (RSD). In total, 112 schools became subject to direct state control, leaving only 5 under the auspices of the local board (Beabout, et. al., 2008). The creation of the RSD, further, initiated a sweeping conversation about the role of private educational interests, charter schools, and philanthropic organizations in the provision of education. As the state pursued the reinvention of New Orleans’s public schools, a number of influential actors – representing these and sundry other interests – pushed for the upending of traditional structures of governance and schooling that they perceived to be ineffective and outmoded (Miron, 2008).

The story of education policy development in Louisiana over the last several years is not, of course, solely the story of New Orleans and the Recovery School District. Louisiana – as with North Carolina, Florida, and many other states – has been engaged in long-standing efforts to address issues regarding student achievement and educational inequity. Most recently, like the other case study states, Louisiana has launched successive bids for federal Race to the Top grants. Louisiana fell short in the first two rounds of grant competition – in 2009 and 2010 – despite the efforts of the state department of education, and the push for RTTT-friendly policies by actors like the state’s Republican Governor, Bobby Jindal. These efforts included the adoption of the Common Core of State Standards, and the development of value-added models for estimating teachers’ contributions to students’ achievement growth in 2010.

These events interacted with significant political developments in Louisiana to provide an opportunity for discourse surrounding teacher policy reforms. Much like in North Carolina, 2010 saw a significant shift in the political balance of the state. Control over the state’s executive seat had been relatively volatile over the previous several years – most recently shifting into the hands of conservative governor Bobby Jindal in 2007. The state’s legislature, however, had been far more stable. Democrats held controlling majorities in both the Senate and House of Representatives since Reconstruction; as such, much of Jindal’s first term was marked by divided government. That changed dramatically in 2010, as control of the Louisiana Senate and House of Representatives changed party hands. Remarkably, this shift occurred not as a result of electoral defeat, but because of party defections by a number of formerly Democratic legislators – generally from the more conservative, rural districts of the state.

Jindal, now presiding over the state's first Republican controlled state government in over a century, began his second term with significantly greater political capital than he had his first. While his administration was, of course, interested in pursuing a number of policy initiatives, it quickly became clear that the governor was interested in capitalizing on the opportunity to pursue education reform. In 2012, the Governor introduced a slate of legislative proposals which included a new state-wide voucher program, an expansion of charter school access throughout the state, and – through House Bill (HB) 974 – a package of reforms reshaping the nature of Louisiana's teaching profession.

H.B. 974

As noted, Governor Bobby Jindal wasted little time in taking advantage of the fresh political winds at his back as the 2012 legislative session began. His administration signaled early – in January of that year – that it would take on the task of working with the new legislative majority to move forward a comprehensive suite of education reforms. Jindal argued, in introducing this initiative, that he perceived the proposed reforms to be absolutely vital to the state's well-being. He shared that

[...] the moral imperative to improve education is more than an economic one. The moral imperative to improve education goes to the heart of the American Dream [...] we have a chance to shape the kind of future we leave behind for our children and grandchildren. I believe, like every generation before us, that we have an obligation to leave this state better than we found it" (45).

Moreover, he noted, there could be no delay in fulfilling this "moral imperative"; he asserted that the legislature should pursue swift action, as "children do not have time to wait. They only grow up once, and they have one shot to receive a quality education" (40).

In general, the governor's plan for delivering that "quality education" consisted of two primary pieces of legislation. The first – which played a role in the policy discourse examined by this study, but which was not focused on teacher policy reforms – was H.B. 976. The bill represented a significant expansion of school choice in Louisiana, initiating a new state-wide school voucher program and opening the gates for an escalation in the approval of charter schools across the state. As such, the first portion of Gov. Jindal's sweeping plan to reform Louisiana's public school system seemed to be drawing heavily from lessons learned from the New Orleans Recovery School District.

The second piece of the puzzle – and the one most central to this study – was H.B. 974. Rather than tackling issues of school access and choice, 974 proposed several reforms targeted toward ensuring that the state's schools would be staffed by highly effective teachers. As in Florida and North Carolina, the primary levers for doing so would be reforms to evaluation, compensation and contracting policies. In a way, the bill represented something of a mid-point between the North Carolinian and Floridian approaches. Like the Student Success Act, H.B. 974 coupled teachers' salaries to their effectiveness on the state's evaluation system. The legislation required that all district salary schedules, moving forward, be based upon certain criteria. These criteria included demand – for certain certifications, for example, or geographic need – and teacher experience. In addition to these criteria, of course, was effectiveness, defined by the bill as a teachers' score on the current state evaluation system. As noted, Louisiana adopted value-added estimates of teachers' effectiveness in promoting student achievement as part of its evaluation system in 2010; under H.B. 974, those estimates would link teachers' compensation to their students' outcomes.

With regard to contracting, H.B. 974 more closely resembled the Excellent Public Schools Act's approach. Unlike the Student Success Act, H.B. 974 did not seek to completely eliminate "tenure" as a concept in the state and – as in North Carolina – left the door to multi-year contracts open to teachers. Under the legislation, "tenure" would be preserved for all teachers holding it prior to H.B. 974 becoming law. For those following in the 2013-2014 academic year, "tenure" could only be earned if a teacher achieved a rating of "highly effective" on the state's evaluation system in five out of the preceding 6 years. During this 5-6 year "probationary" period, employees of each district would be held as "at-will" employees, who districts could terminate at their discretion. "Tenured" employees would possess due-process protections and greater latitude to appeal and challenge such decisions. That said, H.B. 974 also expanded the definition of "cause" for terminating "tenured" employees to include poor performance, as measured on the state's evaluation system.

While "tenure" would still, effectively, remain a reality in the state under H.B. 974, the bill contained an important caveat to that status. "Tenured" teachers receiving a rating of "ineffective" at any point in their contracts would, after enactment of the reform, immediately lose their status as a "tenured" teacher. In doing so, teachers' probationary "clocks" would, effectively, reset, starting another 5-6 year period in which they would have to attain "highly effective" ratings to re-earn their "tenured" status. The bill included other disincentives for "ineffective" ratings, as well. H.B. 974's reforms to teacher compensation policies also required that no teacher receiving an "ineffective" rating be allowed to earn a larger salary than they had in the year before, for instance.

This expansive suite of reforms to Louisiana's teaching profession, as in Florida and North Carolina, entered into a legislative process that was contested by numerous participants, and marked by significant debate. H.B. 974 was introduced to in the Louisiana House of Representatives in early March 2012 and was, shortly thereafter, referred to the House Committee on Education. The committee meeting in which it was heard was, without succumbing to much hyperbole, a meeting of substantial drama. The meeting, which lasted nearly 16 hours, was attended by numerous actors – including lobbyists for a variety of interests, concerned citizens, teachers, and representatives of teacher organizations. In addition, nearly 1000 teachers, from across the state, marched upon the capitol to protest and make their voices heard as the committee debated, wearing “red for ed”. So many teachers attended, in fact, that several districts in the state – for example, East Baton Rouge Parish Schools – declared a work day due to the higher than usual incidence of teacher absence (47). The Jindal administration was less than sanguine regarding the show of opposition by these parties. A spokesperson for the governor's office characterized the showing as obstructionism, and asserted that the “coalition of the status quo” was simply failing to recognize “the urgent need to improve Louisiana's schools for Louisiana's students” (46).

Despite the opposition of a number of concerned parties, H.B. 974 successfully passed through committee in the House in mid-March on a largely party-line vote. The bill took a 13-5 victory, with only one “yea” vote recorded by a Democrat. The bill's passage on the House floor was similarly fraught. Debate, which ensued on March 23, lasted nearly 12 hours. After a marathon session, marked by significant and vociferous discourse, the bill passed the Louisiana House of Representatives on similarly partisan lines. H.B. 974 then moved to the halls of the Louisiana Senate where, while still debated by numerous parties,

the legislation moved fairly quickly through the process. The bill passed through the Senate Committee on Education in early April, whereupon it advanced to debate on the floor on April 4. The bill passed the Senate on a nearly party line vote of 23 – 16 (with one Democratic “yea”) and concurrence was achieved between the House and Senate versions the next day. By mid-April, H.B. 974 made its way to Governor Bobby Jindal’s desk, and was signed into law on April 18, 2012. The Governor, for his part, asserted that the day was “a great day for Louisiana” and that the measures would ensure that students would experience “a great teacher in every classroom”. The Louisiana Federation of Teachers, on the other hand, promised to continue the fight moving forward (64).

Policy Narratives Surrounding H.B. 974

Like Florida and North Carolina, the Louisiana case presents a rich discourse surrounding teacher policy reforms in the state, in which a diverse group of narrators wove policy “stories” to support their particular positions. These narratives unfurled both within the chambers of Louisiana’s legislature, and outside of it. As noted above, several marathon committee meetings and sessions on the floor of the Senate and House provided policy actors – including legislators, teachers, and advocacy groups – with a venue for sharing their “stories” regarding teacher contracting, compensation and evaluation reforms. In addition, some that did not penetrate the barriers to entry into the legislative process found voice in the state’s print media, through op-eds, letters to the editor, and quotations.

As they engaged in this discourse, policy “storytellers” wove various narrative elements – including characters, problem definitions, and causal narratives – together to assert their chosen arguments. In addition, they utilized various rhetorical strategies to support their narratives, and to render them more resonant and accessible. The following

sections describe the ways in which these “stories” manifested in the Louisiana case, as well as the narrators who constructed them.

Storytellers

As noted above, numerous policy actors engaged in the debate surrounding H.B. 974 as it moved through the legislative process in 2012. As teachers marched upon the capitol, legislators argued in day-long committee meetings, and advocacy groups lobbied for their chosen side, a complicated tapestry of policy “stories” emerged. This section describes the “players” in this discourse, and the ways that they interacted with one another over the course of the policy process surrounding H.B. 974. A summary description of the actors speaking in support and opposition to reform is provided in Table 9, below.

Table 9. Summary of Narrators - Louisiana

Supporters	Opponents
<u><i>Practitioners</i></u> Minority of teachers Principals Majority of superintendents Minority of local school board members BESE members <u><i>Legislators</i></u> Republican legislators U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu (D) <u><i>Advocacy groups</i></u> Local chambers of commerce Louisiana Association of Business and Industry Louisiana Committee of 100 Council for a Better Louisiana Blueprint Louisiana Pelican Institute for Public Policy Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans Louisiana Resource Center for Educators Stand for Children Louisiana Louisiana Federation for Children Black Alliance for Educational Options <u><i>Others</i></u> Governor Bobby Jindal/administration Concerned citizens Parents	<u><i>Practitioners</i></u> Majority of teachers Principals Minority of superintendents Majority of local school board members <u><i>Legislators</i></u> Democratic legislators Small minority of Republican legislators <u><i>Advocacy groups</i></u> Louisiana Federation of Teachers Louisiana Association of Educators Local teachers' unions Louisiana School Board Association <u><i>Others</i></u> Concerned citizens Parents

Practitioners

As they had in Florida and North Carolina, practitioners – including teachers, administrators, and district personnel – exercised their voice as the debate surrounding teacher policy reforms in Louisiana ensued. Teachers were, by far, the most well represented of these actors. Like the FEA in Florida, organizations like the Louisiana Federation of

Teachers (LFT) and Louisiana Association of Educators (LEA) took the initiative to bring teachers to the halls of the state legislature to assert their policy “stories”. Most of these teachers expressed their staunch opposition to H.B. 974. Also as in Florida, however, there were a handful of teachers who constructed policy stories which asserted their support for contracting, compensation and evaluation reform. While these teachers clearly understood their minority standing, they also saw themselves as bold reformers, willing to go against the grain. One such teacher, for example, stated before the House Education Committee that “I don’t speak for every educator, but neither does anyone else speaking to you today [...] I’m glad that a few of us had an opportunity to do so. It takes courage to come here, and stand before you all, and say that we need to change how we’re doing things after decades of doing things the same way” (65).

Teachers were not the only practitioners to make themselves heard in the debate surrounding H.B. 974. Principals also joined in the discourse, supporting and opposing teacher policy reform in almost equal numbers. In an interesting peculiarity of the Louisiana case, a large number of school board members – both local school board members, and members of the state-level Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) – and superintendents also took part in the discourse, both within legislative meetings and through the print media. The more active participation of these actors in the Louisiana case was likely due to an additional provision in H.B. 974 related to contracting reform. Under the bill, authority over hiring and firing within districts would shift from local boards of education to local superintendents. As such, there was a strong showing by local school board members standing in opposition to H.B. 974, with a similar push by superintendents in support. In both cases, however, there were members of both groups who went against the tide of their peers.

Legislators

As they had in Florida and North Carolina, legislators in the Louisiana case largely split along partisan lines with respect to their position on teacher contracting, evaluation and compensation reform. Nearly every legislator standing in support of H.B. 974, for example, was a member of the Republican majority. The sole member of the Democratic Party willing express their support for Gov. Jindal’s ambitious reform agenda was, interestingly, not a member of the state legislature, at all. Sitting U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu broke ranks with the state party by expressing her support for H.B. 974 and its reforms to teacher policy; the senator was less positive, however, about the voucher proposal that entered the legislature alongside it.

Similarly, opponents of H.B. 974 in the Louisiana House and Senate were almost exclusively Democrats. As in the case of the supporters, however, there were some members of the opposite party – in this case, Republicans – who expressed their dissatisfaction with the bill. Two Republicans stood in opposition to H.B. 974 as it was debated in committee, and on the floor of the legislature, although in both cases their opposition had less to do with the merits of teacher policy reform than it did with political aspects of the process. One such Republican expressed his opposition to the bill because he felt that it represented a “national agenda”, rather than state-based reform serving the needs of Louisianans. The other took umbrage with the process surrounding the legislation, arguing that the accelerated process allowed for insufficient debate on the bill, given the gravity of its proposals.

Advocacy groups

A number of advocacy groups – far more than in the North Carolina case – also participated in the discourse surrounding teacher contracting, compensation and evaluation reform in Louisiana. Those standing in support of H.B. 974 can, largely, be separated into three groups. First, a number of organizations representing business interests were represented in the discourse surrounding the bill. Several representatives from local Chambers of Commerce, for example, made their voices heard. Additional groups representing business and industry included the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry and the Louisiana Committee of 100. In addition to business interests, several state policy advocacy organizations, like the Council for a Better Louisiana, Blueprint Louisiana, Pelican Institute for Public Policy, and Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans, sent representatives to the legislature to render their opinion. Finally, a few education-focused advocacy organizations took part in the debate, including the Louisiana Resource Center for Educators, Stand for Children Louisiana, the Louisiana Federation for Children, and the Black Alliance for Educational Options.

Advocacy groups standing in opposition to H.B. 974 were less varied. The majority of contributions from such actors were made by representatives of two of the state’s largest teachers’ organizations – the Louisiana Federation of Teachers and the Louisiana Association of Educators – both of which were strongly represented in both committee meetings and in the media. In addition to these groups, several representatives of local teachers’ unions from across the state also participated in the discourse surrounding H.B. 974 as it moved through the legislature. Finally, the Louisiana School Board Association joined several of its members in expressing its opposition to the contracting, compensation and evaluation proposals contained in the bill.

Other Participants

Finally, in addition to practitioners, legislators, and advocacy groups, a number of other actors took part in the debate surrounding H.B. 974. Of particular note in the Louisiana case was the architect of the larger education reform initiative in the state – Governor Bobby Jindal. Jindal was a far more active participant in the discourse surrounding contracting, compensation and evaluation reform than his counterparts had been in North Carolina and Florida, both testifying before the legislature and contributing to editorials in state newspapers. Representatives of the Jindal administration supported the governor in forwarding the administration’s “story” regarding teacher policy reform, as well. Examples included official spokespeople, the state’s secretary of education, and the state’s secretary of economic development.

Other participants taking part in the discourse surrounding the people also included concerned citizens from a number of walks of life – including self-identified “small business owners” and a librarian. Parents were represented, as well, although they often affiliated themselves with one of the advocacy groups identified above – particularly Stand for Children, an education advocacy group. Finally, students were notably absent from the discourse surrounding teacher policy reform in Louisiana, much as they had been in Florida and North Carolina – again, likely an artifact of the venues from which the data for these cases were drawn.

Narrative Elements in the Discourse Surrounding H.B. 974

As these actors – including practitioners, legislators, parents, advocacy groups, and others – aligned themselves in support or opposition to teacher contracting, compensation,

and evaluation reform in Louisiana, they stitched together various elements into policy “stories”. These elements included *characters*, *problem definitions*, and *causal narratives* which, when combined, constituted complex narratives elucidating the perspectives of the “storytellers” who wove them. The ways in which each of these elements emerged in the Louisiana case is described in detail below.

Characters

Like actors in the Florida and North Carolina cases, participants in the discourse surrounding teacher policy reforms in Louisiana worked to frame a number of characters in their “stories”. As in the other states, teachers were frequently integrated into the narratives of both supporters and opponents of reform. Supporters of H.B. 974 characterized teachers in ways similar to their analogues in the other cases. They argued that teachers – who were, indeed, pivotal in the lives of children – were largely protagonists in the “story” of education. While supporters noted that there were ineffective teachers who needed to be dealt with, they acknowledged that such teachers were in the minority. As they had in North Carolina, supporters of teacher policy reforms in Louisiana did not focus on establishing this minority as the principle antagonist in their stories, instead focusing on the “broken system” that protected them. The state’s Secretary of Education captured this perspective, sharing with the House Education Committee that

I’ve spent the last eight weeks, pretty much every day, driving around, meeting with teachers and schools. I think it’s safe to say, both in meeting them and in looking at the results that this state has achieved in education over the last decade, that there are a very large number of fantastic teachers in the state of Louisiana. I cannot think of a more laudable goal for a piece of legislation than to try to equip every local school district and school with the tools necessary to keep great teachers in classrooms in Louisiana. That’s really what this bill does (65).

