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DISSERTATION

THE EXPERIENCE OF HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS WITH
A ZERO TOLERANCE FOR FIGHTING POLICY

Submitted by

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School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Spring 2001

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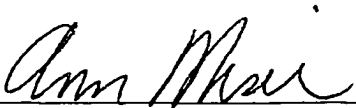
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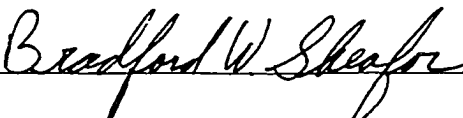
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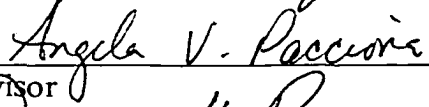
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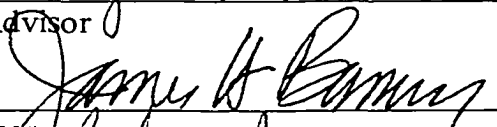
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EXPERIENCE OF HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS WITH A ZERO TOLERANCE FOR
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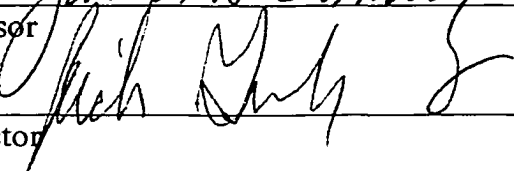
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

THE EXPERIENCE OF HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS WITH
A ZERO TOLERANCE FOR FIGHTING POLICY

Violence has become news in the nation's public schools, touching rural and suburban schools as well as those in the inner city. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the experiences of high school teachers with a zero tolerance for fighting policy. In-depth individual interviews were conducted with eleven teachers from a south Louisiana high school. Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed in an attempt to capture as closely as possible the essence and meaning of each participant's story. The phenomenological research method was used to analyze data gathered in participant interviews and to assist in identification of elements of participant experience.

Analysis of data resulted in six themes. The following themes were found to be included in the experience of the high school teachers with a zero tolerance for fighting policy: (1) Here's the policy; now enforce it, (2) Divided we stand, (3) There are fewer fights, aren't there? (4) Consistency and fairness, (5) School climate, and (6) Should we mend the policy or just end the policy? Elements of each theme were described in detail through presentation of descriptive data collected in the interviews.

The elements that emerged from this phenomenological investigation present a clear, yet varied, picture of what the teachers in this study have experienced in regard to the zero tolerance for fighting policy. As many school districts consider zero tolerance policies as a disciplinary intervention, it is imperative that school leaders be aware of the implications and ramifications relating to teachers surrounding the implementation of such policies. Suggestions and recommendations intended to assist school districts examining zero tolerance policies are provided.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3: 5,6

First, and foremost, I acknowledge and thank the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for guiding me to this point in my life. I realize that all my strength comes from Him.

I would like to express my gratitude to my committee, Dr. James Banning, Dr. Angela Paccione, Dr. Ann Miser and Dr. Brad Shaefer, for their constant support and invaluable feedback. I am especially grateful to Dr. Banning, my advisor, for sharing his knowledge and expertise in the area of qualitative research. Thank you for reminding us that there are “multiple realities” in this world and encouraging your students to explore them.

I must also thank my family for their prayers, support, and encouragement throughout this process. My mother, Ruby G. Ray, has been a wonderful mother and father, the rock of our family. In addition to instilling a belief in myself, she teaches and has lived the importance and value of education. My brother, Edwin Kent Ray, always believed in me, listened to me and encouraged me. Thank you both for all you do.

Thank you to my lifelong friends – Connie, Kristy, Linzette, Monica, Sharon, Sharman, and Chetna, thanks for being sisters and true friends, regardless of how many miles separate us.

I am also thankful for the friends I have made while in Fort Collins. Abul and Ruby, thanks for not only being my friends, but my family as well. Understanding my homesickness, you opened your home to me countless times. The two of you always reminded me that I was never alone in this endeavor. Kent, thanks for encouraging me to consider Colorado State. It was one of the best decisions I have ever made. I never will forget the tears and laughter we shared. Chance, thanks for the advice and insights that you provided. Sharing your experiences helped to make the transition into the doctoral program much smoother than it could have been. JoLynn, thanks for being you. I cannot imagine what the program would have been like without you. I feel blessed to have shared such a significant part of my educational career with you. I am happy that we were able to share our struggles and successes. Darren, you helped me keep my life balanced. If it were not for you, I would not have enjoyed Colorado as much as I did.

Also, I would like to acknowledge the faculty of Southern University. Thanks for reminding your students that someone must be prepared to take your places if our Historically Black Colleges and Universities are to survive. I am especially indebted to Dr. Milton Kleinpeter. Thank you for encouraging me to “expand my horizons” and reminding me that one must leave home to come home.

Finally, I would like to thank the superintendent, principal, and teachers who supported and participated in this study. I appreciate your commitment, time, and openness.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my family members who have passed on to the next life. Unfortunately, my father, Robert I. Ray, paternal grandmother, Ruth McFadden Ray, and grandfathers, John B. Guidry and Irvin R. Ray did not see me grow into an adult. However, I feel their impact on my life through those who knew them. To Grandmother, Louise Chevis Guidry, words cannot express what you will always mean to me. I am who I am because of you.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The safest havens for children should be their schools. A safe school is one in which children have no fear for their physical, psychological, or emotional safety. Students, teachers, administrators, and staff should not be harmed or injured by words, intentions, or actions of others.

The issue of school safety has always been a fundamental concern to the public and to educators. Although schools remain among the safest places in society for children, concerns about school safety have increased, particularly over the last decade. Sadly, excessive violence in society has crept into today's schools.

Especially shocking is a new form of random, senseless school violence. During 1997 and 1998, eleven people were killed in school shooting crimes in Mississippi, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Arkansas, and Oregon. In 1999 fifteen people tragically died in a Littleton, Colorado school. In February of 2000, a six-year-old boy allegedly shot and killed a first grade classmate in Michigan. And, yet another school shooting occurred in March of 2001 in Santee, California. These were all terrible incidents in which troubled students killed teachers and other students within their own schools. The killings were brutal, shocking, and without provocation.

Citizens and educators across America are seeking understanding of the cause of these terrible acts and strategic sense of how similar instances can be prevented in the future. In Louisiana, like many other states, these violent incidents have elevated the

need for safe, violence-free schools to a higher priority and have generated a greater sense of urgency about addressing the problem.

Background of the Study

In 1997, Louisiana Superintendent of Education Cecil J. Picard assembled a task force of students, teachers, principals, supervisors, superintendents, school board members, parents, law enforcement representatives, corrections officers, district attorneys, municipal officers, and others interested in school safety and concerned about school violence (Louisiana Department of Education, 1997). They were instructed to review existing plans, programs, and funding sources related to safe schools and to create a tactical plan for violence prevention. Among the task force's recommendations to address these concerns was for school districts to consider designing or adopting zero tolerance policies for violent behavior.

School districts were told that such policies could be achieved through a new design process. Policies could also be adopted and modified from several exemplary existing models in order to suit the particular needs of the system, school, and community. If a policy was already in existence, decision-makers of the districts were told to conduct careful reviews (Louisiana Department of Education, 1997).

As a result of this state initiative, Southland Parish's Zero Tolerance for Fighting Policy went into effect. This policy was approved by school board members and was implemented for the 1997-1998 school year. The stated goal of this anti-violence policy is simply to make school a safer place for learning (Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook & Discipline Policy, 1999).

The Zero Tolerance Violence Prevention Program

The following is the procedure that is to be followed when the principal or designee has established that a physical fight has taken place. This procedure printed in the Student Handbook (2000).

1. The law enforcement officials usually will not be called to break up a fight. They will be called once the situation is under control and it is evident that a physical fight has occurred.
2. In the event of an arrest, all procedures of the appropriate law enforcement agency will be followed including handcuffing inside the building.
3. The school will conduct its own investigation; school and parish rules and regulations regarding suspensions and expulsions will be enforced.
4. If there is a disagreement among the students involved, the law enforcement officials will conduct an investigation including taking depositions from witnesses.
5. The bond for disturbing the peace by fighting on campus, at extra-curricular activities, on school buses, or at the school bus stop will be \$250. This bond has been pre-set by judges. Parents will be required to post a cash or surety bond.
6. As a special condition of the bond, each person arrested will be required to pay \$25 to attend conflict resolution sessions. Repeat offenders will be required to pay \$50. The school board, to defray program expenses related to the guidance counselor and the resource officer, would retain this money. Conflict resolution sessions will take place in the parish courthouse for two Saturdays following the arrest. The facilitator of the sessions will be school personnel specifically trained in conflict resolution. Sessions will be two hours long. Parents will be required to attend and participate in the final session so that children may discuss the solution reached and possible referrals to other sources.
7. The facilitator of the conflict resolution, with concurrence of the District Attorney, will determine which cases will be referred to the court and

which will be dismissed. The following disposition could be reached:

- a. Case dismissed. Bond refunded.
 - b. Case dismissed. Bond or portion thereof paid as restitution to school board for actual damages caused by fighting.
 - c. Case accepted for pre-trial intervention. Fighter ordered to one or more days of after school supervision, during which time the student would be required to perform various school improvement projects under the supervision of school personnel. Criminal charges refused.
 - d. Case referred to court for hearing on criminal charges at least three weeks after charge. Sentenced by judge as in any other case including, but not limited to, detention in a juvenile facility, community service, counseling, payment of restitution to victims and to school, fines, etc.
8. Each of the student aggressors will be suspended and/or expelled from school. The suspension or expulsion is appealable according to established school board policies. Law enforcement procedures are not subject to appeal through the school board.

Violence in Schools

In the 1980s, school safety and violence discussions were largely relegated to the rise of violence in urban public schools. Gangs or the lack of family influence were often the topics of educators' conversations. Early solution attempts included a variety of psychological, economical, and sociological components such as the introduction of adult mentors and tougher juvenile crime laws. Developing prevention and intervention plans became a part of daily school life for many school principals. Even in the face of other

concerns, such as classroom overcrowding, budget cuts, and growing public demand for accountability, principals struggled to achieve and maintain safe school environments (Blair, 1999).

Nearly two decades later, school violence has a new face. What is seen in today's society is a rise in violence, particularly assault, in suburban schools and communities. In some states, the juvenile justice system has been given greater authority in dealing with youth offenders. There also has been a corresponding movement to adopt tougher juvenile laws. Zero tolerance grew from this concern for school safety, an issue that surveys have shown to be the number one school concern of both parents and adults without children (Blair, 1999).

Student discipline and behavior management entered a new era in 1994 when the federal government passed PL 103-382, tagged the Gun-Free Schools Act. This law mandated expulsion of one calendar year for possession of a weapon and referral of students who violate the law to the criminal or juvenile system (Skiba & Peterson, 1998). Prior to this time state legislatures were not nearly so specific with regard to student discipline and control and generally decreed it to be a local issue. The most common law on the books was a general requirement that local boards have in place a policy on discipline, suspensions, and expulsions. The federal legislation made the eligibility for Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) funds contingent on a state's enacting a "zero tolerance" law with the goal of producing "gun-free" schools (Pipho, 1998).

Trend of Zero Tolerance

While a few states had zero tolerance laws before the federal legislation was enacted, most states used ESEA to strengthen and add new state laws. Many states later amended the established policy of zero tolerance to include possession of drugs and alcohol, as well as a number of other objectionable behaviors (Blair, 1999). The zero tolerance laws adopted by the states, and the interpretations of those laws, have not been uniform. In some states, school administrators lack clear guidelines for zero tolerance expectations and for some situations where they are permitted to use their best judgment (Pipho, 1998).

Zero tolerance has had its share of supporters and detractors. Supporters point to the need for tough laws to bring a sense of order to America's schools. Opponents point to the inflexibility of most zero tolerance statutes, which work against administering disciplinary sanctions that are consistent with existing school policy. Regardless of one's position, inconsistencies in the application of zero tolerance laws in many states are quite telling. According to 1997 Department of Education statistics, only 31% of students caught with guns on school property were expelled in 1995-96. Fewer than half were suspended for more than five days and fewer than 20% were referred to alternative school programs to meet their needs. Large numbers of these students are "expelled to the streets" (Blair, 1999).

Other proponents assert such policies ensure that all children, regardless of race, athletic ability, or parental influence, follow the rules. Opponents quickly retort, "one size does not and cannot fit all" (Curwin & Mendler, 1999). They state that schools should not treat all students the same when they are in need of corrective measures

(Curwin & Mendler, 1999). In their research, Skiba and Peterson (1999) agree with the idea of schools having strong, effective policies to protect students and make them feel safe. However, they have found that zero tolerance, despite its appearance of fairness, is inherently an unfair policy. In addition, no solid evidence links zero tolerance laws with lower school crime rates nationwide (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998).

Meanwhile, anecdotal evidence abounds. An informal survey of 1,000 teachers conducted by the Texas Federation of Teachers suggests the Texas' law may have made a dent in violent crime in schools across the state. From 1993 - when the zero tolerance law was adopted - to 1996, reported student-on-student assaults dropped 10%; threats of violence to students fell 6%; and assaults on teachers tumbled 35%. "This means that kids are finally getting the message that we mean business and their actions have consequences," reports Robert Nash, the spokesman for the Texas teachers' union, an affiliate of the AFT (Portner, 1997).

Problem Statement

Violence has become news in the nation's public schools, touching rural and suburban schools as well as those in the inner city. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to discover the experience of high school teachers with a zero tolerance for fighting policy.

Grand Tour Question

What is the experience of high school teachers in a school that has implemented the Zero Tolerance for Fighting Policy?

Definitions of Terms

Assertive discipline - a discipline model created by Lee and Marlene Canter that centers around clear expectations, insistence on correct behavior, and rewards and consequences.

Behaviorism - based on the B.F. Skinner's basic ideas that human behavior is a product of the Stimulus - Response interaction and that behaviors are modifiable.

School climate - the quality and frequency of interactions between staff members and the students, among the staff members themselves, and between the staff and parents/ community members of a school.

School culture - historically transmitted patterns of meaning that include the norms, values, beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, traditions, and myths understood by members of the school community.

School violence - all behaviors that endanger self or others, including physical and verbal harassment as well as use of drugs, alcohol, and weapons.

Zero tolerance policies - specific lists of unacceptable behaviors that include a set of explicit, predetermined consequences for students. These rules immediately punish all offenses and are usually applied without regard for extenuating circumstances.

Significance of the Study

A large number of school districts are considering zero tolerance policies as a disciplinary intervention. While they cite positive endorsements from other districts that have implemented similar policies, there is little data that exist on this topic. As a result of this study, school leaders will be aware of the implications and ramifications relating to teachers surrounding the implementation of such policies.

Delimitation and Limitations

A delimitation is that this study will focus on the perceptions of teachers in one school in south Louisiana. The findings of this study may not be generalizable to other

schools. It is assumed that participants will be honest as they respond to questions about their perceptions and beliefs.

Researcher's Perspective

Because the researcher's role in qualitative studies is an integral part of the process, it is imperative that she provides a researcher's perspective. According to Moustakas (1994), an *epoche* must occur before phenomenological research begins. This attitude shift happens when researchers try to eliminate or clarify any preconditions, biases, and judgments by allowing them to appear.

My interest in this topic is based on my experience as a high school teacher and administrator. After five years of teaching, the school district in which I worked implemented a Zero Tolerance for Fighting Policy. I first read about the policy in a local newspaper and a few days later the school board announced they were holding several public hearings to inform the parents about the policy. Initially, I thought the policy was a great idea. I believed that students and parents should be held accountable for disrupting the learning environment. Moreover, are citizens not held to similar expectations in the real world? I focused on the fact that there are always options to fighting. Students who were feeling provoked could always report the incidents to teachers or other nearby adults.

The next year, as an administrator, I was responsible for the enforcement the policy. There were four times when I was required to impose the consequences of zero tolerance policy. In three of the cases, the altercations were clearly the “exchange of physical blows” that defined a fight in the district’s student handbook. The other instance

was not so clear. After investigation, I determined that one party involved was attacked and attempting to protect herself. Because there was no clause for self-defense, both students were suspended. This caused me to question the fairness of the policy.

