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A View from the Bottom: The Self-Perception of Highly Regarded Teachers' Experiences in a Time of Multiple Policy Implementation

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**A VIEW FROM THE BOTTOM:
THE SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF HIGHLY REGARDED TEACHERS'
EXPERIENCES IN A TIME OF MULTIPLE POLICY
IMPLEMENTATION**

By

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M.B.A. University of Kansas, 1984

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

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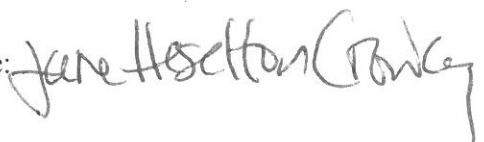
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Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Catherine Fallona

An Abstract of the Dissertation
Presented
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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The goal of educational policy is to improve the teaching and learning process within public schools. This qualitative study was designed to add depth of understanding to the process of educational policy implementation. The study focused on the classroom implementation of three policy initiatives impacting public schools in Maine: Teacher Evaluation System (TES), Response to Intervention (RtI), and Proficiency Based Education (PBE).

Within the design of this phenomenological interview study, the researcher sought the perspective of five mid-career, middle school teachers of English/language arts or mathematics who were highly regarded within two educational communities. While previous quantitative research has provided teacher responses on topics concerning

educational policy, little research has been conducted that provides depth of detail and understanding about the implementation of policy within a teacher's classroom. The research provided insight about which factors influence highly regarded teachers' understanding and implementation of policy reforms within their classrooms.

The research focused on the presence of three factors that may influence policymaking and implementation: policy coherence, compliance readiness, and cognitive sense-making. Each is composed of multiple components. Each may develop in one stage of the policymaking process and subsequently affect implementation efforts elsewhere.

The research findings indicate that policy implementation was impacted by the following components: (1) combining of multiple policy initiatives, resulting in inconsistent implementation and unintended consequences; (2) organizational capacity, especially with respect to levels of financial capital; (3) insufficient development of social capital; (4) varying degrees of resistance that appeared to be tolerated; and (5) over-reliance on individual sense-making that resulted in incomplete understanding and conveyance of policy goals.

The findings indicate that policymakers at all levels of the policy-making process impact classroom implementation efforts. Policymakers and educational leadership must be knowledgeable about the desired goals, the resources necessary for implementation, and the conditions that exist in the field. Broadening participation within and providing for collective sense-making throughout the policymaking process may be beneficial in implementation of policy.

Dedication

To Tom,
My best friend and husband

To my family
My sister says that family is your wealth.
She is right.
My life is filled with riches.

Acknowledgements

There would be no study without the generous participation of the teachers. Christine, Diane, Jennifer, Leslie, and Molly are pseudonyms, but the individuals will recognize their own words, which are the essence of the study. You are all inspirational.

As my advisor, Dr. Catherine Fallona's guidance and encouragement were instrumental in helping me to work through the process of developing my thesis and research process. She was my guide on the qualitative process: with her help my study took shape. Her willingness to read and comment on the multiple drafts of my paper-in-progress was critically important to the completion of my study. The support of Dr. David Silvernail, another member of my committee, was an instrumental ingredient in so many facets of my doctoral experience. His comments made the policy-related content of my dissertation stronger and more focused. He challenged my reasoning, helping me to find greater depths of understanding. May you enjoy your well-earned retirement, David. I am also indebted to Dr. Jeff Beaudry for consenting to be a member of my committee. He also worked with me on my C.A.S. capstone project, *Making Summative Assessment Formative*, deepening my understanding of the craft of teaching.

It is also important to acknowledge that the camaraderie of my doctoral cohort which developed over three years was an important source of energy and encouragement. Grace, Jean and Becky: we made a good team! Special thanks to Julie for her continuous support and friendship.

Last, but certainly not least, I must thank my family – Tom, Jameson, Jonathan, Megan, Sally, Mike, Henry, Alison, Stella, Mom, and Dad – who always encourage me in my endeavors. Your support was so very important to me. I love you all.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Within the past decade, the pace and breadth of policies and reforms that impact public schools and teaching have occurred at an unprecedented pace. As one study stated:

All at once, state and district policymakers, largely in response to federal grant incentives, are trying to create new teacher evaluation systems, overhaul professional development, revise tenure laws, and rethink hiring, compensation, and dismissal policies. They are doing it all with stunning speed and alongside a host of other reforms, including the implementation of common standards, and new student assessments. Tight deadlines (...) reinforce the familiar mantra: we must do more, and we must do it now (Rosenberg & Silva, 2012, p. 1).

The majority of teachers have been supportive and feel they have been making contributions toward reforms, (Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession(CSTP), 2005; AAEF, 2014; Harris Interactive, 2013; Rosenberg & Silva, 2012; NEA, 2013; AFT, 2013). However, there are apprehensions.

In one survey, teachers expressed “deep reservations about certain aspects of it (policy) - in particular, that too much was being asked of them, with too little time and too few resources to get the job done” (Knapp, Elfers, Plecki, Loeb & Zahir, 2005). Other survey responses stated that teachers and principals found it

“challenging” or “very challenging,” to manage declining budgets and the subsequent declines in resources necessary to meet school needs, especially those required to address reform initiatives (Harris Interactive, 2013; Rosenberg & Silva, 2012). The trends have been problematic: an apparent adding on and a cutting back simultaneously executed.

That concern has become all the more acute as schools (1) strive to address the individualized requirements of diverse learners - as mandated by policies aiming to meet the needs of all learners through the implementation of Response to Intervention (RtI); and (2) ensure that all students leave public schools ready to encounter a career or further education -- a goal to be fulfilled through the application of standards and assessments within Proficiency-Based Education (PBE). When surveyed, teachers expressed reservations about their ability to respond and a lack of support for helping to meet these goals (AAEF, 2014; NEA, 2013; AFT, 2013), while at the same time being more closely scrutinized through application of new teacher evaluation systems (TES) that are tied to student learning, and used to inform professional development, compensation, and employment status decisions. In other words, seen as the agents of change for implementing rigorous content, pedagogy, and improved learning, teachers are required to develop public school graduates who can meet the demands of the 21st century workplace, and have been held to a higher level of accountability while doing so.

It has been well documented that teachers have the most significant impact on student learning within a school (Good, 1983; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Goe,

2007; Thoonen, Sleegers, Oort, Peetsma & Geijssel, 2011; Looney, 2011; Mead, Rotherham & Brown, 2012). In a meta-analysis of over 500,000 studies, *Distinguishing Expert Teachers from Novice and Experienced Teachers* (2003), Hattie quantified the important influence of teachers in the process of teaching and learning.

Using hierarchical linear modeling to decompose the sources of variance that influence student achievement, he enumerated six major sources of variance. First, the student accounts for 40 percent to 50 percent of the variance. It was what students brought to the table that predicted achievement more than any other variable. The role of schools was to improve the trajectory of all these students. Next, the home contributes about five percent to ten percent of the variance, taking into consideration that the most significant effects of the home were already included within the attributes of the student. Home effects were related to the levels of student expectation and encouragement. Third, schools and principals are connected to about five percent to ten percent of the variance. The attributes of schools – from finances to class-size – had little impact as long as a physical, functioning school existed. Within reason, it did not matter what the physical plant looked like -- a state of the art facility or an open-air classroom with benches -- or the level of resources that were available as long as the goal of educating students was present. Principals were important to the degree that they impacted the climate of the school, helping to create an environment that was responsive to students, safety, and a focus on learning. Fourth, peer effects also have minimal impact, five percent to ten percent of the achievement variance. Unfortunately, too often these

were negative effects due to bullying and the fact that students created reputations based upon values other than pride in learning. Finally, teachers account for a substantial thirty percent to forty percent of the achievement variance. What teachers knew, did, and cared about had a powerful impact on learning.

Given that teachers had the most substantial impact on student achievement, Hattie argued that they needed to use methods that were most effective and had “a marked and meaningful effect on student learning -- not just a positive (greater than zero) effect (...) the focus is to have a powerful effect on achievement, and this is where excellence in teaching comes to the fore...”(p. 3-4). Hattie concluded that teachers needed to be as effective as possible. That analysis directed scrutiny and responsibility on all teachers and underscored the importance of their role in public education.

Taking aim at that goal, many educational policies seek to ensure that public schools provide effective teaching that will meet the needs of each learner, focus education on individualized rather than group outcomes, and assist students in acquiring the skills and knowledge that will enable them to be productive participants within the 21st century American society and global economy. “Policy thus seems a chief agency for changing practice. Yet teachers are the chief agents for implementing any new instructional policy...” (Cohen, 1990, p. 326). The incorporation of the policies of RtI and PBE throughout public education aim to focus those efforts, but actualization is not simple. New policy seeks change in knowledge, learning and teaching, but “these are intimately held human constructions. They cannot be changed unless the people who teach and learn want

to change, take an active part in changing, and have the resources to change” (Cohen, 1990, p. 326).

One policy initiative is RtI. “RtI is a federally mandated initiative that requires school districts to provide high quality research-based instruction, universal screenings, on-going progress monitoring, researched-based interventions, and reliable measures that are implemented with fidelity” (Millhouse-Pettis, 2011). In practice, RtI is a multi-tiered program that aims at improving the educational outcomes for all students. It is a pro-active, preventative approach that is grounded in immediate, differentiated instruction for students who are at risk for poor learning outcomes. It involves (1) increasingly intense, multi-tiered application of an array of high-quality, evidence-based instruction matched to individual needs; (2) continuous monitoring of progress to determine the impact of interventions; and (3) expectations for parent involvement throughout the process (PBIS, 2014).

Universal screening assessments are used to provide data that aid in identifying of students who may be at risk for poor learning outcomes; however, it is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to monitor the progress of individual student achievement and gauge the effectiveness of the curriculum, a process that is ongoing.

Providing differentiated instructional strategies and interventions that are aligned to state and district standards seeks to maximize student achievement and minimize behavioral problems. The RtI initiative impacts all public school classrooms and teachers. Given that schools are complex environments full of many

personalities, teaching styles, and beliefs, introducing the systemic changes that accompany the implementation of RtI can be expected to produce a variety of responses from public school classroom teachers and thus, require different degrees of professional development for individual teachers and school districts.

The implementation of an additional initiative, proficiency-based education (PBE), intensifies teacher responsibilities. In Maine PBE refers

to any system of academic instruction, assessment, grading and reporting that is based on students demonstrating mastery of the knowledge and skills they are expected to learn before they progress

to the next lesson, get promoted to the next grade level or receive a diploma... The general goal of proficiency-based education is to ensure

that students acquire the knowledge and skills that are deemed to be essential to success in school, higher education, careers and adult life.

If students struggle to meet minimum expected standards, they receive additional instruction, practice time and academic support to help them achieve proficiency, but they do not progress in their education until expected standards are met (ME DOE, 2013).

Defining PBE “is complicated by the fact that educators not only use a wide variety of terms for the general approach, but the terms may or may not be used synonymously from place to place” (Great Schools Partnership, 2014).

Consequently, PBE can take different forms, deviating from state to state, district to district, or even school to school. For example, a more general understanding of PBE is suggested in the following:

While the goal of proficiency-based learning is to ensure that more students learn what they are expected to learn, the approach can also provide educators with more detailed or fine-grained information about student learning progress, which can help them more precisely identify academic strengths and weakness, as well as the specific concepts and skills students have not yet mastered. Since academic progress is often tracked and reported by learning standards in proficiency-based courses and schools, educators and parents often know more precisely what specific knowledge and skills students have acquired or may be struggling with (Great Schools Partnership, 2014).

When schools transition to PBE, it can entail significant changes in how a school operates and teaches students, affecting everything from the school's educational philosophy and culture to its methods of instruction, testing, grading, reporting, promotion, and graduation. While there is little debate that students should be held to high academic expectation and

public schools and teachers should make sure that students acquire the most important knowledge and skills they will need to succeed in adult life, there is often disagreement and debate about the best way to achieve these goals. For this reason, debates about proficiency-based learning tend to be focused on the methods used by schools, rather than the overall objective of the strategy (Great Schools Partnership, 2014).

There is synergy between the goals of PBE and RtI which serves to bolster the importance of each; however, the inherent uncertainties accompanying both policy reforms are evident as well. Each requires systematic and individual understanding at the state, district, school, and classroom level: processes that are currently underway, but fraught with risk, unpredictability, and variability as each policymaker, bureaucrat, district administrator, school leader or classroom teacher seeks to interpret and make sense of the meaning, means, and desired outcomes. At each level of policy transmission, from the state capital to the classroom, information is interpreted and passed on. While accurate communication is the goal, several factors inherent within the policymaking and implementation systems may create inconsistencies in what is relayed, and what is understood. Information, message, and intent are filtered through all institutions and individuals who encounter them. Most often, the revisions may be unintended and undetected, but ultimately they have an influence on the outcomes.

Added to those public school reform initiatives that have direct impacts on teaching and learning within the classroom, the Obama Administration's Race to the Top (RTTT) competitive grants of 2009 resulted in magnified scrutiny on annual performance reviews for teachers, in which student growth is a required aspect of teacher performance. Performance reviews must also be used to inform professional development, compensation, and employment status decisions. The focus on the construction of new or revision of existing teacher evaluation systems (TES) has intensely trained public inspection upon teaching practices.

The National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), two unions that represent the majority of practitioners within the teaching profession, warned that hyper-focus on teachers will not lead to whole-scale, substantive reform of public education. “Efforts to reform a single component (of public education), such as teacher evaluation, cannot produce a ‘silver bullet.’ Focusing on only one component can lead to reforms that merely tinker around the edges” (NEA, 2010). “Evaluation procedures ...should not only assess individual teachers but also help them continuously improve” (Phillips & Weingarten, 2013). Effective TES should provide recommendations for individual teacher professional development.

The reality is that teachers in Maine are increasingly required to learn about and incorporate strategies that address RtI and PBE, aware that they will be responsible for demonstrating proficient responses and practices as they are evaluated by new systems that incorporate measures of student learning, and which will be available to the public at large. While it should be understood as a complex, nuanced issue, TES is an aspect of public school education of which the public has an understanding. While RtI and PBE may be abstract educational ideas for society, performance reviews and test scores are concepts understood by most people. Increased scrutiny of classroom teachers by the greater community is inevitable.

Figuring out how to develop and sustain expert instruction in all public school classrooms is the challenge. For more than half a century, bureaucratic administration has driven institutional change by the promise “to bring transparency, accountability, and efficiency to modern governance” (Meyer,

Tröhler, Labaree, & Hutt, 2014, p. 5). Social and political efforts have worked to remake public education in that form. Especially in the past couple of decades, ‘accountability’ has emerged as a prime rationale for educational reform and policy initiatives. Meyer, Tröhler, Labaree, & Hutt (2014) state that social processes have contributed to the "accountability agenda." They suggested that the globalization of educational policy has been a significant influence on moving toward the centralized governance of education, and caution that may be based upon inconsistent rationale.

The accountability agenda derives much of its seeming self-evidence from the popularity the idea enjoys in political democracies where keeping leaders accountable is a basic tenet of democratic vitality. But in politics we hold leaders accountable by judging their choices in context. Educational accountability, by contrast, wants to judge the work of educators based on predetermined indicators that are insensitive to the great variance of people, publics, and places... "accountability" in public education wants to determine educational effectiveness based on context-free rankings (p. 1).

Questioning the foundational premise by which accountability is “becoming a pervasive normalizing discourse” (p. 1), the researchers conceded that it was presently entrenched. Education was commonly viewed as less a social and cultural

tool and more “an economic project engendering usable skills and ‘competencies’” (p. 1.)

Within the environment of accountability, it is tempting to invoke a relatively clear causal model to explain how a government agency can induce schools and/or teachers to change behavior. One currently dominant method is rational choice theory, which employs incentives and sanctions that matter to the teacher. It asserts that each participant will act to maximize her utility, a principle that guides all decision making.

Rational choice theory assumes that the act of choosing is at the center of an individual’s life, that the individual preferences are neither vague nor contradictory, and that all choices are reduced to personal interest or to utility maximization (Spillane, 2004, p. 6).

In that manner, it is assumed, teachers will conform to directives and the desired goals will result. However, reality is seldom so simple.

Additionally, the model grounded in the rational choice theory poses that there is a strong link between the policy environment, the authority of school and district administration, and the classroom teacher. It envisions a structure in which information and demands are passed down through a hierarchical structure. It assumes that local actors are choosing between following policymakers’ directives or ignoring them. However Diamond (2007) saw an inconsistency between this conventional thinking and the actual functioning of contemporary educational policy directives.

Although most scholarly work has acknowledged that mobilizing rewards and sanctions gets educators' attention, the link between the policy environment and changes in instruction is complex, and studies in the neo-institutional and faculty workplace traditions have conceptualized this process differently from those that have used the bureaucratic/rational choice perspective (p. 286).

Black & Wiliam (2001) commented on this approach, referring to the classroom as a "black box." They wrote

In terms of systems engineering, present policy seems to treat the classroom as a *black box*. Certain inputs from the outside are fed in or make demands - pupils, teachers, other resources, management rules and requirements, parental anxieties, tests with pressures to score highly, and so on. Some outputs follow, hopefully pupils who are more knowledgeable and competent, better test results, teachers who are more or less satisfied, and more or less exhausted (p. 1).

Research suggested that in the process, teachers' work had increased, intensified, and expanded (Knapp, Bamberg, Ferguson & Hill, 1998; Valli & Buese, 2007; McGuinn, 2011; Superfine, Gottlieb, & Smyllie, 2012).

Researcher have asserted that initiatives fail to start "where the teachers are," and thus may result in modest levels of change (Guskey, 1986; Kennedy, 2005).

How can anyone be certain that new policies and inputs will produce better outputs, greater student achievement?

The answer usually given is that it is up to teachers—they have to make the inside work better. This answer is not good enough for two reasons. First, it is at least possible that some changes in the inputs maybe counter-productive—making it harder for teachers to raise standards. Secondly, it seems strange, even unfair, to leave the most difficult piece of the standards-raising task entirely to teachers (Black & Wiliam, 2001, p. 1).

What is actually happening inside the classroom, within the process of teaching and learning? What factors may deter the transfer of information and intentions from being transmitted with clarity from inception - policymakers - to implementation - classroom teachers?

It is important to ask these questions and construct possible answers. Only by studying the conditions through which educational policy enters the classroom can the process be improved. Only by attempting to understand the transition of policy and information from inception to implementation can the process become more efficient. The goal of improving the achievement of American public school students can only begin to succeed if all actors within the process understand one another.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to look inside the “black box,” to examine the impacts of educational policies on the classroom teacher as she meets the challenges of teaching and learning within the classroom. As Black and Wiliam (2001) pondered more than a decade ago, without specifically hearing from

teachers how can anyone be sure that the inputs of the contemporary educational reform movement have the desired impact on the classroom teacher? By gaining understanding of how initiatives trickle down from state-to-district- to-classroom, the researcher sought to recognize the challenges of capacity, varied information, multiple lines of communications, complexities of goals, and other challenges that confront the classroom teacher.

It has been well-documented that change is difficult. Policy mandates within education have been received by many teachers with great skepticism and, in some cases, outright negativity. Some analysts argued that “entrenched classroom habits defeat reform. Other reported that many innovations fail because they were poorly adapted to classrooms” (Cohen, 1990, p. 312). Other research, based in large part on survey results, indicates that accountability policies can contribute to low morale, increased frustration, diminished student learning experiences, and limited curricular options (Abrams, Oedulla & Madaus, 2003). On the other hand, Desimone (2013) did not find the same negativism, characterizing her findings concerning standards based reforms, for example, as “constructive and positive” (p. 1). Janssen, Westbroek, Doyle, and van Driel (2013) suggest that there is a lack of study of “the nature of *practice* in teaching and even fewer attempts to understand what practical work means and what implications such an analysis might have for discerning how innovation connects to actual classroom work” (p. 2).

However, it is not just any teacher whose views were sought in this study. The researcher sought to understand how mid-career teachers who were highly regarded by peers and supervisors interpreted policy initiatives and attributed

meaning to their experiences during the current era of educational reform. The selection of highly regarded, mid-career teacher of English-language arts or mathematics was targeted with the goal of learning what was occurring from the perspective of respected teachers as RtI, PBE, and TES unfolded in their classrooms. The teachers were admired by their peers because it was perceived that they were constantly looking at how to improve their practices in order to better meet the needs of their students. Moreover, they were motivated by a sense of service to the school community. Desimone (2009) found evidence that the most motivated teachers were open to change or to try something new. They sought out professional learning opportunities that improved their practices. They were respected as leaders, both formally and informally. Those were also positive characteristics that caused some teachers to become “active users,” of policy reforms according Firestone (1989). He suggested

positive examples illustrate the possibility that is masked by the typical case. They raise hope; in fact only one such case is necessary to indicate that the exceptional is possible (p. 162).

Currently, many policymakers depend upon test scores to provide a view of whether progress is being achieved. At best, that is a limited view. There are potential detours and roadblocks to the flow of policy goals from the capital to the classroom. Many are evident to the classroom teacher, but beyond her control. Some are inherent in the process of policy enactment. Others occur as participants strive to make sense of guidelines and goals. The “bumps” must be identified and addressed if the goal of improving the educational outcomes of all public school

students is to be met. It is through striving to understand the perceived impacts of educational policies on the processes of teaching and learning within the classroom - the boots on the ground - that the implementation may better achieve the intended goals of the policymakers.

Surveys have been the most common method to seek input from classroom teachers about the current environment of education policy and reform. While an efficient way to gather opinions, surveys may be limited in drawing conclusions about a large, diverse population. Moreover, they do not allow for nuanced viewpoints to be expressed. An interview study, on the other hand, has the advantage of allowing a researcher to clearly define the sample. It is possible to specify and target a population that has particular interests. Additionally, it focuses on capturing attitudinal behavior, and the opportunity to extensively probe respondents on their comments. Interviews also allow for untangling complex topics and opinions by probing into responses. Qualitative interview research contributes to the discussion by extending the research and providing the opportunity to gain important detail or perspective from the classroom teachers, the end of the chain of educational policy.

Research Question

As teachers struggle to address educational policies and reforms, the researcher asks: What factors influence highly regarded teachers' understanding and implementation of policy reforms within classrooms?

Significance of the Study

The ultimate goal of educational policy is to improve the teaching and learning process so that American public schools are able to better prepare young

citizens or students for the 21st century global economy and society in which they will live. This study was designed to add depth of understanding to how policy can better effect such change and provide improvement within the classroom by seeking the perspective of teachers who were highly regarded by their schools and within their educational communities.

The significance of this study is found within providing insight into how educational policies may become altered from the original intentions as they are applied or implemented within a classroom. This study searched for understanding. It explored participants' views about educational policies and reforms that affect their practices, classrooms, and students. The researcher's goal was to deepen current knowledge about the demands placed upon classroom teachers during a time of rapid educational change as they tried to offer the desired high-quality education to their students. Implementation within the classroom may stray from originally intended policy goals, and the researcher sought to gain understanding of some aspects of the phenomenon that caused this to occur.

This research contributes to a better understanding of the teacher's perspective and experiences: the concerns, impediments, and supports. The information assists institutions at all levels of policymaking and implementation to facilitate the flow of information and aid in the execution of policy initiatives. The research provides those from the beginning or top of the process - policymakers - and those of interim levels -district and school administrators - with understanding of the viewpoint from the bottom - the classroom teacher.

In a well-recognized quote, from her novel *A Wrinkle in Time*, author and poet Madeleine L'Engle suggests there is a reason for persistence and optimism, “...(J)ust because we don't understand doesn't mean that the explanation doesn't exist.” Her words mean that while one may desire to know all of the answers, sometimes things are revealed over time. Currently, policy changes faster than actual change can occur within educational institutions. There is a sense of urgency within the desire for reform, but change does not, and probably should not, happen rapidly. Everything is not known, but understanding is an appropriate pursuit. Instant, definitive answers are seldom available. This study moves toward greater understanding and explanation so that the flow of educational changes may be articulated and translated into practices that aid the teaching and learning process.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

Placing responsibility for enactment of educational policy and reforms, or lack thereof, solely on the teacher is too simplistic, as this literature review indicates. Background literature related to the current educational environment is examined in this chapter. The information provides context to aid in understanding the journey of reform initiatives from policymakers to the teacher. While the volume and pace of proposed educational change is significant, the ability of the classroom teacher to comprehend and execute the desired initiatives is complicated, sometimes due to circumstances beyond her control. The responsibility for execution falls upon the classroom teacher, but much can be lost in the process of interpretation, translation, and implementation.

The review of literature is extensive and complex, but it is not exhaustive. It conveys the processes and challenges faced by educational initiatives as they make their way toward their intended goal: improved teaching that will result in better student learning in the classroom. First, to gain an understanding of the complexity that exists in public school education and policymaking, the researcher provides a historical overview of how the contemporary environment between policy and education has evolved in recent decades. Societal goals are translated through different stages of policymaking into the classroom for implementation. That is

followed by a review of research detailing the organizational translation between policymakers and local school districts. Policy coherence, compliance readiness, and cognitive sense-making at the administrative, collegial and classroom level as factors that may have an impact on the communication of policy initiatives are discussed. Those factors are selected for they each appear to be key at different stages in the transmission of policy. Finally, a framework illustrates the factors and components that were examined in the research study.

Recent Intergovernmental Educational Reform

The Goals of Contemporary Educational Policy

A desire for change and improvement in public schools has been a state of being for several decades. Since the late 1980s, the challenges and revisions have been dramatic. As of the mid-20th century, established public educational practices supported only minimal programs for most students; the majority of Americans were committed to providing most students with a basic, practical education. A shift occurred for two main reasons. First, the quest for universally applied educational goals began to emerge when legal and policy efforts addressed unequal educational opportunities for American students. Secondly, to remain competitive within the challenges of the 21st century global economy, the United States came to believe it must mobilize a well-educated populace comprising the greatest majority of them.

It is widely articulated today that all citizens must have access to an appropriately effective public school education if those goals are to be achieved. That represents a significant shift for politics, policy, and instructional practices

(Cohen & Spillane, 1992). “The notion that everyone should have the chance to get ahead regardless of race, class, and other identifiers is an important ideal, despite the fact that for many this does not happen” (Spillane, 2012, p. 125). Liu (2006) asserted that those efforts were affected by other complex social systems: families, communities, professional and regulatory agencies. Thus, the larger environment impacted, constrained and shaped the work of administrators, teachers and students within schools. Moreover, national efforts were complicated because all 50 states have different governing structures and political priorities.

Although states have long maintained a partnership with local governments in the governance of public education, and authority over teacher workforce policy, the shift toward greater state authority and the increasing inclusion of the federal government, created new dimensions and dynamics in education as authority and influence shifted from ‘local’ educational professionals toward national and global experts (Shulman & Sykes, 1983; Cohen & Spillane, 1992; Knapp, Bamberg, Ferguson & Hill, 1998; Spillane, 1998; Spillane, Diamond, Burch, Hallett, Jita, & Zoltners, 2002; Malen, 2003; Honig & Hatch, 2004; Valli & Buese, 2007; Diamond, 2007; Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009; McGuinn, 2011; Superfine, Gottlieb & Smylie, 2012).

Policy deals with abstractions and attempts to apply them to realities. “Policy...always deals with what is good in general, on the whole, and for the most part” (Shulman & Sykes, 1983, p. 1). It requires a grasp of the complexities that are present within, between, and among people. Schools are complex social organizations. Perceptions of policy where the actual work of teaching and

learning can be found, within the classroom as directed by a teacher, must be considered.

According to Elmore (1983), “Complexity is probably the most troubling aspect of modern government. Nowhere is the effect of complexity more apparent than in the translation of legislation into administrative action- what we have come to call ‘the implementation problem’” (p. 342). Karmon (2007) suggested that historically the unsuccessful attempts to change the way that schools “transmit knowledge” came from the lack of awareness of the “structure for organizing knowledge,” even before the subject matter encounters the teacher and enters the classroom (p. 1).

It was the intent of this researcher to examine how the relative simplicity of societal goals plays out in the complexities that ensnare the public education system. Often starting with clarity of purpose and the best of intent, policymakers create directives that converge on schools, classrooms, teachers, and students. Like the game of “telephone,” something seems to get lost in translation between societal goals and the final delivery of the communication within a classroom by a teacher. There is potential for policy initiatives to appear in the public school classrooms: (1) altered in appearance; (2) erroneously translated from their original purpose, or (3) as intended. Even with the most sincere attempts to focus on reforms, there exist areas of potential vulnerabilities. However, it is necessary to examine top-down school reform efforts from the bottom, within the classroom, the actual domain of teaching and learning, to fully understand the reality of policies.

A Historical Overview

Traditionally, education has been a decentralized institution, considered a function of state and local governance. The Constitution of the United States made no mention of education. However, over time public school education has become an important institution within American society. It is perceived by most of society to be the means by which to attain access to the American Dream. That label was introduced by James Truslow Adams in 1931 in the preface of his book *The Epic America*. He defined the concept as:

that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement... a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.

However, during the subsequent decades of the 20th century a host of influences, most recently the increasing influence of globalization, as well as a perceived shrinking of economic opportunities have increasingly trained the public's focus on the institutions of public schools as a means to achieve that dream. Public schools are now commonly understood to be to be the vehicles through which equitable access to future opportunity can be attained by America's children.

Most recently, societal goals for public education have expanded in order to elicit more generalized support from the greater American public through

preparing for the changing realities of the 21st century: (1) prepare persons for democratic citizenry through education in civic literacy; (2) aid the development of critical and innovative thinkers; (3) produce individuals who are prepared to compete in a global society; (4) develop students who can work collaboratively with others representing diverse cultures, religions and lifestyles; and (5) cultivate a skilled workforce (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2015). Meeting those goals requires that all students be provided with equitable access to an adequate education, however.

The purpose of policies and reforms initiated in the 1990's by the federal government were significantly focused on that goal of equitable access to adequate education. Throughout the decade two groups became increasingly vocal about the inadequacies of public school education, joining together in an unlikely coalition to push for federal leadership in school reforms: (1) the business community voiced concerns that its members were having to spend more on training newly graduated public school students who lacked fundamental skills and (2) civil rights groups expressed impatience that educational equity had yet to be achieved universally throughout America, especially for poor and minority students (Rhodes, 2012). In 2001, the United States Congress attended broadly to educational quality and outcomes in its reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), an educational program that was part of President Johnson's policy agenda to overcome economic disadvantages. Additionally, "(f)ueled by national reports and public concern about basic skills," state governments began to assert more authority over local districts by focusing on standards-based reforms "establishing

core curricula and statewide assessment programs” (Spillane, 2004, p. 17). Every state began to develop educational policy to build and support such systems (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Honig & Hatch, 2004; Diamond, 2007; Montrop & Sunderman, 2009; McGuinn, 2011; Superfine, Gottlieb, & Smylie, 2012).

The reauthorization in 2001 of ESEA as *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) required states to develop and implement standards, testing, and accountability systems. With its aim to raise the overall achievement of the national education system and close the achievement gap, NCLB constructed a system of greater accountability requirements than ever before, implementing two strategies of accountability simultaneously. The first strategy involved setting rigorous achievement goals that are adjusted upward periodically, because raising the bar had been shown to have some impact on increasing academic achievement in schools, and had shown progress in other fields (Jacobsen, Saultz, & Snyder, 2013). The second strategy was to publicize school accountability data, assisting the public in making judgments about how well public institutions were performing. Ironically, those approaches may produce unintended consequences. When the bar was raised, schools often initially experienced a drop in student achievement. Jacobsen, Saultz, and Snyder (2013) suggested that initial reaction by the public had been an erosion of confidence in and satisfaction with, public education and teachers.