He elaborated upon this point in his testimony before the Senate a day later, indicting the “broken system” – which emphasized seniority instead of performance – as the real villain.

The Secretary stated, for example, that

[...] we know that often in tight budget times some layoffs are necessary. The reality is that at present many of our districts continue to use a last in, first out method, almost necessitating that highly effective teachers are discriminated against based on their years of experience and are removed from the classroom in spite of the extraordinary value that they could offer to our children (66).

A teacher speaking in support of the bill captured a similar sentiment, acknowledging the minority of poor performing teachers while focusing his ire upon the “system” which protected them:

My last teaching position was at Webster Junior High School, where I taught eighth grade pre-algebra. I enjoyed my work and the positive impact I made on students’ lives. However, as a teacher who did her job, it became more and more difficult to remain in the system that not only tolerated mediocrity but rewarded it. Few things frustrate a good teacher more than knowing you’re going the extra mile for students, and the teacher down the hall is putting forth half the effort for the same pay. It’s an insult to the truly hardworking men and women in our public school classrooms to know that, under current law, no matter how hard they work, how much progress their students make, their paycheck is still going to be the same as their underperforming colleague. Make no mistake, there’s not a teacher in this room who can’t tell you who the effective teachers are in their schools and who the ineffective teachers are, and the sad thing is that the students know it too. Thankfully statistics show us that underperforming teachers only make up about 10% of our workforce (66).

Opponents of teacher policy reform, as they had in Florida and North Carolina, framed teachers as heroic actors who – despite sacrificing themselves for the wellbeing of their young charges – were often blamed and victimized by policy actors. One citizen, for

example, captured the heroic nature of teachers in a letter to the *Shreveport Times*, arguing that

Public school teachers are the glue that holds this country together. Take away public school teachers from our society, and I believe America will sink faster than a bag of bricks thrown in the Red River. Public school teachers work long hours, nights, weekends, and during the summers, too. Many hold graduate degrees paid for by student loans. They work to individualize instruction, to address the needs of diverse student populations, and daily meet rigorous standards of evaluation. In addition, they are deeply involved in the community and care about children. In short, every teacher I know is the salt of the earth (29).

The president of the Louisiana Education Association agreed, asserting that self-sacrificing, hard-working teachers were being ill-treated by policy actors in the state. She noted that

You must remember that teachers' working conditions are our students' learning conditions. There are currently no raises or praises for teachers who work hard every day – those who pay for student uniforms and school supplies out of their own pockets. Tenure is just a small benefit earned in lieu of salaries we rightfully deserve. Instead of pushing to eliminate the process, our lawmakers – the representatives of the people – should be advocating to keep it (8).

A teacher, testifying before the House, captured both aspects of this characterization and, further, expressed the frustration felt by teachers who felt caught in the crossfire of reform. He shared that

I come here, and I'm a little upset tonight. It started this morning, and it's been brewing. I'm a former marine with three meritorious promotions. I've been selected as teacher of the year by my colleagues. I've done an outstanding job. I've been rated as highly effective and highly qualified. I've had to talk to some of my peers because they have been beat down an awful lot, and I've heard them make a statement, "Well, excuse me. I don't know too much, I'm just a teacher." Now, it was sarcasm, but I told them, "No, excuse me. You're in one of the best professions in this world. You don't even joke about that." To be at the mercy of you guys, I respect the fact that you're law makers, but you're not educators. You're in the Education Committee. I'm an educator. A proud educator. And to have our superintendent tell us that my years of experience and my degrees don't matter, and hear the young ladies

come up and preach about the fact that they're happy because they were selected and they didn't have to hear to a seniority process, I can only tell them, "Give it a little time." Give it a little time. I put in the blood, sweat, and tears and I'm proud of what I've done and I haven't let off. I haven't let up. I go in each day and my kids know what they expect because just like with the Marine Corps, "It's the few and the proud," and they know how I feel about them. But I am tired of people saying that my rights should be taken away because their job is difficult. Have you tried to be on a teacher lately? It's very difficult (65).

Some opponents of H.B. 974 coupled their characterization of teachers with efforts to frame members of the legislature – in particular, members of the Republican majority – as antagonistic actors in their “stories”. In general, although several did echo the “attack” narrative found in the other case study states, fewer actors in Louisiana were willing to cast legislators in as nefarious a light as narrators had in Florida and North Carolina. Instead, opponents of teacher policy reform framed the legislature as a meddling body, guilty of ignoring the advice of educators – who knew better than they what schools needed – and betraying their responsibilities to the people by pursuing ill-advised policies. One parent, for example, testifying before the House, argued that

There's not a whole lot that I could add to what the educators have already said about the flaws in this bill, but what I would like to add is about this process. Sure, I appreciate the attentiveness that each and every committee member has given tonight, and all throughout the day, but it doesn't really matter. Do the stacks of red cards really matter? Does our voice matter? Do our votes matter anymore? Or as I watch the 7 to 11 votes on many of the amendments, it seems that this is a foregone conclusion, and I just want you to ask yourself, are you really representing your constituents? Or are you simply following the agenda of the American legislative exchange council? I understand that Louisiana has a B minus in implementing the ALEC Education Agenda. It is not right for you to take office and not represent your constituents (65).

A Democratic representative agreed, arguing further that “I stand here in opposition of this bill, and I’m going to ask you all if you can go back to your districts. If you can hold your

head up. If you can smile. If you can be happy about what you've done. If you can be happy about that, I promise you that teachers won't be happy about it when you go to the poll the next four years from now" (72). Finally, in a rare show of opposition from the Republican side of the aisle, a Republican representative asserted that legislators were abusing educators at their peril. He wondered aloud to his colleagues:

How about if we just stop requiring teachers to spend 30% of their time filling out paper work for every bureaucracy that requires it, and just let them teach? How's that for a novel idea? Well, that's the way it used to be when the state government wasn't in their business, and the federal government wasn't in their business. I remember those days. Fundamentals were taught, phonetics were taught, and people could read and write. We don't let them teach anymore. I have teachers and I've listened to them. They tell me "I spend 30% of my time everyday just preparing reports to report to the federal government and the state government on whatever and everything they're asking from me, for me to do." How about a simpler time where we just didn't put all that trouble, all of those speed bumps, all of those road blocks in the way and just let teachers teach (68)?

Few supporters of H.B. 974 spent time countering this narrative, or framing legislators as characters within their narratives. When they did, they largely characterized legislators as responsible public servants, simply doing their jobs and executing the will of the people. One of the few actors leaping to the defense of the majority, for example, was Governor Bobby Jindal. A representative of the Jindal administration, commenting on charges that the legislature was ignoring opponents and bucking the will of the public, waived concerns aside by noting that "the committees did a great job with over 20 hours of debate and discussion on these bills [...] only the coalition of the status quo would argue about process" (31).

As noted above, a number of advocacy organizations took part in the discourse surrounding H.B. 974. As such, it comes as little surprise that narrators incorporated them as

characters in their “stories” about teacher policy reform. Among supporters, as in the other states, these efforts largely focused on the state’s teachers’ organizations. Groups like the LAE and LFT were characterized by supporters as impediments to the state’s efforts to improve and, in addition, as the guardians of poorly performing teachers. Gov. Bobby Jindal, for instance, stated that “[...] no matter if they do a good job or a poor job, teach English or music, teach high poverty or middle class students, union leaders want us to treat all teachers the same. It’s not fair to our kids, and it’s not fair to the effective teachers in this state” (24). A former teacher agreed, asserting the culpability of such groups in protecting lower performers; he noted that

Teacher unions have contributed to some of the educational problems, which is one reason I have been a member of the non-union Associated Professional Educators of Louisiana for the past 25 years. Unions do not want tenure to be touched. Most of us have encountered an occasional teacher that may have been better suited to another profession. They should not be allowed to stay in the classroom year after year (32).

Opponents of H.B. 974, when including advocacy groups in their policy “stories”, tended to focus on groups from outside of the state, rather than inside. Several actors argued that the debate over teacher policy reform had become a battleground for national interests, and that the undue influence that they wielded over state government would lead Louisiana to no good end. The president of the Louisiana Association of Educators, for example, asserted in an op-ed for the Advocate that

Tenure protects K-12 public school teachers from false allegations of wrongdoing, coercive education practices, and political reprisals. It has a long history in this state; the process has been “acceptable” for decades. Why is it now, in a time when public school teachers across the county are being attacked, that there is an issue with it? Perhaps it’s because there are certain individuals pushing for an alternative agenda – one that would destroy public education as we know it. Public school privatization interests are ruling this state. They want to have free reign to take out teachers in order to transform

the public school system into a small “business”, with small salaries and no benefits. These same individuals want to employ “teachers” for only two years, pay them less and get them out. Simply put, they want teachers to be “employees at will (8).

In later arguments, she named these interests more explicitly – laying the blame for the trajectory of policy change in the state at the feet of a national actor: the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). She noted that Governor Bobby Jindal’s agenda for the state’s schools was “straight out of the American Legislative Exchange Council playbook. He’s following along with that playbook, and he should be ashamed” (31). Another LAE representative concurred, further asserting ALEC’s nefarious intentions. He argued that ALEC was “all about destroying public education. If they wanted to improve it, they’d listen to us” (36). The LAE was not alone in asserting the influence of such external groups. One of the Republican legislators opposing H.B. 974, as noted previously, did so primarily because of his suspicion that it was reflective of national interests; debating before his colleagues, he shared that “I can tell you that this is not a Louisiana agenda. This is a national agenda to do away with public education as we know it...I hope I’m dead wrong. I hope we are not destroying something we all grew up with” (61).

Finally, policy “storytellers” framed a number of other characters within their narratives as they debated the merits of H.B. 974. Supporters of the bill, for example, tended to focus on two additional characters in their policy “stories”. First, students played a significant role in supporters’ narratives. In general, as in Florida and North Carolina, students were framed as victims of a broken educational “system” in desperate need of reform. One Republican senator expressed this passionately, stating to his colleagues that

I stand before you as one of the 50,000 kindergartners that enter the system every year. 50,000 young children, children whose parents desperately

want a better life for them and understand that the only way to achieve that better life is through a good education. I stand before you as one of 36,000 graduating seniors. 36,000. Remember we had 50,000 entering; 36,000 seniors graduated last year. Unfortunately, when rated by the ACT, which is a common post-secondary education test, the average for the State of Louisiana was two points under the national average, about an 18 compared to a 20 on average. I stand before you as one of those 14,000 students who entered as a kindergartner but who didn't graduate. Fourteen thousand kids who didn't see a future through education. As a result, their life will be doomed to a life of struggle and unfulfilled expectations. The bottom line is, fellow senators, we have failed the children of Louisiana. I don't mean this year or next year or last year. For generations we have failed these children. Now, we got to go forward into the future (71).

One of his colleagues concurred, arguing simply that “lives are at stake, and they’re being lost. Every kid ought to have an excellent teacher, but some of them don’t. We’ve got students stuck in a no-win situation” (36).

In addition to students, some supporters – in particular, Gov. Bobby Jindal and members of his administration – frequently brought forward another “character” in their policy stories. This “character” was actually an aggregation of a number of individuals and groups – a “coalition of the status quo” that encapsulated all of the varied actors standing in opposition to the Governor’s educational initiatives. This “coalition”, according to Jindal loyalists, were obstructionist advocates of a failed structure, guilty of harming the people of Louisiana through their resistance. The Governor asserted the motives of this group simply, arguing in the *Times-Picayune* that “The coalition of the status quo will always say we need more time and more money. When we’re wasting almost a billion dollars on failing public schools, we don’t have any more time to waste” (41).

Opponents of H.B. 974 also targeted some additional characters as they wove their “stories” about teacher policy reforms. First, as in Florida and North Carolina, opponents of teacher policy reform in Louisiana turned their eyes to other key actors in the educational

process – namely, parents. Several argued that parents were often antagonists in the “story” of education. While they were not portrayed as actively villainous, they were portrayed as occasional impediments to the work of teachers. A representative of the Louisiana School Board Association, for example, argued that

[...] if that child that we are trying so hard to educate goes home to an educational black hole, to a parent who is not doing his or her responsibility, that child will never succeed. It is not the teacher's fault. It is not the school's fault. It is not the school board's fault. It is not the legislature's fault. It is not the governor's fault. When we have 100's of kids coming to kindergarten not able to count to 10, not knowing the difference between red and blue, not being able to recite their alphabet, they will never catch up (69).

A Democratic representative concurred, further bemoaning the fact that H.B. 974 did not, in fact, do much to motivate parents in its zeal for reforming the structure of teaching. He asserted to his colleagues that “[...] I saw nothing, nothing in the plan that activated our parents. Nothing in the plan to tell us how we get the parents back into the system. There are some parents that won't even come to the school. I applaud the effort. I applaud what has been done, but it has a lot of holes in it and it has a long way to go” (72).

Finally, opponents of H.B. 974 also frequently drew another key set of characters into their policy narratives – Governor Bobby Jindal and his administration. The Governor, some asserted, was not the visionary reformer that he saw himself to be. Rather, they argued, he was guilty of damaging the state’s system of public schools through ill-advised policy. The president of the East Baton Rouge Teacher’s Federation, for example, testified before the Senate Education Committee that

The truth of the matter is if we're going to look at highly effective and ineffective situations in this state, I think what's been ineffective is the governor, and his administration's ability to properly fund local schools. Because of that ineffectiveness from the top, it has caused local school

districts to make hard decisions and cut; and when those cut, they hurt children. When you take that ... Now, so what do you do? You refuse taxes, you give away 700 ... I mean 7.1 billion dollars in tax giveaways, you refuse to do the proper things to funding schools, and now we're in this corner and we have to find a way to come out of it. So, what you're doing, you're coming out on the backs of teachers (66).

A Democratic representative agreed, further asserting that the Governor's rhetoric – in addition, of course, to his policies – were offensive to the state's dedicated teacher corps. He noted that

I guess if you are going to do reform on the scale that we are talking about, you've got to destroy what you've got first in order to build the case for reform. In order to do that we had to destroy teachers. That's unfortunate because all of us here, I suspect, [are successful because of] the teachers that we had. I find that unfortunate. I wish that the debate had never gone there. I will point out that it absolutely started with the governor himself, when he started this out by saying, if you are going to teach and you want job security all you got to do is be able to breathe. Don't beat your children and don't sell drugs in the classroom and you can keep your job. Well that's just offensive, it was unnecessary and it's demeaning to teachers and to the teaching profession. That's a place we did not have to go in the debate. It's a sort of disrespect that, had it been exhibited by a student in a classroom, that student should be punished, put out of the classroom (72).

Problem Definitions

In addition to framing their perspectives on the various characters operating within their policy “stories”, supporters and opponents of H.B. 974 also constructed narratives – or counter-narratives – regarding the *problems* motivating the movement toward teacher contracting, evaluation and compensation reform in Louisiana. Supporters of teacher policy reform, for example, framed a problem definition similar to those in Florida and North Carolina. This definition was constructed upon two main themes: first, the public school systems' continuing inability to produce adequate outcomes for the state's children and,

second, the critical breakdown of the “antiquated” professional structure surrounding teaching.

With regard to the former, supporters of H.B. 974 were assertive in their perception that poor educational outcomes were a clear, present and significant danger to the state’s future – particularly with regard to its economic well-being. Louisiana’s Secretary of Economic Development, for example, argued that the public schools were holding the state back as it competed for new business. He noted that “the biggest single lever to move up now is education reform [...] In Forbes, it is the reason we’re not ranked 15 places higher. It impacts how people view Louisiana” (1). A representative from Blueprint Louisiana agreed, testifying before the House that

Our state has ranked 48th in the nation, with an F for K-12 achievement in 2012, because one third of our students lack the grade level knowledge and skills to succeed academically. For the future of our state, our economy, and our way of life, we can't afford not to change. Blueprint Louisiana believes now is the time to prioritize student success over traditional practices that impede performance in public schools (65).

Further, supporters noted that this central problem was, at least in part, compounded by inefficient and “antiquated” means of governing the profession of teaching. Governor Bobby Jindal, for instance, asserted in a letter to the *Shreveport Times* that

Unfortunately our system today often crushes talented teachers and makes their jobs harder [...] This was confirmed recently by a report from a national education organization about teacher quality in Louisiana. The National Council on Teacher Quality gave Louisiana a C-minus for teacher quality. The study said Louisiana doesn’t do a good job of keeping effective teachers or removing ineffective teachers from the classroom. The report also said that our current system focuses on seniority over effectiveness when determining personnel decisions. The report lays the blame on Louisiana’s tenure system because it’s hampering efforts to reward good teachers. That’s why our plan will finally recognize good teachers, promoting the profession

the way it should be, and ensuring that every child has a high quality teacher (24).

One of the state's superintendents also highlighted the contribution of this "broken" system to the state's achievement woes in his testimony before the House Education Committee. He shared that

I don't know for sure if tenure helps or hurts a teacher, but it has certainly never helped a child. Louisiana students cannot afford another year with ineffective teachers in the classroom. We must work now to ensure this bill passes so that teacher performance will be linked to personnel decisions and so that students can have the best teachers possible in their classroom. We must help ineffective teachers improve. If they fail to improve, they must be removed. Our Louisiana students cannot afford anything less (65).

Finally, supporters also argued that the task of solving these core problems could not be put off any longer. As a spokesperson for the Jindal administration asserted, the time for action was now. He noted that

The reality is that the people complaining about process are trying to distract from the real issue. All of our children are not getting the education they deserve. We're currently spending nearly a billion dollars on failing schools. Our kids don't get a second chance to grow up, and Louisiana ranks in the bottom five in the country. That's unacceptable and it's time to act (31).

