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Managing Multiple Mandates: Teachers' Practice in the Nexus of Educational Reform

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Education

in

Teaching and Learning

by

Stephanie Lynn Hasselbrink

Committee in Charge:

Paula Levin, Chair  
Amanda Datnow  
Tom Humphries

2014

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The Dissertation of Stephanie Lynn Hasselbrink is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2014

## **Dedication**

To my amazingly supportive family. Thank you for being my cheerleaders throughout this and every journey in life. I love you!

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## Vita

### EDUCATION

---

- June 2014      **University of California, San Diego**  
**Doctor of Education in Teaching and Learning**  
Dissertation: *Managing Multiple Mandates: Teachers in the Nexus of Educational Reform*
- First-Year Research Project: *Assessments as Students' Tools: Promoting Intrinsic Motivation, Conceptual Understanding, and Metacognition through Collaboration and Discourse in a Fifth-Grade Mathematics Classroom*
- May 2008      **San Diego State University**  
**Master of Arts in Reading/Language Arts**  
Thesis: *Can I Revise it Again? Embracing Revision in a 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Classroom*
- May 2001      **Boston University**  
**Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education**

### CERTIFICATION

---

California Multiple Subject Clear Credential

Reading Specialist Credential

Cross-cultural, Language, and Academic Development Certificate (CLAD)

Gifted and Talented Education Certificate (GATE)

### TEACHING EXPERIENCE

---

- 2013      **University of California, San Diego**  
**Department of Education Studies**  
EDS 114, Cognitive Development  
Graduate Reader
- 2011-  
present      **San Diego Unified School District**  
**La Jolla Elementary**  
5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher

- 2009-2011 **San Diego Unified School District**  
**Boone Elementary**  
5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher
- 2003-2009 **San Diego Unified School District**  
**Webster Academy of Science and Research**  
5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher
- 2001-2003 **San Diego Unified School District**  
**John Muir School**  
4<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher
- 2001 **Department of Youth Services, Massachusetts**  
**EDCO Collaborative at Brighton Treatment Center**  
Science Teacher, Grades 7-12

## **ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

---

2008-2009 Site Teacher of the Year, Webster Academy of Science and Research

Highlighted in *Comprehension Through Conversation: The Power of Purposeful Talk in the Reading Workshop* (Heinemann, 2006) by Maria Nichols

Highlighted in textbook and video companion of *Elementary Mathematics is Anything but Elementary: Content and Methods from a Developmental Perspective*, First Edition (Cengage Learning, 2010) by Damon Bahr and Lisa Ann DeGarcia

## **Abstract of the Dissertation**

Managing Multiple Mandates: Teachers' Practice in the Nexus of Educational Reform

by

Stephanie Lynn Hasselbrink

Doctorate of Education in Teaching and Learning

University of California, San Diego, 2014

Paula Levin, Chair

This mixed methods study draws on Sensemaking Theory (Weick, 1995) and Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987) to understand how teachers experience mandated programs, curriculum, and other activities associated with large- and small-scale reform efforts. The complex nature of teachers' practice, as they are situated in this nexus of reforms, is a largely unexamined area in the field of education. Missing from the research literature is a study that explicitly combines these constructs in an examination of how teachers experience about mandates.

Study participants included nine teachers at an elementary school in Southern California who had contrasting orientations toward teaching and learning, a range of teaching experience, and varying attitudes toward mandated change. Surveys, interviews, and questionnaires were used to examine how teachers conceptualized

mandates, felt about mandates, perceived mandates, and talked about implementing them.

The study yielded four findings. First, several factors play a role in how teachers define and interpret mandates, which leads to contrasting notions of what mandates are and which activities are mandated. Secondly, teachers approach their practice with agency. Thus, they tend to adapt mandates and have a strong desire for autonomy. Third, teachers tend to have negative attitudes toward mandates, as well as negative feelings associated with implementing mandates. As such, teacher's personal lives can be adversely affected. Finally, there are distinct features of mandates that teachers believe have positively and negatively impacted their practice: effective mandates have goals that were realized and fairly moderate rules, whereas ineffective mandates have goals that are not realized and strict or permissive rules.

The results of this study suggest that teachers will thrive in environments in which they are allowed to express their autonomy. Conversely, if teachers practice in constraining environments, their professional identities and emotions may suffer. Therefore, administrators should create supportive environments, provide adequate resources, and encourage teachers to modify mandates. In addition, because there is so much variation in how teachers defined and thought about mandates, it is important that administrators clearly communicate their expectations and whether certain activities are mandated, especially as new mandates are introduced.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Generally, I have to implement several things at once. It is overwhelming for quite some time and a bit demoralizing, because I cannot give either thing the attention it warrants and I know...that I am not doing it justice.

A middle school teacher, who had previously taught at the elementary level, expressed the words above. Each day, she strives to meet the many demands of her practice, including teaching her students grade-level concepts for all of the subjects she teaches, assessing student learning, engaging students in learning activities, managing student behavior, and taking care of other student and professional needs. In addition to those demands, she is also routinely required to implement programs, curriculum, assessments, and other activities aimed at increasing student achievement. Determining how to enact the many mandates associated with small- and large-scale educational reform has therefore become a regular part of her practice. Each day, she, along with many teachers across the world, is faced with enacting a variety of mandates associated with educational reform. But, why are there so many reform-related mandates that teachers are routinely required to implement? The answer lies in the faith the public has in education system.

Throughout the world, people put faith in education to actualize their collective hopes and dreams. It is the vehicle through which children are prepared to become good citizens and productive workers who contribute to their society and to the economy. Labaree (2010) reminds us that in the United States there is also the hope that education will reduce inequality and crime, while at the same time improving

health and supporting improved environmental conditions. According to Cuban (1990), because there is faith schools will serve as an engine of social and individual improvement, people turn to schools to improve our quality of life and to solve societal problems that arise. However, as Labaree (2010) points out, education inevitably fails to promote everyone's goals. As such, people turn to policymakers, researchers, and educators to reform our education system.

### **Defining Reform**

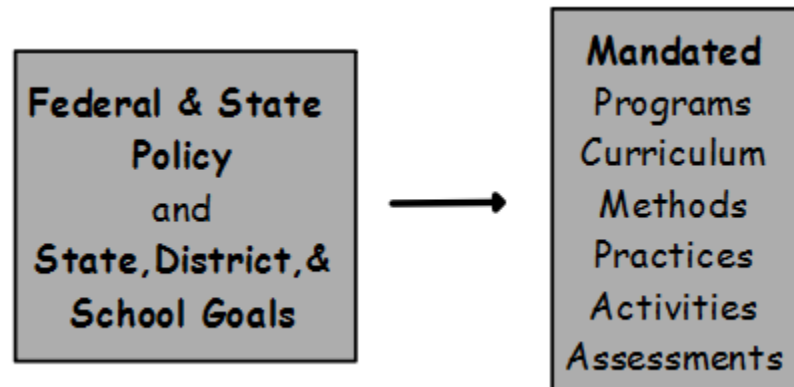
So, what exactly does it mean to reform education? Reform is a complex notion, so it is not surprising that a simple definition does not exist. As Kurth-Schai and Green (2009) point out, it depends on how the word "reform" is used: "As a noun, the term is used to describe changes in policy, practice, or organization. As a verb, 'reform' refers to intended or enacted attempts to correct an identified problem. As an educational aspiration, its' goal is to realize deep, systemic, and sustained restructuring of public schooling" (p. 306). Tyack and Cuban (1995) offer a more specific definition of reform, stating that it refers to planned, purposeful efforts aimed at remedying perceived social and educational problems and bringing about large-scale change. In contrast, Fullan (1999) uses reform in reference to the process of improving classrooms, schools, and the entire educational system in order to improve the life chances of individuals. The two definitions differ, as Tyack and Cuban's refers to large-scale, systemic change, whereas Fullan's perspective relates to anything that targets individual improvement. Calderhead (2001) offers an even broader definition of reform, pointing out that reform efforts can target a wide variety goals,

including curriculum, managing schools, teacher training, teacher conditions, teacher career structures, teacher professional development, and relationships between teachers, schools, and the community. Thus, the meaning of ‘reform’ is dependent upon on one’s perspective of the purposes of education and the role of the educational system in society.

Contrasting definitions also arise because reform movements originate from variety of sources, aim to target an array of goals, and are conceptualized and implemented in differing ways. On one hand, it could be argued that teachers reform their own practice. They routinely observe students, reflect on the lessons they teach and the activities in which students are engaged, and they analyze student work. In response to their observations and analysis, teachers create and implement methods and programs aimed at improving the quality of their teaching in order to ultimately improve student learning. In contrast, however, large-scale reform movements are systemic, widespread, organized efforts that have resulted from federal, state, and local policy.

Educational reform is clearly a broad concept. Throughout this dissertation, however, I will define ‘reform’ as policy-driven efforts that aim to improve or correct social and educational problems. When reform movements are guided by federal and state policy changes, local districts and individual schools institute initiatives to carry out the goals of policy. In this dissertation, these initiatives are referred to as *mandates*, which can relate to programs, curriculum, methods, practices, assessments,

and other activities that teachers are required to implement. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between policy, goals, and mandates.



*Figure 1. Relationship between policy and mandates.*

### **History of Educational Reform**

Reform has been a prominent feature of the American K-12 public system of education since its inception. There are several related theories about why it has been such a stable feature. Cuban (1990) highlights three reoccurring debates that have driven educational reform: 1) whether pedagogy should be teacher-centered or student-centered, 2) whether curriculum should be the same for all students or should be differentiated to match students' needs and interests, and 3) whether authority over schools ought to be centralized or decentralized. Cuban points out that the persistence of these debates has resulted from conflicting values as well as the faith that Americans put into schools to be the engine of social and individual improvement. As such, the debates and inherent conflict have continued to drive educational reform. Along the same vein, Labaree (2010) also believes that conflict has led to sustained reform efforts, pointing out two key tensions: the tension between social aims for



education and the system's own organizational inertia, as well as the tension between America's social goals and individuals' personal hopes. Again, these key tensions, including the individuals involved, have led to sustained need to reform education. In contrast, Haskins and Loeb (2007) argue that most reform efforts have stemmed from the need to remedy three chronic problems in our education system: poor performance on international assessments, elevated and increasing rates of high school dropouts, and the persistent achievement gap between whites and African Americans.

Ongoing debates, key tensions, and chronic issues have led to the continued need to make changes and improvements to the American K-12 educational system. As such, our nation has a long history of educational reform. According to Labaree (2010), one of the first attempts to reform American education was the common school movement in the mid-1800s, which established the basic organizational and political structures that are still present in today's public K-12 education system. Although the basic features of the common school, such as being publicly funded and state regulated, are still present in today's system, much has changed. Over the past century, there have been a multitude of reform movements which have targeted many aspects of education, such as equity, standards, accountability, and so on. Table 1 summarizes important policies, events, and waves educational reform, as well as their impact on public K-12 education.

*Table 1. Policies, Events, and Waves of Reform, and Their Educational Implications*

Policies, Events, and Waves of Reform	Educational Implications
Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954)	Ended the legal segregation of schools by race
Civil Rights Act (1964)	Prohibited discrimination in programs that received federal funding
Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965)	Funding for economically disadvantaged students with Title 1
Title IX (1972)	Gender-based equity for all federally funded programs
Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975)	Equal access to education for students with mental and physical disabilities
Publication of <i>A Nation at Risk</i> (1983)	Curriculum guidelines and high stakes testing to increase achievement
School Choice (1990s)	Provided parents with more choices about where to send their children to school, such as vouchers
Outcome Based Education/ Standards Movement (1990s)	States adopted standards and established assessment measures to ensure accountability
No Child Left Behind (2001)	Aimed for every child to meet minimum proficiency in core subjects through high qualified teachers, research-based strategies, high stakes testing, and sanctions
Common Core State Standards (2010)	45 states adopted standards to prepare students with real world knowledge and skills for higher education and careers

Although there have been many efforts aimed at improving different aspects of American's K-12 public education system, some writers and researchers have argued that not much has actually changed. Cuban (1990; 2013) has had a prominent voice in educational reform over the past few decades. He posits that schools and classrooms have gone largely unchanged even though they appear to be reformed. He further states that patterns in educational reform might suggest that reforms have not been successful in remedying the problems they were intended to solve. This perceived failure, then, may lead to questions about whether the right problems were addressed, whether policies were designed to fit the problems, and whether practitioners implemented policies as they were intended. In short, Cuban (1990) questions, "Right problems, wrong solutions? or vice versa? Are we dealing with the problem, or the politics of the problem?" (p. 6). Cuban also points out that the "value conflicts" inherent in educational reform are not easily solved, as they require negotiation and compromise.

When examining our nation's lengthy history of educational reform, Tyack and Cuban (1995) criticize it for being both too resistant to change, as well as for being too faddish. An additional problem with reform, they argue, is that different groups hold contrasting interests: "Since the value of change is in the eye of the beholder, one set of innovators may seek to undo the results of previous reforms" (p. 4). More recently, Cuban (2013) has also criticized reformers for creating a perceived need for reform by selling myths and "pushing" their agenda items: test-driven standards (Common

Core), parental choice of schools (more charter schools), and increased technologies in classrooms (tablets, mobile devices, smart boards, and “flipped” classrooms).

Although there are critics, educational reform is still an important endeavor, because, as Tyack and Cuban (1995) point out, reform efforts can substantially improve schools when they are adapted to local contexts and practice is revised over long periods of time. Further, Darling Hammond (2011) argues that educational reform is necessary to reduce inequality and close our nation’s persistent achievement gap. Therefore, although our nation has a long history of reform that may not necessarily have led to a largely improved system of education, we still have faith in the power that reform has to improve our schools and ultimately our society.

### **Current Context of Educational Reform**

In the midst of the 2013-2014 academic school year, the American K-12 public education system is at a crossroads, as it shifts from an era of strict accountability associated with No Child Left Behind (2001), to an emphasis on college and career readiness that comes from the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). In light of this transition, state, district, and school leaders have started to, and will likely continue to, institute a variety of mandates aimed at supporting the Common Core. Thus, in addition to the routine decisions and tasks that teachers already make and implement each day, they must also determine how and whether to taken on the curriculum, methods, and assessments associated with the Common Core State Standards.

In addition, teachers must also routinely respond to other mandates that come from the local school or district level. It is important to note that mandates are not generally introduced one at a time; rather, at any single moment in time, teachers are charged with implementing a variety of them. Not only are teachers expected to implement a several mandates simultaneously or in short succession of one another, they must also determine how to implement mandates with varying, and at times conflicting, goals. While some mandates aim to improve different aspects of education, such as teaching and learning, others may attempt to improve other aspects of students' lives, such as character development or physical health. Because mandates come from different sources, have varying goals, and are implemented simultaneously or shortly after one another, teachers must routinely decide whether to implement mandates, which aspects to implement, and how to adapt them to align with their beliefs about teaching and learning.

*Personal experience with educational reform.* Over the course of my 13-year career as a public elementary school teacher, I have experienced many mandates associated with large- and small-scale reform efforts stemming from national, state, and district policy. I have been required to implement mandates associated with assessment, curriculum, pedagogy, and student behavior. Each time a new mandate is introduced, I must make decisions based on how it relates to my beliefs about teaching and learning, as well as how it relates to my existing practice.

Based on my experiences, I have concluded that the manner in which multiple mandates are introduced and implemented is problematic. The multitude of mandates

and the manner in which they are introduced makes the already challenging practice of teaching even more challenging. Between the routine demands of my practice and the constant introduction of new mandates, I often feel overwhelmed. It seems that just as I determine how to incorporate a new mandate into my practice, I am expected to implement something else. In addition, sometimes mandated programs, curriculum, and methods are not best suited for my students, or they seem to conflict with one another.

My experience with mandates is not unique. In order to gain insight into other educators' experiences, I asked several colleagues how they felt about enacting multiple mandates. In addition to the elementary teacher's quote that opened this chapter, other teachers also expressed negative feelings. An elementary school teacher with 15 years of experience responded, "Whenever I'm implementing something new, it makes me feel very anxious. Sometimes I feel like I'm learning right along with the children. Just like the kids, I need time to get comfortable with new learnings. I try to approach things in a 'one step at a time' way. If I am implementing more than one new thing at a time, that anxiety is there. It helps if I can start one new thing one week, and then in a week or even two, start the second new thing." An elementary school teacher with 11 years of experience voiced, "It felt overwhelming. I usually just try to remember that I'm a work in progress and I'm doing the best I can." Another elementary school teacher with three years of experience expressed, "It can be very overwhelming and make life difficult." Clearly, my experiences as a teacher were not

unique; managing multiple mandates presents teachers with a variety of challenges and results in negative feelings.

### **Summary**

As Labaree (2010) has stated, “we have long pinned our hopes on education” to accomplish a variety of social and educational goals (p. 1). Those hopes often fail to come to fruition, and we are therefore left searching for remedies. Although there are different approaches to and motivations for improving the American K-12 educational system, reform has played a prominent and persistent role since the beginning. The United States has had a long history of educational reform, driven by federal, state, and local policy. To meet the goals of policy decisions, states and districts conceptualize a variety of mandates that target assessment, curriculum, pedagogy, student behavior, and other aspects of teaching and learning. As such, teachers are routinely charged with implementing multiple mandates simultaneously. Because of the many mandates teachers must implement, and the conflict that sometimes results from integrating them into their practice, teachers, including my colleagues, often have a negative reaction to mandates.

Given the reliance on educational reform to improve society, researchers have long studied the nature and outcomes of such efforts. The next chapter discusses relevant literature about educational reform.

## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

For well over a century, reformers, policymakers, and other interested parties have made countless attempts to improve our educational system. As such, there is an abundance of literature on educational reform. Research in this field has tended to focus on large-scale implementation (e.g., Bodilly & Berends, 1999; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Desimone, 2002; Erlichson, 2005), scaling up reform efforts (e.g., Coburn, 2003; Penuel, Roschelle, & Shechtman, 2011; Sanders, 2012), policy interpretation and enactment (e.g., Berends, Bodilly, & Kirby, 2002; Cohen & Ball, 1990; Cuban, 1998; Spillane & Jennings, 1997; Spillane & Zeuli, 1999; Thompson, Zeuli, & Borman, 1997), and strategies and conditions that administrators can employ to facilitate change (e.g., Little, 1993; Spillane, Diamond, & Jita, 2003; Zimmerman, 2006).

Given the broad scope, I will focus the review of reform research to teachers as autonomous agents of change, teachers' enactment of reform programs, the role of leadership, and emerging studies about enacting multiple reforms. In order to contextualize the study, literature on the complex nature of teachers' practice will also be discussed. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion about what is missing in the research literature, and is therefore needed to add to the body of literature about educational reform.



### **Teachers' Agency and Autonomy**

According to Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002), agency refers to “the capacity to change the existing state of affairs” (p. 62). Based on a review of literature, van den Berg (2002) found that teachers generally have a strong sense of agency and take an active part in change: “most teachers are not passive with the respect to what is going on around them. Teachers do not just undergo things, and they are strongly influenced by the context in which they work” (p. 601). Teachers do not merely enact policy and implement mandates; they make decisions about their practice based on their work environment, determining the best way to integrate mandates into their classrooms. According to Schmidt and Datnow (2005), many researchers consider teachers to be not simply agents of change, but rather the “centerpiece of educational change” (p. 949). McLaughlin (1990) echoes this sentiment, arguing that “teachers lie at the heart of successful efforts to enhance classroom practices” (p. 15). Teachers are presented with a variety of mandated programs and activities, which they are charged with implementing in their classrooms. As such, they make a multitude of decisions about how to best deliver programs, curriculum, and other activities to their students. Fullan (1993) asserts that in order for reform to be successful, “educators... must become skilled change agents” (p. 4). Teachers must determine the most effective ways to enact policy in and execute change at the classroom level.

Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002) caution that individuals cannot enact change alone. Rather, agency must be conceptualized within the larger context in

which individuals are situated, which includes “the structural and cultural features of their school environment and the larger societal structure and culture of which they are part” (p. 62). As such, school and district leadership must create and foster climates in which teachers can enact change and exercise their agency.

Closely related to the notion of agency is autonomy, which according to Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan (1991) refers to initiating and regulating one’s actions. Teachers who have higher senses of autonomy are also more able to act as agents of change, and the opposite relationship is true for the converse. Olsen and Sexton (2009) conducted a case study of six high school English teachers in Southern California in order to observe ways in which the reform implementation process influenced how teachers perceived their work. In the study, teachers defined autonomy as having control and freedom in their classrooms. Olsen and Sexton found that teachers who reported having higher levels of autonomy also expressed stronger levels of commitment to the teaching profession. Further, all but one of the teachers reported that they would change schools if their autonomy was compromised. Thus, it is important for teachers to have a sense of autonomy, as it provides them with the requisite freedom required to enact change in their classrooms.

Day (2002) has also found that that autonomy is important as teachers enact reform efforts in their classrooms. According to Day (2002) and Apple (1986), large-scale reform efforts associated with the United States’ No Child Left Behind policy have led to increased pressure to perform on standardized tests. The result of the increased pressure, they argue, has been in the erosion of teachers’ autonomy. Losing

autonomy negatively impacts teachers' professional and personal identities, which are key variables in their motivation, job fulfillment, commitment, and self-efficacy. The trend is not unique to the United States, as other countries are increasing control and decreasing teachers' autonomy with national curricula, national tests, evaluating schools, and publishing school performance information. Further, Day pointed out that teachers' perceptions of their autonomy, coupled with their personal and professional identities, relates to how teachers receive, adopt, adapt, and sustain reform efforts. As such, it is critical that teachers are able to express their autonomy in order to act as agents of change as they enact reform efforts at the classroom level.

### **Teachers' Enactment of Reform**

Because teachers should be autonomous agents of change and central figures in educational reform efforts, there is an extensive body of literature about how teachers enact reform. This section discusses how teachers respond to and implement reform, as well as the reasons for teachers' varied implementations.

*Teachers' responses to and implementation of reform.* Although those who create policies, programs, and other reform-related efforts hope that teachers implement them with fidelity, the research literature indicates that teachers do not simply adopt policy. Rather, the literature indicates that teachers tend to adapt and at times may resist reform efforts.

*Adaptation.* According to Cuban (1998), the story of school reform is a really a story of adaptation. Because teachers interpret policy, adjusting it to align with their beliefs and fit their practice, it is natural that they adapt reform programs. Berman and

McLaughlin (1978) conducted a seminal study, known as the Rand Change Agent study, which examined the implementation of reform programs. The four-year study consisted of two phases. Phase I examined over 200 reform projects across the United States during their last year of funding, and Phase II studied what happened to the projects after the end of the funding period. Berman and McLaughlin found that there was a wide variation in how educators implemented policies, which led to varying effectiveness of implementation. At the local level, there were "decisions and choices, explicit or implicit, how to put the innovation into practice" (p. vii). Moreover, they found that the most effective implementation strategies promoted what the authors referred to as "mutual adaptation," which is "the process by which a project is adapted to the reality of its institutional setting, while at the same time teachers and school officials adapt their practices in response to the project" (p. viii). Therefore, this study highlights the importance of implementation and adaptation at the local level, rather than a uniform implementation.

In Coburn's (2001) study of how teachers make sense of policy messages, she also found that teachers interpret and adapt them in order to align them with their practice. Policy does not influence practice, she argues; instead, teachers shape policy by interpreting, adapting, and transforming reform initiatives as they determine how to integrate them into their practice. Further, Coburn found that teachers' professional communities played an important role in how teachers made sense of and enacted policy messages.

According to Berends, Bodilly, and Kirby (2002), another reason why adaptation is a common response to educational reform is because “the process of planned educational change is much more complex than initially anticipated” (p. 170). In particular, when mandates come from external sources, districts and schools develop their own strategies to support implementation. As such, mandates “tend to go through significant changes over time as they adapt to local conditions and contexts or engage in scale-up” (p. 170). Therefore, activities, programs, and curriculum come to look quite different across districts, schools, and even classrooms as policies are molded to suit different contexts.

Interestingly, even in cases of highly structured reform models, teachers make changes to mandates. In a study about the relationship between teachers’ emotions, reform implementation, and teachers’ practice, Schmidt and Datnow (2005) found that although teachers believed they were required to simply adopt reforms, they often made modifications. In fact, they found that teachers “rationalized that they would personally remedy this situation while still remaining true to the essence of the models” (p. 960). During an interview, one of the elementary teachers involved in a highly structured comprehensive school reform model said, “you are supposed to be on a certain page, but you know, those teachable moments come up unpredictably and if I were to stick to the script I would have to pass up these moments” (p. 960). Thus, even in highly structured, scripted models of reform, teachers make adaptations in order to meet their students’ needs and to accommodate reform practices into their existing practice.

*Resistance.* According to Clandinin and Connelly (1998), “teachers... are frequently cited as the principle impediment to successful implementation. They become the primary focus for reform, so much that some say, ‘change them, fix them, remake them into risk takers’ ” (p. 157). It is often believed that if teachers would just embrace change and be open to new practices, efforts to reform the educational system would succeed.

Zimmerman (2006) argues that teacher resistance is, indeed, a major factor in reform failure. Rather than simply citing teachers as the source of failure, however, she offers suggestions about how school leaders can foster teachers’ willingness to implement reform efforts. Among the solutions she presents are improving principals’ leadership skills, modeling risk taking and a willingness to change, gaining teachers’ trust, developing a supportive culture, involving teachers in decision making, enhancing teachers’ sense of efficacy, promoting professional development, and winning the support of influential teachers. Zimmerman’s suggestions indicate that resistance is not merely related to teachers’ lack of desire or willingness to change; rather, resistance may be related to a lack of resources and a safe, supportive environment.

Greenberg and Baron (2000) also examined teachers’ resistance to change. They posit four explanations for the reason teachers fail to change in ways reformers would hope: a lack of belief that change is necessary, habit, previously unsuccessful efforts at change, and a fear of the unknown. If teachers do not believe change is essential, they will continue to maintain the status quo. The researchers point out that

it is also easier for teachers to continue to teach the same way they always have, rather than trying an innovation or employing new skills and strategies. Further, previous unsuccessful attempts at change may make teachers leery of trying yet another innovation. Finally, trying something new may make teachers feel uneasy and insecure, which is also a concept that is also supported by Fullan (2001). Addressing some of these underlying issues, therefore, may increase the likelihood that teachers would change their practice and take on reform efforts.

Similarly, Schmidt and Datnow (2005) have also found that teachers may resist change if believe their interests, beliefs, and values are threatened by the reform agenda. Their claim is supported by Olsen and Sexton's (2009) work in the area of threat rigidity, which is the theory that when an organization perceives itself as threatened (e.g., in crisis, under attack), it responds in certain ways: structures tighten, centralized control increases, conformity is stressed, accountability and efficiency measures are emphasized, and alternative/innovative thinking is discouraged. The ways in which the organization and people within it respond are referred to as threat rigidity effects. Olsen and Sexton used threat rigidity as a theoretical lens through which to explore discuss how current policy contexts influence schools and how schools adopt corresponding reforms that influence teachers' work. Influences include centralizing and restricting flow of information, constricting control, emphasizing routine and simplified instructional/assessment practices, applying strong pressure for school personnel to conform. In their study, Olsen and Sexton found that threat rigidity pushed school leaders to adopt changes that emphasized administrative control

and teacher conformity and restricted teacher feedback and transparent decision-making. The manner in which implementation played out at the high schools created teacher hostility and disenfranchisement. In light of their findings, it would be reasonable to conclude that teachers who work in environments with high levels of threat rigidity may be more likely to resist reform efforts.

Although researchers have found resistance to be a common response to change, the notion of resistance is more complicated than it may appear on the surface. For one, there are many reasons why teachers might resist reform, some of which are internal to teachers (e.g., beliefs, emotions), and some of which are external (e.g., feeling threatened, lack of support and resources). Another reason why the notion of resistance is complex is because depending on who is conducting the research and their accompanying goals and interests, what some researchers might characterize as resistance, others might label as coping with, interpreting, or adapting reform.

Van Veen, Slegers, and Van de Ven (2005), for example, point out that teachers who are labeled as resisting reform are often “characterized as traditional, conventional, lacking knowledge, recalcitrant, not having students’ best interest at heart or passive” (p. 931). These negative descriptions of teachers, however, fall short of explaining why teachers sometimes seem to resist reforms. By using a case study approach, Van Veen, Slegers, and Van de Ven gained insight into an experienced Dutch high school language and literature teacher’s involvement in multiple efforts associated with reform at his school. After their initial data collection and analysis, they determined that the teacher was a “reform-enthusiast,” as he believed the



innovations would improve his teaching and his students' learning. Interestingly, although he was supportive of the new policies and changes at the onset of the reforms, he was unable to effectively carry them out. This teacher's partial implementation of various aspects of the reform could compel some researchers to label this teacher as resistant. Van Veen, Slegers, and Van de Ven's further research, however, revealed that although the teacher initially believed in the reforms, his perceived lack of support from management and lack of materials resulted in negative feelings, which led to a lack of implementation. Although this case study included only one teacher, it has important implications about the need to go beyond labeling a teacher as resistant; teachers can appear resistant because they lack the necessary supports to fully implement mandated reforms.

***Reasons for varied responses to and enactment of reform.*** There are several reasons for teachers' varied responses to and implementations of reform efforts. Berends, Bodilly, and Kirby (2002) state that despite efforts that schools and districts make to enact reform in a uniform manner, there is a wide range of responses. The variability, they argue, stems from the number of people involved in implementing reform initiatives, as well as the numerous factors that are involved in supporting large-scale change. Further, they claim that because people make sense of policy in different ways, and because schools and districts have varying supports for educators as well as different delivery models, reforms will be enacted differently, and thus will have different outcomes. While other school-based factors, such as leadership,

certainly play a role in how teachers respond to and enact reform, in this section I discuss factors related directly to teachers.

*Teacher beliefs.* Research indicates that most teachers interpret policy in a way that makes sense for them, which, in turn, affects how they enact reform efforts. According to Schmidt and Datnow (2005), when teachers' beliefs and practice are consistent with an overarching reform, teachers tend to embrace its programs and activities. Spillane, Reiser, and Reimer (2002) argue that teachers' prior knowledge, which includes their beliefs, attitudes, and values, plays a role in how teachers make sense of policy messages. Because there is so much variation among teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and values, teachers arrive at drastically different interpretations of activities associated with large- and small-scale reform.

Researchers (e.g., McRobbie & Tobin, 1995; Tobin & LaMaster, 1995) have also found that when a program or activity conflicts with teachers' views, teachers must restructure their beliefs or adapt the reform to fit into their belief system. For example, Cohen and Ball (1990) found that mathematics teachers generally "re-framed the policy in terms of what they already knew, believed, and did in classrooms" (p. 331). These findings are not unique to mathematics, as there are similar conclusions in the areas of literacy (Spillane & Jennings, 1997) and science (Thompson, Zeuli, & Borman, 1997).

Contrasting approaches to teaching and learning are also shaped by teachers' beliefs. Van Veen et al. (2001) found that teachers' orientations generally reflected either teacher-centered or student-centered approaches to teaching and learning.

These different orientations can be useful in explaining variations in how teachers respond to and enact mandated programs and activities associated with reform. In a case study by Aarts (2000), two high school teachers with contrasting notions about their role in the classroom participated in a study about the implementation of a large-scale reform, which required teachers to instill self-responsibility in students and to guide them through the learning process. One teacher believed his role as a teacher was to impart subject knowledge to his students, whereas the other teacher believed his job was to support students in developing capacity to be independent learners. Because the goals of the reform conflicted with the first teacher's beliefs about how to best instruct students, he experienced difficulties implementing the new approaches and even opted for a career change. Conversely, the teacher whose beliefs aligned with the pedagogical considerations of the reform had a positive experience, as the goals of the reform effort aligned with how he viewed his role as a teacher. This study highlights the important function that teachers' beliefs have as they attempt to incorporate reform practices into their existing practice.

*Teacher emotions.* Teachers' emotions have also been found to influence the manner in which teachers respond to educational reform. In their study of the relationship between teachers' emotions, the implementation of comprehensive school reform, and teachers' practice, Schmidt and Datnow (2005) found that reform-related transformations resulted in strong emotions in some teachers. In their analysis of 75 elementary school teachers' interview transcripts from a longitudinal case study on comprehensive school reform in California and Florida, Schmidt and Datnow found

that when teachers adapted highly structured programs, some experienced negative feelings, such as resentment, frustration, worry, and guilt.

As previously discussed, Van Veen, Slegers, and Van de Ven (2005) examined the role of emotions in education reform by examining a Dutch high school teacher. Although the teacher was initially found to be enthusiastic about the new policies, in the end he had negative feelings, such as anxiety, anger, guilt, and shame, because of the challenges he had with implementing the reforms. Further, the teacher's negative feelings toward the initiatives resulted from insufficient time and support from school management to do the kind of work he deemed necessary to effectively carry out the reform efforts. This study reveals that perceived constraints can lead to negative feelings, which can, in turn, lead to a lack of implementation.

*Career stage.* Researchers have also found that teachers' characteristics, such as career stage, also play a role in how teachers respond to reform. Drake (2002) used career stage as a framework for understanding elementary teachers' varied responses to mathematics education reform. Building upon Huberman's (1993) work, Drake defines career stage as "an indicator of development within...schools and classrooms" (p.314) that is characterized by teachers' years of experience and their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. The goal of Drake's study was to understand what teachers from different stages understood about reform, as well as the sense teachers from different career stages made of reform. The data from the study came from two sources: quantitative data from a large-scale survey of several hundred elementary teachers, and qualitative data from multiple observations of and interviews with

teachers. Drake's quantitative analysis revealed significant differences among teachers at different career stages, particularly between beginning and experienced teachers, as related to their attitudes toward reform, their understandings of reform, their perceived preparation for teaching the new curriculum, and their use of traditional teaching practices. Interestingly, early career teachers reported high levels of support for reforms, yet reported the lowest levels of reform teaching practices and high levels of traditional teaching practices. Drake explains that high levels of support for reform may relate to midcareer teachers being more likely to desire change and experimentation.

*Zones of enactment.* How teachers enact reform has also been found to play a role in how mandates are implemented, thus contributing to variation in the outcomes of reform efforts. Spillane (1999) conducted research on the mediating role of teachers in reform, and found that teachers' *zones of enactment*, a term he coined to refer to where teachers enact reform, play an important role in how teachers implement reform. Using survey data from a five year research study, the researchers identified 25 elementary and middle school mathematics teachers who reported implementing reforms as they were intended and changing their core practices of mathematics instruction. Based on observations and interviews, however, Spillane found that there were large differences in core practices across classrooms. Although all 25 teachers reported that they had transformed their practice, Spillane found that only four had done so, as reflected in classroom observations. In those reformed classrooms, students solved complex problems, used a variety of representations, and

were required to reason and justify their answers. In 10 of the classrooms some changes were implemented, and in 11 classrooms there was no evidence of changes to the core teaching practices. Spillane sought to investigate the reason behind the range in changed practice, and he found that it was related to teachers' zones of enactment. Teachers who had most changed their practices had interacted with their colleagues and experts, which meant they had enacted the reforms "outside" of their classrooms. In addition, they also sought to make sense of the reform by reading articles, discussing documents, and watching and discussing video tapes. Thus, Spillane concluded that teachers who most changed their core practices enacted the reform outside the context of their classroom by interacting with others about the reforms and consulting additional resources.

*Summary.* Numerous studies have examined the ways in which teachers respond to demands to make changes in their classroom practice. Many studies of enactment have sought to determine the extent to which teachers adopt programs and practices, examining issues of replication, fidelity, and scaling up; however, the manner in which teachers respond to reforms is complex. Teachers do not merely adopt or resist reform. Rather, the literature indicates that many teachers act as agents of change who adapt policies to align with their beliefs about teaching and learning. As such, it may be helpful to think about teachers' enactment of reform as a continuum of adaptation, rather than a simple dichotomy of adoption and resistance. Along this continuum, some teachers' interpretations may appear more like the

original reform, while others might look quite different than how the reform was conceptualized and introduced.

Teachers' responses to reform and subsequent enactment vary for a variety of reasons. As previously described, the two most common responses to reform are adaptation and resistance. Factors such as teachers' beliefs, emotions, career stage, and zone of enactment impact the manner in which teachers respond to reform efforts. Further, although there is quite a bit of literature that deals with teachers' resistance to implementing reform efforts, resistance is a complex notion that requires disentanglement. Although resistance carries a negative connotation, what some researchers would label as resistance, others might label as adaptation or coping.

### **The Role of Leadership**

Reform does not merely involve teachers' internal beliefs and emotions, their career stage, or whether they enact reform practices while interacting with colleagues. Many studies have found that school leadership plays a critical role in teachers' implementation of reform-related activities. Spillane and Thompson (1997) found that leaders play a critical role in implementing change. They concluded that the capacity for district and school leaders to support reform efforts involved human capital (i.e. knowledge, skills, and dispositions of leaders), social capital (i.e. social links, norms, trust), and financial resources (staffing, time, and materials). Drawing from previous studies, they examined how nine school districts in Michigan revised their policies in order to align them with state and national standards in order to support instructional ideas. Spillane and Thompson studied the kinds of local capacity that were required

for teachers to realize reform efforts, which included administrator capacity to support/foster teachers' abilities to teach in new ways related to reform efforts in mathematics and science. Further, they found that the ability of teachers to learn "depends in *some measure* on the capability of district leaders (administrators and teacher leaders) to construct the right sort of learning environment" (p. 186). Spillane and Thompson also acknowledged that teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and experience also play a role in policy interpretation and enactment. The results of this five year study indicate that district and site administrators clearly play a crucial role in implementing large-scale change.

***School Culture.*** School leaders are also responsible for creating their school's culture, which several researchers have found to be a key factor in affecting change (e.g., Davies, 2005; Fullan, 2003; Hallinger, 1996; Hargreaves, 2007; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Whitaker (1993) found that schools that provide the capacity for developing culture will have more success in enacting change. Leaders can nurture their school's culture by promoting a sense of shared values and assumptions (Marris, 1975), and by fostering a collaborative environment (Fullan, 1998; Hargreaves, 1997). Both strategies were found to foster a stronger common sense of purpose among administrators, teachers, and school staff. According to Hargreaves (1997), it is also essential for a school's culture to be supportive of teachers throughout the process of change. Rather than imposing strict rules and high levels of accountability, leaders should allow for teachers to act autonomously by making decisions about how to take on reform efforts. Along a similar vein, it is also important that school leaders foster a culture



based on trust. Cosner (2009) concluded that collegial trust was a central feature principals' capacity building work. Her 18-month long qualitative study examined leadership perceptions and reports practices of 11 Wisconsin high school principals through interview data and school documents. In order to foster trust among colleagues, principals established, enforced and reinforced norms of interaction. Thus, in order to successfully implement reform efforts, it is essential that principals and other school leaders take action to promote a strong school culture.

***Professional development.*** Several researchers (e.g., Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Hallinger, 1992; Youngs & King, 2002) have found that strong leaders also offer their teachers opportunities for professional development as they take on new practices, curriculum, and policies. Little (1993) also argues that the traditional "training-and-coaching" model is not adequate in supporting teachers as they implement reform related practices. She suggests that in order to effectively implement them, teachers must participate in effective professional development opportunities, such as teacher collaborations and subject matter associations that specifically target school reform efforts. Further, Little points out six principles of effective professional development, ranging from teachers' active intellectual, social, and emotional engagement to offering support for informed dissent. Clearly, Little believes that actively involving teachers in professional development opportunities is essential.

***Shared leadership.*** Leaders can also promote reform efforts by adopting a shared leadership perspective. Brunner (1999) points out that shared leadership does not merely mean delegating tasks and activities to others. Rather, shared leadership is

a collaborative effort to engage other school personnel, including teachers, in the reform process. Trail (2000) further explains that principals cannot remove themselves from the decision-making process by turning over their responsibilities for others to take over. Rather, principals must stay active in the process, while at the same time involving others, as well. By including teachers in the decision-making process, principals can also increase teachers' engagement with reform activities. Furthermore, based on their quantitative study of over 4,000 K-12 teachers across the United States, Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) concluded that shared leadership increases trust in teachers' relationships with their administrators – a finding that suggests that shared leadership also fosters a positive school culture.

*Summary.* The role of leadership is critical as teachers take on new programs, policies, curriculum, and activities. Leaders create cultures that are conducive to change by fostering shared values and assumptions, increasing opportunities for collaboration, and protecting teachers' sense of autonomy and trust. Principals also offer opportunities for teachers to learn. Because the task of transforming schools through reform is so large, shared leadership is a strategy principals use to not only lighten their burden, but to include teachers in decision-making processes and increase teachers' engagement in reform efforts. Increasing teacher engagement can lead to more successful reform efforts.

### **Teaching as a Complex Practice**

Many researchers and authors have written about the complex practice of teaching. Cochran-Smith (2003) states that the nature of teaching is “unforgivingly

complex” (p. 3). As educators deal with pressures from our current system of accountability, she argues that teaching and learning is not reduced to pursuing the simple goal of passing a test. Instead, we must embrace and foster the challenges that come with teaching as a whole. Coburn (2001) also discusses the complex nature of teachers’ work, because it “involves action” (p. 162). Teachers are continuously presented with multiple messages and pressures about their practice, and they must translate abstract ideas into the context of their classrooms.