Recognizing that it had intruded into an area of authority traditionally left to state and local governments, NCLB allowed flexibility for states to set their own standards, adopt their own assessments, and essentially define for themselves what

constitutes adequate yearly progress: definitions which determine whether schools become targeted for sanctions. Unique to NCLB was a convergence on teacher workforce policy that required states to ensure that there was a highly qualified teacher in every classroom, a requirement with which compliance had been difficult in some states and localities (Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009; Mead, Rotherham & Brown, 2012; Superfine, Gottlieb, & Smylie, 2012). In that way, "teacher" became the nexus as an important leverage point of educational policy and reform.

"Accountability is here to stay" is a slogan that was often heard throughout public education the early 1990s. Its intent was to persuade disbelieving teachers to make the necessary adjustments in response to NCLB. Its message has proved to be accurate. State accountability systems constructed by NCLB have been durable, often powerful instruments in reshaping how schools go about their business of educating students. Driven by quotas and sanctions, if improvement efforts failed, loss of control and possible closure of schools or districts were imminent.

Most recently, the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* (ARRA) of 2009 intensified the spotlight on state and local school districts and classroom teachers. "RTTT is both a policy tool and a political one..." (McGuinn, 2011, p. 141). Eighty billion dollars were directed to public K-12 education, signaling that the Obama administration intended to save jobs in education, and to keep its campaign promises to spur educational policy reform. Making improvements in teacher effectiveness and the equitable distribution of qualified teachers for all students, the ARRA also included the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top Fund (RTTT),

a competitive grant program. In their grant applications, states were required to demonstrate their comprehensive approach to future education. Significantly, more than one quarter of the possible score that states could attain (138 out of 500 points) were earned in the Great Teachers and Leader section of the applications (Superfine, Gottlieb, & Smylie, 2012). The section required states to demonstrate how they would recruit, train, and retain effective teachers and principals. The largest component of this section required states to outline their plans for evaluating all teachers and principals, at least annually. For teachers, evaluation goals are

1. student achievement growth as a significant factor;
2. differentiation of effectiveness in multiple categories; and
3. use of evaluation results to inform key personnel decisions, including professional development, compensation, promotion, retention, tenure, certification, and dismissal (Mead, Rotherham, & Brown, 2012).

Winning applications shared a commitment to using student data as a significant part of teacher evaluation, developing alternate routes to teacher certification, and committing to using teacher evaluation data to make personnel decisions (Mead, Rotherham, & Brown, 2012; Superfine, Gottlieb, & Smylie, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

“On a fundamental level, conflicts and tensions in the policy landscape arise because at least some of these different policies are grounded in conflicting conceptions of what improves student learning in schools” (Superfine, Smylie,

Cummings, Tozer, 2011, p. 80). According to Elmore (2007), national educational policies and reforms often “simply fail to understand the institutional realities of accountability in states, districts, and schools...” (p. 31). The working theory behind accountability policies was that measuring student academic achievement through test-based accountability can trigger consequences for students, teachers, schools, school districts, and state educational bureaucracies. The simplicity was logical and accounted for the commitment of human, social, and financial resources to be dedicated to the effort. However, the approach failed to acknowledge that the problems of the system were the problems of the smallest units.

Internal accountability precedes external accountability. That is, school personnel must share a coherent, explicit set of norms and expectations about what a good school looks like before they use signals from the outside to improve student learning (Elmore, 2007, p. 33).

Many researchers agreed that if policies were to impact student achievement, more needed to be done to enhance capacity within schools to those elements that attended to internal accountability and instructional improvements (Elmore, 2007; Spillane & Thompson, 1997; Center for Education Policy, 2011; Reagans & McEvily, 2003; Elmore, 2004; Corcoran, Furman, & Belcher, 2001; Diamond, 2007; Jacobsen, Saultz & Snyder, 2013 ; Darling-Hammond, 1990).

Table #1: *The Policy Path: From Societal Goals to the Classroom Teacher*

Societal Goals for Public Education = Equitable Access to an Adequate Education for Equitable Opportunities:

1. Prepare Students for Democratic Citizenry
2. Aid Students to Become Critical Thinkers
3. Help Individuals to Compete in the Global Marketplace
4. Teach Cultural Literacy
5. Cultivate a Skilled Workforce



Policymakers at Federal Level - legislation

(1965) "Education and Secondary Education Act"

(ESEA) (2001) Renewal of ESEA – "No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

(2009) "Race to the Top" (RTTT)



Policymakers at State Level - themes of legislation

STANDARDS-BASED EDUCATION

Proficiency-Based Education(PBE) Common Core(CCSS) /College & Career Ready

MEETING THE NEEDS OF ALL LEARNERS

Response to Intervention (RtI) Data Systems for Data-Driven Decision-making

ACCOUNTABILITY

Focused on Teacher: Teacher Evaluation System (TES) Teacher Professional Development
 Focused on Learner: Assessment & Standardized Testing



Policymakers at Local Level

School District Board of Directors (Community Input), Superintendent and Central Office Administrators



School Administrative Leadership (Administrators, Leadership Teams, Committees)



The Classroom Teacher

As Table # 1: *The Policy Path: From Societal Goals to the Classroom*

Teacher indicates, there are multiple parties and layers of communication from the creation to the implementation of educational policy initiatives. Despite the continuing rhetoric of local control and decentralized authority, the intensification of activism and control at the state level had become a defining feature of educational governance and reform initiatives. Local school districts increasingly were a maligned player (Malen, 2003). Consequently, the spotlight of public scrutiny and accountability had begun to shift toward the classroom and the teacher. It was feared that accountability measures could create or accentuate tensions between the leadership and teachers within a school and its school district.

According to Spillane, Diamond, Burch, Hallett, Jita, and Zoltners (2002), leadership, interested in meeting the demands of the public and policymakers, increasingly became involved with the processes of teaching and learning that take place within the classroom. Those efforts resulted in an opening of classroom doors, promoting access to an area where teacher autonomy was once the rule. District leadership was pressed to meet the demands of the policy system as quickly as possible, while teachers advocated that incremental changes might be best, given the needs of their students and the plague of educational fads. The two groups, especially principals as the middle-level intermediaries between district leadership and classroom teachers, strove for credibility as they worked to collaborate, and to maintain constructive deliberation about policy implementation. A path of cooperation was needed. How that was to translate into the classroom and instructional practices was not and in some schools still is not clear.

Moreover, according to the 2010 U.S. Census, children between the ages of six and 17, public school ages, can be found in fewer than 26 percent of American households. That statistic is not favorable to public school funding and investment in educational reforms. Researchers at the Center on Education Policy (2011) following trends in state funding concurred, predicting that educational reforms would “hit a wall” in 2012 and would not improve in the foreseeable future. As states intended to move forward with major reform work, in the majority of the states funding was forecast to remain flat or decline. The timing was unfortunate, for results of the nationwide survey suggested that most reform initiatives were in the planning and development stage. A majority of the most demanding reform strategies reportedly were expected to enter the implementation phase after 2012. Implementation of educational reforms for classroom teachers was hampered by cuts in state education agencies, operating budgets and limited staffing levels. Other forecasts predicted similar conditions of local district funding levels. It was of interest to further examine how classroom teachers were being impacted by this major challenge to educational policy. Greater progress could be achieved by understanding the dynamic nature of public schools, a concept given surprisingly little attention within the policymaking process; more study was warranted (Spillane & Thompson, 1997; Reagan & McEvily, 2003; Elmore, 2004; Cohen & Ball, 1999).

Political and institutional challenges result as policy directives are enacted within school districts and teacher classrooms. Many studies on policy implementation have focused on the characteristics of the policy or the

characteristics of the individual as determinants of implementation success or failure. However, as *The Policy Path: From Societal Goals to the Classroom Teacher* indicates, the journey from the inception of society's desires for its students to policy implementation within the public school classroom is complex and multi-layered. This research provided understanding about some factors that may unintentionally alter or impede the original intent of policy as it is implemented in public school classrooms by instructors.

Ultimately the responsibility lies in the classroom with the classroom teacher. It is imperative that issues of policy and reform focus on the classroom and the teacher, the place where it is possible to know how policies really are impacting the quality of education. That is the place where the problems, issues and challenges must be understood.

Factors that may Impact the Implementation of Educational Policy

The literature suggested that several factors may impact the implementation of educational policy, As *The Policy Path: From Societal Goals to the Classroom Teacher* indicates, policies trickle-down through the federal, state, and local levels to the classroom. At each transfer point there is the potential for revision of the message or intention, purposeful or unintended, to occur. Often the policy focus is on piecemeal changes, lacking a holistic approach. "In particular, district personnel must interpret legal and policy mandates in order to decide whether and/or how to ignore, adapt, or adopt reforms in practice" (Superfine, 2011, p.95). Generally, teachers have been considered "among the most important decision makers in the educational policy process, as they have traditionally made decisions independently

of much government oversight when they ‘close the classroom door’” (Superfine, 2011, p. 87) because of a variety of factors:

It is difficult to find strong evidence that federal education laws... have achieved their primary goals or ...that it is even possible to challenging and rethinking education practices, the status quo often appears to achieve deep instructional reform consistently across schools in the U.S. (especially) when reforms are mandated by law at the federal level” (Superfine, 2011, p. 96).

Down "where the rubber meets the road," educators charged with implementing the policy initiatives that sift between intergovernmental relationships, but that "road" is not always well-defined. Major potholes may surface and seem unavoidable. Moreover, future policy efforts that build on the ARRA , “focus more narrowly on managing the teacher workforce” (Superfine, 2011, p. 134). However, initiatives do not all bind together; they are fragile (Hammersley-Fletcher & Adnett, 2009; Superfine, 2011). They do not always engage all staff in extended or deep comprehension of the desired changes or mandated initiatives. There are many areas along the road of educational reform "from the capital to the classroom." That phrase is used by many researchers to connote the implementation of contemporary educational policy : wherein communication can be intentionally or inadvertently altered or revised and can change the goals of policy.

A paradox exists in that "(t)he policymakers who define problems and devise remedies are rarely the ultimate problem solvers" (Cohen, Moffitt, & Goldin, 2007, p. 522). They depend upon the very people and institutions that they deem to be part of the problem to implement changes to solve the problem.

Policy and practice shape each other in continuing interaction and... depend on each other. Policies and programs cannot specify practice but depend on practitioners to realize them in varied situations, while practice depends on policy to frame action and offer resources (p. 521).

In other words, the ability to reconcile policy and practice in the search for solutions requires the cooperation between the authority and the practitioner. This relationship is not easily established, however.

The sharper the departures from conventional practice that policy urges, the more radical are the entailed changes for practitioners and recipients, the more practice is placed at risk of failure. For more ambitious policies require practitioners to acquire new capabilities and to unlearn present capabilities; such policies create even more incompetence among the practitioners whose incompetence already is implied in the policies' novel aims...The more incompetence policies create, the more difficult it is to mobilize that express mutual dependence that can enable cooperation. The more that difficulty grows, the more likely is conflict (p. 522).

The cooperation that is needed in the relations between policy and practice is sometimes put at risk by the policy itself which may create incompetence in

practice. According to Cohen, Moffitt, and Goldin (2007), this may be additionally complicated by resistance or erosion of trust. Actions, reactions, and adjustments eventually become public which creates more risk of failure and damages the legitimacy of practitioner and/or policy maker interests.

Ultimately, this may become an implementation problem. Well-intentioned policy may not fit the realities within the classrooms. It is important that issues of policy implementation focus on the classroom, the teacher, and her students. It is here where policies impact the quality of public education.

Currently, schools face multiple demands from several sources as illustrated by *The Policy Path: From Societal Goals to the Classroom Teacher*. The demands spread across numerous aspects of teaching and learning including curriculum, uses of time, testing, accountability, management, parental involvement, and professional development. A number of reforms focus on aspects of the educational workforce - from preparation, certification and licensure to evaluation, compensation, professional development, tenure, and retention. All of those demands and policy initiatives do not exist as social fact waiting to happen. They are constructed across a system of public education that contains approximately 14,000 school districts and almost 130,000 schools spread across fifty states that have developed vastly different education systems that vary greatly in school quality (McGuinn, 2011).

Without deliberate steps taken to ensure uniform interpretation and implementation toward the desired outcomes, results may vary significantly between states, school districts, schools, and even between classrooms within the

same school. As policy initiatives descend upon schools, the first task is to promote systematic efforts toward achieving the desired objectives.

Policy Coherence

Policy coherence is achieved when organized, efficient promotion of policy actions is established across an organization, creating synergies towards achieving an agreed-upon goal (Trinity College Dublin, 2010). Different elements within the implementation process may uniquely interpret various aspects of the policy. Awareness of that potential may prevent inconsistencies from developing across various stakeholders in the organization. Marshalling the resources needed to maintain uniformity and reliability of message, understanding, and implementation can represent a significant challenge, however.

According to Honig & Hatch (2004), "when multiple external demands converge on schools they compete with each other for funding, time, and attentions" (p. 16). Researchers suggested that teachers, principals, and other school staff charged with implementing multiple demands may be negatively impacted if they have inadequate resources for managing them (Superfine, Smylie, Cummings, & Tozier, 2011; Honig & Hatch, 2004). Providing more time or resources for an initiative may have limited impact if multiple priorities compete time and attention (Coburn & Russell, 2008).

Honig & Hatch (2004) argued that "policy coherence is not inherently positive or negative" (p. 16). Multiple demands may, in fact, bring new opportunities for school improvement, if each external demand brings with it additional resources. They suggested that coherence can provide a productive

process if schools use the multiple external demands to strengthen opportunities for student learning. It is potentially positive if policy coherence is treated as an ongoing 'process' in which schools and school district central offices work together to help manage external demands. They stressed that seeing coherence as a process that must be managed requires "ongoing investment in the institutional capacity of schools and district central offices to engage in practices that may help schools manage multiple external policy demands productively" (p. 27). Funding should also be appropriated for the development of people in schools who can be "the crafters of coherence" and in development of central office personnel to support these efforts.

At present, policy coherence is difficult to achieve. It is common for researchers to define it in terms of incoherence:

Policy incoherence (is) the tensions, dilemmas, and conflicts that result when different federal, state, and district education reform policies and programs that are not aligned converge at the school and classroom level (Superfine, Smylie, Cummings, and Tozer, 2011, p. 73).

When multiple external demands come together within schools, it may or may not contribute to positive student performance outcomes. A high degree of collaboration and interdependence is required to successfully navigate toward policy coherence.

Policy coherence is composed of two major components: policy convergence; and problem framing.

Policy convergence. Knapp, Bamburg, Ferguson, and Hill (1998) defined reforms “as initiatives undertaken at any level of the educational system, although often at a level higher than the classroom or school, to improve the functioning of the system at the service-delivery level” (p. 400). When multiple policies interact, it is called convergence. In combination, policy initiatives may reinforce each other, get in each other’s way, or overload the system.

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 so that little, if anything, is accomplished” (Knapp, et al., 1999, p. 398).

“Reform initiatives separately and jointly alter, refocus, enhance, complicate, or otherwise affect the work of all people who directly serve school children and their families” (p. 398-399). The researchers urged policymakers to consider possible interactions between major initiatives. The challenge, they asserted, is being able to understand how policy convergence affects “the full range of professional people operating within the extremely varied contexts of schooling” (p. 416).

The existence of convergence raises questions of multiple policy interactions on one another and their joint influence on the working conditions of school professionals, as well as on the quality of learning opportunities available to children. The combined impacts of positive, negative, or neutral convergence depend on the capacity of schools and school district central offices to manage and

mediate the demands. They require constant negotiation of determining a fit between external demands and schools' own goals and strategies, an inside-out strategy that Honig & Hatch (2004) asserted is a continuous process. Other researchers suggested that challenges include:

increases in the number of responsibilities for professional staff, escalation in demands on time, challenges and trade-offs to the allocation of time and effort, increases in demand for new knowledge and skills, questions regarding the goals of the school and goals for schooling, prospects for goal and role ambiguity and conflict, questions regarding the nature and function of professional roles, increases in overall responsibility and accountability, and expansion of sources and forms of responsibility and accountability (Superfine, Smylie, Cummings, & Tozer, 2011, p. 74).

Those concerns are complex, not readily evident, and not easily reconciled.

Problem framing. Within an environment of policy incoherence , a cluttered and contradictory collision of external policy and local priorities , school professionals attempt to maintain a balance among competing elements, a challenge that may produce frustration, fear, and heightened stress (Knapp, Bamburg, Ferguson, & Hill, 1998; Honig & Hatch, 2004; Kaufman & Stein, 2009; Superfine, Smylie, Cummings, & Tozer, 2012). Those factors may significantly affect how the problems of local educational systems and educational reforms are defined or framed.

Although the United States may have goals for its educational system, it lacks an effective system within which the goals can be uniformly and consistently pursued. Even though politicians, business persons, parents, and educators have widely endorsed proposals intended to improve American public schooling, the social world is complex and multidimensional. “(A)ny representation of the cause of a problem inevitably highlights certain aspects of the situation while deemphasizing or ignoring others” (Coburn, 2006, p. 344). Defining or framing the problem is crucial “because it assigns responsibility and creates rationales that authorize some policy solutions and not others” (p. 344). Problem framing is not simple. Usually it should involve input from multiple stakeholders with differing perspectives. The process is often constrained by the realities of limited time and money. However, framing the problem is important; only after a problem has been accurately identified may appropriate steps be taken to solve it.

Local interpretations, decisions, and actions shape how policies impact practices. According to Coburn (2006), how local actors frame problems during policy implementation is imperative, however little study has focused upon it. Framing is not a single event: neither is it communicated by a single decision maker. It requires that school staff construct their understanding of the problem to be solved, a process that is interactive, contested, shaped by authority relations, and mediated by teachers’ social networks. Framing sets parameters by which decisions are made, and shapes the allocation of resources such as time and dollars.

Problem framing not only shapes the direction of proposed solutions, it is also important in enabling and coordinating action toward those goals. If a clear and shared understanding of a problem is not evident, it can be very difficult to move forward. Coburn (2006) also suggested that there exists a reciprocal relationship between individual world views and the social process of problem framing. Ultimately, understandings, beliefs, and values must be negotiated among all individuals. Negotiated understandings of the problem create a frame within which teachers construct new views, and guide experimentation with new instructional practices. Coburn's research asserted that individual motivation can be socially organized and channeled toward collective action. "In the absence of clear and shared understandings of problems, collective and coordinated action is elusive" (p. 375).

Newman, Smith, Allensworth, and Bryk (2001) suggested that student achievement will best be served through program coherence, a goal that can be attained when school staffs and external organizations that work with them aim together "to recognize both internal and external sources of incoherence," and by strengthening instructional frameworks that guide and coordinate "supports for teaching and learning throughout the school" (p. 316). That is achieved, they assert, through simultaneous bottom-up and top-down efforts.

Compliance Readiness

All of that assumes that the classrooms of public schools are actually influenced by government policy at all.

A central conceit of traditional, rationalist policy analysis is that policy gets "made" in one place and "implemented" in another. A successful policy, in this view, is one in which the behavior of those charged with implementing the policy is consistent with the expectations of those who made the policy, and the effects that follow from this behavior are consistent with what the policy says they should be. The fact that these conditions seldom, if ever, occur seems not to have had much effect on the practice of policy analysis (Elmore, 2006, p. 238).

Meyer & Rowan (1977) argue that many organizations in post-industrial society “reflect the myths of their institutional environments instead of the demands of their work activities” (p. 341). Those myths often become embedded in the institutional environment, and a gap between their formal structure and their ongoing work activities is maintained. In other words, an organizational structure that appears on paper is not an accurate depiction of the way an organization truly functions.

For example, in their study of the normative influence of reading policy on teaching practice, Penuel, Frank, Sun, Kim and Singleton (2013) conclude that while state and federal agencies created reading reforms of an unusually high level of policy coherence and accompanied them with funding for resources and professional development, teachers’ practices across the 11 elementary schools in the study did not conform to the new policies and reforms. Teachers’ responses to the new regime for reading instruction were most influenced by the “local norms of

practice in their schools and collegial subgroups” (p. 3). Thus the dynamics within schools must be considered. Making assumptions about how schools are supposed to function neglects to fully examine the environment in which public schools and teachers find themselves.

According to Zald (1978), focus should be not so much on control of the individuals as on the "industries," related groups of "firms" that can be compared across like organizations according to products and functions. In a general sense, schools are "firms" within the educational "industry." Zald suggested that "compliance readiness" has three primary dimensions:

1. *ideological readiness*: the degree to which the target group agrees with
2. the norms and conditions of the control agent;
3. *organizational capacity*: the existence of moneys and personnel that can be used to meet demands;
4. *power to resist control agents*: the perceived ability and resources of the target element to redefine the standards of performance or resist control agents.

Zald's view recognized that behavior is dependent upon interactions among controllers and target elements, i.e., policymakers and educators. How these interactions operate in modern day schools is not clear.

Ideological readiness. The classical understanding of organizational learning is that it is routine-based, history-dependent and target-oriented. Within that framework, organizations encode inferences from history that guide behavior in establishing routines, including the rules, procedures, and conventions within

which organizations operate. Routines also include the structure of beliefs, cultures and knowledge. They are independent from the individuals within an organization and are capable of surviving turnover within the institution.

According to Levitt & March (1988) historical experiences are captured by routines, recorded in a collective memory that is sometimes jumbled. Since organizations are collections of subunits, a routine may produce different outcomes in the subunits, or different routines may produce the same outcomes among subunits. In organizations that have the potential to effectively learn and adapt new routines, the institutions must exhibit a design:

that recognize(s) the difficulties of the process and in particular the extent to which (...) learning is often frustrated, and the extent to which the comprehension of history may involve slow rather than fast adaptation, imprecise rather than precise responses to experience, and abrupt rather than incremental changes (p.336).

While they wrote more than a decade ago, Spillane & Thompson (1997) provide a description that remains pertinent.

Recent state and national reforms (...) propose a pedagogy that departs fundamentally from modal practice and notions about teaching, learning, and subject matter. Moreover, the teaching they envision requires deeper knowledge of subject matter, as well as pedagogical decision making that is more complex and contingent on changing, unpredictable classroom situations than either traditional teaching or 'direct instruction' methods. Thus, local change processes are more complex that they were

in previous waves of reform. These reforms, then are even more dependent on local capacity than were past waves of reform (p. 185).

Building ideological readiness within an organization is seen by many educational researchers as crucial to a change in teacher practices within classroom. For teachers to be successful in transforming their practices and beliefs, a district's capacity to foster a learning environment for its teachers must continually adapt (Darling- Hammond, 2004; Spillane & Thompson, 1997; Reagans & McEvily, 2003; Center on Education Policy, 2011; Cohen & Ball, 1999; Jacobsen, et al., 2013; Diamond, 2007; Faxon-Mills, et al., 2013; Rowan, et al., 2009).

Researchers stress that the ideological capacity of a local school district to develop and carry out policies intended to support changes in the classroom is highly dependent upon the support of district administrators and lead teachers, those with formal and informal positions. District leadership needs to construct a learning environment for teachers that requires sustained, substantive interactions with opportunities to learn about reforms, an environment in which it is acknowledged that learning is not merely acquisition of additional information and skills, but also transforming, reconstructing, or "unlearning" a great deal of what most teachers habitually do. Examination of local district capacity is often overlooked, but needs to be undertaken (Spillane & Thompson, 1997; Spillane, 2004; Faxon-Mills, et al., 2013; Spillane & Zeuli, 1999; Center on Education Policy, 2011; Reagans & McEvily, 2003, Penuel, et al., 2013).

Organizational capacity. All organizations require three forms of capital: human, social, and financial resources. However, Spillane & Thompson (1997) suggest that there may be significant differences in an organization's capacity to mobilize those resources. That is an important finding, for, "(w)hile these forms of capital...are analytically distinguishable, the nature, value, and sometimes even the existence of each depends critically on one or both of the others" (p. 190).

Human capital. Human capital is the commitment, dispositions, and knowledge of employees. Learning is the process through which human capital is developed. The human capital represented by local leadership and policymakers is an important components of a local district's capacity to promote ambitious instructional reforms. Learning, however, depends upon the development and exploitation of social capital (Spillane & Thompson, 1997).

Social capital. Social capital is the way individuals relate to one another. Human capital and social capital are interdependent: an interaction that has implications for knowledge development and diffusion of innovations, especially for teachers in times of reform. Coburn & Russell (2008) identified four sources of teachers' social networks that matter for the development of social capital: structure; access to expertise; trust; and content interactions. "(I)t is these features of teachers' social relations and the resources available through them that (...) can create conditions that foster the creation of social capital" (p. 206). A strong sense of *trust* within a district is needed, especially for teachers, for it motivates them to share and discuss information.

Social capital is a factor of the strength of ties between individuals, a function of emotional/social closeness and the frequency of interactions. Additionally, while collaborative and trusting internal habits and norms are needed, equally important may be linkages or networks outside a school district. Connections to external networks provide perspectives and knowledge that allow for deeper understandings of the necessary learning and potential challenges. Reagans & McEvily (2003) asserted that cohesion and range of networks, or “multiple knowledge pools” (p. 242) are distinctly separate features of the network structure that impact the transfer of knowledge. Coburn & Russell (2008) defined those concepts as *tie span* and *tie strength*. They suggested that the degree to which a teacher’s ties span or reach different functional areas will influence appropriation of needed information, *access to expertise*.

Financial capital. Financial capital in the form of resources such as money, staffing, time, and materials is important for a school district's capacity to enact reforms. Spillane & Thompson (1997) found that while the resources available to local districts were not necessarily the key ingredient in establishing trusting relationships, access to time, money, staffing and materials are important, for they may have an impact on the *content of interactions* or the substance of social engagement that occurs. Sustained time is imperative, for it impacts the knowledge, dispositions and commitment to policy initiatives on which district leadership and teaching staff must focus. Within school districts, time is defined not with respect to deadlines for completed curriculum or implementation, but with an emphasis on the learning needs of staff. By themselves, other resources

are not enough. School districts must possess individuals who can guide their colleagues through new concepts; without a collaborative, trustful learning environment, no amount of financial resources will help (Spillane & Thompson, 1997).

Researchers caution that care must be taken to continually monitor organizational capacity, and keep it properly balanced, an equilibrium that is shifting and dependent upon the challenges of initiatives being faced (Cohen & Ball, 1999; de Lima, 2001; Supovitz, Sirinides & May, 2009). Moreover, Cohen & Ball (1999) suggest that building capacity in school instruction has most often focused on the wrong components of capital. Since the mid-1900s most efforts have concentrated on improving the curriculum materials used in schools or on "training" teachers in new instructional methods. Labeled as "building instructional capacity," few of those intervention efforts have had detectable effects on instruction and are rarely sustained over time.

It is argued that interventions will more likely succeed if they recognize that teachers learn best when provided with the same inputs for learning as their students might require. Those inputs include that the intervener or leader takes into account the enactor's/teacher's (1) existing background knowledge about content and pedagogy; (2) current level of pedagogical skill; (3) motivation or willingness to learn. It is the responsibility of leadership to match instruction to the needs of their learners. Policymakers and organizations must focus not just on their influences in their own right, but on the establishment of instructional relationships that focus on aiding teacher learning about professional practice.

Supovitz, Sirinides & May (2009) found that the relationship between principal leadership and teachers may have an impact on student learning indirectly through influences that bear on instructional practices. “Through fostering a climate of instructional collaboration, principals have the greatest impact on learning” (p. 46).

Researcher de Lima (2001) cautioned that over-emphasis on developing collegiality or strong interpersonal ties may focus on the wrong areas of capacity development. Indispensable in the current climate of reform and educational change is a school environment in which cognitive conflict, not simple teacher collaboration, is necessary. “If they are to contribute to school change, collaborative cultures must espouse independent thinking, discussion of alternatives and confrontation of perspectives” (p. 117). De Lima advocated against allowing all teachers’ partnerships to be voluntary, suggesting competition within schools may spur increased levels of flexibility and creativity. To create and sustain such school environments requires skillful, deliberate, and insightful leadership, a responsibility that is being shared through the creation of teacher leadership. However, competition may also create additional stress within a school or district, adversely impacting the processes of teaching and learning. Constructing or maintaining an equilibrium requires a knife-edge balance of resources.

Power to resist. Much evidence has established that the structure and function of public schools have traditionally worked to protect themselves from external impacts through organizational structures and relationships called "coupling." Coupling is “synonymous with words like connection, link, or

interdependence, yet each of these latter terms misses a crucial nuance”

(Weick, 1976, p.3). According to Weick, in organizations in which loose coupling is the norm, different parts or elements of the organizations may be responsive to events, but each element also preserves its own identity, as well as some evidence of its physical or logical separateness.

Orton & Weick (1990) suggested that loose coupling is a distinct organizational form that:

1. allows an institution to maintain some stability, providing persistence;
2. seal off elements of the organization and prevent the spread of problems and neutralizing the impact of change, often called buffering;
3. allows for both assimilation and accommodation, a characteristic of adaptability;
4. fosters efficacy, reduces conflict, provides security, and creates a perception of smaller groups and social contacts, all of which contribute to job satisfaction;
5. simultaneously allows employee autonomy, experimentation, and innovation that produce effectiveness (p. 218).

They argue that coupling is a process: “something that organizations do, rather than merely as something that they have” (p. 218). Linking that concept directly to public education, Coburn (2004) stated:

(s)ince the late 1970s, researchers have argued that schools respond to pressures in the institutional environment by making symbolic changes in structure and procedures but decouple these changes from classroom practice, buffering the classroom from environmental pressures”(p. 211).

That view suggests that the institutional or external environment may have little influence on teachers’ classroom practices. (Weick, 1976; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Coburn, 2004).

Researchers hypothesized that a school’s formal structure may act to buffer its core technical work from outsiders in order to prevent scrutiny of the uncertainties and variations in classroom teaching, and thus undermine the legitimacy of the school’s mission (Meyer & Rowan, 1978; Weick, 1976; Spillane, Parise, & Sherer, 2011). Buffering can result in a classroom becoming loosely coupled or decoupled from the internal and external environment as well as from the school administrative structure. That neo-instructional theory suggests that district and school administrators, as well as teachers, have a great deal of discretion when attending to policies (Coburn, 2004; Diamond, 2007; Weick, 1976; Spillane, 2004). Schools are routinely labeled as loosely coupled, for they allow the simultaneous presence of interdependency and separateness, as well as a specific history to the system (Orton & Weick, 1990; Weick, 1976).

The idea of the loosely coupled classroom where teacher professionalism and autonomy dominantly reign simply by the closing of the classroom doors to shut out unwanted pressures is a cliché’ in educational cultures. It assumes that teachers or district and school administrators “often fail to notice, intentionally

ignore, or selectively attend to policies, especially those that are inconsistent with their own agendas” (Spillane, 2004, p. 5). Contemporary reality is much more complex, however. “(I)nstitutional sectors are neither fixed or immutable” (Spillane, Parise, & Sherer, 2011). With recent shifts in the policymaking environment, especially in directives on accountability and standardized testing, some researchers have argued that the connection between the policy environment and instructional practice has tightened (Diamond, 2007; Coburn, 2004; Saunter & Espeland, 2009; Diamond, 2012). It is suggested that policy initiatives intend to reshape the relationship between the external environment, the administrative level, and the instructional core.