The Governor, for his part, agreed – he argued that "we can't wait for another generation of students to graduate from high school unprepared for the work force and higher education – or to drop out before they even get there. This applies not only to K-12 education, but to early childhood education as well" (10).

As they had in Florida and North Carolina, opponents of teacher policy reform in Louisiana attempted to counter this problem definition, although the nature of this counter-narrative differed from the other states. Some members of the opposition did pursue a

strategy of undermining supporters' assertions regarding the saliency and severity of the achievement problem. One school board member, in a letter to the *Shreveport Times*, adopted this tact. He argued that

[...] because of our determination, our students, as well as many across the state, are performing better than they ever have before. They will have to go a long way with this legislation to outperform the improvements that have been made across the state in the past 10 years. Statistics show that there has been great progress in student achievement in the past 10 years in Louisiana, and we agree that continued, faster improvement is necessary [...] the new legislation greatly increases the risk of losing ground, not only for willing and capable children with good support systems, but minority children who may not have such systems. I believe the legislative and executive branches of our state government have sown the wind in this matter. It remains to be seen if we will be reaping the whirlwind (37).

Several opponents of H.B. 974, however, linked this counter-narrative regarding the problem of student achievement with elements of the complex causal framework regarding the educative process that they wove into their narratives – described in the next section. The result was a problem definition that acknowledged the core issue of student achievement deficits in the state, but also situated that condition within the context of a much wider network of other problems, rather than just a “broken” professional structure. One Democratic representative, for example, argued before his colleagues that

Sure we are next to last in the United States in education. That's what they say, we are 49. You can make anything look bad, but I'm telling you we got good people in this state, we've got good families in this state, and our children are very important and they are good people. We are a unique state, here. We will never fix education in this state. And this is redneck mentality talking here, but we will never fix education in this state till we fix these families. When you have children that go home and they don't even know their daddy, or their daddy is in prison. Or their mother is a crack head out on the street working. Sure, children aren't going to go to school. We go to start from the root and work our way up, not start from the top and work our way down (72).

As noted, in in this example, the narrator implies his acceptance of the core problem definition asserted by supporters – that there were grave issues with student outcomes in the state. Where opponents differed, however, seemed to be in the degree to which they saw that problem as solvable, at least with the tools offered by H.B. 974.

Causal Narratives

As they constructed their policy “stories”, actors taking part in the debate surrounding H.B. 974 also, like actors in the other two case study states, articulated narratives unpacking the mechanisms at the heart of the policy issues they faced. Supporters of teacher policy reform in Louisiana did so in similar fashion to their counterparts in the other case study states – by articulating a causal narrative that situated teachers firmly as the causal drivers in the mechanism of student learning. A member of the state’s Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, for example, testified before the House Education Committee that

I'll say this as others will say and have said. There's no single factor more critical in the education of a child than the quality of a teacher in the classroom. It's not even close. We can come up with all the programs we want. We can come up with all the studies we want. At the end of the day, this quality of a teacher in the classroom is the single most critical factor. I helped start a charter school in the state over 10 years ago. I played only a small role in starting that charter school, but the key was really simple. It wasn't that we had a secret formula that we kept in the back and bought out for the school. We did very simple thing. We put a good principal in the school, and a quality teacher in every classroom, and made sure that he or she was properly prepared and given the proper tools to do their job [...] you'll hear a lot of individuals who definitely think that there aren't a number of teachers who do support these things, but I can tell you for sure there are a number of educators who do in fact support these changes. We would tell you, and any other educator would tell you, that teachers are more than any program, more than any book. More than any program, more than any book, more than any computer, in that they may actually make the difference in kid's lives. We appreciate you considering this tonight and we support House Bill 974 (65).

Given this direct relationship between teachers' efforts and their student outcomes, supporters found the policy proposals forwarded by H.B. 974 – particularly easing restrictions on removing teachers, and changing their incentive structures – to be common sense. A Republican senator captured this perspective as he debated with his colleagues, asserting that

Listen, teachers are like all of us. We're trying to support our families, and you try to figure out what you need to do, to do what you do better so you can make more money. I've always found in private practice that the money incentive is not the end all, but the money incentive makes things work. Employees that work within my company, we incentivize those employees, and the system works well for us. I think there was a couple of things when Senator LaFleur was talking about, well, where would you get the teachers? I think one thing that's going to happen, I think you alluded to it and pointed it out very well, is when this system evolves and teachers understand what it is that's expected of them, I guess some of these teachers who aren't doing well right now are going to fall by the wayside but others are going to understand it's a new direction for him. This is the way the school system is going to operate, and I can do better. I can make more money. I can support my family. I continue doing teaching, which I love, and these are the things I'll now need to do. We're going to have a crop of teachers who are going to do better than they've done in the past simply because school boards and superintendents are going to be smart enough to incentivize those teachers (66).

Further, supporters argued that, given the power of effective teachers to drive greater student outcomes, failure to adopt policies ensuring teacher quality assured that the state's students would suffer “financial and social and personal devastation”, as the president of the BESE claimed (66).

Opponents also followed the lead of their counterparts in Florida and North Carolina as they worked to counter the causal narratives asserted by supporters of H.B. 974. Their policy “stories” articulated a *complex* causal narrative that situated student outcomes as the product of a number of causal drivers. While teachers were, they argued, an important part of the equation, other aspects of students' lives were equally – or even more – important. For

actors in Louisiana, students' social and family lives took particular precedence within the complex causal mechanism underlying student learning. One teacher, for example, described the difficult conditions facing her students in her emotional testimony before the House. She shared that

This year, I'm teaching a child who's been molested. Guess what she's going to be thinking about when she takes those tests? Just a little story. A couple of years ago, I gave a LEAP GEE test. It wasn't really a LEAP test. It's GEE to a group of students, not my students, but a group of students. After the math section of the tests, which one child finished quite early. I noticed that she's writing on a piece of paper, writing, writing and writing and writing. I go over to her and quietly tell her, "Baby, I can't let you take that out of the testing area. You're going to have give that to me." She did and I put it away. After the testing, I took out the note to read what was in it to see if it was test material. What it was, was a note to her boyfriend. She was quite upset because he was going to be a father, but she's not the mother. Guess where her mind was as she took her math tests. A lot of these children are victims of circumstances, and they are undergoing these testing conditions under really stressful circumstances. Children are children. As such, they're going to make decisions that are not always in their best interests. Some of them choose not to take those tests seriously either because they don't want to, or they can't focus on them. Let me assure you that I and my colleagues doggedly continue to push forward with our teaching (65).

A representative of the Louisiana School Board Association made a similar argument, noting that this complex causal narrative rendered attempts to target specific actors in the process problematic, at best. He noted that

We are all...we are chasing a chimera. We are completely ignoring one of the largest problems facing public education in Louisiana, and across the United States. [...] ladies and gentlemen, and I say this to the world at large: Poor schools, failing schools are not necessarily failing because of the school, or the teacher, or the school system. They're failing because the parents are failing, and we need to recognize that shortcoming before loading everything onto the shoulders of teachers and administrators who are working their behinds off to overcome that difficulty from kindergarten through 12th grade. You cannot force a child to stay in school if his mama won't make him. He's going to drop out. You cannot force a child to complete his assignments on time or to study for his tests if nobody at home is doing that, and that needs

to be recognized before this discussion comes to an end. Thank you Mr. Chair (69).

Finally, one of the few Republican opponents of the bill expressed his opposition more simply, arguing to his colleagues that “I have just about had enough of the blame being laid at the feet of our teachers for every possible social ill and educational failure we can imagine [...] educational outcomes are every bit the responsibility of the family as they are the school” (57).

Supporting Narratives through Rhetoric in Louisiana

As was the case in Florida and North Carolina, policy “storytellers” in Louisiana supported the narratives that they wove from the elements described above through the use of various rhetorical strategies. In doing so, they strove to increase the accessibility and resonance of their “stories” by claiming or contesting various claims to legitimacy, connecting their constructions to powerful images, and invoking powerful cultural “master” narratives. As in the other cases, some aspects of rhetoric – for example, rhetorical tropes – were less evident in the data analyzed for this case. With regard to *heresthetic*, the pattern in Louisiana strongly resembled the case in Florida. By and large, examination of the discourse surrounding H.B. 974 indicates that policy actors tended to avoid direct engagement with one another – rarely challenging each other’s policy “stories” directly, instead opting to “talk past one another”. This stood in contrast to the North Carolina case, which featured more numerous examples of direct engagement – and often rancor – on the part of participants in the process. The few exceptions to this general lack of engagement in Louisiana lay with opponent’s accusations that the Republican majority was ignoring practitioners as they engaged in the process, and treating them unfairly. A few legislators took umbrage with such

statements, offering terse counter-arguments that they were, in fact, paying attention and allowing for a relatively open process – which, when compared to how the process in North Carolina unfurled, was largely true.

Claiming and Contesting Legitimacy

One of the primary rhetorical strategies used by policy “storytellers” as they engaged in debate surrounding H.B. 974 centered on the construction of legitimacy for their arguments – or the assertion of the illegitimacy of their opponents’ narratives. Both supporters and opponents of teacher contracting, compensation and evaluation reform in Louisiana, for example, claimed the evidentiary legitimacy of their arguments. As in North Carolina and Florida, this generally took the form of asserting that “research” – broadly constructed and rarely cited specifically – supported their particular position regarding H.B. 974. A representative of the Pelican Institute for Public Policy, for example, testified before the House that “research” strongly supported the bill’s proposals – ironically, while simultaneously asserting that “common sense” was likely a better judge of their validity. He stated that

[...] these reforms ... one of the things that make these unique is that this really isn't ... these reforms are probably not really the kind that we would look to back up with facts, and figures, and statistics as much as, I think, just common sense and life experience. I think our own experience would tell most of us that successful organizations that we've experienced in our lives need strong leaders [...] Finally, as other have noted, the significance of having good teachers in the classroom cannot be overstated. There's ample research demonstrating the impact good teachers have on students. The difference between being taught by a good teacher and poor teacher can be life-changing. Given these high stakes, these reasonable reforms are long overdue, and I encourage you to support them. Thank you (65).

Similarly, a member of the Council for a Better Louisiana claimed that research supported teacher policy reform – without citing specific studies or findings. He noted that

We have decades of history of doing research on this very issue. I echo everything that Mr. Roemer just said about the importance of the teacher [...] we stand very strongly in favor of this bill. There's a lot of excellent qualities. I would go so far to say that it's one of the best education policy bills we have seen in our two decades of working in education policy realm. We do a lot of research on this arena about school boards, and leadership, and management, and best practices. It all leads to having the best people lead the school and the best people in the classroom. That's what we support and this bill goes a long way to addressing that (65).

While arguments like these fit the general mold of both supporters and opponents claims to evidentiary legitimacy, there were a few examples of actors who were more specific in invoking specific sources for their claims. One, for example, was Governor Bobby Jindal. Writing to the *Shreveport Times*, he noted that

In a recent opinion piece, Nick Kristoff asked this question: what should you do if your child's terrific fourth-grade teacher decided to retire? His response? Hold a bake sale, go door to door, and come up with a \$100,000 bonus to get that teacher to stay. Why? Because the potential impact that that teach will have on your child's future income far exceeds that sum. The opposite is also true. Kristoff says it makes much more sense to pay a bad teacher a \$100,000 buyout to get them to leave the classroom – and replace them with a merely average teacher – because the future income loss of your child will be far greater if they stay in that teacher's classroom. These kinds of numbers reveal the heart of new research that was recently released from a group of Harvard and Columbia professors. Having a good fourth-grade teacher makes a student more likely to go to college and less likely to get pregnant as a teacher (24).

In this case, however, Jindal's source was secondary – which he indicates indirectly by noting that the source in question is an opinion piece, without directly addressing that Nick Kristoff is, in fact, a columnist for the New York Times and not directly involved in educational research, policy, or practice.

Opponents of H.B. 974, for their part, focused on attacking the evidentiary legitimacy of the reforms proposed by the bill – largely through the same generalized claims regarding research and “knowledge” regarding their efficacy utilized by supporters. The president of the Louisiana Association of Educators, for example, attacked the legitimacy of performance-based compensation, arguing that there was simply no “proof” in the wisdom of

[...] requiring that every single school district become no more than a merit pay system. When there is no proof, there is no evidence that merit pay will contribute anymore to student achievement. I believe, too, that when you look at the value added structure, and I've got a couple of things to say about this piece. When you look at the value added structure as this state has put it together. First, the pilots that were supposed to take place last year have not been completed. I think the superintendent himself earlier said, "We don't have the report yet," because they haven't been done. Yet in two weeks, what's theoretically is going to be after you pass this bill, then we'll know how viable value added was in the pilot [...] before we make decisions, let's make sure we have all the data and we've done as much of the research as we possibly can. Yet, what I'm hearing is that there's a rush to judgment, simply on a belief (69).

A teacher, testifying before the House, took a similar tack – arguing that the evidence supporting the state's value-added model was mixed, at best, and likely unreliable. She shared that

[...] the instrument that you're going to use to evaluate me and all the other teachers in our state is hugely flawed. If you look at Los Angeles and New York City, and what has happened to the teachers there, with the scores being published. Those instruments have sometimes as much as a 50% margin of error. Let's call it what it is. It's flawed. It's not a good instrument [...] Research, one of the standards of research is that you must be able to replicate your research for it to be considered empirical data that proves a theory. As of yet, you've got research that says, "Yes, it works." You've got research that says, "No, it doesn't work." If you can't get empirical evidence and research projects that can be replicated then that means you don't have a good model (65).

Finally, the president of the Louisiana Federation of Teachers took aim at the evidentiary legitimacy of one of the core assumptions underlying supporters' arguments – the importance

of teachers in promoting student achievement. He asserted that, counter to the “evidence” cited by supporters of teacher policy reform, research supported a much more nuanced understanding of the teachers’ role in student outcomes:

Now, I think there is always some truth in everything that everyone says, and that includes what I say and what others say. But then I think there is also some places where we can ... we at least note that there is some doubt to be placed. At the beginning of this entire conversation in regard to this bill, the underlying piece of it is that I think the statement goes like this, "The key contributor to student achievement is the teacher. The most overarching variable, the underlying foundation is the teacher." I would say that is only half-true, because everyone in this room, I would assume, knows as well as I do, that unless you add the words "in the school", the statement is false, because there are studies. Educational Testing Services, did a study that indicated that there were only 16 variables that affect student performance. The teacher in the school is the most important, but there are other variables when we speak of failing schools [...] (66).

In addition to arguing for their evidentiary legitimacy, participants in the discourse surrounding teacher policy reforms in Louisiana also attempted to claim legitimacy for their policy “stories” through the accountability warrant. Supporters of H.B. 974, for example, frequently asserted that their proposals would lead to the elevation of the state’s educational status. The state’s Secretary of Education, for example, noted that

These bills give us advantages, in that we can move faster toward attaining those objectives for our children. So, I see no reason why we cannot be very, very quickly – not a bottom tier state – but, soon, a middle tier state across those scores. And we will know, because we will have outcomes that will be compared on the exact same assessment across all of our kids and be even actually a better measure than the measures that we currently have to compare us to other states. I would expect fast movement (66).

Further, a number of supporters argued that H.B. 974 would drive results by emphasizing the efficacy of reforming the state’s outdated professional structure for teaching, responsible for

holding Louisiana back from success. One lobbyist made this assertion, testifying before the House Education Committee that

Our adherence to long-standing models and systems for tradition's sake is not delivering the outcome that our students deserve, or that our society requires in the 21st century. We must replicate what we know works in public education. High quality teachers, and principals empowered to make performance-based decisions removed from politics. We know highly effective teachers can generate 50% more learning than an average teacher. These hardworking and passionate individuals frequently sacrifice time and their own family to help our children reach their potential. Yet when it comes to hiring, firing, placement and pay for our teachers, currently, seniority is valued above all else including proven effectiveness. Teacher tenure decisions in Louisiana must be based on the individual's teaching impact on student learning, which would become state law under this bill [...] The changes in House Bill 974 have the potential to transform Louisiana's classrooms, and give every student the opportunity to succeed. We sincerely thank you for your service and for your courage to put Louisiana students first (65).

Governor Bobby Jindal made similar statements in his comments before the Senate, arguing that

[...] the reality is that antiquated personnel practices remain in many, many schools and school districts across our system, I'm sure you hear about many of them today, and in many cases they in fact run entirely contrary to the practices of the great schools that I named before, where people are making rigorous decisions about adult performance so as to keep our best teachers in the classroom. The changes that we propose today, as I said before, are not a change in good educational practice. They reflect good educational practice. They simply insist that it'd be universal rather than be isolated in specific pockets (66).

A Republican representative, quoted by the *Times-Picayune*, stated it more simply – he noted succinctly that “we’ve been doing the same thing for, what, 20, 30 years? It hasn’t worked” (54).

Opponents of teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting reform, for their part, focused on attacking the supporters’ claims regarding the accountability warrant. Several

opponents of H.B. 974, for instance, argued that the policies proposed by the bill wouldn't produce the outcomes claimed by supporters – some argued that they might, in fact, do the opposite. A retired teacher, testifying before the House, argued that

There's another big issue. That is the 10% factor. As part of the value-added evaluation, the state superintendent has decreed that 10% of the bottom group of teachers will be rated ineffective. I guess that's every year, 10% of the teachers had to be rated ineffective. It doesn't matter how well they teach, if they just happen to be in that bottom 10%, those people have to be rated ineffective. They're on their path to being dismissed. Go ahead and run that 10% for several more years, what are you going to get? It won't always be the same 10% because this evaluation system is very erratic. It gives you all kinds of strange results. You could be decimating your teaching force and putting all new people in no time at all because of that 10% factor. I don't think that was in the original law. It's in the evaluation. I think it's the pig in the poke. You don't really know what you're getting, and it could do a lot of damage. You could lose your investment. You could damage a lot of teachers, and you could damage the educational system. I'm just asking that you all think this over very carefully and wait until this evaluation is at least proven before you subject teachers to loss of tenure and loss of their other employment benefits (65).