Shulman (2004a) argues that teaching is more complex a profession than medicine. Unlike doctors, he argues, “The teacher is confronted, not with a single patient, but with a classroom filled with 25 to 35 youngsters. The teacher’s goals are multiple; the school’s obligations far from unitary” (p. 258). Many factors, such as children, the teacher’s goals, and school-related responsibilities, contribute to the complex nature of teachers’ practice. Shulman also claims that the decisions teachers make are cognitively more demanding than those made by doctors. Doctors examine patients and determine the cause of their symptoms. If there is a red, swollen throat and a fever, for example, the doctor may determine the patient has strep throat. The doctor can confirm his diagnosis with a simple test, prescribe the patient with some medication, and send the patient home. In contrast, when a student does not appear to understand something, teachers cannot make an easy diagnosis or employ a simple solution. Did the student miss requisite background knowledge? Perhaps the child missed breakfast and is unable to focus. Or, maybe the student has a learning disability or other factor that impedes his ability to acquire the information. Further,

teachers are not able to focus on individual students on a case-by-case basis; they must routinely make decisions about all of the students in their classroom. In light of all of the factors that contribute to teacher's work, their practice is unarguably complex.

Berg and Clough (2006) echo Shulman's discussion of the numerous decisions teachers make each day. Teachers continuously take in information, which they must respond to immediately. They write, "Classroom conditions change in unpredictable ways, and information arises during the act of teaching that by necessity must inform performance as it occurs. Reflecting these complexities, classroom teachers make hundreds of non-trivial decisions each day working with children" (p. 1). Teachers are constantly responding to their changing conditions, taking in information, and making important decisions in rapid fire time. Figure 2 depicts Berg and Clough's visual framework of the factors that play a role in the complex decisions teachers often unknowingly make moment to moment in their classrooms, as well as the relationships among them. Berg and Clough also contend that the complex nature of teaching is largely unrecognized by the general public, policymakers, and educational researchers, as evidenced by alternative teacher certification programs and the application of a business model to education. Further, they argue that this oversimplification of teaching has resulted in a research-practice gap. Therefore, it is important to recognize that researchers who study educational reform recognize the complexity of teachers practice when implementing new policies and mandates.

Not only is teaching a cognitively demanding practice, but it is also emotionally challenging. According to Hargreaves (2001), teaching and learning are

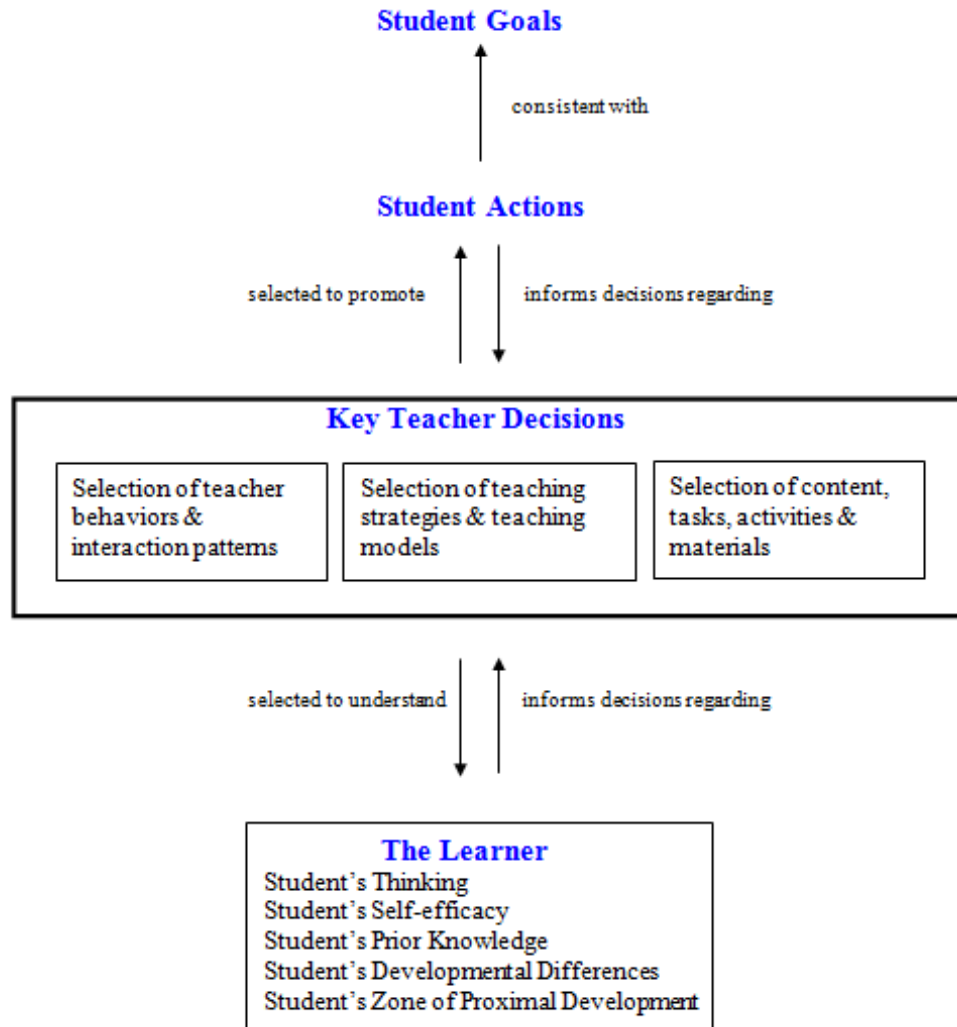


Figure 2. Berg and Clough's (2006) framework illustrates teacher decision-making and their interactions.

emotional practices. Kelchtermans (2005) echoes this notion that teachers' emotions, in addition to other aspects of teaching, make teaching an incredibly complex job. He writes, "Emotion and cognition, self and context, ethical judgment and purposeful action: they are all intertwined in the complex reality of teaching" (p. 996). He adds on that the addition of reform in teachers already complex practice brings to light just how complex teaching is.

*Summary.* Teachers' practice is far from simple. Teachers make an enormous number of cognitively demanding decisions on a daily basis using their knowledge about children, subject-specific content, the setting in which they work, and best practices. Managing a variety of reform efforts makes teaching even more complex, as teachers must make sense of, negotiate, and respond to changes they are required to make in their everyday practice.

### **The Reality of Teachers' Practice**

Teachers are currently situated in practice that involves determining how to deal with a variety of initiatives associated with reform. Fullan and Miles (1992) point out that "school districts and schools are in the business of implementing a bewildering array of innovations and policies simultaneously" (p. 745). Teachers must therefore routinely determine how to handle all of the innovations and policies. Blasé (1991) points out that schools "exist in a vortex of government mandates, social and economic pressures, and conflicting ideologies associated with school administrators, teachers, students, and parents" (p. 1). As such, teachers are left to determine how to enact policy and deal with the conflicts in their practice. Similarly, referring to teachers and others working on the front lines of education, Knapp, Bamberg, Ferguson, and Hill (1998) write that "the fact of multiple reforms is an unmistakable presence in their lives" (p. 398).

These initiatives come from federal policy (e.g., NCLB), state policy (e.g., state standards, Common Core), the local school district (e.g., textbook adoptions, pacing guides), and site administrators (e.g., scheduling, instructional practices,

pedagogical practices). Although educational reform efforts may have different origins, they certainly intersect in the classroom. As Knapp, Bamburg, Ferguson, and Hill (1998) point out, not a lot is known about how multiple reforms intersect in the classroom. They caution that “there is no guarantee that, in combination, the reform initiatives will reinforce each other. It is just as possible that multiple reforms, separately conceived, might get in each other’s way or simply overload the system at the point of service delivery so that little, if anything, is accomplished” (p. 398).

Therefore, in addition to the complexities involved in the daily practice of teaching, teachers must also determine how to manage expectations associated with reform efforts. As Shulman (2004b) points out, “in cases of school reform, the classroom becomes the educators’ laboratory, a setting in which new forms of teaching and learning are painstakingly grown in a fertile culture of exploration. The teacher manages that laboratory and is responsible for detecting and reporting its lessons for improved educational practice” (p. 506). Thus, at any one time, teachers are charged with implementing a variety of pedagogical and curricular mandates, along with all the other complexities of their practice.

*Multiple reforms at the district and school level.* Although multiple initiatives are a current reality in the field of education, research in this area is limited. On the policy front, Berends, Bodilly, & Kirby (2002) conducted research about enacting multiple reforms. They noted that there are many challenges related to large, scale-up reform efforts. In their discussion of a RAND study, they assert that given such challenges, “federal and state policy makers need to think critically about their current

stance on simultaneously promoting high-stakes testing, comprehensive school reforms that center on innovative curriculum and instructional strategies, and the adoption of multiple additional reforms” (p. 175). In addition, Hatch (2001) investigated multiple reforms at the school level to understand how the demands and expectations of multiple reforms affected district administrators, principals, and members of improvement programs in one school district. Based on his analysis and drawing on previous research in California and Texas schools, Hatch concluded that “even though the adoption of improvement programs can bring some new funds, resources, and services, it can also bring new demands and expectations that schools may not have the capacity to meet” (p. 410). Clearly, enacting multiple reforms has created additional challenges for school administrators.

*Multiple reforms at the classroom level.* Regarding teachers, there have been a limited number of exploratory studies about their experiences dealing with multiple reforms. In one study, Knapp, Bamberg, Ferguson, and Hill (1998) analyzed the consequences of multiple reforms (school governance; systematic innovations in curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and reform activity aimed at integrating education, health, and social services) for teachers and other frontline professionals in Washington state schools. Their goal was to understand the “working lives” of professionals who delivered educational and human services. In order to learn about their working lives, the researchers conducted several focus groups with approximately 60 frontline professionals, including teachers, social workers, counselors, and health and mental health professionals, as well site visits and



surveying teachers in one Washington state school district. After their analysis, Knapp, Bamburg, Ferguson, and Hill identified three types of convergence among multiple reforms: 1) *mutual reinforcement* refers to reforms that enhance one another, 2) *interference* refers to reforms that may get in each other's way, and 3) *cumulation and overload* refers to a situation in which several reforms work together but also overload frontline professionals. The researchers also found that the participants responded to and managed multiple reforms in a variety of ways. For example, many professionals adopted coping mechanisms, such as prioritizing, selective attention, and organized or passive resistance. These mechanisms allowed them to reduce the demands of a reform to a more tolerable level. Professionals also expressed an increased need for professional development to learn the needed skills and knowledge to carry out reforms. The authors pointed out that their study was exploratory in nature, and it is necessary to conduct case studies in order to "capture in some detail how professionals attend to (or ignore) reforms, interpret the meaning of reform activity, engage in reform-related work, and adopt (or reject) reform ideas as part of their practice" (p. 415). This type of research should enable reformers and policy makers to understand whether professionals can "feasibly and usefully" incorporate innovations into their professional practice (p. 415).

Mayrowetz (2009) also conducted an exploratory study to learn about how elementary school teachers of special education students implemented multiple reforms, which he referred to as "converging policies." Specifically, he explored elementary mathematics instruction in the context of standards-based reform and

special education policy. Based on interviews and classroom observations of 12 teachers in inclusive fourth-grade classrooms, he found that teachers' practice was only somewhat consistent with the policy messages. Further, he found three ways these teachers responded to converging policies: skimming the surface of both policies without engaging the ideological core of either, finding common ground and remaining true to the spirit of both policies, and privileging one policy at the expense of others.

More recently, Samaniego (2013) conducted a case study that explored how high school mathematics teachers made decisions about and responded to multiple reform expectations. The reform expectations referred to enacted and perceived mandates with high external accountability, as well as initiatives with low or no accountability. Samaniego found that the teachers made decisions about each initiative separately, rather than holistically "blending them into their current instructional practice" (p. xvii). She also found that teachers did not enact initiatives simply because they were mandated. Instead, a variety of factors played a role into whether teachers adopted or rejected them: alignment with beliefs about teaching, pedagogy, and content; perceptions of mandates' importance and relevance; external pressure and accountability; and anticipation of students' reactions. In addition, school infrastructures, such as common planning time and professional teams, supported teachers' implementation, whereas factors related to students, such as behavior and a perceived lack of readiness, prompted teachers not to implement initiatives. Thus, Samaniego found that a variety of factors in teachers' settings

played a role in whether and how they implemented multiple initiatives related to educational reform.

*Summary.* There the research literature suggests that teachers practice involves managing multiple mandates that often intersect in the classroom. Teachers make an overwhelming number of cognitively demanding decisions on a daily basis, have a wealth of prior knowledge, and understand the setting in which they work. When new reform efforts are introduced, teachers must also make decisions about those, as well. Because teachers' jobs are already highly complex, the addition of not just one, but many reform-related programs and activities, makes their jobs even more challenging and complex. Teachers must assess reforms to decide whether investing in them is worth their time and efforts, especially as they consider all of the other demands they face in their everyday practice. In addition, teachers must also determine whether reform efforts align with their beliefs about teaching and learning; thus, they must determine whether reforms are right for their classrooms and students. Further, the results of the exploratory studies indicate that teachers' responses to multiple reforms differ from findings about how teachers enact a single, even if comprehensive, reform. As a few studies have indicated, teachers develop a variety of strategies to manage multiple mandates in their classrooms, and several factors in teachers' settings affect how and whether they implement them.

### **Summary and Discussion**

There is an abundance of research literature on educational reform. The research findings suggest that teachers approach their practice with agency and need

autonomy when determining how to implement mandates in their practice. When teachers are presented with mandates, they interpret and enact them in a manner that aligns with their beliefs. As such, teachers generally adapt mandates. Teachers have also been found resist reform programs, but as suggested in the literature, resistance is a complex notion. In addition, there are a number of strategies leaders can implement to reduce the likelihood of resistance and to support implementation.

Although there is an extensive body of literature on educational reform, few studies seem to highlight teachers' perspectives. In addition, although teachers are situated in a nexus of educational reform, studies exploring teachers' experiences as they try to enact multiple reforms are in short supply. Further, missing from the literature is a study that brings these constructs together. Teachers' perceptions about the kinds of reform efforts they are expected to participate in, as well as the type of efforts they would like to experience should provide for a more thorough understanding of teachers' practice in this nexus of educational reform. By understanding teachers' perspectives, policymakers, administrators, and others who conceptualize and implement educational reform may better be able to design reform efforts in ways that align with teachers' beliefs.

Gaining insight into teachers' perspectives about how they experience educational reform requires powerful theoretical frameworks. These are discussed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

As researchers design a study, they must consider which questions to ask, who will participate, where the study will take place, the methods of data collection, how the data will be analyzed, and how to interpret the findings. According to LeCompte and Preissle (2003) theory and methods are “inextricably linked” (p. 116). Theory shapes a research study and drives the methodology. Therefore, researchers’ decisions should not be random; they must be deliberate and purposeful.

This chapter provides an overview of Sensemaking Theory and discusses how it has been applied to studies of educational reform. Then, I discuss the origins of Activity Theory, as well as provide an overview. Further, Although Activity Theory has not traditionally be used as a lens for examining educational reform, the chapter explores how it may provide a valuable lens through which to examine teachers’ experiences with educational reform. Finally, the chapter concludes by examining how the two theories may provide complementary theoretical lenses in order gain insight into how teachers experience multiple mandates associated with educational reform.

#### **Sensemaking Theory**

Although sensemaking can be defined in a variety of ways, according to Weick (1995), the father of sensemaking in organizations, the concept of sensemaking literally refers to “the making of sense” of the unknown so we can act in it (p. 4). Weick’s notion of sensemaking includes seven properties, including identity

construction, retrospection, enactment of sensible environments, a social element, the notion that it is ongoing, a focus on and by extracted cues, and being driven by plausibility. To borrow from Ancona (2012), sensemaking “involves coming up with a plausible understanding—a map—of a shifting world; testing this map with others through data collection, action, and conversation, and then refining or abandoning, the map depending on how credible it is” (p. 1). Sensemaking is useful when researching teachers because their understandings “are framed by who they are (their identities) as well as by their prior experiences and the cultural, organizational, and structural contexts in which they are situated” (Drake, 2002, p. 313).

*Sensemaking and educational reform.* Many researchers have used sensemaking as the theoretical framework through which they have come to understand how educational reform is implemented and is experienced by a number of stakeholders, including policymakers, organizations, leaders, professional developers, and teachers. Sensemaking has been a particularly useful theory when studying educational reform, because it transcends the notion that policy influences teachers’ practice. As Coburn (2001) points out, by interpreting, adapting, and even transforming reforms, teachers actually shape policy as they implement reforms in their classrooms.

Although earlier studies of sensemaking (e.g., Cohen & Ball, 1990; Jennings, 1996; Spillane & Jennings, 1997; Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977) primarily focused on individual interpretation of policy, Coburn (2001) moved beyond individual interpretation by introducing the notion of *collective sense making*. Sensemaking in

the collective sense refers not only to how individuals interpret, adapt, and transform policy, but how teachers and others make sense of and shape policy through interactions with colleagues. This process relates to the social property of sensemaking that Weick (1995) identified. Coburn points out that “there has been little systematic research into the processes by which such interpretation and adaptations occur” (p. 145). Thus, her research study was designed to examine the processes that teachers used to construct and reconstruct meaning about reading instruction in the context of their professional communities. Coburn used a case study approach that involved observations of classroom teachers, as well as interviews with classroom teachers, resource teachers, and the principal. She selected an urban school in California that was involved in ongoing efforts to improve reading instruction, moving from a whole language approach to a balanced approach to teaching literacy. Coburn drew from Sensemaking Theory to explore how teachers adapted, adopted, combined, or ignored messages and pressures about reading instruction, as well as how their considerations shaped classroom practice. In her analysis, Coburn found that teachers tended to turn to their colleagues to make sense of new messages related to reading instruction in formal (faculty meetings, grade level meetings) and informal (before school, after school, and during lunchtime) settings. Coburn also found that the sense teachers ultimately made was shaped by those with whom teachers interacted, in addition to the conditions for their conversations. Messages about reading instruction were more likely, for example, to affect teachers’ practice when teachers had opportunities for deep engagement with colleagues. Such interactions allowed teachers to immerse

themselves in their environment in order to construct understand and determine how to integrate new practices into their classrooms. Coburn's study highlights the power of a sensemaking framework to understand how teachers interpret policy messages, make adaptations, and apply them to their practice.

Just as earlier studies of sensemaking focused on the individual, they also tended to emphasize cognitive processes (e.g., Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). Schmidt and Datnow (2005) took a different perspective, however, by examining teachers' emotions as they made sense of educational reforms. Based on the notion that emotions can influence how teachers make sense of change, Schmidt and Datnow sought to understand the relationship between teachers' emotions, teachers' implementation of reforms, and teachers' practice. They drew from qualitative data from a broader, four-year longitudinal case study of comprehensive school reform. Reform in these schools involved adopting externally developed, whole-school initiatives. The researchers asked teachers questions such as, "Tell me a little about some of the feelings you've had during the initiation and implementation of the reform. Give an example of something that created positive or negative emotions," as well as other questions about reform and their schools (p. 953). Schmidt and Datnow found that when teachers made sense of reforms in their own practice, it was more emotional for teachers than when they made sense of reforms at the school level. Further, reforms that allowed for teachers' own interpretations resulted in positive feelings and emotions. Conversely, when teachers made adaptations to highly structured programs, they had negative feelings of guilt. In addition, teachers had



more positive emotions toward reforms about which they could clearly articulate definitions, compared with negative emotions associated with reforms teachers could not define or did not understand. Schmidt and Datnow's research suggests the importance of teachers' involvement in educational reform; the more involved teachers are, the more positive their feelings and the more positively their practice is affected. By using sensemaking as their theoretical framework, Schmidt and Datnow were able to gain insight into the important relationships between teachers' emotions, implementation of reform, and teaching practice.

Sensemaking has also been a useful framework to gain insights into the analysis of survey data. In a study of how elementary teachers at different career stages responded to reform in mathematics, Drake (2002) used Sensemaking Theory to help explain differences among the participants. The quantitative data, which was collected in a large-scale survey of elementary teachers, revealed significant differences in their attitudes toward reform, their understandings of reform, their perceived preparation for teaching the new curriculum, and their use of traditional teaching practices. To uncover how teachers made sense of reform, Drake conducted extensive interviews with teachers about their beliefs, prior experiences, and teaching goals related to mathematics. She also observed teachers multiple times as they used the reform curriculum with their students in order to reduce bias related to self-reporting. Drake's qualitative analysis revealed that teachers from different career stages differed in three ways: their goals for students, how they integrated reform teaching practices with traditional ones, and the connections between their own

learning related to the reform and their students' mathematics learning. Early career teachers regarded reform as a procedural mandate, early/midcareer teachers viewed reform comprehensively to create principled practice, and midcareer teachers merged together reform practices with their existing traditional practices. Thus, to make sense of her quantitative findings, Drake drew from Sensemaking Theory to understand the relationship between teachers' career stages and mathematics reform. In addition, she focused on teachers as sense makers in order to also help them to uncover their own understandings of policy and practice.

Finally, Sensemaking Theory provided Park (2008) with a useful framework to learn about how urban high school teachers conceptualized data use and how their contexts shaped their implementation of Data Driven Decision Making (DDDM). Drawing on interviews, observations, document reviews, and teacher surveys, Park analyzed how teachers constructed and enacted policy messages related to DDDM. She found that how teachers conceptualized data, their motivations for data uses, and their anticipated outcomes affected teachers' sensemaking of DDDM. Further, teachers' sensemaking of DDDM was also influenced by three contexts: accountability, district, and department. The accountability context led to a focus on data, the district context framed teachers' work on DDDM, and the departmental context provided an infrastructure for teachers to work together on DDDM. Thus, Sensemaking Theory provided a valuable lens through which to learn about the many internal and external factors that shape how teachers make sense of and enact policy messages related to educational reform.

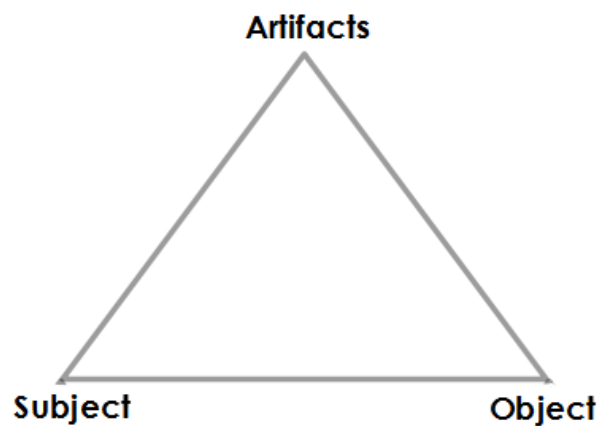
**Summary.** Sensemaking has proven to be a valuable framework through which to understand how people interpret and enact policies within organizations. In the field of education, sensemaking enables researchers to understand how teachers develop an awareness of messages and build understandings of them through their preexisting practices and cognitive frameworks. In Coburn's (2001) study sensemaking brings to light how teachers' practices are changed through collective sensemaking, where teachers actively interpret norms, opinions, proposals, and suggestions, in addition to making sense of them through interactions and discussions with colleagues. Schmidt and Datnow's (2005) study illustrates how sensemaking can be a useful framework through which to understand the relationship between teachers' emotions and their interpretation and enactment of policy. Drake's (2002) use of Sensemaking Theory demonstrates how the framework can help to explain differences among teachers. Finally, Park's (2008) use of Sensemaking Theory illustrates how the framework can be used to gain insight into internal and external factors shape teachers' thinking about and enactment of policy. Clearly, many researchers who are interested in understanding the sense teachers make of educational reform rely upon Sensemaking Theory to inform their research design.

### **Activity Theory**

Activity Theory, also referred to as Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), is a conceptual framework that has its roots in Russian psychology. It was established across several eras from the cultural-historical perspectives of Vygotsky (1978), Leont'ev (1978; 1981), and Luria (1976). Activity Theory emerged as a

theoretical and analytic framework to “bring in culture in the understanding of human functioning” (Engeström, 2002).

At the core of Activity Theory is the notion that individuals make meaning by interacting with others in their environment. A key concept the CHAT perspective is that people live in a social world. Interactions among individuals are mediated by the use of tools, which can refer to material objects, such as hammers, pictures, gestures, and sounds, and corresponding ideal objects, such as meaning and values (Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, 2010). This mediation between individuals and tools enables individuals to achieve their goals. These three elements - the individual (*subject*), the tools (artifacts), and the goals (object) - comprise an activity system at the most basic level, which is depicted in Figure 3.



*Figure 3. Model of a basic activity system.*

Leont’ev (1978; 1981) extended Vygotsky and Luria’s work, recognizing the complexity of the world beyond *individual* human actions. Influenced by the Marxist notion of labor, Leont’ev pointed out that work is “performed in conditions of joint, collective activity” (Leont’ev, 1981, p. 208). Engeström (1987) drew from Leont’ev’s

work to expand the model of the basic activity system, arguing that the traditional model did not fully depict the all components of an activity system. Engeström posited that all systems were governed by a set of rules and beliefs that more fully explained the context of an activity. As such, Engeström expanded the model to include *rules*, *community*, and *division of labor*. The expanded activity system, depicted in Figure 4, illustrates that rules mediate the subject-community interaction, and division of labor mediates the community-object interaction.

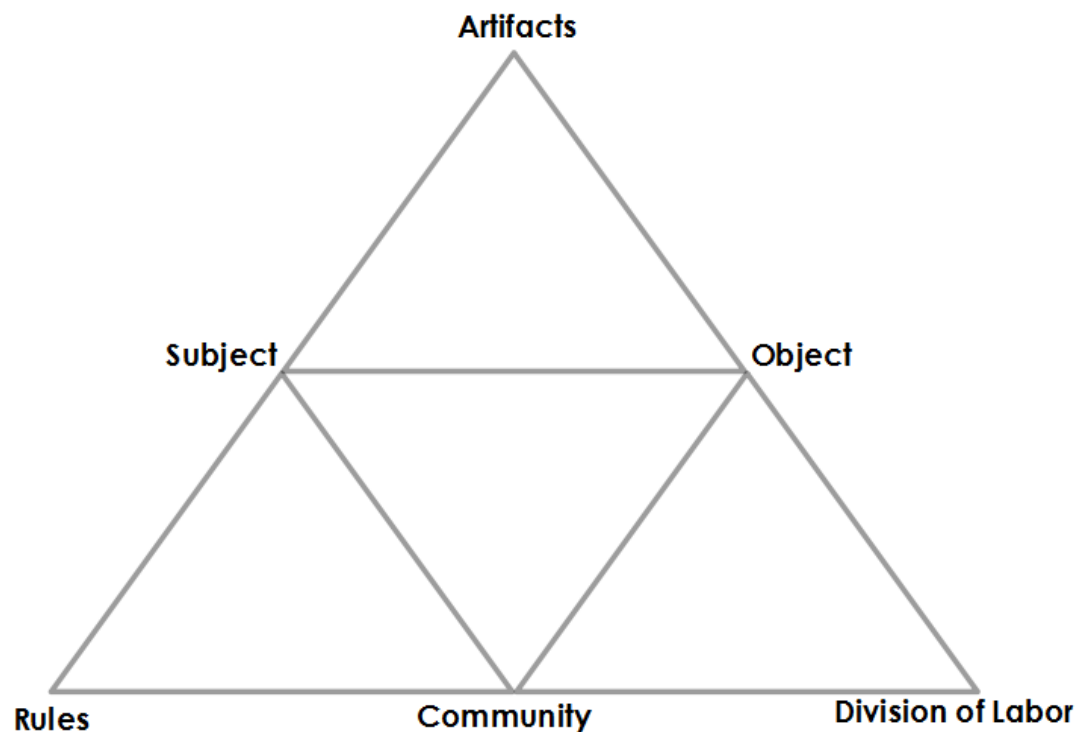


Figure 4. Model of the Engeström's (1987) expanded activity system.

**Activity Theory and educational reform.** Although Activity Theory has not been used to examine educational reform, it may provide a promising lens. Curriculum, programs, policies, and other activities associated with large- and small-scale educational reform possess all of the components that constitute an activity

system (see Figure 5). The *subject* can refer to the teacher who is charged with implementing a reform. Each reform effort also has an *object*, or goal. I have also borrowed from Kain and Wardle's (2010) model of an activity system by adding the *outcome* of a goal. Whether or not a reform's goals and outcomes are aligned, meaning that goals are realized, is critical. The achievement of the reform's goals is mediated by the teacher's use of *artifacts*, or tools, such as teacher editions of textbooks, pacing guides, lesson plans, worksheets and other documents, materials that students might need, and other resources. *Rules* are also associated with reforms, as teachers are governed by expectations, evaluations, and systems of accountability when they are first introduced to them and as they enact them over time. The rules mediate how the teacher engages with the reform and how teachers interact with their *community*: their grade-level and cross-grade level colleagues, support teachers (coaches, specialists, intervention teachers), staff developers, and site administrators. Finally, there is also a *division of labor* associated with reforms, as members of the community adopt different roles when enacting mandated activities. As such, the achievement of the reforms' goals is also mediated by the community's division of labor. Clearly, reforms have all of the components of an activity system.

**Summary.** Activity Theory has been a useful framework for understanding people's actions as they are situated within complex activity systems. Although Activity Theory has not traditionally been used to study educational reform, curriculum, programs, policies, and other activities associated with educational reform

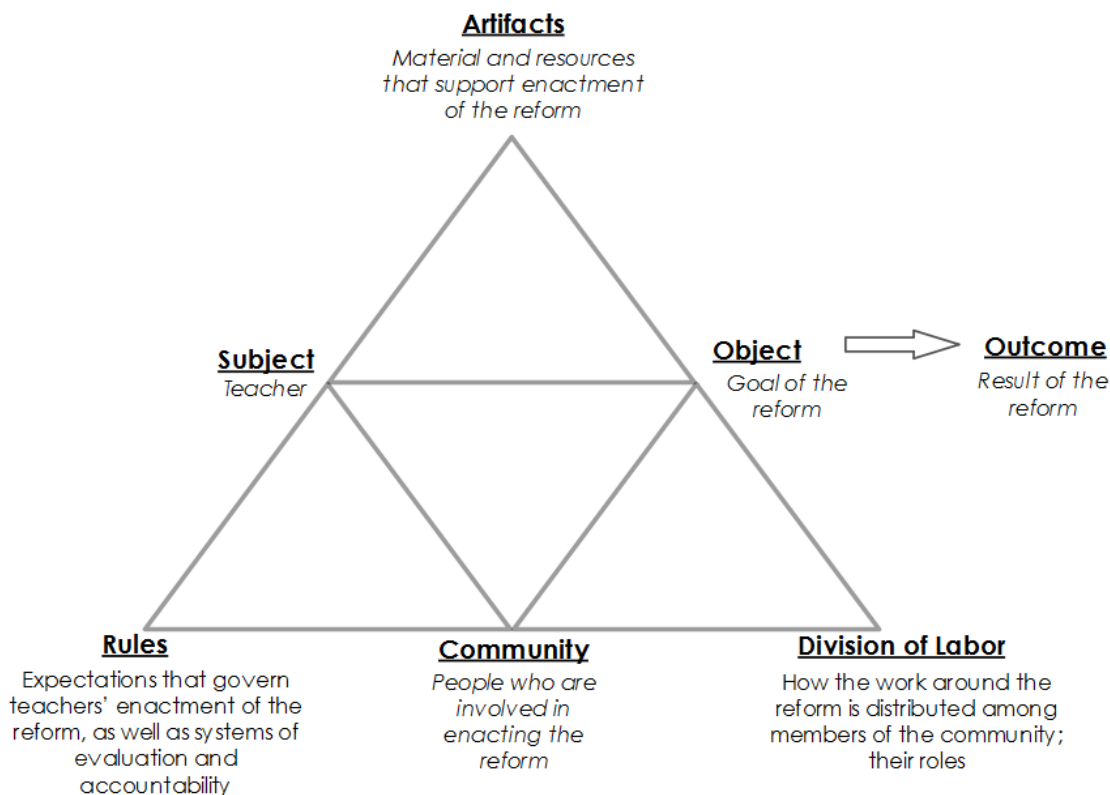


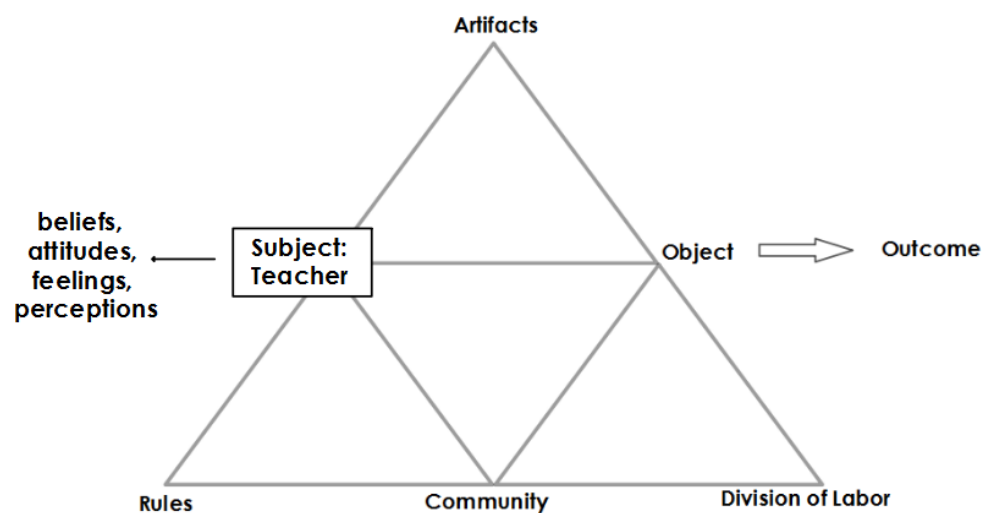
Figure 5. Application of Activity Theory components to reforms.

can be conceptualized as activity systems. Thus, drawing from Activity Theory may provide valuable lens through which to investigate educational reform.

### Summary and Discussion

Based on its application to previous studies, Sensemaking Theory promises to be useful in gaining insight into teachers' understanding of, attitudes toward, and beliefs about the multiple reform expectations they are routinely required to implement. Although not traditionally used to examine educational reform, Activity Theory has the potential to provide a complementary analytic lens through which one can understand how teachers experience reform. As seen in Figure 6, when

conceptualizing individual reform efforts as an activity system, it is apparent that Sensemaking Theory emphasizes the *subject*, or the teacher, of the reform. Thus, in order to more thoroughly understand how teachers experience reform, Activity Theory should allow for a more complete examination, accounting for not only the subject, but for the artifacts, the rules, community, and division of labor inherent in every curriculum, program, policy, and reform-related activity. Analyzing teachers' sensemaking of reform in this way should also provide insight into the features of reform efforts that teachers believe have impacted their practice.



*Figure 6. Sensemaking Theory's emphasis on the subject of an activity system.*

Based on the gaps in the research literature and the promise of Sensemaking Theory and Activity Theory, I have designed a study that explores teachers' experiences and perceptions of educational reform. In the next chapter, I describe the methodology used to inform the design of the study, including the research questions, context, participants, data sources, and data analysis methods.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Methodology**

#### **Overview and Research Questions**

Teachers routinely face district- and school-level expectations associated with a variety of large- and small-scale educational reform efforts. Some of these expectations are mandated, not merely suggested. Teachers' complex practice is made even more so when they are required to put into practice activities related to reform efforts – that is, when they are expected to manage multiple mandates that target a variety of aspects of teaching and learning, such as curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, intervention, and student behavior. Research in the field of educational reform has tended to focus on implementation studies of large-scale reform policies and programs, teachers' interpretation and enactment of policy, and strategies that administrators can use to facilitate the successful implementation of reform efforts. There are also bodies of literature about the complex nature of teaching, how teachers make sense of and enact reform, and a few exploratory studies about multiple reforms. However, the nature of teachers' practice as they manage multiple mandates related to reform efforts is a largely unexamined area in the field of education. Therefore, the goal of this study was to add to the current body of research about teachers' beliefs about and roles in educational reform in order to better understand how teachers experience multiple mandates.

Specifically, the study was designed to understand the association between elementary school teachers' practice, their beliefs and attitudes, and their

understanding and implementation of mandated activities and programs related to large- and small-scale reform efforts. Studying how teachers' make sense of multiple mandates as they balance the demands of their everyday practice will provide for a more thorough understanding of the complexity teachers' current practice.

Therefore, the overarching research question that guided this study is: How do teachers experience multiple mandates? Four sub-questions aided in addressing the overarching question:

1. How do teachers conceptualize mandates?
2. How do teachers describe their enactment of multiple mandates?
3. What are teachers' attitudes toward and feelings about mandates?
4. How do teachers distinguish between effective and ineffective mandates?

### **Positionality**

The inspiration for this study comes from my nearly 13 years of experience as an elementary school teacher. Throughout my career, I have been charged with implementing a variety of mandates associated with small- and large- scale reform efforts. As such, I have a set of ideas, beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, and behaviors related to mandated curriculum, methods, practices, and activities associated with educational reform. In reflecting upon my experiences, I have come to realize that although I am open to change and believe that reform is necessary to improve our educational system, I am also somewhat skeptical and critical of mandates associated with reform efforts. When I am mandated to implement curriculum, programs, and

practices, I rarely, if ever, implement them as they were presented or intended. Rather than implementing mandates with fidelity, I tend to adapt mandates in a way that makes sense by drawing from my past experiences, and by considering my students' needs, my beliefs about teaching and learning, and the context in which my practice is situated. As a result, some curriculum, programs, and activities may appear very different from how they were initially presented and intended to be implemented. In short, I believe that it is not only acceptable to adapt mandates, but that it is an essential aspect of my role as a professional educator.

While my experiences and associated beliefs led me to explore literature, to find a gap in the field, and to design the study, it was essential that I was aware of and accounted for my biases as I conducted the research study. As a teacher, I have worked with many colleagues who have opinions, beliefs, and values that differ from mine; therefore, I expected that study participants' experiences would differ from mine, as well. In addition, I did not design the study to confirm my experiences, but rather to gain insight into other teachers' experiences as they face the demands of enacting multiple mandates in their everyday practice. In order to ensure that I was open to participants' experiences, I asked open-ended questions, and I offered minimal, non-evaluative feedback during the interview. Further, once the interviews were transcribed, I read and annotated transcripts, applied a priori codes that were developed from the review of literature, and I looked for emergent patterns that surfaced within and across participants. Thus, while I certainly could not ignore my

own beliefs and experiences, I was able to put them aside in order to listen to, analyze, and interpret the data that I collected from participants.

My position as an outsider in the district and school in which I conducted the study had some potential benefits and challenges. One challenge was that I was not familiar with many of the mandates these participants experienced. To decrease this risk, I asked interview participants to define and discuss mandates with me, including the mandates' origins, goals, resources, and so on. I also reviewed the district and school websites to learn about their mandates, and I consulted websites related to specific mandates. Conversely, my lack of familiarity with many of the district and site mandates may have enabled me to focus on teachers' sensemaking of them, rather than constructing meaning by relying upon my own prior knowledge and experiences. Because I did not have preconceived notions or experiences with the majority of the mandates, I was able to gain insight into teachers' interpretations of them. Thus, being an outsider had some benefits, as well.

My role as an outsider may have also affected how teachers at the school site felt about interacting with me. There may have been teachers, for example, who opted not to participate in the study because they were uncertain about my motives, relationship with the principal, and relationship with other district personnel. In addition, study participants may have withheld information from me for those aforementioned reasons, as well. In order to reduce this risk, I attempted to build rapport with teachers, routinely expressed that I wanted to highlight their voices and experiences, and I informed participants and reminded them that everything was

confidential, that they could elect to discontinue their participation, and that they could stop or erase audio recordings at any time. Conversely, being an outsider may have allowed participants to feel more able to speak freely with me since I was not viewed as a member of the district. As such, they may have been less concerned about me judging or evaluating them.

### **Research Design: Case Study**

In order to address the research questions, I used a case study approach. According to Yin (2006), case studies are particularly helpful in gaining an in-depth understanding of “a ‘case’ within its ‘real-life’ context” (p. 111). They are best suited for studies that aim to address explanatory questions, such as how or why something happened. Further, Shulman (2004c) points out that case studies provide depth, specificity, and illustrations of uncertain territory. Although there is extensive literature about educational reform, investigating the demands of multiple mandates as teachers are situated in their everyday practice is an under-examined area. Using a case study approach, therefore, allowed for a deep examination of teachers’ thinking about their practice as they made decisions about their day-to-day practice, as well as about implementing mandates. Although, case studies can be criticized for their small scale, Erickson (1986) suggests that their depth allows for questions, insights, and perspectives that are useful in other, related contexts. Thus, because understanding how teachers thought about multiple mandates in the context of their everyday work required closely examining teachers’ practice and understandings, a case study approach was fitting.

## **Context**

The case was conducted at an elementary school in Southern California. There are several reasons for conducting the study at the elementary level. First, many research studies have emphasized reform efforts and programs at the high school level (Boyer, 1983; Porter et al., 1993; Samaniego, 2013; Sedlak, 1986; Wraga, 1994). In addition, many studies have also focused on specific subject areas, such as math (Ross, McDougall, & Hogaboam-Gray, 2002; Samaniego, 2013; Wu, 1997), science (Ruiz-Primo, Shavelson, Hamilton, & Klein, 2002), and language arts (Coburn, 2001). However, because teachers at the elementary level have self-contained classrooms where they generally interact with the same group of students throughout the day, they often face simultaneous reform-related mandates across curricular areas, as well as in other aspects of teaching and learning (e.g., behavior, participation, engagement). Little (1993) has also pointed out that “elementary teachers must absorb the changes in content and method associated with an entire spectrum of the elementary curriculum” (p. 130). Therefore, conducting the study at the elementary level made sense and would add to the literature on educational reform.