Proponents of accountability argue that educational outcomes may be improved as schools develop more structure, and become more organized or recoupled. Research studies have reached mixed conclusions, however. Because teaching is a complex, multidimensional practice, the extent to which policy translates into the classroom may depend upon several variables. Most basic are the differences in the demands of subject matter and the resulting instructional dimensions. Nevertheless, the environmental pressures of standards and accountability measures increasingly make it beyond the schoolhouse door and into classrooms. Classroom-level research emphasizes that the pressures of policy initiatives: influence what teachers teach; marginalize low-stakes subjects; increase resources to test-taking skills and high-stakes subject areas; and shift resources between groups of students (Diamond & Spillane, 2004; Au, 2007;

Minthrop & Sunderman, 2009; Valli & Buese, 2007; Spillane, Parise, & Sherer, 2011).

Significantly, Sauder & Espeland (2009) suggest that tight coupling can result when meaning is negotiated inside an organization in response to environmental pressures. For example, educational rankings create extreme incentives for organizations to buffer their activities, but they are not able to do so because of the public nature of the data. In fact, the phenomenon of comparing educational institutions results in tight couplings. “Rankings have changed the fundamental of schools, transforming, for instance, how actors make decisions, do their jobs, and think about their schools” (p. 64). The researchers determined that the school institutions are unable to protect their practices from the influence of the new environmental pressures.

(P)rocesses of surveillance and normalization, change how internal and external constituencies think about the field of legal educations. These new understandings... in turn, encourage schools to self-impose the discipline that rankings foster. Rankings also offer external audiences a means for compelling ... schools to meet their demands. (Sauder & Espeland, 2009, p. 64).

While the study focused on law school rankings, rankings are a part of the global educational environment. Because they cannot be ignored, rankings are redefining accountability, transparency, good governance and, generally disrupting traditional power relations.

Organizational structures of public school institutions and the external environments within which they function are dynamic. A look across a school or school district at any given time may reveal a complexity of changing relationships that spans the spectrum from loosely coupled to tightly coupled. Such a reality stresses the resources and capacity of local resources as schools and school districts respond to state and federal mandates. State and federal resources are also stressed as they strive to meet the demands of their own directives. It is important to develop an awareness that knowledge is not absolute and thus implementation of policy initiatives may be susceptible to the processes by which individuals learn.

Cognitive Perspectives: Sense-Making

Policy change requires new learning as well as reframing existing knowledge and beliefs. “Educators are often blamed for their attachment to the status quo. Failure to make rapid change should not be interpreted simply as a lack of capacity or a deliberate attempt to undermine new policies” (Louis, et al., 2005, p. 179). Such assumptions overlook the importance of the sense-making process that takes place before action and response to new reforms are undertaken. Sense-making is not often a single deliberate event, but rather is an ongoing process. Individuals encounter sense-making tasks as they seek to understand new information. Most work tasks require some degree of sense-making, especially if they contain at least one of the following characteristics:

1. new situations or problems;
2. complex, less structured situations or problems;

3. a new domain;
4. an unclear information need (Zhang, Soergel, Klavans, and Oard, 2008, p. 4).

Using a broad understanding of the term "sense-making" which "refers to the total process of (1) searching for information and (2) making sense of the information" (Zhang, et al., 2008, p. 2), it is evident that the process is a daily, constant challenge within the environment of the school and classroom. Within the confines of a "normal" day, teachers encounter scores of tasks in which they are required to make sense of the situation at hand and respond accordingly.

Making sense of new information, situations, or problems generally first requires the recognition that a knowledge gap exists between an individual's existing schema and a novel "challenge." Learning theory suggests that a learner assimilates new pieces of information into an existing relevant aspect of his/her knowledge structure. Knowledge can be thought of as stored in human memory as schemas with interconnected concepts and relationships, organized in a meaningful way (Zhang, et al., 2008, p. 3).

Sense-makers tend to assimilate, make the unfamiliar familiar, so as to accommodate or make room for new information within existing schema. As such, sense-making tends to be a conserving process (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002; Spillane 2004, Louis, et al., 2005). New information is noticed, framed, and comprehended with respect to what is already known. Moreover, familiarity draws attention. People tend to focus on that which fits with their schema and ignore that which does not.

First, new ideas are understood as familiar friends - ideas that are already known to us. Second, we rely on surface or superficial similarities between new knowledge about something and existing scripts for that somethingwe tend to draw analogs to surface features rather than to the structural features...(Spillane, 2004, p. 78-79).

The ultimate product of successful sense-making is an updated knowledge representation comprising of revised schema. But the process may involve different levels of conceptual change.

Zhang, et al. (2008) found that the degree of change in existing knowledge is influenced by the relative strength and coherence of the internal schema versus that of the new information. When persons encounter conflicts between pieces of information or new information and their existing schema, there are four ways with which the conflicts are dealt: (1) *disregard* or refusal to accept conflicting ideas, resulting in no conceptual change; (2) *compromise*, resulting in some tuning of the existing conceptual model; (3) *acceptance*, in which the existing conceptual model is restructured; or (4) *confusion*, producing an unsatisfied mental state, which sometimes results in the participant searching for enough information to resolve the confusion and one of three prior states results. However, confusion sometimes causes an individual to simply give up and move on without resolution.

Spillane (2004) also stressed information is not merely transmitted or decoded. Each person must make sense of the messages received. This is an active process of interpretation that draws on the sense-maker's experiences, knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes...Knowledge and

experiences are integrated into a web of interdependent relationships...scripts or schema. We filter new incoming information through these scripts...The sense we make thus depends on the sense we already have; our existing knowledge is a primary resource in the development of new, sometimes better, understandings (p. 76).

Familiarity is a mixed blessing. On the positive side, familiar ideas about reforming instruction attract attention, but on the negative side, that which is already understood becomes the filter for new ideas, retaining the information that allows familiar scripts and frames to be preserved, not radically altered.

Paradoxically, those individuals who possess more experience, and are perhaps more expert, may require more time and opportunities to become familiar with and to struggle with new ideas.

The familiarity bias is even more important when it is acknowledged that change is a gradual and difficult process for most individuals, one requires extra time and individual energy. For American public school teachers, that may be problematic: researchers find that teachers have very little time to digest new information and make decisions about what to do in their classrooms. Kennedy (2005) cited research that suggested that American teachers teach almost the entire work day and therefore “have less time away from their students than teachers in many other countries,” (p. 4). That means they have less time to plan their instruction, let alone time to digest and implement policy initiatives.

Those ideas have important implications when applied to new learning for both district leadership and teachers. It is problematic to assume that they

understand the ideas pressed upon them by policymakers with consistency or in similar ways. That may have significant consequences for what actually occurs in the classroom.

Collective Sense-making. Much sense-making activity occurs in groups. Collective sense-making is the process by which individuals and groups evolve shared understandings of their setting. It is a process by which “teachers’ and administrators’ interpretations of external demands culminate in formal or informal decisions about how they collectively respond to externally initiated policies” (Louis, et al., 2005, p. 179). Collective sense-making is rarely a deliberate activity; it emerges over time due to frequent formal and informal communications that lead to common and agreed upon actions. It holds importance when determining responses to new policies (Spillane, Diamond, Burch, et al., 2002; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002; Louis, Febey, & Reiser, 2005). Honig & Hatch (2004) argue that it may be the primary process by which policy coherence is created within schools; however, few studies have focused on collective sense-making and little is known about the processes that are involved.

Louis, Febey, & Schroeder (2005) focus on the development of collective interpretation and its impact on the demands for change. While most sense-making occurs through individual reflection, “when teachers feel that their legitimacy is threatened or their professional judgment is undermined, they may be more likely to engage in collective sensemaking” (p. 179). Threats to a school’s reputation - for example through publication of low test scores or school ranking - may result in teachers banding together (Saunders & Espeland, 2009). Louis, et al., (2005)

state that the development of external accountability systems is not a proven strategy of long-range improvement or change, for when teachers (and administrators, too), are confronted with a new policy, they will undertake a sense-making process in order to interpret it. That will directly and indirectly influence work roles and work flow within the classroom.

Individual Sense-making. Policy is often inconsistently understood at different levels within the educational system because so many individuals strive to make sense of it. With inadequate capacity or provision for learning, teachers may individually choose "to generate a coherent explanation for policies that drive their actions, but they may also choose to emphasize inconsistencies, which can lead to cynicism and 'hunkering down'" (Louis, et al., 2005, p.181). Sense-making takes root within individual reactions and reflections, but organizations have opportunities to mediate those signals. The process has the potential to aid teachers as they determine whether to engage in significant change, incremental change, or resistance. However, if mediators and leaders cannot make "proper" sense of policies, they are not able to assist teachers within their classrooms in choosing courses of action. Teachers may be having conversations and enacting strategies that depart significantly from the policy's original intent.

Misinterpretation can occur at any level of the policymaking process, however. Spillane, Diamond, Burch, et al. (2002) examined how school leaders' sense-making is grounded in their own experiences, building routines and histories and roles as intermediaries between district office directives and classroom teachers. The researchers note that those "mid-level" managers or school leaders

often possess perceptions and understandings of policies that are mediated by their past experiences and their positional role in the school community. Classroom practitioners may be impacted by undetected misunderstandings of supervisors and mediators or their own misperceptions.

Sense-making within the Classroom. Classroom practices may not approximate those envisioned by policymakers' proposals, even when teachers report consistency. Some dimensions of practice are more responsive to policy than others (Cohen & Ball, 1999; Spillane & Zeuli, 1999). What a teacher already knows - the existing repertoire of knowledge and expertise - has significant importance when making sense in the complex activities that comprise teaching and learning. Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer (2002) assert there are at least three important implications for classroom teachers.

1. New ideas are interpreted on the basis of current frame of reference.
What is understood about the "new" or desired "revision" is only understood given the knowledge base one already has. Moreover, different persons will construct different understandings.
2. Individuals encounter difficulty when presented with the potential for major restructuring of their own sense-making framework.
That can make assimilation a conserving process, as the individual strives to make the novel familiar, reducing the new to the old. New ideas are at risk of becoming minor variations of what is already understood, rather than substantially altering ideas and practices.
3. When unfamiliar concepts are presented, less-experienced teachers

may focus on superficial aspects, unable to focus on the deeper, more significant concepts.

Spillane (2004) reached similar conclusions, but recognized that policymakers were also vulnerable to developing inconsistent understandings of policy. Approaching a state mandated initiative rationally and deliberately, district policymakers from nine different districts acted from assumptions that produced significantly different interpretations and, ultimately, results. The dominant theory of action is "transmission:" a process by which "experts" tell, show, and model ideas for teachers. Teachers, in turn, make use of those new ideas through individual sense-making. There are potential flaws at the outset, for district-level leadership sought expert assistance from those who fit the prevalent philosophy of knowledge held within the district, a difference in viewpoints that was not even perceived. Teachers tended to incorporate those practices which required the least amount of change from traditionally familiar conceptions of content and pedagogy. Spillane (2004) concluded that for teachers to successfully implement new standards requires an awareness by policymakers, mediators, and leaders at all levels that the sense-making process occurs within individuals at different rates, requiring varied time and experiences.

Policy implementation within the classroom must attend to (1) the process of conserving; (2) the degree of complexity; (3) the potential for misalignment and (4) practicality theory.

Conserving. Firestone, Mayrowetz, & Fairman's (1998) implementation study suggested that teachers tend to assimilate new policies into their existing

frameworks, demonstrating the conserving nature of sense-making. Policies intended to challenge conventional ideas were interpreted by teachers to be consistent with their current understandings and practices. Teachers fit new ideas into their existing models rather than substantially rethink them, thus diverging from the intent of the designers. It is concluded that it is not valid to assume practitioners intentionally subvert the intent of the policy initiatives. The goal of conveying new, deep, underlying principles requires an intentional focus on them and not an assumption that they are understood by the teachers.

Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer (2002) concur that the understanding of directions, goals, and regulations are depends on the ideas, expertise and experiences teachers already possess. While willful misinterpretation by practitioners may account for some failure of policy implementation, it must be considered, they caution, that unintentional failures also occur. Prior beliefs and practices present challenges

not only because teachers are unwilling to change in the direction of the policy but also because their extant understandings may interfere with their inability to interpret and implement the reform in ways consistent with the designers' intend (p. 393).

New policies supplement rather than replace teachers' and other implementing agents' practices. New is always understood with respect to that which is already known.

Complexity. Spillane & Zeulli (1999) determined that some dimensions of instructional practices are easier, and therefore more likely to be revised than

others. That is not necessarily intentional. Teachers can change some aspects of their instruction, such as materials used or grouping arrangements, but leave others unaltered. Instruction is not monolithic, but multidimensional. Moreover, the researchers found that epistemological regularities of instruction of practice are particularly difficult to alter. “Policy analysts often conclude that teachers adapt policy into their practice in ways that undermine the core intent of the reform proposal” (p. 20), that they are intentionally resistant to reform, but in fact this study concludes that there is little proof of that assertion. The teachers believed they were teaching in ways that were consistent with the policies.

Misalignment. Hill’s (2001) observations of a group of local mathematics teachers attempting to align their existing math program with new state standards bears witness to the adage, “There are things we do not know we don’t know” (Rumsfeld, 2002). In spite of the well-intentioned work by the teacher participants to apply the policy’s standards, the result is faulty. Hill concluded that the teachers understood the policy ideas in a manner very different from what was intended by the state directives. Their misunderstandings resulted from the local interpretation and use of the language, or words, assigning more conventional definitions and understandings that were not aligned with those intended by state policymakers. In other words, language that carried specialized meanings in one community was interpreted differently in another. Striking to the researcher was that the teachers were dedicated and devoted to understanding the policy initiative. Without the provision of additional resources there was no reason for the teachers to assume that their traditional curriculum did not meet the requirements of the policy

initiative. The "policy trickle down process" may lose its message or potential to inform policy initiatives if inadequate resources are provided, for words only attain meaning when ascribed to actions and applications of a community. Therefore, it should not be assumed that application will be uniform between different settings, especially if a complex restructuring of existing schemas is required. More than mere words are required to communicate reforms. Hill suggested that better inputs from state policymakers will result in better alignment of understanding, findings further corroborated in a later study (2005). Hill was cautious about generalizing to other academic settings, but suggested that more research is needed before assumptions are made that terms used in academic subject matter have shared understanding among those who use them.

Practicality theory. Janssen, Westbroek, Doyle, and Van Driel (2013) recognized the fundamental tension between policy ideas and the practical work in the classroom. They suggested that the gap between "theory" or policy and what actually "works" may be due not so much to deficient knowledge or beliefs held by teachers as to a policy competing against an ethic of practicality. They contend that practicality is a way of "understanding the complex design issues that operate in the everyday work of teaching" and may extend to "the world of educational reform" (p. 3).

Practicality theory posits that the judgments teachers make about the utility of change proposals determine the likelihood they will be adopted. Those considered 'practical' have reasonable potential for a classroom impact. Those not seen as practical will not be utilized.

Further, teachers select for implementation those features of an innovation that are most practical, or they reconfigure an innovation to impose practicality on an innovative design (p. 2).

The researchers stated that teachers must constantly identify procedures that work with the given time, resources, and local circumstances. Responding to the innovations presented by policy initiatives is a special case of normal teacher reasoning and design. Teacher practicality is derived in the special features of the classrooms setting (Janssen, et al., 2013).

1. Scale - Teachers work with relatively large groups of students that require special procedure to distribute resources, maintain orderly transitions.
2. Time - Teachers work within structured schedules each day, for a continuous number of weeks or months.
3. Context - Teachers must accommodate lessons to many different personalities, social styles and intellects. That will vary from class to class.

The characteristics of the classroom shape the opportunities and constraints for teachers and their students. From that perspective, “practicality takes on special importance because components of classroom life are not easily interchangeable” (Janssen, et al., 2013, p. 6).

It is suggested that teachers work to ease ambiguity within the classroom in order to sustain working or learning events. However, policy initiatives often depend upon innovation rather than routine. “In the language of practicality,

external pedagogical innovations are, by definition, incongruent with ordinary practice” (Janssen, et al., 2013, p. 10). Moreover, because the focus of innovation is on design for multiple school locations, it is left to an individual classroom teacher to redesign her own practices. While teachers often create their own innovations, it is not surprising that the relationship with policy initiatives is often contentious, for these innovations are initiated and developed by persons outside the classroom.

...(E)ternal pedagogical innovations are, by definition, incongruent with ordinary practice. As a result, teachers’ ordinary performance heuristics may not apply, leaving them as relative novices in the new context required by the innovation. (Janssen, et al., p. 5).

Thus, construction and implementation of innovative practices and policies are left to the teachers. The classroom teacher falls back on practicalities and common sense heuristics - simplified "rules" that specify what to do in a particular situation - within her classroom environment.

Influences on Policy Implementation Framework

As the literature review indicates, the conveyance of the goals of improved student learning and achievement through improved classroom instruction may be influenced by several key factors. *The Policy Pathway: From Societal Goals to the Classroom Teacher* illustrates the multiple parties that may influence the conveyance of goals for public education, through the policymaking stages to implementation within the classroom. Before policy reaches the classroom it often passes through multiple hands: from lawmakers or policymakers at the federal or state level to educational bureaucrats or administrative leadership at the state or

local level to school district and building level. The path from policy to classroom is not simplistic or linear, however, though it may appear to be. Throughout *The Policy Path*, public opinion and political processes may weigh in as well, creating revisions and new interpretations. As initiatives pass from one level to the next, they may be revised either purposefully or inadvertently. Individual and group comprehension or sense-making may result in unique understandings.

The review of the literature suggests there are many factors that may ultimately impact or revise policy as it is transferred from layer to layer along *The Policy Path*. Those may impact a practitioner's ability to respond to or implement the initiatives and mandates. They are reflected in the research framework *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework*. Each of the factors that have been selected for inclusion within the framework are selected because they impact different "layers" of the policy implementation process: policymakers; educational bureaucrats and administrative leadership; and classroom practitioners. Those three factors appear to be key, each at a different level of the policy implementation process. They may impact the implementation process positively, negatively, or have no influence.

Policy coherence is at the top of the framework. It originates within the actions of policymakers who create initiatives with the intent of actualizing societal goals. Originators of policy may be situated at federal, state, and/or local levels. Ideally, the creation of multiple policies is undertaken with an awareness of how they interact in concert. Policy coherence may develop among different types of public policies, different levels of government, or different stakeholders. Elements

within the policy-making process may uniquely interpret various aspects of a policy. To overcome variable understandings and unexpected interactions requires a systematic promotion of mutually reinforcing actions across agencies so that synergies toward meeting objectives can be maximized. Without awareness and deliberate efforts to identify how multiple policies may interact, incoherence may occur, influencing subsequent implementation efforts.

The influences of compliance readiness may originate within the middle stages of policy implementation: state and local educational bureaucrats, administrators, and other leaders. It is placed within the middle of the research framework. As middle-level actors respond to the directives of educational policy initiatives, they also influence policy implementation. Within those middle stages, decisions are made that refine interpretations of the policies, impacting implementation. Compliance readiness has three components: ideological readiness, organizational capacity, and power to resist. The responses of target agents to leadership's directives are most commonly impacted by three components: the degree of established routines within the organization; the strength of collective memory possessed by the target agents; and leadership's the level of commitment to assist in transforming and reconstructing a system or practice.

At the bottom of the research framework, cognitive sense-making is closely associated with the implementation level, for it is there that the understanding of the goals of each policy initiative is ultimately put into action. Classroom teachers must interpret or make sense of the initiatives that influence within their classrooms and practices. Sense-making involves a continuous process of searching

for and creating meaning, processes in which teachers are continually involved, both individually and collectively.

These three factors that may influence policy implementation - policy coherence, compliance readiness, and cognitive sense-making - are the foundation of the research framework, *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework*.

While each factor may impact both agent and target groups, its placement within the framework is determined by where its influence may originate. Each factor has multiple components; each components may or may not impact the subsequent implementation of the policy initiative. The degree of influence may vary.

The research was designed to provide some insight into the implementation of RtI, PBE, and TES. Phenomenological interviews conducted with highly regarded, mid-career, middle school teachers provided insights into the actual implementation process. Information obtained by those educators is valuable, for it potentially supplied understanding of a best case scenario. It was important to understand the realities and challenges that impact teacher implementation of policy initiatives. It is particularly important to hear the stories of mathematics and language arts teachers. They are under great scrutiny, for those are the subject areas in which student assessments were made public.

Table #2 *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework*

Factors that May Alter Policy Intent	Components - Definitions from the Literature
<p>I. <u>Policy Coherence</u> is the systematic promotion of mutually reinforcing policy actions across organizations creating synergies towards achieving agreed upon objectives (Trinity College Dublin, 2010).</p> <p>This is created from two main components.</p>	<p>A. <u>Policy Convergence</u> - the interaction of multiple reforms, in combination. This may have different effects and challenges on different parts of the organization, resulting in reinforcement or obstruction of the policy, or overloading the system (Knapp, et al., 1998).</p> <p>B. <u>Problem Framing</u> - the interactive, often contested, mediated process that sets parameters by which decisions are made and resources allocated (Coburn, 2006). It identifies the problem to be acted upon.</p>
<p>II. <u>Compliance Readiness</u> is the willingness or ability of an organization to respond to policy mandates. Success is more likely when the organization possesses resources that can be committed to assisting transformations of an existing system or practice (PetaForce, 2011).</p> <p>Three components are important in aiding an organization to respond and conform to directives.</p>	<p>A. <u>Ideological Readiness</u> - the degree to which the target group agrees with the norms and conditions set by the control agent (Zald, 1978).</p> <p>B. <u>Organizational Capacity</u> - the ability of an organization to develop and execute policy demands. The following resources constitute capacity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Human Capital - the commitment, disposition, and knowledge of the employees (Coburn & Russell, 2008); (2) Social Capital - the manner in which individuals relate to one another, impacted by factors such as interpersonal trust (Coburn & Russell, 2008); (3) Financial Capital - available resources of money, staffing, time, and materials (Spillane & Thompson, 1997). <p>C. <u>Power to Resist</u> - the perceived ability and resources of the target element to redefine the standards of performance or resist control agents (Zald, 1978).</p>
<p>III. <u>Sense-Making</u> is "the total process of (1) searching for information and (2) making sense of the information" (Zhang, et.al, 2008, p. 2). It is encountered as individuals or groups seek to span "gaps" between the known and new experiences. (Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002; Spillane, 2004; Louis, et al., 2005).</p>	<p>A. <u>Individual/Teacher Sense-Making</u> - individuals develop their own explanations of new policies (Louis, et al., 2005) which may result in inconsistent understanding and implementation throughout the organization. Individuals/teachers often respond to novelty in the following manner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Conserving - a tendency to fit new ideas within existing cognitive frameworks (Firestone, et al., 1998; Spillane, 2004); (2) Complexity - a focus on superficial or simplistic aspects of complex initiatives (Spillane & Zeulli, 1999); (3) Misalignment - developing inconsistencies due to discrepant use or comprehension of concepts and the language of instruction (Hill, 2001 & 2005); (4) Practicality Theory - tension between policy and the practical work done within the classroom, leading to default responses that are consistent with established classroom routines (Janssen, et al., 2013). <p>This may lead to inconsistent understanding and implementation throughout an organization.</p> <p>B. <u>Collective Sense-Making</u> - an agreed upon group response to new concepts, created through an emergent process of formal and informal communications (Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002; Spillane, 2004; Louis, et al., 2005).</p>

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the impacts of educational policies on the classroom teacher as she meets the challenges of teaching and learning within the classroom. Several components comprise the factors of policy coherence, compliance readiness, and cognitive sense-making that may ultimately impact a practitioner's ability to implement initiatives and mandates, as outlined in *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework*. Previous studies have used surveys to describe the attitudes of classroom teachers in the current environment of education policy. They revealed a range of orientations, from general support (CSTP, 2005; AAEF, 2014; Harris Interactive, 2013; Rosenberg & Silva, 2012; NEA, 2013; AFT, 2013a) to apprehension (Knapp, Elfers, et al., 2005; Harris Interactive, 2013; Rosenberg & Silva, 2012; AFT, 2013), but little is known about the actual implementation process that occurs within the classroom.

The researcher's goal was to understand how teachers interpret and implement policy initiatives during the current era of educational reform by answering the question:

What factors influence highly regarded, mid-career, middle school teachers' understanding and implementation of policy reforms within classrooms?

Using the conceptual framework, *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework*, to uncover how teachers interpreted RtI, PBE, and TES, a phenomenological inductive approach to analysis was conducted. A qualitative study was designed to provide depth and detail. Through interviews of a sample of mid-career, highly

regarded middle school teachers of mathematics and language arts -- subject areas most impacted by recent policy initiatives-- the researcher sought to reveal how the participants came to experience and understand the reforms they are responsible for implementing.

Qualitative research focuses on insight and understanding from the perspectives of the participants, in this case the classroom teacher. Merriam (2009) states that perspective “offers the greatest promise of making a difference in people’s lives” (p. 1). This chapter discusses the method of analysis, a description of the sample and setting, methods of data collection and analysis instruments. Also shared is discussion of the safeguards used to maintain validity and reliability. The role of the researcher is provided. Steps taken to maintain the confidentiality of the participants are described. Finally limitations and delimitations identified within the research study are enumerated.

Methodological Overview

The study followed a qualitative research approach involving a phenomenological strategy of inquiry designed to identify an understanding of human experiences that are not readily observable. According to Magrini (2012), the practice of phenomenology seeks “to expose, uncover, or reveal ‘universal’ (transcendental) elements of human existence that are instantiated within practical, ‘particular’ empirical situations” (p. 1). Phenomenology is concerned with *how* something is rather than *that* it is or even *what* it is, anchoring itself in the lived experience. It is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the lived experiences of a small number of participants in order to develop patterns and focus on exploring how they

experience the phenomenon: how they perceive it; describe it; and make sense of it.

Givens (2008) stated that

(k)nowledge about differences between various ways of experiencing particular phenomena and of the potential for change from less to more complex understandings are important in a number of fields such as teaching and learning, as well as for developing services and tools within different institutional practices (p. 614).

By approaching this study through a phenomenological approach, a holistic view of the implementation of policy initiatives within the classroom was viewed. The research focused on policy implementation efforts through the perspectives of the teachers, provided through culturally specific and contextually rich data. Such data are critical in the design of comprehensive solutions to problems currently facing implementation of educational reforms at the classroom level.

Sample: The Participants

Purposive, or purposeful, sampling is a deliberate process of selecting the setting and persons for study so that the researcher can access the richest sources of information that are available. According to Merriam (2009) the power of purposive sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases from which the researcher can gain information.

Purposive sampling was used in this research in order to achieve representativeness or typicality of the setting and individuals selected. This study involved five highly regarded, mid-career, middle school teachers in the fields of language arts and mathematics education. They were selected from two different

school districts: Big City and Small Towns (pseudonyms). More than a dozen middle school teachers composed the initial pool of candidates. After eliminating those who had not taught either mathematics or English/language arts, six remained and agreed to participate in the study. Midway through the data collection process, one participant chose to withdraw, due to personal obligations.

Givens (2008) stated that “qualitative studies emphasize inductive theory building, subjective understanding, and detailed, holistic data”. Those goals are often best met through intense investigations of small, systematically selected samples” (p. 797). The purposive approach was well-suited to this small-scale, in-depth study. A purposive sample targets individuals who are particularly knowledgeable about the issues being studied. Utilizing purposive sampling the researcher exercised personal judgment to select participants who would be best able to address the objective of the study: investigate which factors influence teachers’ understanding and implementation of policy reforms within classrooms. Participants who were knowledgeable about the issues and willing to talk composed the purposive sample.

The researcher gained insight by obtaining access to the thoughts, beliefs, and actions of mid-career, middle school classroom teachers who taught English-language arts or mathematics and were highly regarded among their peers. The four characteristics are described below.

Characteristics. *Mid-career educator.* Mid-career teachers were defined by Hargreaves (2005) as those between approximately six to 20 years of teaching experience.

They are open but not innocent, critical but not curmudgeonly, relaxed but not withdrawn. They are and feel themselves to be "in the middle," in a job where the people above are relieved they're leaving, and the people at the bottom are concerned about whether they are going to stay (p. 981).

According to Hargreaves (2005) they are usually more relaxed, experienced and comfortable about their jobs and themselves. Moreover, mid-career teachers are still enthusiastic and flexible enough to respond to change in a broadly positive manner. They seek to work within the "system" or educational institution as a way to change the system. They possess the ability to reflect back, but also to anticipate the future. In that position, they are doubly empathy: remembering their younger selves and connecting with the newer teachers, while simultaneously understanding their older colleagues who are pointed toward the future that awaits them (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 779-781). Mid-career teachers often take on the role of mentoring early-career teachers, but also appreciate the institutional memory, collective wisdom and experiences of their late-career colleagues. They are significantly important and often recognized as such by their peers and administrators. They are integral staff members as schools attempt to productively make sense of reforms initiatives.

Middle school educator. Additionally, the researcher focused on teachers in public middle schools, schools that educate students from the ages of 11 to 15. The selection was made because of the idiosyncrasies that accompany the onset of adolescence. Midgley, Anderman, & Hicks (1995) stated that the transition

between elementary and middle level schools is often “characterized by a negative change in motivational orientation and decline in academic performance for a number of children” (p.90). Greater stress on performance measured through achievement and grades, rather than task, which emphasizes effort, may impact the self-efficacy of the middle school student. It is suggested that skilled teachers who possess an awareness of those tendencies in the school environment, may aid in overcoming many negative student self - perceptions.

Moreover, middle schools possess a unique place in most school districts, for they receive children from elementary schools, and are expected to graduate young adults prepared for high school. The middle school movement that began in the early 1960s recognized that such children are not merely junior versions of high school students.

(T)he biological event of puberty fundamentally disrupts the relatively smooth development of the elementary school years and has a profound impact upon the cognitive, social, and emotional lives of young teens.

(There is) the need for the provision of special instructional, curricular, and administrative changes in the way that education takes place for kids in early adolescence. (Armstrong, 2006).

Regardless of research that questions its relevance in today’s educational system, the middle school structure is prevalent throughout public school education.

Teacher of mathematics or English/language arts. To ensure all students are ready for success after high school,

the Common Core State Standards establish clear, consistent guidelines for what every student should know and be able to do in math and English language arts from kindergarten through 12th grade (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014).

English/language arts and mathematics have always been fundamental to student learning. That was underscored with the release in 2010 of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), an initiative sponsored by the National Governors Association intended to better prepare American students for college and/or career upon graduation from public school. As part of the standards and accountability movement, the governors sought to create deeper, clearer expectations for learning in the areas of literacy and numeracy. The standards were not without controversy, however. Political representatives, policy analysts, educational commentators, parents and taxpayers continued to weigh in on the standards and the accompanying assessment process. Because CCSS only specified the standards and descriptions of the skills that students must acquire at each grade level, individual school districts are responsible for choosing curricula. Moreover, according to Spillane, Parise & Sherer (2011) "coupling efforts" aimed at linking policy initiatives and the language arts and mathematics in particular have impacted "instruction in these classrooms in at least three ways: by promoting standardization through alignment with common standards, by monitoring classroom instruction, and by making aspects of instruction transparent" (p. 5) Teachers of mathematics and English/ language arts are thus currently the focus of great levels of accountability.