Immediately following this, several teachers remarked about how unfair they thought the policy was. In the ensuing weeks, a few rumors of fights were taking place, but teachers filed no reports. Thus, I began to wonder if the teachers' feelings about the policy dictated how it was executed.

In 1999, I continued my graduate studies at a university in a different region of the country from where I received my education and began my career. It was during this time that I was truly exposed to a plethora of discipline models and philosophies. I reflected upon my education and professional experiences. I began to perceive the schools that I was associated with as punitive. But aside from this, I no longer saw this ideal as an effective way of ascertaining the causes of inappropriate behavior such as fighting.

Upon returning to the school district in 2001, I found that there was little or no change of teacher sentiment. Teachers are still on both sides of the issue. Parent groups are voicing their objections loudly. Unfortunately, fighting still occurs. Nearly five years after its implementation, the zero tolerance for fighting policy is still in place. And, once again, I am in a position of enforcing a policy in which I no longer whole-heartedly support.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature focuses on the research, background and events that led to the implementation of a zero tolerance policy in a rural school district located in the South. This chapter is divided into five major sections: school violence, zero tolerance policies, behaviorism, assertive discipline, and school culture and climate.

School Violence

The issue of school violence is not a new phenomenon. "Discipline in the Public Schools: A Problem of Perception?" an article that appeared in the January 1979 edition of Phi Delta Kappan traces the problem back to the 1950s, when the problem was not discipline but juvenile delinquency. John W. Williams (1979), author of the article, wrote that in the 1950s "there seemed to be a marked increase in both the serious and less serious antisocial behavior on the part of our youth."

In 1955, according to Williams, a national study conducted by the National Education Association's Research Division entitled "Discipline in the Public Schools" documented two particularly startling problems: violence committed against teachers and the increased use of narcotics by students. More than twenty years later, the Phi Delta Kappan report bore a striking resemblance to that of the 1950s, except that the problem was worse (Williams, 1979).

Today the possibility that a disagreement among students will be settled with some type of weapon rather than an old-fashioned fistfight has increased significantly. A major difference between violence in the schools in the 1950s and the 1990s is the presence and use of weapons, especially guns.

School violence is not unique either to the public schools or to the nation's urban centers. Indicators of School Crime and Safety (1999), a report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics and the National Center for Education Statistics, presents the latest available data on school crime and student safety. Data in this report are compiled using a variety of independent data sources from federal departments and agencies. According to the U.S. Department of Justice (1990), public, private, and nonsectarian schools have all experienced an increase in school violence. Nine percent of public, 7% of private, and 6% of nonsectarian school students reported being victims of violent acts or property crimes in 1989 (Department of Justice, 1990). Furthermore, media reports indicate that the issue of violence in school is a national problem that has seeped into the very heartland of America. No geographic region is excluded. The findings of a National School Boards Association survey, "Violence in the Schools," (1994) of 1,216 administrators indicated that 54% of suburban and 64% of urban school officials reported more violent acts in their school in 1993 than five years earlier.

Almost forty years after the National Educators' Association study on discipline was conducted, the public's attention is once again focused on the issue of discipline and violence in the schools. And that concern is justifiable and accurate. Problems of violence caused by school age children are worse now than they have ever been. Youth violence is on the rise and permeates every segment of our society. That is not to say,

however, that all of today's youths are discipline problems or perpetrators of violent acts.

Generally speaking, there are three groups of students in a school. Eighty percent of the students rarely break the rules. Fifteen percent break the rules on a somewhat regular basis by refusing to accept classroom principles and resisting restrictions. The last 5% of the students are chronic rule breakers and are generally out of control most of the time. These students are more likely to commit acts of violence in school (Metropolitan Life, 1993).

Where Does Violence Occur in Schools?

Most teachers believe that violence occurs in hallways or under staircases, in the cafeteria, or in unattended classrooms. A study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCEA), an arm of the U.S. Department of Education, found that students concur that most acts of violence erupt in these places, but add the gym and locker rooms as prime sites. Students are also victimized in restrooms (1992). Most acts of violence occur where adult supervision is minimal, or where there are large crowds of people moving to and fro.

According to the Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher (1993), violence is more likely to occur in schools where the quality of education is poor. Teachers and students agree that a major factor contributing to increased violence in the schools is the perception that the quality of education is not up to par. Thirty-three percent of the teachers who feel their school provides only a fair or poor education have been victims of property crime, and 11% have been victims of acts of violence (Department of Education, 1993).

Factors That Contribute to Violence in Schools

Factors contributing to school violence are numerous, complex, and for the most part, community related. Teachers perceive that the major factors contributing to student violence are lack of parental supervision at home (71%), lack of family involvement with the school (66%), and exposure to violence in the mass media (55%).

Students (36%) concur that lack of parental supervision at home is the major factor contributing to violence in schools. However, they (34%) cite as a second major factor the presence of gang or group membership or peer pressure (Metropolitan Life, 1993). The Metropolitan Life and Department of Justice studies, as well as research by Toby (1994), concluded that peer group pressure is perhaps the fastest growing and most disturbing cause of acts of violence among youth, whether in school or out.

Students cited involvement with drugs and alcohol as the third major factor contributing to school violence. Although reports indicate that the use of drugs such as heroin, cocaine, marijuana, and crack is down among students in grades 6 through 12, the consumption of alcohol is not. Alcohol is the number one drug used by teenagers and young adults. Students who reported the availability of drugs in school did not vary significantly by ethnicity, level of family income, or geographic location (Department of Justice, 1990).

The Impact of School Violence on Teachers

Victims of violence in schools cover the spectrum. For example, nine hundred teachers are threatened, and over two thousand students and nearly forty teachers are physically attacked on school grounds every hour of every school day each year (Stone,

1993). In a 1991 study of teacher victimization, from 12% to 28% reported verbal abuse within the four weeks preceding the study; from 4% to 15% reported treats of injury; and 1-3% were physically attacked within the twelve months preceding the study (National Center for Education Statistics, 1992).

Data compiled by the U.S. Department of Education (1993) indicated that within a 12-month period, 44% of teachers reported that student misbehavior interfered substantially with their teaching; 23% of eighth graders were involved in serious student fights; 19% of teachers were verbally abused (previous four weeks); 12% of teachers feared for their safety; 8% of teachers were threatened with bodily harm; and 2% of teachers were physically attacked. Teachers in urban schools are much more likely to be victimized than are those in suburban and rural settings (National Center for Education Statistics, 1992).

Although the majority of teachers believe that they are unlikely to be victims of violence in and around school, studies state just the opposite. Most teachers feel safe in their schools during the day, but after school hours many teachers, especially those in urban areas, do not. Women and younger, less experienced teachers are often targets, but they are not the primary victims of violence among school staff. Teachers who are considered to be strict and who insist that students adhere to rigorous academic and behavioral standards are most at risk of being victimized. Thirty-eight percent of teachers and 57% of students rank strict teachers as more at risk of becoming a victim than any other members of the teaching staff (Metropolitan Life, 1990). If teachers fear they will be targets of students' physical or verbal abuse, they will be less willing to insist that all students meet new, more rigorous standards. This is particularly so if teachers do

not believe school administrators can or will provide a safe environment in which the standards can be achieved.

The increasingly disruptive and often violent behavior in schools is reflected in part in the increasing number of teachers who are leaving the profession. One in five teachers who decide to leave teaching do so because they are tired of the hassle of trying to teach in environments that are not conducive to learning (Department of Education & NCES, 1994). They are also demoralized by the lack of respect, appreciation, and support. These teachers are described as "burned out."

Zero Tolerance Policies

Background

Presidential candidate Richard Nixon campaigned on "law and order" issues in the 1960s. Politicians in the '70s bragged of being "tough on crime." Then in the 1980s, as the government's "war on drugs" heated up, "zero tolerance" joined the lexicon. The term probably first appeared in 1983, when the Navy cracked down on drug abusers (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). The Marines soon adopted a similar policy and initiated random drug tests.

A year later, Congress passed the first mandatory-minimum sentencing law, specifying stiff, automatic penalties for drugs and firearms violations. Lawmakers also amended federal forfeiture laws, expanding the government's authority to seize private property suspected of being involved in commission of a crime.

By 1986, with the nation beset by crack cocaine and skyrocketing violence, President Ronald Reagan launched the "war on drugs," and Congress passed the Anti-

Drug Abuse Act, which expanded the list of offenses covered by mandatory sentencing (Edwards, 1995). All of this helped create a sense of urgency in the American public. Policies such as this moved from the halls of Congress to the school board rooms of school districts.

Zero Tolerance and Public Schools

In May of 1986, Education Secretary William J. Bennett asked Congress to withhold federal education money from schools unless they adopted zero tolerance expulsion policies for students using or dealing drugs on school grounds ("Zero Tolerance on Drugs Urged," 1986). However, Bennett got little support from the House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control, which said it preferred drug-education programs to simple expulsion ("Zero Tolerance on Drugs Urged," 1986).

By late 1989, school districts in California, New York, and Kentucky had adopted zero tolerance expulsion policies for drugs or gang-related activity. By 1993, schools across the country had cracked down on tobacco, alcohol, and disruptive activities, as well as drugs and weapons (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). According to a 1998 NCES report, most public schools reported having zero tolerance policies. As shown in Figure 1, at least 9 out of 10 schools reported zero tolerance policies for firearms and weapons other than firearms. Eighty-seven percent of schools had policies of zero tolerance for alcohol and 88% had zero tolerance policies for drugs. Most schools also had zero tolerance policies for violence and tobacco.

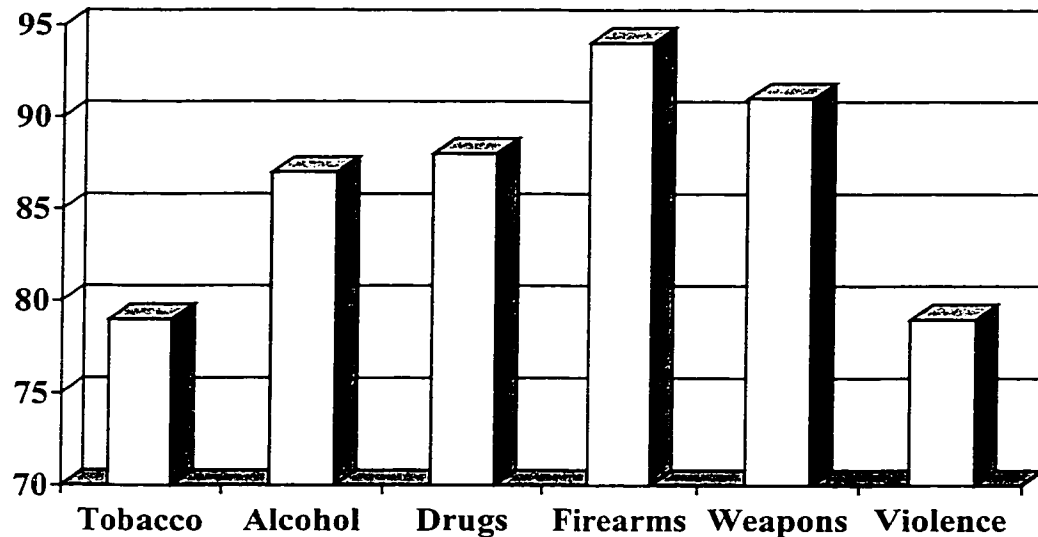


Figure 1. Percent of Public Schools That Have Adopted Zero Tolerance Policies

In 1990, President George Bush signed the Gun-Free School Zones Act into law, prohibiting the possession or discharge of a firearm near a public school. The act claimed Congress had the right to act under its power to regulate interstate commerce. But the Supreme Court disagreed, ruling in 1995 that Congress had exceeded its constitutional powers. By then lawmakers had gone back to the drawing board and enacted the 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act, which tied enforcement to the federal government's spending power ("Mandatory Punishment," 2000).

This prompted state legislatures to begin requiring local school districts to implement zero tolerance policies for firearms and bombs. Many of the new laws also included anything that could be used as a weapon (Pipho, 1998). Zero tolerance rules in many states also cover fighting, drug or alcohol use and gang activity, as well as minor offenses like possessing over-the-counter medications, disrespect of authority, sexual harassment, threats and vandalism (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). In 1997, eighty-seven

percent of private schools and 88% of U.S. public schools reportedly had policies of zero tolerance for alcohol and drugs, respectively. Seventy-nine percent had a zero tolerance policy for tobacco. About 94% of U.S. public schools reported zero tolerance policies for firearms and 91 percent reported zero tolerance for weapons other than firearms. Seventy-nine percent had a zero tolerance policy for violence. (NCES, 1998).

The Effectiveness of Zero Tolerance

Proponents credit zero tolerance policies with recent declines in crime and school weapons cases, even though they acknowledge there is little data to support that claim. Federal statistics confirm that the number of crimes in schools per 1,000 students decreased from 155 in 1993 to 102 in 1997. There also were declines in the number of students carrying weapons to school and the number of student fights (NCES, 1998).

In Baltimore, school officials credit the aggressive zero-tolerance law with a 67% drop in arrests and a 31% decline in school crime in the first two months of the 1999-2000 school year (Johnson, 1999). After Texas adopted zero tolerance for drugs and weapons, the percentage of teachers reporting that assaults on students was a "significant problem" dropped from 53% in 1993 to 31% in 1998 ("Mandatory Punishment," 2000). Moreover, the dramatic increase in the number of alternative schools around the country reflects the fact that zero tolerance policies have "taken the troublemakers out of schools and allowed the teachers to get back to teaching" (NCES, 1998).

But, critics argue that if zero tolerance were responsible for either falling street crime or the decline in weapons-possession, proponents would have statistics showing that crime or weapons possession dropped faster in schools and communities with zero

tolerance policies than in those without them. Despite the lack of compelling statistics, 85% of principals, 79% of teachers and 82% of students credit zero tolerance policies with keeping drugs out of schools, according to a 1998 Columbia University survey.

However, a 1998 federal government survey of more than 1,000 school principals indicated that there were only minor improvements in school discipline and drug problems from 1990 to 1996 (NCES, 1998). The percentage of principals reporting "serious problems" with fighting, alcohol use and weapons possession dropped somewhat. But an increase was posted among principals who said tobacco and drug use, drug sales and verbal and physical abuses of teachers were "moderate or serious" problems.

Constitutionality of Zero Tolerance

Many critics maintain students' rights to privacy, free speech and due process are being abridged by zero tolerance rules. The Supreme Court has ruled that children have a property interest in public education, and thus the government cannot deprive them of their education without due process. The court ruled in the landmark *Tinker v. Des Moines* case in 1969 that neither students nor teachers "shed their constitutional rights at the school door." However, the Supreme Court held that schools can act if they have "reasonable anticipation" that a student's behavior will cause a "material disruption" of school discipline ("Mandatory Punishment," 2000).

Many lawsuits challenging zero tolerance rules charge that students' rights to free speech were violated. Other challenges to zero tolerance rules allege that schools failed to follow due-process procedures. Many contend that many zero tolerance policies are

being automatically implemented without giving the students the opportunity to respond or the right to have a parent or lawyer present ("Mandatory Punishment," 2000).

Nonetheless, zero tolerance policies have generally received favorable treatment from the current Supreme Court, which "almost always rules in favor of state laws, police actions and school actions." For instance, in *Veronia School District v. Acton*, the court said in 1995 that student athletes have a reduced expectation of privacy and thus could be randomly tested for drugs without probable cause ("Mandatory Punishment," 2000).

Charles B. Vergon, an attorney and professor of educational leadership at Youngstown State University, in Ohio, analyzed about 60 lawsuits brought on behalf of students expelled or suspended for weapons or firearms possession since 1990. In three-quarters of the cases, the schools' right to ensure safety on their premises was upheld, even though in some cases "a reasonable person could have taken a very different posture," Vergon says ("Mandatory Punishment," 2000).

National School Boards Association's staff attorney Julie Lewis says zero tolerance policies are usually upheld as constitutional unless they are too vague or the school district violates due process rules, infringes upon students' free speech rights or enforces the policies inconsistently ("Mandatory Punishment," 2000). Ironically, some schools are broadening their zero tolerance policies, hoping to discourage civil rights and equal protection lawsuits. But instead, they now face more due process and First Amendment suits.