Convenience sampling, which according to Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999) refers to “any group readily accessible to the researcher that reasonably might be assumed to possess characteristics relevant to the study” (p. 233), was used to select the elementary site for this study: Rolling Hills Elementary School (in order to maintain study participants’ anonymity, the district name, school name, and all participants’ names have been replaced with pseudonyms). Rolling Hills Elementary

School is located in the Evergreen Union School District, an urban district with 17 elementary schools and six middle schools. According to the most recent information from the California Department of Education ([cde.ca.gov](http://cde.ca.gov)), Rolling Hills serves approximately 950 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Eighty-one percent of the students at Rolling Hills live at or below the poverty line. Hispanic students account for 80% of the students enrolled at Rolling Hills, while 6% are White, 2% are African American, and students reporting two or more races, Filipino, and Asian students each comprise slightly less than 1% of the school's overall population. English Learners comprise 57% of Rolling Hills' population. Of that subgroup, 98% of the students are native Spanish speakers, and the remaining 2% speak Filipino, Lao, Vietnamese, Farsi, and Assyrian.

Rolling Hills Elementary can be considered as a low-performing school. In California, schools are ranked on an Academic Performance Index (API), which assigns schools a single number score on a scale from 200 to 1000. The rating is directly related to students' performance on the state's standardized test, the California Standards Test (CST) and can be used to track individual schools' change over time. According to the California Department of Education ([cde.ca.gov](http://cde.ca.gov)), Rolling Hills had an API score of 746 in 2013, a four-point drop from the previous year. It also falls short of the minimum goal of 800 set for all schools across California. On the most recent administration of the CST, which was in the spring of 2013, between 34% and 46% of the second grade through fifth grade students met or exceeded grade level standards in English language arts, lower than the state averages of 46% to 65%. In

mathematics, between 33% and 60% of the students met or exceeded grade level standards, compared to a state average of 65% to 72%. The API also ranks schools using a 10-point scale. Currently, Rolling Hills has an API ranking of two, meaning that compared to all of the elementary schools in California, Rolling Hills is performing in the bottom 20%. Because there is so much variability, schools are also ranked in comparison with schools that serve students with similar demographic profiles. Rolling Hills' similar school API ranking is also a two, putting it in the bottom 20% of elementary schools that serve students with similar demographics.

### **Participants**

Study participants included kindergarten through fifth grade teachers at Rolling Hills Elementary School.

*Selection procedures.* In September 2013, I invited all 36 teachers to participate in the study via email (see Appendix A). Due to a low response rate (approximately 3%), the principal of Rolling Hills invited me to a staff meeting to introduce the study in mid-October 2013. I discussed my research interests and fielded teachers' questions about the study. At the conclusion of the presentation, the site's principal emailed a link to the electronic version of the survey, and I distributed paper copies to several teachers who expressed interest. The survey, discussed in more detail in the next section, was designed to collect information about mandates present at the site, participants' feelings about making changes to their classroom practices, as well as teachers' orientations toward teaching and learning, their attitudes toward mandates, and their sense of agency. Half of the 36 classroom teachers at the



school (although fewer were present at the staff meeting), completed the survey. Ten teachers expressed interest participating in the interview portion of the study, nine of whom actually participated. A census was employed, as all nine volunteers were selected for participation. Among the teachers who participated in the study, two were men and seven were women, four taught a primary grade level and give taught an upper grade level, and four participants had 7-11 years of experience, two had 12-20 years of experience, and three had 21-30 years of teaching experience.

### **Data Sources**

I employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to address the study's overarching research question: How do teachers experience multiple mandates? In order to address the research questions and to triangulate findings, I utilized multiple sources, including a participant survey, an artifact elicited interview, and a follow up questionnaire. Table 2 displays the relationship between these data sources and my research sub-questions.

*Participant survey.* The survey (see Appendix B) was designed to gain general demographic information about each participant, including the grade level they taught and their career stage. It was also used to compile a list of mandates that teachers reported that they had been expected to enact over the past several years. Finally, the survey was designed to gain insight into participants' orientations to teaching and learning, their sense of agency when enacting mandates, and their attitudes toward general changes and mandated ones. I pilot-tested the survey several times with teachers who were not participants in the study. The survey went through several

Table 2. Data Sources Used To Address Research Sub-Questions

Research Questions	Data Sources		
	Participant Survey	Artifact-Elicited Interview	Mandate Questionnaire
How do teachers conceptualize mandates?	x	x	
How do teachers describe their enactment of mandates?	x	x	
What are teachers' attitudes toward and feelings about mandates?	x	x	x
How do teachers distinguish between effective and ineffective mandates?			x

iterations, as I revised and improved it based on pilot participant feedback and analyzing the pilot survey data. Initially I had included many open-ended questions, but because I wanted to categorize participants, I changed the format to include more Likert-scale (Likert, 1932) type questions.

*Demographics.* The first two survey questions asked participants to indicate the grade level they taught as well as the number of years they had been teaching full time, including the current academic year. The number of years participants had been teaching full time were separated into ranges based on Huberman (1993) and Drake's (2002) research on career stages: 0-6, 7-11, 12-20, 21-30, and over 30 years of experience.

*Mandates.* An open-ended question asked participants to identify all of the mandates they had been required to implement over the past few years, including

curriculum, programs, methods of teaching, systems for managing students, and so on. This list of mandates was used during the subsequent artifact-elicited interviews, as participants sorted them based on whether they believed they were mandated.

*Attitude toward change and mandates.* Teachers were presented with two open-ended questions about how they felt about making changes to their instructional practice, teaching methods and/or curriculum. The first question targeted teachers' *general* attitudes toward change, whereas the second question addressed how teachers felt about making *mandated* changes to their practice. Participants responded to 10 Likert-scale items (Likert, 1932) designed to ascertain their attitudes toward mandates. In response to each statement, participants indicated whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed.

*Orientations to teaching and learning.* The survey gauged whether teachers tended to be more “teacher-centered” or “student-centered” in their approach to teaching and learning—terms derived from the work of Van Veen, Slegers, Bergen, and Klaassen (2001). Participants responded to 11 Likert-scale items about specific classroom practices, and they were asked to indicate how frequently they took place in their classrooms. In response to each statement, participants indicated the frequency in which they engaged in the practices.

*Sense of agency.* The final 10 Likert-scale items were designed to determine participants' sense of agency, which refers to the extent to which participants felt that they could make changes to mandates. I sought to determine whether participants lacked agency and were more passive in how they took on mandates, or whether they

had a strong sense of agency and actively adapted and modified mandates to align with their practice. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements about implementing mandates in their classrooms, ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*.

***Artifact-elicited interview.*** Artifact-elicited interviews were another source of data for this study (see Appendix \_ for the interview protocol). I adapted this interview technique from the work of Tobin, Wu, and Davidson (1989) and Tobin, Hsueh, and Karasawa (2009). In their studies of preschools in China, Japan, and the United States, Tobin and his colleagues videotaped preschool activities, showed specific video-recorded segments to participants, and asked them to discuss their perspectives about the recorded interactions. The video segments allowed the researchers to target specific interactions about which they sought feedback. As a result of highlighting particular clips, the participants' responses were specific, reflective, and rich in content.

In this study, the classroom—the arrangement of furniture and materials, the items on the walls, and everything inside—served as the artifact. During the artifact-elicited interview, I prompted participants to discuss and explain their thoughts in relation to items in the classroom, rather than relying solely on their memory, as they would with a traditional individual interview. A semi-structured format allowed for a natural conversational flow, as well as for enough flexibility to ask additional questions that arose from participants' responses and comments. The interview included six questions that aimed to gain insight into how individual teachers made

sense of their practice, made sense of mandates, and made decisions about enacting mandates into their practice. Included in those questions was an activity sort, in which participants determined whether activities were mandates and not mandates. The source of the activities in the sort was participants' responses to a survey item that asked them to list everything that they had recently been required to implement. I also utilized the interview learn about teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning, their attitude toward mandates, and their sense of agency.

*Mandate questionnaire.* As with the survey, I pilot-tested the format for the follow-up using two methods: a face-to-face interview and an email questionnaire. During the previous round of interviews, most participants expressed some concern about scheduling a second interview, indicating that they would prefer an email version of the interview, if possible. Because the pilot-test of the two methods of collecting data resulted in similar types of responses, I opted to transform these interviews into an emailed questionnaire. In fact, because I posed very specific questions about how mandates were introduced to teachers, the training and resources that accompanied the mandates, and so on, emailing the questions may have given participants more time to contemplate and recall their experiences in more detail than during a face-to-face or phone interview. Therefore, the final source of data I used was an emailed questionnaire (see Appendix D).

I designed the questionnaire to gain insight into the mandated programs, curriculum, and other activities that teachers believed impacted their practice in a positive manner, as well as ones that teachers did not believe were effective. During

the initial artifact-elicited interview, participants categorized activities as mandated or not mandated, they discussed mandates in fairly general terms, and they touched upon mandates they believed were effective and ineffective in their practice. This follow-up questionnaire allowed me to gain insight into teachers' sensemaking of the mandates in greater detail. Further, drawing from Activity Theory, I examined each mandate as an activity system, asking each participant questions about a positive and negative mandate's motives (goals and outcomes), tools, rules, community, and division of labor. This final questionnaire allowed me to generalize characteristics of mandates that teachers identified as effective and ineffective.

### **Data Collection**

I collected survey, interview, and questionnaire data over a five-month period, from September 2013 to January 2014.

*Participant survey.* In September 2013, I contacted the principal of Rolling Hills Elementary School, asking her to forward an introductory email with a link to the survey to her staff (Appendices A and B). The principal forwarded the email and survey link to her staff, and she included her own statement, reiterating that their participation was completely voluntary and confidential. Only three of the site's 36 teachers responded to the survey, and only one teacher indicated interest in participating in the interview portion of the study. The principal informed me that teachers were extremely busy and likely overwhelmed with parent conferences. In addition, the district was in the midst of contract negotiations, which the principal believed may have contributed to teachers' lack of participation. As such, the

principal invited me to introduce the study to her staff in person at a meeting in mid-October 2013. At the conclusion of my brief presentation and question-answer period, the principal gave her staff time to complete the online or paper version of the survey. After a week, half of the site's 36 teachers had completed the survey.

Once the survey was closed, I uploaded participants' responses into a spreadsheet, which included their responses to demographic information, open ended questions, and Likert-scale items. I converted the Likert-scale items to numerical values in order to ascertain participants' orientations to teaching and learning, their attitudes toward mandates, and their senses of agency. In addition, I compiled a comprehensive list of mandates for use in the interview portion of the study. Finally, in order to protect participants' confidentiality, I assigned each a pseudonym.

*Artifact-elicited interview.* After the survey was closed, I contacted each participant who indicated interest in participating in the interview phase of the study, thanking them for their interest and making plans to schedule the interview. These interviews took place in November and December 2013 at a mutually agreed upon day and time in the participants' classrooms, and the duration ranged from 30 minutes to slightly over an hour. At the beginning of each interview, I briefly stated my research interests and presented consent forms that detailed possible risks of participation, as well as safeguards that I had established to protect participants' confidentiality. With each participant's consent, I audio recorded the interviews and took photographs to document the artifacts in the teachers' classrooms. Participants had the option of stopping the recording or the interview at any time, refraining from answering

questions, and deciding whether or not to allow certain photographs to be taken. I also took field notes during and at the conclusion of each interview, which consisted of initial observations, notes about artifacts and mandates, thoughts, questions that arose from the interview, and final interpretations. All of the participants were warm, welcoming, and seemed eager to share their thoughts and experiences. None of the participants expressed concern about participating in the study. Within a day after each interview, I contacted the participants, thanking them for sharing their classrooms and insights, as well as reminding them that once the first round of interviews had been completed, they would be contacted to complete a follow-up questionnaire.

***Mandate questionnaire.*** In mid-December 2013, once the interviews had been completed, I contacted the participants via email with the follow up questionnaire. I gave participants a choice of completing the questionnaire and returning it to me, discussing it on the phone, or meeting in person to discuss their responses. All of the participants opted to complete and return the questionnaire via email. After a week, I had received three responses. Several days later, I sent an email to all of the participants, who were blind carbon copied. I thanked those who had completed the questions, and I reminded the others to please do so in the next few days. The reminder elicited three more responses. After sending out an additional two reminder emails, I received all of the responses. Once the responses were all in, I coded and analyzed them using Activity Theory as an analytic tool.

### **Data Analysis**

I employed quantitative and qualitative techniques to analyze the study's data.



*Quantitative.* I primarily analyzed the survey data quantitatively. For example, in order to determine the number of teachers who taught at specific grade levels and were at specific stages in their careers, I used the teachers' demographic information for descriptive purposes.

I also analyzed the teacher-identified mandates quantitatively for descriptive purposes. First, I compiled a complete list of mandates. Then, I sorted into different categories in order to understand the types of programs and activities that teachers believed were mandated. I came up with the following categories: intervention and support, assessment, pedagogy, content, and holistic.

The majority of quantitative analysis was for the survey's Likert-scale items that targeted teachers' orientations to teaching and learning, their attitude toward mandates, and their sense of agency. Analyzing this information quantitatively allowed me to discover patterns and possible relationships that I could explore further with qualitative analysis.

*Orientation to teaching and learning.* To analyze the participants' responses, I first separated the survey items into two sections: teacher-centered and student-centered orientations to teaching and learning (see Table 3). Then, using a two-point scale, I converted the participants' responses to each statement into a numerical value. I assigned a value of one if a participant responded that they often or sometimes implemented a student-centered practice or if they rarely or never implemented a teacher-centered practice. Conversely, I assigned a value of zero if a participant responded that they often or sometimes implemented a teacher-centered practice or if

they rarely or never implemented a student-centered practice. Thus, a value of zero represented a teacher-centered orientation, and a score of one indicated a student-centered orientation.

*Table 3. Survey Items Targeting Participants' Orientation to Teaching and Learning*

Teacher-Centered	Student-Centered
Students working independently	Desk or tables arranged in groups
The teacher presenting information to the whole class	Students working collaboratively
Desks or tables arranged in rows	Students presenting information to their classmates
The teacher explaining concepts to students	Students working with manipulatives or doing hands-on activities
The teacher sharing knowledge with students	Students explaining concepts to each other
Students working from textbooks	

*Attitude toward mandates.* To analyze the participants' responses, I first separated the survey statements into two sections: statements that indicated a positive attitude, and statements that indicated a negative one (see Table 4). Then, using a two-point scale, I converted the participants' responses to each statement into a numerical value. I assigned a value of one if a participant strongly agreed or agreed with a positive attitude statement or if they strongly disagreed or disagreed with a negative attitude statement. Conversely, I assigned a value of zero if a participant strongly agreed or agreed with a negative attitude statement or if they strongly

disagreed or disagreed with a positive attitude statement. Thus, a value of zero represented a negative attitude, and a score of one indicated a positive attitude.

*Table 4. Survey Items Categorized By Attitude Toward Mandates*

Negative Attitude	Positive Attitude
Implementing mandates interferes with my practice	I like to implement mandates
There are too many mandates	Mandates meet my students' needs
Implementing mandates makes me feel overwhelmed	Mandates align with my beliefs about teaching and learning
Mandates don't meet the needs of my students	It is easy to integrate mandates into my practice
It is challenging to implement mandates.	Implementing mandates improves my practice

*Sense of agency.* To analyze the participants' responses, I first separated the survey items into two sections: lack of agency and strong sense of agency (see Table 5). Then, using a two-point scale, I converted participants' responses to each statement into a numerical value. I assigned a value of one if a participant strongly agreed or agreed with a strong sense of agency statement or if they strongly disagreed or disagreed with a weak sense of agency statement. Conversely, I assigned a value of zero if a participant strongly agreed or agreed with a weak sense of agency statement or if they strongly disagreed or disagreed with a strong sense of agency statement. Thus, a value of zero indicated that teachers had a weak sense of agency, and a one indicated that teachers had a strong sense of agency.

*Table 5. Survey Items Categorized By Sense of Agency*

Weak Sense of Agency	Strong Sense of Agency
I implement mandates with fidelity	I adjust mandates to fit my beliefs about teaching and learning
I implement mandates in the way I am told to do	I adjust mandates to meet the needs of my students
I implement mandates as they were intended to be implemented	I make adjustments to mandates
I do not make changes to mandates	I select which mandates to implement
I follow the manual/guide when implementing mandates	I decide how to implement mandates in my classroom

*Qualitative.* I analyzed the majority of the data qualitatively, including data from the open response items on the survey, from the artifact-elicited interviews, and from the follow-up questionnaires.

*Survey.* I analyzed the two open-ended questions that asked teachers about how they felt about making changes to their practice, both general and those that were mandated, qualitatively. I determined whether participants' responses about making general and mandated changes indicated positive, neutral/mixed, or negative attitudes.

*Interviews.* I transcribed four of the interviews, and due to time constraints, had the remaining five transcribed by an outside source. I used InqScribe (2010), software that allows the user to play audio and type in the same window at the same time, to transcribe and to check and modify the transcripts I had received the outside transcription service. My own transcription, as well as modifying the transcripts that were done by an outside source, served as the first step in the data reduction and

analysis process, as transcription is an interpretive process in which the transcriber must make a number of decisions about what to include, what to exclude, and how to represent the interaction between the participants (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1998; Tilley, 2003a; Tilley, 2003b). Although there is often an assumption of transparency in the transcription process, transcripts represent the transcriber's meaning of a conversation rather than the conversation itself (Lapadat & Lindsey, 1998). I opted to eliminate speech disfluencies and hesitations, such as *um*, *uh*, *like*, in order to preserve the meaning and intent of participants' responses. In addition, although I included the vast majority of interactions between participants and myself, I did not include non-evaluative responses that were used solely to keep the participants' responses going, such as *uh huh*, *yeah*, and so on.

After transcribing the interviews, I continued the process of preliminary data reduction. First, I annotated each transcript with my thoughts, questions, interpretations, and hypotheses. I also noted presence of some a priori codes, which I had compiled from the review of the literature and from pilot-testing the survey and the artifact-elicited interview. The a priori codes related to participants' orientation toward teaching and learning (student- or teacher-centered), attitude toward mandates and change, sense of agency, factors that supported and constrained implementing mandates, and factors that affected participants' decisions about implementing mandated activities. As I read and annotated the interview transcripts, I started to notice patterns, some of which related to the a priori codes, and some of which had emerged from the data. As such, I assembled a list of patterns. After this initial data

reduction, I reread all of the participants' transcripts, looking for evidence of patterns present or absent. Once I reread all of the transcripts and had applied the patterns, I engaged in deeper data analysis by further examining patterns that emerged across participants and by looking more into individual participants. In this process, I applied Wolcott's (1994) three-stage approach: description, analysis, and interpretation.

In order to ensure that the coding methods were reliable, I retested the codes over time. After some time had lapsed, I revisited previously coded and annotated interview transcripts and coded clean copies of them. I compared my initial codes with the subsequent ones, and each time my codes were the same. Thus, I tried to ensure that my coding methods were reliable.

### **Summary**

This study was designed to gain more insight into elementary teachers' understanding of, attitudes toward, and experiences with mandates associated with small- and large-scale reform efforts. In order to address the research questions, I collected and analyzed three sources of data: participant survey, artifact-elicited interview, and mandate questionnaire. The survey was used to identify participants, to learn about mandates that participants had experienced, as well as to gain insight into their orientation toward teaching and learning, their attitudes toward mandates, and their sense of agency when enacting mandates. Participants then engaged in an artifact-elicited interview that provided rich data about teachers' practice, beliefs about teaching and learning, attitude toward mandates, and sense of agency. Finally, the questionnaire was used to examine mandates as activity systems, in order to determine

profiles of mandates that teachers believe impact their practice in positive and negative ways.

The next four chapters present the analysis and interpretation of the data, organized around four major findings about teachers' experiences with and perceptions of mandates.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Definitions, Features, Contexts:**

#### **How Teachers Conceptualize Reform Activities**

Teachers implement a variety of curriculum, programs, policies, and other activities related to educational reform. Although researchers have noted that enacting multiple reforms has become part of teachers' routine practice, not much is known about how teachers experience them. As such, this study addressed the question, "How do teachers think about mandates?" Data, which was collected during an artifact-elicited interview, included participants' definitions of a "mandate" and an activity in which participants identified a variety of activities as mandated or not mandated.

This chapter discusses the study's first finding through the lens of Sensemaking Theory. Teachers had contrasting notions of what it means for an activity to be mandated. Because they possessed different definitions of "mandate," teachers also had different perspectives about whether activities at their site were mandated or were not. Although there was strong agreement among the participants about slightly over half of the activities, there was limited agreement about the other activities. Further, participants engaged in a great deal of thought and internal negotiation when determining whether or not activities were mandated. Clearly, how teachers think about mandates is influenced by a variety of factors.

This chapter begins with participants' definitions of "mandate." Next, I present the activities that were included in each participant's "activity sort." The



results of the activity sort, including the level of agreement among participants, are then discussed. Because participants engaged in a great deal of thinking and reflection as they sorted the activities, I also describe participants' approaches to the activity sort. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the results, as well as implications for practice.

### **Participants' Definitions of "Mandate"**

Participants had different ideas about what being a "mandate" entailed. Before I engaged participants in the sorting activity part of the interview, I asked them to provide me with their definition of the word "mandate." I wanted to ascertain participants' working definitions of a mandate in order to determine whether there was a general consensus, or whether participants held differing views. I also wanted to understand the definition of "mandate" from which participants drew when determining if activities were mandated.

Participants generally thought about mandates in two ways: by considering the source of the mandate, or by considering the level of expectation that was associated with enacting the mandate. Three of the nine participants provided definitions that related to the source of an activity: activities were mandates because they came from a source higher than the school or site administrator. In contrast, five participants provided definitions that related to the level of expectation of a mandate: activities were mandates because they were required to implement them. One participant provided a definition that included both the source and level of expectation associated with the activity, expressing that a mandate was an activity that was required and came

from the government rather than the principal. Table 6 displays participants' definitions of "mandate," as they related to an activity's source and level of expectation, and the last definitions in each category came from the participant whose definition included both the source and level of expectation.

*Table 6. Participants' Definitions of "Mandate" by Category*

Definitions that referred to the <b>source</b> of an activity	Definitions that related to the level of <b>expectation</b> associated with an activity
A federal thing, a state mandate, or a district mandate - not from the principal	When a person or group of people are required and may be enforced to do a directive or task
Something that typically comes from a higher source other than just our immediate site	Something that I'm told to do... that I have to do
Government required, legal	"Mandate" is I don't have a decision
A governmental mandate rather than my principal requiring something	Mandated to me would mean you have to do it this way
	Something that you're told to do and you better do it or else. Maybe it's district level. Maybe it's site level. Not a mandate, you can choose to do it or not to do it.
	I'm required to do

Sensemaking Theory provides insight into participants' contrasting definitions of "mandate." People's identities – how they perceive themselves in their context – influence how they interpret ideas and events (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Study participants possessed identities related to compliance, such as Katie who referred to herself as a "rule follower" and Annette who used the term "good girl" to

describe how she perceived herself. Participants' identities result from a variety of other factors, as well, including the grade level they teach, their levels of experience, their interaction with colleagues and administrators. Therefore, participants' identities shaped how they interpreted "mandate," thus resulting in contrasting definitions. Further, because sensemaking is a social activity, people make meaning through interacting and communicating with others (Currie & Brown, 2003). Therefore, the participants also likely constructed their definitions of "mandate" as a result of their conversations with colleagues. Because nearly all of the participants had taught at different school sites and/or had worked in a variety of roles, they interacted with different colleagues in different contexts, thus constructing different notions of what it meant for an activity to be mandated. Clearly, sensemaking influenced participants' definitions of "mandate" and it helps to explain why teachers had contrasting interpretations.

### **Activities Identified as Mandates on the Survey**

On the survey, participants identified a variety of mandates they had been required to implement. An open-ended question prompted participants to consider all of the curriculum, programs, methods of teaching, systems for managing students, and other activities they had been required to implement over the past few years. Collectively, the participants listed over 30 mandates that targeted intervention, assessment, pedagogy, and content.

I planned to use the list of mandates during my interview in order to learn more about participants' sensemaking of mandates. Because I wanted the participants to be

generally familiar with the mandates that they sorted, I looked for ones that appeared on multiple participants' lists. However, I also wanted participants to be comfortable identifying an activity as not mandated, so I included one activity that had only been identified by a single participant. Table 7 displays the 31 activities that I included in the activity sorting portion of the interview.

### **Activity Sort Results: Mandated and Non-Mandated Activities and the Level of Agreement Among Participants**

During the interview, I asked participants to sort the 31 activities from Table 7 into two categories, identifying them as either "mandates" or "not mandates." In the results, I only included 30 of the activities; as mentioned in the previous section, one of the activities was purposefully included as an activity that only one participant was familiar with. Overall, participants collectively categorized eleven of the 30 activities (37%) as mandated and 19 (63%) of them as not mandated.

I analyzed participants' activity sorts in order to determine which activities they considered to be mandated or not mandated. I used photographs of participants' activity sorts, coupled with their interview responses, if needed. Although there were varying levels of agreement among participants regarding which activities were mandated or not, which is discussed in the next section, I wanted to determine which activities participants generally considered to be mandated. Therefore, if five or more of the nine participants categorized an activity as mandated, I considered it to be mandated; conversely, if five or more of the nine participants considered an activity as not mandated, I categorized it as such.

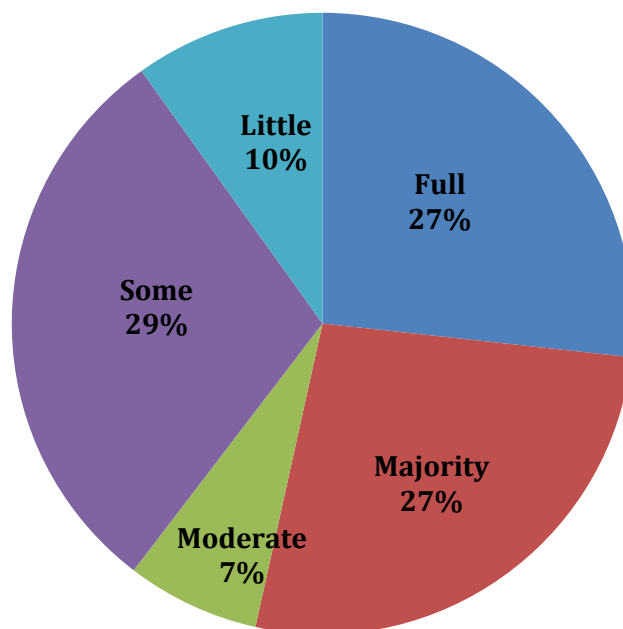
*Table 7. Description of Participant-Identified Mandates*

Mandate	Description
Accelerated Reader	Computerized reading accountability program
Avenues	Language textbook for English Learners
Classroom seating arrangements in groups of 4	Pairings include a high student, medium-high student, medium-low student, and a low-student
Common Core Math	Standards and pedagogical approaches for math
Common Core Reading	Standards and pedagogical approaches for reading
Common Core Writing	Standards and pedagogical approaches for writing
Daily 5	Language arts program with five centers/tasks
Daily Schedule	Teachers provide principal with their regular schedule
Grade Level Intervention Teams (GLIT) during recess	Same as above, but teachers meet at recess
High Point	Intervention program for English Learners
Houghton Mifflin	Language arts textbook
Inclusion/Mainstreaming	Including children with disabilities in general education classrooms
Kagan Structures	Instructional strategies that support student communication
Manipulatives	Tools to develop conceptual understanding of math concepts
Math Talks	Student discourse about mathematical concepts
Objectives Posted	Teachers post learning goals/objectives for each subject
Side by Side	Teaching ELD standards and writing standards together
Teach Like a Champion	Book/program with instructional techniques
Technology	Classroom technology: document cameras, computers, iPods, iPod Touches, and iPads technology varies by teacher
Thinking Maps	Visual patterns to organize thinking
Use of Technology	Student and teacher use of technology

On the survey, multiple participants had identified the 30 activities as being activities they were required to implement. As such, it was surprising that collectively, participants only considered one-third of the activities as mandated. This discrepancy, however, may result from participants' contrasting definitions of mandate. Because participants had different notions of what constituted a mandate, they drew from their definitions, thus resulting in contrasting decisions about whether or not activities were mandated. Another explanation for the discrepancy is that some of the activities were former mandates. However, as will be discussed further, there was not full agreement among the participants about whether or not some activities were no longer mandated.

Although I wanted to understand whether or not participants generally considered activities as mandated or not mandated, the previous results are oversimplified. As depicted in Figure 7, there were varying levels of agreement among participants about whether or not activities were mandated. As such, I calculated the percentage of agreement between participants for each of the activities based on the following categories: full agreement (9/9), majority agreement (8/9), moderate agreement (7/9), partial agreement (6/9), and little agreement (5/9).

Participants had high or fairly high levels of agreement about 18 activities (60%). All nine participants agreed about whether eight activities (27%) were mandated or not, eight participants agreed about whether or not another eight activities (27%) were mandated, and seven participants agreed about whether two activities (7%) were mandated. Of these 18 activities, participants generally agreed that eight of



*Figure 7. Level of agreement between participants about whether activities were or were not mandated.*

them were mandated and ten were not.

In contrast, participants had partial or little agreement about whether or not the remaining 12 activities (40%) were mandated. Six of the nine teachers, or two-thirds, agreed about whether or not nine of the 30 activities (30%) were mandated. Only five of the nine teachers agreed about whether or not the remaining three activities (10%) were mandated. Of these 12 activities, three were considered to be mandated, and nine were not. Table 8 displays the level of agreement for activities that participants generally agreed to be mandated and not mandated.

Because all of the participants taught at the same school site with the same administrator, it is surprising that there were such low levels of agreement for nearly half of the activities. Although partial agreement between two-thirds of the

*Table 8. Level of Agreement Among Participants for Each Mandated and Non-Mandated Activity*

	Full Agreement	Majority Agreement	Moderate Agreement	Partial Agreement	Little Agreement
<u>Mandated</u>	Data Study Teams	Grade Level Intervention Teams	Computerized Testing/Maps	English Language Development	
	Inclusion/Mainstreaming	Common Core Writing		Objectives Posted	
	PBIS	Common Core Math		Side by Side	
	Writing Assessments				
<u>Not Mandated</u>	Classroom Seating Arrangements	Accelerated Reader Avenues	No Excuses University	Common Core Reading	Daily Schedule
	Daily 5	Grade Level Intervention Teams during recess		Goal Setting Manipulatives	Houghton Mifflin
	Teach Like a Champion			Math Talks	Universal Access
	High Point	Kagan Structures		Thinking Maps	
		Technology		Use of Technology	

participants might not seem low, when thinking about the implications at a school site, it could be problematic. At a school site with 30 teachers, two-thirds agreement would mean that 20 teachers believe they must implement an activity, while 10 believe it is optional. Conversely, it could also mean that 20 teachers believe an activity is optional, while 10 teachers believe they must implement it. As such, several teachers could be spending a great deal of time and effort on activities that were not mandated, or they could be spending no time or energy on activities that were mandated.



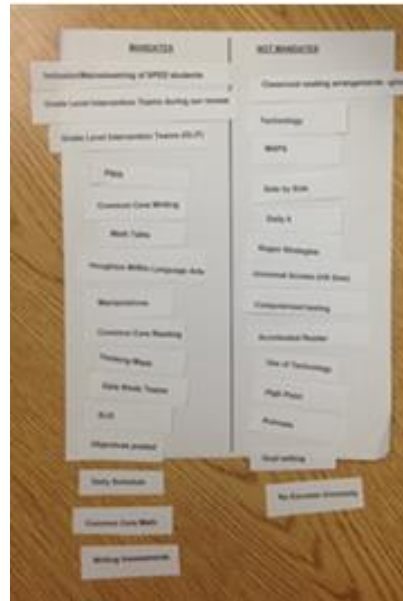
The varying levels of agreement among participants indicate that teachers are not certain about whether they are required to implement many activities. This uncertainty may result from a lack of clear expectations put forth by the administrator. When teachers are not provided with clear expectations, they may draw from their previous experiences, their attitudes toward mandates, and their beliefs about teaching and learning when deciding whether or not to implement activities.

### **Participants' Approaches to the Activity Sort**

The description of whether participants identified activities as mandated or not mandated, as well as the level of agreement among them, tells only a small part of the story of teachers' conceptualization of mandates. The information presented thus far does not take into account the process in which participants engaged as they determined whether activities were mandated or not mandated. Although it seems that it would be a simple and straightforward process to determine whether an activity was mandated or not, many participants experienced difficulty. Throughout the sorting activity, most of the participants engaged in a great deal of reflection and internal conflict and negotiation as they decided whether specific activities were, indeed, mandated.

*Sorts with two categories.* Only one participant quickly and fairly easily sorted the activities into two separate categories: *mandates* and *not mandates* (see Figure 8). Matt drew from his definition of a mandate being something he was required or expected to do, and he conducted the sort using that definition as his frame of reference. Referring to his principal, Matt said, "I figure if she spends the time talking

about and training us about something, it's something that I would expect myself that I need to do or use. So, yeah, I would consider it mandated.”



*Figure 8. Matt's activity sort.*

Although Lisa was also able to sort the activities into the two categories, it was more of a negotiation for her than it was for Matt. When determining whether Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) was mandated, for example, she said, “PBIS. Oh, dang! What's with that? PBIS. It's not a mandate. It's sort of ... It depends on who you ask. If somebody walked in I'd be like, ‘Oh, I better put it over here,’ but it's not a mandate.” Although Lisa did not initially consider PBIS to be mandated, she drew from her definition of a mandate being “something that you're told to do and you better do it or else,” and ultimately decided to categorize it as a mandate. Even though Lisa did not necessarily believe PBIS was a mandate, she realized that it was something she was expected to do, and thus categorized it as a mandate.

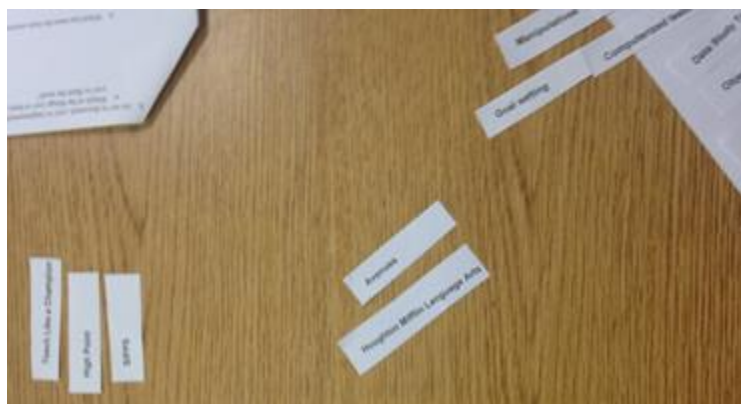
*Sorts with multiple categories.* Because the remaining seven participants were unable to easily classify one or more activities as mandated or not, participants created additional categories.

*Old mandates.* As part of their sorting processes, many participants created categories in addition to the ones that I provided. One additional category was for “old” mandates - activities that had been previously mandated but were no longer expected. Not only did Jessica create a category for former mandates, but she further separated it into two groups:: one for activities that had been mandated at a previous site, and the other for mandates that were no longer expected district-wide (see Figure 9).



*Figure 9. Jessica’s activity sort, with “old” mandates from her previous site at the top and from the district at the bottom.*

Heather also created an additional category for formerly mandated activities. Initially, Heather only used the two categories that I had provided; however, when I prompted her to discuss how she had sorted the activities, she indicated that some of the activities were old mandates. Heather ended up moving these former mandates from the “not mandates” category to the left of the mandates. Her category of old mandates is displayed in Figure 10.



*Figure 10. Heather's activity sort, with “old mandates” off to the left of the mandates.*

Similarly, May created a category for activities that she had previously been mandated to implement. Although she put them to the right of the sorting paper, indicating they were not mandates, she separated them from activities that were truly not mandated (see Figure 11). May conceptualized activities as former mandates when they were no longer discussed or talked about and when there was no longer a level of expectation associated with implementing them:

These are things we've done in the past. The previous principal was very much for this No Excuses University and we started with him. Many of us have continued. We talk about college, and we have our college walls, but it hasn't progressed in any way since. Nobody really talks about it, so if a teacher does it ... Thinking Maps. We had

training for Thinking Maps. Like I said, that was one of those things I posted all up on that wall. I took them down a year or two ago. I will still use Thinking Maps, but because there's no continuity ... If you start them in kindergarten, by the time they get to fourth grade there'd be continuity, but there isn't. There used to be a huge focus on [ELD, Avenues, and High Point]. Nobody talks about them at this site anymore.



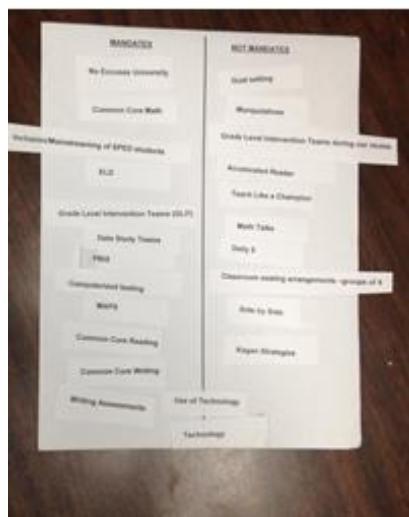
*Figure 11. May's activity sort, with "old mandates" at the top.*

*Almost mandates.* Another strategy that participants employed to facilitate their sorting process was creating a middle category. The middle category provided participants with a place to put activities that were expected but not fully mandated, as well as for activities that were becoming mandates. Although Jessica sorted most of the activities into the two categories, she placed two of them in the middle (see Figure 12). Throughout the sort, Jessica engaged in a great deal of negotiation, but she did not feel the need to create a middle category until the end of the sort. When trying to determine whether “use of technology” and “technology” were mandated, she said, “I’m not comfortable, really, putting it over here. It’s kind of in the middle.” Her decision to create a middle category came after quite a bit of reflection: “I’m going to

say ... Oh gosh, because there's technology and use of technology. It is an expectation. I can't say that anybody would be really called on the carpet if they didn't have, or weren't really comfortable with, technology and weren't really using that much of it. But I would say that, I'm going to just put it over here at our school, because we do a lot of talking about technology." Jessica was about to categorize them as mandated. However, drawing from her definition of a mandate as something about which "I don't have a decision," she could not categorize them as mandates. Because there was not a level of accountability associated with implementing and using technology, and conversely there was room for flexibility in whether and how teachers implemented and used technology, Jessica could not ultimately call them "mandates." Because they were both expected and talked about, however, she also was not comfortable categorizing them as not mandated. Jessica continued to try to determine where to place the two activities:

I would say, with both of these then that it's ... If you don't do it, it's like why not? ... How I picture it, and maybe because of my coaching, is that the principal or the vice principal or the leadership team will come in from time to time and check up on what's going. If all the computers are off and we have no iPads playing, nothing, then there might be something said. There's evidence in first grade of access to technology for those students, and is that fair and equitable? I think there would be conversations, so I'm going to say here.

In the end, Jessica created a middle category. She did so because the two activities did not align with her definition of "mandate," nor did she believe teachers could opt out of implementing them. Clearly, Jessica engaged in a great deal of reflection and negotiation as she decided how to categorize technology and use of technology.

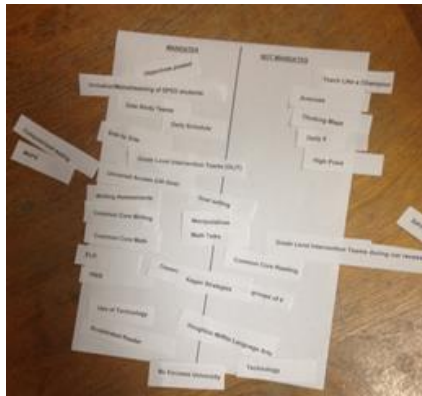


*Figure 12. Jessica's activity sort, with two activities in her middle category.*

Annette also created a middle category. However, unlike Jessica, Annette expressed the need for a middle category at the start of the sorting activity: “You’re not going to like me, because I want a middle category.” One reason she needed the category was to place activities that she believed were on the path to becoming mandated. As she placed activities in her middle category, she expressed, “That’s where we’re going,” or “That’s something that we’re starting.” Annette also created the middle category as a place to put activities that she considered to be expectations that had not yet been fully mandated. When referring to such activities, she made statements such as, “It’s not that the mandate police were going to come around, but the principal wanted to see you using that,” and “I wouldn’t necessarily say that it’s a mandate, as much as an expectation.”

While sorting the activities, Annette drew from her definition of mandate as “something that typically comes from a higher source other than just our immediate site.” Therefore, she nearly always considered activities that were required at the

district level as mandates, while ones that her principal expected were generally in the middle category. However, there was one exception with Common Core Mathematics. Although she knew it was not yet a district-level mandate, she decided to categorize it as mandated, saying, “Yeah, I’m going to say that it is! Even though our district hasn’t said that everybody has to do it, our principal says, ‘Yep, we’re going to take a step ahead.’” Common Core Mathematics was the only activity that Annette categorized in a manner that did not align with her definition of “mandate.” She may have included it with the mandates, because she supported it: “I’m having fun with it, and mainly because I’m not a math person. It really makes sense to me now. And it’s like I want the kids to do it.” Annette’s activity sort is displayed in Figure 13.



*Figure 13. Annette's activity sort, with several activities in her middle category.*

May also engaged in a great deal of reflection and negotiation as she sorted the activities. Just as soon as she started to sort the activities, May experienced difficulty placing them into the two categories. In fact, after sorting the first activity, she stopped to ask for additional parameters and to contemplate her approach:

May: By you, a mandate is from the state, or from locally?

Me: Everyone defines it differently, so however you define mandate.



May: OK, because to me a mandate is more coming, it's a governmental mandate, rather than my principal requiring something. So it's up to me how I group them?