Highly regarded educator. These teachers were nominated for participation by teacher leadership and their peers. In the judgment of their peers and supervisors, they possessed exemplary skills and were highly regarded. As a first step, district-level administrators were contacted and asked to make recommendations. Instead of being provided with criteria of "highly regarded," they were asked to discuss their understanding of the attributes connoted by the label. They then nominated teachers who met that description. Among the attributes mentioned in nominating possible participants, leadership mentioned such traits as

1. recognized among peers as very knowledgeable in content area and pedagogy;
2. possessing passion about teaching and learning;
3. fulfilling one or more leadership roles within school and/or district;
4. possessing strong communication skills ;
5. willing to learn and change;
6. possessing a relationship of mutual respect with students;
7. setting high standards for herself and students;
8. being well organized and flexible;
9. demonstrating kindness and caring.

Firestone (1989) stated that research into positive, exemplary examples is important, just as "deviant case analysis" is useful for expanding both theory and practice. On the theory side, looking at "deviant cases" helps to identify the conditions under which more typical patterns occur, or suggests explanations for

those patterns that might otherwise be overlooked (p. 162). On the practice side, ideal examples raise hope, indicating that the exceptional is possible. Importantly, he suggested that careful analysis of exceptional examples can provide “concrete possibilities for improvement” (p. 162). Ultimately, the researcher chose highly regarded teachers so that the study focused on policy implementation factors rather than mixing in concerns about significantly different teacher qualities or proficiencies. By converging on policy, the researcher sought to uncover greater understanding of the process by which policy and its intentions are communicated to the classroom.

Selection Process. The selection process within both school districts was relatively similar. In Big City, a senior district administrator contacted instructional strategists at the district' middle schools and asked them to make nominations directly to the researcher. Similarly, a building administrator who was initially contacted in Small Towns and requested that a teacher leader in the building make direct contact with the researcher. (Instructional strategists and teacher leaders collaborate with classroom teachers to aid in designing instruction for all students; as such, they are often in charge of professional development initiatives within the school. They observe most of the middle level teachers in action within their classrooms, witnessing first-hand their willingness to assist learners and colleagues.) The teacher leaders corresponded directly with the researcher, creating greater opportunity for confidentiality between the administrative level and teaching staff participants.

The teacher leaders made contact with prospective participants, seeking permission to forward their names to the researcher, ensuring the individuals initially had interest in joining the study. From Big City the names of thirteen nominees were forwarded. The researcher ordered the lists with teachers of literacy (reading and/or writing) and mathematics put at highest priority, ultimately obtaining six candidates. All six nominees were contacted and provided with an overview of the study. Of the six who were contacted four responded to the request to participate in the interview study: two math teachers and two English/language arts teachers; after the first round of interviews, one of the language arts participants declined to continue. In Small Towns, three names were forwarded. Two, who were language arts teachers, expressed their willingness to be a part of the study, while one declined to do so. To preserve their individuality and unique perspectives, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant, and maintained throughout the study. They are all introduced, below, in the alphabetical order by their pseudonyms.

Christine. Christine was a 6/7 grade looping mathematics teacher who was completing her seventh year of public school teaching, her sixth in Big City middle school. She had been involved in leadership positions for five years, tapped by her administrators and supported by peers as she made an effort to represent their collective voice. “I always imagined myself as a teacher...my teachers were like my heroes. They were the people I really looked up to,” she explains.

She believed that her influence on her students extended beyond the teaching of math. A young teacher, she possessed an understanding of adolescent

learners and suggested a dedication for her job and students. Describing her role as a teacher, Christine offered,

...Much of my job is to help students feel safe and cared for
in a school environment, which needs to be established before
learning can happen anyway. I tend to teach from a relationship.
That's my thing with kids and adults and
if I feel connected, that's how I work...

While committed to teaching the mathematics standards of CCSS, Christine was also focused on the whole child.

I want (my students) to be good people in the world. I do think
about that. But I'm not thinking, "What college are you going to
go to?" I hope they all will go and I want them to have the math
skills.

She was reflective and welcomed change, especially when striving to meet the needs of all of her students. She stated that she was constantly gathering data about her students and was willing to try innovative methods in order to meet their needs, "I always feel like I'm not doing a good job and maybe that's what makes me good, because I reflect --- constantly." It was her explicit goal to meet the demands of each and all her learners. In pursuit of that goal, Christine understood her own learning as a process that is dynamic and never ending.

Diane. "I knew I wanted to be something important," Diane stated, explaining why she became a teacher. A fifteen-year teacher within Small Towns middle school, she was certified in middle school education, English/language arts, and social

studies. The majority of her experience had been as an 8th-grade language arts teacher, but during the year of this study she worked exclusively in a 7th- grade Humanities classroom, a mix of language arts and social studies, with students who demonstrate below grade-level literacy skills. Recently her job had changed: she was now splitting her day, serving as a classroom teacher 50 percent of the time, and as a school-wide literacy coach the other 50 percent of her time.

Diane indicated that she was constantly challenging herself to learn about effective pedagogy and policy initiatives because she believed her students deserved that of her.

The rewards for me are seeing a kid get it, the light bulb moment when something you've taught clicks, so that they're reflecting too, so that they feel success too, and it's not just do the work and get it done, but actual that learning...

Knowing her students required her to reflect on their work and her own teaching constantly.

Diane saw a need for refining the focus of education. "I think people are realizing that the education that we've been delivering to our kids is not working for all students," she stated. However, she was concerned about the emotional toll on her students, generally at-risk academically, who were increasingly immersed in a culture of high stakes testing. She worried, "I could generalize that the pressure of performing on test to get to college and all that, causes more kids (pause) that stress turns into apathy, negative emotion..."

She would welcome more curiosity, support, and involvement about the inner workings of her classroom and school from both parents and the public. Diane mused, “...(They) don’t have to be nice, but just that I know that I’m not fighting (pause) alone, that they see the same struggles...”

Jennifer. Jennifer has been a teacher for more than 20 years and had held a variety of positions throughout K-12 public school education. While science was her major in college and the area in which she began as a teacher, she much preferred teaching mathematics and was a strong advocate of CCSS, which, for her, outlined logical, structured goals for teaching and learning. Currently as a looping 6/7 mathematics teacher in Big City, she strongly advocated for the benefits of the looping model for student learning. The two years a student stays with the same teacher, she suggested, allows the teacher to more fully know the needs of each student.

Jennifer became especially passionate when she talked about the slowness of change within society and education.

...starting (as a high school science teacher) in inner city Baltimore
I was shocked by how much education depended on your zip
code, if your parents can afford to live in a nice place then you
get a better school. That still remains a bit of a shock to me
because (of) the students I see. It’s so surprising that 25 years
later we’re still there.

It was her sense of social justice that continued to motivate her dedication to inner city schools and students.

She had held both formal and informal leadership roles -- representing her school building colleagues, in general, as well as her math colleagues -- at the school and district level. She worked collaboratively with her colleagues and students. Jennifer described herself as follows:

I'm earnest. I try really hard (pause) frustrated by things that I can't do for whatever reason. You know, lack of resources or support. I think I'm always trying to look out for what's best for kids. And you know, I will stand up for what I believe in.

Her beliefs were focused primarily on what she understands to be best for children: socially, emotionally, academically, and physically.

Kids don't remember what you teach them. They remember how you make them feel. I like middle school kids. I want them to do well. And I want them to take a challenge, and I want them to make mistakes. I model making mistakes every day, just for their benefit...

Speaking about changes and policy initiatives she had encountered since becoming an educator, Jennifer's years of experience were revealed as she suggested that it is important to adapt and integrate new principles, but "...you maintain what you value. You get better at the stuff that you realize is necessary and important."

Leslie. Leslie had been in her current position as an 8th grade language arts teacher in Big City for eleven of her fourteen-year teaching career. She possessed some unique experiences and perspectives, having started her teaching career in Ohio. Concern for the "whole child" was a priority for Leslie. She revealed her own values when she said, "Overwhelmingly teachers get into this work because

they care about kids and they want kids to thrive and grow up to be, if not productive, maybe even enlightened and critical thinkers. Right?”

She saw her job as getting to know her students in order to address their needs: “I’m finding more and more that as I get kids and see them at the wide range of who they are, and -- trying to figure out who they are, it’s just exciting...” which she shared was a challenge for the middle school teachers within her school who typically worked with 75 to 90 students each day. Working with young adolescents was about finding balance, she suggested, but Leslie acknowledged,

It's important to feel safe, but it's also important to push yourself.

My favorite thing to say to my students is that learning is uncomfortable. Your brain is trying to make a new connection and it doesn't feel easy and it doesn't feel good and every child should feel that in school. No child should coast through school.

Molly. Sounding like a veteran teacher, Molly explained her enthusiasm for teaching and learning.

I feel like sometimes it’s a job you don’t see them (results) instantly.

I enjoy when they (students) get something and they seem to enjoy the process of learning. I have now taught kids long enough now that they are through high school, and when they(contact me) and when they can tell me they remember certain things from class (pause)I think that that’s pretty awesome. I enjoy when they get something and they seem to enjoy the process of learning...

She had just completed her seventh year of teaching, her fourth in Small Towns. The year of this study had been novel for her as she taught eighth grade social studies in addition to a new subject area, language arts. After completing additional certification requirements during the previous summer, she was now considered to be highly qualified in both areas. She had assumed a variety of leadership roles within her building and school district during the past four years, having volunteered and been selected by her colleagues and administrators.

Not yet thirty years old, Molly was educated in a public school district, prepared to become an educator, and held her first job in Massachusetts, one of the early adopter states of uniform teaching and learning standards and high stakes testing. She reflected on how her experiences as a student and professional in the current environment of high stakes testing and accountability have shaped her views as a teacher. She empathized with her students when she said, "I wonder if I were a kid at this point how gracefully I would handle some of this stuff."

Molly said she was conscientious about making connections with her students while maintaining her professional stance. She enthused, "...I think the knowledge, the passion of the teacher, and their desire to conscientiously meet students where they need to be met is probably where the biggest impact comes from (as a teacher)."

The profiles to the participants are summarized in Table # 3 *Profiles of Individual Participants* below.

Table # 3 Profiles of Individual Participants

Participant	Christine	Diane	Jennifer	Leslie	Molly
Locale	Big City	Small Towns	Big City	Big City	Small Towns
Total Experience	7 years	15 years	20+ years	14 years	7 years
Experience In Current School	6 years	15 years	4 years	11 years	3 years
Experience In Maine	7 years	15 years	19 years	11 years	3 years
Experience In Other State	NA	NA	2 years in Maryland	3 years in Ohio	4 years in Massachusetts
Current Teaching Position	6/7 looping mathematics	7th ELA & social studies	6/7 looping mathematics	8th ELA	8th ELA & social studies
Previous Position(s)	middle school mathematics	8th ELA 8th social studies	gifted /talented K-5 HS science	6 & 7 ELA 5th grade multiage virtual charter school	8th social studies
Current Leadership Positions	school leadership team team leader	school and district literacy leadership school PD team TES Peer Observer team leader	school and district math leadership	team leader	school social studies content leadership school PD team school climate committee district PBE committee TES peer observer

Setting

The setting for this study involved two school districts which offered contrasts in size and diversity of student body, school staff, and community population. Pseudonyms were assigned to minimize recognition of the districts.

Big City was a small northeastern city, classified as urban by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2007), and located at the core of a metropolitan statistical area (MAS). It possessed a population that exceeded 50,000. It had the economic and cultural center of the greater surrounding geographic region. In this city, multiple elementary, middle, and high schools. Intentional enrollment strategies were designed to redistribute the student population from elementary schools to reduce neighborhood clustering in middle and high schools and create a more even distribution of student socioeconomic and cultural characteristics among the schools.

Student enrollment was diverse with a mix of socio-economic backgrounds, a multitude of cultural backgrounds, and a significant population of English language learners (ELL). With a special education enrollment that mirrored the national percentage, the majority of the classrooms were based upon full-inclusion models, involving students with a variety of physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive characteristics. Big City was selected because it possessed attributes that can be present within many public school systems, especially from larger urban settings, and thus was a rich environment from which to select a sample of teacher participants.

The second district was contained within the MAS that centered on Big City. Near the suburban/rural fringe of the MAS region, the consolidated school district of Small Towns drew students from two towns with a combined population of just over 13,000. Total enrollment was only about one-third the size of that in Big City. Three schools service all K through 12 students. Perennially labeled as a high-performing school district, its student population was relatively homogeneous with a low percentage of minority students or English language learners. A full inclusion curriculum model serviced the special education students, a population that was equal to the 14 percent national identification rate. One hundred percent of the teachers were classified as highly qualified in their subject areas. Given its relatively small size, teachers were encouraged to participate in leadership positions throughout their school and district. Small Towns School District was subject to the same policy mandates as Big City School District, but its smaller, more uniform enrollment offered a counterexample to the larger, more diverse district of Big City.

Data Collection

This was an inductive/phenomenological interview study. It is the goal of phenomenological interviewing to have participants “reconstruct their experience and then reflect on its meaning” (Seidman, 2013, p. 19). Because context is crucial to understanding the “subjectiveness” of the participants’ point of view, it was important for the researcher to allow each participant to share the larger context of her life. Patton argued the following:

We interview people to find out from them those things that we cannot directly observe...We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things (as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 88).

In other words, sometimes interviewing is the only way to get the desired data.

According to Ferrarotti, “social abstractions like ‘education’ are best understood through the experiences of the individuals whose work and lives are the stuff upon which abstractions are built” (as cited in Seidman, 2013, p. 9). Furthermore, Seidman (2013) suggests that while much research is conducted on schooling in the United States, but little of it is based upon studies involving the perspectives of the actual participants of public schooling. This phenomenological interview study revealed what Schutz calls the “subjective reality” (as cited in Seidman, 2013, p. 10) of the participants’ experiences. It is important for researchers to be able to understand multiple realities that are socially constructed based on those perceptions.

The data for this study were collected through a series of two approximately 90- minute interviews with each participant. Interviews were conducted at a

mutually agreed upon time and neutral location for each participant and researcher. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed by the researcher.

The researcher conducted semi-structured phenomenological interviews. An interview guide provided questions that probed teacher reactions toward, and understandings of, RtI, PBE, and TES. Additionally, questions were asked that probed for explanation of how the teacher made meaning and gained knowledge about the policy initiatives in order to implement them. The semi-structured approach allowed for flexibility and adaptations on the part of both the interviewer and the interviewee, accommodating for emergent information.

Following Seidman's (2013) proposed model, the interview series was designed to (1) establish the context for the teacher's life history and experiences; (2) to concentrate on the details of the present lived experiences of how perceptions of the reforms were developed and how the teacher is dealing within an era of educational reform; and (3) reflect upon the meaning - intellectual and emotional connections - of how those reforms impacted her present situation. All interviews were completed within a three-week window. Flexibility was built into the interview structure to accommodate participants' needs. Some separation between interviews allowed both the participant and researcher to reflect on the previous interview, but it was important that not so much time passed that the connections between the interviews were lost.

Primarily open-ended questions were used to build upon and explore the responses. In the first interview session the interviewer focused on building a rapport with interviewee, allowing the teacher to recount personal and professional

history, philosophy of education, and current classroom practices. The session ended with a card sort activity. The subsequent interview focused on the participant's current classroom practices and experiences with respect to the specific policies of RtI, PEB, and TES. Through the process, a sketch of the individual, her practices, and her challenges during the current policy environment emerged.

The card-sort activity provided cards with the following labels:

1. Differentiation/Response to Intervention (RtI);
2. Assessment & Standardized Testing;
3. Teacher Evaluation System (TES);
4. Common Core State Standards (CCSS)/College & Career Ready;
5. Data Driven Decision making; and
6. Proficiency-Based Education (PBE).

Those were components of recent policy initiatives that middle school teachers encountered in their practices and classrooms. The cards were used in two ways. First, the teacher rank-ordered the cards with respect to the challenges and the impacts the policies have had on her teaching practices. She was asked to share her understandings and beliefs about the challenges. Next, the teacher was encouraged to share her own personal priorities with regard to the initiatives by reordering the cards from highest to lowest valued. Comparing impacts on the classroom versus personal priorities provided information for the researcher to probe more deeply into the teacher's practice and beliefs, seeking consistencies and inconsistencies between personal practice or preferences and policies. It provided insight into the problem framing process of each participant. As interviews progressed, the focus

narrowed to the initiatives of RtI, PEB, and TES. At the completion of the interview series, the researcher made arrangements to share transcripts with each participant to allow examination for accuracy.

The researcher recorded and transcribed each interview session as soon as it was completed. At the end of each, the researcher listened to the recordings and created memos that captured notable topics and identified emerging themes.

The researcher transcribed each interview herself. The transcription process allowed the researcher to examine each interview more closely, with greater depth and understanding. Transcription of one session at a time allowed for the researcher to develop greater awareness of emerging themes and provided opportunities for deeper probing in subsequent interviews. The researcher was immersed in the data and came to know each participant as an individual. The process facilitated a continuous internal dialogue for the researcher which eased the processes of reflection, introspection, and self-monitoring. Thus, data analysis began nearly simultaneously with data collection.

Data Analysis

The intensive interaction with the data during the transcription of the interviews facilitated the subsequent steps of data analysis. Data was analyzed simultaneously with data collection, to the degree that this was practical. Using the *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework*, the researcher focused on uncovering teacher perspectives concerning policy initiatives, and determining which factors may have led to inconsistencies between policy intentions and implementation. As the *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework* indicates,

some factors that result in revision of policy intent are attributable to the classroom teacher, but many may be outside of teacher influence. The interview data provided direct evidence of teacher responses to RtI, PBE, and TES and how the intent of policy was transferred to the teacher. The data provided insight into which factors of the *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework* impacted teacher awareness and, therefore, influenced her practices. While self-reported understanding does not necessarily correlate directly with actual change or action, changing perspectives and beliefs can be an important, indicative precursor to factual and behavioral change (Desimone, 2013).

A general inductive approach was taken to analyze the qualitative data. According to Thomas (2006) that strategy is evident in much qualitative analysis.

The primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by methodologies (Thomas, 2006, p. 238).

That approach was used in order to condense extensive text data into a summary format of findings. Emerging themes were developed by repeatedly studying transcripts, focusing on possible meanings and connections to developing themes. The inductive approach required more explanation of what was occurring. It was a descriptive strategy that aided the search for patterns of experience within the interview data, and the identification of overarching thematic design that united them.

An important cornerstone of qualitative analysis is to reduce the data by developing codes and categories to discover common meanings or themes. Development of categories from codes required the researcher to sift through data, searching to find significant patterns. To gain an awareness of the potential trends and overall meaning within the data the researcher first listened to each recorded interview in its entirety as data was collected.

While transcribing, the researcher made notes, beginning the process of finding and describing themes within the meanings of the experiences for the participants that fit categories outlined in *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework*. As more data were collected, the development of initial codes occurred.

The researcher continually returned to transcripts as new information was gathered. Developing meaning from the interviews was not a linear process, but rather a spiraling process by which the researcher constantly read, re-read, coded, and combined meanings. The researcher deliberately focused on developing connecting strategies. Those strategies were needed to understand the data with respect to the “relationships that connect statements and events within a particular context into a coherent whole” (Maxwell, 2009, p. 238).

Some data did not fit within the categories outlined in the *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework*. In particular, two significant themes emerged during analysis that were not included within the framework: importance of leadership and communication. Memos were written and codes developed. All the data were examined and analyzed with the addition of those additional themes.

The researcher used memos as a means of aiding reflection on methods, theories, or goals. These analytic tools were important, for they facilitated the researcher's thinking about the relationships in the data and made ideas visible and retrievable. From the substantial number of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), the researcher selected *Dedoose* to assist with the analysis of the data. No CAQDAS eliminates the need for a researcher to read the data and create the concepts and relationships. However, CAQDAS greatly assisted the task of coding, storing and retrieving the data as transcripts were analyzed.

The culmination of that inductive process was to generate descriptions and themes that provided information about the participants and their experiences, emotions, and opinions concerning the implementation of the educational policies of RtI, PBE, and TES. While initial analysis focused on themes that fit within the *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework*, additional themes were identified and added as they were identified. The participants' words were used throughout, with only minor syntactic changes being made to provide readability of the findings.

Trustworthiness

The researcher conducted a phenomenological interview study that sought to gain understanding of how teachers interpret policy initiatives and attribute meaning to their experiences during the current era of educational reform. By gaining understanding of how initiatives are communicated from state-to-district-to-classroom, the researcher recognized the challenges of capacity, varied

information, multiple lines of communications, complexities of goals, and other challenges that confronted the classroom teacher. In the process of conducting this study, the researcher gave particular attention to the construction of a process that was valid and trustworthy.

Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Seidman, 2013, p. 26) stated that “the human interviewer can be a marvelously smart, adaptable, flexible instrument who can respond to situations with skill, tact, and understanding.” As a scholar of philosophy, van Manen (2006) suggested that any researcher who strives to “write up” her research findings inherently enters the realm of qualitative research, for he asserted that writing itself cannot be separated from interpretation. In a qualitative study the process of writing “creates” understanding.

With that awareness and responsibility in mind, the researcher conducted the study with a consciousness that focused on establishing and maintaining processes that were trustworthy throughout the research. Guba, as quoted in Shenton (2004), proposed four criteria that should be pursued in a trustworthy qualitative study: (1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) dependability, and (4) confirmability (p. 64).

Credibility

Credibility is an important factor. It requires a researcher to focus on establishing validity that the study actually measures what was intended. It also requires the researcher to constantly ask the question: “How closely do the study findings reflect reality?”

Established Research Methods. The researcher adopted research methods that were well-established: a phenomenological interview study, which required adoption of research methods that were accepted, honest, and consistent throughout the process. For this study, an interview guide was developed and followed for each interview. Open-ended questions solicited responses concerning the following topics:

1. personal and professional background;
2. knowledge and personal viewpoints concerning educational policy initiatives - in particular RtI, PBE, and TES,
3. participation in professional development experiences, especially those associated with policy initiatives and implementation;
4. changes within curriculum and classroom due to policy initiatives;
5. opportunities for collaboration with peers and collegial learning; and
6. communication within the professional community at building, district, and state levels.

Familiarity with the Culture. Additionally, credibility was further established by the researcher who possessed a familiarity with the culture of the participating organizations and the participants. That condition was satisfied as the researcher was actively employed within a public middle school as a classroom teacher and teacher leader while conducting the study, a role further detailed in a section that follows, *Role of the Researcher*. Although she did not have "prolonged contact" with the participants prior to the study, the researcher's knowledge of the

culture and operations within public schools aided in establishing a relationship of trust between the parties (Shenton, 2004).

Triangulation. Triangulation of data sources, another strategy employed to foster credibility, was achieved by involving multiple sources from different settings. Inclusion of five teachers from two subject areas allowed the opportunity, according to Van Manen, as quoted in Shenton (2004), “to checkout bits of information across informants” (p. 66). The wide range of interviewees allowed for individual views to be “verified against others and, ultimately, a rich picture of the attitudes, needs, and behaviors” (Shenton, 2004, p. 66) was constructed. Site triangulation, achieved through involvement of two different school settings in different communities, reduced the likelihood that responses might focus on the peculiarities of one institution. Different sites allowed the researcher to obtain a variety of perspectives in order to gain a more stable view of "reality" based upon a spectrum of points (Shenton, 2004).

Conditions that Promote Honesty. Voluntary participation increases the likelihood that participants will be candid and honest in their responses. In order to ensure that the data collection involved genuinely interested teachers who participated of their own free will, the researcher employed a variety of safeguards. The teachers were given multiple opportunities to refuse to participate. First, they were approached by teacher leaders, persons with whom they were familiar, to inquire about their interest in participation. Next, those who agreed to participate received an email from the researcher that more fully described the study. Additionally, participants were encouraged to select session times and

places that were comfortable and agreeable to them. At an initial meeting, participants were presented with a *Letter of Informed Consent* that provided the specific goals of the study, outlined steps that would be taken to ensure participant anonymity, and stated that involvement with the study could be ended unconditionally at any time at their request. Additionally, the researcher purposefully designed interview sessions that established a rapport indicating that the research was to be conducted without judgment.

Attention to Inconsistencies. The researcher was also attuned to the possibility that inconsistencies might be presented with the data. To uncover such instances, several precautions were taken. First, all interviews were tape recorded. Transcription of each session was completed before subsequent interviews took place, to the extent possible. That allowed the researcher to examine the transcripts looking for inconsistencies or contradictions. Awareness of such instances allowed the researcher to return to those topics and use probes to elicit clarity and related data through rephrased questions.

Additionally, the qualitative design was chosen because it is a highly contextual approach, allowing for a degree of flexibility in the study design as the research progressed. For example, during data collection and analysis of the first round of interviews, it was discovered that two significant themes – importance of leadership and communication - emerged that were not anticipated within the framework. Because of the iterative nature, subsequent interview questions were adjusted to further elicit details about those themes. Resulting data relating to the

new themes were categorized and coded and included within the findings and conclusion of the study.

Continuous Researcher Reflection. The researcher sought to continuously evaluate the study data and her own techniques as the research progressed. After each interview session, the researcher composed a reflection detailing her initial impressions of interesting facts or emerging patterns. Maxwell (2009) asserted that it is important, for a researcher to continually question herself in order to maintain vigilance toward validity. To be aware of her need to maintain trustworthiness, the researcher continually kept questions such as the following in the forefront during analysis:

1. How might my results or conclusions be wrong?
2. What are alternative interpretations and validity threats to those?
3. How can the data collected support or challenge my ideas about what is going on?
4. What data do not fit within my framework? Are there additional themes that should be included in my analysis that were not anticipated by the framework?
5. Why should others believe my results?

The researcher conducted that internal conversation early and continuously within the data collection process, a dialogue that was further enhanced during the transcription of the participant interviews.

Listening to each tape recorded session, she sought to evaluate her role of data gatherer with the intent of improving subsequent sessions as well. The

researcher monitored her own thinking throughout the data collection process. It is thought that “monitoring of the researcher’s own developing constructions” (Shenter, 2004, p. 68) is a critical step toward establishing credibility.

Thick, Rich Description. Detailed description helped to convey the actual contexts of the interviewees’ remarks. Maxwell (2008) stated that a researcher increases credibility of her conclusions and minimizes threats to validity by providing the reader with a full, revealing picture of what is occurring. Through thick, rich description the researcher conveys interpretive rather than merely descriptive data. Givens (2008) stated that “all observation is theory-laden and that descriptions are social constructions rather than reflections of some external reality” (p. 880). Givens quoted Schwandt as suggesting that , “It is the interpretive characteristics of description rather than detail per se that makes it thick” (p. 880).

Thick, rich descriptions were provided in several ways. First, the researcher created factual portraits of each participant, providing information about the individual's educational experiences and background. Demographic description of the school district environments in which the teachers worked also provided context for their experiences. In her own words, each teacher described her own personality and educational philosophy. Finally, the teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the policy reforms within classrooms was described using their own words. That allowed a portrait of each individual to emerge, providing a fuller, richer context or frame of reference for her remarks and viewpoints. It was through the words of each individual that their experiences were presented in this study.

“Without this insight, it is difficult for the reader of the final account to determine the extent to which the overall findings ‘ring true’”(Shenter, 2004, p. 69). Additionally, the detailed descriptions of each participant and the settings within which they work allows the reader to create greater understanding and “enables the reader to assess how far the defined types truly embrace the actual situations” (Shenter, 2004, p. 69).

Member Checks. In order to identify any biases or misunderstandings, the researcher systematically solicited feedback about the data and conclusions from the participants, a process called member checks. Checks relating to the accuracy of the data took place during the interview sessions and at the end of the data collection dialogues. Participants were encouraged to read transcripts of interview sessions as well.

Debriefing and Peer Review. The researcher enlisted debriefing opportunities with her supervisor and use of a peer debriefer to enhance the trustworthiness of the study, a process known as analytic triangulation. Both individuals provided probing of the researcher’s values and interests and how those might impact the interpretation and analysis of the study. Those individuals provided guidance, challenged assumptions and findings, and generally helped to improve the rigor or trustworthiness of this research study.

The researcher met and consulted frequently with her supervisor in order gain insights about the research process, which allowed the researcher to discuss approaches and receive feedback from her supervisor. Those meetings provided an

opportunity to develop ideas and interpretations, and also helped the researcher identify her own potential biases.

Peer review was conducted with a doctoral candidate from the researcher's cohort group, one who was familiar with qualitative research, and could offer fresh perspectives on the process. Collegial questions allowed the researcher to refine her explanations and strengthen her arguments. In and of itself, the act of conveying a summary of events, findings and questions helped the researcher to clarify her understanding of her research process herself.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the generalizability, the ability to apply study results to other situations. It is most commonly thought to be only applicable within quantitative research, but Merriam argued that qualitative research also possesses the potential to inform other similar settings and individuals. "In qualitative research, a single case of small, nonrandom, purposeful sample is selected precisely because the researcher wished to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many" (Merriam, 2009, p. 224).

Transferability is typically thought to be the idea that results of the research can be applied to a wider population, however in a qualitative study the results are applicable to a specific, small number of environments or individuals. Differing results may, in fact, reflect multiple realities, variations that may be useful in themselves.

It was the task of the researcher to provide contextual description about the two sites and description of the phenomenon under investigation. That allows

readers to develop an understanding of both settings, thus enabling them to compare instances of the phenomenon described in this research report with those they have seen emerge elsewhere.

The results of a qualitative study must be understood within the context of the particular characteristics of the setting(s), and the participants. In keeping with Shenton's (2004) recommendations, the researcher provided description of the following information in order to make transferability possible to readers of this study:

1. the number of schools taking part in the study and a description of their communities;
2. the number of the participants and descriptions of the individuals;
3. the data collection methods that were used;
4. the number and length of the data collection sessions; and
5. the time period over which the data were collected.

Dependability

Dependability suggests that if the study were "repeated, in the same context, with the same methods and the same participants, similar results would be obtained" (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). It required the researcher's approach to be consistent throughout the study. There is a strong connection between credibility and dependability. In order to address dependability, the researcher shared details about the processes of this study. A future researcher may be able to repeat the work, but not necessarily gain the same results. Those criteria have been enhanced through the inclusion of thick, in-depth descriptions of the research process. The

researcher critically and constantly examined her role within the study and strove to maintain an appropriate role and minimize her influence on the processes. In order to enable readers to develop an understanding of the study methods, the researcher has included information describing the following elements of the research process:

1. the research design and implementation;
2. detail of data gathering; and
3. reflection on the process.

Confirmability

Confirmability required the researcher to be aware of, and act to prevent the intrusion of biases. To safeguard against bias, the researcher used Seidman's (2013) interview structure. It inherently incorporates features that enhance the quality of validity. Using that protocol for all participants, the researcher

1. placed participant comments within context;
2. encouraged participants over time (one to three weeks) to account for idiosyncratic ways and to check for internal consistency of what is said; and
3. connected the experiences and checked the comments of one participant versus those of others.

The researcher also continuously scrutinized the transcripts, noting her level of input. She consciously made an effort to maintain the role of listener, not interrupting the participants and trying not to redirect thinking while the interviewees developed an idea. Those efforts aid in ensuring that the thoughts

expressed were the participant's and therefore likely valid and reliable for the particular interviewee (Seidman, 2013, p.28).