The University of California's Volokh says if zero tolerance laws are properly written, and the school does not conduct an illegal search or otherwise violate the Constitution, they are perfectly constitutional. Even expulsion for artwork or writings

dealing with death may not violate a student's right to free speech ("Mandatory Punishment," 2000).

Fairness and Consistency in Application of Zero Tolerance Policies

One rationale for zero tolerance policies both in schools and law enforcement was to remove discretion from authorities and ensure that everyone would be treated equally. A discretionary policy allows authorities to consciously or subconsciously treat people from one group differently from those of another. Advocates say zero tolerance policies theoretically diminish discretion and the chance of racist enforcement.

But critics argue that when zero tolerance policies are actually applied in the real world, minorities, poor people, and disabled students are expelled and suspended at a higher rate than whites. That was the charge made by the Rev. Jesse Jackson, who led marches in Decatur, Illinois, to protest the expulsions of six African-American teenagers for starting a brawl at a football game. White boys, Jackson said, never would have been expelled for two years for a fight that involved no weapons and no injuries. Lawyers for the six youths produced statistics showing that 82% of Decatur students expelled in the past three years were African-American, although only 48% of the student population is black (Sims, 1999).

In addition, a recent survey of twelve large school districts showed that in some districts black students are three to five times more likely to be expelled than are white students. For instance, in Phoenix, blacks made up only 4% of the high school population but received 21% of the expulsions or suspensions. By comparison, only 18 % of the whites - representing 74% of the enrollment - were suspended. Similarly, in

San Francisco blacks account for 16% of the enrollment but 52% of the exclusions (First, 2000). Even the Department of Education's own figures show that in 1997 black students represented 17% of public school enrollment nationwide but 32% of those suspended-a disparity that has remained since 1975 (First, 2000).

However, in a recent study, researchers found no difference between the punishments meted out to black and white students once the students are referred to the office. But black students were twice as likely to be referred to the office as were white students. Black students were referred more often for minor, more subjective behaviors like loitering, disrespect, threats, excessive noise and a catchall category called "conduct interference." Whites were referred for less subjective behaviors such as smoking, vandalism, obscene language or using drugs or alcohol (Skiba & Peterson, 1999).

A study by the Civil Rights Project (2000) at Harvard University corroborated these findings. The results indicated that African-American and Latino children are constantly being suspended for the more discretionary offenses, such as "defiance of authority" and "disrespect of authority."

Impetus

In 1997 Louisiana Superintendent of Education Cecil J. Picard assembled a task force of students, teachers, principals, supervisors, superintendents, school board members, parents, law enforcement representatives, corrections officers, district attorneys, municipal officers, and others interested in school safety and concerned about school violence (Louisiana Department of Education, 1997). They were instructed to review existing plans, programs, and funding sources related to safe schools and to create

a tactical plan for violence prevention. Among the task force's recommendations to address these concerns was for school districts to consider designing or adopting zero tolerance policies for violent behavior.

School districts were told that such policies could be achieved through a new design process. Policies could also be adopted and modified from several exemplary existing models in order to suit the particular needs of the system, school, and community. If a policy was already in existence, decision-makers of the districts were told to conduct careful reviews (Louisiana Department of Education, 1997).

As a result of this state initiative, the Zero Tolerance for Fighting Policy went into effect in Southland Parish. This policy was approved by school board members and was implemented in the 1997-1998 school year. The stated goal of this anti-violence policy is simply to make school a safer place for learning (Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook & Discipline Policy, 1999).

Behaviorism

The rationale of zero tolerance is based heavily on the concept of behaviorism. The research of B. F. Skinner (1968) demonstrates that the future rate of any behavior, including misbehavior, increases if it is followed by reinforcement. Many "neo-Skinnerians" have translated his theories for use in the classroom (Axelrod, 1983a, 1983b; Homme, 1970; Madsen & Madsen, 1991; Walker & Shea, 1976). These writers share a common belief that a student's misbehavior can be altered and reshaped into a more socially accepted behavior by directly manipulating the student's environment through a systematic set of rewards. The most common approach to classroom

management in schools is some form of behavior modification. Rules, consequences, and rewards seem to be the mainstay of most teacher repertoires for student discipline.

Pavlov's classical conditioning, Bandura's social learning theory, and Thorndike's operant conditioning (later expanded by Skinner) form the theories known as behaviorism (Freiberg, 1999). Researchers indicate that the roots of behaviorism can be traced to the time of Aristotle. In his essay entitled Memory, Aristotle spoke of "associations," in which man relates similar events or mental pictures to each other. For example, a sword and combat would be associated with each other. Other philosophers and researchers, particularly psychologists, tried to observe humankind and to develop theories and models to explain, predict, and at times, change or modify human behavior.

Prior to Skinner's work, a Russian scientist, Ivan Pavlov, completed a series of experiments with dogs and their physiological responses to food, which led to a new theory of psychology for humans. Classical conditioning is a theory derived by Pavlov who measured a dog's reactions to receiving food by the level of salivation. Dogs repeatedly salivated when presented with food, which was an unconditional (natural) response to the food. Pavlov sounded a bell each time the dog was presented with food and after a period of time, the dog would salivate with only the sound of the bell. The bell became a "conditioned" (unnatural-external) response. Pavlov understood that the bell reinforced the salivating response. When the food was withdrawn, the reinforcement was not provided, the dog's response would begin to disappear or become "extinguished." These experiments with animals led to further work on conditioning animal behavior and subsequently that of people to achieve certain responses.

Operant conditioning, described by B. F. Skinner, is the reinforcing of behavior and its relationship to specific consequences. Skinner used the term conditioning to explain his observations of so-called contingencies of reinforcement under which learning takes place (Skinner, 1968). A "contingency" is an action that is repeated to reinforce and shape a particular response by the student. However, in order to produce "efficient mathematical behavior" in students "something in the order of 25,000 contingencies" would be needed (Smith, 1996). Psychological lessons learned in the laboratory with rats and pigeons may not transfer well to the human condition or to the classroom. The teacher is not the only "reinforcing agent" in the classroom and Skinner realized that the classroom was a very complex place with only one teacher and many students.

Skinner argues that in the typical classroom situation, a teacher cannot supply reinforcement quickly enough or often enough. Accordingly, he recommends the use of teaching machines, which he maintains possess certain advantages (Biehler & Snowman, 1982; p. 153).

Behaviorists are not concerned with the early origins of a person's problems, unless it helps them understand the mechanisms by which behaviors were shaped through reinforcement. Similarly, behaviorists assign little importance to feelings and emotions that cannot be observed. Nor do behaviorists expect misbehaving students to insightfully discover the reasons they break the rules.

Initially, the behaviorist formulations were overly focused on specific behaviors and emphasized rigid technique prescriptions such as rules, praise, and ignoring. But as behaviorism developed and began to take into account human intentions, behaviorist advice retained its emphasis on reinforcement but became more realistic, shifting from a

focus on eliminating particular forms of misbehavior to shaping desired behavior.

Since the early 1960s, many educators have relied on behavior modification programs derived from operant conditioning to shape student behavior in the classroom. Commercial programs like Assertive Discipline (Canter, 1976) have systematized the principles of operant conditioning and behavior modification.

Assertive Discipline

Lee and Marlene Canter developed one of the most popular discipline programs in the 1980s and 1990s. With the publication of their book Assertive Discipline: A Take-Charge Approach for Today's Educator (1976), the Canter introduced a method of maintaining consistent school-wide discipline. The goals of Assertive Discipline are (1) to increase students' time on task, (2) to minimize distracting and disruptive behavior, (3) to reduce the likelihood of more serious disciplinary problems, (4) to minimize the teacher's effort in maintaining discipline, and (5) to achieve these goals with the least possible use of serious punishment (NAESP, 1981).

Assertive Discipline resulted from Lee Canter's exposure to the theories and practices of "assertion training" (Canter & Canter, 1976). Skill factors of assertion training were modified into competency skill guidelines for teachers. The resulting skills were

1. The teacher must know at all times what he or she wants the student to do.
The teachers must communicate these wants to students both verbally and visually.

2. The teacher must know how to systematically set limits when the students do not behave properly. A teacher must provide a negative consequence every time a student chooses to behave inappropriately.
3. The teacher must know how to systematically reinforce the appropriate behavior of students. Effective positive reinforcement of appropriate behavior is the key to dealing assertively with discipline problems.
4. The teacher must know how to elicit the cooperation of the principal and the parents in discipline efforts with problem students. A teacher's discipline plan, to be effective, must be shared with the principal and the parents, and it must systematically spell out when and how they are to cooperate with the teacher in implementing the plan (Canter, 1979, p. 35).

Assertive Discipline posits that effective teachers need to have clear expectations, must insist on correct behavior, and provide consistent follow-through regarding demands. It involves (1) recognizing and removing roadblocks to assertive teacher behavior and replacing of their own negative expectations of students with positive expectations; and (2) practicing assertive response styles. Teachers make their expectations known to students by backing their words with actions. Ideally, students receive positive benefits from compliance. Noncompliance results in consequences that are related to the misbehavior (Canter & Canter, 1992).

Advocates of Canter's Assertive Discipline model believe that it more efficiently uses class time by effectively stopping misbehavior while instruction continues. In addition, assertive discipline promotes a single system of rules, rewards, and punishments that can be used for all kinds of students. Further, Wolfgang and Glickman (1986) add

that teachers can be confident and efficient with discipline, because assertive discipline offers a set program to follow.

Despite its widespread use, critics claim that Canter's assertive discipline is too harsh and overpowering for children (Charles, 1985). It is accused of being undemocratic and authoritarian and suppressing negative behavior to the exclusion of building values for positive, responsible behavior. Thereby, it releases the student from personal responsibility and rational decision-making, and it is really a version of behavior modification and take-charge teacher firmness with rules and consequences (McDaniel, 1989; Rich, 1985; Wolfgang & Glickman, 1980).

Some educators believe that there are certain students for whom it is appropriate to make disciplinary exceptions. Conversely, Canter and his associates (1992) claim that Assertive Discipline works for all students at all grade levels. As a result, students with emotional problems, students whose parents do not support school discipline, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, or "low achievers," are not exempt from the behavior expectations.

Because assertive discipline is so widely used and aggressively marketed, there have been heated debates about its effectiveness. The evidence supporting assertive discipline is not very convincing, although the number of studies exceeds those on most other approaches (Mandlebaum et al., 1983; McCormack, 1985; Render, Padilla & Krank, 1989a, 1989b; Rich, 1985; Smith, 1983). Most of the claims are based on outcome measures of teachers' perceptions rather than their actual classroom behavior or student behavior.

School Culture and Climate

The field of education lacks a clear and consistent definition of school culture. The term has been used synonymously with a variety of concepts, including "climate," "ethos," and "saga" (Deal, 1993). The concept of culture came to education from the corporate workplace with the notion that it would provide direction for a more efficient and stable learning environment.

Scholars have argued about the meaning of culture for centuries. Noted anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) has made a large contribution to current understanding of the term. For Geertz, culture represents a "historically transmitted pattern for meaning." Those patterns of meaning are expressed both (explicitly) through symbols and (implicitly) in our taken-for-granted beliefs.

A review of literature on school culture reveals much of Geertz's perspective. Deal and Peterson (1990) noted that the definition of culture includes "deep patterns of values, beliefs, and traditions that have been formed over the course of [the school's] history." Heckman (1993) reminds us that school culture lies in "the commonly held beliefs of teachers, students, and principal." These definitions go beyond the business of creating an efficient learning environment. The focus more on the core values necessary to teach and influence young minds.

Thus, school culture can be defined as the historically transmitted patterns of meaning that include the norms, values, beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, traditions, and myths understood, maybe in varying degrees, by members of the school community (Stolp & Smith, 1994). This system of meaning often shapes what people in organizations think and how they act.

School culture correlates with teachers' attitudes toward their work. In a study that profiled effective and ineffective organizational cultures, Cheng (1993) found stronger school cultures had better-motivated teachers. In an environment with strong organizational ideology, shared participation, charismatic leadership, and intimacy, teachers experienced higher job satisfaction and increased productivity.

School climate is usually defined as those qualities that affect the attitudes, behaviors, and achievement of the people involved in its operation (National Association of Elementary Principals, 1990). Buffie (1989) pointed out that a positive learning environment, good teacher morale, and high student achievement are essential for a positive school climate.

Deal (as stated in Gonder, 1994) states that the climate of a school refers to the short-term, malleable aspects of the school's physical and psychological environment. Researchers have identified a number of climate related characteristics. The most frequently mentioned characteristics are high expectations for students, student centered learning environments, focused mission, teacher efficacy, positive physical environment, strong administrative leadership, community support, orderly atmosphere, and safe and disciplined schools (Gonder, 1994). However, climate most often is measured by an individual's perception of climate.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (1990) listed six areas as essential ingredients of good school climate. Among them, four are directly related to climate and zero tolerance:

- 1) A caring atmosphere permeates the school. Feelings, concerns, and conflicts receive fair and consistent attention.

- 2) Respect for individual differences among staff, students, parents, and administrators is demonstrated.
- 3) The trust level is high. The principal respects the judgment of teachers.
- 4) Social development is emphasized. Good citizenship and a written code of behavior have been developed through collaborative efforts of parents, school and students.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the actual experiences of high school teachers who work in a school that has the Zero Tolerance for Fighting Policy. Chapter Three provides a precise description of the qualitative methodology used in conducting this phenomenological study. This section includes the following elements: (a) research design, (b) research setting, (c) identification and selection of participants, (d) consent procedures and confidentiality assurance, (e) research question, (f) data collection, (g) data analysis, and (h) validity and reliability.

Research Design

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 1998, p.15).

The reason for using the qualitative approach is to explore the experiences of high school teachers in regard to a Zero Tolerance for Fighting Policy. This methodology is recommended when the focus of research is on the textual descriptions of participants' experiences. The qualitative approach is ideal for this study for several reasons. First, this method allows for the phenomenon to be studied in its entirety. Secondly, the process is inductive. That is, the information emerges through the process of hearing the

individual experiences. Finally, through the use of description, the qualitative method values the introspective and subjective nature of human science research.

Qualitative research designs provide an opportunity for the researcher to become involved personally with the informants in an unobtrusive and non-threatening manner. The researcher does this by entering the natural setting of the participants (Patton, 1986). Another characteristic of qualitative design is its descriptiveness. As data are collected they may appear in words, pictures, or other symbols that are not number oriented. The researcher takes interview transcripts, field notes, and other participant related documents and analyzes them as they appear, paying close attention to the richness they exhibit. This descriptiveness requires the researcher to regard nothing as trivial but that every gesture, word, or artifact may be a key to understanding what is being studied.

Qualitative researchers tend to analyze data inductively. This allows the researcher time to spend with the participants and during the process of examining data in various forms one discovers the important questions. The theory evolves from the bottom up. Lastly, the researcher is interested in meaning to understand the perspective of the participants. In the process, the researcher is concerned with accurately representing the informants' experiences. This allows the researcher to take transcripts or other data sources to informants for accuracy. In the qualitative research design the research is not focused on outcome or product, but is concerned about the process of discovering meaning.

The tradition chosen for this study is the phenomenology. Creswell (1998) describes phenomenology as a study that "describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept" (p. 51). The researcher in a phenomenology

focuses on understanding the essence of a phenomenon. Data are collected through long interviews with ten or more people. Phenomenology is the tradition that studies how people experience events and how people describe these events (Patton, 1990). In this study, the people are high school teachers and the event is the implementation of the Zero Tolerance for Fighting Policy.

Research Setting

Tucked away amid remnants of the plantations and cotton fields of south Louisiana lies a small, quiet town with a rich history. The area was discovered in 1699 by a French-Canadian explorer. A small church was built a year later. The church was soon destroyed and settlers were not seen again until the 1720's, when the French established a plantation. Until the turn of the nineteenth century, only large sugar plantations and mills were located in this area. In the early twentieth century the lumber industry began to grow, as did the community. However, the lumber industry declined in the 1970's. In the 1980's, oil and gas formed a large part of the town's economy (Iberville Parish History, 1985). But this, too, was destined for demise. With the end of the prosperity that came with the oil and gas years, several inhabitants of the community were forced to move to larger, nearby cities in order to find jobs. The community has had no new businesses for several years, thereby decreasing the availability of jobs and number of high families moving into the area.