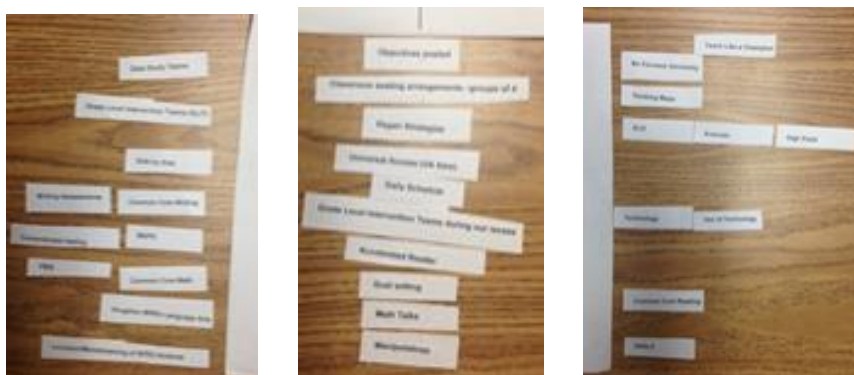
Me: Yes. Up to you.

May: See, this is what I mean. This used to be a mandate... If I do this at the local level ...

May was the only participant who defined a mandate by considering the source (“a governmental mandate rather than my principal requiring something”) and the level of expectation associated with implementing it (“I’m required to do”). Because of her more complex definition of a mandate, May might have experienced greater difficulty than the other participants. When sorting the activities, May not only considered whether the activity came from a governmental policy, but she also had to reflect upon whether it was something she was required to do. May’s dual definition of a mandated made her sorting process more challenging, because the two definitions were not mutually exclusive. Activities that her principal and district required were not generally government mandates. Similarly, not all government mandates were required at her site.

Throughout her activity sort, May often talked herself into and out of placing activities in particular categories. As can be seen in Figure 14, May did not even use the paper I provided to sort the activities. Instead, she placed the activities to the left of the paper to indicate they were mandated, below the paper to indicate they were expected or becoming mandated, and to the right of the paper to indicate that they were not mandated. Interestingly, many of the activities that she placed in the mandated category were not governmental mandates, but were activities that her

principal expected. For example, May put Common Core Math, which resulted from state policy and was highly expected, in the middle category, rather than identifying it as a mandate: “We’re doing Common Core Math, but is it...? Well, we do it, but is it a mandate? They would like us to... See, I have a lot that to me are in the middle. Is that ok?” May’s experience with the sorting activity clearly demonstrates the great deal of negotiation in which participants engaged when they tried to determine whether activities were mandated.



*Figure 14. May’s activity sort, with many activities in her middle category.*

### **Summary and Discussion**

On the survey, multiple participants identified 30 activities as mandates. However, when participants later engaged in an “activity sort,” in which they categorized the activities as “mandates” and “not mandates,” they identified only about one-third of them as mandates. Participants had full, majority, or a moderate level of agreement about whether eighteen of the 30 activities (60%) were mandated. They had lower levels of agreement about the remaining 12 activities (40%).

Interestingly, nearly all of the participants engaged in a great deal of reflection, self-conflict, and internal negotiation as they participated in the activity sort.

Throughout the process, they talked to and questioned themselves, hesitated to place activities, and spoke with me. Deciding whether specific activities were, indeed, mandated was not a simple task for participants. As a strategy to facilitate their sorting processes, participants came up with additional categories. Some created a category for activities that had formerly been mandated, and several created a middle category to place activities that were becoming mandates or were activities that participants felt they were expected to implement.

Relying upon their definitions of “mandate” to categorize the activities may have contributed to participants’ difficulties when sorting the activities. For many participants, it seems that their definition of “mandate” represented an abstract, idealized notion of the term. When they were faced with actual activities, however, participants were prompted to consider how they actually interacted with and thought about the activities in their everyday practice. Participants’ experiences with the “activity sort” can be understood through the lens of Sensemaking Theory. According to Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005), “to make sense is to connect the abstract with the concrete” (p. 412), which is exactly what participants did as they engaged in the sorting activity. The discrepancy may also be explained through Argyris and Schon’s (1978) notion of Theory of Action. People possess *espoused theories*, which include the beliefs, values, and ideas that they articulate to others. In contrast, peoples’ enacted beliefs, values, and ideas are referred to as *theories-in-use*. Peoples’

espoused theories are not always in line with their actions. When considering this study, teachers' idealized definitions of mandates may have reflected their espoused beliefs, whereas the activity sort prompted them to consider their enacted beliefs.

The activity sort challenged some of the participants' definitions of mandate, as several of them seemed to modify their definition as they engaged in the process of sorting activities. For example, although Annette originally defined a mandate as something that came from a source higher than her principal, she decided to categorize Common Core Math as a mandate, even though she acknowledged that it was not yet a district-wide expectation. Similarly, Jill conceptualized mandates as a legal requirement that came from the government, but as she considered activities in her practice, she decided that mandates were things that she was "required to do."

As viewed through the lens of Sensemaking Theory, it is not surprising that some participants altered their definitions of a mandate as they engaged in the sorting process. Sensemaking involves retrospection, as people make sense of new experiences by reflecting on previous ones (Weick, 1995). Participants provided an initial definition of "mandate," but several modified their definitions as they engaged in retrospection by reflecting on their experiences with specific activities. According to Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005), retrospection can be thought of in terms of the following question: "How can I know what I'm seeing until I see what it was?" (2005, p. 412). When relating that question to participants' experiences in the study, it could be articulated as, "How can I categorize an activity as a mandate until I have experienced it as a mandate? Perhaps a reform activity cannot be labeled as a

“mandate” until it had been experienced as one, regardless of the source of the activity or expectations associated with it. Thus, participants engaged in retrospection when contemplating whether activities were mandated, and several altered their definitions of “mandate,” rather than relying on their initial notion of the concept.

Clearly, teachers’ thinking about mandates is influenced by a variety of factors. Argyris and Schon’s (1978) concept of espoused and enacted beliefs can be applied in order to understand teachers’ conceptualization of mandates. In the study, participants approached the sorting process by considering their espoused beliefs about mandates. While some participants considered the source of an activity, others thought about the level of expectation associated with an activity. As participants engaged in the activity sort, they had to think about how they actually engaged with the activities. In doing so, participants seemed to prompt themselves to consider how they implemented activities and what would happen if their principal did not see them incorporating activities into their practice. Thus, participants’ actual experiences with activities elicited different ideas about what a mandate was. The misalignment of participants’ beliefs about and their recollections of their enactments confused and frustrated some of the participants.

In addition, time seems to factor into teachers’ perceptions of whether an activity is mandated. Participants seemed to think about activities in three ways that related to time. First, participants thought about whether they were currently expected to implement activities. If they were, many participants considered them to be mandated. Conversely, many of the activities that teachers did not consider to be

mandated were actually formerly mandated. Many teachers placed activities that they were no longer required to implement in the “not mandates” category. Finally, there were also many activities that teachers believed were becoming mandates. Several teachers created middle categories for these activities, because they were not “mandates,” but participants were not comfortable categorizing them as “not mandates.”

Finally, Sensemaking Theory also helps clarify teachers think about mandates. According to Weick (1995), people make sense of their world in a way that aligns with their identity, by engaging in retrospection to reflect on their past experiences, by interacting with others, and by extracting cues from their environment.

Because so many factors impact how teachers think about mandates, it seems that it would be important for administrators to be clear about their expectations. If principals fail to articulate their expectations, teachers will likely rely on their own sensemaking and preferences to determine whether or not they will implement activities.

Just as a variety of factors influence teachers’ sensemaking of mandates, there are also variations in how teachers think about incorporating them into their practice. Although teachers enact mandates differently, there were some commonalities in their enactments. The next chapter presents the ways in which teachers describe incorporating mandates into their practice, and the role that agency and autonomy play in the adaptations that teachers make in their enactments of mandates.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Agency, Adaptation, and Autonomy:**

#### **How Teachers Describe Their Enactment of Multiple Mandates**

Teachers are routinely charged with implementing a variety of activities associated with educational reform. Although research literature describes various ways that teachers respond to reform (e.g., adopting, adapting, and resisting), there is little discussion about how teachers enact multiple mandates. Therefore, this study explored the question, “How do teachers describe their enactment of multiple mandates?”

This chapter discusses the study’s second finding. The results indicate that teachers approach their practice with a sense of agency to adapt mandates. By drawing from their prior experiences and reflecting upon their beliefs about teaching and learning, teachers routinely make changes. Their agency to adapt mandates suggests that teachers need opportunities to express autonomy in their practice.

In this chapter, the survey data related to teachers’ orientations to teaching and learning and agency are presented in order to gain a broad sense of how teachers approach their practice. Then, drawing from interview data, each participant’s sense of agency, how they implemented mandates, and their need for autonomy are discussed. Because there were some inconsistencies between the data sources, I then discuss survey and interview data together. Finally, the chapter concludes with an examination of the role of identity in teachers’ practice and by considering some implications for practice.

## **Survey Results Related to Teachers' Orientations to Teaching and Learning and Their Sense of Agency**

*Orientation to teaching and learning.* In order to understand how participants approached their practice, I asked them several Likert-scale questions that were designed to gauge whether teachers tended to be more “teacher-centered” or “student-centered” – terms derived from the work of Van Veen et al. (2001). Overall, the participants’ responses indicated that they had fairly balanced approaches to teaching and learning, as their collective mean score was a 0.5 on a scale from zero to one.

Figure 15 presents participants’ mean scores along a continuum from teacher-centered (a value of 0) to student-centered (a value of one). All but one of the participants’ responses to the survey items indicated a balanced orientation to teaching and learning. Five participants’ mean scores were 0.5, and three were 0.6, indicating a slightly more student-centered approach. Jill was the only participant whose responses indicated a more teacher-oriented approach to teaching and learning.

The lack of variation in participants’ orientations to teaching and learning suggests similarity in their attitudes toward and use of teaching methods and pedagogies. Since I conducted the study at a single school site and all of the participants taught at the same site, the similarity might relate to the common mandates teachers are expected to implement. Indeed, many of the teacher-identified mandates in Table 5 relate to pedagogy. Because teachers may have implemented similar approaches to teaching and learning, they may have actually adopted similar orientations to teaching and learning.



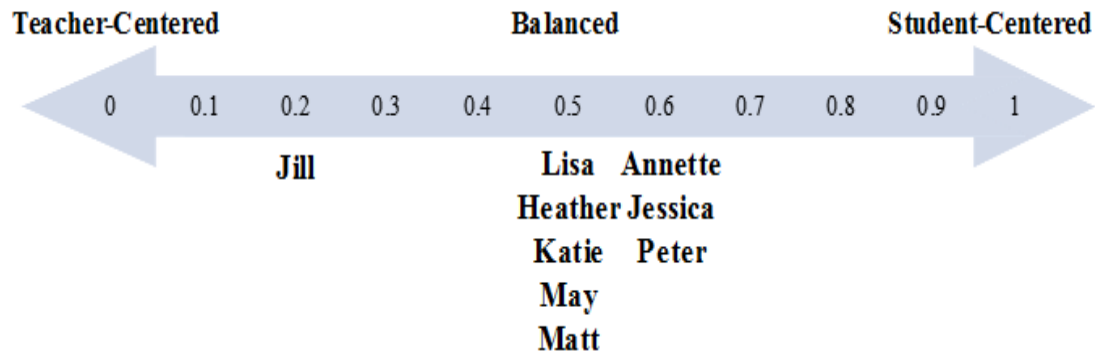


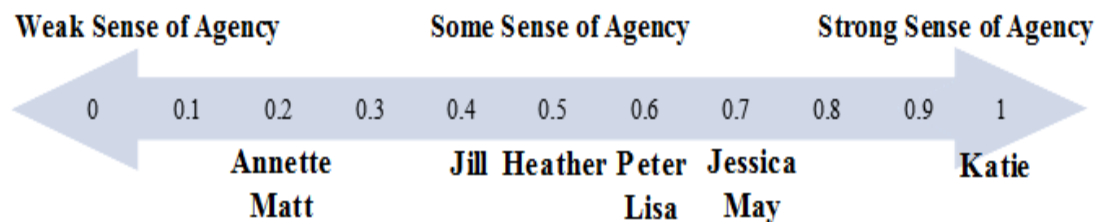
Figure 15. Continuum of participants' mean scores for orientation to teaching and learning.

Clearly, Jill's more teacher-centered orientation to teaching and learning identified her as somewhat of an outlier. Neither Jill's career stage nor the grade level she taught could explain the difference between her and her colleagues. Although Jill's career stage was in the 21-30 year range, so were Jessica and Annette, whose survey results suggested orientations to teaching and learning that were more balanced. In addition, Jill's upper grade colleagues all had balanced approaches to teaching and learning. Therefore, factors such as career stage and grade level were unlikely to account for Jill's much more teacher-oriented approach to teaching and learning.

*Sense of agency.* In order to gain insight into participants' sense of agency, which I used to refer to the extent to which teachers felt that they could make changes to the mandates they implemented, I asked them several Likert-scale questions. I sought to determine whether participants had a weaker sense of agency and were more passive in how they took on mandates, or whether they had a stronger sense of agency

and actively adapted and modified mandates to align with their practice. Using a scale from zero (weak agency) to one (strong agency), collectively the participants' mean score was a 0.5, indicating some sense of agency to adapt mandates among the participants.

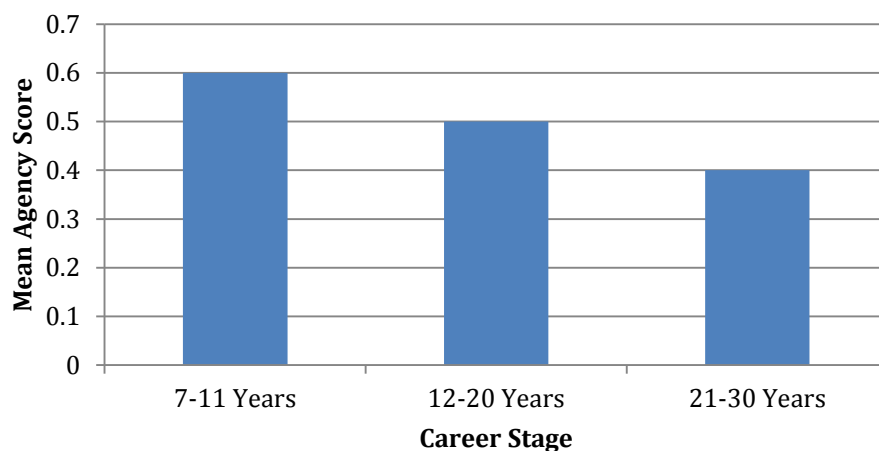
Figure 16 presents participants' mean agency scores along a continuum. Although the mean fell directly in the middle, there was quite a bit of variation in the participants' senses of agency. Katie's mean score was a one, which indicated that she had a strong sense of agency when implementing mandates. Jessica and May both had a mean score of 0.7, indicating that they possessed fairly strong senses of agency. In contrast, Annette and Mark's responses indicated very little agency, suggesting that they did not believe they could make changes as they enact mandated activities in their classrooms. The mean scores of the remaining four participants tended toward the center, ranging from 0.4 to 0.6, indicating that they felt some agency when enacting mandates.



*Figure 16. Continuum of participants' mean scores for sense of agency.*

There was clearly quite a bit of variation in teachers' senses of agency when enacting mandates in their practice. In order to understand the variation, I further examined participants' responses to determine whether there were patterns. First, I examined participants' sense of agency by career stage. In order to ascertain whether

there was a difference, I averaged participants' responses to the agency questions by their career stages, and I found that there was a difference. The difference, however, was quite small, and all of the means fell within the "some agency" range. The mean for the four teachers in the 7-11 year stage was 0.6, the two teachers in the 12-20 year stage was 0.5, and the three teachers in the 21-30 year stage had a mean of 0.4, which is displayed in Figure 17.



*Figure 17. Participants' mean scores for sense of agency by career stage.*

Although there was only a small difference in participants' mean agency scores, an interesting trend emerged. As illustrated in Figure 18, there appears to be an inverse relationship between teachers' sense of agency and career stage. Teachers' responses indicated that their sense of agency decreased as the number of years they have been teaching increased. More experienced teachers having a better sense of the effectiveness of particular activities might explain this trend. As such, they may not feel as strong a need to make changes to mandated activities. Alternatively, perhaps more experienced teachers naturally approach their practice with agency and are not

aware they are making adaptations as they implement activities. In contrast, less experienced teachers may make more adaptations to activities as they refine their practice and determine how to best teach their students.

Although there are plausible reasons why teachers' sense of agency may decline over time, as is discussed later in the Summary and Discussion section of this chapter, I was unable to substantiate this trend with my qualitative analysis.

*Summary.* Participants' responses to Likert scale survey items indicated that as a group, they had balanced orientations to teaching and learning, as they responded that they implemented a variety of teacher- and student- centered practices. The lack of variability in participants' orientations toward teaching and learning may suggest that common mandates have resulted in similar practices. There was more variability in participants' agency to adapt mandates, and their responses suggest an inverse relationship between agency and career stage.

### **Interview Results Related to Teachers' Agency and Implementation of Mandates**

Overwhelmingly, participants described themselves as agents of change who adapted mandates. Participants spoke about how they had actively made decisions about which mandates to implement in their classrooms and the decisions they made about implementing them. Because participants approached their practice with agency, they spoke of how they tended to adapt mandates to align them with their beliefs about teaching and learning. Participants' sense of agency and tendency to adapt mandates suggested that they had a strong desire to be allowed some autonomy in their practice. Although there were certainly differences among the participants, the

three intertwined constructs of agency, adaptation, and autonomy were common across all of them.

This section begins with a brief description of the interview questions that supplied data to address the research question. In this section, each of the participants is discussed separately. Next to each participant's name, a summary statement is used to capture my interpretation of their perspective. Although the participants were similar in that they approached their practice with agency to adapt mandates, they indicated that they had different levels of agency and expectations for autonomy. Therefore, this section is organized along a continuum of agency to adapt mandates, starting with the participants who indicated less agency and need for autonomy in their interviews, and moving to the participants who's interview responses expressed stronger senses of agency and more need for autonomy. This section concludes with Jessica, not only because she has a strong sense of agency and desires autonomy, but also because of her unique perspective as a former Reading First coach. Because of her role as a coach for a prominent federal mandate, Jessica was also able to offer insight into her perspective about the importance of offering teachers autonomy in their practice.

In order to elicit participants' thoughts about the varied ways that teachers respond to new mandates, as well as to gauge how they respond to new mandates, I introduced the following prompt:

Teachers respond differently when they are told to implement mandates - new curriculum, teaching methods, programs, etc. Some teachers bring it into their classrooms the very next day the way it was supposed to be implemented. Others take a while to implement something.

Some teachers make changes to mandates before implementing them.  
And some teachers choose to close their doors and do what they know  
is best.

I asked participants to discuss their thoughts about teacher's responses, as well as how they viewed themselves in relation to the examples. I also engaged participants in a discussion about how they implemented mandates and other activities in their classrooms, and because we were in their classrooms, they were able to show me related artifacts. Finally, because all of the participants had worked for multiple administrators over the course of their careers, and many had taught at several schools and/or worked in different capacities, I also prompted them to reflect on their previous experiences enacting mandates.

***Matt – Likes direction, but wants time and space to make choices about his practice.*** At the time of the interview, Matt had been teaching at Rolling Hill for three years. He previously taught at several schools, including a Reading First school. When I asked him about his experience with the federal mandate, he indicated that it had been “pretty strict.” He talked about how the principal and coaches came into his classroom in order to “make sure that I was not only saying the right things, but also that I was doing it in the right order.” If he failed to do so, he would get some corrective feedback in the form of reminders, but he “wouldn't get written up for it.” Interestingly, after leaving the Reading First school, Matt moved to a site that he described as “open.” Although they followed the same curriculum as at his previous school, it was more “open-ended with what we could do.” While many of the teachers in this study would have likely preferred an open environment to a restrictive one,

Matt expressed a different perspective: “I felt lost that first year because I was used to following the scripts.”

Although Matt found comfort in the guidance offered by the scripted lessons, he still expressed the tendency to “try to adapt” activities, rather than taking them on right away in their entirety. When asked where he saw himself in relation to the examples I presented of how teachers respond to new mandates, he expressed, “I absorb it while it's being presented and then tuck it away for a little bit. Then I know that I catch myself thinking about how I'm going to integrate it, and then I'll pull it out a little bit later. I'm not really the rush back to the classroom and prep all the materials and do with the next day kind of a guy.” Matt clearly needed time to reflect on how he could integrate new programs into his existing practice. Although he welcomed new ideas, he took his time to determine how to implement them. One example Matt provided was Math Talks. After attending training, Matt felt very positive about the new mandate. Even though he was eager to implement Math Talks, Matt took time to consider how he could alter his existing practice in order to incorporate it into his day. Eventually, he indicated that he “just made it part of my daily routine.” Thus, when Matt had time to engage in reflection, he was able to integrate new mandates into his practice.

***Katie – Wants to be perceived as a “rule follower,” but does approach her practice with some agency.*** Early on in the interview, Katie identified herself as a “rule follower.” She said that she implemented everything as she was supposed to, because that is what she was told to do. When talking about No Excuses University,

Katie explained that although she did not believe it was relevant to her primary-age students, it was present in her classroom because it was an expectation: “We're told we have to put up college prep. That's not a choice of mine, and quite honestly, I don't use it that much... I really feel that's an upper grade thing, but I don't know. That's just my personal opinion. But, it's there!” So, although Katie said that she implemented everything, some of it may just be to provide the appearance of implementation rather than actual implementation.

Regarding where she viewed herself along the continuum of adopting to resisting, she said that she generally implemented programs right away, making adaptations if the need arose. Although Katie identified herself as a rule follower and indicated that she implements everything, she mentioned that she did not use Avenues because she did not believe it was necessary. She rationalized the lack of implementation by citing all of the other resources she had for teaching English Learners. Thus, although Katie wanted others to think of her as someone who followed the rules, she still approached her practice with agency and craved some autonomy.

***Lisa – Wants a voice, and to be trusted to do what she has been trained to do.***

Lisa indicated that she tended to adapt mandates and exercised her own professional judgment when making choices about her practice. When implementing Thinking Maps, for example, instead of taking on all ten of them, she chose the three that made the most sense to her.



Lisa expressed a strong desire to have her voice heard. She indicated that leadership played a major role in supporting or hindering teachers' ability to be autonomous. When speaking about her current administrator, she said that her principal did not listen to her staff or care about teachers' perspectives: "She kind of has her own agenda, and that's kind of what she does. If we like it, oh well. If we don't, oh well. She doesn't really care." When reflecting upon previous site administrators, Lisa reminisced about how she and her colleagues were treated as professionals who were able to make choices about their practice: "We've had other principals that trust you to do what you know is best in the classroom... I can honestly say that the ones I like the best are ones that are more hands off and let you do ... I mean you go to school and you learn things, and a lot of the principals they haven't been in the classroom for a very long time and they think they know, but they really don't." Lisa clearly had a strong desire to exercise autonomy. She wanted to be heard and to be entrusted with making choices about her practice.

*Annette – Wants to be perceived as a good girl, but also has a strong desire to do what is best for her students.* When asked where she fit among the examples of how various teachers responded to new mandates, Annette indicated that she implemented everything and has done what she has been told to do: "I tend to just you know, do my job. I want to be a good girl." Although Annette did not overtly admit that she adapted programs, several of her responses indicated a tendency to do so. She spoke, for example, about a hands-on math program that was lacking substance: "There was no base program to support it, and if you were a veteran teacher of that

particular grade level, you knew how to provide the support materials that were the baseline for it.” Because the program did not meet the needs of her students, she adapted it by supplementing it with additional materials.

In addition to adapting programs to meet her students’ needs, Annette also opted not to implement mandates, even though she said that she had “embraced everything.” For example, when talking about having her objectives posted, she said, “I don't mind it, other than I just don't have room on my board very often to do it.” Annette indicated that she felt fine about posting her objectives, but she rationalized her lack of implementation by citing a lack of space. Annette also rationalized her reason for not implementing High Point, a program for English Learners: “I felt like it was just such a baseline program that kind of taught down to the kids, and I'd rather teach the regular program and differentiate for those kids, versus having a lower level.” Thus, although Annette wanted others to regard her as someone who implemented everything the way she was supposed to, she approached her practice with a sense of agency, making choices about whether and how to implement mandates.

Annette seemed to have difficulty admitting that she did not always take on mandated programs as she was supposed to do, thus possibly indicating a perceived lack of ability to exercise her autonomy. Annette seemed hopeful that she would be given permission to exercise her autonomy with the Common Core Standards, stating that she would have “the freedom to teach differently - not this page on that day.” Thus, although Annette did not openly discuss her desire for autonomy, instead trying

to portray herself as taking on everything and doing what she was supposed to do, she certainly adapted programs to meet her students' needs and to align with her beliefs. Further, her lack of admission that she had adapted mandates and had opted not to implement certain ones might suggest that Annette did not believe that she had been able to exercise her autonomy.

***Heather – Wants to be listened to and trusted to do what I know is right.***

Heather approached her practice with a strong sense of agency. She actively made decisions about which programs to integrate into her practice, as well as how and when to do so. Although she stated that she was expected to implement several Kagan Structures, integrate manipulatives into her math program, and transition to the Common Core Standards, she decided to “just work on one thing at a time” as a way to take control over her practice.

It seems that Heather's sense of agency and desire for autonomy have increased throughout her career. Earlier in her career, Heather said that she implemented programs “how I was supposed to.” Now that she was more experienced, she adopted a more critical perspective when taking on new programs. Although Heather expressed an openness to change, she seemed to approach mandates with a sense of skepticism, seeking proof that something was going to make a positive impact on her practice before abandoning what she was already doing: “Fifteen years of teaching [this] grade. I know what works, and I know what doesn't. I'm open to taking risks and doing it, but I don't think that things that are just shoved down your throat blindly without any backup.. I'm just going to say no to that. I'm not going to

stand for it.” Unlike her grade level colleagues, Heather decided not to fully implement the Daily 5, even though she acknowledged that her principal wanted her to do so: “I don't think that you should just change because someone told you. I think you should be like, what does the data show?” Heather was not going to take on a program unless she believed it would support her students. In fact, if she believed a mandated program would negatively impact her students, she expressed that she had and would refrain from implementing it: “I cannot do this. My kids are not learning. I know better... Go ahead and write me up.”

Not only did Heather desire the freedom to choose which programs to implement in her classroom, but she also had a strong desire to have her voice heard by district leaders. During the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era, Heather’s district tested her young students– something she strongly believed was wrong:

We had a test that was 55 questions long, and it was bubbling, and they had to read it, and they don't read...in the beginning of the year. I just had kids crying. It was so useless. The information was so useless that I just was so frustrated. So, we went to the district and said, "Look. This is what you're giving them. Why are you doing that?" "Well, we have to" And, so I said, "Well, I..." There's no transparency, and that was the frustrating part.

In the same vein, Heather felt constrained by the mandates associated with NCLB. The lack of allowance for autonomy led Heather to feel that her district did not treat her as a professional who could be trusted to make decisions about her practice. When speaking about the expectations associated with implementing Houghton Mifflin and Avenues, she said, “Well, these to me were like, ‘You do these, and you stay on the same page. And, that it what your whole program is. Don't add

anything else, 'cause you wouldn't know what to do 'cause you're not smart enough to figure it out.' We weren't allowed to do anything else.” In contrast, Heather expressed excitement about the transition from NCLB to the Common Core Standards, because she felt as though she was being trusted to make choices: “It's just being able. ‘Oh, do you want to do this story, and do writing on it? Go ahead!’” Therefore, being allowed to approach her practice with a sense of autonomy made Heather feel like she could be trusted and that her administrator and district believed that teachers “actually have a clue.”

*May – Does as she is told, but will question things and ultimately do what makes sense to her.* Similar to Annette and Katie, May also revealed that she wanted others to perceive her as doing what “I'm told to do.” At the same time, May said that she would always “fall back on what I know the kids need.” Further, after I described various ways that teachers responded to new mandates, May expressed her belief that “everybody approaches things differently,” suggesting that teachers generally approached their practice with a sense of agency and a need for autonomy. May indicated that although she was focusing on Common Core math and letting other programs to go “a little bit by the wayside,” other teachers had opted to emphasize different mandates because of their “personal preference.” May’s description of how she and her colleagues implemented mandated programs suggests that she may believe that autonomy is a standard and important aspect of teaching.

Like Heather, May discussed how the manner in which she approached mandates in her practice had changed over time. During her early years, May said that

she “was just trying to stay afloat,” so she “wasn’t really worried about what the mandates were.” She described herself as “one of those teachers who, if you told me to do that, that’s what I need to do. I never questioned it.” As she gained “more experience with the profession,” however, May became more apt to “question what they’re doing,” rather than quietly complying with mandates and other requirements. At Rolling Hills, May expressed a belief that she had been offered an avenue through which to ask such questions, as her principal had offered teachers a voice in the decision-making process. As such, she and her colleagues had a means of exercising their autonomy and expressing their sense of agency. Although May indicated that her principal would ultimately make the final decision, she said that she “involves us a little more in her decision making process” by getting “input from the grade levels and the teachers - the staff as a whole.” Therefore, May, too, wanted others to perceive her in a positive light, but she acted autonomously by making decisions about her practice.

*Jill – Wants to be treated as a professional.* At the time of the interview, Jill had taught for nearly thirty years at the elementary and middle school levels, and she had worked at several schools across her district. I described various ways that teachers responded to new mandates and asked her to consider where she fell. After reflecting upon her previous experiences and interactions with colleagues, Jill acknowledged that some teachers resist implementing mandated programs, describing colleagues at a former school as “rebellious.” In contrast, she also mentioned that she knew a teacher at her current site who was a “rule follower,” who did everything as

she was supposed to do. Along the same vein, Jill also described teachers in her district who fully complied with mandated programs – something she did not believe made sense and conflicted with her beliefs about teaching:

I had a teacher tell me in this district that she wasn't allowed to have her kids read that because they weren't on the ... she was in that Reading First school, and you weren't allowed to have anything but Reading First approved books in your room. That's wrong. That blew me away. That's wrong. I'm sorry. I mean you're telling the teacher they don't understand? What about all the things we learned about finding kids' passion and finding books that help them get excited about reading and reading at their level? I mean there's all that research that is showing that you had to get them at the certain instructional level, and you can't do that and with the prescribed amount of books. You have to go out and find those things for your kids. So if I have a kid who is in skateboarding and I can find a nonfiction book at his level on skateboarding, but it's not on the list... That's crazy. That's just crazy.

Jill's comments suggest that she believed that teachers should not follow mandates when they conflict with best practice. Her perspective seems to be that teachers should adapt mandates in order to engage students and to meet their instructional needs. As such, Jill may believe that adapting mandates is an important element of teaching.

When describing how she responded to implementing new mandates, Jill expressed, "I kind of fall in the middle." Although she did not consider herself rebellious like some of her former colleagues, she also did not view herself as a rule follower. Instead, Jill approached her practice with a strong sense of agency, as she had made decisions based on what she believed was best for her students: "I like to be a team player, so I want to get on board. But if it doesn't make sense to me, then I'm going to hide in my room and do what's best for my students." By saying that she

would “hide” in her room, it suggests that Jill was not comfortable overtly defying mandated activities and programs. Her need to hide may relate to prior experiences when she was not allowed to exercise her autonomy. Jill discussed how she was not afforded an element of choice during the No Child Left Behind era: “You had people who came in with clipboards and intimidated you. And then you knew that your job was on the line so you just did it.”

At the time of the interview, Jill expressed positive attitudes about her administrators and her school climate. She expressed the belief that the transition to the Common Core Standards would allow her and her colleagues some freedom: “My administrators today now will say to you, ‘Well, how it looks in your classroom is going to be different.’ And the Common Core seems to respect that you might do this differently because of the needs of your students and your personality and whatever.” From Jill’s perspective, she seemed to believe that the Common Core Standards, her administrator, and her school culture were working in concert to support teachers’ agency and autonomy as they adapted mandates to their practice. This aligned with her belief that educators ought to be treated as professionals who could and should exercise their autonomy, rather than being treated as “widgets in a factory.”

***Peter – Implements everything, but feels stifled and uninspired if he cannot do it his way.*** After describing the different ways that teachers tended to respond when being charged with implementing a new mandate, I asked Peter what he thought of them. Like Jill, Peter took the position that teachers should be treated as professionals who could make decisions about their practice: “I think that I trust



teachers and think that they want to do the best for their students.” He indicated that in the past he had implemented some mandates “verbatim.” However, because there was flexibility at his current site, and his administrators had said, “Well, here's the task, and you know what to do –what's best for your students,” he and his colleagues have tended to adapt mandates. The flexibility and clear expectations enabled Peter and his colleagues “to suit the needs of our students and our teaching style.” Further, Peter expressed that having the space to be creative and to find new ways of making information accessible to and interesting for his students had made him excited about his practice. Peter criticized some programs for not being “engaging enough for students,” and in response, he tried to make them “more enticing for the students.” Peter indicated that although he had “implemented everything,” he has generally done “it my own way.”

In line with Peter’s tendency to adapt mandates and other programs, he expressed a strong sense of agency. He believed that if existing programs and mandates were not meeting students’ needs, it was up to him to find alternative programs and additional resources. At his school, he indicated that “there's a large amount of support... to get us the things we need to do that.” In addition to support, Peter said that there was also allowance for flexibility. He felt that his administrators permitted him to make decisions about his practice, and as a result, he was better able to meet the needs of his students:

I've been using Khan Academy for the past few years. Not the videos, but the assessments, as a coach. So, being able to do that, that's the most valuable things for me personally, because I understand the exact skills a student misses and understands, and it allows me to have

conversations with individuals or with groups to really make that catch up growth that is kind of plaguing the clientele we have.

Because Peter tended to adapt mandates and had a strong sense of agency, autonomy was critical to him. In the past, Peter felt stifled and constrained when he was not allowed to exercise his autonomy. Peter described how the school at which he worked the previous year did not allow him to express his autonomy. When he modified PBIS, for example, he “was in fear that if I got caught, I would have to get spoken to.” In contrast, his current site encouraged him to implement PBIS and other programs in ways that aligned with his beliefs and met the needs of his students: “Here it was explicitly told to us, ‘Here's your PBIS lesson... We trust you. Implement it the best way for your class and your students.’” Peter indicated that being allowed to make decisions about how to enact mandates was “really refreshing,” especially because he was “explicitly told” that he was allowed to do so. It is important to note that Peter did not equate autonomy with being allowed to do anything that he wanted. Rather, he believed that a certain level of accountability was also essential. When referring to the environment at Rolling Hills he said, “It's definitely a safe environment... There's a lot of flexibility, where you can back up your reasoning and thinking with some evidence.” Peter valued having flexibility, but believed that it was also important that teachers’ choices were based on something more than simply teacher preference.

It is evident that Peter approached his practice with agency to adapt mandates. He had a strong desire to be autonomous in his work, and he felt stifled when not afforded the opportunity to do so. Although Peter indicated that he would implement

all mandated programs, he wanted the freedom to be able to do so in a manner that aligned with his beliefs about teaching and learning.

*Jessica – Believes that brilliant teachers will flourish if they are allowed to put their own label on mandates.* As a coach, Jessica worked with teachers as they implemented mandates associated with Reading First. As such, Jessica offered a different perspective about how teachers took on mandated activities. Jessica spoke about how it was her experience that newer teachers had a tendency to adopt mandates, whereas more experienced teachers had more of a tendency to resist them. Jessica noted that many teachers who she believed were gifted seemed to appear to resist reform. Jessica described how some experienced teachers who what she referred to as the “*it* factor” tended to put “their own label” on a mandate, resulting in something better than the original activity. Drawing from her experience as a coach, Jessica expressed the importance of allowing teachers to exercise their autonomy to adapt mandates. She explained how she never stifled teachers as they adapted mandates, “because that way was brilliant. It was better than what this one might have offered.” Jessica recognized that experienced teachers had the ability to improve mandated programs, because they drew from previous experiences and consulted other resources.

After serving as a Reading First coach, Jessica returned to her own primary classroom. When reflecting on how she had taken on mandated activities, she said, “I’m a little of both,” meaning that at times she adopted and at times she resisted. Jessica explained that it had been hard for her to be excited about some mandates

because she had “been through so many educational cycles that they put a different label on something that we’ve done before.” As such, she was at times skeptical when a program resurfaced: “When that kind of thing happens it’s hard for me to get real excited about it, because I’ve already done it, and for whatever reason we dismissed it along the way. Which meant it really didn’t work out then so what makes us think it’s going to work out now?” Jessica said that if she were given her choice, she would “shut the door. Don’t come in. Let me do my own thing.” Ultimately, however, Jessica also recognized that mandates helped her to “get refreshed,” to improve her practice, and they enabled her to feel excited about her work.

When discussing how policymakers and administrators should go about introducing mandates, she said, “Give them the reason why and then allow people to have a little bit of freedom within their regime... Then I think that mandates would be more effective and they would have less resistance and less of a negative push back.” Clearly, Jessica wanted to be treated as a professional who could make choices about implementing mandates.

*Summary and Discussion.* Although there were differences in how the participants spoke about mandates and their practice, all of the teachers indicated that they tended to approach their practice with some agency, adapting mandates to meet the needs of their students and to align with their beliefs about teaching and learning. While none of the participants overtly stated that they desired autonomy, their sense of agency and tendency to adapt mandates suggests that being afforded some freedom and choice are important to them. All of the participants indicated that they sought

autonomy at the classroom level, while others desired higher levels of autonomy by having their voices heard by their site-level or district-level administrators. Many of the participants also indicated that they wanted to be treated as professionals, who possessed the knowledge and experience to make decisions that meet the needs of their students.

Sensemaking Theory can be applied to understand teachers' tendencies to adapt mandates and to approach their practice with a sense of agency. As Weick (1995) notes, one of the key features of sensemaking is that it is ongoing. As such, people continually revise their thinking based on their new experiences. Ancona (2012) pointed out that sensemaking "involves coming up with a plausible understanding—a map—of a shifting world; testing this map with others through data collection, action, and conversation, and then refining or abandoning, the map depending on how credible it is" (p. 1). In the context of the classroom, teachers enact mandates, observe how their students respond, communicate with colleagues about mandates, and then decide how to proceed. Based on these experiences, teachers generally refine, or adapt, mandates, until they make sense and work in their practice.

In addition, Sensemaking Theory's notion of "identity" (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005) helps to understand the discrepancies within some of the participants' interview responses. Katie, Jill, and Annette all expressed their desire for others to view them in a positive light – as a rule follower, as doing what she is supposed to do, and as a good girl, respectively. At the same time, they also indicated that they adapted mandates and made decisions not to implement particular mandates. As such,

their identities – how they wanted others to perceive them – seemed to conflict with their desire to be agents of change in their classrooms. Their identities were in opposition with their desire to approach their practice with agency by adapting mandates to align with their beliefs and their students’ needs. This conflict suggests that it is essential that administrators allow their staff to exercise their autonomy. If the expectation were that teachers could adapt mandates, then doing so would enable teachers like Katie, Jill, and Annette to honor their identities *and* their need to approach their practice with agency.

### **Linking the Survey and Interview Results**

According to Mertens (2009), mixed methods studies can be used to seek a common understanding through triangulation, or they can provide multiple lenses through which alternative perspectives about data can be achieved. Thus, I examined several participants’ interview transcripts in order to see if they converged with their survey results or if an alternative perspective emerged after examining the two sources of data. In all three cases, which are discussed below, participants’ interview responses provided an alternative perspective to their survey results.

*Orientation to teaching and learning.* All but one of the participants’ responses to the Likert-scale questions suggested a balanced approach to teaching and learning, employing both student- and teacher-centered practices. Jill was the only participant whose responses indicated that she used teacher-centered approaches to her practice. In order to determine whether there was another possible explanation for the difference between Jill’s approach and her colleagues’ approaches, I examined Jill’s

interview transcripts. Although Jill's interview responses did not necessarily suggest she was teacher-centered in her approach to teaching and learning, her responses did help to explain why her approach differed from her colleagues' approaches.

Unlike the other participants, Jill was switched grade levels at the start of the 2013-2014 academic year. During our interview, Jill indicated that the transition prompted her to feel like a new teacher, expressing, "Every time you change it's like your first year of teaching." When considering what being a first year teacher entails, Jill likely felt overwhelmed and not fully in control of elements in her practice. The transition to the new Common Core Standards further compounded her sense of feeling overwhelmed: "So I'm doing two things. I'm trying to learn this whole new style of teaching. At the same time I'm learning a new curriculum." In addition to learning about a new developmental stage, implementing different science and social studies curriculum, and getting acquainted with new grade-level colleagues, Jill was also taking on new standards and pedagogies for teaching math and language arts. As a result, Jill expressed that she felt stressed: "It's driving me all nutty, so I feel like I don't have the time for stuff, what I normally would have time for." This sentiment surfaced at several additional points in the interview, as Jill stated, "It's been very stressful moving" grade levels, "It's been too much for me," and "It's just a lot of stress." Clearly, the change in grade levels intensified Jill's stress level, which was already heightened due to the transition to the Common Core Standards and associated pedagogical implications.

As a means of coping with her stress, it is plausible that Jill may have adopted an approach that was more teacher-centered. For example, because Jill was not familiar with the new grade level content, she may have had students use textbooks or engage in independent work, rather than implementing more student-centered activities, such as partner or group work. By using more traditional methods, Jill may have been able to free up some of her time and energy in order to focus on the curricular changes associated with teaching a new grade level and implementing new standards.