Additionally, the interview process allowed not just the researcher, but also the participants to understand and make sense of their own experiences. The time between interviews allowed both parties to reflect on the process and the data.

To further meet the standard of confirmability, the researcher disclosed her own predispositions and background below in *Role of the Researcher*.

Role of the Researcher

Perhaps most important in providing trustworthiness to the study, the personal goals of the researcher must be fully disclosed. According to van Manen (2006) any researcher who strives to "write up" her research findings inherently "creates" understanding.

It is precisely in the process of writing that the data of the research are gained as well as interpreted and that the fundamental nature of the research questions is perceived (p. 716).

Additionally, according to Maxwell (2009):

(e)radicating or submerging ...personal goals and concerns is impossible, and attempting to do so is unnecessary. What *is* necessary, in qualitative design, is that (the researcher) be *aware* of these concerns and how they may be shaping (the) research and that (the researcher) think about how best to deal with their consequences (p. 219).

Personal experiences and perspectives of the researcher provided a valuable source of insight, theory, and data about the phenomena being studied. Her own experiences served as a resource that aided in obtaining insights that might otherwise have been overlooked, overcoming the opaqueness that sometimes occurs when an outsider attempts to look within a phenomenon.

The researcher was a mid-career middle school teacher who had worked with all kinds of students in the sixth to eighth grade spectrum, teaching a variety of subjects: social studies, English language arts, and mathematics. In recent years her professional role had been that of a teacher leader . She served as both a classroom teacher who worked with struggling literacy students one to two years below grade level and as an instructional literacy coach and RtI coordinator. Her long career, marked by a constancy of change, motivated this study to understand the policy initiatives and their implementation.

In undertaking this study, she asked herself: Why it is important to do this research? Who will benefit? It was the intent of the researcher to drill deeply into the topic so that teaching and learning could be aided as a result of policy implementation. The researcher's familiarity with the conditions presented by the participants focused her understanding of the teachers' perspectives and awareness of trends or themes.

Risk, Protection, Confidentiality

Rights of the participants in this research were respected and protected. Risk associated with this study included the possibility of being identified which might have had the potential of damaging relationships with the institutions in

which they were employed, as some of the issues discussed in the interviewing process were sensitive in nature. With that in mind, efforts were made to protect the identity of research participants. Fictitious names were assigned to participants and any individuals mentioned within the interviews. Names of the school districts, schools, staff positions, or any other defining characteristics were generically presented. Every attempt was made to maintain confidentiality, including holding interviews in private, neutral locations at times that were mutually agreeable to the researcher and participants. A *Letter of Informed Consent* was used to obtain agreement from subjects to participate in the study. It outlined the steps that would be taken to maintain confidentiality of the participants.

All transcripts and data were kept in a secure setting. Any names or identifying characteristics were redacted. Pseudonyms were used within the study to provide readability.

Permission to conduct this study was sought from the university Institutional Review Board (IRB). Research ethics were carefully observed. Participants were allowed to voluntarily withdraw from the study at anytime. The only potential ethical issue the researcher identified was that the upper level administrators who provided permission for the interviews to be conducted may be able to recognize the individual participants through reading the study. Incorporation of teacher leaders as the actual persons who provided names of nominees made that less likely. Additionally, asking the teacher leaders to submit several names lessened the likelihood that the participants would be identified. It

was anticipated that the risks to the participants were minimal, for the individuals were nominated because of their professionalism and teaching acumen. They were respected teachers who possessed solid reputations and opinions. Discovery by an administrator would not prove to be detrimental to the participants since they were selected due to the high level of professional respect they have earned.

Limitations

This study was limited by a number of factors decisions made throughout the research process. The following discussion explores some of those limitations.

First, selection of a purposive, convenience sample in this study limited its scope and generalizability. The individuals who participated in this study had similar backgrounds, but each was unique. A compilation of themes, paired with thick description, allowed for transferability to other situations, but definitive conclusions cannot be drawn.

Secondly, there was a limitation with the interpretative nature of the research. In this study, a singular method of data collection was used. The researcher conducted all of the interviews and was the sole data collection instrument. This impacted the interpretive nature of the research. As such, the researcher worked to withhold judgments and look at data impartially. Although efforts were consciously made to fairly and accurately represent the teachers and to use their voices in this interpretation, the fact remained that the interpretation was from the point of view of the researcher.

Also linked to the interpretative nature of this study, the researcher could only understand through the views of the interview participants. As teachers who

understood the purpose of this study and were subjected to the educational policies that impacted their practices, they were motivated to be interviewed. It was possible that participants made conscious decisions to emphasize certain aspects of themselves or their opinions.

Those limitations affected the study's findings. Pope & Mays (1995) caution that all research is selective, however, meaning that the researcher could not, in any sense, capture the literal truth of events.

The findings referred to the viewpoints of five individual teachers. Generalizations cannot be made. This study did not attempt to focus on the identification or explanation of fact, but rather sought to understand interpretations of facts and events and help to make sense of them. Identifying commonalities allowed for drawing implications to other settings, but it is for others to determine if their own contexts "are sufficiently similar to the context of this research to make the transfer of results possible and reasonable" (Fallona, 1998).

Additional limitations were also apparent from the research design.

First, the participants all fit a common profile. The study focused specifically on mid-career, middle school teachers who were admired for their leadership and expertise by administration and colleagues. The teachers participated willingly, understood the purpose of this study, and were motivated to be interviewed. Importantly, it was recognized that self-reported change does not necessarily correlate to enacted change, but may be an important indicator of changing perspectives and behavioral changes.

Secondly, the number and timing of interviews was set to occur over a period of two to three weeks, allowing for some cursory review, reflection and analysis by both researcher and participant. Some alterations were mutually agreed upon by the researcher and participants in order to schedule and complete the interviews within constraints of all parties. The study focused on teacher impressions that took place during a specific time span, the end of the school year 2013-14. It should be expected that changes in perspective may occur as subsequent or additional events occur.

Chapter 4

Policy Coherence: Findings

This study was designed to provide insight concerning which factors influence understanding and implementation of policy reforms within classrooms. Through phenomenological interviews with five mid-career, middle school teachers whose practices were highly regarded by peers and administrators, this study explored participants' views about the implementation of three educational policies that affect their practices, classrooms, and students: RtI, PBE, and TES. Within the research framework, *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework*, policy coherence, compliance readiness, and sense-making were examined. Those factors may be neutral, or they may transform the original intentions of policy.

Policy coherence recognizes that various aspects of a policy initiative may be perceived uniquely by the individuals involved in the transmission of an initiative from governmental policymakers. Without awareness of the potential for inconsistencies to occur, a change from the original goal may result when it is implemented. In the words of Darling-Hammond (1990) "policies do not land in a vacuum; they land on top of other policies" (p. 346). Therefore, policies are introduced into a work environment that is already structured and functioning. As a result, the effects of implementing reforms may or may not occur as was originally envisions or intended.

Policy coherence is a foundational factor in reaching toward desired changes. It has two components: policy convergence; and problem framing. Close reconciliation of policy and implementation requires low levels of policy

convergence as well as high agreement about problem framing. On the other hand, high levels of policy convergence and low agreement about problem framing may result in inconsistencies developing, and ultimately creating departures, from the original or desired intent of an initiative. Each component is examined separately.

The purpose of this chapter is to look at the first factor that may influence highly-regarded teachers' understanding and implementation of policy reforms within classrooms: policy coherence. Using the words of the participants, the degree of policy coherence or incoherence is revealed by focusing on its component parts: policy convergence and problem framing. Finally, a summary of those observations is made.

Policy convergence. Policy convergence is the interaction of multiple reforms in combination that may have different effects in different areas of the organization and may result in a variety of intended or unintended outcomes (Knapp, et al., 1998). Some of the “tensions, dilemmas, and conflicts that result when different federal, state, and district education reform policies and programs that are not aligned converge at the school and classroom level” may be significant. (Superfine, Smylie, Cummings, & Tozier, 2012).

When multiple policies are mandated simultaneously within an agency, a number of unintended consequences may result. First, when policies mutually reinforce each other, that is to say they complement one another, the outcome may be that the policy initiatives cohere around similar goals, strategies, and resource demands. That is the ideal. However, policies may interfere with each other. Convergence may also cause conflict and contradiction to develop. Additionally,

multiple policies may accumulate on the same timeline for implementation. Such conditions may overload or overburden an organization. A system is vulnerable to policy incoherence when many initiatives are imposed concurrently without adequate levels of resources that allow for the planning, processing, and implementing each initiative requires.

Individual policies may be perceived to be feasible or important by themselves, but when combined they become vague or overwhelm the system. That may result in variant understanding and implementation. As communicated within the participants' comments, policy convergence is the most consistent and strongly communicated factor that influenced the understanding and implementation of policy reforms for all of the five highly regarded teachers.

Respect for the purpose of the initiatives did not make implementation easier. The initiatives were perceived to be substantial and substantive to the practice of teaching. The five teachers individually and collectively spoke to the volume and pace of change that was being encountered. This point was reiterated by Leslie, an eighth grade literacy teacher in Big City, who exclaimed, "I think this is all good. It is just so, so, so, so much."

The teachers agreed that change was needed, however the volume of changes was impacting their personal capacities, as well as district and collegial resources. As the three policies of RtI, PBE, and TES converged on their schools, the teachers expressed a sense of becoming overwhelmed. The participants stated that the amount of personal time involved in getting up to speed had been substantial and wondered if that time commitment was sustainable. For example, Molly, an eighth grade

literacy/social studies teacher in Small Towns, articulated this point, representing the general sentiment of the other participants when she stated, "...To me, none of this is crazy (or) what we should be steering from, but it is a lot on one plate to handle."

The convergence of multiple policies also impacted Christine, a young teacher. She suggested that the volume of new initiatives to be implemented had resulted in a lack of common understanding within her school. She revealed that she and her mathematics colleagues in a Big City middle school lacked consistency in their approach and grasp of the initiatives when she said, "...the way I approach all these things feels pretty comfortable to me (but) I know they're not necessarily the way they are meant to be approached, or the way other people would..." She wondered when collective, focused, "official" district-wide professional development resources might begin to alleviate some of the differences.

The pace of policy implementation was noted by Jennifer, a Big City mathematics teacher. She was the most veteran participant of the study, and throughout her interviews noted the quickened speed, volume, and significance of change, as demonstrated in her remarks:

You just can't take it all in. You can't be expert at all of it.

(pause) There's a lot more to keep track of now. There's a lot more asked of you. It's so--it's quicker. It's a lot faster, just so much more-- the pace--just so much more.

As Jennifer's comments suggested, policy incoherence may be a result of the convergence of many initiatives demanding attention and implementation. Those

conditions may occur at several levels individually or simultaneously within the individual teacher's classrooms, within schools, within school districts or within bureaucratic agencies. Such conditions may create inaccurate understanding and inconsistent implementation of the desired outcomes.

Diane acknowledged the volume and complexity of reforms, the feeling of constantly having to implement multiple new policy initiatives. As a literacy/social studies teacher in Small Towns, she had been in the profession since the advent of the mandates of *No Child Left Behind*, the early 2000s. She explained that during her fifteen years as a teacher

...there's always been a lot on our plates. I don't remember a time there wasn't a lot on my plate. We have always had a lot going on. I just think (pause) it's just that what we're doing is different than what we used to do...

She suggested that while change had been a constant, the new initiatives seemed more complex. She perceived that some of her colleagues were responding defensively to the convergence of reforms by trying to shut out the need to change, rationalizing that their practices would not be significantly influenced by outside demands. They often conveyed the sentiment, "Oh, I do that already." she said. Diane perceived that to be a defensive tactic, one of self-preservation as multiple policies converged on the classroom teacher.

Moreover, all five individuals expressed concern that unintended consequences may occur as multiple policies converged, descending upon their classrooms simultaneously from different directions, layered on top of existing

responsibilities. The interaction of multiple reforms in combination was having different effects in different areas of their schools, resulting in what they perceived to be unintended or unanticipated outcomes. The convergence of the various policies created a dissonance for the teachers as they tried to reconcile what they perceived to be incomplete information or conflicting outcomes. Christine spoke to these concerns when she stated,

I think RtI, teacher evaluation, and proficiency based education are all put in place to have the best schools, teachers, and students we can possibly have, but policies can get in the way of best practices in student-centered teaching.

Policy convergence can tax the capacity of the individuals charged with the efforts of implementation. Leslie commented on her colleagues' responses to the multiple policies, "...some are intense." She explained some of her coworkers were weary of juggling the implementation of multiple initiatives: "...teachers who have been through many cycles of reform (pause) I'll call it 'reform fatigue' where it's like 'OK. Here we go again.'" She was sympathetic and felt that the grumbling represented feelings of being overwhelmed or exhausted.

With the convergence of multiple policies to be implemented, Molly also noted that time to learn about and understand the implications of the changes was difficult to find and sustain. When asked how she dealt with the current educational environment, Molly, an eighth grade teacher in Small Towns, revealed that she committed much time outside of the school day in order to understand and accommodate the new initiatives. She empathized with colleagues, especially those

with children, who do not have the time available. Looking into the future, she stated that this time commitment would not be sustainable for herself:

...right now I have handled what has been tossed at me, but I do think there are a lot of initiatives up in the air and I also may be at the point in my life where if I have to go home and work for a few hours, I can do that... I think there are a few people with families, in particular, where maybe that is not as easy to pull off. So I wonder if in a different point in my life as well if that will become more over-whelming as I have less flexibility not just worried about myself.

She indicated that the personal resources of time and energy she devoted to implementing the reforms within her classroom were not inexhaustible, especially if the multiples of complex policy initiatives continue to impact teaching and learning.

Christine added another perspective about time. The everyday realities of teaching and learning did not mesh easily with the commitment of time required for accomplishing implementation of multiple policy initiatives. For Christine, a mathematics teacher in the middle school at Big City, the daily demands of public schooling and the needs of her students were consuming in themselves, not allowing much time to decipher the implementation and impact of the policy initiatives. She stated, "I think about this a lot and don't focus on them as much as I probably could or should or might..." She continued by explaining that the teaching day in itself was so consuming that she usually did not have the time or energy to

examine "the bigger picture." She concluded, "We don't focus on that really. I mean it's kind of like we're putting out fires all day. Right? "

When policies converge, unintended or unanticipated consequences may occur. Christine and Molly, the two newest teachers, spoke to that. They stated that there may be inherent inconsistencies for the teaching and learning processes because RtI and PBE were implemented at the same time. RtI required them to attempt to meet the individualized needs of each child in their classrooms, while at the same time teachers were charged with helping all students to meet levels of proficiency of the content standards, PBE. That interaction, both suggested, sometimes felt like a contradiction.

Focusing on their students as individuals, they stated that the grade-level standards outlined in CCSS may not be attainable for all of their students at any given point in time, regardless of the interventions put in place. Students develop as individuals, and may not be ready to demonstrate proficient levels of learning at the same time as their peer group, they explained. The converging policies of RtI and PBE did not appear to be mutually attainable for all of their students.

Molly said that she understood the intent of RtI and PBE, but had some misgivings about their application universally for all of her students.

I think the goal is that kids have the same access to certain skills and learning so that it is somewhat in common. I hope we do not overshoot and expect that everybody be doing the same thing at the same time.

She clarified by describing that working with struggling learners was challenging,

“I do think that’s the toughest as we work to raise the bar...” She elaborated on the challenges she had encountered as she has attempted to meet the goals of RtI for her students:

I think I have never worked so closely with Special Ed with getting help for some of those students and even students who aren’t identified in Special Ed, but figuring out what resources they need to make some learning attainable. And that’s a lot of work that needs to be done, but it does have to be done ‘cause for some of these kids, the structure of what we want them to do, it’s brand new to them...

Adding the requirements of CCSS and PBE at the same time as RtI, she continued, made her job even more complex, “I don’t think raising the bar is necessarily a bad thing, but then again you need that scaffolding to make it work for a lot of different children.” In spite of all her efforts as an eighth grade teacher, Molly had concerns for some of her struggling students, wondering if the learning goals of CCSS could eventually be reached.

...those skills are a little intimidating as far as what I see in my students versus what that list says they should be able to do. But I also think in reflecting back at this point in the school year, we’re making progress. So are the goals realistic? Maybe by high school graduation. I’m hoping they will put it all together. Some of the kids I really worry about, they come back and they impress me. So there’s going to be some maturity at

different points for different kids. I do think it is something you work on, kind of on a spectrum.

Additionally, Molly expressed that while the standards may be appropriate targets, they were not necessarily easily adaptable goals for all of her students, especially those at either end of the ability spectrum. The range of student abilities represented in her classroom boggled her mind when she thought about meeting individual needs as mandated by RtI. She was challenged by not just the students who struggle, but by the brightest students who could move at a faster pace and needed greater challenges than the standards require. She felt professionally stretched by the demands of her students.

...I do think you should be designing things with standards in mind... but I do think that some of what is expected is going to be very difficult for some students in front of me to attain. And I wonder with proficiency based diplomas and learning in the long run if what is considered proficient is perhaps lower than some of our kids can achieve. For some, (pause) I don't know how some are ever going to hit some of them (the standards) where they are right now. There's such a diverse group sitting in front of me everyday...

Christine admitted the convergence of the policies of RtI and PBE was challenging within her middle school in Big City, in general, for "Our population, everybody could be getting interventions, almost. Our teaching is really different." She explained her misgivings.

My impression is that RtI is the "no child gets left behind" and that we notice when they are falling through the cracks and we give them the type of intervention that they need so that they can meet the standards and the goals that they are supposed to. Not every kid can learn everything that they have to learn just because we're human and that's how it is. (pause) It's one of those things that's really good in theory. It's great that there is a system for catching the kids so that they're not falling all the way behind, so they can keep going with their classmates.

Realistically, however, Christine believed that regardless of how much effort was put forth by a teacher and a child, PBE was not as achievable for all of her students without providing the necessity of different timeframes for the learning. Unfortunately, allowance for the additional time some of her students needed had not been considered within the policy initiatives.

I think it's a nice target and I think it gives us something to shoot for and give our kids something to work towards, but not every kid's going to learn how to multiply fractions by Thursday. They are going to need a few more months to learn that, or a few more years. So are all the kids going to meet proficiency? No. But it gives a guide for me of what proficiency is and then I can communicate to their parents and to the rest of the school where this kid falls in comparison to that proficiency standard. So will every kid meet proficiency? No, but at least I have something to compare where they should be.

She suggested that allotting more time for teaching mathematics would assure more of her students could get to proficiency, but did not believe this was a realistic option especially given the current level of district resources.

Adding the reforms of TES along with RtI and PBE created other concerns for Christine. She was anxious about the implications of accountability as the policies converged on her students, her classroom practices and her school. Accountability meant public scrutiny of high stakes testing for her students, and TES for teachers whose effectiveness would be tied to the test results. She shared that her students were so much more than a graph or a number when she stated, “A standardized test is important. It tells us where we’re at. It helps us move forward, but it shouldn’t be what holds us back or defines us.” Christine respected the intent of the policy initiatives, but was concerned that too much focus on outside mandates could compromise the educational experience and personal development of some students.

I think RtI, teacher evaluation, and proficiency based education are all put in place to have the best schools, teachers and students we can possibly have, but policies can get in the way of best practices in student-centered teaching. We don’t always see the forest through the trees. Students need a holistic, whole-person approach to their education...

The convergence of RtI, PBE, and TES in addition to the increased public accountability that accompanies their implementation was

worrisome for her, for she feared unintended consequences especially to her students' self concepts.

Jennifer also perceived the potential for troubling consequences with the convergence of RtI and PBE. Similarly to Christine and Molly, she questioned the reality that each student could achieve proficiency through instruction within her classroom, on the same timeline. She favored the implementation of standards as a target, but qualified her enthusiasm when explaining,

...I think my job is to start with them (my students) where they are and take them as far as I can. And I don't necessarily think it is my responsibility to get everybody to grade level because I do not think that it is always possible. To expect a kid to gain three to four years of math in a single year is unrealistic for both the teacher and the kid...

The reality, she felt, was that each child may require different amounts of time to learn certain concepts. That is a fundamental principle of differentiation, a classroom strategy within RtI, however, she understood differentiation to be synonymous with RtI, given the professional development that had been provided thus far about the implementation of RtI. Differentiation was a daily occurrence within her classes, she explained. Yet, she understood the RtI initiative to be a duplication of teacher effort that required "a lot of paperwork." Communications from district and building leadership had indicated that RtI was a necessary step to be taken before a struggling child could be tested for identification of learning disabilities or other educational impairments that would require the development of a special education learning plan. She characterized RtI as "jumping through

hoops" to get to the special education referral process for students. According to Jennifer, the sole responsibility for implementation of RtI was the classroom teacher.

All five of the participants expressed significant concerns that with so much focus on implementation of RtI, and moving learners toward demonstrating proficiency, the other needs of their students were not being well served. In Leslie's words, how do those initiatives serve the child, "...really understanding them as a person? Where do you measure a child's resiliency to work hard and tackle challenges?" she asked. "And is it measurable?" She feared the heavy focus of measuring proficiency would have a deleterious effect on the nurturing of character development of the adolescents who were her students. She believed that it was within the responsibilities of public education to provide varied experiences that aid in developing personal attributes and talents, aspects not necessarily measured by standardized tests. She was concerned that with over-emphasis on only academic, classroom goals students might graduate, but be ill-equipped to encounter the challenges of life beyond the classroom. Leslie stated, "Humans have experiences and then they take those out into the world and do what they do." She felt that the demands of policy initiatives created a vacuum where other kinds of learning and experiences were being neglected. She articulated the sentiment of the other teachers when she shared that she did not want the changes to produce negative impacts on her students.

Molly and Christine also recognized that some students needed more than just academic challenges. While they were supportive of, if skeptical, about their

ability to meet the academic needs of the student during the school day, finding time to meet the needs of "the whole child" was an equally concerning issue. They felt the emphasis on attaining CCSS for all students had caused the social/emotional needs of some students to be over-looked in the increasingly full school day. Molly explained,

You have to think about both the lower kids and the higher kids.

Differentiation is fine. It doesn't stress me out. You have a lot of prep work to be able to handle any of that at any point. My concern is still about the kid who's not self-motivated and regardless of what I change. You almost need more time to get to those kids...

Diane also had concerns about the emotional needs of her students as PBE and RtI simultaneously converged on the school. Her students, an academically high-risk population, struggled with reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. She perceived that her students were increasingly experiencing stress due to the "pressure of performing on tests" - formative and summative - that were used to document levels of proficiency, a component of PBE. For those students who did not perform well, especially those who required RtI or Special Education involvement, she watched "that stress turns into apathy." Diane worried that when being measured against standards, her students experienced only incidental or temporary success throughout their school day. She suggested that she did not feel she or the school could properly address what were becoming systemic impacts on students created by the interaction or convergence of PBE and RtI.

...I certainly don't make kids aware that they're coming to me with so many gaps. I don't want them to feel badly about themselves and I don't want to place blame (but) I'm sure that they're aware of it...

She was concerned that the strong focus on preparation for the annual high-stakes, proficiency-based testing was taking the "fun" out of learning.

Favoring the goals and benefits of TES did not make it universally appealing to the teachers. For example, both Leslie and Jennifer were concerned about some aspects of the implementation that they felt had not been well conceived, especially the required process of documenting features of their teaching practices. In Jennifer words, "I get that we need the data (but) this is just one more thing to keep track of and prove..." Leslie concurred, noting that she had mixed feelings about the implementation of TES.

...I have something that might help me and that's where I am happy.

I am not happy about finding evidence and having the details with the evaluation system because I feel like, as it's presented right now, a lot more is added as far as "make sure you have evidence that you did this for the school"...

Additionally, both wondered if all the levels of proficiency reflected in the selected framework were attainable. Jennifer commented that she did not believe that exceeding the standards in the framework was possible for her.

There was one thing I saw, like it's a four (exceeds the standard)

...you're hardly talking at all and they're (the kids) sort of answering each others' questions and I'm like, "Really? Come see me in

September. Like that's going to happen in September, in sixth grade?
Really? Who's a four?" ...It's definitely the spectrum, but...I'll never
be any more than a two. That's it.

In spite of her misgivings, Jennifer supported the initiative. "Goals...are to make us
better at teaching and the students better a learning and to look at what's
measurable

about that and what's specific..." She would like to become a peer observer for the
TES. She would also like to believe that eventually the glitches could be resolved.

Leslie also explained her reservations about the framework, finding it
intimidating.

... I think of it as "the big rubric," much like my students must feel
when they look at my big writing rubrics. When I drill down into a
skill or two it seems pretty clear about the fact that I'm never going
to be a super professional teacher because the standard is way up
there. The highest level on the framework seems a little unattainable
for human beings. That would be a good ideal [sic]. I don't have a
problem with it. I think it sets the bar very high and I like it.

Overall, she too saw great potential in TES, but indicated that teacher input during
implementation might eventually improve the system.

The teachers also expressed concerns about how TES and PBE would
interact and impact them. The TES was being designed to include student
achievement data created through the PBE mandate. As the implementations of

both initiatives were simultaneously in process, none felt confident in how the two would converge and impact their performance reviews.

In Molly's view, there were a number of factors that were needed for learning to occur for her students. As a teacher she did not control several important components, and therefore felt vulnerable, especially as the rigor of the proficiency targets increased. She explained,

Not everything is in my control. Wouldn't that be nice, but it's not.

(M)y own personal evaluation when I have either a peer come in or an admin come in, I feel like at this point it's me being evaluated, but I think if we start using things like statistics and data and student scores and things, yeah, it's going to open a whole 'nother [sic]. And it's a chain too. It's where these kids were educated before and who had them before and what worked and what didn't. It is a more group idea than maybe I've thought about it in the past --a village...

She was not adverse to being evaluated, and felt very comfortable with receiving feedback on her classroom practices. For Molly, education of a child, however, was a progressive effort dependent on many factors. She wanted TES to be fair, not just looking at a child's level of proficiency, but taking into account the growth that had been achieved: "I guess it needs to be collective pieces. I think it is a team. I think that test scores have some play in it, but maybe it is growth that should be one piece of data..."

Diane agreed with those sentiments. She felt that the interactions of the policies did not consider the fact that educating a child is a cumulative process that

takes place over multiple years, and is impacted by many adults throughout the child's day. She accepts that teachers should be accountable for student learning, for they direct what occurs in the classroom, "I'm the one that makes those decisions and then chooses to implement them or not and no one is in my room policing me..." The interaction of the student data that reflects absolute levels of proficiency and TES was concerning for her as well. Given the low academic achievement of her students, she was concerned with being held responsible for whether her students were able to reach proficiency within the year she taught them.

(I)t's the teacher in the classroom who is making decisions every day, so the reality is that those kids had at least one if not many teachers who were not effective or who for some reason, and there are many and some not even in their control, overlooked these kids or did not serve these kids.

She also advocated for using data that reflected student growth, but understanding the discouraged student population with whom she worked, feared for teachers being evaluated on factors that were outside of their control.

Christine found the goal of receiving feedback about her teaching to be an important one, but felt there were still unanswered questions about the actual implementation of TES that concerned her. In other states, implementation had not proceeded smoothly as policy convergence between the accountability measures of PBE and TES were creating problems that had not been anticipated. She tried to

express optimism that her state's initiative would not experience similar vulnerability.

nobody really knows what we're going to end up with when we start doing this. (pause) I read stuff about New York State teachers and (failing teachers) pictures being on the front cover of newspapers and that people don't really know how this is going to work out. Nobody does. We're building a boat and sailing at the same time. I also feel pretty competent that I'm doing a lot of the stuff on there (the framework) that they're asking me to. No one's perfect, right? But it is in the back of my mind. It's good to have those whether the system is going to work or not. I think it's good to have standards for teachers trying to meet. I want to keep getting better.

Christine's hopefulness and support for TES was clearly mixed with uncertainties and concerns that appeared to result from a system is not yet clear.

As the three policies converged, the Small Towns teachers perceived their goals conflicted, or would not achieve the desired ends. Given the apparent contradictions they recognized, both questioned if the realities of the teaching and learning processes were truly understood by policymakers. Diane suggested that RtI and PBE were too narrow in focus to really make the kinds of differences that would have a meaningful impact for students. She envisioned other strategies that she believed would have a greater influence.

I do believe we could do a better job of personalizing education more to a student, getting to know him or her and their learning

style and interests and needs better, and creating a classroom environment or even a school campus that is more flexible and responsive to kids...

Molly bluntly stated, “I just hope people who are experienced teachers get to have input on policy...” because she wanted the initiatives to be logical and workable in her classroom for her students and herself.

The comments of the five participants suggest that a high degree of policy convergence was impacting their classrooms and schools, creating tensions for both teachers and students. The interaction of the three reforms has different effects in different classrooms. They were creating unintended consequences within the teaching and learning process, setting up potentially conflicting priorities (individualized learning, RtI, and universal learning target, PBE), while oversimplifying the use of assessment data to evaluate teaching and learning.

Some had the potential to be significant. As a factor that may influence the understanding and implementation within the classrooms of highly regarded teachers, policy convergence had a substantial impact. Convergence of multiple policy demands was changing the processes of teaching and learning within their classrooms, creating unintended consequences, and taxing personal and institutional resources. Overall, policy convergence was contributing to policy incoherence.

Problem framing. A second component of policy coherence is problem framing. Problem framing typically starts with the development of the perceptions of a problem that should be addressed. It may occur as an individual or collective

process, but always involves an interactive process in which the definition and scope of an issue are set. It sets the parameters of debate and directs participants toward solutions; however, it is a largely subjective process. Local actors are an important part of the policy framing process, for their decisions and actions shape the direction of implementation. They are constantly framing and constructing meaning through the lens of their own preexisting beliefs and practices (Coburn, 2006).

The process of problem framing not only identifies the problem to be acted upon, it also may influence allocation of resources (Coburn, 2006). Resource allocation in an environment of scarcity may be a contentious process. Moreover, researchers suggest that it is difficult to move forward on initiatives if there is conflict between the interpretations of leadership and teachers (Spillane, et al., 2002; Coburn, 2006). The remarks of all five participants suggested that policy framing was not a hotly contested process within their personal experiences. As additional evidence of their support for the initiatives: when the five participants were encouraged to eliminate any with which they disagreed or any they could not support, all declined to do so.

None of the participants questioned, contested, or placed significant parameters on any of the policy initiatives as might be the case with inconsistent or erroneous problem framing of the individuals (Coburn, 2006). For example, during the card sort activity Christine, Leslie, Diane, and Molly indicated that the initiatives were significantly linked. In particular, Christine and Leslie declined to create a hierarchy with the concepts, not wanting to suggest one policy initiative was more important than another. Christine finally arranged the cards during the

card sort into a circle, explaining that each initiative linked to the other.

I hate to put things at the bottom because it makes it seem like they're not as important. These aren't perfect. I mean I've bought into them. I think they're all good. They're important things. I'm not ready to throw anything out.

Similarly, Leslie arranged all of the cards in a web-like configuration. "I'm not going to rank. I'm going to group. I'm a three-dimensional thinker," she explained as she made big circles above the other cards with the "Teacher Evaluation System" card. She liked that TES provides standards for teachers and stated that "They're constantly in the back of my mind..." as she performed any professional duties. Feedback about her teaching, especially from her students, was important to Leslie.