A representative for the Louisiana Federation of Teachers made a similar argument, testifying that

Our highly effective teachers are going to leave our low income and title one schools. They are going to go to schools that have a more favorable demographics. Our low income schools, our poverty-rated schools. Those that are on free lunch. Those that can't pass the test, those are going to be left with teachers that are rotated out frequently, and staffed by Teach for America. This is not what we need for our state. This is not a bill that we should be passing as it stands (65).

A Democratic Representative concurred, arguing in debate on the House Floor that passing H.B. 974 would do more harm than good. He noted that

For those of you who follow the Greek history and mythology, there is a thing called a Pyrrhic victory. A Pyrrhic victory is a victory, or a goal, that's achieved at too great a cost to the perceived victor. Before you go patting each other on the back, congratulating each other and saying job well done,

remember the persons who have been lost along the way, or the things that have been sacrificed on the way. The teachers, the families, the schools, the system as a whole. But more importantly, the 95% or greater of the children. The kids. The ones we were saying this bill is going to protect. We have mortgaged our education system to all parties to the highest bidder. I can't go back to my constituency in good conscious and say that this is the best we could do. I can't do it and I won't do it (72).

Finally, a concerned citizen – writing to the *Shreveport Times* – argued that the intent of the “Jindal Plan” was not to improve the state’s public schools, at all. Instead, she argued,

A full-court press will be made in the legislative session to pass the so-called ‘Jindal Plan’, a package of bills that will not only attack the structure of Louisiana public schools but will harm teachers and students as well. It’s a truly unwise plan. The goals include killing teacher tenure (some call tenure due process), beginning a poorly planned teacher evaluation program, starting untested charter schools statewide, and ushering in vouchers to give away public tax money to private entities, among other doomed for failure education schemes (29).

This argument attacked both supporters’ claims regarding accountability, as well as their political legitimacy – expanded on in more detail below.

As noted, in addition to claiming evidentiary legitimacy and appealing to the accountability warrant, supporters and opponents of H.B. 974 also sought to strengthen their policy “stories” regarding teacher policy reform by claiming their political legitimacy. Supporters of the bill did so by asserting the purity of their intentions, and their desire to serve the children of Louisiana – much as their analogues in Florida and North Carolina had. A school board member testifying before the House, for example, shared with the Education Committee that

In engaging in this debate, there are three basic principles that I adhere to. The first is an unwavering commitment to advancing student achievement. I know that sounds like one of those common little mantras that someone says. I ask you to focus on the word unwavering. When it comes to doing the right thing by our kids, what causes us to waver? Is there a friend in the system? Is

it going to cost too much money? Is there some loyalty element there? I assure you, as difficult as this task becomes from time to time, it is really easy. Because in our world, the coin never lands on the edge. The other thing we have to acknowledge is that there may be a necessity for dramatic change. We know where our performance is. The time is now. Then there needs to be an urgency to get it accomplished. These children just have today that cannot regain this day. The time they lose cannot be regained (65).

A principal testifying in support of the bill before the Senate Education Committee articulated a similar argument, noting that

What we find is that 90 plus percent of our kids come to us at the high school level, and they are reading at fifth grade levels and below. So that's very difficult. But we still continue to work hard, and that's because of quality teachers. But if a teacher and a principal, if we're not accountable, including starting with myself first and foremost, if we're not accountable, if we're not doing our job to be the very best that we can be, then our kids deserve to get the very best person in front of them. I will be the first one to say that if I'm not performing at the level that I should perform as principal, you wouldn't have to ask me. I will step down on my own. I think if you care about kids and if you really care about changing things for all kids, and particularly kids that are in impoverished situations, they deserve the very best [...] I do support this because I support children (66).

Gov. Bobby Jindal summarized supporters' claims succinctly as he signed H.B. 974 into law, sharing that "This is not about the next election. This is not about the next poll. This is about the next generation. This is important for Louisiana; it's also important for America. If we want to preserve the American dream for our children, if we want them to do better than we did, then it is important they get a great education" (62).

Opponents, for their part, worked to undermine the political legitimacy of supporters by shifting the focus of the discourse surrounding H.B. 974 from students to their teachers. The president of the Louisiana Federation of Teachers, for instance, noted to the House Education Committee that

You've heard numerous speakers tell you that this is not about the adults. This must be about children. And then they shared with you the fights they had, legal contests over their contractual rights as superintendents. Their ability to deal with their board as adults. And my point to you, ladies and gentlemen, it's very simple. We all know that what we do is about children, but it's work done by adults. Adults have to be compensated for the work they do. The superintendent of education for the state of Louisiana has a contract. He is well compensated for that contract. He earns his compensation, and there is an obligation, a contractual obligation, as virtue of that contract. I would really hope at some point in the process of a long session, we'd shed the higher road of "I live for children". Everyone else, they're groveling in the adult world. The adults do the work. They have to do the work well, and have to be treated fairly. The bill doesn't do that (65).

Others built on this argument, asserting that H.B. 974's reforms to contracting, evaluation and compensation policies amounted to an "attack" on Louisiana's teachers. One teacher captured this, testifying that

Money is power. Take that money and put it back in the classrooms. This bill is an attack on educators with advance degrees. I have three masters, [it's] attacking me because I went to school in over \$80,000 in student loans. I got to pay that money back. Now, you want to talk about taking tenure from teachers and their livelihood, buying a home or car. Think about these things before you do this, because what goes around comes around. When you dig one hole, you better dig two, or enough for those in support of this bill, because you are hurting families, you are hurting children, you're putting children out of your schools which are home for them (65).

The president of the Louisiana Association of Educators, underscoring the argument that the "Jindal plan" amounted to an "attack", soundly asserted that opponents of teacher reform had right on their side. He proclaimed that H.B. 974 was "[...] an attack on our profession" and that "we're fighting for our teachers, we're fighting for our children, we're fighting to stop you from destroying education [...]" (30).

As noted previously, there were some points of more direct engagement between participants in the discourse surrounding H.B. 974, particularly regarding the assertion that

supporters were, effectively, “attacking” teachers and treating them unfairly. One Republican Senator, for example, captured supporters’ counter-argument to this during a meeting of the Senate Education Committee. He noted that the majority wasn’t interested in “attacking” anybody – instead, he argued, they merely sought to find the best approach to solving the state’s problems. He shared that

I would say in this case, it is not a choice between the teachers and the children. I think everybody is doing their best to strike an appropriate balance between the teachers and the children, and it's not a choice of either-or. I heard you yesterday talking about how the angels don't disagree, and I appreciate that statement. This isn't a contest between who loves the children most, so I appreciate your involvement and that you're coming here, and that you speak with passion. But I do take issue with the idea of saying that there's no fairness here. Thank you (66).

Invoking Metaphors, Symbols, and Master Narratives

In addition to their efforts to bolster their policy “stories” through claiming evidentiary, political and accountability-based legitimacy, supporters and opponents of H.B. 974 strengthened the resonance and fidelity of their narratives by linking them to powerful symbols, and cultural narratives. Supporters of teacher policy reforms in Louisiana, for example, often tempered their “stories” with language invoking images of business, industry and production – much as their counterparts in the Florida case did. Governor Bobby Jindal, for example, argued that existing teacher contracting policies were out of step with the private sector, and the best practices of business and industry. As he did so, he attempted to compare schools to a hypothetical “company”:

Let me describe a hypothetical company to you. In this company, people are hired by a board. Then they are assigned to their jobs by this board with little input from the person who is ultimately going to be their boss and have to work with them. Once in their jobs, they are told to work hard, but

there is no accountability. Whether they are doing a great job or a poor one, they get no recognition for their hard work and are treated the same (40).

The consequence of this lack of accountability, he noted, was the inability of leaders within the organization to rid themselves of even the most undeserving employees: “[...] after three years, if they have survived, they are given lifetime work protection. Short of selling drugs in the workplace or beating up one of the business’ clients, they can never be fired (10)”. A Republican Senator, debating on the floor, tapped into similar imagery – in this case, comparing productivity in the classroom to productivity on the assembly line:

If you go into General Motors and look at a production line, you have layers of authority starting at the board, the high board of General Motors, and then they have sub-boards – perhaps Chevrolet or Buick, or someone like that. Then you get down to the plant site. That's what you're talking about right now, the plant site, the school. At the plant site, what do you have? You have the plant manager who's in overall charge of the facility, and then you have the line managers or foremen or whatever they give them as a name. Now, if you have a worker on that line and that worker doesn't know which place to put the headlight, puts it where the engine is supposed to go, the first person who knows that that worker is ineffective is the line manager, the foreman. That's the principal of the school. That's the principal. That's what we're saying [...] (71).

Another common tactic among supporters was to connect the cause of teacher policy reform to deeper cultural narratives regarding progress, innovation, and the essence of the “American dream”. Several supporters, as noted previously, asserted the importance of reform for promoting the state’s advancement and progress in the face of stagnant and “antiquated” systems for governing the profession of teaching. A representative for the Pelican Institute for Public Policy – like many others – made this assertion in his testimony before the House, arguing that “I think legislatures should endeavor to do away with antiquated employment policies that make it difficult - in some cases impossible - for schools

to award success and to deal with failure. This proposed legislation is modest in scope but I think it will help usher in long overdue changes in the culture at our public schools” (65).

Related to this underlying narrative of progress was an effort on the part of supporters – in particular, Governor Jindal and members of his administration – to link arguments for reform to deeper narratives regarding the ideal of the “American dream”. Jindal, himself, tread strongly on this assertion in his comments before the Senate, arguing to the Education Committee that

[...] The reality is, we believe – I believe as Americans that we believe – that no child’s future outcome should be determined by the circumstances of their birth, by their zip code, their income, their gender, their race, or their family’s social economic status. That’s one of the great things about America. We always remember our parents telling us “Look, kids, if you study and work hard enough, one day you could become president of the United States. You could become a doctor, a teacher, a lawyer, a nurse, an accountant.” I don’t know if they ever said you could become a state senator, maybe they did when you were growing up. For that dream to be true, for that message to ring true, we need to make sure that every child gets a great education [...] (66).

Opponents of H.B. 974 also relied on imagery to increase the resonance of their policy “stories”, although there were fewer examples of coherent themes in their discourse than in the case of supporters, or opponents in the other case study states. Members of the opposition to teacher policy reforms in Louisiana did – as their counterparts had in Florida and North Carolina – frequently draw upon language implying an “attack” or “assault” upon teachers on the part of reformers. In general, however, this rhetoric was more restrained than it had been in the other cases, featuring fewer references to violent, combative imagery. The president of the Louisiana Federation of Teachers seemed to capture this reticence when he noted that he and his compatriots were “[...] not looking for a war [...]” – although he was

quick to note that the “attack” represented by the Jindal plan would “[...] cause casualties on all sides” (10).

Despite there being fewer unifying themes among in opponents’ use of imagery and cultural narratives, there were several interesting examples of individual uses of such rhetoric throughout the discourse surrounding H.B. 974. One Democratic senator, for example, compared the majority’s treatment of teachers under H.B. 974 to more biblical betrayals, arguing on the Senate floor that

We come in here every morning. We pray. We stand erect. We do the pledge of allegiance. We may even have a song. We read our bibles. Some of you have bibles in your desk right now. How many of you know that Delilah, who betrayed Samson, got more money than Judas got for betraying Jesus? You keep that in mind, and you figure what you mortgaged off for the day and where it’s going to cost you long term. I can say this. It is impossible to know what you’ve got until it’s gone. I oppose these bills, these amendments and this process in every form and facet. Because this amounts to political appeasement and we all know how this worked out when we tried to appease a leader like Hitler so you keep that in mind, thank you (72).

Another legislator – a Democratic representative – struck a similar chord, drawing connections between contracting, evaluation and compensation reform and a dark period of the state’s history:

I’ve seen a lot of fights. I’ve seen a lot of disagreements. But I have not seen as much the partisanship, the arm twisting that I’ve seen this year, in many years. The only other time that I’ve seen something this bad in this House was during Katrina, and those days still haunt me. Because I saw some things there that I felt that I really had enough of, and I thought not to even run again for the legislature. I want to share this, which is similar to what I see here today. Innocent people who have made a commitment in their life to take care of our kids - that is our teachers - have been so vilified. Basically saying that they are not worthy of our total attention and trying to work through this process a bit slower. That there will not be any unintentional consequences that we would have to face later on, only to come back and say “well, we can fix it tomorrow”. Tomorrow never comes. As it was in Katrina,

one of the things that really bothered me was that there were innocent people there, out of no fault of their own, that were caught in that situation (72).

Finally, a few opponents of H.B. 974 tied the issues surrounding teacher policy reform to deeper, long-standing social and economic issues facing Louisianans. One teacher, for instance, connected the struggle against the bill to historical trends in the treatment of labor in the state. He asserted that

Let's call this for what it is. In most all economics textbooks that I've been teaching out of, they all agree that the South is attractive to business because of cheap land, cheap labor, and low taxes. I'm questioning all of the motives for this particular bill, based upon what I've been hearing. When it comes down to it, it costs less money for labor if you put these things into place. In the other side over there, in the House, I asked the question, "Do not my degrees and my experience enhance my ability to teach?" I was told that that has no bearing on being highly effective. The superintendent of education made that statement. I questioned whether or not, "Am I obsolete now? Do I have nothing else to contribute?" We belong to what the younger generation... I'm labeling it as the throw-away generation. Get rid of the teachers that have the highest pay, that have the most experience, to save a buck. Bring in at-will employees, destroy the teaching profession, to save money. That's pathetic (66).

Another teacher struck a similar argument, alluding to broader, historical issues of gender inequity surrounding teacher policy issues. She testified before the House Education Committee that

The fact that I want to tell you about [regards] tenure. I'm a history person. Tenure. 1922, tenure in this state. We have had to defend it. Two great cases. One of them was whenever if you became married, you could no longer teach. Sexism at its best. We had to defend it. The other one, if you get pregnant and you started to show, you couldn't teach anymore. That was another tenure case. I have to wonder if what this is not is another case of gender-bias. I had to wonder if you would ... this is a profession made up of women. I had to wonder if we would've been treated the way we were today, if we had not been a profession made up women. I have to wonder it. I would have you think about that. Is this gender-bias? Is this gender-bias against our profession? I have to wonder about that. I'm going to end it by saying two things from Eleanor Roosevelt. She said, "Every day do something that scares

you to death." Please be brave. You'll live another day. The second thing is she said, "Do what is right in your heart because you will be damned if you do, and damned if you don't." Thank you (65).

Summary of Narratives Surrounding H.B. 974

A summary of these findings presented in this chapter - regarding the ways in which participants in the discourse surrounding H.B. 974 framed and combined narrative elements, and utilized rhetorical strategies, is presented in Table 10. From these constituent parts, a broad understanding of the policy “stories” constructed by supporters and opponents of teacher reform in Louisiana can be derived. These more general “stories” are summarized below.

Table 10. Summary of Louisiana Findings

Construct	Supporters	Opponents
Characters	Generally framed teachers as protagonists – with the focus of reform being a minority population of ineffective teachers. Primary antagonist of supporters’ policy stories was the “broken” system surrounding teachers in the state, rather than teachers themselves. Framed reformers as public servants, executing the will of the public. Painted advocacy groups and other stakeholders opposed to reform as protectors of a harmful status-quo. Finally, framed students as victims of antiquated teacher policies.	Teachers portrayed as selfless, heroic protagonists being unfairly blamed by policymakers for poor student outcomes. Framed legislators and other policymakers – including Governor Bobby Jindal - as antagonists, “attacking” teachers and harming public schools in the state. Also asserted that “outsider” groups – including the American Legislative Exchange Council – were pushing a harmful agenda upon the state, and that the “Jindal Plan” reflected this influence. Finally, framed parents as culpable in the “story” surrounding poor student achievement in the state.

Construct	Supporters	Opponents
Problem Definitions	Framed the primary problem targeted by H.B. 974 as chronic issues of poor student achievement facing the state. Also framed a secondary problem related to this core issue – the state’s “antiquated” and inefficient systems for holding teachers accountable for their performance, incentivizing them, and removing poor performers. Framed these problems as significant, salient, and widespread – often by connecting them to broader economic and social problems faced by the state.	Some opponents of teacher policy reform countered the problem definition offered by Supporters by asserting that Louisiana’s public schools had, in fact, been making significant progress in promoting student achievement over the last several years. Several opponents, however, acknowledged the core problem of poor student outcomes, but asserted that the problem was deeply connected to wider economic and social inequities within the state, framing it as difficult to solve.
Causal Frameworks	Supporters of H.B. 974 constructed causal narratives which situated teachers as an important – if not the most important – causal driver of student outcomes. Given the central role of teachers ins “producing” student outcomes, supporters argued that teacher policy reforms were vital in improving the state’s educational fortunes.	Opponents of teacher policy reform in Louisiana framed a complex causal narrative surrounding the process of teaching and learning, arguing that teachers were just one of a myriad of factors determining student outcomes.
Claiming Legitimacy	Supporters of H.B. 974 worked to claim evidentiary legitimacy for their arguments by making broad – although often unspecific and unsourced – appeals to research to support their arguments. Supporters also argued that they held the accountability warrant, and that their policies would succeed in promoting the state’s relative educational position, where the “antiquated” status quo had failed. Finally, supporters asserted that their motives lay with meeting the need of the state’s children, and refuted the argument that they were treating teachers unfairly in the process.	Opponents of teacher policy reform in Louisiana frequently attempted to undermine the evidentiary legitimacy of supporters – largely by claiming that research (again, broadly construed and not specifically cited) did not support their proposed reforms. Moreover, they argued that the proposed reforms would not produce the outcomes that supporters claimed – they might, in fact, cause more harm than good. Finally, opponents attacked the political legitimacy of supporters by arguing that they were unfairly “attacking” teachers and public schools, rather than serving the interests of Louisianan students.
Rhetorical Tropes	Few examples of rhetorical tropes like Metonymy and Synecdoche in the Louisiana case, as in the other states. Participants in the discourse did, however, make use of metaphor frequently – in the case of supporters, often drawing upon comparisons to business, industry and production.	Few examples of rhetorical tropes like Metonymy and Synecdoche in the Louisiana case, as in the other states. Participants in the discourse did, however, make use of metaphors – in the case of opponents, frequently invoking images of “war”, “conflict” and an “attack” upon teaching and the public schools.