Jill's response to the many changes she experienced suggests that administrators should be cautious about how many changes they expect teachers to take on. Being careful not to overwhelm their staff may be especially important with changes like the Common Core Standards, which not only have curricular implications, but pedagogical ones, as well. The shift to the Common Core is associated with implementing more student-activities, which may be challenging for teachers to take on, especially if they feel overwhelmed.

*Sense of agency.* The survey results suggested an inverse relationship between teachers' career stages and their sense of agency to adapt mandates. As their experienced increased, participants seemed to have a weaker sense of agency. In order to determine whether the relationship between agency and career stage could be substantiated, interview transcripts were consulted. Because Katie and Annette's survey responses most illuminated the trend of decreasing agency over teachers'



career stages, examining their interview data seemed to be a promising way to explicate the trend.

An examination of Annette's responses to interview questions showed misalignment with her survey responses. During the interview, Annette indicated that she approaches her practice with some – if not a strong sense of – agency to adapt mandates. When discussing a mandated intervention program for English Learners, Annette commented, “I didn't really teach much of that. I felt like it was such a baseline program that kind of taught down to the kids, and I'd rather teach the regular program and differentiate for those kids.” In this example, Annette demonstrated that she did not merely adopt programs, as her responses to the survey items indicated; rather, she drew from her expertise and decided which action best met the needs of her students. Annette also indicated that she had agency when discussing a previously mandated math program. Annette spoke about how she made changes in order to better align the program with her practice: “There was no base program to support it. If you were a veteran teacher of that particular grade level, you knew how to provide the support materials that were the baseline for it. ... I tried to teach it as directed for a while, and I just... It wasn't there.” Because the math program over-emphasized hands-on activities and lacked a base program, Annette modified it. Further, Annette's explanation that “veteran” teachers knew how to provide support materials also contradicted the pattern that agency may decrease as teachers gain years of teaching experience. Further, it is plausible that exercising agency to adapt mandates

is such a natural part of the teaching practice that Annette and other teachers in her career stage were not cognizant of the modifications they routinely made.

It may be significant that during her interview, Annette identified herself as a “good girl” who had “embraced everything.” Annette’s identity as someone who generally does what she is supposed to do may have prevented her from selecting survey items that suggested non-rule-following behaviors, such as modifying a mandate. Because Annette wanted others to perceive her in a positive light, as doing what she was supposed to do, she may have answered the survey questions about agency from an idealized mindset, rather than from drawing on her experiences. Therefore, Annette’s mean score on the survey’s items about agency may actually reflect how she would like others to regard her, rather than how she actually approaches her everyday practice.

The discrepancy between Annette’s mean score on the survey and what she said during the interview may also relate to her definition of “mandate.” Annette defined a mandate as something she must implement as directed. During her interview, Annette made a very clear distinction between “mandates” and “expectations.” At one point, she corrected me when I referred to a specific activity as a mandate: “I wouldn’t necessarily say that it’s a mandate, as much as an expectation.” She also stated that activities that are mandated are “non-negotiable.” Her narrow view of mandates, therefore, may have left her little room to express her sense of agency on the survey. While she may have felt that she could modify activities that

she believed were merely “expectations,” she may not have believed that she could do so with activities that she narrowly defined as mandates.

There was the same divergence between Katie’s survey and interview responses as there was for Annette’s responses. The strong sense of agency to adapt mandates that surfaced in Katie’s survey results did not come across in her interview. Like Annette, Katie also identified herself as a “rule follower.” She indicated that she implemented everything because her principal expected her to do so. Although Katie said that “there are different ways that you can do” the Daily 5, Katie indicated that she approached it “tried and true,” “by the book,” and “how it’s written.” Her responses indicated a weak sense of agency, as she adopted the mandate with fidelity. Unlike Annette’s routine practice of making changes to mandated activities, Katie indicated that although she would make adaptations if something did not work, she generally implemented things as they were intended.

Therefore, by cross-referencing the survey and interview data, I was not able to support the finding that agency may decline over teachers’ careers, as was suggested in the quantitative analysis. The two participants who most exemplified the trend offered interview responses that conflicted with their responses on the survey.

***Summary and discussion.*** In the three cases I discussed, analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data together provided new insight. Jill’s interview responses helped to explain why the survey results about her orientation toward teaching and learning differed so much from her colleagues’ orientations. Annette and Heather’s interview responses diverged from their survey responses, thus reducing the

likelihood that there is in fact an inverse relationship between teachers' senses of agency and their career stage.

Applying Argyris and Schon's (1978) concepts of espoused and enacted beliefs can also help to provide insight into the discrepancy between Annette and Heather's survey results and interview responses. When responding to the survey items, Annette and Heather may have responded by thinking about their espoused beliefs about their practice. In contrast, engaging in the interview may have prompted them to consider their enacted beliefs. Thus, the lack of convergence between some participants' survey and interview results suggests that it is essential to collect and analyze data from multiple sources.

### **Summary and Discussion**

Because there were few studies in the research literature about teachers' experiences enacting multiple mandates into their practice, this study explored the question, "How do teachers describe their enactment of multiple mandates?"

Although there was variation among the participants, overall, the teachers in the study exercised autonomy by approaching their practice with agency to adapt mandates. These findings are consistent with previous findings about teachers' agency in enacting reform (Schmidt & Datnow 2005; McLaughlin, 1990; van den Berg, 2002), teachers' tendencies to adapt reforms (Berends, Bodilly, & Kirby, 2002; Coburn, 2001; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005), and teachers' need for autonomy in their practice (Apple, 1986; Day, 2002; Olsen & Sexton, 2009).

In light of these findings, it is important that teachers are afforded the opportunity to exercise their autonomy. Instead of labeling teachers who have agency to adapt mandates as “resisters,” teachers should be provided with the time and space to explore mandates, make sense of them, and implement them in a manner that aligns with their beliefs about teaching and learning. Olsen and Sexton (2009) found that teachers generally have an expectation that they will have autonomy in their classrooms. The teachers in their study believed that their professional preparation afforded them the freedom to make choices about their practice.

There may be some unintended consequences if teachers are not encouraged to express their autonomy. Some of the participants’ interview responses highlighted an internal tension related to their identities. Although Katie, Annette, and Jill wanted others to view them as doing what they were supposed to do, they also expressed a need to make changes to mandates by adapting them to align with their practice. This tension suggests that these participants may not have believed that they were allowed to exercise their autonomy. Although a couple of participants stated that their site administrator had overtly expressed told them that they could make choices about their practice, perhaps Katie, Annette, and Jill did not believe it was true. More likely, perhaps, is the possibility these participants believed that they were being “good” by enacting mandates as they had been told to do, even though they had also been informed that they could exercise their autonomy. Clearly, these teachers experienced internal conflict related to their identities. According to Weick (1995), identity is a key element of people’s sensemaking processes. Teachers’ internal conflict may also

add to their sense of feeling overwhelmed and stressed. Therefore, to avoid or reduce this internal conflict, thus supporting teachers' identities, administrators can create and nurture safe, supportive environments. Not only can principals simply allow teachers the opportunity to take risks, but they can encourage teachers to do so.

Administrators, for example, can highlight teachers' successful adaptations of mandates at staff meetings and routinely engage their staff in discussions.

In addition to the inconsistencies within individual participants' interview responses, comparing participants' survey responses with their interview transcripts revealed further discrepancies. Again, these inconsistencies related to participants' senses of identity. Although Katie's responses to survey items suggested that she had a strong sense of agency, her responses to interview questions suggested that she had a weak sense of agency. Conversely, Annette's survey responses indicated a weak sense of agency, but her interview revealed a strong sense of agency to adapt mandates. The lack of congruency may also be explained by Argyris and Schon's (1978) work about espoused and enacted beliefs. Participants may have responded to survey items from an idealized mindset, drawing from their espoused beliefs, rather than from drawing from their actual, or enacted, experiences, which they were prompted to do during the interview. As such, when faced with a survey, participants may consider how they ought to respond, and as a result may select responses that are in-line with how they want others to perceive them. Therefore, it follows that it is important not to rely solely on survey data and self-reports, but to examine participants experiences and perspectives contextualized in practice, as well.

Teachers' tendency to adapt, rather than simply adopt, mandates suggests that teachers have a strong need for autonomy. When teachers are not afforded the opportunity to make decisions about whether and how to implement mandates, they experience internal conflict. This internal conflict, in addition to other factors, is expressed in a variety of feelings. These emotional reactions to mandates are discussed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Negativity, Stress, and Frustration:**

#### **How Teachers React to Mandates**

According to Nias (1996), teachers experience a variety of emotions related to their practice. This study sought to add to existing literature about teachers' emotions in educational reform (Kelchermans, 2005; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005; Van Veen, Slegers, & Van de Ven, 2005) by investigating the question, "What are teachers' attitudes toward and feelings about mandates?"

This chapter discusses the study's third set of findings. The results indicate that although many of the teachers expressed an openness to change, negative attitudes surfaced when asked about being required to implement mandated activities. Further, while teachers did acknowledge that several mandates had positively affected their practice, they overwhelmingly described a variety of negative feelings associated with implementing mandates, such as stress, anxiety, and a sense of being overwhelmed. Frustration with how they had been required to implement mandates also surfaced.

This chapter begins with the survey results about participants' attitudes toward general and mandated change. Next, I discuss participants' interview responses, which suggested many negative feelings and emotions: stress, anxiety, a sense of being overwhelmed, and frustration. The chapter then discusses how teachers' negative feelings impacted their personal lives, as well as the strategies teachers developed for managing their emotions. As with the previous finding, the relationship between the survey and interview data is also considered. I then discuss the



relationship between teachers' senses of agency with their attitudes. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion and implications for practice.

### Survey Results

In order to ascertain participants' attitudes toward change, I asked them both open-ended and Likert-scale questions.

*Open-ended questions.* I asked participants to respond to two open-ended questions about how they felt about making changes to their instructional practice, teaching methods, and/or curriculum. One of the questions targeted general change, and the other question targeted mandated change. I coded each of the responses as *positive*, *neutral*, *mixed*, and *negative*. Positive responses indicated that participants felt good about making changes, while negative attitudes indicated the converse. Neutral responses suggested that participants did not suggest a positive or negative attitude, whereas I coded responses as mixed if participants indicated both positive and negative attitudes. Table 9 displays participants' responses organized from positive to negative, with my interpretation of their attitudes noted in parentheses.

*Table 9. Participants' Responses to Open Ended Questions About Their Attitude Toward Change, Organized From Positive to Negative*

Participant	General Change	Mandated Change
Katie	I am always open to change as long as there is support. (positive)	If my boss tells me to make changes based on viable research then I am happy to do it. (positive)
Peter	I am excited to integrate technology, design my own lessons to meet the Common Core Standards, to be creative, and rigorous. (positive)	It is needed for innovative teachers. I've always disliked using teaching manuals and scripted lessons because it felt contrived and synthetic. (positive)

*(Table 9, Continued)*

Participant	General Change	Mandated Change
Jill	If the changes are tested and proven to improve learning in children, I am generally favorable. (positive)	It depends on how the administrator requires the change and whether I'm given training and materials to make the change. If I feel hurried and unsupported, it is stressful and I don't like it. If I'm given support and time to learn (whatever I'm being asked to change), then I can feel excited and happy about it. (mixed)
May	I think change is good, as it keeps me interested in the curriculum, and I can discover new ways of presenting the material. (positive)	Required changes need to be backed up by sufficient and appropriate support. They also need to be implemented slowly. Often we are asked to do too many new things at once. Resulting in not enough time to do anything well. (negative)
Annette	It is more work, but necessary for changing needs. (neutral)	As a veteran teacher, I choose to embrace the opportunity and give it solid effort. I do make adjustments as student need arises. (positive)
Matt	I usually do not mind as long as it is done gradually. For example, one subject at a time rather than all at once. (neutral)	I feel a little more reluctant - but usually bear down and deal with it. (negative)
Heather	It depends on what the changes are. When No Child Left Behind started I was so frustrated because I didn't believe it was helping kids. It was test, test, test. Everyone had to be on the same page no matter what level the kids were. Now - with CCSS I am feeling that it is hard, but I agree with it. (mixed)	I feel like sometimes the district tells us to do something but doesn't give us the training or materials. Now that we have a new Principal, it is better. She makes it a priority to give us materials and training. (mixed)
Lisa	Change is good, but we get so many mandates it's overwhelming to implement them all, and I feel like I rarely implement any of them very well. (mixed)	Okay if we're given training, practice, and materials. I feel like I'm constantly looking for or making things to use in the classroom, spending lots of money with no hopes for reimbursement. (negative)
Jessica	At first, it's always painful because it causes a disruption to routines, but in the end it is usually worth it. It can be invigorating and refreshing to embrace change. (mixed)	I have learned that over the years that it is just part of the job. The change usually is a result of the last change not working to the degree that it was supposed to. There are times it becomes crazy trying to comply with so many different changes in every area that it's hard to keep up. One month is stating objectives, the next it's differentiation, then it's adhering to Common Core, etc... (negative)

*General change.* Overall, there was quite a bit of variation in participants' responses to the question about making *general* changes to their practice. None of the nine participants expressed a fully negative attitude. Four of the teachers expressed positive attitudes toward making general changes to their practice. Peter indicated the most positive attitude, stating that he felt "excited" about integrating technology, designing lessons that aligned with Common Core Standards, expressing his creativity, and being rigorous. Similarly, May stated, "change is good," because it keeps her interested and she is able to "discover new ways of presenting the material." Katie also indicated a positive attitude toward making general changes, saying that she is "always open to change." Although perhaps not quite as positive, Jill stated that she was "generally favorable" when it came to making changes to her practice. In contrast, two of the teachers indicated neutral attitudes toward making change, as they were neither positive nor negative. Annette expressed that making changes is "more work" but "necessary". Matt's responses were also neutral, stating that he did "not mind" making changes to his practice. The remaining three participants indicated both positive and negative attitudes toward making changes to their practice. Heather wrote that making changes left her "frustrated," but she also indicated that she agreed with making particular changes. Jessica responded that change is "always painful" at first, but in the end it is "invigorating and refreshing" and "worth it." Lisa reported that she believes "change is good," but that it can be "overwhelming" to implement many mandates and she does not feel that she implements "any of them very well."

Clearly, there was quite a bit of variation in how the participants felt about making changes to their practice.

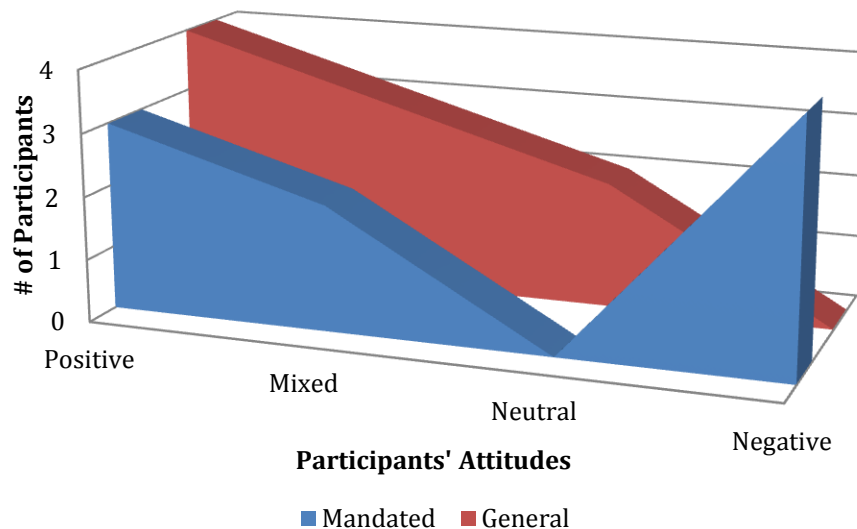
Further analysis revealed an interesting pattern of responses in a few of the participants. Four teachers' responses indicated an attitude toward change that was based on particular conditions. Katie, for example, indicated a positive attitude toward change "as long as there is support." Jill expressed a somewhat positive attitude, but only if "changes are tested and prove to improve learning in children." Matt stated a neutral attitude "as long as it is done gradually" with "one subject at a time, rather than all at once." Heather's inclusion of conditions was perhaps the most overt: "It depends on what the changes are." Based on the participants' conditional responses, they appear to be open to change; within our current climate of change, however, it can be difficult to be completely open-minded. As Shulman (2004a) pointed out, teachers' practice is complex, and as other researchers (Blasé, 1991; Fullan & Miles, 1992; Knapp, Bamberg, Ferguson, & Hill, 1998; Mayrowetz (2009) have illustrated, it has been made more complex by the addition of multiple mandates.

Interestingly, although the first open-ended question aimed to gain insight into how teachers felt about making *general*, rather than mandated, changes to their practice, several of the participants' responses suggest that the two are not easily disentangled. The majority of the participants' responses referred to implementing externally imposed changes. Only two participants, Peter and May, mentioned changes that they elected to make in their practice, which indicated a sense of agency.

*Mandated change.* None of the participants indicated that they had negative attitudes toward making general changes to their practice. The same was not true when participants reflected on how they felt about making mandated changes. Four of the participants' responses indicated a negative attitude. Jessica stated that mandated changes generally come because of "the last change not working." When implementing mandated change, she stated that "it becomes crazy trying to comply with so many different changes in every area," stating that changes are made quickly, as new mandates come in short succession of each other. Matt expressed that he felt "a little more reluctant" about making mandated changes, but that he would "bear down and deal with" them. May reported that because teachers "are asked to do too many new things at once," they do "not have enough time to do anything well. Finally, Lisa wrote that she was "constantly looking for or making things" and she was never reimbursed for doing so. In contrast, three of the participants expressed positive attitudes. Peter indicated that mandated changes were especially "needed for innovative teachers," as he has always "disliked using teaching manuals and scripted lessons." Katie expressed that when it comes to implementing mandates, she is "happy to do" them. Finally, Annette said that she has chosen to "embrace the opportunity and give it a solid effort" when presented with mandates. Only two of the participants' responses included both positive and negative attitudes about implementing mandated changes. Heather indicated that the district "tells us to do something but doesn't give us the training or materials," but that her current principal

compensates for that. Jill wrote that she can feel “hurried and unsupported” and also “excited and happy” about making mandated changes.

*Summary and discussion.* Approximately the same number of participants expressed positive attitudes toward making general and mandated changes. This finding suggests that the participants may be open to change and believe that change, both mandated and general, are important aspects of their practice. Interestingly, there were differences in participants’ negative and neutral responses (see Figure 18).



*Figure 18. Participants’ attitudes toward making general and mandated changes, from survey’s open-ended items.*

Although several participants indicated negative attitudes about implementing mandated changes, none of them expressed a negative attitude about making general changes. In addition, none of the participants expressed neutral attitudes toward mandated changes, although several of them were neutral about making general

changes. Participants clearly felt strongly about mandates, and in general, they were more negative about making mandated changes than general changes. This pattern may relate to several factors involved with mandates. For example, participants might experience negative attitudes when mandates are initially introduced and rolled out. They may be apprehensive about implementing another new mandate, or they may already have a program that they believe works. Another factor that could explain participants' negative attitudes are the expectations associated with implementing mandates. If teachers believe that mandates are highly rigid and there is little room for autonomy, they may not feel positive about implementing them. Finally, lacking sufficient resources might make teachers feel that they are ill-equipped to implement mandates; as a result, they may experience a negative attitude toward implementing mandates

*Likert-scale questions.* In addition to the open-ended questions, I asked participants several Likert-scale items in order to ascertain their attitudes toward mandates. Overall, the mean was a 0.4 on a scale of zero (negative attitude) to one (positive attitude), indicating that collectively the participants had a neutral, but slightly negative attitude, toward mandates.

Figure 19 presents participants' mean scores along a continuum. Three of the participants' responses, Katie, Annette, and Matt, indicated slightly positive attitudes toward mandates. Lisa's responses indicated a mixed attitude toward mandates. Peter's responses indicated a slightly negative attitude. Jessica and Jill's responses

indicated negative attitudes toward mandates. Finally, May and Heather's responses to the Likert-scale items indicated very negative attitudes toward mandates.

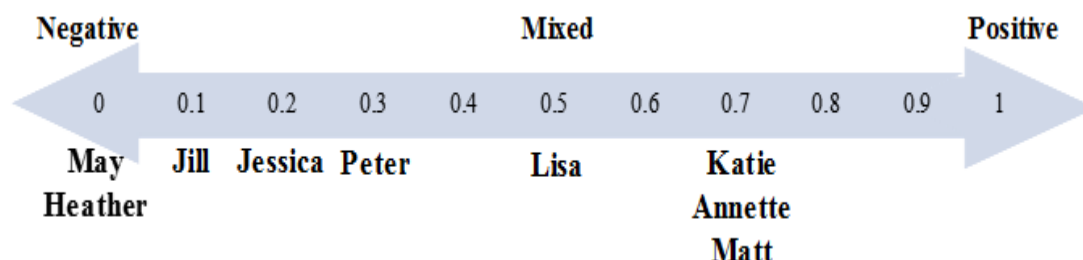


Figure 19. Continuum of participants' mean scores for attitude toward mandates.

Participants' mean scores for the Likert-scale items revealed some differences by career stage in their attitudes toward mandates (see Figure 20). As a group, teachers in the 7-11 year range had the most positive attitude, as their mean was 0.425. Their mean score, however, indicates a fairly mixed/slightly negative attitude. Teachers in the 12-20 year range had the most negative attitude with a mean of 0.25. The mean for teachers in the 21-30 year range was 0.33.

The finding that the less experienced teachers in this study had the most positive attitudes is consistent with Drake's (2002) findings, where the newer teachers expressed more support for a mathematics reform. The means for teachers in the other two career stages, however, do not align with Drake's findings, which suggest that there is an inverse relationship between support for a reform and career stage. The difference in findings may relate to Drake studying attitudes toward a single mathematics reform, whereas this study addressed mandates associated with multiple reform initiatives. This discrepancy, therefore, suggests that there is certainly a need



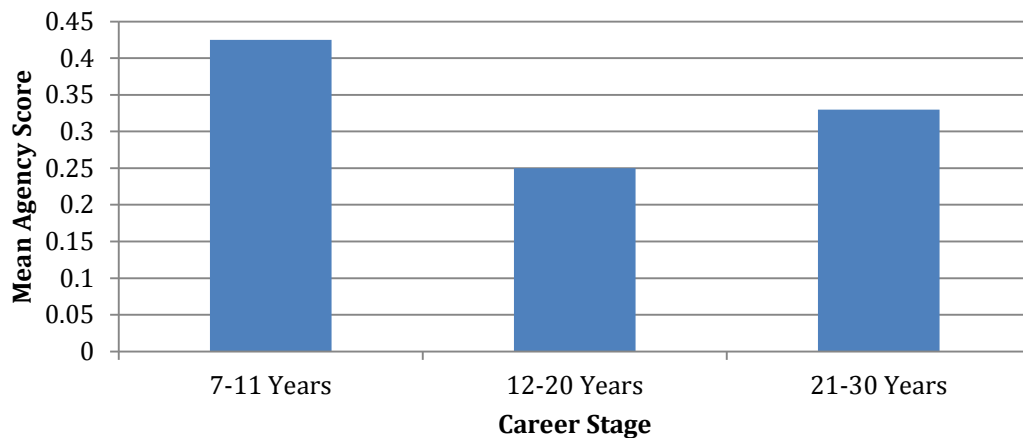


Figure 20. Participants' mean agency scores by career stage.

for additional research on teachers' attitudes toward and experience with multiple reform policies.

**Summary and Discussion.** The overall trend appears to be that participants' attitudes toward mandates were negatively skewed. When comparing participants' responses to the open-ended questions about mandates with the Likert-scale items, there appears to be some similarities and some differences, as can be seen in Table 10.

Only two of the participants' attitudes were the same on the open-ended question and on the Likert-scale questions. Both Jessica and May expressed responses that indicated negative attitudes on both parts of the survey. Two of the participants had expressed attitudes that were more positive on the Likert-scale questions than on the open-ended question. Lisa expressed a negative attitude on the open question and a neutral/mixed attitude on the Likert items. Matt expressed a negative attitude on the open question and a slightly positive attitude on the Likert items. The most common

*Table 10. Participants' Responses to Open-Ended and Likert-Scale Items About Mandates, Organized from Positive to Negative*

Participant	Open-Ended Question	Likert-Scale Items
Annette	positive	slightly positive
Katie	positive	slightly positive
Peter	positive	slightly negative
Matt	negative	slightly positive
Jill	mixed	negative
Heather	mixed	negative
Lisa	negative	mixed
May	negative	negative
Jessica	negative	negative

trend, therefore, was for participants to express attitudes that were more negative on the Likert items.

Argyris and Schon's (1978) concepts of espoused and enacted beliefs may again help to explain the difference in participants' responses. Participants may have considered their espoused attitudes toward mandates when responding to open-ended questions, whereas responding to the Likert-scale items may have prompted them to consider their enacted attitudes. When participants considered how they felt about making mandated changes to their practice, they may have thought about it in idealized terms. Conversely, when faced with specific statements about mandates, participants may have drawn from concrete experiences.

Sensemaking Theory can also provide insight into the differences in participants' responses. Participants may have responded to questions by reflecting

upon their identity, including how they wanted others to perceive them. According to Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005), identity is a central aspect of how people interpret things. Because the participants may have wanted to be perceived as doing the right thing, they may have written survey responses and selected Likert-scale items that aligned with their identity.

### **Interview Results – Teachers’ Reactions to Implementing Mandates**

Participants routinely expressed a variety of negative feelings associated with implementing mandated programs and activities. Conversely, they only talked about how mandates had positively impacted their practice when they were directly asked about ones they believed were effective. Therefore, this section focus on the major finding: teachers have negative feelings about implementing mandates in their practice.

*Anxiety, stress, and feeling overwhelmed.* Nearly all of the participants revealed that they felt stress, anxiety, and being overwhelmed when implementing mandates. Heather, for example, discussed how she felt overwhelmed with all of the mandates she was expected to implement. Heather talked about how she had spent the summer prior to the 2013-2014 school year preparing for the year ahead. She did so because she felt pressure to take on everything, especially with the addition of the Common Core: “This summer I was trying to do every standard. I was like ‘Ahhhh!’ I was just too overwhelmed.” In addition to taking on the Common Core Standards, Heather also felt overwhelmed with other new programs, such as the Kagan Structures and the Daily 5.

When describing her practice, Jill also mentioned feeling anxious and stressed. Jill had been required to move grade levels this year, and she said the transition caused her “a lot of stress” and was “driving me all nutty.” Not only did Jill have to deal with learning the new curriculum – something that made her feel like a first year teacher and was stressful enough on its own – but she also had to figure out “this whole new style of teaching” associated with the Common Core Standards. Having so much to take on made her feel overwhelmed, “like I don’t have the time for stuff... I normally would have time for.” Jill elaborated about how the transition to the Common Core State Standards affected her anxiety levels:

With Common Core Math, it’s like nobody knows where we’re going. It’s amazing how little we all know. We’re one of the sites that’s trying to do it and ... so we’re trying to make the transition, even though they keep saying don’t worry, do it on your own time, try it out. But there is some pushing you, because a lot of our professional development is around Common Core Math. So, really it’s that you don’t have the materials, you don’t have the knowledge, you don’t know what the assessments look like, you know. It’s like the blind leading the blind. Yes, it’s very unsettling and... it does create anxiety.

Jessica also expressed that she had felt overwhelmed implementing mandates. She taught at a turnaround school for several years. She stated that she and her colleagues had initially been “really excited” about taking on the endeavor. They had been handpicked and were eager to take on the rigorous work involved in turning around a failing school. Not long into the journey, however, she expressed that “almost everybody there was ready to just to pack up their bags and change careers, because it was so intense on so many levels.” Jessica and her colleagues constantly faced new mandates prior to fully understanding and successfully implementing the

previous mandates. Jessica said that her experience was analogous to “rebuilding an airplane in the air while it's moving.” She had to continue to teach her students and meet their needs as her administrators routinely introduced and required her to implement a plethora of new tools, resources, and programs. Jessica said that she felt overwhelmed because “it kind of felt like that, you just never felt like you had accomplished anything, because while you are trying to figure out how to do this, two or three things were also coming at you, and so it was overwhelming.” She also spoke about how some her colleagues felt overwhelmed, as well, to the point of feeling that they had been defeated. Although Jessica ultimately elected to transfer from the turnaround school, she expressed that she still feels overwhelmed at times: “On my last day of teaching I will be still saying, ‘I need to get my act together because there is so much to do.’ There are so many good strategies out there. It’s really quite overwhelming.” Clearly, being inundated with mandates leads to a variety of negative feelings.

***Frustration.*** In addition to stress, anxiety, and feeling overwhelmed, some of the participants also experienced frustration while implementing mandates in their practice.

***Mandates do not involve teachers.*** One of the frustrations that participants expressed was that they were not involved in the decision-making process, which was problematic because the people in charge of conceptualizing and implementing mandates were too far removed from the classroom. Lisa shared her perspective about how her administrator had pretended to seek input about making a change to how she

and her grade level colleagues met the needs of their students. Lisa and her grade level colleagues were used to having partner teachers, which referred to two teachers co-teaching a group of students. According to Lisa, her principal said, “Now we're thinking about not having a partner teacher, and so what would you think about?” Lisa and her colleagues responded that they wanted time to think about it. According to Lisa, however, they were not given the time, and when they returned to work after the summer break the partner teachers were gone. Lisa said that her principal attempted to make it seem as though eliminating the partner teachers had been the teachers' decision: “Well, we're sure glad that you decided that that's what you wanted to do, because that's what we're going to do now, and you're not going to have a partner teacher anymore.” Lisa's frustration surfaced with a statement she made to summarize the lack of input she and her colleagues had been afforded: “She just tells us what we think.” Prior to this principal, Lisa worked with other administrators who she believed trusted her “to do what you know is best in the classroom.” Lisa expressed her belief that teachers' voices should be included in the decision-making process because “a lot of the principals they haven't been in the classroom for a very long time and they think they know, but they really don't.”

Heather also experienced frustration with not having a voice in making decisions. At the end of the interview, I asked participants whether they wanted to say about the broader context of educational reform. Heather's response revealed that she truly desired that her and her colleagues' voices were present: “What I think about educational reform is how about including the educators? That's really important.

When you're at the district office, or the state, or you know, make sure that when you're doing it, get a sample. Like, I see there's college professors... Like, college professors wrote this manual. What about some teachers helping with the manual?" Heather also expressed frustration that district personnel would only pretend to get teachers' input. She attended a monthly meeting where district personnel "would pretend to get our advice, and then they would already have it done, handed out to us, printed, after the meeting." Thus, not only was Heather upset that she and her colleagues were not involved in the decision-making process, but she was frustrated that district personnel seemed to pretend to seek their input and ignore it.

*Mandates come too quickly.* Another major frustration that teachers expressed was that mandates came too quickly. Annette, for example, talked about how there were so many mandates that materials would not get used. She recalled some materials that were "brand new, but no one's used them." On a related note, Annette also discussed the quick turnover that many mandates seemed to experience, saying, "Some of those things were here a year and gone."

May spoke about her frustration, indicating that the district changed their focus too frequently: "Every year there is something different." May spoke about how over the past few years school and district personnel would come into her classroom to look for evidence that she and her colleagues were taking on mandates: "They were coming around in groups watching everybody, they were looking. 'Do you have a focus wall? Do you have this? Do you have writing on the wall?'" May stated that their interest declined, and they no longer looked for many of the mandates, including her focus

wall: “they’ve gone away from that. Nobody asks about it, but I put so much effort into that!” May expressed frustration because although she had spent a great deal of time putting together her focus wall together, using a great deal of her time and resources, now, no one seemed to care. May said that if she could change one thing about how mandates were implemented, she “would want consistency with something. Consistency, because we spread ourselves too thin. We just do, we spread ourselves too thin.” May believes that continuity and consistency would allow teachers more time to spend on elements of their practice that are more closely connected to students and less focused on pleasing the constantly changing demands of the district.

*Mandates do not meet students’ needs.* Finally, participants also expressed frustration that some mandates did not meet the needs of their students. Heather, for example, was frustrated that her young students were tested in a multiple choice format. Many of her students were unable to read the questions, so the results were “so useless that I just was so frustrated.” Heather brought her frustration to district personnel, and she experienced further frustration by the lack of transparency about why the students had to be tested.

Annette also talked about the manner in which some mandates were implemented failed to consider the students. Specifically, she talked about how the California English Language Development Test (CELDT), a test taken every year to determine English Learners’ level of English proficiency, was not implemented in a way that allowed children to be successful:

The way CELDT occurs doesn’t work with kids. When the CELDT language things come up, it's like we pump kids up to pass these tests,



but then the day of the test it's so disorganized, because it's people coming in to give it. If I was an eight year old, I wouldn't take this test seriously. And so those are some of the mandates that I think the higher source doesn't actually see the implication of it. It doesn't mean that no one isn't trying to make it happen. It's just really how the logistics apply to making that happen. There's a disconnect, and I don't think they're producing the results that they really want to get. They're not getting accurate results. If I'm eight years old and I'm sitting down with someone I've never seen before - even if my teacher said that it's oMay - do I really care about doing my best?

Similarly, Peter talked about how the people in charge with conceptualizing and introducing mandates were disconnected from today's classrooms and children's needs:

You know, I think a lot of people that mandate these reform things, and a lot of people in education in general are really disconnected from the classroom. And, they really don't understand that classrooms today are really different than when I was growing up, which was not that long ago. I'm 35. It was so different back then, it must be so much different from people who are older. There must be a huge disconnect about what a classroom is like in this day and age, and so therefore, I think a lot of the mandates and reform things are not necessarily effective, because they're so disconnected, and I really presently believe that there's a huge difference between theory and application, and being force-fed for all these years different theories... and all of the data shows that this is going to make it better... are not necessarily true, because it's all about how they're applied. I don't think enough people in reform question the validity of data, and I know from my background how easy it is to skew data, because if you really want to and I think that more data needs to be questioned before it's implemented, district wide, state wide, and across the whole country, I guess you could say.

*Mandates cannot fix everything.* Another reason that teachers expressed frustration was because they had been introduced to them as the means through which everything that was wrong with public education could be remedied. Jill talked about

how the district's reading textbook was introduced as the "the panacea of fixing everything that was wrong in education." Similarly, Heather talked about how No Child Left Behind was supposed to be "the best thing ever," and the "the thing that was going to change" public education for the better. She expressed skepticism about these and other fix-all approaches, because from her perspective, they had inevitably failed.

Peter also expressed frustration that mandates were being used as a "magic bullet" – intended to fix everything that was wrong and broken with our educational system. Several times during his interview, he sarcastically referred to specific mandates as being "new cool thing in education" (Kagan Strategies) and "the new silver bullet in education" (PBIS). At the end of our interview, I asked him whether he had any lingering thoughts about mandates or the broader context of educational reform. In response, he said, "There's always going to be some new magic bullet that people like to mandate, but the truth of the matter is that I don't think there's anything they can mandate to improve everything. It really depends on what the teachers are doing and how they can improve their craft. I don't go home every day thinking I'm awesome. Every day I go home and I think 'What can I do differently?' and 'How could I be better?' And I think that propels me to think how can I be more efficient and have every student succeed." Peter's frustration with mandates being used as a fix-all approach, therefore, rests in his belief that reformers are focusing on the wrong thing. They are constantly implementing new programs and policies, rather than

providing teachers with the time and space to engage in reflection – something that he believes would truly improve teachers’ practice.

*Summary.* Participants indicated a variety of negative feelings associated with implementing mandates. Many of the participants experienced stress, anxiety, and feeling overwhelmed due to the multitude of mandates they were expected to implement. Teachers also experienced frustration for several reasons: lack of involvement in making decisions, the quick speed in which new mandates come, the lack of alignment between mandates and students’ needs, and the false premise that mandates could fix everything that was wrong with the public education system.

### **Negative Feelings About Mandates Affect Teachers’ Personal Lives and Relationships**

Several participants spoke about how their negative feelings affected their personal lives. Although I never asked the participants questions about their personal lives, some of them indicated that teaching in this era of multiple mandates had negatively influenced their personal relationships.

During our interview, Paul indicated that he had been much happier this year at Rolling Hills. Peter’s increased positivity came from the freedom and flexibility to teach in a manner that aligned with his beliefs about teaching and learning. Peter talked about how he had felt incredibly stressed over the past few years, and that not only was he happier this year, but “wife is, too.” He also joked that perhaps the reduced stress might make also impact his appearance: “I think my gray hair might go

away!” Clearly, the years of continuously implementing mandates in a restrictive environment had had an adverse impact on his personal life.

Similarly, Heather talked about how amount of work she had put into preparing for new mandates created difficulties with her husband:

It's like, here, you can get it. But you also need to print it, pay for it, make it, laminate it, cut it, and it's hours. That's when my husband and I have trouble... He's just like, "Why are you here? Why are you going in on the weekend?" You know, he doesn't know. So, like this summer, I was trying to get all this... I was trying to get centers, trying to get ideas... And, it's just tons of hours of our time, so... And, it's not, I mean, if you want to do a good job, then you have to do it... It's all time, you know, but how do you get time?

Heather explained that her husband has grown upset and frustrated with her because he does not understand the level of commitment to her work. He believes that at times she has chosen to focus on her students, rather than nurturing her own children and family.

Katie also indicated that everything she is required to do has placed stress on her marriage. In fact, on the day of my interview, Katie's husband had given her permission to stay late, and he had agreed to stay home and take care of their kids. Although they had made arrangements, Katie's husband called twice during our interview to check in on her status. Katie expressed a bit of annoyance, because he did not fully understand why she had to stay at work late so frequently.

Annette's stress also affected her marriage. In fact, Annette's stress got to the point that she had to decide whether to remain in her position or make a change: "I needed to decide if I was going to be in my marriage or not." Annette was in a non-classroom position in which not only was she expected to carry out many mandates,

but she was also in charge of checking in on whether and how administrators and teachers were implementing mandates. Ultimately, the job took a toll on her marriage, and she decided to return to the classroom.

Finally, although Jessica did not have trouble with her marriage or personal life, she acknowledged that many of her colleagues had: “Families were having marital problems. I mean it got pretty bad. I think change is good, but there are ways to do it where everybody can sort of remain sane and healthy, like kind of embrace things, or it can be done in such a way that it's so overwhelming that you feel defeated and you feel like you kind of lost your niche.” Although Jessica developed strategies for managing her stress, she talked about how many of her colleagues were unable to do so, and thus suffered marital and health problems.

### **Teachers’ Strategies for Managing Negative Feelings About Mandates**

In order to manage their negative feelings, and perhaps to improve their personal lives, participants developed several strategies. Again, I did not ask participants to discuss how they managed their feelings, but several of them discussed strategies they had employed.

One strategy that participants developed was giving themselves permission to reduce what they took on. Annette, for example, stated that her “big challenge this year was to balance the Common Core Math, the Kagan, and technology, and My Big Campus.” Implementing so many mandates led her to feel that she had “spread myself too thin.” As a way of refocusing herself and coping with all of the mandates, she gave herself permission to take on a little at a time.

Heather also gave herself permission to limit her focus. Heather expressed that she had felt overwhelmed from all of the mandates she was expected to implement in light of the Common Core Standards. She indicated that she felt overwhelmed from the pressure to take on all of the standards. In order to manage her stress, Heather developed a strategy: “Now I just work on one thing at a time.” She elaborated, explaining how she narrowed her focus with Kagan Structures: “Now I'm really focusing on three Kagan structures, and then I'm trying to work on just doing one.” She also explained that rather than taking on all of the new pedagogical considerations and approaches associated with implementing Common Core Math, she was just “doing the manipulatives.” Although implementing a multitude of mandates caused Heather to feel overwhelmed, she developed strategies to help her to manage her stress.

Participants also transferred schools or changed positions as a means of easing their negative feelings. Peter, for example, had felt very overwhelmed in past years. He did not feel that he was allowed to teach in manner consistent with his beliefs about teaching and learning, often feeling constrained and stifled. Because he was in an environment that prevented him from exercising his autonomy, he was not able to employ Heather and Annette’s strategies of just taking on a little at a time. Instead, Peter transferred schools when he became overwhelmed. He taught at five different schools in the past seven years, each time electing to make the move. Similarly, as a way to manage her stress, Jessica also transferred schools, transitioning from her position as a Reading First coach, to teaching at a turnaround school, to transferring to

her current position as a teacher at Rolling Hills. Annette also elected to change positions when she felt overwhelmed. She discussed how her position outside of the classroom had placed a great deal of stress on her relationship with her husband. As a result, Annette felt that she had to decide to either remain in her position and destroy her marriage, or she could transfer back to the classroom. Annette elected to move from a position in which she was constantly dealing with and managing mandates back into the classroom at Rolling Hills, where she felt a sense of freedom and control. Therefore, transferring schools and changing positions provided some of the participants with a means of reducing their negative feelings associated with implementing mandates.

### **Linking the Survey and Interview Results**

Because mixed methods studies can be used to triangulate data and to provide alternative perspectives about data (Mertens, 2009), I cross-referenced participants' interview responses with their survey results.

As a group, the participants' open-ended survey responses generally indicated positive attitudes about making general changes to their practice, yet enacting mandates elicited attitudes that were more negative. Although there were some participants who expressed positive attitudes toward implementing mandates, overall their responses to the survey items and interview questions demonstrated negatively skewed attitudes associated with implementing mandates. Table 11 displays the participants' attitudes across all three data sources, organized from the most consistently positive at the top to the most consistently negative at the bottom.