While Diane understood and described the linkages between all of the initiatives, she described CCSS as "top down" and PBE as "theory." She did not dispute the existence any of the initiatives, but expressed that she would like more information about PBE, questioning if CCSS would achieve this result. "... I don't know if the standards will get us there until I know more about them and am working with them," she said. She was hopeful that the TES initiative would result in a closer relationship between administration, the classroom teacher, and effective professional development.

People need to demonstrate that they are performing in classrooms... Certainly teachers work hard, but we don't always know for sure that there are results from hard work. (pause) I value

learning about effective instruction because I know that that leads to the best results.

Ultimately this would lead to improved teaching and learning, even if “measuring it is very challenging,” according to Diane. The practice of guided reflection would be prompted through TES, she hoped, and move a teacher in a cycle of continuous improvement. She was most concerned about the implementation.

Jennifer was not uniformly comfortable with all of the initiatives, however, she confidently placed CCSS as the highest priority. She explained, “It makes my day so much easier. We can look at this and say, ‘We’ve met this really well. Look how many kids met this standard. Look how many kids are still struggling with this standard...’” CCSS helped her focus on all the grade-level concepts and skills that needed to be re-taught throughout the year. It was, therefore, interesting and surprising that she placed PBE as a low priority. She explained her qualified thinking: “I think they are realistic goals for a typical kid... I think they are really challenging for a kid who’s Special Ed. Or a kid with language barriers...” Her concerns focused on whether PBE was a realistic goal, given the current resources she had for her students within her classroom.

Molly mentioned that she grew up, was educated, prepared to become a teacher, and held her first job in Massachusetts. She explained that Massachusetts was an early adopter state of PBE, RtI, TES, and high stakes accountability. Molly felt she had first-hand experience with the initiatives from two perspectives. Not yet 30 years old, Molly shared she had been immersed in the change created by the policy initiatives, “...I have been exposed to it both in my education and my role as

an educator...” Nevertheless, she said that the more veteran teachers with whom she worked had responded negatively to some of the educational initiatives, conversations that sometimes shook her confidence in her understanding. Molly explained, “The people around me who have taught longer...say it’s more of the same thing just put differently. So then I usually go to see where it stems from. That always makes me feel better. I research a little.” She worked at maintaining a personal perspective that she believed was aligned with the intent of the policy initiatives and attempted to positively present her understandings and personal experiences to colleagues. Molly’s remarks revealed the complexities that potentially existed in collective problem framing. Colleagues interpreted the policies uniquely and personally.

From the remarks of the five teachers it was evident that policy framing was not contributing significantly to creating policy incoherence. The teachers perceived the individual policies as meaningful to their practices. Each teacher appeared to find the policies to be appropriately focused on legitimate challenges within education. Inconsistencies within policy framing did not appear to exist for them. Policy framing was not a factor that influenced these highly regarded teachers’ understanding and implementation of policy reforms within classrooms.

Summary

Policy coherence is the systematic promotion of mutually reinforcing policy actions. The goal is to create synergies toward achieving agreed upon objectives. That does not always occur, however, as various aspects of a policy initiative may

be perceived uniquely by the individuals involved in the transmission or implementation of policy. When this happens, policy incoherence is created.

Policy coherence has two main components. First, policy convergence is the interaction of multiple reforms at the same time. That may result in a neutral response, it may have different effects on different segments of an organization, potentially reinforcing or obstructing the policy, or it may overload the system. Second, policy framing is an interactive process by which the problem to be acted upon is identified and the parameters set. The interactive, often contested, mediated process must be conducted so that decisions can be made and resources allocated concerning policy implementation.

The remarks of the participants indicated policy incoherence was a factor that influenced their understanding and implementation of the policy reforms of RtI, PBE, and TES in their classrooms. Policy incoherence was created primarily by the component of policy convergence, not policy framing.

There was little disagreement about the intentions of the policy initiatives among the interviewees. The five teachers did not contest the policies themselves, and understood the goal of each initiative to be that of improving student achievement, aligning their policy framing with that intended by the policy initiative. However, all five felt that simultaneous implementation of the three policies had taxed them personally and the resources of their schools.

First, the participants suggested that the interactions of multiple initiatives in combination possessed the potential to create unintended consequences. The mandates of RtI and PBE were perceived to possess mutually exclusive goals for

some students, especially those already performing significantly below grade-level. They were apprehensive about the interactions between PBE and TES as well. They suggested that the reforms were not serving all of their students well. Second, they perceived that some of their students and colleagues were becoming overwhelmed by the new initiatives that focused on higher levels of performance and accountability. Third, given three significant reforms, the participants expressed concerns regarding the need for expanded professional development for teacher because common understandings of the initiatives were not established among their peers. Additionally, they perceived mounting levels of stress accompanying the increased focus on accountability and the pace of change for teachers and students. Finally, they noted that their personal time and energy were impacted by the implementation of the three initiatives. Their remarks suggested concerns that the convergence of multiple well-intended policies was creating policy incoherence.

Chapter 5

Compliance Readiness: Findings

The researcher conducted this study to learn what factors influence highly regarded teachers' understanding and implementation of policy reforms within classrooms. Through phenomenological interviews with five mid-career middle school teachers whose practices were highly regarded by peers and administrators, this study explored participants' views about the implementation of three educational policies that affect their practices, classrooms, and students - RtI, PBE, and TES. By examining those viewpoints, the researcher sought to understand what factors may alter the implementation of those policy initiatives. The research framework *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework* was created. It comprised three factors: policy coherence, compliance readiness, and sense-making, all of which may be neutral or they may transform the original intentions of policy.

Through their perspectives, it was possible to understand what challenges were presented for the highly regarded, mid-career, middle school teacher as she implemented policies that had trickled down into her classroom from federal, state, district, and school policies. In this chapter, it is the lens of compliance readiness through which the researcher interpreted the remarks of the five teachers pertaining to the new initiatives.

First, the concept of compliance readiness and its additive components are reviewed. Then, using the words of the classroom teachers, the researcher reveals the degree of compliance readiness perceived to exist within the experiences of the

five participants. Discussion focuses on the three component parts: ideological readiness, organizational capacity, and power to resist. Finally, a summary of these observations is made.

Compliance Readiness and Its Component Parts

A second category of factors that may impact the implementation of policy is compliance readiness, the conditions and abilities that exist within an institution that allow or resist a transformation of practices. Just because a policy initiative or reform has been mandated does not mean the desired change will occur. Change is often difficult for the individuals who are impacted. The workers, or target agents, have a degree of free will to act in accordance with the requests or demands in a timely manner. Their acquiescence may vary, depending upon the structure of the organization and the power differential that exists between the controlling agent - the boss - and the target element -the worker (Zald, 1978).

The degree of structured routine that already exists and the strength of the collective memory within the institution may impact how readily the organization is able to change itself or its beliefs. Practices and routines that have become institutionalized over time are difficult to change, especially those practices that are perceived to have adequately worked or accomplished a stated goal. The degree of leadership's dedication to transformation has a significant impact on change as well. Committed leadership may be a necessary catalyst that becomes the inertial qualities of the target group. Leadership's commitment may be indicated through overt messaging or modeling, allocation or reallocation of resources, or heightened levels of accountability. Change is not easily undertaken by some persons, so the

perceived dedication of control agents toward new goals may have a significant impact on the target group.

Compliance readiness, the willingness and ability to respond to changing conditions, can be broken into three concepts: ideological readiness; organizational capacity; and power to resist. It should be noted that each connects with and influences the other two, however, each will be examined separately (Zald, 1978; Coburn & Russell, 2008; Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002; Spillane, 2004; Coburn, 2001; Louis, et al., 2005).

Ideological readiness. Ideological readiness is the degree to which a target group, situated further down the hierarchy of power, agrees with the conditions set by the controlling agent (Zald, 1978). That is variable throughout the teaching profession. However, the five participants' remarks suggested a strong receptivity to the policy initiatives, in theory. That did not mean that they did not have reservations about the implementation of the policy initiatives. They agreed with the goals of the mandates of RtI, PBE, and TES and understood how the policies could work together to support the goal of improved student achievement. Their concerns were with the classroom implementation of the policies, especially the realities that they experienced within their classrooms and students.

Leslie, the English/language arts teacher in Big City, stated that she liked the goals of CCSS, PBE, RtI, and TES, but in general, "I don't think we're doing it right." She too felt her curriculum had the potential to meet the goals intended by the multiple initiatives, but when it came to implementation, "it requires a lot of authentic texts for students to be reading." She did not have access to those. She

expressed a lack of trust in the school district as a conduit for implementation of federal and state educational initiatives. She had moved forward, however, focusing on what she did control.

I reconcile it by saying, "This is out of my control and I can't be in charge of that" and focus my attention on kids and learning and their families and making sure that things are going well in the place that I can control, quote, unquote. I can pretend that I'm controlling it. I can have an impact, I guess. Control is not even anywhere near the truth...

Her experience lead her to believe that over time, "like five to ten years from now," after a lot of process, the responsibility to appropriately implement the initiatives would be placed on classroom teachers "...teachers looking at those kids who are partially meeting or not meeting and ...working our way through that." She trusted her colleagues would eventually be given the responsibility to figure out how best to make the mandates work as intended for students.

Jennifer, a Big City teacher, also supported all initiatives, but as a teacher of mathematics felt that requiring all of her students to reach proficiency was not a realistic goal. She did everything she knew how to do as a practitioner, she stated, but the reality was that some students were not going successfully reach the grade-level standards within the time she was their teacher. She felt that to have such an expectation, if that was what was required by the mandates, was unrealistic, "But, we're going to get them as far as we can." She emphasized that her students were individual, with individual abilities. "Everybody's different. You can't try to put

square pegs into round holes. You can't." She elaborated about what conditions might help students to meet maximum potential, a level, she clarified, that was individualized not "getting everybody to grade-level."

For them to make the maximum growth you need materials and time and more bodies and you need longer math periods and you need (pause) some pretty ideal situations. You do your best. You get them as far as you can. But those things that are factors you don't really control are going to impact it...

Christine, a math colleague, agreed with Jennifer's assessment. She understood how RtI, PBE, and TES were supposed to work together to maximize student achievement, but also did not believe that it was realistic or believable to expect all students to reach grade-level expectations within the same timeframe." I think it's a nice target and I think it gives us something to shoot for and gives our kids something to work towards, but not every kid's going to learn now to multiple fractions by Thursday." She believed that CCSS and PBE provided ideal grade-level targets in order to discuss needed strategies and supports for individual children, enabling appropriate teaching resources to be put in place. For most of her students who struggle, she felt "longer classes. More math teachers. More collaboration" would move them closer toward levels of proficiency.

Diane, a literacy/social studies teacher in Small Towns, also did not have an issue with the goals of the mandates, rather "it's with the tests. There's this hype and attention that's focused on these single tests..." She was a supporter of the goal that all students should be college- and career-ready before they graduated from a

public high school, but the resources needed to implement that goal were not available to her yet. Moreover, to have imposed new goals and rigorous implementation timelines on teachers and students who had been a part of a different, existing educational system was problematic.

The skills that the Common Core are asking for students to have, I support. I think it's unfortunate that the resources and supporting materials didn't come with the Core, things like rubrics and anchors and PD. There's nothing in there that I as a teacher don't think I should teach. I just worry that we're not teaching it well without the resources and the time and the assumption that I can teach at grade seven standards when kids don't have what they needed K through six is false. It's not a perfect situation.

Molly, Diane's Small Towns colleague, also supported the goals of the initiatives. She did not perceive the content or curriculum of the social studies and English/language arts to be substantially different, but the skills, especially critical thinking tasks, that needed to be taught were. Her objections focused on part of the implementation: the expanded testing of students that was being implemented in order to provide measurement of student achievement and for teacher accountability.

I think the way I was taught was kind of memorization and kind of "spit it out," but that didn't work with me. That did not make me like it, but I think with the social studies and history, in particular, where I tell the kids "You should judge what happened and just don't accept it."

I think that is an improvement. I do think we spend a tremendous amount of time assessing and I'm hoping as we get better at it maybe it consumes less time, but sometimes I feel like I'm just taking a lot of time up to have them give me the output. And it's helpful and it guides your practice and I reflect on it, but at the same time, I don't always feel shocked by what I see the kids do or don't do. But it takes a lot of time.

She suggested that if teachers had greater input into the policymaking process, especially as it relates to classroom implementation, processes could be improved.

I don't know a whole lot about the state level and who's making the decisions and my guess is it would probably frustrate me if I dug into that. I am weary of non-educators having a huge hand in some decisions...

I don't think you belong in that position until you've had experience.

She explained that she respects the lawmakers, "they are educated" and "you have to have some faith in that whole system, and I do" but "I just don't know how much input happens from people who actually know what a daily day looks like. What education is like."

However, both Diane and Molly suggested the presence of resistance toward the goals of new initiatives was evident among some of their colleagues. For instance, Diane did not perceive support when she talked with her colleagues about the policy initiatives of RtI, PBE, or TES. Of discussions about these policy initiatives she said,

Unfortunately, --- I feel like those conversations don't go very far or don't go in a positive way. (pause) There's a lack of understanding or even awareness among teachers, what they are and what those mean to them as teachers because of the full-plate idea, people just feel burdened by it. It becomes cynical and negative...(I)t's rare that I'd hear people wanting to devote a lot of time to learn about those things... it's sort of like "I'll worry about it when it comes 'cause it might not come so why spend the time on it now?"

She perceived her colleagues were avoiding change as a tactic of self-preservation.

Diane's colleague, Molly, sensed similar resistance among her collegial community, but for a unique reason: resistance to change. Change, she stated, "It's everywhere." Molly continued, "... I don't think change is a bad thing, but I wonder how much actually gets changed versus what gets stated that needs to be done, and probably always should have been done." She explained that her willingness to learn about the new initiatives and improve her practices were not always shared by her colleagues. Some of her more experienced teammates attempted to discourage her from embracing the initiatives. "People are telling (me) we're going back," she said and they encouraged her to wait for definitive directives from leadership. Molly conceded that many of the proposed changes were not "necessarily awful" or "going to take you forever," but colleagues appeared to feel that "you are about to be told something different again, without

even thinking about the impact or what you actually have to do or perhaps if what you already do meets that.” In other words, until conditions, requirements or accountability substantially and consistently change, it is better to wait. Molly’s viewpoint was an illustration of the application of collective memory being a significant factor when change was needed. While the future is uncertain, the past is tangible and real and may discourage undertaking new or novel challenges.

A similar lack of ideological readiness was not widely evidenced at the Big City middle school, according to the participants. Jennifer and Christine both emphasized how collaboratively the sixth to eighth grade mathematics teachers worked together to implement CCSS, moving toward PBE. Separately they were effusive in their respect for the hard work of their colleagues. Jennifer also expressed a sense of collegial solidarity and optimism when sharing her impressions of RtI, “Makes sense that we should have strategies in place to help kids get where they need to be. Not organized, not clear cut, not transparent in how we’re going to do that. I’m hopeful that we’ll all get better at it.”

Leslie stated that she sometimes perceived what she called “reform fatigue” among her colleagues, which she admitted on the surface could be construed as negativity and resistance to change. However she explained more fully that “...I always hear that in the processing of the reform, but the implementation in the classroom, teachers use good strategies.” Leslie suggested that collaboration with her peers in brainstorming responses to policy initiatives or specific guidance from leadership usually resulted in appropriate, positive responses, “So when you put a strategy out there and they find out that it works,

they're going to use it. We are fortunate. We have a very collaborative environment..." She suggested that her colleagues may complain, but they are willing to try new ideas that may benefit their classrooms, which Leslie labeled "buy-in." While reluctant, Leslie's colleagues were willing to change their routines if they believed improved student learning was the result.

There are varying degrees of ideological readiness within any school, however. Christine revealed that TES had been a strong focus of professional learning and discussion in her middle school in Big City. Peer observation was being introduced, but not everyone was happy about this.

So there are some teachers who are pushing back. People are saying teachers saying teachers shouldn't be evaluating each other. That's not good because that puts you on a different playing field and you're supposed to be colleagues.

The dissenters tended to be older, closer to retirement, generalized Christine, but not all. One of the most vocal critics of the new TES was her teammate. However, not all, "veteran" teachers resisted change and in fact, even her teammate was willing to adapt to some policies. Christine shared, "There are other people in my building who are trying things. I feel like people are doing what's best for kids. Even the teacher I mentioned."

The participants' perceptions suggested that ideological readiness varied significantly between Small Towns and Big City. There was some variability within each school as well. While Molly and Diane expressed their willingness to engage with the policy initiatives, they did not feel that all of their colleagues were

accepting of, or moving toward, the required changes. Big City participants expressed that, for the most part, they worked productively with their peers, collaborating with the intent of learning about and attempting to implement required changes, especially if these changes were perceived to favorably impact student achievement.

Organizational capacity. An institution's compliance readiness is also dependent upon the organizational capacity it possesses. Organizational capacity is composed of the level of assets in three domains. First, human capital is the commitment, disposition, and knowledge of the target agents or employees. It may in turn be influenced by the second component, social capital, that is shared within the organizational community (Coburn & Russell, 2008). Social capital refers to the collective value of all social networks, who people know, and the natural tendencies that arise from those relationships to do things with and for one another, norms of reciprocity. It develops through formal and informal interactions between and among colleagues. It can be impacted by a variety of factors including prior relationships, proximity of colleagues, shared norms, levels of expertise, and established routines. It is strongly connected to levels of collegial trust. It also emphasizes a variety of specific benefits that flow from reciprocity, information, and cooperation. It may create value for the people who are connected to one another, and sometimes the benefits extend to bystanders as well (Harvard Kennedy School, 2000; Coburn & Russell, 2008). Third, financial capital refers to the resources of money, staffing, time, and materials that are available throughout a professional organization (Spillane & Thompson, 1997). Adequate levels of each

are ideal for the organization to adequately possess the ability to respond to policy demands in an effective manner.

A dominant concern among all five of the teachers was the perception that some aspects of organizational capacity were missing or insufficient. A perceived lack of capacity may result in the inability to adequately respond to policy initiatives. However, there was a different emphasis on which aspects of organizational capacity were lacking, depending upon which school was examined.

Human capital. Human capital is the commitment, knowledge, and disposition of the staff and is highly influenced by the degree of social capital shared within the institutional community. Jennifer and Christine, Big City math colleagues, independently described a high degree of human capital that aided the functioning of their mathematics department to meet the multiple challenges of their students. By their accounts, the twelve teachers within their cohort possessed the qualities needed to function collaboratively, as they strove to aid students in CCSS and standards-based instruction, PBE.

Each teacher shared a version of the same challenge in which she and her colleagues were forced by district administration to adopt a math curriculum. While originally mathematics teachers throughout the district were consulted during the process of picking the middle school curriculum, ultimately the decision was made at the district level for financial reasons. In Christine's and Jennifer's opinions, the choice was not appropriate for Big City students. Christine tried to be faithful to the new, chosen curriculum: "I had to sign a fidelity statement. I was really faithful to the book and the kids---oh, they really struggled with it..." Jennifer described the

choice as “not appropriate for our students,” of which almost 50 percent are ELL. They could not read the textbook. She described some of the challenge she and her grade-level colleague encountered, “...It’s very dense. Very dense. And like 50 percent of my kids couldn’t use it. So we tried very diligently to use it the first two years, my partner and I...” The teachers feared that their current students would not get exposure to the grade-level standards due to their lack of learning progress while using the required textbook curriculum. As Jennifer explained, not only were “we not going to have them learn it, we’re not even going to address it.”

After two years of sharing strategies and materials, trying to make the program work, Jennifer and her partner piloted a free, online shareware curriculum and recommended it to the mathematics department. Others tried some of the modules and finally, with the consent of the building administrator, they made plans to adopt it for the coming year. Christine remarked that she is relieved that she and her mathematics colleagues had been empowered.

I really like that we’re given this permission to use whatever resources will meet standards. It wasn’t working and thank goodness our administration said, “We need to do something that will work for the kids.”...Kids were all over the place and this was really difficult math with a lot of language barriers...So we did get the OK, “You can use ... other resources”...

When questioned about their ability and willingness to respond flexibly, both teachers suggested that their mathematics department in the Big City middle school often collaboratively responded to the challenges of teaching and learning.

As Christine stated, concerning the adoption of the new mathematics program by the teachers, “We aren’t a school where you have to be on a certain page on a certain day...It’s pretty student-centered and teachers can be creative...”

The remarks of both mathematics teachers suggested a high level of human capital existed in their department, as long as the students were kept in the center of the conversation. Jennifer described herself, her partner, and the entire mathematics department in her references to CCSS and PBE: “...we (are) making sure this is where kids need to be when they leave us, and if they’re not, what are we going to do about it.” Having students be able to demonstrate appropriate levels of learning was the primary goal on which these teachers collectively focus.

In Small Towns, Diane and Molly perceived a high degree of knowledge was evinced among their peers, but in general a disposition that favored collegial learning and sharing was not broadly in evidence. Diane offered that when she first came to the middle school in Small Towns she was under the impression that the community of teachers was “top notch,” and in some sense her perception was still true. “Even our lowest teachers are good teachers,” she stated. However, due to what she believed is the increasingly stressful nature of the job, the sense of a collegial professional community was disappearing.

There is a lot of deception, isolation. So as much as everyone is saying we shouldn’t be isolated, there are still plenty of ways to. It’s a way of dealing with all the pressures of the job. “I can’t” or a way of hiding the things they don’t value.

Shutting one’s door, Diane suggested, was one way to deal with change.

Molly agreed that an improved attitude of collegial professionalism needs development within Small Towns middle school. While she participated in regularly scheduled meetings each week with her interdisciplinary team, “I don’t know how productive that is always...” She suggested that colleagues often expressed that many aspects of their jobs were beyond their control, but she suspected “that it is very easy to say some of it is not in our control.” Molly shared that interpersonal dynamics were not always trusting or open, especially outside of her team and content colleagues. She perceived that many of her more experienced colleagues were not as invested in the changes represented by the policy initiatives as she was and she sympathized with some of these veteran teachers, “If things change at the rate that they have since I started teaching---I don’t know if I will be able to keep up for forty years.”

Dispositions, knowledge, and commitment within the collegial environment are important ingredients in the level of human capital. The Big City teachers expressed a strong commitment to their students, which became a common ground for collegial sharing of expertise and inquiry. While there was a perception that many of the teachers of Small Towns possessed professional knowledge, the quality of openness and sharing was not predominantly evident, according to the participants. Moreover, the degree of perceived human capital influenced social capital.

Social capital. Social capital refers to the formal, informal, and developing manner in which colleagues interact with each other. It can be impacted by a variety of factors including prior relationships, proximity of colleagues, shared

norms, levels of expertise, and established routines. To a large extent, it is dependent upon collegial trust.

Diane and Molly expressed their frustration at the lack of social capital within their school. They described an environment of inadequate collegiality, a tolerated level of isolation, and the less than satisfying sharing of information. There was more than a hint of frustration expressed from Molly when she related that meaningful communication between colleagues was lacking throughout the school.

I have only been involved with a handful of conversations six, seven, eight and the content never develops. Not everyone has developed three common assessments. Lots has been said [sic] that they are still developing them. Lot of work. Lot of people that need to be on board with it.

Later she mentioned feeling isolated within her school, "...I can really only speak for my own little world. I know my content and most of what happens on team and some of what happens on grade level, so I'm in a bubble..." Furthermore, she suggested change needed to start with the tone and explicit goals set by leadership within her building.

We have a lot of freedom, and people get asked a lot about what they would like before a decision is made which is very different for me...I have never in my life before I came to (Small Towns) filled out so many surveys about what I

thought should happen. I think sometimes decisions need to be made and people need to be told. Tough.

She was discontented with the lack of leadership in her building and in the district.

I think our administration has very good intentions and wants to be supportive. I don't think they are unsupportive. I think at a district level (pause) I don't have a great sense of what the intention is, good, or bad, or indifferent. And I'm sure they're doing their thing and I'm in my world and they're in theirs.

While she sympathized with the difficult role administrators possessed, she wanted a more definitive structure for goal setting, communication, and collaboration between herself and her colleagues throughout the school.

Diane also pointed toward leadership as a cause of the lack of staff cohesion and trust, especially as it pertained to the processes of teaching and learning throughout the building. As a teacher leader she believed more overt administrative support would go a long way toward building collegial motivation toward policy initiatives and maintaining her own motivation.

I think if I ask for it, I would get it, but generally they're doing what they need to do every day and they're trusting that I'm doing what I need to do every day, to the best of my ability, and if I need them, they will come (pause) but (pause) it would be nicer, be better, and would rejuvenate a person ... to feel like they're more available...

Diane wondered if the fact that her administrator was new to the position may have had a bearing on the lack of direct support she perceived, but then recalled that she felt similarly with her previous administrator who was in the position for eight years. She advocated for “shared leadership” as a theme that would build trust. That, she explained, would be

...teachers leading as well as administrators (pause) or teaching administrators-- sort of a "we're all in this together" attitude rather than a hierarchical structure. (pause) You know, administrators that are living it and they know the realities and would put their focus on what matters for teachers and students...

Both Diane and Molly acknowledged Small Towns was publicly perceived to be a high performing district and therefore was open to greater scrutiny by the communities. Both attributed the higher levels of accountability, in general and specifically within the community, translated into greater pressure for Small Town teachers. Molly suggested, “...the responsibility is huge and when you are going to get your students’ results and you’re going to see what impact you had potentially from point A to point B, yeah, that’s a lot. That’s both pressure and responsibility...” She further clarified her concerns.

I don’t think anyone is sitting there and analyzing what I did or what my particular cohort is, but could they at some point? Yeah. And could they compare me to the person teaching next to me teaching the same subject? They could. (pause) It also makes me a little

nervous about who's going to teach or prefer to teach kids who need a little extra help, to get to measure that growth carefully as well.

Diane conveyed her concerns another way.

Pressure to perform. Pressure to measure up. Pressure to get those results that people are paying attention to. Pressure to change the public's opinion of the profession. (pause) I think it takes a conscious effort not to just get sucked in by all of that and remember why I'm doing it...

As those examples illustrate, there was a perceived lack of social capital or trust impacting the organizational capacity of Small Towns middle school. The dynamic transcended beyond the school, extending into the greater community.

The three teachers from Big City, on the other hand, found the collegial climate within their school to be supportive. For example, Jennifer described how flexible grouping with another math teacher had become a part of her teaching due to their desire to better meet the needs of the students they teach: "...I don't know if it was a suggestion from my administration, which is entirely possible, but that doesn't matter. The schedule (worked) and the guy I was working with said, 'Hey, let's give it a shot.'" For the coming year, they had advocated for revising the schedule so that they could include a third teacher, the ELL teacher and flexibly group students into three groups, according to teaching and learning needs. Jennifer was excited as she explained about the smaller, teacher led groups, "(T)hat gives us three teachers to flexibly work with. The three groups. Ideally, we've shrunk the

span a little bit ...” The benefits would extend to the teachers’ professional development with her ELL colleague, she hoped.

And the ideal would be I’m her model of how (the math) works and then she teaches, so part of her co-teaching is to bring me up to speed with ELL techniques and strategies and then I’m a better ELL teacher and then she moves on to another person. That’s our thinking...

This illustrates what appears to be a high level of partnership and trust that exists among the teachers, all focused on improving the teaching and learning. Jennifer was enthusiastic about the levels of collegial collaboration she experienced throughout the mathematics department and her building, due in large part to the support received from the school administration.

It’s really awesome because I work with some really smart people.

It’s a good, great department. and they’ve given time to every department which is really good. We use that effectively. I think there are ways we can use that time more effectively, but (pause) you have to have the time first...

Christine echoed Jennifer’s admiration for the collegial trust and tolerance that she perceived in their department.

I’d say we’re an unusual group of math teachers... I want to take risks and try something new and I have administration that allows me to do

that...Sometimes it's hard fitting in with the other teachers, but they're all really open to trying new things and I do a lot of traditional things.

Additionally, Leslie shared that the language arts teachers throughout the school had been working together for the past two years to complete the adoption of a new curriculum. The selection of the curriculum was assigned to the language arts teachers by the building leadership in a process that Leslie felt was conducted in a particularly respectful manner. The message, she said, was "You are professionals that know what works and doesn't work for kids." While the new program provided lots of resources and flexibility for her colleagues and herself, a degree of commonality was ultimately a relief: "I was inventing the wheel every single year and that was fine, but I have to say that having this curriculum is quite a bit of relief for me because I'm confident that the curriculum is rooted in standards..."

She and the other language arts teachers had weekly common meeting time to discuss alignment of teaching, learning, and assessing. Additionally, the language arts teachers had initiated an integrated humanities approach with the social studies department. All teachers, with the exception of the mathematics department, met once a month to learn about using reading and writing strategies across all subject areas. In those meetings, the language arts teachers were recognized for their expertise. Leslie said their leadership was appreciated by the science and social studies teachers, "It's very friendly. There's no one put on the spot."

All of these instances shared by the three teachers in the middle school in Big City suggested that this was an environment that possessed a high degree of social capital. The climate had been purposively developed with leadership guidance. None of the teachers indicated that they felt isolated from, or scrutinized by, colleagues.

Similarly to the Small Towns teachers, the three teachers from Big City expressed concerns about the ever-increasing public scrutiny. Their reasons were different, however. They believed accountability measures did not fairly consider some of the unique characteristics presented by their student population. As Christine articulated, “A standardized test is important. It tells us where we’re at. It helps us move forward, but it shouldn’t be what holds us back, or defines us.” She mentioned some of the challenges she faced when working with her students, things she could not control: “Much of my job is to help students feel safe and cared for (pause) which needs to be established before learning can happen...”

Furthermore, there was the feeling that the media fed into the negative stereotypes of “teacher” and overly focused on the perceived shortcomings of Big City and public schools, in general. Leslie stated that “the continual ‘this needs to be reformed, that needs to be reformed’ mentality leads a teacher to think, ‘I’ve never done it right.’ It’s a constant undercurrent...” Similarly, Jennifer said that “most of us are doing our best,” but wished it were recognized by policymakers and the public, “just a little more acknowledgement of we are working pretty darn hard and we’re all working with less than what we really need to get the job done the way they want it done.”

The three Big City teachers expressed high regard for their climate, the internal collaboration and support from peers and leadership that helped them face the challenges presented by their students. The apparent high degree of collegiality built a sort of "esprit de corps" mentality that can aid in countering some of the challenges and criticisms that arose.

Financial capital. Insufficient levels of financial capital appear to have a significant impact among all five teachers. The influential component is dependent upon which school district is considered, and varies as to which resource is most scarce.

Diane presented a global, big picture concern when she stated her concerns that there are not enough resources to fully meet the demands of all the policies because inadequate guidance had been provided from the top, from the state and federal educational administrators. That in turn limited the quality and quantity of resources available within her school district and school.

She sounded like the teacher leader that she was when she stated that "NCLB is interesting because I think the idea is superb and no child should be left behind... (but) I think it was a perfect example of something that was mandated without the resources and time and clarity necessary to make it a reality..."

Diane's concern that NCLB, arguably the foundation of all the other policy initiatives, was an unfunded mandate came from her perception that there was an absence of time and materials for teachers to actualize changes within their classrooms. While funding was available within her district, she was concerned that few of her colleagues fully and collectively understood the goals of the policy

initiatives. Neither was there an effective supervisory process for guiding their development, in her view.