Construct	Supporters	Opponents
Cultural Symbols/ Narratives	Supporters of teacher policy reform in Louisiana, as noted above, often drew upon connections to business practices and the efficiency of the private sector as they constructed their policy “stories”. Further, some – particularly Governor Jindal – drew upon deeper cultural narratives regarding progress and the “American dream” as they sought to increase the resonance of their narratives.	Fewer shared themes were evident among opponents of H.B. 974, although – as noted – several participants did invoke narratives regarding an “attack” and “assault” upon teachers in the state. Other opponents connected their narratives to stories of biblical betrayal, or drew links between the issues surrounding teacher policy reform to historic narratives regarding labor relations and gender in the state.

Supporters of teacher reform in Louisiana, in general, constructed a policy “story” which asserted that lagging student achievement was a pressing and significant problem, presenting wide-spread economic and social ramifications for Louisianans. They noted that teachers – and a “broken”, “antiquated” system for governing the profession of teaching – were at the heart of this problem, particularly given the significant influence that teachers held over the production of student outcomes. Supporters were, however, careful to note that the majority of teachers in the state were hardworking and dedicated professionals; they argued that it was, in general, a small minority of poor performers holding the state’s schools back from success.

Given the singular importance of teachers, supporters asserted, finding innovative and effective means of rewarding effective teachers – and dismissing ineffective teachers – was a promising avenue for overcoming the state’s issues regarding student achievement. Moreover, they charged that actors standing in opposition to this reform effort were guilty of defending a “broken” status-quo, and preserving a structure which valued the interests of adults over those of the children of Louisiana. Supporters girded this general narrative in metaphors which invoked images of business and production, grounding their proposed

reforms in the “best practices” of the private sector. In addition, some – particularly Governor Bobby Jindal, the author of the broader educational agenda under consideration – connected their “stories” regarding teacher policy reform to deeper narratives regarding progress, fairness, and the “American dream”.

Opponents of reforms to teacher contracting, compensation and evaluation policy in Louisiana told “stories” that countered many elements of those asserted by supporters. They argued that the problem of lagging student achievement was, in fact, less salient than supporters argued – in some cases, by arguing that the state’s public schools had been steadily improving over time and, in others, by arguing that the manifold issues which fueled gaps in student outcomes were far too complex to address with the legislation at hand. The latter of these arguments complemented the causal narrative forwarded by opponents, which articulated a complex understanding of the mechanisms producing student achievement – of which teachers and their actions were only a small part. Opponents asserted that, given the fraught connection between teachers’ actions and the outcomes of their pupils, efforts to incentivize teachers, or to more easily dismiss them, were unlikely to produce the outcomes sought by supporters. At worst, they noted, supporters’ proposals had the potential to bring greater harm the state’s schools.

As they wove this policy “story”, opponents of H.B. 974 attacked the legitimacy of supporters by arguing that their proposed reforms lacked empirical support. Moreover, they asserted that supporters’ claims that they served the interests of the states’ children were also suspect. Instead, opponents argued, actors pursuing teacher policy reform were guilty of unfairly “attacking” teachers, and pursuing a destructive course of policy undermining the public school system. Further, some opponents argued that their adversaries did so at the

behest of “outsider” groups seeking to impose their political will upon the state. Finally, opponents of H.B. 974 sought to bolster the resonance of their narratives by wreathing them in language connecting reforms to an “assault” or “war” upon education, and by connecting their “stories” to deeper cultural narratives which raised the specters of betrayal, and a history of inequitable practices in the state.

Chapter 7

EXAMINING POLICY STORIES ACROSS THE STATES: A CROSS-CASE COMPARISON AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

As the last few chapters have shown, the debates surrounding reforms to teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting policy in Florida, North Carolina and Louisiana engendered a rich discourse. In the course of the debate surrounding these policy processes, a variety of actors in each state – including legislators, practitioners, advocacy groups, concerned citizens, and a number of others – articulated powerful policy “stories”. These “stories” combined several narrative elements – including characters, problem definitions and causal narratives – in order to frame particular understandings regarding the nature of the teaching profession and the learning process. Moreover, actors constructing these policy “stories” made use of rhetorical strategies to enhance the accessibility, fidelity and resonance of their narratives. In this final chapter of the study, I compare the ways in which these elements manifested across my case study states – highlighting patterns of similarity and difference. I then discuss some broader narrative themes emerging from examination of all three cases, and conclude by discussing the implications of this study, limitations of its findings, and avenues for future research.

Cross-Case Comparison of Findings in Florida, North Carolina and Louisiana

As noted in previous chapters, there were a number of similarities – and a few key differences – in the ways that actors debating teacher policy reforms in each case study state constructed their policy “stories”. These similarities and differences are summarized and described below.

Cross-Case Comparison of Narrative Elements

Findings from each case study state indicate that, as they supported or opposed reforms to teacher compensation, contracting and evaluation reform, actors wove together several constituent narrative elements to form cohesive policy “stories”. In each case, these included efforts to frame *characters*, to define *problems*, and to articulate the *causal narratives* at the heart of the “stories” constructed by policy actors in each state. Looking across the findings from each case, broad similarities and differences in the ways in which “storytellers” leveraged these elements can be observed. Table 11, for example, summarizes the ways in which supporters of teacher policy reform in Florida, North Carolina and Louisiana constructed the *characters*, *problems* and *causal narratives* in their narratives.

Table 11. Summary Comparison – Supporters’ Use of Narrative Elements

	Supporters	
	Similarities	Differences
Characters	<p>Framed the majority of teachers as hard-working, “heroic” protagonists.</p> <p>Framed minority of “ineffective” teachers as a driver in student achievement problems.</p> <p>Framed teachers organizations like the FEA, NCAE and LFT as “antagonists”, standing in the way of reform.</p> <p>Framed students as victims in policy “stories”, of the “broken system”, or ineffective teachers.</p>	<p>Supporters in Florida more willing to frame “ineffective” teachers as primary “antagonists”.</p> <p>Supporters in North Carolina and Louisiana framed “broken” or “antiquated” system as “antagonist”.</p> <p>Great focus on framing reformers as “heroes” in North Carolina and Louisiana.</p>
Problem Definitions	<p>Framed poor student achievement as a severe and salient problem for their states.</p> <p>Asserted that solving the student achievement problem “couldn’t wait”.</p> <p>Linked the problem of poor student achievement to wider economic and social issues.</p> <p>Linked the problem of an “antiquated” professional structure of teaching to the broader problem of poor student achievement.</p>	<p>Few major differences in problem definitions between states.</p>

	Supporters	
Construct	Similarities	Differences
Causal Narratives	Framed teachers as the primary causal driver in the process of student learning.	<p>Greater emphasis in Florida on framing the minority of “ineffective” teachers as the primary cause of poor student achievement.</p> <p>Actors in North Carolina and Louisiana framed the “broken” or “antiquated” system governing the teaching profession as the primary cause of poor achievement.</p>

In each state, supporters of teacher policy reforms framed some important characters in similar ways. In all three states, supporters were quick to assert that the majority of teachers were, in fact, hard-working, self-sacrificing protagonists who were effective in their work. The foil to this effective majority, however, was a minority group of ineffective educators who – through lack of skill or motivation – were unable to promote success in their students. In Florida, supporters of S.B. 6 and 736 focused on this minority of ineffective teachers as they asserted the necessity of reform; in their policy “stories”, these teachers took the role of antagonists whose poor practice harmed students and, ultimately, the well-being of the state. Supporters of teacher policy reform in North Carolina and Louisiana were less willing to adopt such a harsh characterization of teachers – ineffective or not. Instead, actors in the latter case study states emphasized the role of the “broken system” surrounding teachers, to the extent that the “system” became an antagonist character in and of itself.

Supporters in all three states, similarly, integrated advocacy organizations into their narratives as characters – in particular, teachers’ organizations like the FEA, NCAE and LFT.

In each case, supporters tended to frame such organizations as antagonists guilty of placing the interests of teachers – regardless of effectiveness – before those of children. In doing so, supporters charged, such organizations acted as roadblocks to necessary reform, standing in the way of improvement to each state’s school system. In Louisiana, supporters – in particular, Governor Jindal and his administration – went further, lumping teachers’ organizations with a number of other advocacy groups standing in opposition to H.B. 974 into a “coalition of the status quo”, focused on defending the “antiquated” professional structure of teaching in the state to the detriment of Louisiana and its students.

Finally, students were frequently highlighted as characters in the policy “stories” told by supporters of teacher policy reform in all three states – although this was a more minor thread in the North Carolina case than in Florida and Louisiana. In each state, supporters framed students as the “victims” in their tales – of the “broken system” in North Carolina and Louisiana, and of underperforming teachers, more directly, in Florida. This characterization of students served as a foundation for other elements of supporters’ narratives – creating space for reformers to claim political legitimacy, for example, by asserting their interest in protecting the interests of their state’s children.

While there were a number of similarities in the ways that supporters of teacher compensation, contracting and evaluation reform framed the characters of their policy “stories” across states, there were differences as well. One key difference, as noted above, lay with supporters’ willingness to lay the blame for problems with student achievement directly at the feet of teachers. Floridian actors were much more assertive in this regard – adopting a “discourse of derision” in their efforts to lay responsibility for a number of the state’s educational woes at the feet of “ineffective” teachers (Ball, 2003). Supporters in North

Carolina and Louisiana, however, were more cautious in their framing of teachers and their role in limiting student outcomes. In addition, there were differences in how aggressively supporters were willing to incorporate themselves into their political narratives. In both North Carolina and Louisiana, supporters' efforts to characterize reformers as "heroes" were far more prevalent than they were in Florida. It seems likely that supporters in those two cases – particularly legislators – may have felt greater pressure to position themselves as protagonists in the process, given the relatively historic political upheavals that occurred in Louisiana and North Carolina, and subsequent assertions by opponents that reformers' true intentions lay with reprisal against former political enemies.

Supporters also defined the problems at the heart of their policy "stories" in very similar ways. In each of the three case study states, they constructed narratives which presented poor student achievement as a pressing problem facing the public at large. Moreover, supporters asserted that this problem was salient – often framing the task of reform as something that "couldn't wait" and extolling the immediacy of the moment. Supporters also argued for the severity of this core student achievement problem by linking it to other critical concerns in each state – frequently, for example, arguing that student had significant impact on economic outcomes and the labor market in each state. Critical social problems, including economic inequity and crime were tied by supporters to deficits in academic performance. Finally, supporters of teacher policy reform in each state defined a "broken" or "antiquated" system – which included the policy structure surrounding the profession of teaching – as a sub-problem of the principle issue of deficient student outcomes. Given this problem framing, reform to these systems was framed as a reasonable – and desirable – policy option.

In general, there were few significant differences among supporters in each state with regard to the way they defined the core “problems” at the heart of their policy “stories”. On slight difference was that the narrative thread regarding the “broken system” surrounding the profession of teaching was relatively stronger in North Carolina and Louisiana – it was, however, still present in Florida, although not as strongly.

Finally, there were some general similarities in the causal narratives constructed by supporters of teacher policy reform in each state as they articulated the mechanisms defining the “plots” of their policy “stories”. In each case, for example, supporters framed teachers as key causal drivers in the process of student learning – arguing that it was, at least in large part, the decisions and actions of the teacher at the front of each classroom that determined the extent to which their students achieved success. Efforts to shift the ways in which teachers were incentivized – or to clear paths for dismissing the most ineffective teachers – were, as such, an effort to target this direct relationship between teachers’ efforts and their students’ outcomes.

The particulars of how these causal narratives were constructed did differ a bit between states, however. In Florida, as noted, there was a greater willingness on the part of supporters to frame ineffective teachers as antagonists, and their causal narratives reflected this. They worked to construct what Stone (1998; 2002) called an *inadvertent* narrative, in which it was, in fact, poorly performing teachers causing the problem at hand, albeit without malign intent. North Carolinian supporters, on the other hand, tended to tack more toward what Stone (1998; 2002) defined as a *mechanical* narrative, asserting that it was the “broken” system of evaluation, compensation and contracting at fault for the state’s educational woes – by protecting inept teachers and failing to reward effective teachers. Finally, Louisianan

supporters of teacher policy reforms struck a middle ground between these narratives – again, articulating a direct relationship between teachers and student outcomes, although less strongly than in Florida. They generally, however, did not link this narrative directly to the problem of deficient student achievement – rarely, for example, directly articulating that ineffective teachers were *causing* students to fail –instead, simply acknowledging teachers’ direct role in “producing” achievement and inferring that improving the profession would yield benefits. Similarly, while the “antiquated” system was a feature of the “stories” evident in Louisiana, supporters were less adamant in weaving it into their causal narratives than those in North Carolina.

Similar patterns of harmony and dissonance occurred in opponents’ policy “stories” across the three case study state – summarized below, in Table 12.

Table 12. Summary Comparison – Opponents’ Use of Narrative Elements

	Opponents	
	Similarities	Differences
Characters	<p>Framed teachers as heroic, self-sacrificing protagonists.</p> <p>Framed teachers as victims of policy-makers’ poor decisions.</p> <p>Framed policy-makers as “antagonists”, often guilty of “attacking” teachers and public schools.</p>	<p>Greater focus on framing “outsider” advocacy groups as antagonists in North Carolina and Louisiana.</p> <p>Focus on framing parents and students as problematic actors, complicating the process of teaching and learning in Florida and Louisiana.</p>

Problem Definitions	<p>Countered supporters’ problem definitions by framing student achievement “problem” as less severe and salient.</p> <p>Argued that the trajectory of achievement in each state was improving over time.</p> <p>Asserted that reforms to teacher compensation, contracting and evaluation policies may actually harm this “upward trajectory”.</p>	<p>Louisianan opponents acknowledged student achievement problem, but argued that its complex nature made it inherently difficult – if not impossible – to solve through teacher policy.</p>
Causal Narratives	<p>Framed the process of teaching and learning as a complex process, rather than a direct one.</p> <p>Argued that teachers were only one part of this complex process, and that they had relatively little control over many factors leading to student outcomes.</p>	<p>Greater emphasis in Florida and North Carolina on the actions of policymakers in the complex causal narrative surrounding teaching and learning – particularly budgetary decisions.</p>

As the table indicates, there were numerous similarities in the ways that opponents of teacher policy reform framed characters as they wove their own policy “stories”. In each case, for example, opponents uniformly characterized teachers as protagonists – describing them as heroic and self-sacrificing professionals who often overcame significant obstacles to serve their students. These teachers, moreover, were often framed as victims of the poor decisions made by policy actors in their states. This fed into another similarity between opponents policy “stories” – the role of policy-makers in each state as antagonists. Opponents of teacher policy reform in all three states were, generally, strong in their

assertions that policy-makers were guilty of “attacking” public schools, teachers and – even if indirectly – students. Some went even further, asserting that reformers were, in fact, more interested in pursuing political goals, rather than meeting the needs of the children they purportedly served.

There were, of course, also a few differences in the ways that opponents constructed characters between states. In both North Carolina and Louisiana, opponents of teacher policy reform painted certain advocacy groups – specifically, “outsider” groups that they perceived to be encroaching upon their state – as antagonists within their policy “stories”. This thread was not, however, evident in the Florida case – potentially indicating the stronger influences of such groups within the policy processes in Louisiana and North Carolina. Additionally, the roles that parents and students played in the “stories” constructed by opponents varied by state, as well. In Florida and Louisiana, opponents were generally more assertive in framing parents and students as – if not antagonists in their “stories” – then at least problematic actors who complicated the work of teachers and often challenged their ability to produce the kinds of outcomes that policy actors demanded of them.

With regard to problem definitions, opponents of teacher policy reform across all three states told their policy “stories” with nearly unified voice. In all three states, opponents countered the narratives offered by supporters of reform by asserting that deficits in student achievement were a problem that was not as salient or severe as their counterparts argued. Rather, they asserted, public schools in Florida, North Carolina and Louisiana were making significant progress in overcoming persistent inequities, improving student outcomes, and responding to the various policy mandates that had been levied upon them in recent decades. Some went so far as to assert that proposed reforms represented a threat to this progress –

which had been hard won by the very teachers that policymakers seemed intent upon “attacking”. In Louisiana, this narrative thread was slightly weaker than it was in the other two case study states – although it was certainly still present. Several Louisianan opponents of teacher policy reform coupled it with an additional counter to supporters’ narratives – acknowledging that poor student achievement was a problem, but arguing that it was inherently difficult, if not impossible, to solve as a result of the complex causal mechanisms underlying it.

Finally, opponents wove “stories” with similarly uniform causal narratives – countering the more direct narratives articulated by supporters of reform by framing the mechanisms of teaching and learning as inherently complicated. Within this *complex* causal narrative – as Stone (2002; 1998) described it – teachers were simply one of many causal drivers operating in tandem to “produce” student outcomes. Opponents often asserted, in fact, that teachers were far from the most important of these drivers – instead, pointing to factors like students’ home lives, socio-economic disparities and the actions of students, themselves, as powerful mediators of student achievement. Moreover, opponents – particularly in North Carolina and Florida – argued that the actions of policymakers themselves, guilty of looting state budgets for education, were a significant causal driver in the mechanisms producing student outcomes.