*Table 11. Participants' Responses to an Open-Ended Item, Likert-Scale Items, and Interview Questions About Mandates, Organized from Positive to Negative*

Participant	Open-Ended Question	Likert-Scale Items	Interview
Annette	positive	slightly positive	positive
Katie	positive	slightly positive	positive
Matt	negative	slightly positive	positive
Peter	positive	slightly negative	negative
Jill	mixed	negative	negative
Heather	mixed	negative	negative
Lisa	negative	mixed	negative
May	negative	negative	negative
Jessica	negative	negative	negative

As with the previous finding related to teachers' sense of agency, I examined whether there was consistency within participants' responses. As Table 11 shows, four of the participants' responses were consistent across all three data sources: open-ended question, Likert-scale questions, and interview. Annette and Katie's responses across the three sources of data indicated positive attitudes, whereas May and Jill's responses consistently expressed negative attitudes toward mandates.

There were some variations in Jill, Heather, and Lisa's responses. On the survey, Jill and Heather responded to the open-ended question with a mixed attitude toward enacting mandates. Their responses to the Likert-scale items and to the interview questions, however, indicated negative attitudes. Lisa's response to the



Likert-scale questions indicated a mixed attitude, whereas her responses to the open-ended and interview questions indicated a negative attitude.

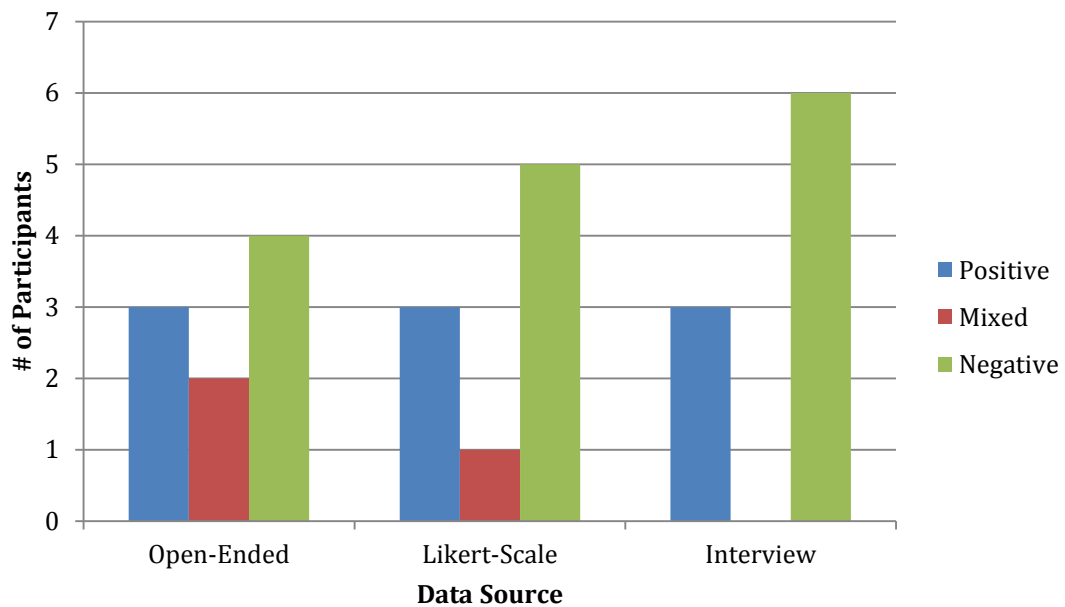
There was a great deal of variation in two participants' responses to the data sources. Matt's response to the open-ended survey question indicated a negative attitude, his response to the Likert-scale questions indicated a slightly positive attitude, and his responses to the interview questions were positive. Conversely, Peter expressed a positive attitude toward mandates on the open-ended survey question, a slightly negative attitude on the Likert-scale items, and a negative attitude during the interview.

Although Matt's responses changed from negative to positive while Peter's changed from positive negative, the work of Argyris and Schon's (1978) on theories of action and organizational learning can help to provide insight into the inconsistencies. People have espoused beliefs and values, as well as the ones that that they actually enact. While the other participants' espoused and enacted beliefs may have been aligned, perhaps Matt and Peter's were not. As such, the open-ended question may have elicited Matt and Peter's espoused beliefs about mandates, whereas the interview experience may have elicited participants' enacted beliefs. When reflecting on their attitudes toward mandates abstractly, drawing from their espoused notions of mandates, Peter's responses indicated more idealized perceptions of mandates, whereas Matt's response was more pessimistic. Conversely, when reflecting on their concrete practice during the interview, drawing from their enacted beliefs about mandates, Peter expressed negative attitudes toward mandates and Matt

was much more positive. Based on the discrepancies between Matt and Peter's survey and interview responses, it is important that researchers collect multiple sources of data.

Interestingly, participants' responses to the interview questions indicated attitudes that were more negative than their survey responses. As seen in Figure 21, the number of participants with positive attitudes remained the same across all three data sources, whereas the number of participants with negative attitudes increased on the interview. This discrepancy may relate to participants' theories of action (Argyris & Schon, 1978), or the difference may relate to participants' identities, which are central to their sensemaking (Weick, 1995). On the survey, participants may have provided responses that were consistent with how they wanted others to perceive them. Because I developed rapport, ensured confidentiality, and expressed how important it was for participants to share their experiences, participants may have been more honest and less concerned about their identities when responding to interview questions, thus presenting attitudes that were more negative about mandates.

Overall, there was consistency or only slight variation across participants' responses to the open-ended survey question, the Likert-scale questions, and the interview. Only two of the participants' responses varied greatly across the three sources of data. The variation in might be understood by considering Argyris and Schon's (1978) work on theories of action and Sensemaking Theory's notion of identity.



*Figure 21. Participants' responses to an open-ended item, Likert-scale items, and interview questions about mandates.*

### **Relationship Between Sense of Agency and Attitude**

The findings discussed thus far have addressed teachers' sense of agency and their attitudes toward mandated change. In order to examine the relationship between these constructs more closely, I created a Cartesian grid (see Figure 22). Participants' Likert-scale scores for sense of agency are represented along the x-axis, and their attitudes are along the y-axis.

In the Cartesian grid, Quadrant I represents a positive attitude toward mandates and a strong sense of agency, which means participants like mandates and make changes to them. Moving counterclockwise, Quadrant II represents a positive attitude toward mandates and a weak sense of agency, which means that participants like

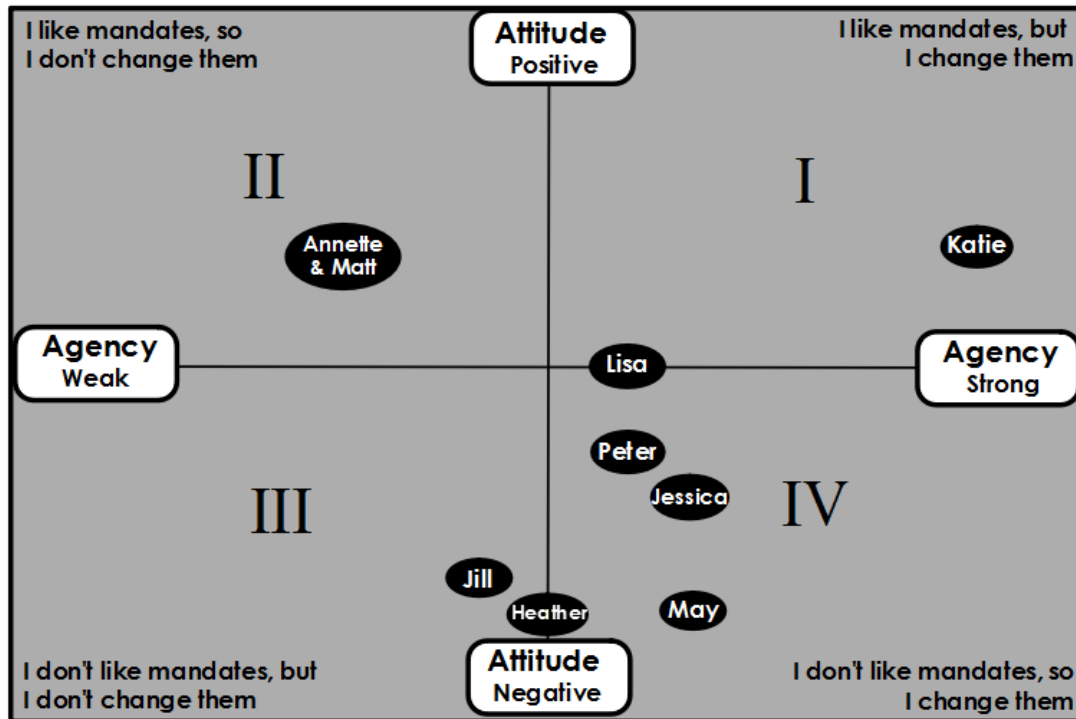


Figure 22. Relationship between teachers' attitudes toward mandates and their sense of agency.

mandates and do not make changes to them. In Quadrant III, participants do not like mandates nor do they make changes to them, as it represents a negative attitude and a weak sense of agency. Finally, Quadrant IV, participants do not like mandates and do make changes to them.

Quadrant II and Quadrant IV represent participants whose agency seems to align with their attitude toward mandates. In Quadrant II, because participants like mandates, they may opt not to make changes to them. Participants in Quadrant IV might make changes to mandates because they have negative attitudes toward mandates. In contrast, Quadrants I and III represent participants whose agency and attitudes do not align. Although they have positive attitudes, they make changes to

mandates (Quadrant I), or although they have negative attitudes toward mandates, they do not make changes to them.

As can be seen in the Cartesian grid, the majority of the participants fall within quadrants that represent aligned agency and attitudes. Peter, Jessica, and May are in Quadrant IV, which suggests that because they have negative attitudes toward mandates, they make many changes to them. Matt and Annette are in Quadrant II, which suggests that they do not make many changes to mandates because they like them. Although two participants are between quadrants, their positions also make sense. Lisa has a mixed attitude toward mandates and some agency. Heather has a negative attitude toward mandates and some agency. Therefore, most of the participants mean scores for agency and attitude toward mandates seem to align.

In contrast, two of the participants are in quadrants that do not suggest aligned agency and attitude. Although Jill has a negative attitude toward mandates, she has a weaker sense of agency, placing her in Quadrant III. A possible explanation for the lack of alignment may relate back to how she changed grade levels this year, which was discussed earlier in the chapter, as well as in the previous chapter. Because she is learning new curriculum, she may not be ready to make many adaptations. Heather is in Quadrant I, suggesting that she likes mandates but has a strong sense of agency. It would seem that teachers who liked mandates would not have a strong desire to make changes to them. As discussed in the previous chapter, however, although Heather's Likert-scale scores indicated a strong sense of agency, her interview responses suggested weaker agency. Thus, she likely belongs in Quadrant II.

By examining participants' sense of agency and attitudes toward mandates, there seems to be a relationship. Participants who expressed negative attitudes about mandates generally expressed stronger senses of agency.

### **Summary and Discussion**

Overall, teachers experienced negative reactions toward mandates. The findings are consistent with prior research on teachers' emotions in the context of educational reform (Kelchermans, 2005; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005; Van Veen, Slegers, & Van de Ven, 2005). Although the teachers in the study generally seemed to be open to change, many of them expressed negative attitudes toward mandated change. They expressed a variety of negative feelings associated with implementing mandates, such as stress, anxiety, and feeling overwhelmed due to the multitude of mandates they were expected to implement. Teachers also experienced frustration for several reasons: lack of involvement in making decisions, the quick speed in which new mandates come, the lack of alignment between mandates and students' needs, and the false premise that mandates could fix everything that was wrong with the public education system. Some participants' negative experiences resulted in challenges in their personal lives. As a means of managing their negative feelings, and perhaps to support their personal lives, participants developed a variety of management strategies, such as focusing on fewer mandates and transferring school sites and/or positions.

Because participants collectively indicated negative feelings associated with implementing mandates, it is likely that the manner in which mandates are introduced

and implemented does not align with how teachers view their practice. One way to foster more positive feelings relates to school culture, which researchers have found to be a key factor in affecting change (Davies, 2005; Fullan, 2003; Hallinger, 1996; Hargreaves, 2007; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Whitaker (1993) found that schools that provide the capacity for developing culture will have more success in enacting change. As such, administrators can nurture their school's culture by promoting a sense of shared values and assumptions (Marris, 1975), and by fostering a collaborative environment (Fullan 1998; Hargreaves, 1997).

Further, administrators can promote reform efforts by adopting a shared leadership perspective. By involving teachers more in decision making processes, teachers negative feelings associated with implementing mandates may be reduced. Honoring teachers' perspectives can support their need for autonomy. Further, according to Wahlstrom and Louis (2008), shared leadership increases trust in teachers' relationships with their administrators, so it also supports a positive school culture.

During their interviews, teachers focused their talk on mandates about which they had negative attitudes and feelings. Therefore, in order to gain more insight into teachers' perspectives of the features that characterized "effective" and "ineffective" mandates, I asked them to describe a mandate that they believed positively affected their practice, as well as one that negatively affected their practice. The next chapter discusses their responses, in terms of the features of these effective and ineffective mandates.

## **Chapter 8**

### **The Importance of Accountability and Outcomes:**

#### **How Teachers Perceive Effective and Ineffective Mandates**

Teachers simultaneously enact multiple mandates in their practice. On a daily basis, they make decisions about whether and how to enact mandates based on their beliefs about teaching and learning and their attitudes and experiences with mandates. Although there is an abundance of research literature about educational reform, research that explicitly examines the relationship between mandates' characteristics and teachers' perceptions does not exist. Therefore, this study explored the question, "How do teachers distinguish between effective and ineffective mandates?"

This chapter discusses the study's fourth and final finding. Using Activity Theory as an analytic lens, the study found that mandates that teachers believe have positively impacted their practice have common features. In addition, mandates that teachers think have negatively or not affected their practice were also found to have common features that differed from the "effective" mandates. Furthermore, there were several elements of mandates that seem to most impact teachers' perceptions about how mandates affected their practice.

This chapter first presents an overview of the mandates that teachers identified as effective and ineffective. Next, I discuss how Activity Theory was applied to the study. Analysis techniques for effective and ineffective mandates are then explained, followed by a discussion of the common features among effective mandates, as well as ineffective ones. Then, I examine the two types of mandates together in order to



determine which aspects of Activity Theory most impact teachers' perceptions of mandates. Finally, the chapter concludes with implications for policymakers about how mandates should be designed.

### **Participant-Identified Effective and Ineffective Mandates**

During the artifact-elicited interview, participants categorized activities as mandated or not mandated, talked about their negative attitudes and emotions related to mandates, and briefly discussed mandates they believed had impacted their practice in positive ways. In order to gain further insight into teachers' perceptions of mandates, I designed a questionnaire. This questionnaire allowed me to learn more about the mandated programs, curriculum, and other activities that teachers believed positively and negatively affected their practice. Further, using Activity Theory as an analytic lens, I used participants' descriptions of mandates to examine each one as an activity system. By analyzing mandates through an Activity Theory lens, I was able to generalize features of mandates that teachers believed impacted their practice.

The questionnaire asked each participant to identify one mandate they believed had a positive impact on their practice and one that did not have a positive impact. For ease of discussion, I labeled these mandates as "effective" and "ineffective," respectively. Table 12 presents the mandates that teachers identified, organized by the origin of the mandate, from the federal level to the local level. A description of each mandate can be found in Table 7 in Chapter 5.

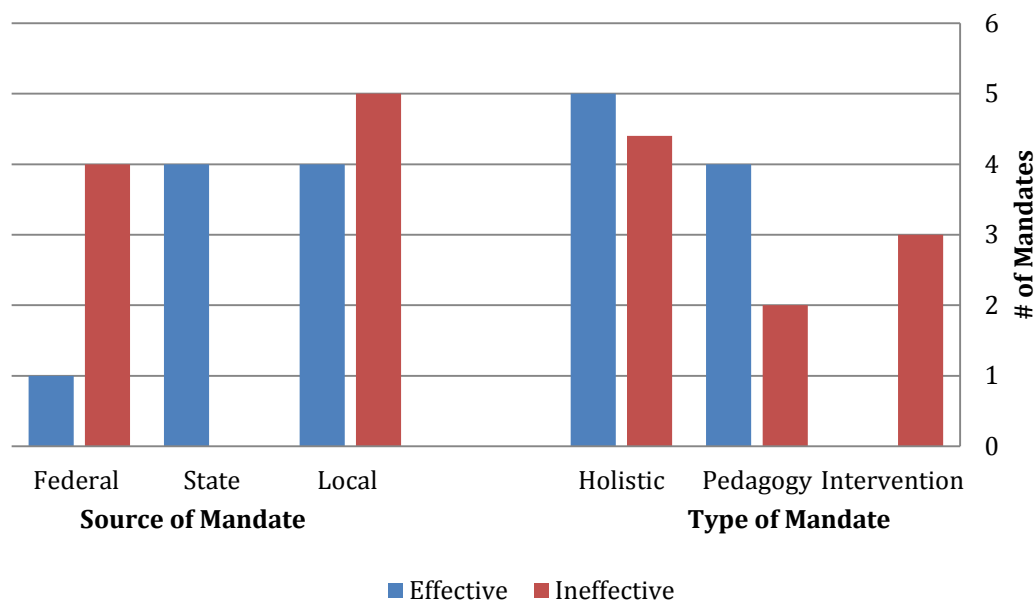
*Table 12. Participant-Identified Effective and Ineffective Mandates, Organized by the Origin of the Mandate, from the Federal Level to Local Level*

Effective	Ineffective
Reading First	No Child Left Behind
Common Core Standards	Turn Around School Model
Common Core Writing	Reading First / Houghton Mifflin
Common Core Math Practice Standards	Instructional Rounds
Common Standards for Each Grade Level	Data Teams
Math Institute and Math Talks	Side By Side
Technology / My Big Campus	Take Home Folders
Thinking Maps	
Daily 5	

Collectively, the participants identified 16 different mandates. Reading First was the only mandate that two different participants identified as both an effective and ineffective mandate. None of the mandates in the “effective” category were repeated, as each teacher mentioned a different mandate. Two participants identified two of the mandates – No Child Left Behind and Side by Side – as ineffective.

In order to analyze the types of mandates teachers identified as effective and ineffective, I categorized them in two ways: by the source of the mandate and by its purpose (see Figure 23). Reading First was the only effective mandate that originated

from federal policy. In contrast, four of the mandates teachers identified as effective were driven by state policy: Common Core Standards, Common Core Math Practice Standards, Common Core Writing, Common standards for each grade level. Finally, four of the effective mandates also came from local policy decisions: Thinking Maps, Daily 5, Math Talks, and Technology/My Big Campus. I also categorized the mandates by their purposes. Four of the effective mandates were designed to impact teachers' pedagogy: Thinking Maps, Daily 5, Math Talks, and Technology/My Big Campus. The other five mandates were more holistic, as they targeted content and pedagogy, and they had curricular and assessment implications: Reading First, Common Core Standards, Common Core Math Practice Standards, Common Core Writing, Common standards for each grade level.



*Figure 23. Teacher-identified effective and ineffective mandates categorized by source and purpose.*

Three of the mandates teachers identified as ineffective were driven by federal policy: Reading First, No Child Left Behind, and Turn Around School Model. Two teachers identified No Child Left Behind, so four of the teachers identified mandates that came from federal policy. None of the mandates teachers identified as ineffective came from state policy. Finally, four of the ineffective mandates originated from local policy: Data Teams, Instructional Rounds, Take Home Folders, and Side by Side. Two teachers identified Side by Side, so five of the teachers' indicated that mandates from the local level were ineffective. I also categorized the ineffective mandates by their purposes. Side by Side, which two teachers identified as ineffective, was the only mandate designed to impact teachers' pedagogy. Three of the mandates were more holistic, as they targeted content and pedagogy, and they had curricular and assessment implications: Reading First, No Child Left Behind, and Turn Around School Model. Again, two of the teachers identified No Child Left Behind, so four of the teachers' responses indicated that holistic programs were ineffective. The remaining three ineffective mandates targeted intervention and accountability: Data Teams, Instructional Rounds, and Take Home Folders.

The holistic mandates that teachers identified came from federal and state policies. This is likely because federal and state policies target a wide variety of goals. In contrast, all of the mandates that targeted pedagogy and intervention came from the local level, which likely relates to Berends, Bodilly, and Kirby's (2002) discussion of how local districts and schools interpret policy and then adapt it to align with their goals and situations. It makes sense that local districts and schools would identify

additional pedagogical mandates in order to implement state and federal policies.

Further, local districts and schools also have to determine interventions that support their specific student population's achievement of federal and state policies.

**Summary.** Participants identified 15 mandates as ones that they believed had positively and negatively affected their practice. Most of the effective mandates came from the state and local level, whereas most of the ineffective mandates resulted from federal and local initiatives. As depicted in Figure 24, the source of the mandates seemed to somewhat relate to the aspects of teaching and learning the mandates targeted. Mandates that targeted intervention resulted from local policy, and teachers generally identified them as ineffective. Teachers also perceived holistic mandates that came from federal policy as ineffective. In contrast, pedagogical mandates that resulted from local policy decisions were generally perceived as effective, as were holistic mandates that came from state policy. Thus, the source and type of mandate seem to relate to teachers' perceptions of their relative effectiveness as mandates.

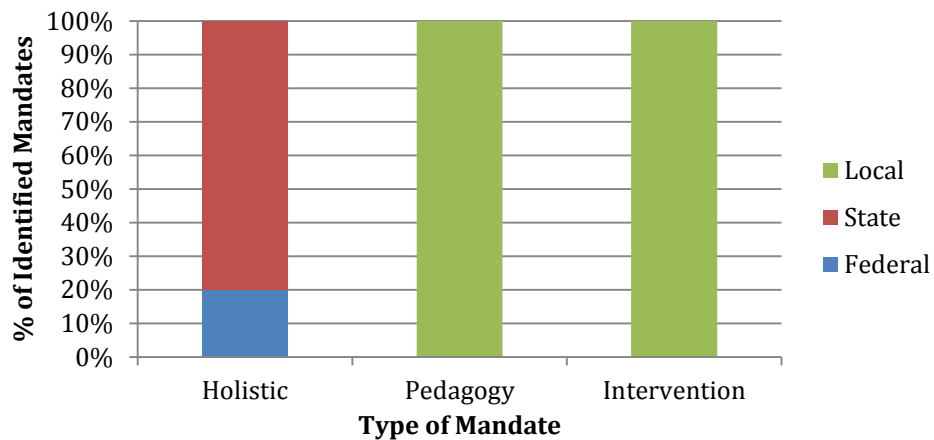


Figure 24. Relationship between the type of mandate and its source.

### Application of Activity Theory to the Study

As discussed in Chapter 4, researchers have traditionally examined educational reform by drawing on sociocultural theory, Sensemaking Theory, and more recently Social Network Theory. Although Activity Theory has provided the theoretical basis for many education-related studies, it has not traditionally been used to research issues related to reform. Mandates associated with educational reform, however, can be conceptualized as activities, as they have subjects, goals, tools, rules, a community, and a division of labor (see Figure 25). By utilizing Activity Theory in this manner, each mandate becomes the unit of analysis. As such, the study extends beyond individual and collective teachers' sensemaking, providing a more thorough understanding of how teachers think about and experience mandates.

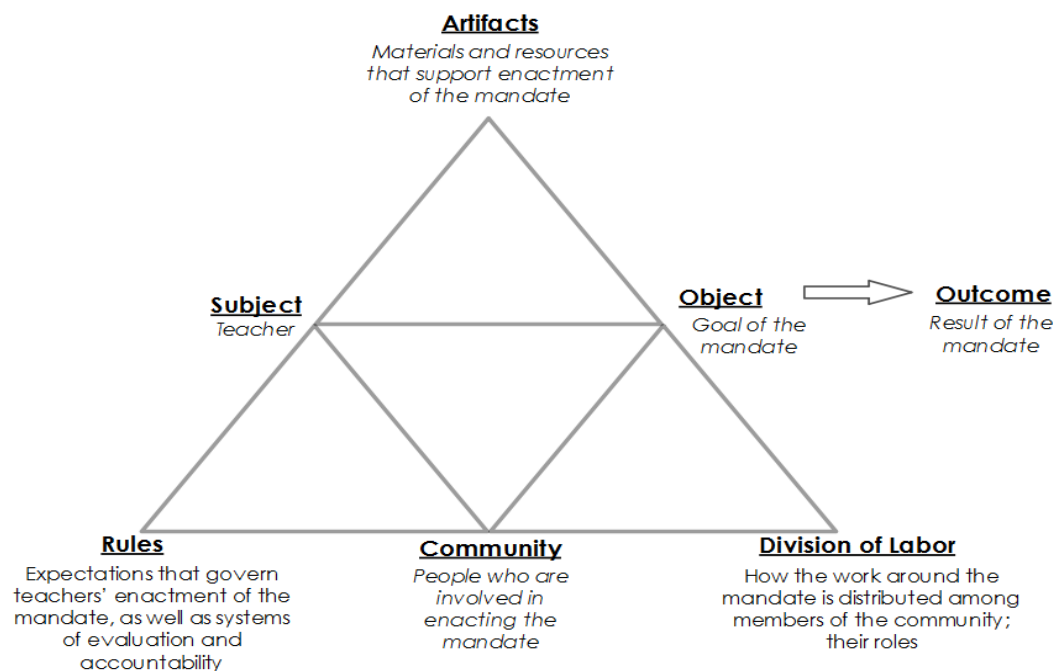


Figure 25. Application of Activity Theory components to mandates.

In order to analyze and interpret participants' responses to the questionnaire, I operationalized each component of Activity Theory as it applied to the study. Table 13 presents each component of Activity Theory, how I defined it in terms of mandates, and examples of how participants responded to the questionnaire.

### **Participant-Identified “Effective” Mandates**

In this section, I present and discuss two of the participant-identified effective mandates' activity systems. I selected two of the mandates in order to illustrate the application of Activity Theory to mandates, yet reduce the redundancy in presenting all nine of the participant-identified mandates. The two mandates best exemplify features of effective mandates. The remaining seven effective mandates' activity system descriptions are in Appendix H.

In order to gain a sense of each mandate, I consulted outside resources, noted parenthetically, to define each mandate. It is important to note that each description represents individual participants' perspectives. Other teachers, and certainly other “subjects” – policymakers, administrators, coaches, parents, students, et cetera – would likely perceive mandates in different ways, depending on their experiences and roles in enacting them. Because the study draws on Sensemaking Theory, however, I was not concerned about reaching a consensus or whether individuals' perspectives were generally accepted.

*Table 13. Definition and Examples of Activity Theory Components as Related to The Study*

Activity Theory Component	Definition	Examples
Subject	The teacher who is charged with enacting the mandate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attitudes</li> <li>• Beliefs</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Experiences</li> </ul>
Object	The goal of the mandate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase test scores</li> <li>• Increase achievement</li> <li>• Decrease undesired behaviors</li> <li>• Decrease</li> <li>• Improve instruction</li> </ul>
Outcomes	What happened as a result of the mandate, which may or may not align with the <i>object/goal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (same as Object)</li> <li>• Increased student engagement</li> </ul>
Artifacts	The materials and resources that support enactment of the mandate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher editions of textbooks</li> <li>• Pacing guides</li> <li>• Lesson plans</li> <li>• Worksheets and other documents,</li> <li>• Materials that students might need</li> <li>• Resources</li> <li>• Professional development / inservices/training</li> </ul>
Rules	The expectations that govern teachers' enactment of the mandate, as well as systems of evaluation and accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Visits</li> <li>• Walkthroughs</li> <li>• Assessments</li> <li>• Feedback</li> <li>• Verbal/Written instructions and expectations</li> </ul>
Community	The people who are involved in enacting the mandate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colleagues</li> <li>• Support teachers (coaches, specialists, intervention teachers)</li> <li>• Staff developers</li> <li>• District and site administrators</li> </ul>
Division of Labor	How the work around the mandate is broken down among members of the community; their roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal introduces the mandate</li> <li>• Coaches model lessons and provide feedback for teachers</li> <li>• Teachers collaborate with their grade level members</li> </ul>



*Common Core Writing (May).* Common Core Writing is a strand of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. The standards include an articulation of three genres of writing from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade: narrative, informative/explanatory, and argument/opinion. (<http://www.achievethecore.org>)

*Subject.* May is an upper grade teacher with 7-11 years of teaching experience. Her survey results indicated that she has a balanced approach to teaching and learning, a negative attitude toward mandates, and some/strong sense of agency (see Chapters 6 and 7). May had a negative first impression of Common Core Writing, not because of the standards, themselves, but because of the district's assessment of the standards.

*Object and Outcomes.* According to May, the main goals of Common Core Writing were for students to understand informational text structures, to write an informational essay using those structures, and to write opinion pieces. May believes the goals are being realized, but she acknowledged that they were still in early stages of implementation. Overall, she believes that the quality of students' writing has improved, and she has also seen an increase in students' reading comprehension.

*Artifacts.* May indicated that resources provided with Common Core Writing have been limited district-wide training sessions for select teachers.

*Rules.* Two teachers per grade level volunteered to participate in district-wide training for Common Core Writing. At the school site, the principal monitored how teachers implemented Common Core Writing by incorporating it into mandated intervention meetings and grade-level meetings. Students also take a district writing test twice a year.

*Community and Division of Labor.* Members of the community included the principal, district coaches, teachers, and grade-level colleagues. District coaches provided ongoing training for selected teachers. The principal participated in intervention meetings and grade-level meetings. Teachers collaborated with their grade-level colleagues to develop curriculum and discuss interventions.

*Math Institute and Math Talks (Matt).* The Math Institute is a district-wide inservice for teachers who volunteer. During Math talks, students engage in dialogue and conversation to explore mathematical thinking. Individually or in groups, students articulate and defend their ideas and analyze the reasoning of others (<http://mathsolutions.com>).

*Subject.* Matt is a primary teacher with 7-11 years of teaching experience. His survey results indicated that he has a balanced approach to teaching and learning, a positive/neutral/mixed attitude toward mandates, and a weaker sense of agency (see Chapters 6 and 7). Matt's first impression was not positive. He indicated that he thought, "Here we go again!" His perspective changed as a result of being an active participant in the mandate.

*Object and Outcomes.* According to Matt, the main goal of the Math Institute/Math Talks was to teach mathematics in a new way with an emphasis on student exploration. Matt believes the goal has been realized in his classroom, but indicated that he "can't speak for the rest of [his] grade level." Matt expressed that students have enjoyed Math Talks and discovering mathematical concepts.

*Artifacts.* Aside from training, there were no resources that came with Math Institute/Math Talks. However, Matt indicated that teachers created materials, and he was able to ask for hands-on manipulatives for students to use. The training did include a framework, video-recorded classroom interactions, and co-planning.

*Rules.* Two teachers per grade level volunteered to participate in a district-wide training during the summer. Matt's principal and teachers from his site observed Matt teaching mathematics. He reported that the observations were passive, as the observers did not "interfere or report back to [him] about how it went." Matt also co-taught a lesson, received feedback, and retaught the lesson to another group of students.

*Community and Division of Labor.* Members of the community included the principal, district coaches, teachers, and grade-level colleagues. District coaches have provided ongoing training for selected teachers. The principal and other teachers observed classroom instruction. Teachers collaborate with their grade-level colleagues to create lessons and engage in reflection. Teachers also co-teach lessons and refine those lessons based on feedback.

*Summary and Discussion.* In order to interpret the participants' responses, I created a system for coding them. I conceptualized a continuum in which element ranged from being "highly present" to "not present" in the participants' experiences with the mandates, based on their descriptions. Table 14 presents the definitions of these labels as they relate to each component of Activity Theory.

After I analyzed participants' responses to the questionnaire, I coded them based on the system that described above. Table 15 displays how I coded the mandates that participants identified as having a positive impact on their practice. Each aspect of Activity Theory is discussed in relation to the effective mandates.

*Table 14. Definition of "Highly Present," "Somewhat Present," and "Not Present" for Each Element of Activity Theory in the Participant-Identified Mandates.*

Activity Theory Component	Highly Present	Mostly Present	Partially Present	Somewhat Present	Not Present
Object & Outcomes	fully realized	mostly realized	partially realized	somewhat realized	not realized
Artifacts	plentiful	somewhat plentiful	adequate	somewhat lacking	lacking
Rules	strict	somewhat strict	moderate	somewhat lax/ permissive	lax/ permissive
Community & Division of Labor	high division of labor	somewhat high division of labor	partial division of labor	somewhat limited division of labor	limited or no division of labor

*Object and Outcomes.* Mandates that positively impacted participants' practice overwhelmingly included goals that participants believed came to fruition because of the mandates' implementations. Seven of the nine mandates had fully realized goals and one mandate's goals were mostly realized. The outlier in this category was Jessica's experience with Reading First, which had goals that were only somewhat realized. She indicated that although the large-scale goals were not realized, students did experience growth and there were a number of other positive

outcomes. None of the mandates that teachers identified as effective had goals that were not realized. Clearly, teachers believe that mandates whose goals and outcomes are aligned positively impact their practice.

*Artifacts.* There was more variation in effective mandate's artifacts than with the object and outcomes. Participants' responses were fairly spread out. Three of the participants described mandates that had plentiful tools, three identified mandates that had adequate tools, and three participants identified mandates with somewhat adequate tools. Interestingly, none of the participants identified effective mandates with tools that were lacking. The variation in participants' responses suggests that teachers may not believe that a mandate's tools are the critical element that makes them effective, as long as the tools are not fully lacking.

*Rules.* Even more variation was present in participants' responses about a mandate's rules. My coding of participants' responses, however, revealed that rules tended toward the middle and were fairly moderate. Only one mandate was coded as having strict rules. Conversely, one rule was also coded as being lax or permissive. Three of the participants' descriptions involved mandates with rules that were somewhat strict, two were moderate, and two were somewhat lax or permissive. This suggests that rules are an important aspect of mandates, and teachers believe effective mandates have rules, expectations, and systems of accountability that are fairly moderate. This finding implies that teachers do want clear expectations and do want

Table 15. Coding of Activity Theory Components of Participant-Identified Effective Mandates

Mandate	Objects & Outcomes				Artifacts				Rules				Community & Division of Labor												
	Fully	Mostly	Partially	Somewhat	Not	Plentiful	Somewhat	Plentiful	Adequate	Somewhat	Lacking	Strict	Somewhat	Strict	Moderate	Somewhat	Lax	High	Somewhat	High	Partial	Somewhat	Limited		
Thinking Maps	x					x						x							x						
Common Core Math Practice Standards	x					x							x							x					
Reading First				x			x						x								x				
Common Standards for Each Grade Level	x						x						x									x			
Common Core Standards	x									x													x		
Daily 5	x									x														x	
Common Core Writing	x									x														x	
Math Institute and Math Talks	x										x													x	
Technology / My Big Campus		x																						x	
Totals	7	1	0	1	0	3	0	3	3	0	1	3	2	2	1	1	3	3	2	0	1	3	2	0	1

to be held accountable; however, they do not believe that mandates that positively affect their practice have high levels of accountability.

*Community and Division of Labor.* There was also quite a bit of variation in participants' descriptions of the community and division of labor; however, they were skewed high. Three of the mandates that participants identified had high levels of division, in which many members of the community shared the work and took on varying roles in implementing mandates. Three of the participants' responses indicated somewhat high levels of division. Two of the participants described a community in which the labor was partially divided. Only one participant, Peter, expressed a limited division of labor with technology/My Big Campus. During our interview, Peter expressed that he enjoyed working with technology and that he had piloted several technology-based programs prior to them becoming district-wide mandates. In his questionnaire, Peter also indicated that he provided support and training sessions to his colleagues. Therefore, Peter seems to be somewhat of an expert when it comes to implementing technology and took on a prominent role in implementing the mandate with his colleagues. As such, it makes sense that he would not conceptualize the division of labor as high. In order for Peter to consider the mandate he reported to be effective to be effective, he did not need a high division of labor. Conversely, several of the mandates teachers identified were in fairly early stages of implementation, and thus fairly new for teachers. For these mandates, teachers expressed moderate to high levels of division of labor within their community. This contrast may suggest that when teachers have a strong background

or a great deal of experience with a mandate, they may not need a high division of labor to conceptualize it as effective. Or, perhaps as teachers gain more experience with a mandate, the division of labor becomes routine, and thus teachers are not aware of how the labor is divided. Conversely, when teachers are experiencing a new mandate or have limited background information or experience, teachers prefer a moderate to high level of division of labor within their community.

*Summary and Discussion.* There were similarities among the mandates that teachers identified as having a positive impact on their practice. Nearly all of the teachers identified effective mandates as having goals that were mostly or fully realized in the mandates' outcomes. Further, although there was some variation in how teachers described the tools and resources that accompanied mandates, none of the teachers identified effective mandates with tools that were absent. Teachers indicated a preference for moderate rules – not too strict and not too lax or permissive. Finally, the mandates that teachers identified as effective had labor that was fairly well divided across the community, especially with newer mandates or ones where teachers had less background knowledge or experience. There were clearly some commonalities in teachers' descriptions of effective mandates. Figure 26 displays a model of an effective mandate. The size of the circles relates to the presence of the features in the model. The larger the circle, the more “highly present” it was in the mandate; the smaller the circle, the less present it was in the mandate (see Table 14 for definitions).



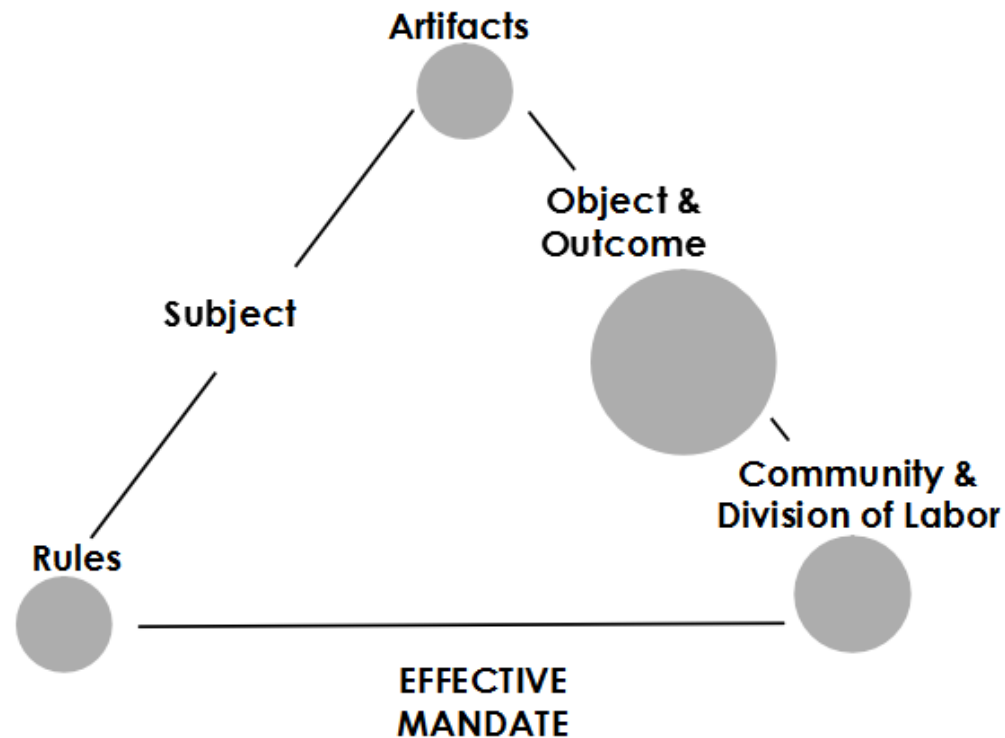


Figure 26. Model of the effective mandates' strong realization of goals, moderate rules, moderate artifacts, and somewhat high division of labor.

### Participant-Identified “Ineffective” Mandates

In this section, I present and discuss two of the participant-identified ineffective mandates' activity systems. As with the effective mandates, I selected two of the mandates in order to illustrate the application of Activity Theory to mandates, yet reduce redundancy in presenting all nine of the participant-identified mandates. The two mandates best exemplify features of ineffective mandates.. The remaining seven ineffective mandates' activity system descriptions are in Appendix I.

As with the effective mandates, different teachers and certainly different “subjects” would likely discuss these mandates differently. Because I wanted to gain

sight into participants' perspectives, I was not concerned about others' perspectives or opinions of the mandates.

*No Child Left Behind (Jill).* No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is a federal policy that aimed for every child to meet minimum proficiency in core subjects through high qualified teachers, research-based strategies, high stakes testing, and sanctions.

*Subject.* Jill is an upper grade teacher with 21-30 years of teaching experience. Her survey results indicated that she has a teacher-centered approach to teaching and learning, a negative attitude toward mandates, and some sense of agency (see Chapters 6 and 7). Jill indicated that she was initially “appalled” when NCLB was first instituted.

*Object and Outcomes.* According to Jill, the main goals of NCLB were to get every child at grade level in reading, writing, and mathematics. Jill does not believe the goals were realized, as the policy failed to acknowledge that not all children are average or above, and some children struggle due to poverty, disabilities, and other factors.

*Artifacts.* Teachers gained access to new textbooks and many training opportunities. Jill indicated that “there was a lot of money being thrown around.”

*Rules.* The main system of accountability was standardized testing. Test scores were publicized and comparisons were made between schools. Jill indicated that site administrators handled NCLB differently, as some “softened the blow” while others were “punitive” and went into classrooms with checklists, ensuring that everyone was on the same page. Teachers were rewarded and faced sanctions.

Schools, in addition to teachers, were held highly accountable by being “put on a list” if they “failed.”

*Community and Division of Labor.* Members of the community included the principal, teachers, and grade-level colleagues. The principal established expectations and monitored teachers’ achievement of them. Teachers routinely collaborated with their colleagues.

*Take Home Folders (Annette).* Take home folders refers to a site-based program where each student was given a folder to bring home important school communications on a weekly basis.