...(W)e don't know what we don't know and people go after the professional development that they enjoy and find interesting and it might be the professional development they don't need...(S)ome teachers go after the stuff that just validates what they already do. They're not, for lack of a better word, forced to get the learning that they really need, so while they're spending all this time and energy into this stuff, it's not in the right place...

The district had money to spend on materials, but lacked staffing, particularly in leadership and personnel systems, to ensure that the funds were appropriated in an effective manner. She also suggested that time was a scarce commodity, but teachers were encouraged with limited oversight to use their professional development time on pursuits that they deemed to be necessary.

Molly, Diane's colleague, provided an example that illustrated Diane's concerns. Molly prided herself on handling all the initiatives that had come her way so far. Curriculum or teaching materials were not a concern for her or her colleagues she said. "(W)hen I think about planning and budgeting and ordering items ...(I) work in a place that when I do identify what that priority is, it is pretty commonly met, which is pretty fortunate." Molly worried, however, about the lack of time, another element of financial capital. When comparing the amount of work that still needed to be accomplished with the time required to complete it, she expressed that at

times it felt overwhelming to her. “How many of those things there are to do! And deadlines!... but I'm literally running out of time to accomplish these things. The time limit I think gets factored into it as well. I need more of me or more of a day ...” Her comments signaled a system that was well resourced as far as funding, but was finding itself short of time and supervision.

The teachers in the Big City middle school indicated different concerns about financial capital. When asked what resources she needed within her classroom to aid in meeting policy initiatives, Jennifer quickly listed pencils, paper, a notebook for each child, “without me having to go out to buy new stuff.” Teaching materials were of greatest concern for Leslie, too. Her awareness of how under-resourced her school was came through in her tongue-in-cheek remark, “We're excited for this year, because we have phones in our classrooms that dial out! For the first time!”

Limited resources had a significant impact on Leslie's classroom and students. Approaching the third year of the school-wide language arts curriculum, she was anxiously anticipating the expansion of the program, but was concerned about obtaining “the actual materials to implement the curriculum” for herself and her colleagues. Purchasing was conducted at the building level, she explained, after the district budget had been approved, but communication with building administration about what actually had been funded was usually vague. “(A)t the end of this year I put in a request for all these sets of historical fiction, and I don't know if it got funded or if they were able to purchase them,” she shared. Moreover, staff turnover at the district and building level had hampered Leslie's efforts to gain

information about the status of her request. “Our lead secretary retired and there is a chance that those books are actually in our building, but we’re not sure where...”

Reductions in staff in areas that service special education students (SE) and English language learners (ELL) were an even greater concern to Leslie, however. With a highly diverse student population between 150 and 175 per grade-level, each grade was staffed with one SE and one ELL teacher, one-half of what it used to be. Leslie was concerned that her students would not receive enough support in her classroom with the reduced staffing levels. “I think from those teachers’ point of view they are trying very hard to make that work. I thought it was working well before,” Leslie explained.

Limited organizational capacity in the form of staffing was also mentioned by Jennifer. The math interventionist, a position she believed had been successful in raising the achievement level of some struggling students, provided re-teaching and supplemental instruction. However, the position was cut two years ago.

...(i)n a budget thing. We had a teacher who was specifically working with kids who needed it. We were trying to bring them up. So they had the class every other day, sixth, seventh, eighth grade, and if they achieved grade level, we would move them out and bring somebody else in.

The additional support for those students now fell on the classroom teacher, ed techs, and an adaptive on-line math program that "teaches" and challenges students with the skills they need. She believed it was too soon to tell if those resources could make up for the loss of the math interventionist position. Having worked within her district for some time, Jennifer was concerned about the district’s ability

to adequately and consistently provide for appropriate levels of financial capital. “I don't trust that resources are ever committed for anything for the long term. (pause) Things come and go pretty rapidly, so I don't know what the long term is...” she said.

Both Jennifer and Christine shared that from their perspectives the district's purchase of the inappropriate mathematics textbook program was a result of prioritizing costs within the final decision making criteria. Ultimately, that proved to be a decision resulting in wasted money, staffing, time, and materials. More importantly, by undervaluing teacher voice and student needs in the decision making process, lack of potential student achievement also suffered.

The lack of leadership stability at the district and school level was another challenge, according to Leslie, that had slowed the process of building compliance readiness for the advancement of policy initiatives. Leslie illustrated her thoughts, using RtI as an example.

(O)ur district leadership... has been through three transitions of superintendents in the six years that I've been in (Big City)... so it hasn't been our priority. It's not that kids haven't been a priority or that RtI isn't a priority, but within two years of being a superintendent of a district, I imagine that they don't always get to everything. They're trying to learn their new role.

She suggested that instability in district leadership had also led to a degree of alienation, “a rift,” between central office directives and her colleagues.

Financial capital is an important ingredient in establishing organizational capacity. It impacts staffing levels, teaching materials, and available time, all of which depend upon funding. These are dependent upon funding, money. As the comments of the participants suggest, public schools receive funding and other resources from sources outside the control of teachers. Thus teachers are vulnerable to many factors that are beyond the control of the classroom.

Power to resist. The final aspect of compliance readiness is the power to resist. It recognizes that district and/or school leadership, as well as teachers, may be motivated to maintain a degree of individual discretion when attending to policies (Coburn, 2004; Diamond, 2007; Weick, 1976; Spillane, 2004). "Buffering" may occur in order to prevent scrutiny when uncertainty and variation exists (Meyer & Rowan, 1978; Weick, 1976; Spillane, Parise, & Sherer, 2011). Teachers, school administrators and district leadership have the ability to ignore or selectively attend to policies, especially those that are not consistent with their own personal beliefs or priorities. The power to resist is inversely related to the degree of social capital that is present within the culture of the organization. The greater trust present in a working environment, the lower the levels of resistance.

The idea that teachers have the ability to work in isolation, closing the door to parents, colleagues, administrators, and the public has been receding, in part because of demands for greater transparency and accountability. School administrators are no longer encouraged to "buffer" or actively seal off their schools from outside influences and changes. The policies of RtI, PBE, and TES are aimed at increasing accountability between the teaching and the learning.

The participants did not indicate a desire to work in isolation. However, the two Small Towns teachers suggested it did exist within their school cultures. Diane observed that the time was approaching when TES would require teachers to fully open their classroom practices to others. Diane wanted teachers to be involved in evaluating their own practices, but strongly felt that it was time for there to be more accountability with the goal of effective teaching.

There's no easy fixes. There's a lot of deception (pause) isolation.
 (pause) So as much as everyone is saying we shouldn't be isolated, there are still plenty of ways to. It's a way of dealing with all the pressures of the job (pause) "I can't," or a way of hiding the things they don't value, "I don't value common assessments so I don't engage" or "This is too much and I can't take it all in so I'm just going to shut my door and talk a good talk and not really do it."

Diane's insights indicated a working climate where trust was low, and fear or competition was high. She suggested, however, that each teacher had an obligation to make decisions and implement best practices in her classroom, "...just like we would expect kids to show that they learned and applied, teachers should have to, too." She was optimistic that an effective TES would break down barriers that had allowed teachers to extol the rights and virtues of academic freedom.

Molly, Diane's colleague, had similar concerns about a school culture where a degree of teacher isolation and autonomy were tolerated. She valued the weekly content time she shared with grade level colleagues, as indicated in her remarks, "I do think that time is well used." However, she would like discussions with other

teachers, especially between middle school colleagues. When asked if such conversations ever take place she answered definitively, “Never. (pause) I mean it. No it doesn’t.” Like Diane, Molly feared that some colleagues may intentionally avoid that work due to their lack of understanding or compliance with some of the mandates. She noted “...that’s a really hard conversation to have whenever everybody isn’t at that point that they have their common assessments figured out and they know what each of those levels looks like...” She wanted there to be more directives that would speed the sharing of teacher practices and examination of student work. Molly believed that the application of CCSS, PBE, and RtI were all aimed at the goal:

that kids have the same access to certain skills and learning so that it is somewhat in common. There needs to be common learning. The skills need to be similar. A common assessment and common standard ensures that kids all have a certain baseline that they have access to.

Molly wondered why avoidant behaviors among professional staff were allowed to occur in her school, since they slowed the progress of making teaching and learning more effective. Her remarks illustrated the importance of establishing a climate that prompted social capital to grow.

On the other hand, throughout their interviews the teachers at the Big City middle school emphasized the collaborative culture in which they practiced with colleagues. From their perspectives, there was minimal resistance to sharing individual teaching practices. Each Big City participant independently stated that

the collaborative culture within their school was supported with time, and that was valued by staff. Jennifer shared that a survey of the staff indicated the collaborative structure was a priority that should be maintained within their school, "...that's one of the things that everybody said. Time and common-planning content time are two of the biggest things that we feel like (pause) it was really beneficial and really helpful. It's huge." She personally valued the opportunities to collaborate with others around teaching and learning. "I meet with the other math teacher in the grade level every day. It's our schedule to meet every other day, but we meet everyday..." she shared. Noting that there had been many changes since she began teaching more than 20 years ago, she stated that there was less autonomy today, especially within her present school, but that fit her idea of the kind of teacher she wanted to be.

...you don't just shut your door and do what you want. I'm not the kind of teacher who does that anyway. I don't want to shut the door and do my job. I like to work with other people. I have to have that feedback and I have better ideas if I bounce stuff off someone else...

Working with her colleagues had helped her take on new challenges and priorities that she perceived were better for her students and herself. For example,

One of the things we are trying to do is get better doing the workshop model: mini-lessons, work time, pull it together. And while I still feel like we haven't had enough professional development, I'm getting better at not talking all the time. That's a huge change.

Interestingly, the focus on the workshop model could traced back to the adoption

of a new curriculum by the English /language arts department, an implementation that began two years ago. That indicated the teachers were open with their practice, even to colleagues across content areas. Their goal was to improve student learning, served by sharing strategies that work, regardless of grade level or subject areas.

In agreement with Jennifer, Christine related how the mathematics staff had worked together to share and develop ideas on a range of topics: supplemental teaching materials, use of remedial or support materials, adoption of new teaching techniques, analysis of student data, and adoption of a new math curriculum within their building. The challenges of the diverse student body united the staff. Christine explained the focus of discussions with colleagues: “We need to do something that will work for kids...We have all these different feeder schools from the elementary and they are doing different programs. Kids were all over the place, with a lot of language barriers...” United in a common purpose, the teachers were opening their doors. There was a sense, she shared, that meeting the educational challenges of their students required a collective, collaborative effort.

Leslie explicitly stated that progress toward the PBE initiative would only be developed with collegial input and collaboration. For example, she explained

...our staff has been polled and eighty, ninety percent of us agree with standards based, but then we have these little and big obstacles, where we don't feel like it's happening for real because (pause) teachers (need to) sit down...(to do) that work, to figure out how...

She continued that there were limits to a system where the classroom teachers were expected to collaborate, design, and implement.

It's not that teachers want to be crafting everything. It's OK if you hand teachers a system. But then there are other times that if teachers have input and are feeling like they've had time to test, like the curriculum, and are valued: "You are professionals that know what works and doesn't work for kids."

At times, such as the documentation process of RtI, prescriptive structures or 'systems' should be provided as a tools, she stated. At other times, teachers should be the architects of the structures.

Instead of teachers seeking to shut out policy initiatives or administrators trying to force visibility and conformity, Molly suggested that a balance might be achieved if policymakers understood the unique applications of teacher expertise, if it was remembered

that as a trained educator, some of these decisions should be left up to me in my room, that nothing is done with bad intention. I wish they knew and understood how unique each group you get each year is (pause) and that you are going to be faced as a teacher, with different challenges depending on what time somebody walks into your classroom. It is not ever going to be a simply one-size-fits-all approach.

In other words, she welcomed the broad structures and goals set forth by policy initiatives, but felt that teachers' voices may have a valuable perspective to add to the creation and implementation of policy initiatives.

Summary

Change does not often occur easily within an organization. An organization is dependent upon the ability and willingness of its individual staff members to change. When analyzing that capacity, compliance readiness is the focus. As all five of the interviewees' comments suggested, the development of structures, relationships, and resources needed to actualize optimal conditions for compliance readiness was lacking. The participants of the study desired more input concerning the implementation of the policy initiatives, but theoretically, they did not object to the goals.

An insufficient level of ideological readiness was perceived to be a more significant in Small Towns than Big City. The Small Towns teachers suggested that levels of trust and reciprocity may be inconsistent or low among colleagues. Big City teachers conveyed that cooperation and reciprocity between their colleagues is high, encouraging the development of solidarity as challenges are presented.

Differences between the two schools in the level of organizational capacity were noteworthy.

Human capital, the knowledge, habits, social and personality attributes that are evident in a work force. All the participants conveyed that levels of collegial knowledge and skills are high. Additionally, the remarks offered by the Big City teachers suggested that the collective habits and social characteristics of their school were also high. In Small Towns that was not the case, however. Collegial sharing was insufficient according to the two participants. They perceived that some of their

colleagues were able to close their doors and work in isolation. They suggested that there was a degree of administrative tolerance for this behavior.

Social capital is influenced by the manner in which colleagues relate to one another through formal, informal, and emergent interactions. A work culture that possesses high amounts of social capital is characterized by trust, reciprocity, and cooperation. The remarks of participants in Big City emphasized a work environment in which collegial collaboration is voluntary and frequent. In contrast, the remarks of the Small Towns teachers suggested that social capital was insufficient within their school. In the absence of clear, direct mandates some of their colleagues appeared to interpret their efforts as adequate. Those participants perceived evidence of avoidance and lack of compliance. They implied that their district and school leadership could aid in changing the culture by becoming more involved and consistent when communicating expectation concerning the implementation of the policy initiatives.

Financial capital is composed of money, staffing, time, and materials. It was an area of great variance between the two settings. Big City teachers indicated financial resources within their school and district were unpredictable or often inadequate. Basic curriculum materials were not always assured. Programmatic and staffing decisions were made in which budgets priorities, not student achievement, were the primary concern. The Big City teachers stated that the district was not able to always provide basic classroom and student supplies. On the other hand, both of the Small Towns teachers stated that they had adequate amounts of materials to support the teaching of curriculum. However, one of the Small Towns teachers suggested that there was insufficient oversight to ensure that resources were being

used effectively and efficiently, especially with respect to professional development. With a unique concern focused on their content area, two of the English/language arts teachers, one in each of the districts, stated that the standards, CCSS, were not sufficient tools by themselves to guide instruction. The teachers wanted materials or resources that would help them calibrate the quality of their students work relative to other schools and school districts. They stated that was a systematic need throughout the teaching of reading and writing in public schools if targeted levels of proficiency were to be equitable and adequate for all students in all classrooms. A lack of time was perceived to be the most insufficient resource, a theme sounded universally. All five expressed time provided to understand the policy initiatives and implement them was inadequate.

Within the comments of some of the participants, the instability of leadership – at school and district levels specifically - was mentioned. In a broad sense, leadership is an important factor within compliance readiness. It was mentioned within each of the components: the ideological readiness, organizational capacity, and power to resist. Participants expressed that they perceived effective, involved leadership was an important component that was needed within their schools and districts.

While schools have traditionally been viewed as being able to control their levels of compliance readiness, the dynamics between schools and communities have shifted. The words of the participants indicated that compliance readiness within both Big City and Small Towns was most impacted by deficiencies in organizational capacity. In particular, levels of financial capital appeared to be

vulnerable. Needed resources were not adequately developed or appropriately disseminated to teachers. Funding appeared to fluctuate, impacting levels of staffing. However, schools and teachers did not possess the power to ignore the environment outside the classroom.

Chapter 6

Cognitive Sense-Making: Findings

In the previous two chapters the words of the five teachers suggest that the introduction of multiple policies has created conditions that hinder implementation. As Chapter 4 suggests, they worked in a time that was subject to high levels of policy convergence. They were impacted by a number of challenging policy initiatives and rapidly paced timelines. Chapter 5 reveals that the five teachers were impacted in varying degrees by the three factors that compose compliance readiness. All were experiencing insufficient organizational capacity, but of different types and different degrees. Their ability to move forward on initiatives was compromised by lack of resources or capital, especially social capital and financial capital. The teachers of Small Towns suggested that a lack of trust complicated movement toward implementation and that colleagues appeared to be permitted a degree of "power to resist." Both school districts were struggling with instability within a variety of leadership positions.

Those conditions had created an environment in which it was difficult to maneuver toward solutions. Yet, if the implementation the three policy initiatives - Proficiency Based Education (PBE), Response to Intervention (RtI), and Teacher Evaluation System (TES) - were to succeed understanding at both the individual and systemic level if implementation was necessary.

This chapter focuses on the sense-making process, the third factor presented in *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework*, the participants encountered as they attempted to move forward on PBE, RtI, and TES. In order to gain an understanding

of the cognitive sense-making that is occurring within the experiences of the participants in Big City and Small Towns, their perspectives concerning the understanding and implementation of each individual policy initiative are shared.

It is their perceptions of these initiatives that will provide the narrative. Through the words of the classroom teachers, the researcher outlines their experiences with sense-making by focusing on the specific policy initiatives allowing the participants to express how the implementation efforts were progressing. It is through those descriptions that the teachers revealed their vulnerabilities, as well as their desires for systemic improvement in making sense of the initiatives. Finally, a summary of the comments is made.

Cognitive Sense-making

Organizational theories sometimes characterize institutional influence as diffusing like waves throughout an organization, exerting uniform pressures on all individuals. That is not commonly the case, however. The meanings of information are constructed, not transmitted. At its optimal, influence is a communicative practice that includes the needs for and uses of information. Initially this process begins with the individual.

The concept of information as an objective, transmitted thing independent of the individual human has been useful in designing and evaluating the mechanisms of communicative and informative systems, however... (h)uman perception and understanding of messages are not absolute; each of us must make sense of what we encounter (Spurgin, 2006).

Sense-making processes play a central role in how people in schools implement instructional policies (Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002). Penuel, Frank, Sun, et al. (2013) stated that individuals and collegial networks within schools mediate the flow of information and have an influence on teachers' instructional practices. Sense-making theorists suggested that how people notice or select information from their environment, interpret meaning, and then act on those interpretations will have impacts on the culture, social structures, and routines over time (Coburn, 2006). The processes may be influenced by various aspects of policy coherence and compliance readiness. Ultimately, all policy implementation depends upon teacher understanding and learning -- sense-making.

Sense-making occurs on two levels, the individual and the collective. The differences are significant. Emerging research suggests understanding the distinctions between individual and collective sense-making can aid in designing more appropriate and efficient implementation of policy initiatives (Coburn, 2004; Coburn, 2006; Coburn & Russell, 2008; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002; Penuel, et al., 2013; Kim, 2014a; Conklin, 2012).

Individual sense-making. Individual sense-making may be a deliberate or a passive process. Teachers note and select information from their environment - within the school, the district, and from the greater community outside of schools. They make decisions about information, choosing to ignore or integrate it. Generally, all individuals construct understanding by drawing on their preexisting beliefs and practices in a process that is shaped by patterns of interaction with colleagues. The teacher is the expert within her own world, the classroom.

However, gaps likely form between individuals if each is left alone in the sense-making process (Zhang, et al., 2008; Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002; Spillane, 2004; Louis, et al., 2005). Furthermore, in the face of complicated issues, individuals often become exhausted and dissatisfied, especially when they perceive there are inadequate resources to address the issue. Individuals hit their mental capacity. They drop back into isolation and simplistic, siloed thinking.

Collective sense-making. The collective sense-making process can help individuals endure into areas of greater complexity than they could handle by themselves (Kim, 2014; Conklin, 2012). While researchers state that more study needed to be conducted, collective sense-making appears to be a means by which some of the inaccuracies or biases of individual sense-making can be mitigated (Coburn, 2004; Coburn, 2006; Coburn & Russell, 2008; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). There is a growing recognition that no one person has the sense-making capacity needed to deal with truly complex issues.

Research was providing evidence that collective sense-making was a preferred mode of undertaking new initiatives. However, that required the commitment of large amounts of organizational capacity (Coburn, 2004; Dixon, 2014; Coburn & Russell, 2008; Spillane, Parise & Sherer, 2010). Collective sense-making is a conversational event where people intentionally come together for the purpose of using their varied perspectives and cognitive abilities to make sense of an issue or problem they are mutually facing (Dixon, 2014). Working together, the collective moves toward common understanding and building consensus. According to Kim (2014a),

science supports the notion that individuals are limited in our ability to change... However, groups are capable of transcending the limitations of its individual members, provided that they are structured optimally and that they interact effectively.

Applications

Teacher evaluation system (TES). All the participants suggested that TES had received the greatest focus of professional development time and collegial discussion during the past year or two. For example, in Big City at least once per month, school- wide professional development sessions had focused on TES and were facilitated by central office directives. The teachers believed that within the coming year the new system would be piloted, nevertheless none of the teachers had full understanding of the details. Jennifer shared,

There is a district committee. Teachers are on the committee. There are teachers who have been trained as observers but I don't know what the process is going to be in terms of like having them come in or how many times (pause) might be that it was presented and I was kind of like in LaLaLand or something, but it's not something that I own yet.

Christine added detail that clarified Jennifer's confusion, noting that specifics had not yet been revealed. "So we are mostly reading and watching videos of classrooms and talking about what it means to 'meet'...So we haven't started talking about the 'how' yet. It's all about the 'what.'"

While none of the Big City participants could provide the details of the

actual process of TES that will be implemented, the highly regarded teachers were excited about the prospect of receiving feedback about their practice. Leslie expressed that sentiment: “I want feedback from people to know whether or not I’m doing well.” In other words she perceives that TES would become a developmental process intended for teachers to improve their skills and craft, not an evaluative or punitive one that is traditionally associated with an evaluation system. Jennifer agreed, but worried about the time that would be required to document the processes.

We have to prove that we are doing what we say we do, but (pause)you can’t spend all of your time proving that you are doing what you say you are doing because then you can’t do what you’re supposed to do.

Overall, the teachers saw TES as an opportunity to increase collaborative dialogue or collective sense-making. Jennifer stated,

I like the peer observation piece of it...because I do think getting feedback from a colleague and being able to observe a colleague and picking up things from them (is good). A system that’s more collaborative like that could be very intriguing to me and appealing, and not just an evaluation system that’s top-down...

She was skeptical, however, when she suggested that her understanding may not be district-wide, but limited to her school:

...I’m not sure how it’s been communicated to the district, goals. I think, at least from our administration, are to make us better at teaching

and the students better at learning and to look at what's measurable about that and what's specific. I don't think any one's out to destroy a teacher. Part of the thinking is "Everybody could use help. Everybody can get better" and that's what I'm choosing to believe.

A number of details had not been communicated to the teachers. They valued the concept of TES, but were less than certain about many of the procedural details. Their shared description of the TES as an opportunity for professional growth and improvement was aligned with the contemporary goals of the initiative. That suggests a collective sense-making process was conducted, the teachers had developed a relatively uniform understanding with respect to the purposes of TES. However, understanding was still incomplete suggesting development of understanding was still in process, for the teachers were also suspicious about unstated intentions. That may also be indicative of the need for greater dedication of resources for sense-making when attempting to change established perceptions that are complex or that have been firmly established within an institution. That is especially understandable when individuals have conducted their own, individual sense-making process. It can also be a result when a collective sense-making process has not been fully undertaken or successful. More resources and development must be dedicated in order for consensus understanding about TES to be expanded in Big City.

On the surface, the environment at the middle school in Small Towns was not so different. The school district had just completed its first year of a district-wide pilot implementation of TES. Two years ago all teachers were involved with

professional development sessions, and some teachers volunteered to be trained as peer observers. During the past year a combination of administrative and peer observations were conducted so that every teacher experienced a classroom observation and feedback. Initially, there had been several opportunities for collective sense-making, but more time apparently was needed. The learning and sense-making had not been collective in its focus. Molly and Diane suggested that many peers welcomed the implementation of a more consistent system than had been in place previously, but some apprehension remained among colleagues. When she heard the term “accountability,” for example, Diane suggested that

People need to demonstrate that they are performing. It sets up some fear and competition. (pause) The more teachers are involved in their own measurement the better...

Molly shared that there was apprehension among her colleagues, something she implied, but did not share. “I think a lot of people have not been used to being evaluated-- having someone else judge you is not easy. I don’t want somebody to tell me I am bad. That would horrify me. I get it.”

The colleagues offered insights that suggested more collective sense-making opportunities are needed throughout the implementation process, not just during its roll out or introduction. It may also suggest the existence of a school environment in which collectively sharing ideas, opening the classroom door, or admitting vulnerabilities was not the norm. With respect to the sense-making process, it is noteworthy that each appears to have an individualized perspective of TES. Molly discussed TES in terms of “being evaluated.” Diane’s understanding

centered on demonstration of performance. Both teachers indicated that a pervasive sense of apprehension- fear, competition, judgment - associated with TES existed for some of the staff. That signals a need for more opportunities for a collective sense-making process to focus on the constructive purposes and professional development goals associated with the initiative.

Response to intervention (RtI). The system of RtI was perceived by all five of the teachers as a logical extension of differentiated classroom instruction. However, the teachers' comments suggested that at present, individual sense-making had not aided in moving the initiative much beyond an understanding of individual teacher responsibilities of documentation of differentiated teacher practices. A systematic or complete understanding of the teaching and learning goals of RtI had not been developed. Only one teacher could fully articulate goals and structures of a fully developed system of RtI. It appeared that limited organizational capacity had been dedicated to the implementation as well. For example, few additional resources were available in Small Towns to implement RtI strategies beyond the classroom. Moreover, Big City had experienced a reduction in resources - cuts in ELL staff and math interventionist positions - that could support RtI. In both schools, there were very few resources available to service students who could benefit from RtI. Outside of differentiated instruction in the regular classroom and the supports or accommodations provided by 504 or special education plans, there existed a void of intervention opportunities.

The Big City teachers independently shared their understanding of the RtI initiative, revealing variation in knowledge. RtI was named as a top policy priority

for all three of the teachers. Each understood the potential and obligation to provide more extensive individualized programming for some students. The contrasting views of the three teachers revealed the importance of systematically focusing on the development of collective sense-making.

Jennifer explained, “If we were really good at differentiating, response to intervention, it would all be great , in our classrooms.” As math colleagues, Jennifer and Christine saw the promise of differentiated instruction for their students, something that was always a challenge, but only understood its potential within their own classrooms. Christine admitted that she was still in the process of trying to develop a consistent system of documentation.

I think about my classroom data, any kind of data that I have about my students and deciding based on that data that’s where I make all my decisions based on what I see and what I collect from data. I would say most of my decisions are made on what I’ve collected about students... Her strategies were based upon “you know intuition and just (pause) I can’t even describe it.” As a self-described “people person,”

I feel it and I know it and I can sit down with a parent and tell them all kinds of things that I never wrote down and, yes, I second guess myself. No, I don’t have a very good system ...

Neither mathematics teacher expressed any awareness of the three-tiered pyramid structure of supports and interventions that a fully functioning RtI model includes. In fact, according to Jennifer, the provision of additional resources for teachers was minimal. She shared that each team was provided with a ‘red book,’

but minimal additional information, in a single professional development session conducted by their administrator. Of the "red book," she shared how her team did not see a use for it:

... we whip it out about twice a year. If you have a kid with a specific thing (pause) "Here's a list of interventions you could employ." It's a book and that's as far as we've gotten. That's about the training we've had. Like one staff development meeting. (pause) We do have a form because we need to go through the RtI process to get a kid tested for special ed. You have to fill out the form and dance the dance. I mean I think they think we're probably done with RtI. "You're done. You're good."

Christine provided a little more information as she explained her team's approach.

I'm thinking of the paperwork part of RtI where you collect data about a kid for so long. We have to do that. It's just not as explicit as I think it could be. We are able to list the modification, accommodations (that) we're using, but I don't know. I just think we could be doing a better job, but it's hard. Our population, everybody could be getting intervention almost.

Later she mused,

My goal, right now (pause) would be to at least train all of us about what it is and how we can make it work better as a school. I have not had training, no workshops, no anything, and I've asked for it. A lot. It was better when we had a math intervention class before, but now we don't. Teachers are expected to meet the needs of those students. And

that's difficult. I look at kids as individuals and try to meet their needs where they're at. It would be better if it was more systematic...

Professional learning about this highly valued initiative had been scant and fractured, focusing on individual sense-making. Leslie, however, provided a counterexample to the model because she had participated in extensive sense-making opportunities in a collaborative environment prior to coming to Big City.

Unknown to her other two colleagues, it was she who brought the "red book" to her building administrator's attention. Having completed her teacher preparation and first few years of teaching in Ohio, she had been provided with resources and training that helped her colleagues in her school district understand and implement a systemic approach to RtI. As a result, she was able to articulate what a fully functioning RtI program should look like. Given the minimal presentation of RtI, she perceived that in her present school,

...the implementation isn't happening. And as far as the documenting and systematic thing, it's not happening. It ends up (pause) more of a conversation. That it's documenting, but some of the interventions aren't clearly documented...

Leslie's deep understanding of the possibilities of RtI was revealed as she linked it to PBE, an initiative that was even more out of focus for her colleagues.

I want kids who are struggling to get support and (pause) I don't think we're doing it right. Proficiency-based is a really good start and maybe proficiency based grading would better identify

students, when we're doing it right, who aren't meeting and then those interventions would come into play.

While Leslie had the knowledge, she was discouraged that her colleagues had not been provided with opportunities similar to her own: systemic, extensive, resource-rich collegial learning for collective sense-making. She wished that the staff was not muddling around with the development of a functioning RtI system. She wanted someone to lead the implementation of the initiative.

In Small Towns, Molly and Diane appeared to have more awareness of the RtI initiative. Diane expressed some of the same disappointments, however. RtI, she believed, was “necessary,” though she admitted she found differentiation to be “challenging.” The development of her understanding on the initiative primarily been had individually motivated. In general, she confessed that her approach to professional development was an exception, when compared with her peers. “I find the work that I do to be meaningful and interesting and so...what I do for recreation sometimes in addition to the work I have to do” is read professional books. Her dedication to her students was evident.

I think it's a job that never ends. You don't go home at three o'clock and it's done. I'm learning everyday with them, and I try to be very flexible in what I do so that I'm responsive to what they need...

Diane suggested that she had come to depend upon creating her own professional development because of a lack of confidence and a feeling of inadequacy that was rooted in her early career. In her first few years at the middle school of Small Towns, she felt a sense of fear and pressure, an impression

reinforced by her mentor and other veteran teachers with whom she worked. She felt she needed to become responsible for her own learning out of a sense of self-preservation. She was still impatient to gain the knowledge she needed to meet the needs of her students. "I value learning about effective instruction because I know that that leads to the best results." She was not afraid of the changes the policy initiatives required, for she felt as though, "I've been keeping up all this time and not just waiting for it to come about."

One of her greatest learnings had been in gaining understanding and respect for the process of RtI. She pushed herself to meet the needs of her students, and admitted that she had personalized her obligation more since her own child had entered public school.

I'm much more aware that there is no one-size-fits-all in a classroom any more. Differentiation is really what we should have been delivering all along! And we just didn't know it. Maybe we didn't want to believe it. But I really think that is where our heart and mind needs to be. If we're talking about my kid? I absolutely want her to get what she is needing and I think every parent feels that way. So I'm doing more of that kind of thinking and planning now. And want to be. And those are the resources that I want to get my hands on.