According to 1990 census information, this town has a population of just over 2,000 people (Upclose Census Digest, 1992). African Americans make up approximately 61% of the population, whites comprise about 36%, and Hispanics round off with 3 %.

The education attainment level is low; only 58% of the people are high school graduates and less than 10% are college graduates. As a result the median household income is barely \$15,000 per year (Upclose Census Digest, 1992).

There is one public school that serves the area. Southland High School consists of grades seven to twelve. There are 310 students. The racial composition is approximately 95% African American and 5% white. There are no limited English proficiency students. Seventy-eight percent of the students are on free or reduced lunch programs. Almost 82% are labeled as economically deprived and at least 60% are from single parent homes. Student attendance is slightly more than 90%. In the 1999-2000 school year, 27.4% of students were assigned to in-school suspension, 20.7% received out-of-school suspensions, and .15% were expelled (Louisiana Department of Education, 2000).

There are 27 teachers and two administrators. Fifty-two percent are African American, approximately 92% are female, and 52% hold master's degrees or higher. Attendance rate for teachers is nearly 95% (Louisiana Department of Education, 2000).

Identification and Selection of Participants

In a phenomenology, data are collected by means of interviews. Southland High School, located in a district that has implemented the zero tolerance for fighting policy, was selected as the site. A letter was written to the superintendent of the school district explaining the purpose of the study and seeking permission to record and publish findings. Once consent was given, a list of teachers was obtained from the personnel department. That list was narrowed to include only state-certified teachers.

When selecting a sampling strategy for a phenomenological study Creswell (1998) asserts that "all participants experience the phenomenon being studied" (p. 118). He goes on to state that "criterion sampling works well..." (p. 118). In criterion sampling, all individuals meet some criterion (Miles & Huberman, 1994). There was one criterion for participant selection in this study. The teachers must have been employed by the school district since the 1995-96 school year, one year prior to implementation of the policy.

Prospective participants were contacted by phone in order to ask if they wished to participate in the study. Those who agreed were mailed and asked to return a signed consent form at the time of the interview (The consent form is included as Appendix A.). Also, during this phone contact, the researcher discussed the topic in general, the purpose of the study, and the actual interview process involved. Of the seventeen prospective interviewees, eleven teachers agreed to participate. The individual interviews occurred at an agreed upon time.

Consent Procedures and Assurance of Confidentiality

The researcher submitted a research proposal to the Colorado State University Human Subjects Committee for approval to conduct the study. The researcher discussed the need for consent and the plan for conducting the study with each participant. At the time of the interview, the researcher obtained informed consent and permission to record and publish findings.

Participants were assured complete confidentiality. This was done in an attempt to protect the participant's anonymity. All gathered materials were held by case number

so that no names were associated with individual teacher's responses. Additionally, the names of the school and school district were given pseudonyms.

Research Question

The following research question guided the investigation of this study:

What is the experience of high school teachers in schools that have implemented the Zero Tolerance for Fighting Policy?

The interview questions that follow were used to ascertain the answer to the guiding question:

1. Reconstruct your own high school experience.
 - a. size
 - b. rural/urban
 - c. relationship with teachers
 - d. student behavior
 - e. rules
2. Tell me what you know about zero tolerance policies.
3. How did the Zero Tolerance of Fighting Policy in this district come about?
4. What changes have occurred at the school since implementation of the policy?
5. Were you in favor of the policy when it started? Based on all your experiences, pre and post zero tolerance, what is your opinion now?

Data Collection

Prior to the actual interviews the researcher conducted a pilot study. The pilot study was conducted with four teachers who worked in schools with a zero tolerance for fighting policy. The researcher conducted mock interviews with these teachers to

determine what changes, if any, should be made to the interview questions before being used in the actual study.

Long individual interviews were the primary data collection technique for this phenomenological study. Face to face interviews were conducted. The length of the interviews was approximately one hour to one and a half hours. In some instances, follow-up phone calls were placed. The interviews were informal and interactive. Open-ended questions were utilized. All interviews with teachers were recorded by tape in order to capture what was being communicated. These tapes were then transcribed.

Data Analysis

In order to identify themes that emerged from the interviews, the following data analysis methods were used. Audiotapes of the interviews were transcribed immediately following the interviews (One complete transcript is included as Appendix B.). The researcher listened to each interview recordings and read the transcriptions for a "sense of the whole" (Hycner, 1999).

The following steps were helpful in the analysis stage of this research:

- 1) Reading and listening to the data
- 2) Reducing the text and bracketing information
- 3) Eliminating irrelevant repetition
- 4) Making thematic connections
- 5) Naming themes
- 6) Analyzing dynamic relationships of themes

Following the transcription process, each interview was read and reread.

Practicing the process of Moustakas' (1994) *epoche*, the textural descriptions were seen and experienced without preconceptions. Every attempt was made to listen and see the data in its pure form. There was a conscious effort to stay in the words of the participants, to avoid theorizing or analyzing based on the researcher's experiences and notions, and to focus on the phenomenon that appeared. *Epoche* was a conscious and constant process of returning to the words and statements themselves and focusing on the meaning they presented.

During the process of reading and reducing the transcripts, the researcher began to label the passages. At this point, labels were kept tentative in order to avoid being locked into categories. Next, the information was grouped by selecting passages that connect to other passages. Names were given to the themes. Finally, the themes were analyzed to determine relationships among them.

Validity and Reliability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that credibility is a key concept in establishing the trustworthiness of qualitative inquiry. Trustworthiness refers to the validity of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To address the issues of validity and reliability, various methods were employed. Specifically, the study employed member checks. Member checking was used to ensure that what was recorded by the researcher represented the statements that were made by the informants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each participant involved in the study had the opportunity to review his/her interview and correct any misinterpretations that may have existed.

Expert debriefs were used prior to the interviews to check the instrumentation and process employed to enhance validity. Expert individuals examined the research proposal, interview questions, the methodology chapter, the analysis chapter, and made suggestions for changes to the researcher. By doing this, the panel of experts helped to evaluate the credibility of the processes that was used and also the conclusions that were drawn by the researcher.

Three criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Marshall and Rossman (1989), and Erlandson et al. (1993) are used to assess the trustworthiness of this type of study. They include (a) credibility, (b) transferability, and (c) dependability.

Erlandson et al. (1993) wrote that the criterion of credibility can be achieved by triangulation, reflexivity, and peer examination. Regarding this study, credibility was met in the following ways. The majority of the data came from the words of teachers heard during the interviewing process. Additional data included field notes and relevant literature. Reflexivity was accomplished by discussing my work with people familiar with qualitative methods. Finally, an outside reader reviewed my work.

The second criterion for trustworthiness is transferability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote that transferability is the extent to which research findings can be utilized in other situations. It is the responsibility of the researcher to generate thick description (Geertz, 1973) to demonstrate the possibility of applicability of research results to other contexts with shared characteristics. The researcher has provided substantial description of experiences of high school teachers from their voices and from the literature.

Dependability is the third criterion of trustworthiness and concerns the degree of consistency to be found if the study were to be repeated or replicated. Dependability is

made evident from an audit trail. Lincoln & Guba (1985) wrote that the purpose of an audit trail is to leave an adequate amount of evidence so that interested parties can reconstruct the process by which the investigators reached their conclusion. An audit trail has been established beginning with the first letters written to school district's superintendent and a phone script used to contact potential participants. Other elements of the audit trail include the taped interviews, transcriptions, and field notes.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Included in this chapter will be a brief introduction to the participants in this study, a continued look at the analysis process, and a description of the findings on the meaning and experience of high school teachers with a zero tolerance for fighting policy.

Participant Profiles

There seems to be no one right way to share interview data. Some qualitative researchers argue for less reliance on words and more on graphs, charts, and matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994). However, Seidman (1998) suggests crafting a profile of a participant's experience as an effective way of sharing data. The narrative form of a profile allows the researcher to transform what he or she has learned from the interviews into telling a story (Mishler, 1986). Telling stories, Mishler argues, is one major way that human beings have devised to make sense of themselves and their social world. For this study each participant was asked to reconstruct his/her high school experience. Then, each person was asked to compare those personal experiences to what is going on in the school in which the participant teaches.

Table 1, depicted on the next page, is a condensed demographic chart. This aided the researcher in her analysis of data. There were eleven participants, five males and six females. Years of experience range from five to thirty-three. Most of the participants (7)

teach in humanities areas. Only one teaches science, one teaches math, and two are vocational educators.

Table 1.

Demographic Data of Teachers

Participant	Gender	Years of Experience	Content Area
A	Male	less than 20	social studies
B	Male	less than 20	vocational education
C	Male	less than 20	English
D	Female	20 or more	English
E	Female	less than 20	math
F	Female	20 or more	vocational education
G	Male	less than 20	science
H	Female	20 or more	social studies
I	Female	20 or more	social studies
J	Male	less than 20	social studies
K	Female	20 or more	English

Participant A

Participant A is a social studies teacher. He holds also has a master's degree in his discipline. He has been teaching for six years, all public school experience. He has been employed by this district for five of these years.

My high school experience ... was quite interesting at the onset, initially for a new school. The student behavior of course, pretty much like you had those students who were there to go to school and then you had those were still probably rivals so all of that combined together caused for in many cases chaotic situations. You had a lot of fights. You had territorial fights basically every year at the close of the school year. Sometimes even when students were going on break there would be these territorial fights where they would just fight each other. They [the administration] really didn't deal with it. They basically assumed the policy that if you would fight you would go home and that was their way of dealing with the problem. If you fight we were going to send you home you were going to get 7 days, 5 days or whatever.

Well [the school I attended then and the one where I work are] a little different. Because the school I attended was a community school. We had fights like we had at any school probably, however situations at the school when I was in high school were handled a little different. If you got into a fight you didn't go home

for 5 days or 7 days not unless it was a just real, real bad fight. What would happen is that you would probably be required to have a choice, to stay after school to clean the windows, you'd clean the bathroom and that you'd do it for maybe 5 or 6 days. This is what you would do. Also you had what was the corporal punishment, you could take 7 licks or 5 licks whatever it was, go back to class, if you would do it again then you would look at being suspended from school. So that was different because within a community school I think the parents and the administrators and teachers were so close that this could work out fine. Many of the teachers at the school lived in the community. So as a result of them living in the community their children going to school, attending the same school where they were at made for a big difference. And of course more importantly was that the teachers were more sincere about you accomplishing something because it was a reflection back on the school and the history of the school and it was also a reflection on those teachers. So if students weren't excelling and students were fighting and they could just never get along, then that was a reflection back on those teachers. So that was different. So students knew in some cases if we're going to fight, we fight behind the green building. And that way nobody knows that we're fighting. Once we finish fighting it's over. The school's where I work is totally different. Students may not want to fight and what they want to do is attention. So they start talking about, you know let's fight and they fight in the hall where teachers can see.

Participant B

Participant B is a technology teacher. He also has a master's degree in counseling. He has been teaching eleven years. He has been employed by the district for five of these years. All of his experience has been in public schools.

The student recognized that the teacher was in charge and had the responsibility of educating the student [when I attended high school]. And the student basically followed the instructions that were given. Of course you had a few [students who didn't follow the rules] but they were the minority, now it's the majority. The biggest concern was shaving... It was required that if a student had hair on their face be required to bring a doctor's excuse justifying why they would have it, some kind of skin problems, other than that you were sent home.

[Comparing schools then to schools now] The rules have been I think increased by as far as for students having to deal with bigger problems then just shaving. You know your having to deal with weapons and things of this sort. So the rules, they really have to be clearly defined now. Where I felt they weren't as clearly defined then.

Participant C

Participant C is an English teacher. He holds a master's degree in administration and has taught for five years. All of his experience has been in this school district, with three years at this particular school. He has the unique perspective of having graduated from the high school in which he currently is employed.

The overall student behavior when I was in high school I think was pretty good at least in comparison to now. There was a lot of school pride a lot of camaraderie there was some competition between the classes, which made for an excellent environment I think but overall everybody got along. And people knew everybody and pretty much interacted with everybody.

I think the students liked the teachers and in some cases loved the teachers. I find that those teachers that were tougher or the toughest they were well respected. And those were the kids who probably were the quote unquote problem kids probably flocked towards those teachers more than any others.

I can think of one [instance when there was some type of disruption in school] in particular I don't think it wasn't really a school problem, something that was carried over from the community. The community is somewhat divided because of location areas and you know kids keep, seem to identify more with their peers from their particular areas in which they live. And there's some kind of conflict over the weekend where one teen was against another teen from a different area. And it kind of carried over into the school... There was a set of structured rules [in place to address problems such as this], I think all schools have you know have a set of structured rules, but this particular case I think according to the rules was extreme and the ultimate result was the kids being suspended. I don't recall the amount of time, maybe 3/5 days. But it was suspension. "It's tough [to compare the school then to the school now]. On one hand I want to say there is no comparison because it's somewhat different, yet the circumstances are the same. You still have a low socio-economic population; it's still rural. The same areas, these are probably some of the brothers and sisters of the kids I went to school with but somehow it's different because the school pride is not there, the camaraderie is not there. A lot of kids are there not really for the education I think. And one main difference that I picked up as a teacher is both kids who aren't there and aren't really interested in education they end up somehow being the

leaders or somehow being glorified when in my time they would have been outcasts. Black sheep.

Participant D

Participant D is an English teacher. She also holds a reading specialist's degree and a master's degree in counseling. She has twenty years of experience in education; the first ten were accrued in private schools. She has worked in the district for the last ten years, all at the same school.

My high school was an urban school. Very large population, very large population. We [the students and the teachers] were very close, they were always looking out for us and making sure we did everything we needed to do to get where we needed to get. And I was very comfortable with each one of them. It was like you had a mamma at school and a mother at home. And so you know it was a rewarding experience.

We had a strict disciplinary as the principal. And you know there were disturbances but not as bad [as they could have been]. I would say we maybe had a few fights like maybe twice a month, which is not bad for a large school. Things that I can remember [when these fights happened] we would have a detention in the afternoon. Say for instance, staying after school until like four or five working with the custodial staff. If it was real bad fight when somebody was hurt, then no one was sent to jail at that time, but we were placed in an out of school suspension for maybe like a week or two. We were out longer periods of time then.

Student behavior [today] is totally different [from when I was in high school] if I had to make a comparison. Student behavior is terrible. The things that students do now we would not have thought to do. For an example the talking back to a teachers, the disrespect for property, disrespect for authority I should say when I say talking back to the teachers. I mean all of that we would never have thought about doing.

Participant E

Participant E is a math teacher. She also has a master's degree in administration. She has been a teacher for eight years. Most of experience is in this school.

My high school had about 800 students. I guess I would call it rural as opposed to urban. I remember students being well behaved. I really can't

recall one fight, even though I'm sure a few took place. Teachers and students had relationships that were based on respect. I, personally, don't remember being exceptionally close to them [teachers], but I do believe most students respected teachers as authority figures.

I think schools must have been safer back then. I don't remember any specific fights. The only violence that stands out in my memory is a student who committed suicide with a gun. I guess it was school related because he did it when he left campus for lunch. As a result, the students were no longer allowed to leave the campus during the school day without parental permission.

On the other hand, today I would say school is a bit more violent. Since I have been teaching, I've seen several fights. The funny thing is that most of the fights are between girls. I don't think that ever happened in my day.

Participant F

Participant F is a business teacher. She has been a teacher for twenty years. All of her experience has been in this one school.

I attended a small, parochial school in the same town in which I currently work. Because our community is rural, I think we all [the students] felt like we had a close-knit relationship with our teachers. There were a few, very minor discipline problems. I think it was like that because rules were in place and everybody knew the consequences for breaking them. All I can say is that there is a huge difference between the parochial school I attended and the public school I have taught in for the last twenty years.

Participant G

Participant G is a science teacher. He also has a master's degree in administration. He has been employed in the district for five years.

My high school experience was at an inner city school. At that time, my school had approximately 1400 students. It was definitely an urban school because the majority of the students (approximately 60%) were on free/reduced lunch.