*Subject.* Annette is an upper grade teacher with 21-30 years of teaching experience. Her survey results indicated that she has a balanced/slightly student-centered approach to teaching and learning, a positive/neutral/mixed attitude toward mandates, and a weak sense of agency (see Chapters 6 and 7). Annette’s first impression was “yuck,” as she already had a system in place, with which this interfered.

*Object and Outcomes.* According to Annette, the main goal of the folders was to organize parent communication and to ensure that important items made it home. Annette does not believe the goal was realized, and it is currently “out of sorts,” or not implemented.

*Artifacts.* Teachers were given an initial set of envelopes, but they were not provided with any extras. Teachers were not given instructions or directions.

*Rules.* Teachers were told they were going to implement this system of communication, but there was no accountability or follow-through.

*Community and Division of Labor.* Members of the community included the principal and teachers. The principal introduced the Take Home Folders at the beginning of the year.

*Summary and Discussion.* After I interpreted participants' descriptions of the ineffective mandates, I coded them the same way that I had done so for the effective mandates. Table 16 displays how I coded the mandates that participants identified as having a negative impact on their practice. Each aspect of Activity Theory is discussed in relation to the ineffective mandates.

*Object and Outcomes.* Participants believed that the mandates that did not positively affect their practice included goals were not realized in the mandates' outcomes. Six of the nine participants described mandates with goals that were completely not realized. Three of the mandates had goals that were more aligned with their outcomes. One mandate had goals that were fully realized; however, it also lacked tools and had strict rules. Another mandate had mostly realized goals, but it also had strict rules. Finally, the mandate that had partially realized goals also had lax/permissive rules and lacked tools and resources. The majority of mandates that teachers believed negatively impacted their practice had goals that were not realized in the mandates' implementations. Mandates with partially to fully realized goals had other aspects, such as strict or lacking rules and limited tools, which likely caused participants to deem them as less effective. Thus, the majority of teachers believe that

Table 16. Coding of Activity Theory Components of Participant-Identified Ineffective Mandates

Mandate	Objects & Outcomes			Artifacts					Rules				Community & Division of Labor													
	Fully	Mostly	Partially	Somewhat	Not	Plentiful	Somewhat	Plentiful	Adequate	Somewhat	Lacking	Strict	Somewhat	Strict	Moderate	Somewhat	Lax	Lax	High	Somewhat	High	Partial	Somewhat	Limited	Limited	
Side By Side				x				x									x						x			
Take Home Folders				x						x								x								x
Turn Around School Model				x							x															x
No Child Left Behind				x								x														x
No Child Left Behind				x																						x
Data Teams																										x
Instructional Rounds	x																									
Side By Side																										x
Reading First / Houghton Mifflin																										x
Totals	1	1	1	0	6	3	0	2	1	3	5	1	0	0	3	2	0	3	2	0	3	2	0	3	2	2

mandates whose goals and outcomes are misaligned do not have a positive impact on their practice.

*Artifacts.* There was more variation in ineffective mandate's artifacts than with their object and outcomes. Participants' responses were fairly spread out. Three of the participants' described mandates that had plentiful tools, two identified mandates with adequate tools, one of the mandates had somewhat adequate tools, and three participants described mandates with a lack of tools. The mandates' tools, therefore, were quite spread out along the continuum of being plentiful to lacking. The variation in participants' responses suggests that teachers may not believe that a mandate's tools are a critical element that makes them ineffective.

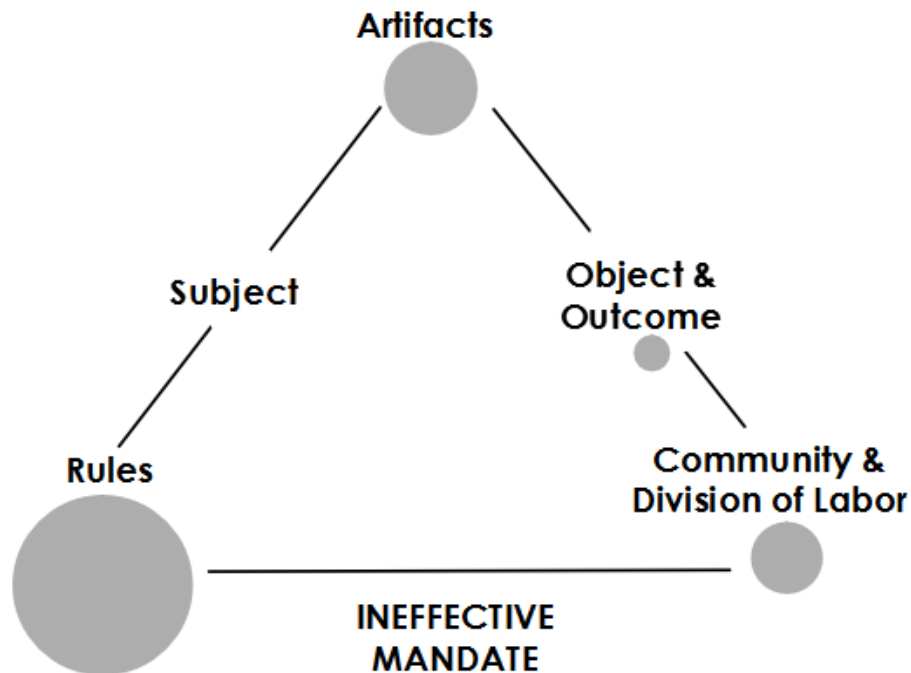
*Rules.* Participants' description of ineffective mandates' rules tended toward the extremes. Six of the nine participants discussed the rules, expectations, and systems of accountability as being strict (five participants) or fairly strict (one participant). Conversely, three participants discussed mandates' rules as being on the other end of the continuum, as lax or permissive. This suggests that rules are an important aspect of mandates, and teachers believe ineffective mandates have rules, expectations, and systems of accountability that are at opposite ends of the spectrum: strict or lax/permissive. This finding implies that teachers may want moderate levels of accountability.

*Community and Division of Labor.* There was quite a bit of variation in participants' descriptions of the division of labor within their community. Two of the participants indicated that mandates had high levels of division, in which many

members of the community shared the work and took on varying roles in implementing mandates. Three of the participants described a community that had a partial division of labor. Two participants' descriptions indicated somewhat limited divisions of labor, and two of the participants described a limited division of labor. Overall, my coding of the participants' descriptions was skewed low. Although there was quite a bit of variation in the division of labor, the mandates that teachers identified as not having a positive impact on their practice tended to have limited to partial division of labor.

*Summary and Discussion.* There were similarities among the mandates that teachers identified as having a negative or no impact on their practice. Nearly all of the teachers identified mandates with goals that were not realized in the mandates' outcomes. If the goals were realized, however, the mandates had other negative attributes. Further, there was a great deal of variation in how teachers described the tools and resources that accompanied mandates, suggesting that the tools are not a major factor in whether mandates are deemed ineffective. The majority of mandates tended to have rules that were strict; however, a third of the participants also described ineffective mandates as having lax or permissive rules. Finally, although there was quite a bit of variation in teachers' descriptions of how labor was divided across the community with ineffective mandates, the division tended to be skewed low, with partial and limited division. There are clearly similarities in the mandates that teachers identified as ineffective. Figure 27 displays a model of an ineffective mandate. The size of the circles relates to the presence of the features in the model.

The larger the circle, the more “highly present” it was in the mandate; the smaller the circle, the less present it was in the mandate (see Table 14 for definitions).



*Figure 27. Model of the ineffective mandates' lack of goal realization, strict rules, moderate artifacts, and slightly low division of labor.*

### Summary and Discussion

In order to determine whether mandates that positively and negatively impacted teachers' practice had similar profiles, I designed the questionnaire to gather information about their activity systems. Using Activity Theory as an analytic framework, I coded participants' descriptions of the objects and outcomes, artifacts, rules, and division of labor within their communities associated with the effective and ineffective mandates they identified. I found patterns within each of the components of Activity Theory for effective and ineffective mandates. I also found patterns



between effective and ineffective mandates, which are discussed in this section, as well.

In this section, I present graphic representations of effective and ineffective mandates as they relate to the components of Activity Theory. I used an area model in order to highlight contrasts between effective and ineffective mandates. As such, some of the data are obscured. Although the obscured data are not important in the finding that is being highlighted, it makes sense to include the complete data set in a table.. Therefore, Table 17 displays all the data presented in the graphs. The numbers refer to the number of times that I coded the features of mandates as *highly present* to *not present*.

*Table 17. Features of Effective and Ineffective Mandates for Activity Theory Components*

Features of Mandates	Type of Mandate	Highly Present	Mostly Present	Partially Present	Somewhat Present	Not Present
Realization of Goals	Effective	7	1	0	1	0
	Ineffective	1	1	1	0	6
Adequacy of Tools	Effective	3	0	3	3	0
	Ineffective	3	0	2	1	3
Strictness of Rules	Effective	1	3	2	2	1
	Ineffective	5	1	0	0	3
Division of Labor	Effective	3	3	2	0	1
	Ineffective	2	0	3	2	2

***Realization of Goals.*** There was a clear difference in how participants discussed the object and outcomes of effective and ineffective mandates (see Figure

28). Nearly all of the teachers identified effective mandates with goals that were mostly or fully realized in the mandates' outcomes. Conversely, nearly all of the teachers' ineffective mandates had goals that were not realized in the mandates' outcomes. With such a stark contrast, it is likely that mandates' goals and outcomes play a prominent role in whether or not teachers believe they positively or negatively affect their practice.

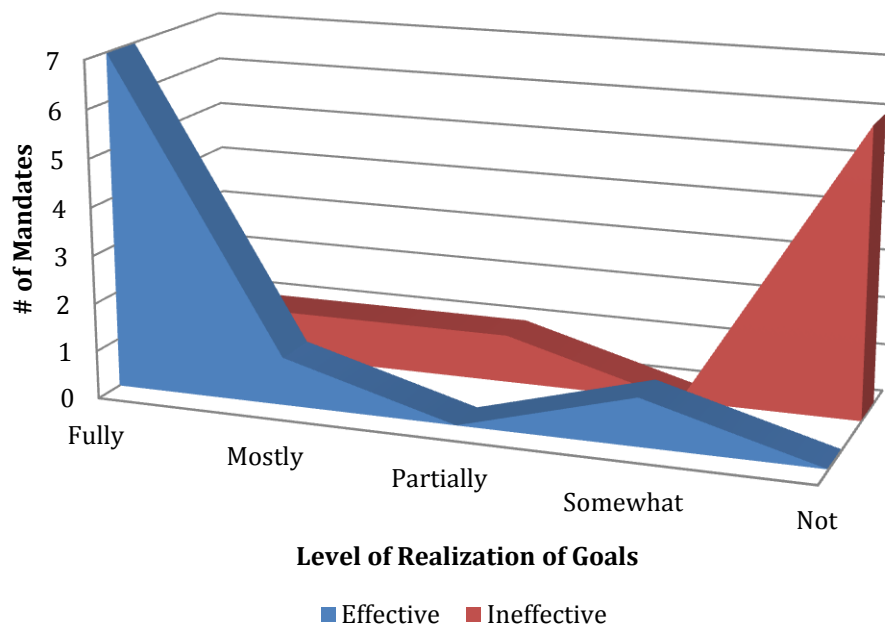


Figure 28. Comparison effective and ineffective mandates' realization of goals.

**Adequacy of Tools.** There was quite a bit of variation in how participants discussed effective and ineffective mandates' artifacts (see Figure 29). The only difference is that none of the mandates that teachers identified as effective completely lacked tools. The great deal of variation in the tools and resources that support

mandates' implementations suggests that tools are not a major factor in whether teachers consider mandates to be effective or ineffective.

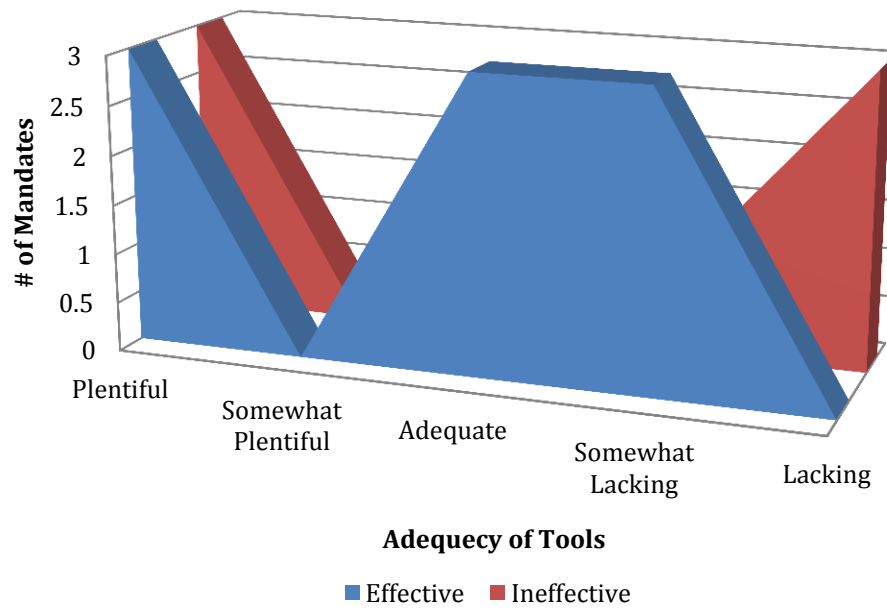


Figure 29. Comparison of effective and ineffective mandates' tools.

**Strictness of Rules.** There was a clear difference in how participants discussed the rules, expectations, and measures of accountability associated with effective and ineffective mandates (see Figure 30). Mandates that teachers identified as effective tended to have moderate rules – not too strict and not too lax or permissive. In contrast, ineffective mandates tended to have strict rules, with some participants indicating lax or permissive rules. Because there is such a contrast in the rules associated with effective and ineffective mandates, it seems that rules play a prominent role in how teachers conceptualize mandates.

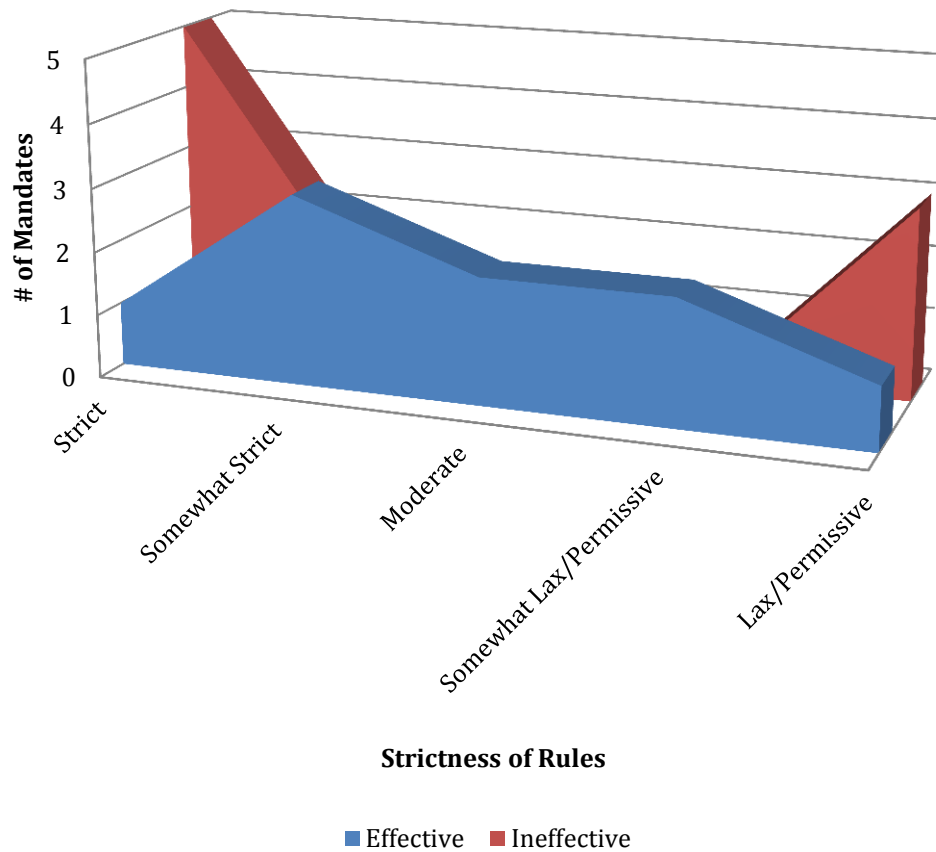


Figure 30. Comparison effective and ineffective mandates' rules.

**Community and Division of Labor.** Although there was quite a bit of variation in how teachers discussed mandates' divisions of labor, there was a difference between effective and ineffective mandates. Overall, mandates that teachers identified as effective tended to be skewed toward higher levels of division, while ineffective mandates tended to be skewed toward lower levels of division, as can be seen in Figure 31. The difference in effective and ineffective mandates' division of labor is not as pronounced as the difference in object and outcomes or

rules, but it does seem to be more pronounced than the difference in tools. Therefore, the division of labor likely plays a factor in how teachers conceptualize mandates, but it does not play a prominent role in whether they believe mandates are effective or ineffective.

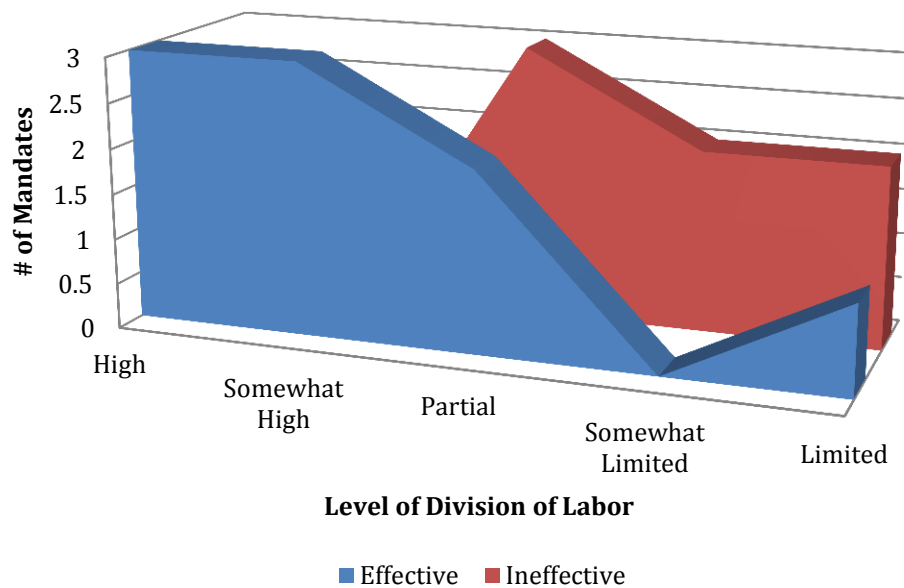
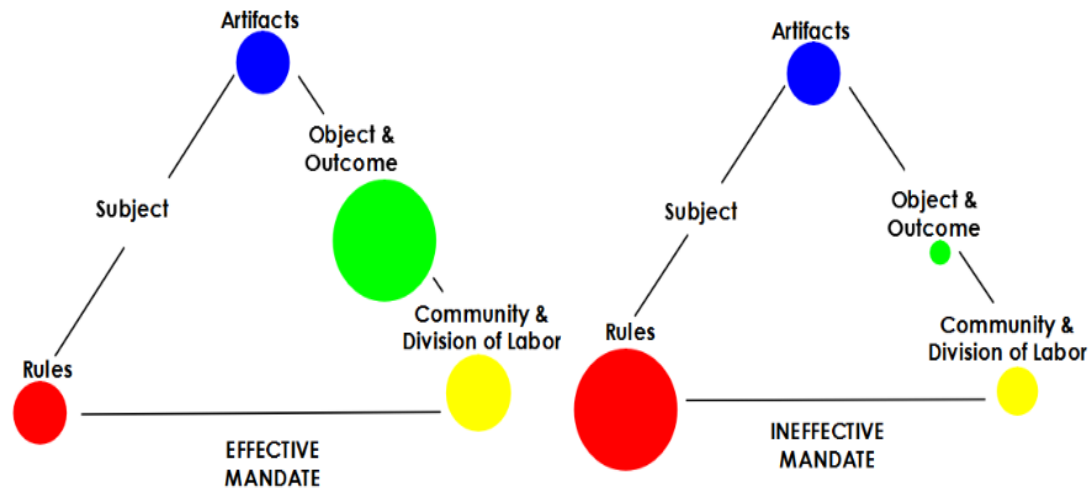


Figure 31. Comparison effective and ineffective mandates' division of labor within the community.

**Summary and Discussion.** The purpose of the questionnaire was to ascertain whether mandates that teachers believed positively and negatively impacted their practice had separate, similar profiles. By using Activity Theory as an analytic framework, I found out that there were differences in how teachers conceptualized mandates. I found that effective mandates had a high realization of goals, moderate rules, moderate artifacts, and a slightly high division of labor. In contrast, ineffective mandates were characterized by a lack of goal realization, strict rules, moderate

artifacts, and a slightly low division of labor. This difference is highlighted in Figure 32, where the models of the mandates that were presented are now seen side-by-side for comparison purposes.



*Figure 32. Side-by-side comparison of effective and ineffective mandates' activity systems.*

The side-by-side comparison highlights the similarities and differences between the mandates' activity systems, which provide insight into the factors that play a role in whether teachers tended to conceptualize mandates as effective or ineffective. The artifacts in both mandates' activity systems were both fairly moderate, suggesting that tools and resources do not seem to play a prominent role in whether teachers found mandates to be effective or ineffective. There was a slight difference in the mandates' division of labor, as effective mandates tended to have higher levels of division, and ineffective mandates tended to have lower levels of division. The difference suggests that how labor is divided with a mandate may play some role in how teachers conceptualize it. The starkest contrasts between effective

and ineffective mandates was found with the realization goals and their rules.

Effective mandates had goals that were realized and fairly moderate rules, whereas ineffective mandates had goals that were not realized and strict or permissive rules.

Therefore, the most important factors in whether a teacher conceptualizes a mandate as effective or ineffective seem to relate to whether or not its goals are realized, as well as to the rules associated with implementing and evaluating teachers' implementation of mandates. Based on these findings, that goals and rules are central to teachers' determinations of whether a mandate is effective or ineffective, it may be possible to reconsider how mandates are designed. Policymakers, administrators, and others who conceptualize mandates can develop them in ways that align with how teachers conceptualize effective and ineffective mandates.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Conclusion**

#### **Overview of the Study**

Teachers' practice is complex, and it is made even more so as they are required to implement multiple mandates that target a variety of aspects of teaching and learning, such as curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, intervention, and student behavior. Research in field of educational reform has tended to focus on large-scale implementation, policy interpretation and enactment, and strategies and conditions that administrators can employ to facilitate change. There are also bodies of literature about the complex nature of teaching, how teachers make sense of and enact reform, and a few exploratory studies about multiple reforms. Teachers' perspectives and experiences, however, as they manage multiple mandates related to reform efforts is a largely unexamined area of study. Therefore, I pursued this study in order to gain insight teachers' senses of and experiences with implementing mandated activities and programs related to large- and small-scale reform efforts.

The overarching research question that guided this study is: How do teachers experience multiple mandates? Four sub-questions aided in addressing the overarching question:

1. How do teachers conceptualize mandates?
2. What are teachers' attitudes toward and feelings about mandates?
3. How do teachers describe their enactment of multiple mandates?



#### 4. How do teachers distinguish between effective and ineffective mandates?

Participants in the study included nine elementary school teachers who had contrasting orientations toward teaching and learning, a range of teaching experience, and varying attitudes toward change. In order to address the research questions, I collected and analyzed three data sources. I designed a survey to collect a variety of information about teachers, such as demographics, their attitudes toward change and mandates, their sense of agency when enacting mandates, and their orientation to teaching and learning. Teachers also identified mandates they had implemented over the past few years. I analyzed the survey data both qualitatively and quantitatively. The participants also took part in an interview, which was conducted in their classrooms in order to gain insight into how they made sense of mandates and their perspectives and experiences implementing them. Finally, I designed a questionnaire in order to learn about the mandates that participants believed affected their practice in positive and negative ways. I analyzed the questionnaire data by examining the mandates through the lens of Activity Theory.

#### **Summary of Findings**

The sources of data and analysis methods were fruitful in addressing the study's research questions, each of which is addressed in this section.

##### *How do teachers conceptualize mandates?*

There was quite a bit of variation in how teachers conceptualized mandates. The teachers in the study expressed contrasting ideas about what they believed it

meant for an activity to be “mandated.” Because they possessed different definitions of “mandate,” which related to the source and expectation associated with implementing an activity, it was not surprising that teachers held different perspectives regarding whether or not activities at their site were mandated. Although there was strong agreement among the participants for slightly over half of the activities, there was limited agreement about the other activities. When considering the implications at a school site, the lack of agreement among teachers could be quite problematic. On one hand, many teachers could be spending a great deal of time and effort on activities that are not mandated; conversely, many teachers might not spend any time or energy on activities that are mandated.

I was surprised by how the participants approached the activity sort, as they engaged in a great deal of thought and negotiation when they determined whether to classify an activity as a mandate or not a mandate. I was initially interested in the final sort, but I realized that the process of the sort revealed a great deal about participants’ sensemaking of mandates. When sorting the activities, participants drew from their definitions of mandates, considered the level of expectation associated with implementing them, and they considered their attitude toward the activities. The difficulties participants experienced when determining whether or not activities were mandated suggests that they are unclear about their administrator’s expectations about implementing the activities.

*How do teachers describe their enactment of multiple mandates?*

Although there were differences in how the participants spoke about implementing mandates in their practice, all of the teachers indicated that they tended to approach their practice with some agency, adapting mandates to meet the needs of their students and to align with their beliefs about teaching and learning. While none of the participants overtly stated that they desired autonomy, their sense agency and tendency to adapt mandates suggests that being afforded some freedom and choice are critical to their practice. All of the participants indicated that autonomy was important at the classroom level, and a few participants expressed an interest in having autonomy at the site- and district-level by taking part in some of the decision-making. Many of the participants also indicated that they want to be treated as professionals, who possess the knowledge and experience to make decisions that meet the needs of their students.

Not surprisingly, the results of the study indicate that teachers generally approach their practice with a sense of agency. By drawing from their prior experiences and reflecting upon their beliefs about teaching and learning, teachers routinely make changes to mandates. It is important to remember that some researchers, administrators, and other stakeholders might classify teachers' adaptation as resistance. In this study, none of the teachers were resistant to implementing mandates. However, teachers did say that there were some mandates that did not meet the needs of their students. These teachers seemed to draw from their repertoire and at

times implemented programs, strategies, and activities that they believed were more effective than the ones that were mandated.

Their sense of agency and tendency to adapt mandates suggests that teachers strongly desire opportunities to express autonomy in their practice. Several of the participants also discussed times when they were not allowed to exercise their autonomy. One teacher talked about how he felt stifled and uninspired. Several participants indicated that a lack of opportunity to voice their opinions and to make choices about their practice left them feeling demoralized. Therefore, it seems that teachers need time and space to exercise their autonomy.

***What are teachers' attitudes toward and feelings about mandates?***

Teachers in the study generally experienced negative reactions toward mandates. Although participants generally seemed to be open to change, many of them expressed negative attitudes toward mandated change. They expressed a variety of negative feelings associated with implementing mandates, such as stress, anxiety, and feeling overwhelmed due to the multitude of mandates they were expected to implement. Teachers also experienced frustration due to a lack of involvement in making decisions, the quick speed in which they were expected to implement new mandates, the lack of alignment between mandates' goal and structures and students' needs, and the false premise that mandates could fix everything that was wrong with the public education system. Although I never asked participants about their personal lives, some of them revealed that the stress and anxiety associated with their practice had adversely affected their personal relationships. As a means of managing their

negative feelings, and perhaps to remedy the difficulties they faced in their personal lives, participants developed a variety of management strategies, such as focusing on fewer mandates and transferring school sites and/or positions.

The negative attitudes and feelings that participants experienced suggests that the manner in which mandates are introduced and implemented does not align with how teachers view their practice.

*How do teachers distinguish between effective and ineffective mandates?*

There were similarities in the mandates that teachers believed positively impacted their practice, as well as similarities in mandates that teachers believed had no effect upon or affected their practice negatively. There were also specific aspects of mandates' activity systems that seemed to influence how teachers perceived mandates.

Mandates that teachers identified as "effective" had similar characteristics. Nearly all of the teachers identified mandates with mostly or fully realized goals. In addition, although there was some variation in how teachers described the tools and resources that accompanied mandates, none of the effective mandates fully lacked tools. Teachers indicated a preference for moderate rules – not too strict, and not too lax or permissive. Finally, the labor in effective mandates was fairly well divided across the community, especially with newer mandates or ones where teachers had less background knowledge or experience.

There were also similarities among the mandates that teachers identified as having a negative or no impact on their practice. Nearly all of the teachers identified mandates with unrealized goals. For the mandates that had aligned goals and

outcomes, however, there were other negative attributes. There was a great deal of variation in how teachers described the tools and resources that accompanied ineffective mandates, suggesting that the tools were not a major factor in whether mandates were deemed ineffective. Most ineffective mandates tended to have rules that were strict; however, a third of the participants also described ineffective mandates as having lax or permissive rules. Finally, although there was quite a bit of variation in teachers' descriptions of the division of labor across the community, it tended to be skewed low.

Although I assumed there would be some similarities between effective and ineffective mandates, I did not realize that they would be so pronounced. Clearly, the realization of mandates' goals, as well as the rules and systems of evaluation and accountability played the largest role in how teachers conceptualized mandates. Effective mandates had goals that were realized and fairly moderate rules, whereas ineffective mandates had goals that were not realized and strict or permissive rules. Surprisingly, although limited tools negatively affected teachers' attitudes and feelings, it was not a key factor in whether teachers conceptualized mandates as effective or ineffective.

***Overarching Research Question: How do teachers experience multiple mandates?***

In light of the four findings that have been discussed, teachers generally seem to have experienced multiple mandates in negative ways. Related to the first finding, simply defining the term "mandate" elicited stress in some participants. In addition,

teachers had difficulty answering the seemingly straightforward question: Are these activities mandated or not mandated? The task of categorizing activities as “mandates” and “not mandates” seemed to create discomfort in some participants. Therefore, if teachers lack clarity about whether or not activities are mandated, they may have feelings that contribute to their overall negative experience with mandates.

Teachers’ uneasiness with the sorting activity was just the beginning of the story about their negative experiences with mandates. Not only did teachers express uncertainty and discomfort when defining and categorizing mandates, but also, as the third set of findings revealed, teachers experienced a variety of negative feelings when implementing mandates. Although teachers did indicate that some mandates had in fact positively affected their practice, most of the talk in their interviews focused on the stress, anxiety, sense of feeling overwhelmed, and frustration that they experienced while enacting mandates.

Uncovering the features of effective and ineffective mandates, which relate to the fourth set of findings, provides some insight into the nature of teachers’ experiences with multiple mandates. Effective mandates have a strong realization of goals and moderate rules. Teachers seem to want some accountability, but at the same time, they view agency and autonomy as important elements of their practice. In contrast, ineffective mandates had either strict rules or very lax ones, and they also had goals that were not realized in their outcomes. During the interview, teachers expressed that many activities were not effective. As such, it seems that teachers believe that ineffective mandates are common in their practice. Thus, the multitude of

ineffective mandates that teachers are routinely required to implement may contribute to their negative attitudes toward and feelings about mandates.

Considering the findings, it seems that the manner in which mandates are implemented does not align with how teachers view their practice. Teachers approach their practice with agency, as they work to exercise their autonomy by adapting, rather than simply adopting, mandates. Therefore, when teachers are required to implement mandates that do not align with their beliefs about teaching and learning, when they experience high levels of accountability, or when teachers are required to implement programs that fail to produce the results they are promised, teachers react negatively. As a consequence, teachers' sense of their professional identities may suffer, which may also result in further negative experiences.

By conducting this study, I hoped the findings would inform policymakers and others who conceive, introduce, and monitor reforms about teachers' experiences. I also hoped that the stakeholders involved in reform would consider teachers' perspectives as they develop and carry out future policies, programs, curriculum, and other activities that teachers are routinely required to implement in their practice. Although there are a few limitations to the study, there are several important implications for policy, practice, and research, which are discussed below.

### **Limitations**

As with any research study, this one has a few limitations. First, the study was conducted with elementary teachers. As such, the findings may not apply to the experiences of middle and high school teachers. In addition, the study was conducted



at one school in a single district. Therefore, teachers at a different school even within the same district might have experienced mandates differently than the teachers at Rolling Hills. In addition, because many mandates come from the district level, teachers in other districts may also experience mandates differently.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The study's limitations can provide opportunities for future research. The study could be replicated at additional elementary schools in the district, as well as at elementary schools in different districts in order to determine whether the participants in this study represented elementary teachers in other schools and regions. Further, the study could also be replicated with middle and high school teachers to gain insight into how they experience mandates.

In addition, I found that teachers' attitudes and agency seemed to be related to one another. Teachers with negative attitudes toward mandates tended to make changes to them, whereas teachers with positive attitudes tended not to make as many changes. Although I did employ some quantitative methods, I heavily relied on qualitative methods in order to listen to teachers' voices and to gain insight into their perspectives about implementing mandates. Because I predominately engaged in qualitative analysis, in addition to having a small number of participants, I did not employ quantitative tests to determine if a statistically significant relationship existed between teachers' attitudes and their sense of agency. As such, further research on the association between teachers' agency and attitude could be pursued.

Further, I drew from Activity Theory to ascertain whether there were common features of mandates that teachers perceived as having a positive and negative impact on their practice. I found that the mandates' rules and the alignment between the mandates' objects and the outcomes seemed to be the most important in whether teachers labeled mandates as effective or ineffective. Although I found features of mandates' activity systems that seemed to be the most critical for teachers, I did not investigate the relationship between them. Therefore, additional research is certainly needed to understand how a mandate's subject, tools, goals, outcomes, rules, community, and division of labor interact with one another. In addition, the interaction between elements of the mandates' activity system could also be simulated in multi-agent models using NetLogo computer application (Wilensky, 1999). Several researchers (e.g., Halter & Levin, 2013; Levin & Datnow, 2012a, 2012b) have used the computer application to model educational phenomena related to teaching, learning, and educational reform. Understanding more about the interaction between a mandate's features could help those charged with designing mandates to create ones that teachers perceive as effective.

This study generated implications, not only for topics that can be researched, but also for ideas about how to conduct research on educational reform. Throughout the discussion of the study's findings, I compared participants' survey results with their interview responses. Although there was congruence for some participants, I found that there were many inconsistencies. It seemed that participants often responded to survey items by considering their identities and their espoused beliefs,

which were not always aligned with their enacted beliefs. In contrast, because I developed rapport with the participants during the interviews and because the interviews were conducted in their classrooms, participants were prompted to think about their enacted practice. The discrepancies between participants' responses suggest that not only is it important to gather multiple sources of data, but when studying teachers' perspectives, it is important to go beyond survey data. Teachers' voices can be more clearly and honestly heard through interviews and other qualitative techniques. Although large data sets provide the field with information about many participants' attitudes and implementation, studies that employ qualitative methods can provide further insight into teachers' stories and experiences, which seems to be critical to understanding the broad topic of educational reform.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

Throughout the study, teachers generally expressed negative attitudes toward implementing mandates, which related to a variety of factors, such as the speed in which new mandates were introduced, the lack of resources that came with them, the mismatch between mandates and their students' needs, and expectations about how to implement mandates. Teachers' negative feelings are likely related to their negative attitudes about mandates, as well. How teachers think and feel about mandates suggests that the manner in which mandates are implemented is not aligned with how teachers view their practice. As such, administrators should reconsider how they introduce mandates to teachers, the expectations they have about how teachers implement them, and the support they can offer teachers as they implement mandates.

Teachers need time to experiment with mandates in order to integrate them into their practice. In addition, teachers need sufficient resources, such as training and materials, in order to implement them successfully. By introducing and implementing mandates in a manner that aligns with teachers' needs and beliefs, teachers may have feelings and attitudes that might be more positive.

As Schmidt and Datnow (2005) pointed out, many researchers consider teachers to be the centerpiece to educational change. As such, it is essential that their voices play a prominent role in educational reform. As one of the teachers in the study pointed out, teachers are not “widgets.” Teachers have gone through extensive training and have engaged in their complex practice daily; therefore, teachers have strong opinions and a wealth of knowledge about teaching and learning. Teachers need opportunities to voice their opinions in authentic situations in which their perspectives are listened to and valued. Individual school sites, and districts, as well, can develop systems to gain insight into teachers' perspectives about implementing mandates. Administrators can employ surveys, as well as offer opportunities for open comments about mandates. Teachers should also be involved in decision-making processes about how mandates are designed, introduced, and expectations around implementing them. Involving teachers in decision-making and listening to their voices may help to support their professional identities and positive attitudes about mandated activities.

In addition, because teachers are agents of change who have a tendency to adapt mandates, they need to opportunities to exercise their autonomy. As Day (2002)

and Apple (1986) pointed out, losing autonomy negatively affects teachers' professional and personal identities, which are key variables in their motivation, job fulfillment, commitment, and self-efficacy. Olsen and Sexton (2009) also found that environments that had high-levels of threat rigidity negatively affected teachers' identities. Therefore, instead of limiting teachers' autonomy and adversely affecting their identities by labeling those who adapt mandates as "resisters" or expecting that teachers implement mandates with fidelity, it is essential that teachers are provided with the time and space to explore mandates. Teachers need time to make sense of mandates, and to determine how to implement them in a manner that aligns with their beliefs about teaching and learning. Administrators can support teachers' autonomy and nurture their professional identities by creating safe, supportive environments. As Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002) pointed out, individual teachers cannot enact change alone; thus, as they state, it is important to consider structural and cultural features of a school environment that support teachers' agency. Principals can also encourage teachers to take risks. One way of doing so is by highlighting ways that teachers have successfully adapted mandates. Providing teachers with an environment in which they can exercise their autonomy should support their identities and may help to decrease their negative feelings

Furthermore, because there was such little agreement among teachers regarding whether activities were actually mandated, administrators should clearly articulate their expectations about activities at their school site. Principals ought to tell teachers which activities are mandated and which ones teachers do not need to

implement. Further, when new mandates are introduced, principals should decide how to proceed. Is a new mandate replacing an old mandate or complementing an existing mandate? Site administrators need to reflect on how they introduce mandates, as well as their expectations about implementation. In order to help teachers understand which activities are mandated, and to reduce teachers' sense of feeling overwhelmed, administrators should prioritize mandates, and clearly articulate their expectations to teachers. It is important to note that administrators are also likely under a great deal of pressure to support district mandates. High levels of accountability for administrators likely leads to environments that have high levels of threat rigidity (Olsen & Sexton 2009). As such, district personnel ought to listen to site administrators' perspectives and come together to find ways to support them, in order for school administrators to be able to support their teaching staff.

Finally, by analyzing mandates through the lens of Activity Theory, I found that mandates teachers believed were effective had distinct features, as did mandates that teachers believed were ineffective. There were two primary factors that related to whether teachers believed a mandate affected their practice positively or negatively: whether a mandate's goals were realized in its outcomes, and the rules, expectations, and systems of accountability associated with implementing a mandate. It was also important that a mandate was not completely lacking tools and resources and that the work around implementing mandates was well-divided among various members of the community. These findings suggest that if those in charge of designing mandates can create ones with viable goals and adequate tools, if those in charge of monitoring

mandates do so with moderate rules and systems of accountability, and if there is adequate support and distribution of the work among community members, teachers will find mandates to be effective.

Thus, if we want educational reform to actually result in changes that benefit learners, then we need to include teachers in decision-making processes, create supportive environments, foster teachers' autonomy, clearly articulating expectations, consider which mandates should be implementing, and improve the design and implementation of mandates.

### **Final Thoughts**

Because of my own experiences, as well as my colleagues', I was compelled to explore how elementary teachers experienced multiple mandates associated with small- and large-scale educational reform. After consulting the research literature, I discovered that although there was a wealth of information about reform, there was not much about multiple reforms or mandates, nor did the literature seem to reflect teachers' voices. As such, I developed this research study to learn more how teachers experienced multiple mandates. In doing so, I hoped the findings would inform policymakers and others who conceive, introduce, and monitor reforms about teachers' experiences, so that they would consider teachers' perspectives as they develop and carry out policies, programs, curriculum, and other activities that teachers are routinely required to implement in their classrooms. Although my findings were generally anticipated and in line with what I had seen teachers experiencing, I was surprised by the extent to which teachers experiences were negative.

This research study provides important insights into how teachers experience multiple mandates associated with small- and large-scale educational reform. Because teachers are considered to be “centerpiece of educational change” (Schmidt & Datnow, 2005, p.949), it is essential that everyone involved in conceptualizing and enacting educational reform - policymakers, curriculum developers, authors of textbooks, district personnel, administrators - listens to their voices. Teachers’ experiences need to be understood and valued in order to make the public system of education work for all children in the United States.



## Appendices

### Appendix A: Email Invitation to Teachers

Dear Teachers,

I am currently a doctoral student in the Teaching and Learning program in the Department of Education Studies at UCSD. I am interested in learning about how teachers manage the complexities of their work, part of which involves managing multiple mandates. By gaining teachers' perspectives and listening to teachers' voices, I believe this work will help to inform people who are in charge of developing, introducing, and implementing mandates.

I am inviting you to participate in this research study because I believe your experiences can be of great help in this work. The following hyperlink will take you to an online survey, which you have the option of completing anonymously:

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1dh\\_wWuHIU3jLpYpILNcK6z3xAZCg5whOicDaO8HIDgY/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1dh_wWuHIU3jLpYpILNcK6z3xAZCg5whOicDaO8HIDgY/viewform)

At the end of the survey, you will be invited to participate in the next phase of the study, which will consist of two interviews lasting a total of two hours. You can complete the survey anonymously and decline further participation.

