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THIRD GRADE TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN PREPARING FOR AND  
INTERACTING WITH THE OHIO ACHIEVEMENT ASSESSMENT: A  
HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF THE 2001  
NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT (203 pp.)

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This research explored the experiences of 4 third grade teachers since the 2003 inception of the Third Grade Ohio Achievement Test (OAT) and the 2009 establishment of the Third Grade Ohio Achievement Assessment (OAA) due to the mandates of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in public school settings in Northeastern Ohio. Also, this study sought to understand the third grade teachers' perceptions of their students' experiences with the OAT (OAA), and the influence of the OAT (OAA) on their curriculum and pedagogy. Using a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology, data were collected through 3 hour-long interviews with each of the 4 participants for a total of 12 hours of interview data and through 24 hours of observations of the teachers instructing and interacting with their students in their classrooms. Artifacts and fieldnotes added to understanding the phenomena.

The essential themes discovered were that the home environments of students influence classroom learning and produce a perceived achievement gap between environmentally disadvantaged students and their affluent counterparts. In addition, the teachers professed that their effective teaching practices and curricula have been altered by test preparation; thus, according to the participants, the test preparation reduced

enriching learning experiences for students and created a stifling teaching environment. Additionally, the teachers and their students experienced adverse emotions prior to and during the OAA testing. The participants maintain that the OAA is poorly designed and developmentally inappropriate for third grade students. Furthermore, the teachers concluded that their high-stakes testing experiences negatively impacted their professional morale.

**Key words:** No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB), state-mandated testing, effects of high-stakes testing, Ohio Achievement Assessment, effects of high-stakes testing on teacher morale, achievement gap