Cross-Case Comparison of Rhetorical Strategies

As discussed in the preceding chapters, policy “storytellers” in each of the case study states worked to strengthen the resonance, accessibility and fidelity of the “stories” that they constructed from the narrative elements discussed above through the use of a variety of rhetorical strategies. These strategies, in general, included appeals to various “warrants” of

legitimacy, the use of various rhetorical tropes, and linkages to powerful cultural symbols and “meta” narratives. Findings from each of the case study states regarding the ways in which actors used these strategies are summarized below, in Tables 13 and 14.

Table 13. Summary Comparison – Supporters’ Use of Rhetorical Strategies

	Supporters	
Construct	Similarities	Differences
Claiming Legitimacy	<p>Claimed evidentiary legitimacy by supporting their arguments, using unsourced statistics and general claims regarding “research”</p> <p>Invoked the accountability warrant by arguing that teacher policy reform would solve student achievement problems.</p> <p>Claimed political legitimacy by arguing that supporters of reform were serving the interests of children.</p>	<p>Greater emphasis on citing statistics in Florida and North Carolina.</p> <p>Emphasis in Florida and Louisiana on the importance of bringing states in line with national reforms and improving national education rankings.</p> <p>Stronger focus on attacking the political legitimacy of opponents to reform in North Carolina and Louisiana.</p>
Rhetorical Tropes	<p>In general, few examples of certain tropes – particularly synecdoche, metonymy and irony – across states.</p> <p>Frequent use of metaphor in each state – in particular, linking education to private enterprise, industry and business.</p>	<p>Some use of the term “system” to aggregate the many elements of public schooling in North Carolina and Louisiana.</p>

	Supporters	
Construct	Similarities	Differences
Cultural Symbols/ Narratives	Supporters across all three states linked their policy “stories” to cultural symbols and “master” narratives.	<p>Emphasis on connecting to symbols/narratives regarding progress, reform and innovation in Florida and North Carolina.</p> <p>Some supporters – like Bobby Jindal – invoked narratives regarding opportunity and the “American Dream” in Louisiana.</p>

As indicated by the table, claiming legitimacy was a frequently utilized strategy among supporters of teacher policy reform in each of the case study states. In general, supporters of teacher policy reform tended to claim legitimacy for their “stories” in similar ways. In all three states, for example, supporters emphasized the evidentiary legitimacy of their narratives by citing statistics and asserting that their proposals were backed by empirical research. These claims were, however, often constructed in vague fashion. Supporters rarely cited sources for their statistics, or specific research studies to support their assertions. In addition to evidentiary legitimacy, supporters in all three states argued that they held the accountability warrant. In doing so, they claimed that their proposals for reforming teacher contracting, evaluation and compensation policies were likely to solve the core problem that they defined in their policy “stories” – deficits in student achievement. Finally, supporters in each of the case study states strongly asserted that they held the political warrant, by situating themselves as the champions of each state’s children, concerned primarily with serving the needs of the students of Florida, North Carolina and Louisiana.

There were, however, some differences in how these various claims to legitimacy manifested across the states. Supporters in Florida and North Carolina, for example, tended to cite statistics more frequently than their counterparts in Louisiana as they asserted the evidentiary legitimacy of their arguments. With regard to the accountability warrant, supporters in Florida and Louisiana were more focused than those in North Carolina on the importance of linking their reforms to wider national trends in education policy, which they framed as a vital part of improving their state's schools, promoting student outcomes, and – particularly in Louisiana – improving their state's national status. Finally, there appeared to be a greater emphasis in North Carolina and Louisiana on attacking the political legitimacy of opponents of reform – particularly teachers' organizations, who supporters claimed were guilty of supporting an ineffective "status quo" at the expense of students.

Supporters also, largely, made similar use of rhetorical tropes as they worked to support their policy "stories" in each state. As noted in previous chapters, there were few examples across the states of narrators leveraging tropes as they constructed their "stories" – including synecdoche, metonymy and irony. One break from this general pattern was the use of the term "system" in both North Carolina and Louisiana to stand in place of the many constituent elements comprising public schools – particularly the human elements. Given the reticence of supporters in those states to directly implicate teachers as the cause of student achievement problems, as Floridians had, this may have been a strategy intended to "depersonalize" their policy "stories" in the face of opponents' accusations regarding an "attack" on teachers. Metaphor was, however, a more commonly used device in each case. In particular, supporters across all three states tended to use metaphor in their "stories" to draw comparisons between education and industry, private enterprise, and business.

Finally, supporters in each of the case study states worked to enhance the resonance of their policy “stories” by linking them to deeper cultural symbols and narratives. The nature of these symbols and narratives, however, differed across states. In Florida and North Carolina, for example, there was a stronger tendency for supporters to link their policy “stories” to deeper narratives of progress and reform – often trading upon cultural beliefs in American progressivism and the pioneering spirit of the nation. In Florida, this also manifested in supporters’ efforts to tie their struggle to enact teacher policy reform to the state’s wider history of educational innovation. In Louisiana, some supporters – principally, Governor Bobby Jindal – linked their assertions regarding the urgency of reform to deep cultural narratives surrounding the “American dream”. In doing so, they argued that unless more could be done to ensure that the children of their state could receive effective education at the hands of qualified teachers, then the “dream” was in danger of slipping further away from the next generation of Louisianans.

Like supporters of teacher policy reform, opponents of change to teacher contracting, evaluation and compensation policies in all three states relied on the use of rhetorical strategies to increase the resonance and accessibility of their policy stories. Summaries of the findings from each case study regarding their efforts to do so are presented below, in Table 11.

Table 14. Summary Comparison – Opponents’ Use of Rhetorical Strategies

	Opponents	
Construct	Similarities	Differences
Claiming Legitimacy	<p>Challenged the evidentiary legitimacy of supporters’ arguments by asserting that research did not support their policies.</p> <p>Construed “research” broadly, rarely citing specific studies or findings.</p> <p>Challenged supporters’ arguments regarding the accountability warrant by claiming that reforms would harm teacher morale, retention and recruiting.</p> <p>Attacked the political legitimacy of supporters by claiming that they were more interested in political gain than in the interests of students.</p>	<p>Greater emphasis in North Carolina and Louisiana on undermining the political legitimacy of supporters through the “attack on teachers” narrative.</p>
Rhetorical Tropes	<p>In general, few examples of certain tropes – particularly synecdoche, metonymy and irony – across states.</p>	<p>Opponents in Florida and North Carolina, like supporters, used metaphors to compare education to production and business – although in ways that countered supporters’ narratives.</p>

	Opponents	
Construct	Similarities	Differences
Cultural Symbols/ Narratives	Opponents across all three states linked their policy “stories” to cultural symbols and “master” narratives.	<p>Greater emphasis in Florida and North Carolina on utilizing violent imagery in policy “stories”.</p> <p>Connections to deeper narratives about freedom and control in North Carolina – allusion to McCarthyism, for example.</p> <p>Connection to narratives regarding historical issues in labor and gender relations in Louisiana.</p>

Opponents of teacher policy reform, like their counterparts, sought to claim legitimacy for their own policy “stories”, in addition to undermining the legitimacy of supporters’ narratives. In all three states, for example, opponents attempted to undermine the evidentiary legitimacy of supporters’ arguments by citing their own statistics and “research”. Similarly to supporters, however, their claims were generally unsourced, and “research” was constructed broadly, without reference to specific studies or findings. Relatedly, opponents of reform in all three cases attacked supporters claims regarding the accountability warrant – in general, asserting that reforms to teacher contracting, compensation and evaluation policies were unlikely to lead to the positive outcomes promised by supporters. Opponents in each state frequently asserted, in fact, that reform proposals were more likely to cause harm to the public system – generally by negatively impacting teacher morale, recruitment and retention.

Finally, opponents across all three states made similar claims regarding their counterparts’ political legitimacy, arguing that supporters of reform were far more interested in punishing teachers and their allies for past political slights than they were in meeting

students' needs. In North Carolina and Louisiana, this counter-narrative manifested differently than in Florida, frequently linked with opponents' assertions that supporters of reform were waging an "assault" upon teachers and the public schools – particularly the new Republican legislative majorities in those states.

Like supporters, opponents of teacher policy reforms also utilized rhetorical tropes in order to make their policy "stories" more accessible and resonant with their audiences. Also like supporters, opponents rarely used some of these strategies, and likely for the same reasons; there were few examples or patterns of synecdoche or metonymy evident in the data from the three case study states. They did, however, frequently invoke images and make use of metaphor as they constructed their narratives, much as supporters had. In Florida and North Carolina, opponents took a common tack, adopting the kinds of production and industry-oriented metaphors utilized by supporters, while simultaneously upending them. They argued that the kind of professional structure asserted by supporters was, in fact, out of touch with the realities of work in the private sector – pointing to the complex nature of educational "productivity" and denying its similarity to the factory line, for example, in addition to arguing that the kinds of contracting and compensation reform proposed would undermine the professional integrity of teaching compared to doctors and lawyers. In Louisiana, opponents leaned less on these metaphors, instead attacking the process surrounding teacher policy reform by comparing it to a "war" upon public schools in the state.

Finally, opponents of teacher policy reform in all three states – like supporters – connected their policy "stories" to deeper cultural, national and political narratives to increase their resonance and accessibility. In Florida and North Carolina, this often involved

invoking language which connoted violence – referring to teacher reforms as a “hand grenade”, for example, or referring to teachers driven away from the profession by the “attack” as “casualties”. While there was still a general narrative asserting that teacher reforms represented an attack on teachers in Louisiana, there were far fewer examples of such language in the data drawn from the discourse in the state. Additionally, opponents of reform to teacher contracting, compensation and evaluation policy in North Carolina and Louisiana drew upon a few other cultural narratives as they asserted their arguments. In North Carolina, for example, opponents connected their policy “stories” to deeper narratives regarding freedom and control, raising the specter of historical events like McCarthyism to underscore their points. In Louisiana, some opponents linked their arguments against changes to the profession of teaching to historical narratives regarding labor relations and gender inequities in the state.

Emergent Themes in the Discourse Surrounding Teacher Policy Reform

Looking across these broad similarities and differences in the ways that policy actors used narrative elements and rhetorical strategies as they wove their policy “stories” in Florida, Louisiana and North Carolina, several narrative themes emerge from the discourse. As they debated the merits of reform to teacher evaluation, compensation and contracting policies, for example, supporters wove stories that asserted the importance of progress, the dangers of maintaining the status quo, and the urgency of reform. Similarly, opponents’ narratives frequently invoked the threat of an “attack” upon teachers and public education, and asserted that reforms to the profession would, ultimately, harm teachers and schools. Finally, actors on both sides of the debate wrestled with the nature of schooling and

education – in particular, assertions that, in order to be more efficient and effective, public schools should operate more like private businesses.

Progress vs. the Status Quo and the Urgency of Reform

The first major theme that emerged from the discourse surrounding teacher policy reform – particularly among supporters of reform across the three case study states – centered on the triumph of progress over an ineffective and damaging “status quo”. Within this broad thematic narrative, supporters argued that they were bold reformers, courageously challenging a “broken system” that had been maintained for far too long. Moreover, they asserted, the “status quo” that had so long shaped the profession of teaching and retarded efforts to maximize educational productivity in each state was resilient; as such, nothing less than radical reform could hope to break the stasis preventing progress in the public school system. A member of the *Charlotte Observer’s* editorial staff in North Carolina captured this sentiment in an editorial, arguing that

There are good things taking place in many of our classrooms. Having acknowledged that, there are enough failures to insist on reforms. Educators have nibbled around the edges of reform long enough. New policies and new technologies, coupled with improved and proven learning techniques, are needed to make dramatic gains in education. Let's call a halt to the partisan finger pointing, to blind support for one group over another and, like parents, let us become advocates for the best outcomes for our students. We can do better. We must do better, and it is time adults acted like adults, finding solutions to education shortcomings. The Excellent Public Schools Act may not have all the right answers, but it is worth consideration (North Carolina, 29).

A school board member in Louisiana agreed, noting that the state had no choice but to pursue progress if it hoped to advance the state of its schools. In his testimony before the House, he noted that

[...] we stand between 45th and 48th in our performance. We need to do better. Things need to change. There's only one solution to improving education. That is putting more effective teachers in the classroom. What are the obstacles that we have to this? [...] Our entire system of laws and regulations deal with adult issues. They do not deal with advancing student achievement. The children must come first (Louisiana, 65).

Opponents of teacher policy reforms in each state frequently moved to counter this narrative by asserting that the kind of “progress” sought by supporters of teacher policy reform was, in fact, not progress at all. Instead, in the eyes of opponents, reforms to teacher compensation, contracting and evaluation policies represented a dangerous regression to a time before the hard-fought battles that had resulted in the “status quo” supporters railed against. A retired UNC professor of economics, for example, asserted this argument strongly in a letter to the *News & Observer*. He noted that

A recent report out of Raleigh noted both the State House and Senate are developing bills that would effectively eliminate tenure in the public schools. Can tenure for post-secondary school be similarly endangered? Sadly, yes. This is potentially the worst kind of legislation any state could consider. Public education would be set back over 60 years to fear mongering, politically based dismissals for inappropriate reasons, autocratic control of faculty personal and professional lives, limitations on thought and learning, destruction of scientific learning, biased analysis of important social, political and economic issues. In short, it's a return to Neanderthal McCarthyism (North Carolina, 11).

The President of the Florida Education made a similar point, arguing that S.B. 6 & 36 represented a deconstruction of the progress made by Floridians over nearly half a century of education reform. He asserted that “the Legislature truly just doesn’t care about public schools. The 2010 legislative session turned back the clock to the 1960’s in Florida. They’ve truly just undone everything we’ve accomplished since Reubin Askew was governor” (Florida, 34).

In addition to asserting the broad importance of pursuing progress, supporters of teacher policy reform in each case study state strongly asserted the urgency of reform. Given the tremendous implications that poor student achievement held for each state's economic and social well-being, they argued, and the "moral imperative" of achieving better outcomes for children, breaking the hold of the "status quo" over public schools simply couldn't wait. A Republican representative in Florida, for example, captured this argument when he argued before the House that

The status quo is unacceptable. The status quo is unacceptable. Being a board member of a community college for 27 years, knowing that 70% of the students that show up at community college need remedial – they can't read, write, do arithmetic enough to do first year to do community college...I know that there are many schools that are doing excellently well, and many teachers that are doing excellently well, but there are many that aren't. The status quo is absolutely unacceptable. We need to move forward, we need to continue to improve this particular bill. We need to improve so many things to make it fairer for the students that we have in the public school system (Florida, 72).

A Senator in Louisiana asserted the urgency of the moment even more strongly, claiming that the press for solving the problems plaguing the state's education system left him feeling "desperate":

[...] if we don't do it now, when? When we wait another year, we lose a whole another group of kids. I tell you, I just don't think we can wait anymore. Is the bill perfect? Of course it's not perfect. Does it have problems? Yes, ma'am it's going to have problems. I tell you...we'll find out what the problems are, and we'll fix the problems, but let's get something in place that moves this down the road. I could say, I'm desperate [...] I can't wait to get it out of here, get it in the floor to senate, get it passed, and get it in the state. What doesn't work, I tell you what, we work together and try to fix it where it doesn't work, but I just don't see the status quo. Listen [...] I just can't put up with it anymore, I'm desperate to do something (Louisiana, 69).

Opponents of reform, for their part, argued that supporters' urgent push for reform amounted to little more than a headlong rush into disaster. Even if reform was necessary, they argues, the appropriate way to pursue progress was through measured, iterative policymaking – much along the lines of Lindblom's (1959) conception of “muddling through”. As it stood, opponents across the case study states argued that there were far too many unanswered questions surrounding supporters' proposals – for example, regarding implementation – to be confident in their success. A teacher in Florida, for instance, shared that

I fear this unplanned and unfunded legislation. Exactly how will it be implemented? No one wants "bad" teachers, but is this really the solution to that problem? Assuming that teachers could be evaluated fairly, will they be rated across years of practice, or annually? Can they count on a set income in order to qualify for homes and pay bills? Will teaching now become an exception to other jobs, where education level, years of loyal service and experience directly affect pay levels -- in addition to receiving annual bonuses (perhaps) tied to an evaluation or performance rating? Before the legislature mandates such provisions, shouldn't someone ensure that it is even possible to enact such a plan? Why are they voting to institute statewide implementation of a program that isn't even fully developed in any real detail (Florida, 16).

A fellow teacher in Louisiana agreed, asserting that change to the “status quo” may be necessary, but that “slowing down” the process was important for ensuring that reform would work for all concerned parties:

We are here to try to convince the legislators to simply slow the process down and not ram this bill down our throats. I know there needs to be change in our education system. I know there needs to be change in the tenure laws, but they are trying to pass it so quickly that no one is being given enough time to read it. Slow it down and take a little more time to think about how to make those changes [...] Public school teachers want change, but we don't want something rammed down our throats (Louisiana, 3).

Within the discursive space surrounding the issue of the urgency of reform, the definitions of concepts like progress – and what kinds of policy, exactly, represented “forward” and “backward” movement for states and their schools – were in flux, open to interpretation by policy “storytellers” as they sought to define the “right” side of history in the debate surrounding teacher policy reform. Moreover, as they worked to situate themselves within this space, actors defined themselves and the characters in their stories in ways that countered traditional partisan stereotypes. There was, for example, particular irony in the relative positions of Democratic and Republican legislators within the discourse in each state. Republican politicians – traditionally understood to oppose aggressive governmental action and regulation – found themselves cast in the role of reformers, arguing that they championed change in the name of greater opportunity and outcomes of children. Democrats, on the other hand, frequently found themselves framed in the opposite role, standing with their allies in defense of a “status quo” that largely represented a legacy of policies favored by the party and its political allies.