Overall, I had a good relationship with all of my teachers during my high school years. I never interacted with all of them because they had approximately 80 teachers; therefore, my level of involvement with others was not very high.

As far as student behavior, it was a good school, but we did have problems with student discipline. We had students from three different low-income areas of town and these students tended not to get along well. Often times, we would have

different neighborhood fights at the school, which tended to disrupt the educational process. These fights would involve a large group of students (usually 10 or more students).

Basically, the rules at the school were the same rules that were established by the School Board governing student conduct for the parish. However, the principals would determine the severity of each student's involvement and then determine whether the student should be suspended or expelled.

Personally, I feel that nothing has really changed in the schools. If you look back over time basically students have the same types of problems and concerns. The same problems have just continued to occur over time. I think the only difference is that students now are a little more aggressive with their attitudes towards teachers. They say exactly what they feel without worrying about consequences.

Participant H

Participant H is a social studies teacher. Her experience spans thirty-three years.

Her last twenty-seven years have been at this school; all of her years have been in this district.

I went to a high school that was about 400 students, maybe 500 at the time. It was all white and it ranged from upper income all the way down to extremely low income. The people of the community seemed to care very much about the school and cared that their children would succeed. Parental involvement, there was a good deal of parental involvement. The teachers did call home on a regular basis to find out about the students if particularly if they missed school for than two or three days in a row. Parent teacher organization it was quite large and they were very involved. We had different organizations at the school where the parents could get involved, booster clubs the parents worked with the students, with the 4-H and the Key Club, the Beta Club, all of the different clubs. We had parents who were actually involved and the school was usually considered right by most parents.

You respected the teachers, you, I wouldn't say looked up to them as gods, but they were community leaders and the kids really respected them. And if you had an oddball teacher they were considered to be eccentric. But they were considered to be a little odd but they were still respected in the classroom. And I don't think I ever really had what I would consider to be a bad teacher. You could go to the teachers, you could talk to the teachers, the teachers treated you with respect, you treated the teachers with respect, and it was just really nice.

We didn't have many rules [when I was in school]. People basically did what they should do because there was so much respect there. One I remember, no touching. You could not hold hands, I guess you would say the paper rule, you had to have you had to be able to put a sheet of paper between two people of the

opposite sex. I think there were rules about going to the bathroom. You couldn't just get up and leave class and go to the bathroom. There were certain times you could use your lockers, too. I really can't remember anything because people weren't late for class. I'm sure they [the administration] dealt with you if there were [late students] but people just didn't do it. The one thing that stands out is we had a huge controversy about a girl who showed up on April Fool's Day with her hair colored green. And that caused a controversy for two or three days because we didn't have a rule to cover it. But, there were really no rules on hair, dress length, oh there was one. Now this shows how old I am, girls could not wear more than two starched petty coats because the hall was not wide enough. And that's it.

Today, kids don't respect you, well some kids do. The parents definitely don't, many of the parents don't respect the teachers. Teaching is looked at as not a real job. If your only teaching because you can't do something else. They [parents] don't give you any support. It's tough because you don't have any support or very little support from the parents. You have a PTA meeting and the only time the parents show up is to see if there's food and they never show up on time; they are always late. You set up a conference; they may or may not show up. So it's very difficult to deal with parents today. I would have never dreamed of doing these things when I was a student.

Participant I

Participant I is also a social studies teacher. She has taught in the parish for thirty-two years.

School for me was fun. I enjoyed it because I basically participated in everything. I lived in rural area but the school was basically in an urban area and we had about eight to nine hundred students in the high school I attended. I was involved in the choir unit; I was in the student council and the FTA, which was the Future Teachers of America at that time. I was a cheerleader. I basically participated; I was very active and I think school was a fun time for me as a student.

The relationship between a teacher and a student at that time was that you knew they [teachers] were professional people. And I mean they looked at you as being a student, but you also knew that these were the people that were there for you whenever they could be of any assistance to you. And I would say that it was a very positive relationship, especially in regards to academics and to wanting to see you achieve.

I guess when you look at some of the things today that we have problems with at that time they were not problems. And I guess folks would say that you were chewing gum, minor stuff, because very seldom you would hear of a student skipping class or skipping school or using profanity. None of those things were basically tolerated. Because of the fact I guess at the time you knew more about

moral value because these things were taught in the home as opposed to today a lot of things our parents instill in us were carried over into the school so as a result we knew that if we did something that was not in accordance with what was at home we'd have to wait until we got home. I mean that was taken care of at school and then when you got home you know you got a double whammy. So it's real hard to say exactly what a serious problem was and if it ever was a problem maybe if you heard about one or two people who may have skipped class or whatever, but when that happened you know it didn't happen again.

Participant J

Participant J is a social studies teacher. He has five years of teaching experience.

I attended a comprehensive magnet high school, grades nine through twelve. Enrollment was probably about right at about of students somewhere between nine hundred to a thousand students. When I say all magnet I mean right there the emphasis is placed on academics, we didn't have any contact sports, we had a few non-contact sports. Students were drawn from zones throughout the parish because of their aptitude. When you stepped on the campus of that high school, you knew you were going to college. It was expected that we were not going to have many discipline problems because a magnet school is somewhere where you're focused on academics. You knew not only what you were going to receive a quality education, but at the same time you didn't have to worry about your safety.

Probably the one rule that I remember would be about tardiness, you know having enough time to get to school and to your different classes. Like most schools, at the beginning of the year they [teachers] would go over the handbook but as far as anything we'd physically put up on the wall in classrooms, no. On the first day the teachers made you aware of their rules, regulations, expectations and I from there it was more unspoken. It was almost like we knew right from wrong. We knew what was expected.

Back then you saw everybody else doing the right thing so it's almost like you know you conformed to the behavior of everyone else. You had a few people, you know the class clowns or whatever but for the majority of everybody else there was there to learn. It was almost like if you're in the classroom and everyone, the majority of the class is doing their work you almost don't have a choice but to do your work. Otherwise you would stick out and look like a sore thumb. I credit this atmosphere to two things: the caliber of students and, most important, the nurturing and expectations of the teachers.

The one fight I remember happened at the end of the day when we were boarding the school buses to go home. Two young ladies started fighting and about all I remember is the principal leading them into the office. I really can't recall whether they received a suspension. The next day there was the big talk that there was a fight; it was a big deal. It was shocking, unexpected.

But all that was back in '83. A lot has changed. I think we [as students] were a little more independent when I was in school. Now I see students who need more guidance, need more direction. You have to stay on them to be consistent. Another thing is their priorities. It's not only academic, but extracurricular activities as well. I see less involvement. When I was in school you would have a large number of students who would participate in things such as the band, sports, and clubs. But I see students now and I don't know if it's peer pressure or what, they don't have self-motivation to say, 'I want to be in the band or I want to be in this club or I want to participate in athletics.' It's almost uncool. The other thing I see different is we would compete among each other academically. When a test would come back, you would look over your test and you would look to your left or to your right to see what your neighbor made. Now with these students, it's almost like they just want to pass. I just can't understand the drastic difference in students then and now.

Participant K

Participant K is an English teacher. She has twenty-seven years of experience; all but her first year of teaching has been in this school district.

I graduated from high school in 1965. During those particular years students had a lot of respect for their teachers. There were very few discipline problems as I can remember and most of the problems were minor problems and quite different from what we have currently. It was almost unusual for a student to disrespect a teacher. It was almost unheard of. Students looked at teachers as being the person in authority and the respect was there. I think at the time it was just a part of the educational culture, our society at that time was different. And those are the kinds of things that were expected of students.

Analysis Process

The analysis and coding processes described in Chapter Three led to the development of an outline of core themes and the elements of each theme. Transcripts were read and re-read. Reflection on descriptive data, the words, statements, ideas, and thoughts led to identification of units of meaning. These units were placed in clusters or groupings along with other units that had similar features. Each unit and cluster was examined in an attempt to gain a sense for how these statements and words combined to

create a narrative of the high school teacher's experience with a zero tolerance for fighting policy (See Appendix C).

Though experiences and opinions varied, the participants discussed many of the same facets. They focused on the implementation and enforcement, the apparent goal, and unintended results of the policy. From this data six major themes emerged:

- 1) Here's the policy; now enforce it.
- 2) Divided we stand.
- 3) Well, there are fewer fights. Aren't there?
- 4) Consistency and fairness
- 5) School climate
- 6) Should we mend the policy or just end the policy?

"Here's the policy; now enforce it" included descriptions of how the teachers perceive the inception of the Zero Tolerance for Fighting Policy. The participants talked about their role in the development of the policy and their duties in the enforcement of such a policy.

The next theme was "Divided we stand." This theme was based on portions of the interviews that explored the teachers' feelings about the policy. Through these interviews it became apparent that the teachers were divided. In addition, several teachers admitted to having mixed feelings themselves.

The third major theme was "Well, there are fewer fights, aren't there?" This theme emerged from conversation that focused on the goal and perceived results of the policy.

Next, the issues of consistency and fairness are the foci of theme four. These terms were mentioned in several interviews. Many of the teachers talked about the perceived inconsistencies in the enforcement of the zero tolerance for fighting policy.

The fifth theme resulted from discussion of the school climate. By and large, teachers felt that the school climate was positively affected by this zero tolerance policy.

Finally, the teachers described what they have observed in the school and students since the inception of the policy. Many of the teachers did not believe that the policy, as currently written and enforced, was an effective way to change students' attitudes and thus decrease the amount of violent acts. This resulted in the theme of "Should we mend the policy or just end the policy?"

Within each of these themes were the elements that make up the experience of being a high school teacher working in a school that has a zero tolerance for fighting policy. Descriptions of these themes were presented to several participants through the process of member checking. Feedback from participants added depth and meaning to the analysis of the data and assisted in clarification and composition of this description of the experience with a zero tolerance for fighting policy. At this point, statements were analyzed in an attempt to make comparisons and draw conclusions. The researcher did this in order to determine if specific attributes affected the way a teacher viewed the zero tolerance for fighting policy.

The following themes are presented and supported by quotes made by the respective research participants. These statements express and explain what the participants believe is the experience of high school teachers who work in a

school where there is a zero tolerance for fighting policy. Basically, the themes are ordered chronologically from policy to implementation to evaluation.

Theme One: Here's the policy; now enforce it.

This theme evolved when the participants discussed how they perceived the policy development and implementation. Many teachers expressed concern about the lack of teacher input. Following are several quotes that support the first theme:

I believe it [the policy] came about as a result of looking at suspensions and the reason for suspensions. I think there was a high suspension rate, specifically for fighting. I know the decision for this was definitely made by people from the central staff, the central office, particularly those who deal with discipline. I know the sheriff's office was involved, some parents were involved and I guess you would classify the other people as community leaders who were involved. We [teachers] were not heavily involved. We were just given the end result. Here is the policy - live by it (Participant C).

It [the policy] was adopted by the school board because in one particular school there were so many fights. I think they [the decision makers] thought in order to kind of cut down on the behavior, if they came up with this policy it would basically stop from fighting; I'm not really sure [who was involved] but there was a group of supervisors that got together. And they researched the zero tolerance from other parishes or other states; I don't know [if teachers were involved]; several counselors were involved (Participant D).

I was pretty indifferent [when the policy went into effect]. I said, ' Well, here is another policy from the central office. I ask no questions.' (Participant E).

Zero tolerance at [this school] came about from the parish level. I did not have a part in the policy being implemented in the parish schools. We were simply given the policy and were told when it would go into effect (Participant F).

I was not involved in the process. I'm not even sure if that asked for teacher input into this decision. I think this may have been totally an executive decision. Therefore, I think just the superintendent and board members approved this policy... Since the implementation of this policy many teachers around the school site have been given extra duty time. In between classes, we have several duty posts that we are assigned to where we must stand at the end of each class. Also,

it puts greater pressure on the teacher to have better classroom management because any potential disruptions could really be the end of a student's scholastic career (Participant G).

I have no idea [about who was involved in the implementation of the zero tolerance for fighting policy]. I would assume that it was the school board and most probably these professionals that they [district administrators] hired. And then there might have been a few parents. I don't know of a teacher that was involved in the decision-making process... We had a general meeting in which they [district administrators] told us about zero tolerance and what they were planning to do. They talked to us and they asked for our input but like so many other things in our parish you get the feeling it was a done deal before it came to the teachers (Participant H).

We [the teachers] were never asked [our opinions of zero tolerance]. They [district administrators] just said, 'We're going to bring zero tolerance into the parish.' It was like it [the policy] was shoved down on us. They never once really expressed what it was, why they were bringing it, or did we [teachers] think that we really need zero tolerance. I think they could have said, 'Do you have any suggestions or recommendations for any other kind of program that you feel might work?' or maybe see if there were things that some teachers are already doing and maybe we can just play on those things (Participant I).

I think the superintendent, his executive team, school board members and lawyers were the ones responsible for the zero tolerance policy. I thought it was copycat syndrome. There was a neighboring parish that already had the policy in effect. It was more this they looked at that particular system and said, 'OK, they implemented it. They saw some results and we're going to do the same thing.' I don't believe input was gathered from teachers. I think if the superintendent and his staff probably gathered input, it was more from the administrators (Interview J).

From the participants' statements, one can conclude that the teachers felt they had little or no input in the development of this zero tolerance policy. Some teachers stated that they felt that this policy was not necessary in this district; they feel that district administrators simply jumped on the bandwagon of neighboring school district policy. Others felt that if fighting were actually a problem, teachers should have been consulted in order to seek options for dealing with assertive behavior.

Theme Two: Divided we stand.

Mixed feelings characterized the stance of the participants. Many of the teachers interviewed discussed the benefits and the shortcoming of the zero tolerance policy. Yet, they felt that they should emphasize the importance of presenting a united front. The following quotes exemplify the above statement:

The faculty [meaning teachers] is probably divided on the policy. I think teachers who are more cognizant of the culture of the students, who are part of that culture can better understand and perhaps do not necessarily see a greater need for zero tolerance (Participant A).

I would assume that most teachers are in support of it. I could not imagine a teacher wanting to have any type of disruptive environment. I think it's a good idea to have zero tolerance because initially kids know that hey if I do this; this is what's going to happen. It gives the kids an opportunity to make their own choice already knowing what the consequences are. It also somewhat sets a standard as to what will and will not be accepted and tolerated. Which I think is outstanding. Another good aspect of zero tolerance is that it brings in different factors of the community. The school, the law enforcement, the judicial system and the parents (Participant C).

I really think the faculty is divided. There are some that think it's a great idea and there are some that think it's not fair it doesn't work and it shouldn't be enforced (Participant D).

I think when they [district administrators] were going through the process of explaining it; most of us [teachers] felt it wasn't needed... I think you'll find some teachers on very divided faculties [of other schools] where they will say, 'Oh, we feel much safer now because of this.' But, I never feared for my safety and I don't really know of a teacher who did fear for their safety. It might have been an isolated case, but not day in and day out (Participant H).

I was there from day one when they [district administrators] brought it into the parish. I was very angry about it because I knew it came from a [different] parish where they were having serious problems. And the kinds of problems they were having, we were not having those problems. And I was angry because I said this is a weapon and this is something else to put our kinds in jail. And I didn't like it at all (Participant I).

Teachers on this faculty expressed their belief that the faculty is divided on the issue of the zero tolerance for fighting policy. Many expressed their own internal conflict and struggles about what benefits the students of the school.

Theme Three: Well, there are fewer fights. Aren't there?

Many of the participants agreed that there appears to be fewer fights as a result of the zero tolerance for fighting policy. Therefore, they stated that the policy seems to have accomplished its desired goal of decreasing the amount of violence. The following quotations exemplify the participants' feelings:

To a certain degree, it [climate] probably changed because students became more aware of their immediate impact of their actions; it's [the policy] created probably more of an awareness to be careful, to watch out to try to avoid confrontations (Participant A).

The number of fights has cut down; you tend to feel more secure (Participant B).

I've heard rumors of how a kid may say, 'You're lucky I don't have \$250 to get myself out of jail.' And so there is any effect there. At least kids are thinking twice before fighting. They understand the ramifications. Which is good I think (Participant C).

I think students are kind of reluctant about fighting each other. The climate is a little quieter (Participant D).