I will be carrying out this study as a researcher from the University of California, San Diego. I want you to understand that this research has no connection at all to your school or your district. Your decision to participate in this study has no bearing on your employment status.

The survey responses will be completely anonymous unless you opt to participate in further research. All responses will be kept completely confidential. I will never use your name, the name of your school, or the name of the district in any publication or presentation. I will safeguard against any risk or loss of confidentiality by using pseudonyms for all research participants, as well as names of schools and districts. All data will be kept in a password-protected file on my computer.

Since this is an investigational study, there may be some unknown risks that are currently unforeseeable. You will be informed of any significant new findings.

If you have any questions regarding this project or the survey, please call me at (619) 813-5181 or email me at [shasselb@ucsd.edu](mailto:shasselb@ucsd.edu) and I will be happy address them.

Thank you!

Stephanie Hasselbrink

## Appendix B: Teacher Survey

Dear Teachers,

I am a doctoral student in Teaching and Learning in the Department of Education Studies at UCSD. As a fellow teacher and researcher, I am very interested learning more about how teachers manage the complexities of their practice within the current era of educational reform.

This survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. Responses are completely confidential. You may skip questions if you'd like. Please place them in the manila folder when you are finished.

At the end of the survey, I ask if you'd like to participate in the next part of the study, which includes two interviews (one 45 minute interview in your classroom, and one brief follow up interview that could be conducted over the phone or in person at a location of your choice). If you're interested, you have the option of providing your email address so I can contact you to discuss the study further. If you're not interested, you can leave it blank and your responses will remain anonymous. I'll give you a \$20 gift card for your time if you're interested in the interview part of the study.

Should you have any questions, please call me at (619) 813-5181 or email me at [shasselb@ucsd.edu](mailto:shasselb@ucsd.edu). All of our communication will be confidential.

Thank you very much for your time and thoughtfulness!  
Stephanie Hasselbrink

### Which grade(s) do you currently teach?

- K
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Including this year, how many years have you been teaching full time?**

- 1-3
- 4-6
- 7-11
- 12-20
- 21-30
- Over 30
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**In general, how do you feel about making changes to your instructional practice, teaching methods, and/or curriculum?**

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**How do you feel about making mandated changes and implementing new mandates?**

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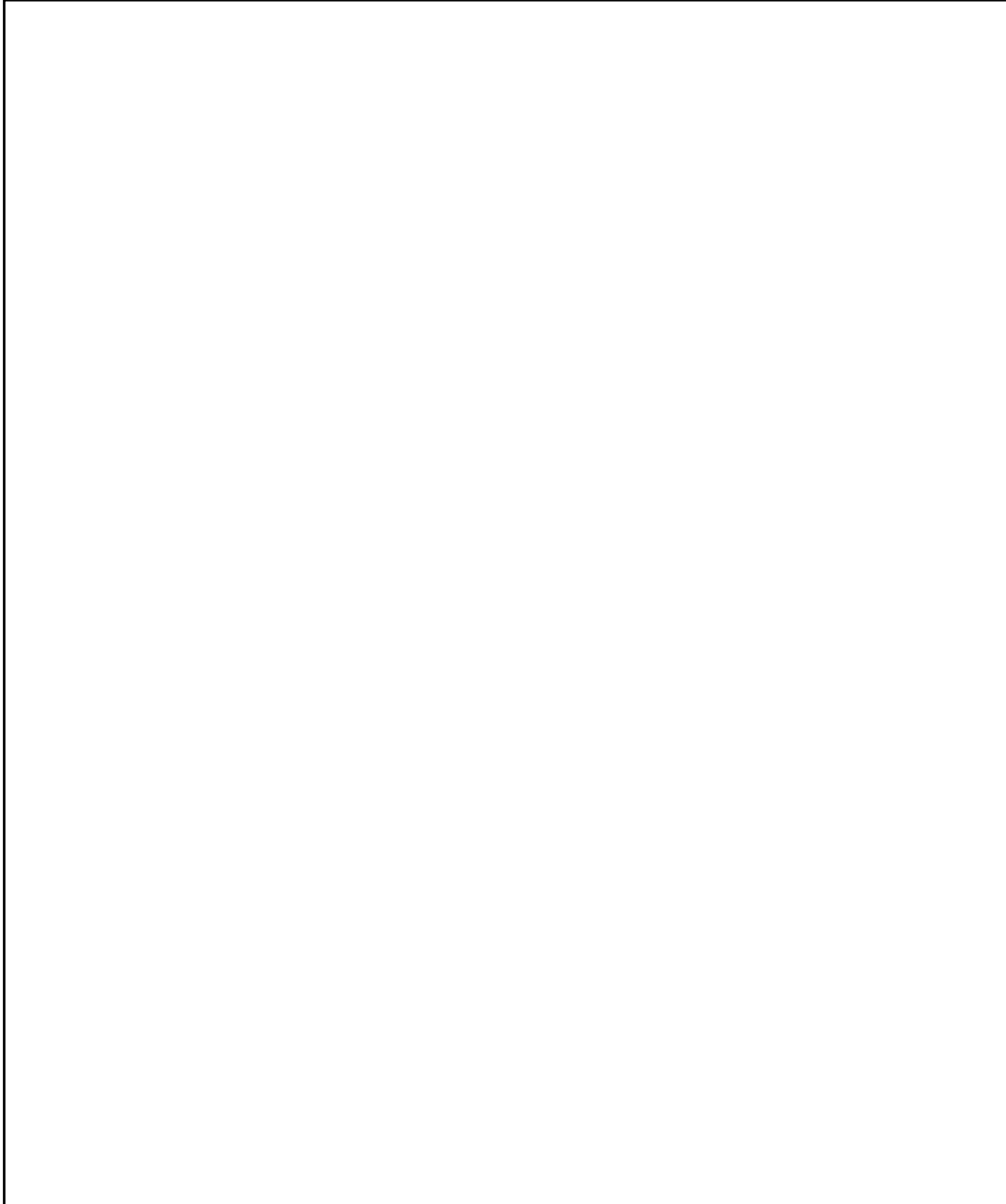
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**What are some of the mandates that you have been asked to implement over the past few years?**

*Please make the list as complete as possible (programs, curricula, methods of teaching, managing students, and so on).*

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the respondent to write their answer to the question above. The box is currently blank.

**Teachers engage in a variety of classroom practices. Please indicate how frequently each of these take place in your classroom.**

*If something does not occur in your classroom, please indicate how frequently you would like for it to occur.*

	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Students working independently	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Desk or tables arranged in groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The teacher presenting information to the whole class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students working collaboratively	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Desks or tables arranged in rows	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The teacher explaining concepts to students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students presenting information to their classmates	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students working with manipulatives or doing hands-on activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The teacher sharing knowledge with students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students working from textbooks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students explaining concepts to each other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Please answer the following questions about mandates, a term used to refer to curriculum, programs, and methods that you are required to implement. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement below.**

*The word "mandates" refers to directives about how to teach, what to teach, what materials to use, how to manage students, and other things you are required to do.*

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
I like to implement mandates.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I implement mandates with fidelity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Implementing mandates interferes with my practice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I adjust mandates to fit my beliefs about teaching and learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I implement mandates in the way I am told to do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mandates meet my students' needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I adjust mandates to meet the needs of my students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I implement mandates as they were intended to be implemented.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There are too many mandates.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I do not make changes to mandates.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mandates align with my beliefs about teaching and learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Implementing mandates makes me feel overwhelmed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I make adjustments to mandates.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is easy to integrate mandates into my practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I follow the manual/guide when implementing mandates.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I select which mandates to implement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mandates don't meet the needs of my students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Implementing mandates improves my practice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is challenging to implement mandates.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I decide how to implement mandates in my classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Thank you so much for completing this survey!**

**I'm looking for teachers for the next part of the study, which will consist of two interviews (one in your classroom without students present, and one via phone or at a location of your choice). Together, the interviews will take no more than two hours of your time, and to compensate you for your time, I will give you a \$20 gift card.**

**If you're interested, please write your name and email address (or phone number, if you prefer) below.**

---

**Name**

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**email address (or phone number)**

### **Appendix C: Artifact-Elicited Interview Protocol**

Thank you so much for sharing your classroom with me. I'm really interested to see and hear about your practice.

This interview consists of seven questions, each with several parts, which should take approximately 45 minutes.

As we discussed, I'm going to audio record the interview, as it will help me to make sense of it later. If you would like me to pause, stop, or erase any of the recording at any time, please feel free to let me know. Of course, I will not play the audio or show the transcript to your colleagues, your principal or others in the district, and I will not use your name when discussing it with my adviser or other students in my doctoral program.

1. So, you tell me a bit about yourself.
  - a. How long have you been teaching? How long have you taught here? Have you taught at other schools? At this school with different principals?
  - b. As you know, I'm interested in educational reform. Principals implement mandates that are associated with them. Have you r different principals implemented those mandates differently? If you were the principal, would you do anything differently when getting teachers to implement mandates?
2. As a teacher, I know just how much thought and purpose goes into setting up and arranging a classroom.
  - a. Can you tell me about how your classroom is arranged and how you came to arrange it this way?
  - b. How much freedom do you have in arranging your classroom?
  - c. Is there anything that constrains how your classroom is arranged? Is there anything you'd like to do differently?
  - d. What role do mandates/directives play when arranging your classroom? How does the mandate support or constrain your practice/job/work?
  - e. What about rearrangement? Do you rearrange the classroom? What prompts you to do so? (ie. When testing comes, after testing is done)



- f. How does your classroom arrangement impact the way children engage with each other, with you, and/or with the materials?
3. Sometimes teachers' classrooms might look very similar to or different from each other.
  - a. Tell me about some of the key similarities between you and your colleagues' classrooms. What accounts for the similarities?
  - b. Tell me about some of the differences between your classroom and your colleagues' classrooms. What accounts for the differences?
4. I have a bunch of different activities and programs that some teachers implement. Some of them are probably mandated, and some of them aren't. I'm going to ask you to sort these into two piles – ones that are mandates, and ones that aren't. Before I do, what does a *mandate* mean to you?
  - a. Tell me about these (mandates). What makes them mandates?
  - b. Tell me about some of these (not mandates). Why aren't these mandates?
5. As we've discussed, you've implemented many mandates over the past few years.
  - a. Which of them has been most successful or have you liked the most?
  - b. Which has been the least successful or have you liked the least?
6. Teachers respond differently when they are told to implement mandates - new curriculum, teaching methods, programs, etc. Some teachers bring it into their classrooms the very next day the way it was supposed to be implemented. Others take a while to implement something. Some teachers make changes to mandates before implementing them. And some teachers choose to close their doors and do what they know is best.
  - a. What do you think about the variation in how teachers respond?
  - b. What do you tend to do when you're told to implement something?
  - c. Can you think of a mandate that you've adapted/changed?
  - d. Can you think of one that you've decided not to do/implement?
7. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your practice, your beliefs about teaching and learning, what you think about mandates, or what you think about educational reform??

## Appendix D: Mandate Questionnaire

### Positive Mandate

1. As we discussed during the previous interview, you've been asked to implement many programs, curriculum, and other activities over the past several years. Which one do you think had the most positive impact on your teaching. What have you seen, heard, or experienced that suggests a positive impact on teaching?
2. What did you like about it? What made it stand out among the rest?
3. Often, districts/administrators create plans to roll out new programs. Tell me a little bit about how the mandate you like was rolled out. Where did it come from? How was it introduced? Why was it implemented?
4. What was your first impression of this mandate? How did your grade level colleagues react? What about the other teachers at your site/district?
5. What were its goals? Do you think those goals were accomplished? What do you think facilitated/impeded reaching those goals?
6. Often, there are expectations for how teachers implement new programs/curriculum. Did anyone check to see if you were doing it? How so? Were there any positive benefits for doing it, or conversely, consequences for not doing it?
7. Sometimes programs come with many resources and sometimes they don't. What resources came with it? If you'd been in charge, what additional resources would you have provided? Did you have to create any additional resources? What made you feel the need for additional resources? What were they?
8. Sometimes colleagues collaborate when implementing a new program/curriculum, and other times they don't. Did you and your colleagues work together on this? How so? Sometimes districts/principals might also offer training. Did you participate in any training? Were there any other supports for you? What additional supports would you have wanted?

### Negative Mandate

1. Now let's think about a mandate that hasn't had a positive impact on your teaching. What was it and why didn't it have a positive impact?
2. What didn't you like about it? What made it stand out among the rest?
3. Tell me a little bit about how this mandate was rolled out. Where did it come from? How was it introduced? Why was it implemented?
4. What was your first impression of this mandate? How did your grade level colleagues react? What about the other teachers at your site/district?
5. What were its goals? Do you think those goals were accomplished? What do you think facilitated/impeded reaching those goals?
6. Often, there are expectations for how teachers implement new programs/curriculum. Did anyone check to see if you were doing it? How so? Were there any positive benefits for doing it, or conversely, consequences for not doing it?
7. Sometimes programs come with many resources and sometimes they don't. What resources came with it? If you'd been in charge, what additional resources would you have provided? Did you have to create any additional resources? What made you feel the need for additional resources? What were they?
8. Sometimes colleagues collaborate when implementing a new program/curriculum, and other times they don't. Did you and your colleagues work together on this? How so? Sometimes districts/principals might also offer training. Did you participate in any training? Were there any other supports for you? What additional supports would you have wanted?

## **Appendix E: Teacher Consent to Act as a Research Subject**

### **UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO TEACHER CONSENT TO ACT AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT**

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Education Studies - University of California, San Diego

#### **Managing Multiple Mandates: Teachers' Practice in the Nexus of Educational Reform**

**Principal Investigator:** Stephanie Hasselbrink

Stephanie Hasselbrink, a doctoral student in the Education Studies department at the University of California, San Diego, is conducting a research study to explore how elementary school teachers manage the complexity of their practice in the face of multiple mandates. You have been identified to participate in this study because you are an elementary teacher who has experience with multiple mandates and on your survey you indicated an interest to participate further in the study.

This form is to seek your permission to participate in this research study. The study is being conducted as part of the Educational Doctoral Program in Teaching and Learning at the University of California, San Diego. The purpose of this study is to understand the work of teachers as they face the demands of multiple mandates.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an individual in your classroom and to participate in an individual follow-up interview, each of which will last no more than 60 minutes. The interview in your classroom will be video recorded, and the interview will be audio recorded. Both of the recordings will be transcribed for the purpose of analysis. You will be able to view and assess the accuracy of the transcription. During the interview in your classroom, I will ask you questions such as

1. As a teacher, I know just how much thought and purpose goes into setting up and arranging a classroom. Can you tell me about the physical arrangement of your classroom?
2. If someone walked into your classroom and said, "Wow! You're really doing a lot of new things here!", or "You're really engaged in some reform efforts here!" What would they be noticing?

Sample questions for the follow-up interview include:

1. All good teachers adjust mandates to make them their own. Think of one that you've adapted to fit the needs of your classroom, and tell me about it.
2. Teachers have very complex jobs. Sometimes it's hard to manage the demands of new mandates along with your regular work. Tell me about your experiences balancing the two.

While every effort is made to reduce risk, there exists the small possibility of a loss of confidentiality in this study. The following actions will be taken to minimize the risk of confidentiality:

- Your classroom tour and interview will be kept confidential, available only to me for analysis purposes.
- To ensure confidentiality for each participant, I will keep all research data on paper (field notes, transcriptions, and analysis coding work) in a locked cabinet in my home. I will be the only individual with a key to this cabinet. I will keep all digital data (video recordings, audio recordings, transcriptions, data analysis, and study writing) stored on my password protected computer. Only I have access to the password. I will keep a back-up of all digital data stored on a flash drive that I will keep locked in the cabinet in my home with all paper research data.
- Your name will not appear on any recordings or transcripts resulting from the interview and your name and identity will remain confidential in any publications or discussions. I will remove all identifying information from all documentation of participant information (interview and video transcripts and surveys). I will assign numeric codes by participant and keep the key to the codes in password protected file on my computer that only I have access to. I will be the only person with access to all research data, keys, codes, and passwords.
- Only I will listen to and transcribe the recorded interviews. The recordings and transcriptions will be kept in a locked cabinet or on my password protected computer for the duration of the study and then destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

Because this is an investigational study, there may be some unknown risks that are currently unforeseeable. You will be informed of any significant new findings.

There is no direct benefit for participating in this study. However, participating in this study will inform educational researchers and practitioners how to better support teachers who are participating in multiple reforms.

Participation in the research study is voluntary. Your participation or non-participation will have no bearing on your relationship with the researcher, your school site, or your school district. In addition, there will be no negative outcomes toward you if you choose not to utilize elements of the district's or your site's reform initiatives. It is your right to decline to answer any question that is asked, and you are free to end the conversation at any time.

You do not have to participate in this study if you do not want to. The alternatives to participation in this study are not to participate. You may refuse to participate or withdraw or refuse to answer specific questions in an interview or on a survey or

questionnaire at any time. If you agree to be in this study, but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide you do not want to participate.

If you decide that you no longer wish to continue in this study, you will be required to contact me at (619) 813-5181 or [shasselb@ucsd.edu](mailto:shasselb@ucsd.edu) and I will make contact with you within two days for confirmation. Once I have confirmed your desire to withdraw, I will immediately destroy your research data. If you choose to withdraw, there will be no effect on your relationship with the researcher, your school site, or your school district.

You will be told if any important new information is found during the course of this study that may affect your wanting to continue.

To compensate you for your time, you will receive a \$20 gift card for participating in this research. There will be no cost to you for participating in this study.

By signing below you indicate that the researcher has explained this study, answered your questions, and that you voluntarily grant your consent, which can be withdrawn at any time, for participation in this study. If you have any questions about this study, I will be happy to answer them now. If you have any questions in the future, please contact me at (619) 813-5181 or [shasselb@ucsd.edu](mailto:shasselb@ucsd.edu).

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may also contact the Institutional Review Board at the University of California, San Diego Human Research Protections Program at (858) 657-5100.

You have received a copy of this Consent Form to keep.

I agree to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

## Appendix F: Teacher Audio Recording Release Consent Form

### UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO TEACHER AUDIO RECORDING RELEASE CONSENT FORM

Education Studies - University of California, San Diego

#### **Managing Multiple Mandates: Teachers' Practice in the Nexus of Educational Reform**

**Principal Investigator:** Stephanie Hasselbrink

An audio recording will be made during your participation in this research project. Please indicate below the uses of these audiotape recordings to which you are willing to consent. This is completely voluntary and up to you. In any use of the audio recording, your name will not be identified and your identity will be kept anonymous. You may request to stop the recording at any time or to erase any portion of your recording.

1. The audio recording can be studied by the research team for use in the research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Initial

2. The audio recording can be used for scientific publications.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Initial

1. The video recording can be reviewed in university classrooms by doctoral students for educational purposes.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Initial

3. The audio recording can be reviewed at meetings of scientists interested in the study of education and educational practice.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Initial

You have read the above description and give your consent for the use of audio recordings as indicated above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Stephanie Hasselbrink at (619) 813-5181 or [shasselb@ucsd.edu](mailto:shasselb@ucsd.edu).**

## Appendix G: Teacher Video Recording Release Consent Form

### UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO TEACHER VIDEO RECORDING RELEASE CONSENT FORM

Education Studies - University of California, San Diego

#### **Managing Multiple Mandates: Teachers' Practice in the Nexus of Educational Reform**

**Principal Investigator:** Stephanie Hasselbrink

A video recording will be made during your participation in this research project. Please indicate below the uses of these video recordings to which you are willing to consent. This is completely voluntary and up to you. In any use of the video recording, your name will not be identified. You may request to stop the recording at any time or to erase any portion of your recording.

2. The video recording can be studied by the research team for use in the research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Initial

3. The video recording can be used for scientific publications.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Initial

4. The video recording can be reviewed in university classrooms by doctoral students for educational purposes.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Initial

5. The video recording can be reviewed at meetings of scientists interested in the study of education and educational practice.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Initial

You have read the above description and give your consent for the use of video recordings as indicated above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Stephanie Hasselbrink at (619) 813-5181 or [shasselb@ucsd.edu](mailto:shasselb@ucsd.edu).**



## Appendix H: Effective Mandates' Activity System Descriptions

### *Lisa: Thinking Maps*

Thinking Maps, often confused with graphic organizers, are eight visual patterns that provide concrete images of abstract thoughts. Teachers model how to create the maps by engaging in think-alouds, then co-create them, in order for them to become a tool that students can use independently (<http://thinkingmaps.com>).

*Subject.* Lisa is a primary teacher with 12-20 years of teaching experience. Her survey results indicated that she has a balanced approach to teaching and learning, a neutral/mixed attitude toward mandates, and some sense of agency (see Chapters 6 and 7). Lisa indicated that she was initially hesitant to use Thinking Maps, thinking of them as “one more hoop to jump through.” She commented that most of her colleagues did not implement Thinking Maps, but she elected to try three of the 10-12 maps.

*Object and Outcomes.* According to Lisa, the goal of Thinking Maps was to help students organize their ideas as a pre-writing strategy. Lisa believes that the goals were realized, as Thinking Maps enabled students to be better prepared to write, to write more in depth, and to rely on fewer sentence frames. Thinking Maps enabled students to write down, review, and explore their ideas when they were in the act of writing.

*Artifacts.* In order to achieve the goals, teachers were given resource binders and posters. Lisa also mentioned that teachers received some training.

*Rules.* Teachers were told that they were “going to use it.” Teachers were held accountable with unexpected visits by the principal “to check whether or not [teachers] had the sample maps posted and to look for evidence.” After visits, the principal made “blanket comments” to the staff, which served as consequences and praise for particular grade levels.

*Community & Division of Labor.* Members of the community included the principal, teachers, and grade-level colleagues. The principal provided expectations, telling the teachers that they were going to incorporate Thinking Maps into their practice. The principal also conducted initial training and monitored teachers' implementation. Teachers collaborated with their grade-level colleagues in order to make sense of and support each other as they implemented Thinking Maps.

### *Annette: Common Core Math Practice Standards*

Together with content standards, the practice standards are part of the Common Core Standards for Mathematics. The practice standards involve problem solving, reasoning and proof, communication, representation, and connections. They also include mathematical proficiency, which includes adaptive reasoning, strategic competence, conceptual understanding, procedural fluency, and productive disposition (<http://www.corestandards.org>).

*Subject.* Annette is an upper grade teacher with 21-30 years of teaching experience. Her survey results indicated that she has a balanced/slightly student-centered approach to teaching and learning, a positive/neutral/mixed attitude toward

mandates, and a lack of agency (see Chapters 6 and 7). Annette was initially excited about implementing the practice standards, because they “made sense to [her]”.

*Object and Outcomes.* According to Annette, the goals of the practice standards were to give students freedom to think, process, and produce math in ways that made sense to students. Annette believes the goals were being realized, because the kids are excited and their math scores are improving. In addition, she believes her students are excited about mathematics.

*Artifacts.* Annette did not identify traditional tools, such as curriculum and pacing guides. She did indicate that a number of opportunities for training, which supported implementation. Teachers were also routinely asked about resources they need and provided with them.

*Rules.* The Common Core Math Practice Standards were presented a staff meeting and was introduced with hands-on practice and discussion. In order to monitor how teachers took on the standards, there were informal visits by administration, data team projects, and instructional rounds (structured visits by district personnel, site administration, and teachers).

*Community and Division of Labor.* Members of the community included the principal, site-based coaches, and teachers. The principal introduced it at a staff meeting and site coaches provided demonstration, hands-on practice, and discussions and subsequent staff meetings.

### ***Jessica: Reading First***

Reading First was a federally mandated policy that came from a large-scale grant at the onset of No Child Left Behind. Its aim was to implement scientifically-based methods of early reading instruction into classrooms across the country to support the No Child Left Behind goal of every child reading at grade level by third grade (<http://www2.ed.gov>).

*Subject.* Jessica is a primary teacher with 21-30 years of teaching experience. Her survey results indicated that she has a balanced/slightly student-centered approach to teaching and learning, a negative attitude toward mandates, and some sense of agency (see Chapters 6 and 7). Jessica’s initial impression of Reading First was very negative. She felt threatened that her practice was “about to be turned upside down. After realizing that she was potentially impeding progress and considering what was best for students, however, she decided to “get on the bus” and embrace Reading First. It is important to note that Jessica’s initial attitude toward Reading First was from her position as a classroom teacher. Her sensemaking of the mandate, however, comes from her experience as a Reading First coach, where she worked with teachers, other coaches, and her principal at a school site.

*Object and Outcomes.* According to Jessica, the main goal of Reading First was to significantly increase performance on standardized testing, especially for underperforming schools and English Learners. Jessica does not believe that Reading First “got the results that were promised by its supporters.” She does, however, believe that the policy still had positive results, including colleagues discussing data and engaging in data-driven decision making, targeted student intervention, school-

wide discussions about success, increased accountability for teachers coupled with support (tools and coaching).

*Artifacts.* Jessica pointed out many tools, including curriculum (Houghton Mifflin textbook), extra books, and a variety of computer programs. She also indicated that a great deal of training was provided for teachers and principals.

*Rules.* Reading First was introduced by the district's superintendent under the guise that teachers would be able to vote about whether they wanted to support the grant. Teachers were not given that opportunity, and instead it was implemented without a true vote; teachers were directed to take part in the mandate. As a coach, Jessica "had someone constantly checking in" with her. In order to monitor how teachers implemented Reading First, Jessica frequently visited classrooms and met with the principal to discuss her observations and subsequent plans. Jessica believes that teachers felt "obligated" to take on many aspects of Reading First. She also noted that pressure from being watched and critiqued when implementing the mandate caused teachers anxiety and to act defensively about their practice.

*Community and Division of Labor.* Members of the community included the superintendent, the principal, site-based coaches, teachers, and grade-level colleagues. The superintendent introduced Reading First at a staff meeting. The principal collaborated with site-based coaches. Site-based coaches worked in classrooms with teachers, by modeling, observing, and providing feedback. Teachers collaborated with their grade-level colleagues to develop interventions and improve instruction based on data. Teachers across grade levels discussed successful strategies.

***Jill: Common standards for each grade level***

In the mid-1990s, California began developing official state content standards. Prior to common state-wide standards, teachers did not have specified content they were expected to teach their students. By 1999, standards were adopted in English Language Arts, Mathematics, History/Social Science, and Science (<http://edsources.org>).

*Subject.* Jill is an upper grade teacher with 21-30 years of teaching experience. Her survey results indicated that she has a teacher-centered approach to teaching and learning, a negative attitude toward mandates, and some sense of agency (see Chapters 6 and 7). Jill's first impression of common standards was positive, because she thought it would have a positive impact on children.

*Object and Outcomes.* According to Jill, the main goal of the standards was to create consistency within grade levels and to create a continuum across grade levels. Jill believes that the goal was realized, as there was much more consistency with what teachers taught within individual states. Further, prior to their implementation there was "wide variation from teacher-to-teacher and district-to-district about what was taught."

*Artifacts.* Jill stated that at the time common standards were implemented, there was a lot of money in education, so there was a lot of spending on tools and resources to support the new mandate. Textbooks that aligned with the new standards

were also adopted. She also indicated that there was professional development for teachers.

*Rules.* Common standards were first introduced by the principal. In order to monitor how teachers implemented the standards, principals observed in classrooms. Students also took standardized tests, which were discussed school-wide. Jill commented that one teacher was involuntarily transferred “because she would not change.”

*Community and Division of Labor.* Members of the community included the principal, teachers, and grade-level colleagues. The principal introduced the standards, observed teachers, and discussed test results. There was some collaboration among grade-level colleagues, depending on whether teachers opted to do so.

### ***Heather: Common Core Standards***

The Common Core Standards are a set of educational standards for kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade in English Language Arts and mathematics. States voluntarily adopted the standards. They were designed to ensure that graduating high school students were equipped with real world knowledge and skills in order to enter higher education and careers (<http://www.corestandards.org>).

*Subject.* Heather is a primary teacher with 12-20 years of teaching experience. Her survey results indicated that she has a balanced approach to teaching and learning, a positive/neutral/mixed attitude toward mandates, and some sense of agency (see Chapters 6 and 7). Heather had initially mixed feelings about the Common Core Standards. She supported the Standards and expressed excitement about creating her own lessons, fostering collaboration among students, and engaging students in hands-on activities. However, she also indicated that “it is overwhelming to start something new.”

*Object and Outcomes.* Heather was not able to articulate the goals of the Common Core Standards, because they will not “get completely implemented until next year,” but she indicated that “we are in the process of reaching... goals.” As such, Heather senses an alignment between the object and outcomes of the Common Core Standards thus far.

*Artifacts.* Heather indicated that the Common Core Standards “come with nothing so far,” although she said that the district did provide some lessons. While traditional tools and resources are scant, there has been initial and ongoing district-wide training and inservices.

*Rules.* California adopted the Common Core Standards, and they were introduced to the district as a whole by the assistant superintendent. Now in its early implementation, teachers have a lot of freedom in the extent to which they are incorporating the standards into their practice. The principal and site-based coaches ask teachers if they can come to observe their practice. Heather trusts them and values their feedback.

*Community and Division of Labor.* Members of the community include the assistant superintendent, the principal, district coaches, site-based coaches, teachers, and grade-level colleagues. When introducing the new standards, the assistant

superintendent told teachers “not to stress” because they “will get there.” The principal observes teachers who volunteer to be observed, and supports teachers with guidance and by ordering materials. District coaches provide training, and site-based coaches model lessons, observe teachers, and provide feedback. Teachers discuss Common Core Standards across grade levels and collaborate with their grade-level colleagues.

***Katie: Daily 5***

The Daily 5 is an approach to teaching English language arts that supports students’ independence in reading, writing, and language activities. Students participate in a variety of activities: Read to Self, Work on Writing, Read to Someone, Listen to Reading, and Word Work (<http://www.thedailycafe.com>).

*Subject.* Katie is a primary teacher with 7-11 years of teaching experience. Her survey results indicated that she has a balanced approach to teaching and learning, a negative attitude toward mandates, and a strong sense of agency (see Chapters 6 and 7). Katie was initially eager to teach the Daily 5 and thought that “it would be fairly easy to implement.”

*Object and Outcomes.* According to Katie, the main goals of the Daily 5 were to let children establish independence and ownership over their learning in areas of English Language Arts. Katie believes that the goals have been realized. In addition, her students have done more reading, writing, and work with words than they had done with other programs.

*Artifacts.* The Daily 5 did not come with tools or resources. Katie purchased a book and spent money to buy additional resources. So, although the program did not come with resources, Katie has used a book, a variety of organizational materials (pocket charts, tubs), and books.

*Rules.* The Daily 5 was introduced by the principal. Although not all of the teachers at her grade level teach the Daily 5, she felt that she needed to do so, as she wanted “to keep a position [at her school] next year.” Katie’s principal formally observed her as part of the district’s evaluation process for teachers, but it was Katie’s choice to have her principal observe her implementing this program.

*Community and Division of Labor.* Members of the community included the principal, site-based coaches, and some of her grade-level colleagues. The principal told Katie about the Daily 5 and mentioned that other teachers were using it and had success. The principal also observed Katie teaching the program, offering her a great deal of positive feedback, as well as some areas to work on. The school’s site-based coach has supported the implementation, offering ideas, emails, and any support that Katie asks for. Katie has not formally collaborated with her grade-level colleagues, but she has “asked them from time to time how they do certain things.”

***Peter: Technology/My Big Campus***

My Big Campus is a web-based social learning network developed for K-12 school districts. Teachers can use the “hub” as a place to post lessons, assignments, feedback, and calendars, which students can access independently and collaboratively

(<http://www.mybigcampus.com>). Technology also refers to document camera, projector, iPods, and iPad Minis.

*Subject.* Peter is an upper grade teacher with 7-11 years of teaching experience. His survey results indicated that he has a balanced /slightly student-centered approach to teaching and learning, a negative/neutral/mixed attitude toward mandates, and some sense of agency(see Chapters 6 and 7). Peter was initially positive about My Big Campus and technology.

*Object and Outcomes.* According to Peter, the main goal of the district’s implementation of My Big Campus was to create a bank of resources, including instructional videos and strategies, which teachers would access in order to facilitate the implementation of Common Core Standards. Peter believes it has been successful with many “new school teachers” who are familiar and comfortable with technology. He believes that it may not have been successful with “old school educators” who may not have accessed resources and content. Peter believes My Big Campus has had a positive impact on his practice because he can easily engage students, develop lessons, track and improve academic progress, connect with a learning community, go paperless, and incorporate student-created digital projects.

*Artifacts.* My Big Campus is tool, in itself. Teachers can use it to find a variety of resources to support instruction and implementation of the Common Core Standards.

*Rules.* Teachers were required to use My Big Campus to implement the district writing assessments. Teachers had to access My Big Campus to show videos that students needed to view in order to complete the writing assessments. My Big Campus also housed the prompts, rubrics, and graphic organizers that teachers needed in order to properly implement the district writing assessments.

*Community and Division of Labor.* Members of the community included the principal, site-based coaches, teachers, grade-level colleagues. The principal and site-based coaches introduced My Big Campus. Teachers have had limited collaboration with their grade-level colleagues.

## Appendix I: Ineffective Mandates' Activity System Descriptions

### *Lisa: Side by Side*

Side by Side is an approach to teaching writing by bringing together writing standards and English Language Development standards to support English Learners (district website).

*Subject.* Lisa's initial impression was that it was going to be "one more hoop to jump through."

*Object and Outcomes.* According to Lisa, the main goal of Side by Side was to help English Learners and lower performing students to better understand concepts. Lisa does not believe the goal was realized, due to high levels of teacher resistance and difficulties with implementation. Lisa commented that the program has mostly fallen "by the wayside."

*Artifacts.* Teachers were given "big binders full of instructions." Teachers attended training, but Lisa indicated that it was poor because teachers did not learn much and were left to create lessons without guidance from the trainers. She felt that "the district pretty much said, 'Here's a new program. Figure it out.'"

*Rules.* Teachers were selected to participate in Side by Side training. There were no systems of accountability, as no one checked in on teachers' implementation and there were no consequences if teachers did not implement Side by Side.

*Community and Division of Labor.* Members of the community included the principal, district coaches, teachers, and grade-level colleagues. The principal briefly introduced Side by Side at a staff meeting. District coaches provided training to two teachers from each grade level at each site. Teachers presented what they learned to their grade-level colleagues.

### *Jessica: Turn Around School Model*

The Turnaround Model is one of four strategies failing schools could employ under Race to the Top and School Improvement programs of the Obama administration. The model involved the following practices: replacing the school's administrator; rehiring up to 50% of the staff; implementing strategies to recruit, place, and retain staff; selecting and implementing an instructional model; providing professional development; employ data-driven decision making; provide increased learning time; provide social-emotional and community-oriented services; implement a new governance structure; and grant operating flexibility to the site leader.

*Subject.* Jessica was initially excited, because she thought the model would make her school unique and would have a great deal of support and resources.

*Object and Outcomes.* According to Jessica, the main goal of the Turn Around Model was to increase standardized test scores. Jessica believes that the goal was not realized, as standardized test scores did not improve as expected. However, scores on other measures did increase.

*Artifacts.* There was a great deal of money involved, as the school received two million dollars each year for three years. Every student had access to an iPod. There were computers in every classroom. Many programs were purchased, such as

SIPPS, Brainpop, Raz-Kids, and Accelerated Reader. There was an abundance of training for teachers, including district-based training and outside workshops.

*Rules.* There was a great deal of rules and systems of accountability with the Turnaround Model. Coaches observed teachers and provided feedback. There were public messages about implementation, such as “Five out of seven first grade teachers effectively used” a specific program or strategy. Teachers experienced stress as a result of the feedback and pressure. The principal frequently observed in classrooms and took photographs of off-task student behavior. Teachers felt extremely restrictive and inadequate.

*Community and Division of Labor.* Members of the community included the principal, district coaches, teachers, and grade-level colleagues. District and site-based coaches provided a great deal of training. Teachers engaged in a great deal of collaboration with colleagues and discussed things whole-staff at meetings with the principal.

### ***Heather: No Child Left Behind***

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is a federal policy that aimed for every child to meet minimum proficiency in core subjects through high qualified teachers, research-based strategies, high stakes testing, and sanctions.

*Subject.* Heather was initially upset about NCLB due to the high amount of district testing of her primary students.

*Object and Outcomes.* According to Heather, the main goal of NCLB was to ensure all students attained grade level standards. Heather does not believe the goal was realized, as although all students can learn and improve, not all students will reach grade level mastery.

*Artifacts.* Teachers received teacher guides, anthologies, practice books, and extra support for English Learners and higher performing students. Teachers were in need of additional guided reading books.

*Rules.* Teachers were monitored through walkthroughs by the principal. Teachers had to turn in their students’ classroom test scores to the district.

*Community and Division of Labor.* Members of the community included the principal, district coaches, and teachers. The principal monitored teachers. District coaches provided initial training. The need to collaborate with colleagues was not there because “they wanted you to follow the teacher’s guide word-for-word, so you didn’t have to plan as much.”

### ***Katie: Data Teams***

Data Teams is a nationally used process for analyzing student data and determining next instructional steps. The process is used district-wide, and at Rolling Hill Elementary, cross grade level teams meet several times a year during school-wide meeting time to analyze student scores on assessments, notice patterns, and determine next steps.

*Subject.* Katie initially had a positive impression of Data Teams due to her desire to do “better for [her] kids.”



*Object and Outcomes.* According to Katie, the main goal of Data Teams was to identify students' strengths and areas of need in mathematics. Katie believes the goal was realized, but that the method was inefficient.

*Artifacts.* Teachers were provided with a form in which they could input information. Teachers had to create assessments to monitor students' progress; however, Katie indicated that this was better than using available pre-made assessments.

*Rules.* Teachers are required to participate in Data Teams, as they take place during staff meetings and "it is not an option to not do it." The principal and support team (assistant principal and site-based coaches) monitor and participate in the meetings.

*Community and Division of Labor.* Members of the community included the principal, assistant principal, teachers, and colleagues. The principal introduced the mandate and teachers engage in Data Teams at staff meetings. Teachers collaborate with one another at the meetings, in addition to collaborating on creating assessments.

### **May: Instructional Rounds**

Instructional Rounds refer to site classroom visits by a team of district personnel. The visiting team is comprised of district leaders, the site's principal, and district and site teacher-leaders. During these visits, the guests observe teachers' practice and room environment.

*Subject.* When May first engaged in Instructional Rounds, it was an "extremely stressful" experience for her.

*Object and Outcomes.* According to May, the main goal of Instructional Rounds was to ensure that teachers implemented a particular mandate. Jill believes that the goal was realized, as there was "100% compliance" by teachers.

*Artifacts.* Teachers were not given any resources or materials.

*Rules.* Jill expressed that teachers must "jump through hoops" the day of the visit in order to "show something." The day prior to the visit, teachers are "given a multitude of do's and don'ts." Shortly before the visit, someone comes in to photograph the classroom. The visits are non-evaluative, which prohibits offering the observed teacher positive feedback. After the visit, a statistic is made public. It might indicate, for example, that "three out of four teachers at [a specific] grade level had objectives posted."

*Community and Division of Labor.* Members of the community included the principal, district personnel, teachers, colleagues, and grade-level colleagues. The principal initially introduced Instructional Rounds. During the visits, the principal, district personnel, and colleagues visit a teacher's classroom and provide non-evaluative, statistical feedback. Teachers may engage in some collaboration with their colleagues prior to the visits in order to support one another.

**Matt: Side by Side.** Side by Side is an approach to teaching writing by bringing together writing standards and English Language Development standards to support English Learners. (district website)

*Subject.* Matt did not have a positive first impression, as he felt that it was “another weight to the load” that he already carried.

*Object and Outcomes.* According to Matt, the main goal of Side by Side was to help English Learners to achieve at higher levels. Matt does not believe the goal was somewhat realized, but he was not able to fully attribute it to Side by Side.

*Artifacts.* Matt indicated that there were not resources that came with the program.

*Rules.* Two teachers from each grade level participated in Side by Side training. Matt indicated that he was uncertain about whether anyone checked in to observe Side by Side.

*Community and Division of Labor.* Members of the community included the principal, district coaches, and teachers. The principal introduced Side by Side at a staff meeting. District coaches provided training to two teachers from each grade level at each site. Teachers did not engage in collaboration.

***Peter: Reading First/Houghton Mifflin***

Reading First was a federally mandated policy that came from a large-scale grant at the onset of No Child Left Behind. Its aim was to implement scientifically-based methods of early reading instruction into classrooms across the country to support the No Child Left Behind goal of every child reading at grade level by third grade. (<http://www.ed.gov>) Houghton Mifflin is the textbook adopted by the district for English-language arts instruction.

*Subject.* Peter did not initially support Houghton Mifflin because he did not believe that it was in the best interest of the students and was implemented primarily to increase test scores.

*Object and Outcomes.* According to Peter, the main goal of Houghton Mifflin was to improve students’ reading comprehension. A secondary goal was to improve the school’s test scores. Peter does not believe the goals were realized, due to curriculum and pacing that did not meet students’ needs.

*Artifacts.* Teachers used the textbook and district pacing guides.

*Rules.* Teachers received classroom visits by administrators, as well as site-based assessments and statewide standardized tests.

*Community and Division of Labor.* Members of the community included the principal, teachers, and grade-level colleagues. The principal monitored how teachers implemented Houghton Mifflin. Teachers engaged in some collaboration with their colleagues.

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