The Assault on Teachers and Public Education

Another particularly strong theme that emerged from the discourse surrounding teacher policy reform in Florida, North Carolina and Louisiana – largely from the narratives forwarded by opponents – centered on the idea that reforms constituted a damaging attack on public education and the profession of teaching. As they asserted this argument, opponents argued that the policies proposed by bills like The Student Success Act and the Excellent Public Schools Act were little more than an attempt to dismantle the public school system, and to gain vengeance upon teachers by Republican lawmakers for past political slights. As such, they argued, reform was less about improving student outcomes than it was about

disadvantaging teachers and re-shaping the image of public education. A teacher in North Carolina drew upon this argument, for example, taking legislators to task in a letter to her representative, read on the House floor. She lamented that

[...] North Carolina is doing a disservice to everybody involved in educating children. It is unfair to teachers to have a pay freeze for so many years. It tells us that we are not professionals, that we are not valued, and our work is not worth the cost. If we continue to spend our own money on supplies and inflation goes up, and we continue to be asked to meet higher and higher standards, the feeling that comes with it is one of defeat. We feel we are never going to be able to create a life for ourselves that is worthwhile. Who wants to work in a state that is 48th in valuing teachers? Not me. I've decided to cross over state lines, and work in a state that more fairly compensates me for educating their future. Please share my frustrations with your colleagues (North Carolina, 71).

Similarly, a teacher-of-the-year for Miami-Dade schools testified before the Florida House of Representatives that the legislature's "attack" on her profession left little doubt as to their intentions. She asserted that

The true stakeholders and believers in public education are here today; teachers, students and parents to say what we stand for. Our large numbers here today should be a clear indication that this bill will crush public education and everything it stands for. Please tell me where teachers will truly be respected and when public education will be a major priority. This bill only insults the professionalism and the higher education of those who inspire and teach the children of your future, of my future, of Florida's future. Thank you for your time (Florida, 65).

Moreover, opponents argued, the "assault" being waged by supporters of reform promised to inflict significant damage upon the profession of teaching and the public school system. In particular, opponents argued that the proposed changes to contracting, evaluation and compensation policies would drive the "best and brightest" teachers from the fold – an outcome that stood in stark contrast to supporters' arguments that they were primarily interested in ensuring that all students would be taught by high quality teachers. A

Democratic representative in North Carolina, for instance, predicted that passage of the Excellent Public Schools Act would result in the flight of quality teachers from the state; he argued to his colleagues that “Teachers cannot continue to do what they’ve been doing without the compensation. We’re going to lose our best and brightest, because you can go to any state that touches North Carolina and make a higher salary, and be treated better with more respect. I think this is a sad statement about this budget” (North Carolina, 71). A teacher in Florida agreed, sharing her own doubts about the future of her profession should the Student Success Act become law: “What is sad about it is the people that might leave as a result now. I don’t have to be a teacher. None of us do. My fear isn’t for myself but for the other individuals in my boat who might say, ‘enough is enough’” (Florida, 14).

Supporters of teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting policy reforms, unsurprisingly, argued that nothing could be further from the truth. Supporters argued that their interests lay with making the best choices for the schools and children of their states, and that “attacking” teachers – the majority of whom they argued were both effective and essential for student success – was not a part of their agenda. Senator Phil Berger argued this point by pointing out his own proximity to the interests of teachers, sharing that

You know, I am a little disappointed in the characterization of the bill as an attack on teachers...nothing could be further from the truth. What the bill is, is something that hopefully will give our kids a chance. It’s not an attack on teachers. My daughter-in-law is a teacher. I don’t relish the thought that when we have family get-togethers...the characterization that I’m attacking her is something that anyone would take seriously, because it’s not accurate. But the fact of the matter is that the status quo is not acceptable, and if you want defend the status quo, and you want to say everything’s just fine, then I guess you can do that. But what this bill does is it tries to move us away from the status quo (North Carolina, 65).

A member of Louisiana's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education made the argument more concisely, simply arguing before the House that "it's not about being punitive. It's about using the information we have to train and prepare teachers to be the best teachers they can be" (Louisiana, 65).

Not only did supporters of contracting, evaluation and compensation reform assert that they were not, in fact, "attacking" teachers, they also argued that their proposed changes would, in fact, strengthen the profession rather than harm it. The "status quo" system of tenure and salary schedules based upon years in service, they asserted, was the actual cause of poor morale among teachers. By adequately rewarding and celebrating high performers, and cutting loose those who weren't making the grade, supporters argued that they were, in fact, building a stronger teaching profession. An undergraduate student at Florida State University – testifying before the House – made this argument, sharing with the K-20 Competitiveness Subcommittee that

I think that a lot people have talked about being afraid of losing their teachers with this bill, but the point is we're already losing good teachers who aren't even entering the profession. There's no motivation, there's no drive to enter into a field where you know that your work will not earn you rewards. As some of the other teachers have mentioned, if you come in every day, work extra hours day in and day out to improve your students' education, and know that you're going to get paid the same amount as somebody who across the hall is showing yet another video, or doing yet another meeting with worksheet, it doesn't create a sense of professionalism or pride in your work. As I said, it's demoralizing for a teacher to come to work every day and be in this kind of environment (Florida, 69).

In North Carolina, Senator Phil Burger agreed with this sentiment, arguing that

I'm not so sure that you don't already create a morale problem, when you have a situation where you have many teachers who are working hard, who are doing a good job, and you have some who are not pulling their weight and not capable of doing that. And yet their pay is exactly the same because

the only way pay is differentiated is based on years of service or advanced degrees or possibly the National Board Certification (North Carolina, 36).

The discourse surrounding opponents' assertions regarding supporters' "attack" on public school represents a fascinating example of the interaction of a number of the narrative elements and rhetorical strategies outlined above. Within the "assault" narrative articulated by many opponents – as well as supporters' counter-narratives – actors offered dueling characterizations of legislators, policy-makers and teachers, framing them in very different ways as they attempted to assert or undermine claims to political legitimacy and the accountability warrant. More than that, however, the policy "stories" which touched upon the "attack" theme revealed the often deeply personal nature of the issues under debate. The narratives asserted by teachers, particularly, seemed to resonate throughout the discourse, as many expressed their doubts and frustrations in the face of sweeping changes that would alter their livelihoods and insert significant uncertainty into their futures. Similarly, supporters' stories attempted to portray their unwillingness to perpetuate an inefficient and failing system – the repair of which would require a difficult balance between the interests of teachers and students, as well as a willingness to pursue "real" reform after a legacy of ineffective tinkering.

Public Schools and Private Enterprise

Finally, the third theme that bridged the discourse surrounding teacher policy reform across the three case study states centered on the relationship between public education and private enterprise. Supporters of reform to teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting policies in each of the states, by and large, argued strongly that the public school system could stand to learn a substantial amount from private business and enterprise. For a number

of legislators and advocacy groups – particularly representatives of groups like state Chambers of Commerce and other business lobbies – the “status quo” of the teaching profession was simply out of step with realities about motivation, productivity and efficiency that the world of private industry had long understood. A representative for the Associated Industries of Florida, for instance, declared before the Senate Education Committee that

Most Florida employers that we represent pay on performance. If a business produced a product that didn’t perform, it wouldn’t sell well in the market place. If Florida’s education system does not produce a product in the form of a graduate that can read, write and can compute, our state won’t fare well in attracting or retaining the companies in our state. In winning the increasing global competition for jobs. Nor will that ill-prepared student succeed in furthering his or her own education or employment (Florida, 68).

Supporters asserting this narrative expressed a fundamental belief in the power of market forces, competition, and accountability to drive greater outcomes – after all, they argued, in many cases it had brought them success in their own business ventures. As such, they asserted, creating meaningful incentives for teachers – and empowering school leaders to more aggressively manage their own employees – was simply common sense. A school board member in Louisiana articulated this in his arguments before the Senate Education Committee, sharing that

As a business owner, I understand that what it takes to ensure successful outcomes [is] successful employees. Mr. Garvey spoke about accountability, this bill along with the package of bills presented right now during this session on education reform would untie our hands as board members in Jefferson Parish, and allow our superintendent [...] to ensure that we have the best teachers in the classroom (Louisiana, 66).

For their part, many opponents of contracting, evaluation and contracting reform across the state rebelled against the notion that public schools and private businesses were equivalent, and that the practices of the latter could meaningfully improve the former.

Several argued, in fact, that the world of business – with its focus on private gain and competition – was anathema to the true soul of education. One Democratic representative from Florida, for example, pointed to multiple examples of corporate malfeasance and failure as he captured some of the fundamental differences between education and enterprise. He asserted that

Members, many times during this debate, I've heard it said time and time again that we should run government and public schools like a business, but I haven't heard what businesses. Enron? AIG? The ones bailed out by taxpayers? Those that make defective products? Those that import cheap, unsafe products made in China by children in sweatshops? Or one of the businesses that files for bankruptcy each and every day? What business? I don't know, but what I do know is this: public schools, they're not businesses, and the kids, they're not widgets or products (Florida, 72).

Diane Ravitch, weighing in on the Excellent Public Schools Act in North Carolina, was less sanguine in her opinion of the encroachment of private sector values on public schooling. She captured the distrust that a number of opponents expressed regarding the motives of supporters, and the market philosophies they espoused, stating that the legislature's push for reform was simply "[...] an effort to turn public education into a profit-making venture, and it won't be to the profit of the children" (North Carolina, 35).

As with the other thematic narratives described above, supporters' and opponents' assertions regarding the relationship between public schools and private enterprise show how some of the narrative elements and rhetorical strategies described earlier in the chapter interacted. In particular, this theme exemplifies some of the interplay between the causal narratives constructed by "storytellers" and their efforts to both connect to potent metaphors and to claim legitimacy. For supporters, their belief in a relatively simple causal process underlying teaching and learning – in which teachers had significant control over the output

of their labor – tightly aligned with their understandings regarding the nature of production and labor in the private sector. Given the similarity between the two processes, industrial practices like paying laborers – in this case, teachers – for increasing their output and effort made intrinsic sense and, at least in the eyes of supporters, were likely to drive the outcomes that they desired. Further, as they argued for a more “business-like” approach to schooling, supporters invoked metaphors and symbols that tapped into deeper national and cultural narratives regarding private enterprise and capitalism.

Opponents, on the other hand, asserted a far more complex causal narrative regarding student learning – one that, they argued, was simply incompatible with the industrial mentality possessed by supporters. Given the fundamental differences between teaching a student Algebra and, for example, making blueberry ice cream, the kinds of strategies employed in the private sector were unlikely to achieve the same success in the world of public education. Moreover, many opponents argued, the values of the free market and private industry were simply not the same as in education; for many, the idea of steeping schools in a culture of competition, conformity and ruthless efficiency ran counter to what they felt that schools were supposed to be.

Implications, Limitations and Concluding Thoughts

As we have seen, the discourse surrounding teacher compensation, evaluation and contracting reform in Florida, Louisiana, and North Carolina was a significant moment in the evolution of education policy for each state. Within those moments – ushered in, as Baumgartner & Jones (1991) and Kingdon (1994) indicate, by moments of perturbation in each state’s political and policy equilibria – numerous actors from a variety of walks of life came together to debate the merits of proposals to radically restructure policies governing the

teaching profession. This study's analysis of that debate – through examination of numerous hours of recorded testimony from each state legislature, as well as articles, letters to the editor, and editorial contributions published by each state's print media – answers the research questions proposed in the first chapter of this work. Further, these findings point toward broad implications regarding our understanding of policy “stories”, and indicate avenues for future inquiry in the field.

A Summary Review of Answers to Research Questions

First, examination of the findings from all three case studies indicates that actors engaging in the discourse surrounding teacher policy reforms exemplified Walter Fisher's (1984) conception of *homo narrans* – actors who engaged in communication through employment of a narrative paradigm of communication through which they constructed “stories” allowing them to “establish a meaningful life-world” for both themselves, and their audience (p. 6). In each case, actors used these “stories” to create accessible and meaningful narratives “meant to give order to human experience and to induce others to dwell in them to establish ways of living in common [...]” – in other words, to build a shared conception for how the future of their states should be constructed (Fisher, 1984, p. 6). That constructed “life-world” served to convey and support their assertions regarding the nature of the policy problem at hand in each state, the nature of the process and actors surrounding that problem, and the legitimacy of their proposals for moving forward.

The first research question of this study queried the nature of the policy “stories” that emerged from the discourse surrounding teacher policy reforms in each state. Examination of the commonalities in these narratives across cases indicates two broad “stories” which emerged from the multitude of individual stories captured in the data. These are, of course,

generalized and – as discussed in previous chapters – vary between cases. Broadly speaking, however, actors rising in support of teacher policy reforms in each state constructed a policy “story” that situated poor student performance as a severe and pressing problem, which presented numerous economic, social and even moral dilemmas for each state. The key to fixing this problem, according to supporters, lay with replacing “antiquated” and “broken” systems for holding teachers accountable, incentivizing their work, and – if necessary – eliminating those who weren’t producing student outcomes. This solution rested on a fundamental understanding that it was, in fact, teachers’ efforts within the classroom that were the primary causal driver motivating student outcomes. While supporters acknowledged that the majority of teachers were effective in their work – and that they should be celebrated and rewarded - their proposals targeted the minority of ineffective teachers who simply weren’t motivating the kinds of student outcomes that they should. Given their tremendous influence in the process of producing student achievement, addressing the issue that these teachers – and the professional structure surrounding them – presented was, to supporters, the pivotal means by which each state’s problems with public schooling could be solved.

Opponents of changes to teacher contracting, evaluation and compensation policies, on the other hand, constructed a very different “story” as they debated the issue in their states – one which largely served as a counter to the narrative forwarded by supporters. Their “story” asserted that attempting to “target” teachers as a means for improving student outcomes was likely a losing proposition. They supported this argument by framing a narrative which envisioned the process of teaching, learning, and production of student outcomes as an inherently complex affair in which numerous factors played a role in determining students’ success. While teachers were a part of this process, holding them

solely accountable – and making decisions regarding their jobs and livelihoods – based upon the outcomes of a process that they had only a modicum of control over was, according to opponents, unfair and unlikely to be effective. Instead, they argued, doing so would likely harm teachers’ already shaken morale, lead to unintended negative consequences within the public schools, and generate largely negative outcomes for each state. Ultimately, they asserted, the current wave of “reform” proposed in each state amounted to little more than an “attack” on public school teachers and public education as an institution.

The second major research question of the study centered on the kinds of understandings regarding education, schooling and the profession of teaching revealed by actors’ policy “stories”. First, supporters’ stories, as described previously, revealed an understanding of the process of education and learning that was teacher-centric, and – based upon the numerous connections to business, private enterprise and production that they utilized – largely analogous to a simple production function through which teachers “manufactured” student outcomes. Second, supporters’ narratives indicate that their perception of the profession of teaching – and the structure governing it in each state – was that it was largely removed from the kind of accountability and competitive drive that marked efficiency and effectiveness in the private sector. Key to modernizing this “antiquated” structure would be ensuring that states were capable of identifying the most productive teachers, rewarding them, and censuring those that fell behind their peers. Taken together, these threads indicate that supporters’ “stories” were very much founded in a neo-liberal, production-focused “life-world”, wherein attaining optimum efficiency within the productive process of learning was pivotal to solving the states’ problems with student achievement. Doing so would require the creation of a new “modernized” structure

surrounding the profession of teaching in each state which motivated teachers to maximize their productive efforts.

Opponents' narratives from each state reveal, unsurprisingly, very different understandings regarding teaching, learning, and education. Opponents' stories focused on a much more complex understanding of the educative process, in which teachers were only one of a myriad of factors determining whether and how a student learned – many of which were beyond the control of teachers themselves. Moreover, they frequently asserted that teachers work within this complex process was far more varied than accounted for in supporters' conceptions of the productive process of the classroom – several opponents argued that teachers in the public system operated, for example, as surrogate parents as often as they did instructors. Further, this understanding of how teaching “worked” seemed to fuel very different understandings regarding the role of the professional structure of teaching. For opponents, standing teacher contracting, evaluation and compensation policies reflected important protections for teachers – who engaged in complex, difficult to evaluate, and often deeply personal work – against capricious dismissal and historically unfair pay practices; moreover, these protections had been hard won over long periods of time. Given this perspective on teaching – in which teachers were simply one “cog” in the learning machine – and the protective role of many aspects of the legal structure of teaching, many opponents asserted that efforts to change the system amounted to an unfair targeting of teachers, and a potentially damaging “assault” upon their profession.

Finally, the third research question explored by this study interrogated the similarities and differences in actors' policy “stories” across case study states. As the comparison of findings presented above indicates, the analysis carried out in this study answers a portion of

this research question. Within case study states, the findings presented throughout the study show the similarities and differences in the policy “stories” constructed by *supporters* and *opponents* of teacher policy reform. In each case, for example, the ways in which supporters and opponents, as aggregate groups, framed characters and defined problems are described and compared. The analysis does not, however, disaggregate these groups in a systematic way – comparing, for instance, the “stories” composed by teachers to those composed by legislators within each state. This limitation of the study will be discussed in more detail under *implications and limitations*, below.

With regard to variability between states, findings do indicate that there were differences in the broad narratives that emerged from each case. There were differences in the ways that supporters characterized teachers in Florida, for example, when compared to Louisiana and North Carolina. While the findings from this study are limited in their ability to identify exactly why these differences in actors policy “stories” developed between states, they do support the idea that differences in state contexts – for example, in political culture or power relationships – likely have some impact on the kinds of narratives that may emerge.