I think since zero tolerance, students go out of their way to avoid trouble (Participant E).

I think this year saw probably the smoothest opening of school that they had ever seen. Usually, at the beginning of school is when you see a lot of incidents of fighting. That's mostly because you have students coming in from different neighborhoods being exposed to one another and I guess they're flexing or whatever trying to show their authority. But as was stated, I think it's different now because the policy [zero tolerance for fighting] has been in effect for a time period and now the students have adapted to the policy and they know what the rules are (Participant J).

I think the students certainly give it [fighting] a second thought before being involved in something that would require that this policy be applied. With 7th to 8th grade students sometimes I think maybe they act first and think later and they're not serious about the policy but still we haven't had very many major problems (Participant K).

However, participants told of instances where this paradox may exist: A policy designed to create safer schools actually may result in less safe schools.

I've seen them turn their backs on things that are about to start or if there's a fight they will do their best not to write it up as a fight. You know just to dismiss it and say, 'Ok, now you know you and so and so were fighting but I'm not going to write you up this time because I don't want your parents to have to pay this amount of money and I don't want you to end up in the Saturday classes' (Participant D).

From time to time a fight may break out in a class and it puts the teacher in the position of whether or not to report it because of the effects it could have on the student (Participant G).

Kids, parents, teachers – everybody – they're really not paying too much attention to it [the policy]. The kids are fighting and now folks [teachers] say, 'I didn't see that' (Participant I).

Others had this to say:

To play devil's advocate, the same few students who fought before the policy continued to fight after the policy. It's not working for the few repeat offenders (Participant E).

At first they [the students] were very leery of fighting because they weren't sure how the administration was going to handle the persons involved. After the first year or so this didn't appear to even be a thought in the minds of the students ready to fight (Participant F).

I don't think mandatory suspensions have changed student behavior at all. My observation is that students tend to protect themselves as before and suffer the consequences (Participant G).

Some of the schools in the parish had a lot of fighting that went on, I mean really bad fights. I don't think our fights were ever that bad at my school. It's just that we come from a small school where [fighting] isn't our major problem. Our major problem is the little picky discipline things that we can't teach a class because we

can't get some people to behave in class, not with fights. And zero tolerance doesn't cover that (Participant H).

Approximately half of the participants credited the zero tolerance for fighting policy for a decrease in the number of fights. Others said that they saw no significant change in student behavior. Regardless of their personal feelings, the teachers who participated in this study indicated that they respect the decision to have the policy and try to enforce it. However, according to a few of the participants, all teachers may not share this sentiment.

Theme Four: Consistency and Fairness

Those in favor of this policy, and all other zero tolerance policies, claim that all ambiguity and possible discretion are removed from situations. But, the participants in this study did not all agree that this is the case. The following are statements from the teachers that indicate what they believe about the fairness and consistency of the zero tolerance for fighting policy.

I think it's a fair policy. But, I am concerned with the self-defense part of it. My only question is whether it's right not to allow one to defend himself. Overall, I think my principal does a good job of executing the policy as it's written (Participant J).

There should be no gray area and I'm finding some administrators have a gray area when it comes to zero tolerance. To me, there should be no gray area; it is zero tolerance. Any physical altercation, any attempted physical altercation, zero tolerance should be automatic (Participant C).

I think it's who you know, how influential your parents are, whether you are a good student or if you are a troublemaker. I think all of those things play a part in this and it's not just cut and dry this is the way we're going to do it. I really think they look at who the person is. I mean would you take a, well no let's say would you give a teacher's child zero tolerance if that child and another student got in a fight? I doubt it...I have seen that people who have a fight might get sent over to

in-school detention and then the other person would follow the assistant principal around for the day and they fought earlier... There's so much discretion as far as I'm concerned by the assistant principal and the principal as to what is a fight, did they really fight or didn't they fight? If it's not fair to everyone, if it's not fairly administered, then don't have it. You've just got to have fair enforcement (Participant H).

Some kids may not go through the entire process and I have always said that what you do for one you must do for the other; but the key word is consistency. And when you're not consistent with what you're doing then folks are seeing that and they don't take it very lightly. ... So if you're going to administer a program you have to be strong about it and just be consistent. If one person is involved or two people are involved in a fight, it doesn't matter who you are, you know, these are the rules of the program and this is what you have to do (Participant I).

One participant even discussed how certain students are profiled and may be targeted by those in authority.

Right before the policy went into effect, a guy [an outside consultant] came and he explained what to look for as far as gang members... If we could identify those people who could be associated with the gang then we could say, 'OK we know these are the people that going to cause trouble and probably have guns this type of stuff.' Those were the kids who would get suspended under zero tolerance... They didn't say, 'Look at the student who's all dressed up, who has on his Girboud [jeans] with his Eastland shoes.' We didn't target those students or we weren't told to target those students (Participant A).

Many told of instances where the zero tolerance for fighting consequence was not consistency applied. In that lies in, according to these teachers, the inherent unfairness.

Theme Five: School Climate

Teachers also talked about the impact this policy has had on the climate of the school. In the following quotes, they discuss changes that they have seen since the implementation of the policy.

To a certain degree, I [climate] probably changed because students became more aware of the immediate impact of their actions; it's [the policy] created more of

an awareness to be careful, to watch out, to try to avoid confrontations...Students have become more aware of the immediate impact of their actions... It's [the policy] created more of an awareness to be careful, to watch out to try to avoid confrontations. I think that this is probably what it has done (Participant A).

There's a comfortable climate [in the school]; you tend to feel more secure because you know that there are repercussions if there is a fight or a violent act (Participant B).

Now that zero tolerance is in place I think students are kind of reluctant about fighting each other. The climate is a little quieter. Even if something [a fight] starts, you really don't see as before students running to be a witness to a fight. They don't want to be involved. I think it's done a lot for the climate...I think it [zero tolerance for fighting policy] makes a school a pleasant environment. It makes the teachers feel a lot better about going to work and in being in a classroom with a large group of students or with any number of students. I'm not afraid that a riot will break out. It just makes everything calm and tranquil (Participant D).

I think the policy has affected the school climate in a positive way. It's raised the level of expectation surrounding student behavior. Students are less prone to fight because they know what the punishment will be ahead of time (Participant J).

There were others, however, who felt differently.

Personally, I don't think the school atmosphere has changed any because of this policy. There are still fights that go on quite often at the school site. It seems to me that students are not worried about the circumstances of their actions in the heat of the moment. They are just moving on as no policy was ever implemented (Participant G).

I think the climate is one of punishment with no tolerance for mistakes. This isn't all due to this policy. It also has to do with the uniforms and all the other strict rules kids have to adhere to here (Participant E).

According to most of the participants, the climate of the school seems to have improved since the implementation of the zero tolerance for fighting policy. Even teachers who were not in favor of the policy concede this better climate may be a by-product of the policy. Many, but not all teachers, agreed with that assessment.

Theme Six: Should we mend the policy or just end the policy?

Most participants do not negate the intent and effectiveness of the zero tolerance for fighting policy. However, many of the teachers express concern about the policy.

The following quotes reveal teachers' beliefs that this policy may not have long lasting results and that it is merely a "band-aid" solution to a bigger problem.

Sometimes we need to look a little deeper into a problem before that fight starts. And then what about the persons who are defending themselves or the person who has been pushed and pushed and pushed? Then what about the person who's been following all the rules and then telling somebody, asking for it [help] and none of that works to one extent then they just can't handle it anymore it happens and they fight (Participant D).

These [zero tolerance] suspensions seem to deter fights, but I question were or not they truly get at what causes the aggressive behavior within individuals (Participant E).

One participant indicated that the concept of zero tolerance has the capacity to be effective. However, it can only be effective with changes.

I think it's a good idea. But maybe we need to change the consequences a little bit more. For example, instead of everything being financial or money and a few days off, why not pay a teacher or pay someone else to handle a program either on a Saturday morning or after school or maybe even have one during school where the parent and the child comes in? This way, they have to spend some time, the parent and the child, together. Have it supervised by a teacher and what you do is give them [students] an assignment, you give them some work to do. This way, parent and child are held accountable. And guess what else? Learning is taking place (Participant H).

I think the policy works fine as it is. I think it would be better to adjust the wording of the policy to fit true cases of self-defense. But more than anything else, I would strengthen the parental component. I think parents should have more involvement and responsibility (Participant J).

There are also those teachers who think the policy should be abandoned as opposed to mended. These teachers focus on the bigger picture.

I don't think it [the policy] has been what I would call effective. Other people may have a different way of looking at effective. If effective means we put students out of school that may be effective for some people. I think if we change attitudes that result in changed behavior, this may eventually result in the removal of zero tolerance policies (Participant A).

What we're doing is putting students out who could possibly be gaining and learning in this school environment in the classroom (Participant B).

I believe if there is a rule in place, it should be strictly followed; if not, then get rid of the rule... This policy would work if it were strictly enforced; since it is not, I suggest doing away with it and find something new (Participant F).

I think schools have implemented this policy to rid themselves of students who have a tendency to cause problems at the various school sites. Personally, I don't think this policy is a good because the educational system is the last resource that some of these students have before they go to the correctional system (Participant G).

I don't think it [zero tolerance for fighting policy] will be around any length of time. Programs like Peer Mediation gets peers together and other folks who want to work with them and help them [students] handle their problems. And then we might start to get to the root of the problem and find out exactly what's going on. Many times it's things at home. Some kids act out the way they do because they can't read, they can't write or whatever and as a result this is when the fights start. They become that anger then. I just don't think this policy can get fix these problems (Participant I).

Participant Profiles: An Epilogue

At the end of each interview, the participant was asked to think about his or her experiences in the school, pre and post zero tolerance. Here is what the participants had to say, in their own words.

Participant A

To a certain degree I have the same belief. It [the policy] is not good depending if you say zero tolerance policy, it's just what we're saying zero tolerance meaning there's no tolerance for fighting, no tolerance for aggressive behavior then I still have disagreements. However, I believe in certain circumstances that there should

be a zero tolerance policy. I think that students should know that if you come here and you're involved in certain activities that there's going to be a zero tolerance policy. At the same time I think more importantly is the attachment to zero tolerance policy, in other words what have we done to cut off aggressive behavior before it ever takes place. I think that if we put in place all of those things and we've taught students, we work to teach students about respect for other students and we've done it as well as we could and students are still aggressive toward one another we got zero tolerance policy.

Participant B

When the policy was first introduced, I was in favor of it. Now, I guess I would say I'm midway. I still like it, but I feel that some modifications can be made.

Participant C

Well I can't say that I necessarily agreed with all the specifics of the policy when it first started, but the overall idea, the overall concept - yes. I was in full agreement with it. I mean as a teacher we want an environment, one that's safe and ideal for learning. Hey, anything that helps me keep my environment the way I want it and need it to be, I'm in full support of it. My opinion of it now is among the students it is effective because it's a deterrent. My opinion to where the administrators are concerned it is effective when administered consistently.

Participant D

I thought it [the policy] was a good idea [when it began]. I thought it was a good idea in some instances. Now, I still think we should keep zero tolerance. I think we should keep zero tolerance with some limitations.

Participant E

I was pretty indifferent at the beginning. I guess now I have come to see it as the school's equivalent to laws. If you break the law, you go to jail. But, I do have concerns about the real problem of students who fight and those who are punished for simply defending themselves.

Participant F

At first they were very leery of fighting because they weren't sure how the administration was going to handle the persons involved. After the first year or so this didn't appear to even be a thought in the minds of the students getting ready to fight. I believe the policy would work if it were strictly enforced; since it is not, I suggest doing away with it. Because of all this, I just see the policy fizzling

out. Maybe something “better” will come along and we [the school district] will jump on that bandwagon.

Participant G

I never liked the idea of zero tolerance. I think it does not allow a kid to make the mistakes that kids make. Don't get me wrong, though. I'm all for safe schools. I don't want to see students fight anymore than the next teacher, but I just have never thought zero tolerance was the way to go.

Participant H

I thought the policy made sense in the beginning, even though it didn't apply to us [our school] much. I said, 'Hey, I know what's going on in the other schools. Let's stop it [fighting] before it gets to us. I thought it was a great idea. At this point, I don't like it. If it's not fair to everyone, if it's not fairly administered, then don't have it. You've just got to have fair enforcement.

Participant I

I don't foresee the policy staying around. It's just not as effective as possibly it could be when they first started out parents of fighters paid \$250. It kind of got to them a little bit. But now you sometimes hear kids say, 'Yeah, I might as well fight. My mama says she's got that \$250. She put \$250 aside just in case.' ...But, really in all sincerity, I really don't think that it will last that long because knowing the way we operate here in this parish, we'll hear about something else and we're going to jump for it ...But I don't think that zero tolerance is going to be around for any length of time now because of the way it's going down the road now. And kids and parents, teachers everybody they're really not paying too much attention to it. You have other programs like peer mediation. I mean like getting these peers together and other folks who want to work with them and let them handle their problems. And then you might start to get to the root of the problem and find out exactly what's going on.

Participant J

In the beginning, I was not in favor of this zero tolerance policy. I knew black males would feel the brunt of the policy more than any other segment of the student population. I guess I felt empathetic. But as time went on, I realized that it was only a few students who consistently disrupted the learning environment. If you allow that, you're doing a disservice to all students. Not only are schools supposed to prepare students academically, we prepare them socially.

Overall, I think the policy has had a positive affect on our school. The environment is more conducive to learning. In my opinion, the policy has been successful. It's all for the best.

Participant K

As a classroom teacher I think it's really an effective program and I think that it has longevity. Students are more likely to talk things out rather than fight because they know of the consequences. I think the fact that we do have consequences in place makes for a safer environment.

Summary

After repeatedly reading and listening to the data, the researcher reduced the text of the transcriptions and bracketed information. From there, connections were made and themes were named. It was at this point that the researcher attempted to move from descriptive into more analytical realm. In addition to discerning the essence of the experience of individual teachers who work in a high school with a zero tolerance policy, the researcher considered specific attributes of the participants. In other words, are the varied feelings expressed by the participants explained by shared characteristics? A componential chart shown in the table on the next page was helpful in the researcher's analysis.

Table 2
Componential Analysis

Teacher	Input	Supportive	Effective	Consistent/ Fair	Impact on Climate	Modify Policy
A	little	no	somewhat	unfair	positive	yes
B	some	yes	yes	yes	positive	yes
C	little	yes	yes	inconsistent	positive	no changes
D	did not know	yes	somewhat	yes	positive	yes
E	none	indifferent	somewhat	inconsistent	negative	yes
F	none	no	no	inconsistent	none	end
G	none	indifferent	no	inconsistent	none	end
H	none	no	no	inconsistent/unfair	none	yes
I	none	no	no	inconsistent	negative	end
J	none	yes	yes	yes	positive	yes
K	did not know	yes	somewhat	inconsistent	none	no changes

Next, the participants were categorized by gender, years of experience and content area. First, responses were examined to identify if the five males were more supportive of the policy than six females. No conclusions could be drawn. Of the five participants who favorably viewed the policy, three were male and two were female. Teachers' years of experience ranged from five to thirty-three. Six were categorized as less than 20 years and five had twenty or more years of teaching experience. Interestingly, four of the five teachers who deem the policy effective are newer teachers.

Finally, the teachers were compared based on their major teaching areas. The seven English and social studies teachers were labeled humanities. One science and one math teacher were collapsed and labeled as science. The remaining two teachers were classified as vocational. Again, no conclusions could be drawn this division. Teachers representing each of the three categories were in favor of the policy.

As a result, no predictions of the participant perceptions of the zero tolerance for fighting policy could be made solely based on their attributes of gender, years of experience or content area. The responses and views were varied. As a result, the researcher can only surmise the following as the "essence" of the of high school teachers' experience with a zero tolerance for fighting policy: The opinions of the teachers have been shaped by their personal philosophies of education and overall backgrounds and life experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This phenomenological study and the resulting descriptive information were presented in response to the question “What is the experience of high school teachers in a school that has implemented the Zero Tolerance for Fighting Policy?” The qualitative research method of phenomenology served as the base and structure for this inquiry. The process included identification of the phenomenon in need of study, locating participants, conducting in-depth interviews and analyzing descriptive data.