Implications, Limitations, and Ways Forward

The answers to the research questions posed by this study – and the findings from which they are derived – hold some broad implications for our understanding regarding policy “stories”, the ways in which they are constructed, and their role in the policy process. First, while the data used to construct these cases do not support conclusions regarding the relative impact that supporters’ or opponents’ stories may have played in the decision to adopt teacher policy reforms in each case, they do definitively show that actors used “stories” to forward their arguments and to support their chosen positions within the debate. Second,

the evidence revealed in each case supports the conceptual model of the policy “story” introduced in Chapter 2 of this study, and affords some limited ability to hypothesize why those narratives that apparently triumphed were so effective. Finally, the policy “stories” described in the previous chapters reveal a set of narratives that may be becoming dominant across the three case study states, holding significant implications regarding the types of teacher policies that may be pursued in each context moving forward. It should be noted, however, that these implications are tempered by the limitations presented by the research design and data used to build the case studies presented in this work.

First, as authors like Edelman (1985), Fischer (2003), Stone (2002), and others have argued in the past, findings from this study reveal that policy “stories” do, indeed, play a role in the policy process. In the cases of Louisiana and North Carolina, for example, these findings showcase the ways in which perturbations in the conditions within policy “venues”, and the nature of the policy narratives defining issues within those venues, are linked – as Baumgartner & Jones (1991) argue. As the political equilibrium in each of the states shifted, and new Republican majorities took control of their respective state legislatures, they brought with them their own “stories” regarding teacher policy reform. Within this moment of “punctuation”, formerly marginalized narratives – or policy “images”, as Baumgartner & Jones (1991) term them – may have gained newfound vitality, in addition to entirely novel “stories” entering the discursive space within each state. This interaction between policy “venues” and the “images” which come to dominate them is, Baumgartner & Jones (1991) argue, consequential. Barring further alteration to the players within the venues with jurisdiction over teacher contracting, compensation, and evaluation in each state – in this case, the state legislatures– the “images” surrounding teacher policy that have become

dominant in North Carolina and Louisiana will likely shape their new equilibriums. Facing a potentially inhospitable audience within the legislative branch, actors seeking to change in the future direction of teacher policy may be forced to push on jurisdictional boundaries as they search for more a more amenable venue – potentially, for example, challenging teacher reform policies in the courts, as opponents in both states have done following their adoption.

Similarly, findings in each of the state cases support Kingdon's (1994) assertion that policy actors use narratives to facilitate the opening of policy windows – defining problems and linking them to solutions through the construction of evocative “stories”. In the case of supporters, a wide variety of actors across the three states – including legislators and advocacy groups – constructed policy “stories” which highlighted the clear connection between teachers' actions and their students' outcomes. In Florida, supporters went even further, framing a minority of ineffective teachers as antagonistic actors who were clearly deserving of greater accountability and consequences for their failure to promote student achievement. In North Carolina and Louisiana, this targeting of teachers was less direct, with supporters instead focusing on a “broken system” which perpetuated mediocrity within public schools. Despite these differences, both “stories” framed policy action targeting the behavior of teachers, through alterations to the professional structure surrounding them, as a “common sense” way to address the problem of deficient student performance. Opponents, on the other hand, constructed counter-“stories” which sought to complicate supporters' more direct causal narratives, re-frame teachers as undeserving of blame for poor student outcomes, and undermine supporters' assertions regarding the severity and saliency of the achievement problem. These counter-narratives, as Stone (2002) argues, sought to fracture

the logical basis of supporters' arguments, and to push teacher contracting, compensation and evaluation reform back out of the realm of "common sense".

For researchers, these findings indicate that charting the "stories" underlying the policies forwarded by actors is, likely, an important facet of understanding the development of policy solutions and the process of policy change. Understanding the prevailing "images" defining the venues in which change processes are occurring, for example, may yield significant potential for predicting the kinds of policy solutions that the players within those venues will pursue. For policymakers and other policy actors, these findings indicate that constructing particularly powerful and evocative narratives may play an important role in shaping the conceptions that participants in the decision-making process hold regarding the problems, characters and solutions at hand. In particular, the findings from each case study state support previous assertions that the construction of policy "stories" with easily identified "protagonists", "antagonists" and "victims" – and clear causal narratives linking them to well-defined problems – likely provides powerful support for policy action.

Given the understanding that – at least in these three states – policy "stories" appear to have played a significant role in the shape and nature of the discourse at the heart of the policy change, understanding their relative influence in determining policy actors' decision to adopt policy would be an interesting and productive path for future research. Additional studies, for example, could explore the importance of policy "stories" through direct interaction with participants – interviewing policy actors, for example, as authors like Cohen-Vogel et. al. (2008) have in the past. Such interviews might explore the ways that various narratives may have swayed actors' decision-making processes, and evaluate the relative

importance that various “stories” emerging from the discourse had in the outcome of the process.

Second, findings from each of the case study states support the conceptual model of the policy “story” forwarded in Chapter 2 of this study. This model envisions policy “stories” as a combination of constituent *narrative elements* – including *characters, problem definitions, and causal narratives* – and supportive *rhetorical strategies*, including making various claims of legitimacy, invoking connections to deeper cultural and national narratives, and using rhetorical tropes like metaphor. In each of the states, for example, evidence indicates that supporters of teacher policy reform linked teachers – the majority of whom were framed as protagonists, with a minority framed in a less positive light – to deficits in student achievement through a causal narrative which positioned them as the pivotal driver of student outcomes in the classroom. Further, they worked to build the resonance and accessibility of this narrative by invoking rhetorical strategies – leveraging metaphors of business and the private sector, for example, or claiming that “research” supported their assertions. Finally, as they brought their stories forward, supporters tended to avoid direct engagement with their counterparts, and largely ignored counter-narratives or disconfirming evidence within the debate – generally holding with Riker’s (1986) conceptualization of *heresthetic*. These elements of the general “supporter” narrative are merged with the broader conceptual model which guided the analysis presented in this dissertation – introduced in Chapter 2 – for demonstrative purposes in Figure 2, below.

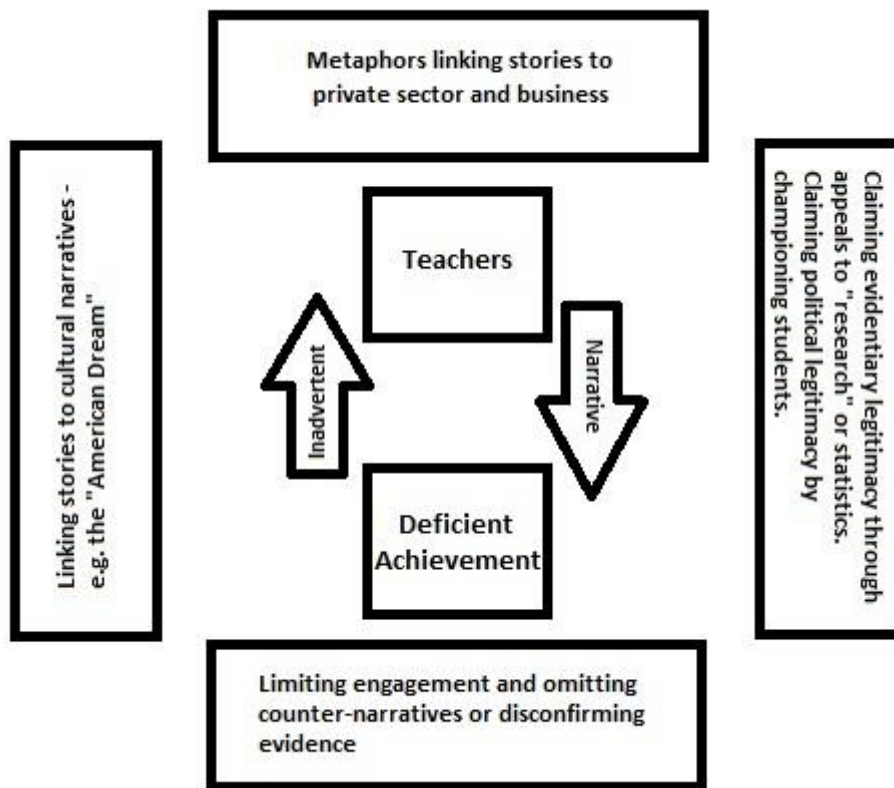


Figure 2. *Graphical Representation of Supporters' Policy Narrative*

Given the support for this understanding of the construction of policy “stories” evidenced by the findings from Florida, Louisiana, and North Carolina, future research pursuing this line of inquiry may benefit from attending to both parts of this model – investigating both the frames employed by narrators, and the ways in which they support their narrative constructions by bolstering their accessibility, fidelity and resonance. For policy-actors, these findings seem to support the notion that a key component of forging an effective policy “story” lies with careful consideration of both its content and its construction.

It should, however, be noted that a key limitation of the study related to the implications framed above lies with the relatively limited sampling of the discourse

surrounding teacher policy reform analyzed in each case study state. While the legislative testimony and print media artifacts captured in each case provides a rich body of discourse for analysis, it does not represent the universe of discursive forms that may have played a role in the process surrounding teacher policy reforms across states. I did not, for example, capture the whole text of prepared speeches, press releases, or other interactions like televised interviews with policy actors – all forms of discourse which may have favored the use of different rhetorical strategies, including linguistic devices like metonymy and synecdoche, as actors worked to support the construction of their policy “stories”. Future research surrounding the role of policy “stories” should, as such, pay careful attention to capturing a wide variety of discursive artifacts, in order to more fully explore the ways in which policy actors employ rhetorical strategies in their narratives.

Finally, similarities in supporters’ and opponents’ narratives emerging from each case indicate a broad pattern in the kinds of narratives that appear to be taking hold – at least in these three states. As noted above, these center on a teacher-centric, neo-liberal conception of how teaching, learning, and schooling operate – in the case of supporters – as well as a counter-narrative which positions education as a far more complex process, dependent upon a number of internal and external factors. This pattern could be predictive of the kinds of education policies that emerge in these three states moving forward, barring further significant perturbations in each context – for example, significant political shifts.

While the data analyzed in this study cannot definitively support such a conclusion, they do indicate that these stories appear to have shaped the perceptions of a number of actors in each case. An important limitation of this finding, of course, lies with the potentially limited subset of “stories” captured within the data used to construct these case studies.

While the legislative meetings, floor debates and print media artifacts that were analyzed do capture a wide variety of stakeholders in each state, it is likely that some important actors and their stories – in particular, those with limited access to such venues – may have been excluded from the analysis. Additionally, one participant group in particular was noticeable absent from much of the discourse explored by this study – students. With the exception of a handful of students who testified in the Florida legislature, students were absent from the venues in which the data for the study were collected – creating a potentially important silence within the discourse.

To address this limitation, future work should build upon the cases presented here by explicitly identifying those stakeholders that may be underrepresented in the decision process surrounding teacher policy reform, and exploring the policy “stories” that they contribute to the policy discourse. In the case of students, especially, this may require very different data collection methods – likely the use of direct participant interaction, given the significant systemic barriers preventing most students from taking part in the “official” policy discourse. In addition, further research might investigate future moments of policy change in order to understand whether these broad narratives recur, whether they recur despite shifts in the political makeup of the contexts in which they are being debated, and if the policies involved in those future processes appear to be shaped by the particular understandings regarding education asserted by these policy “stories”. Moreover, additional studies should endeavor to apply the methods and framework utilized by this work to new contexts, in order to understand whether or not the findings from Louisiana, Florida and North Carolina hold for different states, and the ways that the policy “stories” constructed by different actors, in different contexts, may vary.

Finally, a few additional limitations of this study should be addressed. First, as previously noted, the analysis conducted in each state only partially explored the variability in policy “stories” *within* each context. While the findings presented here do address the different narratives constructed by supporters and opponents of teacher policy reform as aggregate groups in each state, they do not explore the ways in which teachers’ “stories”, for example, differed from legislators’ in each context. Further, participants’ “stories” within these groups may also differ from one another – it is conceivable, for instance, that teachers on different “sides” of the debate might construct very different narratives. Given that there may be important differences in the nature of the policy “stories” constructed by participants in these finer-grained categories, future work should explore these data with a greater emphasis on unpacking within-state variability.

Second, the findings presented in the preceding case studies do not address the evolution of the discourse in each state over time. As the contexts of each state changed over the course of the debate, it is possible that the policy “stories” constructed by participants may have changed systematically, as well. In addition, the ebb and flow of participants over time may have also impacted the nature of the discourse in each case. Future research might use these data to explore both of these phenomena – charting which policy “stories” entered or exited the discourse in each state over time, for example, and the contextual factors contributing to such movement. A future study might also employ methods like network analysis to examine the relationships between different actors in each state and the ways the policy “stories” around teacher policy reform may have spread between them over time.

To conclude, these limitations do place important constraints upon the conclusions we can draw from this study, including inferences regarding the importance of the policy

“stories” described in each state context in determining whether or not teacher compensation, contracting and evaluation reform was adopted. This is particularly true given that there were a number of other factors in each context – for example, the relative power of the newly dominant Republican caucuses in each state – which likely played a significant role in the success of teacher policy reform. That said, the findings described in each case support the assertion that policy narratives play some role – and likely an important one – in the policy process. Even in those states where supporters enjoyed considerable, long-standing control over state government, like Florida, where it is reasonable to hypothesize that there was little need to convince policy actors of the need for reform, evidence indicates that supporters still felt the need to construct detailed policy “stories” to assert their perspectives, frame the logic behind their proposals, and articulate a vision for the reality they hoped to construct through policy action.

Moreover, the evidence regarding the kinds of “stories” that the victors in each case told supports previous research – by authors like Fischer (2003), Kingdon (1994) and Stone (2002) – indicating that those actors able to construct resonant, accessible “stories”, establishing clear linkages between actors, problems and potential solutions, may be more likely to propel their issues onto the policy agenda and win support for their chosen solutions. In the case of Florida, for example, supporters constructed policy “stories” which linked clear “antagonists” – in this case, a minority of ineffective teachers – to the problem of deficient student achievement through a relatively direct causal narrative. Moreover, they framed the problem of student achievement as both salient and significant, linking it to wider social and economic problems within the state and identifying a sympathetic victim in Florida’s students. Finally, supporters enhanced their narrative by making it more accessible, through

the use of metaphors comparing education to more straightforward processes of business and production, and resonant, by tying their “stories” to broader narratives regarding Florida’s history as an education reformer. As this example indicates, the conceptual framework forwarded by this study for understanding the construction of such narratives – pairing *narrative elements* with *rhetorical strategies* – may hold significant utility for actors seeking to understand how to construct evocative policy “stories”.

Ultimately, as with all research, this study answers some questions, while leaving still others in its wake. Questions still remain regarding the nature and sources of the policy “stories” described in each of the presented cases, for example. Were these “stories” representative of all the policy narratives surrounding this particular issue, or did others reside in venues existing outside of those captured in these data? Where did these policy “stories” originate – with the actors evoking them, or with other parties? Were the “stories” captured in each context native to that state, or did they travel from other contexts – and if so, with whom? Future work seeking to answer these questions, as noted previously in the chapter, might seek to explore this discourse among new participants and venues – particularly those systematically excluded by the cases presented here. Exploring electronic “venues”, like blogs or social media, with significantly lower boundaries for entry might provide substantially wider access to new “stories” surrounding teacher policy reform, for instance. Other work might also utilize substantially different methods, like network analysis, to link policy “storytellers” to each other, as well as state contexts, and track their movement over time.

Similarly, while the findings presented here provide a broad understanding of the kinds of policy “stories” that emerged within each state context, it does not systematically

explore the ways in which those “stories” evolved and changed throughout the course of the tumultuous policy processes in which they emerged. For example, were the “stories” captured in this study constant, or did they evolve in response to stimuli within the policy environment? Did some “stories” move in and out of the discursive space over time and, if so, what prompted such movement? Future work unpacking each case in more detail and linking changes in narratives to “milestones” in the process surrounding teacher policy reform in each state – for example, the emergence of “Moral Mondays” in North Carolina – might explore these questions more fully.

Finally, as previously noted, a number of questions still remain regarding the relative impact that policy “stories” in each case had upon the processes in which they emerged. Was the adoption of teacher compensation, contracting, and evaluation reform in each state “fait accompli”, for example, or did supporters’ narratives play a significant role in influencing the decision-making process? What role did the policy narratives play in teacher policy reform rising to the decision-making agenda in the first place? Did policy actors use their “stories” to highlight the problem of deficient student achievement, and push it as a major agenda item, or were the “stories” captured in this work simply tools pulled out by policy actors in response to the agenda they were faced with?

Future work might explore the policy discourse in each state outside of the processes focused upon here – for example, analyzing the campaign rhetoric used by elected officials like governors and legislators prior to the emergence of the legislation targeted by this study – in order to explore the role of these policy narratives in agenda setting. Similarly, future work expanding on this study might employ more direct participant interaction, using methods like interviewing and focus grouping to poll participants in each context, in order to

help unpack the impact that the “stories” described in each case had on their decision to move toward adopting teacher contracting, evaluation and compensation reforms. Finally, further studies exploring the policy “stories” surrounding teacher policy reform should consider ways to better ascertain their relative power – comparing, for example, the “stories” constructed in states where reforms were adopted with similar counter-factual states, where reforms were proposed and did not pass – or where they failed to achieve agenda status at all. Examination of such counter-factual states may identify other factors within the policy environment that matter more than even well constructed narratives, or other narratives that were more efficacious in framing the debate than those constructed by supporters in the cases presented here.

Appendix A

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69	Senate: Education Committee Meeting. 2012, March 29.
70	Senate: Education Committee Meeting. 2012, April 02.
71	Senate: Floor Debate. 2012, April 04.
72	House of Representatives: Floor Debate. 2012, April 05.

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