A literature review was completed in order to identify the background of zero tolerance policies in public education. Overall, the findings of this investigation of the experiences of eleven high school teachers were consistent with the elements reported in the literature.

Overview of Findings

Chapter four presented interpretation of the data gathered in interviews with eleven teachers on their experiences in a school that has a zero tolerance for fighting policy. After thoughtful consideration and analysis of descriptive data, six major themes were found to be included in the experiences of these teachers. These were (1) Here’s the policy; now enforce it, (2) Divided we stand, (3) There are fewer fights, aren’t there? (4) Consistency and fairness, (5) School climate, and (6) Should we mend the policy or just end the policy? Elements of each theme were described in detail through presentation of

descriptive data collected in the interviews. Presented here is a summary of results of this investigation along with related literature that lends further support to the findings.

Implementation Issues

This topic emerged from the participants' responses to the introduction of the policy. Participant C spoke of involvement from local law enforcement representatives in the policy writing. Participant I mentioned public hearings. These teachers voiced dismay about what was deemed insufficient, or nonexistent involvement in the specific policy making decision. None of the teachers interviewed stated that he or she had direct involvement in a district wide needs assessment or policy writing. In addition, no one even knew of a teacher who was asked directly for input during the planning and implementation stages. At the time of this study, however, Participant B was a member of a discipline advisory board.

The notion of teachers not being involved in school decisions and policy-making is not new. In 1991 a survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics was used to analyze teachers' views on control over school policy. Overall, teachers did not believe they had much influence over determining school-wide discipline policies. Of more than 53,000 public and private school teachers surveyed, only 39% felt they had considerable input when determining discipline policy. Teachers in different types of communities (i.e. big cities, small towns and rural areas) did not differ much in their perceptions of their influence (NCES, 1993).

Support Issues

The participants' responses varied when asked to consider the benefits of a zero tolerance for fighting policy. The variation of opinion and lack of consensus led to the questioning of teacher support of this zero tolerance policy. Three of the four social studies teachers, Participants A, H, and I, spoke of their disagreement with the zero tolerance policy. Included in this group were the two teachers with the most years of experience. Similar to Blair's (1999) observations, these teachers point to the "inflexibility of most zero tolerance statutes" (p. 37). Concerns about student self-defense were mentioned countless times. In addition, these participants discussed the need for solutions to the causes of the fights, not just a penalty for them.

Only Participant C expressed unequivocal support for the policy. He was one of the teachers with the fewest years of experience. Participant J also said that over time he came to see the need for the zero tolerance for fighting policy. Both mentioned rationales found in the literature. First is the need to "at least temporarily separate a dangerous or potentially dangerous student from the rest of the school population" (Ewing, 2000, p.7). Beyond immediate safety concerns, "applications of zero tolerance policies denounce violent student behavior as serves as a deterrent to such behavior" (Ewing, 2000, p.7). Proponents believe that a clear message is sent that acts that physically harm or endanger others will not be permitted at school. Thus, the learning environment is preserved. However, everyone agreed that a policy that is in place should be enforced.

Effectiveness Issues

According to the participants of this study, appearance and actuality are not always the same. Everyone acknowledged that there seems to be fewer fights taking place since the zero tolerance for fighting policy was implemented. Participants B, C, D, E, F, and K credit the penalties of suspension and money for making students think prior to reacting violently. But, contrary to this thought, some teachers (in particular, Participants G and H) see no change in aggressive behavior. Ironically, and most alarmingly, three participants spoke of instances when their colleagues consciously disregarded the policy.

Despite widespread use of the term and onslaught policies, virtually no data suggest that zero tolerance policies reduce school violence (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Researchers (Skiba & Peterson, 1999) further suggest that these policies and similar strategies may create “emotional harm or encourage students to drop out” (p. 376). Furthermore, the NCES study of school violence found that schools that use zero tolerance policies are less safe than those without such policies (NCES, 1998).

Application Issues

The fourth issue that emerged from this study was consistency and fairness of the policy’s implementation. Much of the teachers’ disenchantment about the policy seems to lie in this issue. Teachers, especially Participants E, F, and G, communicated misgivings about the amount of discretion and vagueness involved in deciding how, when and for whom this policy is administered. This, ironically, is despite the words of zero tolerance proponents who contend that such policies limit the latitude for biases.

Some of the participants in this study discussed the principal's ability to make decisions as to who is suspended under the zero tolerance for fighting policy. Such decisions were based on the influence of the child's parent within the community. Two participants discussed the issue of race in determining such decisions. While privilege is not specially covered in the literature, the role race plays in school exclusion and the administration of zero tolerance policies is addressed. In a 2000 article, First reported that U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) data show that in 1998-99, 17% of all U.S. public school students were black and 64% were white. Yet blacks received 32 percent of suspensions and expulsions. Up to that time, the OCR had not collected such expulsion information since the 1976-77 school year. The office resumed in part as a response to the Zero Tolerance movement.

Climate Issues

Participants were asked about how the zero tolerance for fighting policy impacted the school as a whole. Responses centered on the "feel," or climate, of the school. Participants B and D felt that climate of the school had improved since the policy's implementation. Even Participant A, a teacher who completely disagreed with the philosophy of zero tolerance policies, conceded and agreed on this issue. This corroborates research in school climate. According to a report published in Education Week (1994) learning and teaching cannot take place in schools that are not orderly and safe.

Not all interviewed teachers, however, shared the view that the climate was improved by a zero tolerance for fighting policy. Participant G stated that he sees little, if

any, change in the school climate. On the opposite end of the continuum, Participant E said that she saw a negative impact of the zero tolerance policy. She views the school's climate as "one of punishment with no tolerance for mistakes." Several researchers have voiced philosophical objections to zero tolerance policies that are based on the behaviorist thrust of the assertive discipline model. Curwin and Mendler (1988) characterized them as an example of an obedience model, in which power-based methods are used to compel students to conform to rules. Moreover, such approaches place the emphasis on threats and punishments.

Modification Issues

The sixth, and final, topic that resulted from analysis of the interviews concerned the future of the zero tolerance for fighting policy. This question arose: Should we mend the policy or just end it? The words of the teachers involved in this study disclose their apprehension in seeing the policy as a solution to the ills of our schools. Participants D and E mentioned that if the goal of the policy is to deter fighting, the policy may be working. But, if the goal is to identify the cause of aggressive behavior and teach coping mechanisms, the policy fails miserably. Teachers such as Participant H see the zero tolerance for fighting as a good start. Suggestions for improving the effectiveness of the policy included removing the monetary penalty and focusing on the anger management classes and peer mediation programs. Conversely, there were also teachers who believe the policy should be terminated. Participant A, B, and I see this policy as a disservice to students and the learning process. As a result, the school problem becomes a larger,

societal problem when these students are removed from the educational system and sent to the streets.

From analysis of the participants' responses, it seems that most of them reject the behaviorist philosophy of education. They do not see strategies such as zero tolerance policies as a means of effectively changing student behavior. Participants discussed the need to get "to the root of the problem" by providing assistance to students rather than, or at least in addition to, simply imposing mandatory suspensions. While no interviewee used the terms humanistic or behaviorist, their conversations led the researcher to surmise that their beliefs are more aligned with humanism. According to Rogers (1983), humanism considers the learner as a "whole" person – physical, cognitive and emotional. The role of the student is to know and to communicate herself or himself. The role of the teacher is to facilitate learning by

1. being real and genuine, discarding the mask of superiority and omniscience;
2. trusting and respecting the learning as individual;
3. communicating openly with the learners who should communicate openly with the teachers (Rogers, 1983).

This is starkly different from the behaviorist model in which zero tolerance is based. With policies such as this zero tolerance for fighting policy, students are told what the rules are, compelled to follow these rules and faced with unpleasant consequences for noncompliance.

The themes and respective summaries presented in this study help to express the feelings, perceptions, and experiences of teachers who work in a high school that has implemented a zero tolerance for fighting policy.

Recommendations

The intent of this research was to share the experience of high school teachers who work in a school that has implemented a zero tolerance for fighting policy. Told in their own words, the narratives are retold by the researcher in order to assist others who may be considering similar policy. The following recommendations, compiled by the researcher, are made based on the data gathered from the literature and the participants of this study.

Determine the need. Conduct a needs assessment and examine data to determine if a zero tolerance for fighting policy is needed. Be wary of implementing a policy simply because neighboring districts have done so. Once need is determined, develop a policy that meets the specific issue to be addressed. Do not rely on copying another system's policy.

Ask the stakeholders. It is especially important to solicit input from everyone who will be affected by the policy. This includes students, parents, community members and law enforcement representatives. If the policy is being made at the district level, it is essential to bring teachers and building administrators in the discussion. These are the people who will be responsible for implementing and enforcing the policy. Often, teachers and principals can predict how a policy will work in the real world. In addition to seeking initial input, the policy makers should continue to solicit feedback from these stakeholders once the policy has been implemented.

Examine the specificity of a policy being considered. Despite their name, zero tolerance policies should allow administrators to examine the circumstance. In the

drafting of a policy, recognize there are going to be exceptions, and allow for administrators to deal with those exceptions.

Implement diversity training. Since students come from a variety of backgrounds, it is important to address the issue of discrimination and examine personal biases and prejudices. Administrators, counselors, and teachers should participate in such training in hopes of increasing cultural sensitivity.

Include others in decision-making. Relying on the judgment of one person, usually the principal, may be problematic. Consider allowing a committee, rather than one person, to determine if a situation calls for a zero tolerance suspension. These decisions should be made after a complete investigation and examination of findings. This may reduce personal biases and increase fairness.

Implement conflict resolution and anger management programs. Pro-active measures should be in place to help students before situations escalate to physical altercations. School counselors can be trained to provide services for students who seek assistance or are recommended. Students may also play a vital role of peer mediators.

Require parental involvement. If a student is reprimanded and suspended under a zero tolerance policy, require the parent to play an active role in the process. One such suggestion would be to require parents to attend anger management classes with the student.

The above suggestions and recommendations represent ideas that may assist schools or school districts as they examine zero tolerance policies and as they begin to engage in the policy-writing process.

Considerations for Further Research

Throughout this research process several questions arose which led to consideration of areas of further research. First was the question of how the zero tolerance for fighting policy is experienced by the administrators who actually enforce it. Do their personal discipline philosophies affect how the policy is implemented? Do they believe that the policy should be written with ambiguity or without room for administrative discretion?

Second, the issue of how students perceive the policy came to mind. Do they feel safer? Is the mandatory suspension really a deterrent to fighting? In their opinions, what is needed to combat aggressive behavior?

This researcher chose a school located in a small Southern town. Would an examination of teachers in another setting be similar to those found in this study? Replication of this study in an urban setting or in a different region of the country would be enlightening.

Also, a quantitative study could be done. Such an endeavor could examine the actual suspension rates prior to and after the implementation of the policy in an attempt to determine effectiveness.

Finally, this study could be expanded to include more participants from more diverse backgrounds. From that, it may be determined if specific attributes are indicators of one's support of zero tolerance policies.

The results of this study may help in providing a base to guide further reflection and discussion of the issues faced by schools and school districts that are considering any type of zero tolerance policy. Through this consideration may come a heightened

awareness and understanding which can lead to increased support and effective implementation of a policy designed to ensure the safety of all students and school personnel. Dialogue with all involved persons (parents, students, administrators, and teachers) is necessary in order to determine what decisions need to be made and how to implement a zero tolerance policy if it is deemed necessary.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Project

TITLE: Experiences of High School Teachers with a Zero Tolerance for Fighting Policy

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: James Banning, Ph.D.

CO-INVESTIGATOR: Ruth Louise Ray

CONTACT NAME AND PHONE NUMBER FOR QUESTIONS/PROBLEMS:
Ruth Louise Ray, (970) 491 - 8039 or (337) 824-2880

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH: To discover the meanings of high school teachers' experience with a Zero Tolerance for Fighting Policy.

PROCEDURES/METHODS TO BE USED: You have been asked to participate in a research study. Data for this research will be gathered through interviews. As a participant you will be asked a series of questions related to your experience with the Zero Tolerance for Fighting Policy. Your interview may vary in length from one hour to one and a half hours. Face-to-face interviews will be conducted at the school during the teacher's conference period; if necessary, a follow-up call may be placed. All interviews, including the possible follow-up calls, will be audio taped to maintain the accuracy of what is said.

RISKS INHERENT IN THE PROCEDURES: There are no known risks; however, it may be impossible to identify all potential risks in experimental procedures. The researchers have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any potential risks.

BENEFITS: You may experience no direct benefits from this study. But, information gained from this research may be used by various school districts throughout the country considering similar policies.

Page 1 of 2 Subject's Initials _____ Date _____

CONFIDENTIALITY: All gathered materials will be held by case number so that no names will be associated with individual teacher's responses. Additionally, the names of the school and school district will be given pseudonyms. Quotes from the interviews may be used to support themes, but these quotes will not be associated with the names of specific persons. A summary report will be provided to the school district; however, there will be no references to individuals and no direct quotations. Interview materials and tape recordings will be stored in a locked area. Upon successful defense of the dissertation, all audiotapes will be destroyed.

LIABILITY: The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of injury.

Questions about the subject's rights may be directed to Linda L. Kovar, (970) 491-0232.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 2 pages.

Participant Name (printed)

Participant Signature

Date

Investigator or Co-investigator Signature

Date

Page 2 of 2 Subject's Initials _____ Date _____

APPENDIX B

Sample Transcription

Interviewer: “This interview is for a research study on zero tolerance. Basically what I’m trying to find out is what is the experience of high school teachers who work in schools who have implemented such a policy. To begin with I’m going to ask you a little bit about your background, a little bit about your high school experiences as a student then compare them to what you saw as a student and your seeing now as a professional educator and then we’ll move specifically into the policy. OK?”

Interviewee: “OK, but how long will this be?”

Interviewer: “About an hour.”

Interviewee: “Ooookay.”

Interviewer: “Is that OK?”

Interviewer: “OK, first will you start off by telling me a little bit about what your own high school experience was like? The size of the school, whether it was urban or rural, and then what school was like for you as a student.”

Interviewee: “School for me was fun. I enjoyed it because I basically participated in everything. I lived in rural area but the school was basically in an urban area and we had about eight to nine hundred students in the high school I attended which was even for a high school at the time. I was involved in the choir unit because I did all the first soprano solos at the rally. I was in the student council and the FTA, which was the Future Teachers of America at that time. That’s something they don’t have anymore. But I was a cheerleader. I basically participated, I was very active and I think school’s a fun time for me as a student.”

Interviewer: “Right, what were the relationships, how would you describe the relationships between students and teachers at that time?”

Interviewee: “The relationship between a teacher and a student at that time was that you knew they were professional people. And I mean they looked at you as being a student, but you also knew that these were the people that were there for you whenever they could be of any assistance to you. And I would say that it was a very positive relationship. Especially in regards to academics and to wanting to see you achieve. “

Interviewer: “Now, student behavior, what were some of the things that caused the most trouble when you were in school?”

Interviewee: “Hmm. That’s a tad bit hard because I guess when you look at some of the things today that we have problems with at that time they were not problems. And I guess folks would say that you were chewing gum, minor stuff, because very seldom you would hear of a student skipping class or skipping school or using profanity. None of those things were basically tolerated. Because of the fact I guess at the time you knew more about moral value because these things were taught in the home as opposed to today a lot of things our parents instill in us were carried over into the school so as a result we knew that if we did something that was not in accordance with what was at home we’d have to wait until we got home. I mean that was taken care of at school and then when you got home you know you got a double whammy. So it’s real hard to say exactly what a serious problem was and like I said if it ever was a problem maybe if you heard about one or two people who may have skipped class or whatever, but when that happened you know it didn’t happen again.”

Interviewer: “So basically, what I’m hearing from you and most of the other people I’ve talked to there were a lot of understood expected behaviors and so there weren’t a lot of rules in place.”

Interviewee: “Absolutely.”

Interviewer: “And so that kind of leads into the next question about as an educator thinking back on your high school experiences how would you compare the two? Or is the comparison even possible?”

Interviewee: “Well let me say that anything is possible but it is so far remote and removed in some instances because many of the things that we were taught in the home are not taught in the homes today. And I say that because you can tell the difference, you can tell when there are some students who come to school and when they would say you the proper manners and certain things they know not to do and not to say because they know that if you call home they know what’s going to happen to them as opposed to some of the others say they don’t care because there aren’t any rules to govern them by in the home. Therefore they feel that no one tells me what to say or do here at school and that way I think they are putting themselves in the realm of being an adult and that’s when I say, ‘hey guys I think you need to come to my (couldn’t understand) class. Because you are acting in that role, I say, ‘there are rules here that you must follow.’ The first day of school we talk about what are some of the rules you have at home? And you would hear some of the kids say, ‘why I know I can’t be on the telephone at certain times, I can’t be out,’ and you know some of the others look at them and the majority of them would laugh, ‘what? Oh man! I can come in and I can go and whatever time.’ And I say, ‘Oh hey, I know we couldn’t do that at my house as a matter of fact you guys talk about going out now? Oh we didn’t go out period to some of the places you were talking about going.’ No, no, no, no and driving up and down streets, we had no cars to drive then. But it was just that you had those rules in the home and you knew that if you did something

wrong what no one had to say anything to you, it was that eye contact. You know and that same thing where some students today in a classroom who knows better and they do something wrong, you look at them and they, I'm sorry and then there are other students, 'Uh uh, hey you don't tell me what to do,' that kind of thing. So, it's about more than moral fabric has decreased immensely in the home. It's about because all of the different groups I should say and organizations who say that you know you don't need to say a prayer, you don't need new blessings so, and those things carry on and folks are afraid to say or do them because they are afraid they're going to break a rule."

Interviewer: "Well how long have you been in the profession?"

Interviewee: "Ah-ha. This is my thirty-second year. I am in the drop program."

Interviewer: "Oh congratulations."

Interviewee: "Thank you."

Interviewer: "Oh, it's so long now for me. But I'm working toward it, every little bit helps."

Interviewee: "You go there and go... possibly when you get there there'll be another program."

Interviewer: "God no because drop will have come and gone and hopefully come back. Has it all been in public schools? Have all of your years been in public schools?"

Interviewee: "Yes."

Interviewer: "Ok, and what about in this particular school, how long?"

Interviewee: "What when I first started teaching in '69 I started at the school I graduated from as a matter of fact. It would be a high school. And the following year is when they integrated the schools and all of the teachers who taught at high school level were transferred throughout the parish. And at the time a lot of the things they were talking about doing or putting into existence we were doing those things because when they integrated the schools. I was team teaching way back then."

Interviewer: "Oh really?"

Interviewee: "Yeah."

Interviewer: "Oh good. OK, this is basically the meat of the interview right here. When I say zero tolerance policy, what do you think about? What come to mind?"

Interviewee: "Hmm. I think about something that came into play and I was there from day one when they brought it into the parish. I was very angry about it because I knew it

came from a parish where they were having serious problems. And the kinds of problems they were having we were not having those problems. And I was angry because I said this is a weapon and this is something else to put our kinds in jail. And I didn't like it at all."

Interviewer: "So you said you were there from day one."

Interviewee: "Yeah when they had the first meeting when they started talking about zero tolerance. They brought the people from outside of the parish to come in to discuss it."

Interviewer: "Well good you're the only person that I've talked to who can go that far back with it. So could you tell me a little bit about that? Like who was even involved in that decision making process?"

Interviewee: "They had an open forum and they went around the parish to the various schools and the night when they came to our school it was a packed cafeteria because that's where the meeting was held. And there were a lot of angry parents in there, there were some who really didn't know what zero tolerance was about and there were some who had heard but still wasn't sure. And there were those who had heard and who knew about it and didn't want it in the parish. And the argument was that, you know you don't have anything to worry about if your child doesn't ever get into trouble. And one parent said that's not the issue, the issue is that why have it here at all? You know this is another thing you know that you're throwing at our children when they're not those kind of children and in reality they were not having those of problems then. It was initiated in that parish because a lot of kids had guns at the school and (I couldn't understand) three or four instances. And there were a lot of fights with weapons. And in our parish you know we hadn't heard of those kinds of things so it was before they really initiated it. There were a lot of questions and a lot of things they had to change to kind of fit some of the things that they wanted to fit in the parish. And they had like I said parents, there were ministers there,"

(SIDE TWO)

Interviewer: "Do you think that it's fairly administered? Across the board?"

Interviewee: "No. Because a lot of times you know that there's students who are fighting? And then hey they know who you are and they know your family, you know some kids you might say may not go through the entire process and I have always said that what you do for one you must do for the other but the key word is consistency. And when you're not consistent with what you're doing then folks are seeing that and they don't take it very lightly. And then well hey well they did nothing so... So if your going to administer a program you have to be strong about it and what, and just be consistent. If one person is involved or two people are involved in a fight, it doesn't matter who you are, you know, these are the rules of the program and this is what you have to do. And when you don't do that, then hey here's the next alternative. You know you'll be removed from this school and you'll have to do whatever the judge says you have to do."

Interviewer: “Do you think that this policy had any effect on the way the students see school? The way they just see rules and authority? I guess that what I’m talking about is the climate of the school, the feel of the morale of the students and the staff. Do you think the policy affected any of that?”

Interviewee: “Not that much. I don’t think so. Because you know those students who come to school and even before they had this zero tolerance thing, actually the program that the morale, the climate of the school was, it was not bad. And there was those kids even if they saw another one who wanted to get into anything they would say, ‘Ah come on man you know this is our school you know, we don’t want to do this kind of stuff you know, let’s just take care of this and go on.’ And then you had those teachers you know who were behind too who would say, ‘hey guys you don’t have to do it you know, what would your mom say? What would your dad say?’ And you know when you kind of pat them on the back and talk to them in that way, it kind of, just move it on right swiftly and everything is in order.”

Interviewer: “So how do you think the students feel about the policy?”

Interviewee: “A lot of them really don’t, they really don’t think it should be, at sometime if you’re a kid if you really want to fight you know, they would say, ‘Look I’m not going to fight you on campus because I don’t have that \$250. You just wait till we get off campus. We’re not going to fight on campus you know because we don’t want to get put out of school,’ and that shows you right then and there if you can wait all that time that means that hey by the time somebody will have talked to them and say, ‘Look now if you didn’t want to do it here on campus, your saying that you don’t want to pay the \$250 then you know what the consequences are and they’ll say, ‘well we don’t have to do it.’ And then they’ll say, ‘we don’t need that zero tolerance anyway now.’”

Interviewer: “So again it still goes back to what you said about that peer mediation. You know and if it were really in placed and pushed...”

Interviewee: “Right, I think that and if that were done properly because you see they would start off with something and it started working real good. But then they would hear or see something going on somewhere else and think that hey well we need to get rid of that, hey this is the thing here that we need. And you know it may not be what we need.”

Interviewer: “Right it may work somewhere else but...”

Interviewee: “Right, it may be working there but that’s what they need. You know they need zero tolerance. The kids in this parish from what I’ve seen their not bad, you know many of them were not raised in the homes like we were raised in with morale values and taught these things but then that’s where we come in and we have to do all of this at school. You know the social aspect of it you know, the political, the economical, the whole job. And bring it into focus and say what should be and what should not be. And this is what you do and how you do it and when you do it and all those kinds of things.”

Interviewer: “Well what about the teachers, because I’ve heard both sides and I’m sure you have too. But if you had to like put your finger on the pulse of your school’s faculty overall do you think there in favor or not really in favor of zero tolerance? What are the teachers saying, you know over the few years that it’s been in place?”

Interviewee: “I think initially they would have said that when they first started out it was effective. But now, no because it goes back to not being consistent. And the way it is being run because I think that a part of it was not really brought into focus to everybody to say well if the kids don’t attend, well what is suppose to happen you know when they are arrested? What are you going to do? And this was like afterwards and then instead of saying well are there any persons who feel comfortable you know working with these kids, anybody who would like to work you know with these kids? And half the folks didn’t know until the students who had gone through the program zero tolerance would come back and say they had to meet on Saturday and they sat up and watched these videos with folds fighting and then afterwards they’d talk about well what did you think about these kids fighting? You see that is not an effective way of trying to combat; you know an anger situation by showing anger. You know this shows too that you don’t have folks who are qualified to deal with that.”

Interviewer: “Well and I guess also other than the forum that took place at beginning where people had a chance to express their opinions it doesn’t seem like teachers were asked their input about you know how the policy should be put into place.”

Interviewee: “No, no, we were never, that’s why I’m saying we never knew, they just talked about we’re going to bring zero tolerance into the parish. It was like it was shoved down on us. They never once really expressed it to what it is why we’re bringing it and do you think that we really need zero tolerance? You know or do you have any suggestions or recommendations for any other kind of program that you feel might work or maybe there’s some things that some teachers are already doing and maybe we can just play on those things.”

Interviewer: “Right give them to share those strategies. To see what works.”

Interviewee: “Right. But those things were never brought into focus so as a result you know folks look at us and say you know they got their own little program going anyway you know so... And then the other thing what folks are looking at and I’ve heard this folks say that well they just have folks up there you know making this money on Saturday. Because then afterwards and this is brought up you know at board meetings and folks wanted to know what was happening with the money.”

Interviewer: “The money that they keep?”

Interviewee: “Yes when they pay the \$250. They say what’s the purpose of that money? And then they say it’s salary and they say salary for whom? And then that’s when they say well you know we have to pay the people who work. Well who’s working in the program? And they say for the materials and folks start you know with a lot of questions

and so... That's why folks say well no, no, no, we're not going to spend our money on this and they're going to sit up and look at videos and that kind of stuff. Whatever it is you know that your going to do and your going to charge for it you know like it's reward and punishment and if your not dealing with the whole picture and having it all laid out so that everybody, student, parents, teachers would know hey this is the program here's how it's going to run. It should have been something that was typed up. Everybody had a copy. You know even the students. And if you don't do it well these are the guidelines right here from day one, these are the folks who will run it. These folks volunteered or say that they wanted to get more training you know so that they can run the program successfully or whatever."

Interviewer: "Just be able to justify it and rationalize it."

Interviewee: "Absolutely. Those things were never brought to force and as a result I think that's why it's not as strong as it really could be enforced. Not saying that you really want to use that because kids fight but sometimes you know your saying if kids bump into one another or whatever you know and then they say it's your call. No. You might see two kids fighting and you say, well did you see that and a lot times folks say, well I didn't see that. And so hey you don't wind it up even though there was a fight. So it's all about being consistent, all about from day one having your program in place and everybody having a copy in hand and saying hey this is how the program is going to run. And if it's going to be every Saturday or every other Saturday then maybe you may want to look at it from a team approach of folks working with these kids. And to look and say, hey it's something deeper inside that's causing these kids to act in a way they're doing so. And you set up some behavior clinics and to deal with the little group therapy and that kind of stuff. For example, I volunteer to work in "The Bottom" - that's in south Baton Rouge during the summertime with kids who were in trouble so."

Interviewer: "Well that suggestions been made a lot. Because one of my questions was do you think that consequences like zero tolerance's automatic suspension and the money, do you think things like this work to change student behavior? And you know overwhelmingly you know most people don't think so. And they talk about things like that. I have two more questions for you. What has this policy, you know having this policy in place, has this affected the role of what a teacher has to do in any way? Did it affect duty schedule, referral process did it have any change on the day-to-day activities that teachers have? Are they required to do anything special because this policy's in place?"

Interviewee: "Not really. Because you know if there's a fight or whatever the situation is you know your going to have to write a referral anyway. And write up exactly what you saw happen. So whether you had zero tolerance or whatever it was that's just documentation that you would have to have in place in case anything did happen. And if it had to go to court or whatever then if you saw it you write up what you saw, the time that it happened, where it happened and that kind of stuff so I don't think it by doing that it was anything special that a teacher had to do on a regular basis."

Interviewer: “OK, have you ever had to report a fight that results in zero tolerance? Or should have resulted in zero tolerance?”

Interviewee: “No.”

Interviewer: “No. OK and the last thing is thinking about all of your professional experiences what you’ve seen with student behavior before and since zero tolerance, it seems like you don’t think it works and you made a couple of suggestions of things that might work better to actual get at changes student behavior, with that in mind do you think, do you foresee the policy staying in place for any extended period of time in our parish?”

Interviewee: “I don’t think so. Because it’s not as effective as possibly it could be and when they first started out with hey you get paid \$250 you know, kids were, it kind of got to them a little bit you know. But now you sometimes hear kids say, Yeah they may as well get my mama that she says she’s got that \$250.”

Interviewer: “Yeah all bases covered huh?”

Interviewee: “She’s put \$250 aside just in case. But you know really in all sincerity I really don’t think that it will last that long because knowing the way we operate here in this parish and we hear something else we’re going to jump for it. And all we have to do is go back to the peer mediation thing and because I know in East Baton Rouge parish I was at a conference a couple of months ago and I heard some of the teachers talking about the training in New Orleans where by the kids and the teachers would go and they’d stay for a week. Now and that’s the bad thing about it as well. If this is in a couple parishes with the zero tolerance I think that everybody should be on the same page. Which means that if there is a conference or workshop everybody should be at that workshop. You know on zero tolerance so that you even the students who are going to be training other students they should be there. But when you start you know picking a select group of folks, and they may not know anything about how to handle kids you know and they go and then they come back not know how to deal with kids. Because you have to think like them on different levels and as classes change you know you have different multiple personalities so you have to be able to cope with each one of those situations so when for zero tolerance in any program to work everybody must be on the same team. And everybody must be involved from day one and want to take charge and say, well this is my part of it. And we’re all working together to do what we can to make this program work effectively. But when one or two have been signed up, because some kids saw a picture in the paper, hey this is right after school oh but where the press run a teacher at (couldn’t understand the name) high school, peer mediation thing was they had gone somewhere else and the kids say, why didn’t we know about this? So you have to let everybody know what’s going on and once you do that, I mean you can eradicate zero tolerance any other kind of program just let folks be aware of what’s going on especially if it’s going to involve everybody. But I don’t think that zero tolerance is going to be around for any length of time now because of the way it’s going down the road now. And kids and parents, teachers everybody their really not paying too much attention to it

because kids fights or whatever now you know folks say, I didn't see that, taking that kind of attitude you know about it. You have other programs like we said about the peer mediation I mean like getting these peers together and other folks who want to work with them and let them handle their problems. And then you might when you do that you start to get to the root of the problem and find out exactly what's going on. And many times but things at home but it goes back to the basics. Kids act out the way they do because they can't read, they can't write or whatever and as a result this is when the fights start. They become that anger then. To answer the question, no I don't think it'll be around any length of time.

Interviewer: "OK well those are all the questions I have and I really, really appreciate... let me turn the tape off."

APPENDIX C

Sample of Data Cluster

Theme One: Here's the policy; now enforce it.

The following phrases were highlighted and pulled from the transcripts of interviews. Then they were re-read and categorized based on a common theme.

I – Involvement E – Enforcement Bold – Captures the essence

I – School board members influenced by other districts.

I - A few teachers were involved, I wasn't.

I - Not that administrators in this district usually act on what teachers say.

I - A discipline committee is in place. Teachers and administrators are members. I was not one of them. I am on the committee now.

I - Central office staff, parents, community members, I don't know if teachers were involved.

I - If I were forced to say yes or no, I'd say no. We were just given the end result. Here is the policy, live with it.

I - I was not involved.

E - We are the ones who have to explain it to the students at the beginning of each year.

E - Some teachers just read the policy from the handbook and others take time to explain it.

I - I'm not sure who was involved. Maybe supervisors. Other parishes.

I - I wasn't involved; I guess board members and central office staff.

E - Our duty starts earlier each day. We have to stand by or doors between classes. More people are on duty during lunch.

I - We were simply given the policy and told when it would go into effect.

E - We give very detailed reports when fights happen.

I - I wasn't involved. I'm not sure if they asked for teacher input in this decision

I - I think the superintendent and board members handled it.

E - We have extra duty time and more focus on classroom management

I - I don't know of a teacher who was involved. We just had a big meeting.

We were asked for our input but like so many other things in our parish you get the feeling it was a done deal before it came to the teachers.

I - Parents and community members

I - A push on the part of superintendent and central office staff, not teachers

I - I'm not certain who was involved or how it came about.