From her reading she had come to the belief that

I think we could do a better job of training teachers to have more of a growth mindset and to learn how to teach in a

way that does tailor a kid's day or learning toward what they need and not just the whole group...

She saw connections between the policy initiatives.

The mandates are, you know (pause) the legislation helps to fulfill the need to make kids all college and career ready.

You know RtI is another avenue, is one avenue to meet those standards...The trick is making those (pause), connecting the dots for teachers who actually do the work.

Diane valued professional discussions with her colleagues, but their collaborations did not often get to the depth she needed. She questioned if the resources directed toward professional development were adequate and appropriately focused. Diane recognized that her dedication to personal learning was unusual and would like her colleagues to be provided with “more of it, but also more accountability for it too, but more time to do it in their day.”

Molly agreed with Diane’s sentiments. While there had been some learning available for the middle school teachers, “RtI caused a lot of panic. I don’t think it’s that bad. Differentiation? Hard. Important. I need more time to sit down with other people to come up with the ideas to do this.” She took much responsibility for her own professional development. When comparing herself to friends in other professions, she stated that she put in “tremendous amounts more time” pursuing graduate classes, conferences and personal learning. When she encountered a new aspect of a mandate or initiative, she admitted that her initial response was to “Google things, which is a very 2014 answer.” She preferred

learning with her colleagues, but in small groups that were purposefully focused.

When those opportunities were available, she welcomed them.

I almost see it more in the last few years as work with my
colleagues and whether that be learning, working, developing,
but it's all time we all use up so quickly...

Given the pace of work to be done, there never seemed to be enough time to learn and fully make sense of it all.

These Small Towns teachers suggest that with time and other resources at a premium, apparently choices had been made. RtI had not been a top priority for school or district-sponsored professional development opportunities. The participants relied on individual sense-making to learn about the policy initiative of RtI.

Proficiency based education (PBE). There was an apparent wide difference between the understandings of the five teachers concerning PBE, suggesting that much learning about the initiative was occurring within the process of individual sense-making. Jennifer was at one end of the spectrum. When asked about her understanding of PBE she replied: "Don't know much, so I don't even know what to say. (pause) I think they're talking about this at the high schools?" She stated that she had not had any professional development specific to the topic. On the other hand, Leslie and the Small Towns teachers discussed RtI in relation to PBE, expressing an understanding of synergy between the two initiatives. The differences in understanding suggest a reliance on individual sense-making and a need for more collective sense-making opportunities.

When asked if students could feel success even if they are not meeting standards in her classroom, Jennifer replied:

I'm going to try to find a way to let you know that you improved.

I try to make an environment that we all make mistakes. That's how you learn and your goal is not to be the best person in here but to get better from wherever you are.

In her classroom, the process of teaching and learning was successful as long as the student made steps forward.

Jennifer participated as a mathematics leader in what she said was supposed to be a series of meetings concerning CCSS across the district's middle schools. It was her impression that ultimately the schools were going to develop common language, understandings, and assessments: initial steps in a standards-based system, a precursor for PBE. As directed by district leadership, she led her mathematics colleagues in her school toward consolidating the individual mathematics standards into a set of "power standards." Returning to the next district-wide meeting, she found other mathematics leaders had not completed the task. The initiative lost energy and died.

Christine recalled that there has been some professional learning around CCSS, facilitated by two of her math colleagues who had been attending district leadership meetings, bringing back what they had learned,

which is often like videos of people implementing common core standards and how you teach the new math differently than in the past. So it was a bit of sharing about what we're doing right now

and then a lot of understanding of what the Common Core is asking us to do, a lot of understanding the big picture of what the Common Core is asking us to do.

The meetings ended rather abruptly, however. Christine shared that the collegial leadership returned from the district meetings and shared the following:

"I don't know what other people are doing. I think we're the only ones actually having this meeting we were mandated to have." That happens a lot. (pause) I don't know if they followed through and made something.

With many other challenges in their department, she shared that she and her colleagues moved on to other priorities and had yet to be asked to revisit the discussion that appeared to have been intended for district-wide learning about CCSS and PBE.

Diane suggested that she and her middle school colleagues had a responsibility or obligation to learn about PBE, "understanding it, working with others to provide a common understanding because I don't teach alone. I'm part of a bigger, bigger thing." She felt that teachers had not been provided with the resources and materials to adequately prepare their students. According to Diane, there was not enough

external stuff to compare what you do with. It would be helpful if Common Core or Smarter Balanced provided something to measure it against. Without it, I don't really know if what I'm doing in (our state) is what they're doing in Missouri...

Developing a common understanding of the standards that must be met was necessary for the teacher and the student, especially when the degree quality was interpretive and subjective. Transitions between grade levels were difficult. Immersion in the CCSS and PBE had been trying and abrupt. “I can’t teach at grade seven standards when kids don’t have what they needed K through six...” she stated. “I mean it can’t work. It’s not a perfect situation.” Ultimately, all teachers have to develop an understanding of CCSS and PBE if students are going to be successful.

Leslie was also able to express her understanding of PBE and the connection to standards. She explained that she and her former colleagues in Ohio were provided with extensive professional development experiences concerning CCSS and PBE, and exemplars of best practices from which to model their own classroom lessons.

Teachers were given the standards, teachers created best-practice lessons. The district published these teacher-created, best-practice, standard-based lessons, as a curriculum guide and we used it as our lessons, as the base-line of the curriculum.

When queried about whether she was required to use those resources within her classroom, she replied,

Required? No. But I was given an amazing set of resources that I used all the time and when I met with the other fifth grade teachers, we pulled that out and we used it, or we tweaked it. It was a baseline. It was noteworthy that Molly and Leslie, language arts/social studies

teachers from two different school districts, and with varying years of experience, spoke most confidently about RtI and PBE. The two had significantly different background experiences from any of their colleagues. Both were beginning teachers in other states, Massachusetts and Ohio, respectively, within the past decade and both had participated in, what they described as extensive, professional development opportunities with colleagues concerning CCSS, RtI and PBE.

Moreover, Molly spoke about her personal experiences, her vantage point as a student herself, as well as her professional understanding as a teacher, when she shared

I think that what came before is a relative free-for-all. I think I probably experienced that as a student, where not a lot of things were in common and if I had a friend in another class they could be doing something completely unrelated.

Through her teacher preparation and initial years of teaching she had opportunities to learn with her colleagues, however. She explained the policies' intents: "I think the goal is that kids have the same access to certain skills and learning so that it is somewhat in common." She also shared that in her first teaching position in Massachusetts there was a school-wide curriculum for the social studies she taught and literacy was embedded within it. Additionally, an outside literacy consultant was contracted to work with the staff. "I think I came into education right on the cusp of a lot of those changes, and have probably been thrown into the changes from the beginning..."

Molly's and Leslie's experiences suggested that some of the factors that were impacting their current colleagues may be unique to the state in which they now practice. For both of them, there was a growing recognition that no one person has the capacity needed to deal with those truly complex issues. The phenomenon was not singular to one school district, for both teachers saw themselves as holding a unique perspective among their peers.

Those examples illustrated that individual understanding was not sufficient for implementing the complex initiative of PBE. Molly and Leslie expressed a degree of frustration that their colleagues were struggling with concepts and initiatives that they themselves found comprehensible. They were willingly share. There was evidence that collective sense-making could have a lasting impact on individuals who participated in a concerted, focused, system-wide implementation. Their remarks suggest that immersion in a system of collective sense-making about PBE had felt efficient and satisfying to them within their collegial culture.

TES + RtI + PBE: The responsibility for raising the achievement level of students, Diane believed, was complex: "I don't teach alone. I'm part of a bigger, bigger thing." In effect she was saying that RtI and PBE needed to be understood as a collective responsibility, and required a system of collective sense-making if student achievement was to be systemic and lasting. Speaking of the struggling students who she teaches, Diane elaborated that

the reality is that those kids had at least one, if not many teachers who were not effective or who, for some reason, and

there are many and some not even in their control, overlooked
 (pause)or did not serve these kids. (pause) I don't think we are
 fully responsible...Their district, and their principal, and their
 state had an obligation to help them in some way
 or form...we need to work together and share the accountability.

From those remarks it was possible to understand how the three initiatives of TES, RtI, and PBE were connected and important to Diane. Her understanding came from personal experiences.

I have people in my family that went to public schools, that graduated, and then went on to college in other parts of the country and they were not ready for college. They did not graduate from high school with what they needed to succeed. And they ended up dropping out of college and returning to their podunk town, looking for a job. (pause)
 I don't think that should happen to any kid.

Additionally, Diane, Molly, and Leslie stated that the resources needed to make the CCSS and PBE initiatives effective had yet to be developed by policy makers, an integral part of collective sense-making. In Diane's opinion

I think it's unfortunate that the resources and supporting materials didn't come (pause) things like rubrics, and anchors, and PD, and they didn't provide time and professional development. I just worry that (pause) we're not teaching it well without the resources and the time...

She was not sure that her expectations around levels of proficiency were universally

applicable from town to town or state to state. “There’s not enough external stuff to compare with,” she explained.

Leslie, the language arts teacher in Big City, concurred that the state and federal policymakers needed to provide more guidance. “There should be standards across the board that are set up by informed people, informed and educated people who say, ‘Yes, eighth graders should be able to do certain things’...”

As language arts teachers, Leslie and Diane’s remarks revealed the challenge of trying to develop a curriculum without clear calibration concerning the quality of student skills. Without those tools as starting points, individual and collective sense-making may not be successful in reaching the desired outcomes of PBE.

Jennifer and Christine were reluctant to talk about PBE because they did not have a sense of a district-wide, unified mathematics experience. Christine was only comfortable talking about her own school. “I haven’t gone to any of the district meetings, but I do hear from some of the people coming back saying, ‘I don’t know what other people are doing.’ That’s happening a lot...” She had the impression that other middle schools in their district were uniquely interpreting, or not complying with, central office directives, and therefore district-level meetings between teachers were not productive.

My impression: we’re mandated to be doing Common Core and that we all need to be doing it in some way. It’s like a committee at the district level. So what I think, they’re trying to move

towards what is important; how are we going to assess kids; can we do this as a district? I don't know if they followed through...

Leslie suggested this was not unique to the mathematics department. Having piloted a new language arts curriculum for the past two years, she was uncertain what the other middle schools were doing, even though the district-supported summer institutes were sponsored through the office of the district's curriculum director. "We don't have an opportunity to meet..." She believed models vary in each middle school because

I think the level of buy-in was different at different schools.

I don't know if it was because different buildings have different time for teachers to meet...

She had not had the opportunity to communicate with the high school teachers who received her students. She felt that discussions with those teachers could provide valuable information about the skills and understanding that her students were able to demonstrate after leaving her classroom. Gaining perspective through collective sense-making conversations like that would provide insights that helped Leslie calibrate her expectations for the teaching and learning that occurred in her classroom. The reality was that she did not confidently know how well prepared her students were for their next academic challenges.

Unfortunately, a similar lack of communications was apparent between the six/seven looping teachers at the middle school and the five elementary schools that sent their students to them. Jennifer and Christine shared that receiving students from different fifth-grade classrooms across the district represented

challenges, in great part because there were significantly different curricular programs represented. Jennifer expressed hope that development of consistent focus on CCSS would produce greater consistency across the district over time. There was a degree of skepticism that the question was of high priority for district leadership at that time, however. She stated, "I'd like being able to say it doesn't matter who you have in sixth grade next year. We're doing the same thing. We have very similar experiences, but I can't. It's not my decision..."

All the teachers expressed that they would like there to be a more productive, systematic process of learning about and implementing the initiatives of TES, RtI, and PBE. They would like a better understanding of how they fit within the educational process across the district, within the K-12 continuum. They expressed a desire to build collaborative relations with others. They do not glean full understanding from single or limited learning opportunities. They strive to supplement their understanding by looking for information independently which does not provide a unified or consistent body of knowledge. The teachers wanted greater clarity of goals and purposes.

Summary

The teachers' remarks highlighted a scarcity of common or shared information and professional development concerning the policy initiatives and the process of implementation. The responses of the participants indicated that insufficient resources had been directed for "teaching the teachers." At a minimum more time was needed to learn about the policies. The teachers revealed their efforts to educate themselves. When individual sense-making was the method of

developing understanding and implementing new initiatives, however, inaccuracies or biases developed. There existed a lack of opportunity for collaborative, sustained learning: opportunities for collective sense-making.

Molly's and Leslie's unique personal experiences within other school systems in different states suggested that undertaking learning as a collective, directed by decisions that had been developed by leadership, can be an efficient process when encountering complex initiatives. As Molly shared, she was reared within the system of state standards, RtI and PBE, completely immersed as a student, and later as a beginning teacher. Leslie participated in a systematic implementation of RtI and PBE in her early experiences as a teacher. They both expressed a preference for a process of collective, collaborative experiences when comparing their prior experiences with their current professional learning experiences. They both suggested that their previous experiences were more efficient, well-resourced, and succeeded in creating an environment of aligned understanding among colleagues.

As evidenced in the participants' anecdotes, individualized sense-making was not equivalent to a collective process. That was most apparent in the example of Big City's implementation of RtI. The "red book" that meant so much to Leslie because of her previous collective sense-making experiences had little value to Christine and Jennifer. Leslie's colleagues did not have the contextual understanding that can be developed through collective sense-making. A purposeful process of information sharing and discussion had aided Leslie's retention and depth of understanding.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the factors that influence highly regarded teachers' understanding and implementation of policy reforms within their classrooms. There has been a lack of study concerning how policy connects to actual classroom work. While quantitative studies, especially surveys, have provided teacher responses concerning understanding and implementation of current educational policy initiatives, this qualitative study draws attention to details shared by highly regarded, mid-career, middle school classroom teachers of English/language arts and mathematics.

Without specifically hearing from teachers, no one can be certain that the inputs of the contemporary educational reform movement are having the desired impacts on the classroom teacher (Black & Wiliam, 2001) and subsequent student learning. The study was designed to hear from a sample of classroom teachers about the limits of capacity, varied information, multiple lines of communications, complexities of goals, and other challenges that confront them during the implementation of educational policy initiatives. The study sought insights of the participants with the goal of learning what is occurring from the perspective of these teachers as RtI, PBE, and TES unfold in their classrooms.

Positive examples were sought, for they illustrated the possibility that may be obscured by a typical case, especially during the early stages of the adoption or implementation process. Desimone (2009) suggested that the most motivated

teachers are open to change, to try something new, and to seek out professional learning opportunities that will improve their practices. They are actively engaged within their school and school districts. According to Firestone (1982), positive examples raise hopes that the exceptional or novel is possible. It is from such individuals that much may be learned about the benefits and pitfalls concerning the implementation of new policy initiatives.

This chapter summarizes the study conclusions and discusses their implications, both generally and specifically, for policymakers and educational leadership. First, a review of the framework that guides the analysis of the research question is conducted. Following that, findings are summarized and discussed. Next, implications for policymakers and educational leaders are presented. Then suggestions for further research are addressed. Finally, the chapter provides brief concluding remarks.

Influences on Policy Implementation Framework: Analysis

Prior to constructing the research framework, *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework*, judgments were made about which possible factors may influence the flow of policy initiatives from inception to actual implementation within the classroom. After reviewing the literature, the researcher chose to include one factor that aligns predominantly at each of three major levels that impacts the journey of policy initiatives from the beginning of the process to its final destination: policymakers, educational bureaucrats and leaders, and teachers, as outlined in *The Policy Path*. Each factor is an ingredient in the process that connects policy as it flows from the state capitol to the classroom. Policy

coherence, compliance readiness, and cognitive sense-making are the factors selected. The selection criteria are discussed below.

The transmission of societal goals into the classroom involves a complex journey, along three major stages of *The Policy Path*: (1) legislative bodies that create laws and directives; (2) administrative levels that put the initiatives into workable policy steps; and (3) the classroom where teachers execute the directives within the teaching and learning process. First, policymakers at federal and state levels are involved in the creation of legislation and directives that attempt to translate society's goals for public education. Educational policies and mandates then pass to middle-level state and local educational administrators - from state bureaucracies, to local school boards, to school district and building administration, where many policy details are further refined for implementation in the classroom. Finally, teachers "translate" and implement mandates within the teaching and learning process. At that point, the predominant influence on the process of policy implementation is cognitive sense-making.

All three factors may have influence at any level of agents or target groups. Selection of factors is based upon an understanding of cause-effect, derived from generalizations about where each factor is dominant, and how it influences subsequent stages of policy implementation. For example, policymakers may be impacted by differing degrees of compliance readiness collectively or individually during the process in which educational policies, directives and laws are created. Likewise, cognitive sense-making occurs within each individual involved in the policy implementation process, from the top to the bottom of the

hierarchy. Of course, policy coherence has an influence at the classroom level, but it is the result of actions begun or caused elsewhere in the policymaking process. Cognitive sense-making is associated with the classroom level, for it is there that the understanding of the goals of each policy initiative is ultimately put into action. The selection of factors is based on the dominant influence at each level. As water flows downstream, so policy moves through the hierarchy of educational policy and governance, picking up the flotsam and jetsam of individual and collective insights and interpretations until descending upon a teacher and her classroom.

In general, the selection of the three categories of factors proved to be accurate and logical throughout the analysis. First, the creation of policy coherence is significantly determined within the federal and state capitals where policy is created. Initial problem framing occurs, defining the scope and parameters of the problems to be solved. Decisions about implementation timelines and resource allocations occur at that level as well. That early stage in the policymaking process is a significant determinant of policy convergence: the number of initiatives, the pace of introduction and implementation, as well as the degree and complexity of desired change. All those originate at the federal and state levels of policymaking, setting the conditions for implementation to occur. Compliance readiness finds its roots in the middle levels of the journey as educational administrators and bureaucrats have input to the policy implementation process. This stage provides the intellectual and material resources needed to actualize policy initiatives. Adequate resourcing may enable a more smooth process of implementation.

Inadequate or unanticipated resource allocation may stall, misdirect, or disable implementation efforts. Cognitive sense-making is the most important factor to be established at the school and classroom teacher level. As discussed, left at individual sense-making, policies are vulnerable to a variety of interpretations, biases, or misunderstandings. Collective sense-making provides the potential for individuals to co-construct understanding, make decisions, and negotiate details of implementation.

Overall, the *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework* provided appropriate guidance for the study analysis. While each participant's understanding of the policymaking process was subjective and depended upon the knowledge and opinions of the individual, in general, selection of highly regarded, mid-career teachers mitigated some potential for misunderstandings and partiality concerning the necessity for change. The remarks of the participants circled back and connected to the reasons that they became teachers: the children, their students.

One shortcoming of the structure *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework* occurred in the area of individual/teacher sense-making, however. The detail required to ascertain the presence of the subcategories of individual/teacher sense-making -- specifically the concepts of conserving, complexity, misalignment, and practicality theory -- proved to be too fine-grained to be inferred through interviews. While field or observational research was beyond the scope of this study, the addition of a series of direct observations of

the classroom teachers, and follow-up interviews, would likely provide some of the detail needed to glean that level of analysis.

Additionally, two areas within the data not specifically included in the initial framework later emerged as themes: the importance of leadership and communications. Within the remarks of all the teachers from Big City and Small Towns, the role of leadership was a significant category of data that was only indirectly included in the *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework*. Technically, leadership may be included within the factors that compose compliance readiness, for by definition it has direct and indirect impacts on the ideological readiness, organizational capacity and power to resist that is present within an organization. Systems of communication are directly influenced by leadership. Nevertheless, the importance of the leadership function was so strongly conveyed within the comments of the teachers that the researcher made the decision to code it as a separate component factor which influenced the understanding and implementation of the policy initiatives.

A definition of leadership emerged. Common to all participants was the understanding that leadership personnel —state and local bureaucrats, district administration, and school administrators — often found themselves in the middle of policy initiatives, both being target agents required to conform to directives, and policymakers, required to initiate implementation plans. Leadership may also have direct and indirect influence upon the workforce, the teacher in the classroom. Throughout the data analysis, themes concerning leadership emerged:

1. There was a perception that leadership was often a remote entity that did not fully understand the reality and challenges within the classroom.
2. There was a desire to establish mutually respectful relationships with leadership at all levels of the policymaking process and teachers.
3. There was a need for leadership to be more definitive and decisive, providing greater clarity concerning goals or priorities, implementation timetables, available and future resources, methods of evaluation, and potential consequences.
4. There was a wish for leadership to encourage input from the workforce during implementation efforts, so that the process and resources could be revised as needed.

According to Myatt (2013), “Few things positively impact an organization like a stable tone from the top.” The importance of stable, trustworthy leadership was conveyed throughout the teachers' remarks. Myatt offers a possible rationale for that emphasis.

The beautiful things about stable leaders is they provide a stabilizing influence on others. They are leaders you can trust – they are leaders you can build around. Stable leaders model a level of consistency that individuals, teams, and organizations so desperately need, but often find missing.

Chopra (2015) concurs.

Everyone has needs. The most basic need, the one upon which everything else is built, is safety....A leader who does all he can to keep his followers

feeling safe will go a long way in their eyes...where management and workers accept joint responsibility for the success of the company.

The comments of both Myatt and Chopra suggest that a lack of stability may create a lack of trust within a workforce, harming the culture, stifling productivity, and making it very difficult to move forward during times of challenge and change. That potential was clearly conveyed within the comments of the participants.

Given the concerns expressed about leadership, it is not surprising that the importance of communication also emerged as a theme, for Myatt (2012) stated that "It is simply impossible to become a great leader without being a great communicator." Specifically, communication with state policymakers and district leadership was mentioned by all the participants, while Small Towns teachers also suggested that their building communication was problematic at times.

Leadership and communication go hand in hand. Most leaders spend the majority of their time in interpersonal exchanges. As a result, a large number of organizational problems occur because of poor communications. Successful communication must take place at all levels: interpersonal, intra-group, inter-group, organizational, or external (Myatt, 2012). This underscores the need for leaders to be good communicators. Communication is only successful if the message has been correctly interpreted. Leadership personnel must check for accurate understanding. Within the expectations of their job, persons in leadership positions should be expected to coach, coordinate, counsel, evaluate, and supervise. "It is the chain of understanding that integrates the members of an organization from top to bottom, bottom to top, and side to side," according to Clark (2013). Through clear, effective

communication, leadership motivates, inspires, and promotes accountability and alignment. It is not surprising that participants' remarks coupled leadership and communication as areas of concern.

Factors that May Impact Implementation

The research question studied was: *What factors influence highly regarded teachers' understanding and implementation of policy reforms within classrooms?* By gaining understanding about the transmission of policy initiatives as they moved from state to district to classroom, the researcher sought to recognize the challenges of capacity, varied information, multiple lines of communications, complexities of goals, and other challenges that confront the classroom teacher. Answering the question involved identifying the manner in which factors that compose policy coherence, compliance readiness, and cognitive sense-making may alter the intent of educational policy as it was implemented within the classroom.

In the context of the two school, within the perceptions of these five teachers there are indications that educational policy implementation was challenged by (1) the combining of multiple demands and interactions resulting in inconsistent understanding and unintended outcomes, often overloading individuals and institutions; (2) evidence of insufficient organizational capacity in the form of deficient resources, especially inadequate amounts of time, and money; (3) insufficient development of social capital, especially trust, within and between different stages of the policymaking process; (4) varying degrees of resistance to change that are tolerated within an institution; and (5) incomplete

understanding of information and concepts due to a reliance on individualized sense-making rather than on collective sense-making level.

Evidence of policy incoherence, a lack of compliance readiness and a need for systematized collective sense-making were implied in the remarks of all five participants. Some factors were linked to the school culture, present in the remarks of the Big City middle school teachers, but not in the comments of the Small Town teachers, or vice versa. Some were connected to subject areas or individual teacher's background experiences. Few comments or perspectives were uniquely singular. Analysis of the interviewees' points of view provided insights that can be used to gain understanding of policy implementation in the classrooms of the five teachers. Their experiences may suggest areas to be studied further, leading toward a revised, improved system of policy transmission and implementation Application of the *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework* used to interpret the teachers' perceptions aided in the development of the themes described below.

As the findings in Chapter 4 reveal, all of the participants expressed their support for the policy initiatives of TES, PBE, and RtI. However, they also spoke about the volume, speed, and pace of change that is being encountered, complicating their understanding and execution of those policies. One teacher spoke for all the participants when she said, "I think this is all good. I would just like people to know it is just so, so, so, so much!"

Policy coherence is defined as the systematic promotion of mutually reinforcing policy actions across government departments and agencies, creating synergies towards achieving the agreed objectives (Trinity College Dublin, 2010).

However, different elements within the policymaking process may uniquely interpret various aspects of a policy. Without awareness of developing inconsistencies, policy incoherence may occur. Different stakeholders may develop inconsistent understandings of the intended goals due to two main factors: policy convergence and problem framing.

All the participants agreed that the ultimate goals of RtI, PBE, and TES are improved student achievement. They did not see those policy goals as inherently flawed, and thus would not eliminate any of them. Their remarks did not suggest inconsistencies within problem framing. They did not dispute the parameters of the policies, finding them to be appropriate, and to some degree already a part of their classroom practices. Therefore, it can be concluded that the policy framing component of policy coherence did not have a significantly adverse influence on their levels of understanding.

The teachers' comments reflected that policy incoherence existed primarily because of the convergence of a volume of substantially significant policy initiatives. Policy convergence may occur when multiple reforms interact, in combination. There was evidence that the implementation processes created conditions that were overloading the systems within the schools in which the participants worked. The participants expressed that the amount of personal time involved in getting up to speed has been substantial. They wondered when the collective, focused, "official" district professional development resources might begin to become more substantive. Some of their colleagues maintained the sentiment that until substantial consequences are in place, they would wait and see what would actually be required,

thus, stalling implementation. Of greatest concern expressed by all of the participants was that they feared that their students might suffer adverse effects while implementation glitches were being discovered and resolved. In their views, concern for "the whole child" was taking a secondary role to the implementation the policies and measurement of their effectiveness: high stakes testing and accountability procedures.

The volume of substantial policy initiatives, pace of change, and quickly approaching implementation deadlines created by the convergence of PBE, RtI, and TES have had a significant impact on their classrooms. There was much to understand and evaluate as new standards, directives, resources, and accountability measures descended into the classrooms.

The process was subject to public scrutiny, widely publicized throughout the media. Public opinion and understanding were also impacted by policy convergence, and understanding of the goals was often muddled. Local, state, and national citizenries were vocal in their concerns, but might have possessed a limited scope of contemporary education policies as well. Public concern and politics often mixed within the media, translating into criticism of public education and public school teachers. There was a high level of accountability. Standardized testing occurred more frequently and had more importance to the public. The data were scrutinized and analyzed in the media. It became a topic of partisan political discussions. The tests and scores became a public focus in the discussion of public education.

Within the discussions, the teachers felt that they, the teaching profession, had become a focal point. They expressed doubts about their ability. They worried

about the impact this publicity had on their students. They feared that the data were being used to categorize schools, teachers, and students. They were concerned about individuals who reduce public education into numbers and stereotypical labels: making students and teachers anonymous, losing sight of the idea that numbers represent individuals and that individuals are difficult to quantify by numerical representations. The participants collectively expressed that while they attempted to ignore negative public generalizations that were levied toward the teaching profession, it was difficult. They knew they should not, but they personalized negative caricatures of teachers. They felt inadequate. They drove themselves to do more and be better. Being evaluated by their peers and administrators through the TES initiatives was almost a relief to them, for they sought validation and constructive analysis of their practice in a process they wanted to trust would provide direction for personal professional development. They wanted to become more effective teachers for their students.

The participants did not lose sight of the reasons that they became teachers: the children. They made efforts to differentiate their teaching methods, looking at their students as individuals with unique needs, a goal also set forth by RtI. Big City teachers were frustrated by the lack of a logical, systematic process for implementing RtI. They found some of the required documentation to be cumbersome and a duplicative, producing resentment at what they perceived could be a poor use of their time.

All five of the teachers expressed support for the Common Core State Standards and the legitimacy of teaching toward proficiency of these targets, PBE.

They all liked the idea of using the standards to help identify students who may need additional or different instruction, potential interactions with the RtI initiative.

The effects of convergence on the teachers were creating challenging conditions for them, their colleagues, and, apparently, for the leadership levels within their districts, too. The participants' remarks point to a variety of concerns: (1) additional responsibilities; (2) additional demands on personal and professional time; (3) the reallocation of personal and system-wide time and effort, trade-offs between the new initiatives and existing strategies; (4) increased need for professional development; and (5) increased levels of accountability. The participants' remarks suggested that balancing the new policy demands with already established responsibilities created a sense of frustration, fatigue, fear, while increasing stress for themselves and their colleagues.

Within the findings about policy coherence, all of the teachers expressed concerns about the combining of various initiatives. Policies converged to create unexpected or unintended consequences. Two participants wondered at the interactive effects between RtI and PBE. Given the vast differences between students, the two goals seemed to be mutually exclusive for some students. Both teachers expressed concerns: What will happen to those students who require more time to reach proficiency? What will happen to their teachers? How will that be perceived by parents, the community, and policymakers? What will be the consequences? Those questions are significant and unanswered.

Additionally, four of the five teachers indicated concerns that PBE and TES may intersect to create unintended consequences for their colleagues and themselves. While they tried to take TES in stride and saw it as an opportunity for becoming better practitioners, they became concerned about the idea that testing data could impact their salaries. If test results were highly weighted in TES, and the consequences impacted teacher compensation, who will want to help the students who struggle? Who would want the responsibility? Is reaching a targeted standard a reasonable goal for all students within a pre-established timeframe reasonable? Should teachers be judged on whether their students meet the standards? The teachers wanted to be evaluated by their ability to help their students grow, and thus were more supportive of measures that track a child's growth.

The participants expressed apprehensions that the combination of TES and PBE may end up creating a system of teacher evaluation that is punitive, or inadequately reflects a teacher's expertise. Their colleagues and they were learning about scenarios emerging in other states, and worried about being subject to similar, illogical circumstances. For example, in New York State, efforts aimed at implementing more rigorous standards were concurrently launched with an improved teacher evaluation system. Those two policies were undermining each other, however. In published reports, teachers who received a "highly effective" label one year were being rated as 'ineffective' the following year because their students' test scores did not meet expectations on the more demanding state tests (Fairbanks, 2015). It was the potential for just tats convergence that concerned the

participants.

All five of the teachers worried that a focus on attaining standards and PBE may obscure the needs and education of what has been called "the whole child:" the idea that each student deserves to be healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged within public schooling (Whole Child Partnership, 2015).

1. There was concern that too much pressure to perform on tests may stifle the creativity, complex thinking, and collaborative learning environment within which most adolescents thrive.
2. Two teachers expressed that teaching toward the more rigorous standards and PBE targets may not be fully complementary with the requirements of RtI.
3. The two language arts teachers worried that without explicit rubrics, exemplars, and learning targets they may not be properly calibrating levels of proficiency in addressing the standards, leaving their students at a disadvantage or overtaxing them.
4. Uncertainty and skepticism about the assessments that would be administered to evaluate student proficiency were universally shared among the participants. The amount of time dedicated to the testing itself, the unique formatting of the tasks, and the validity of the resulting data were all topics of discussion.
5. Perceived student frustration and loss of self confidence or motivation was a concern especially for Small Towns teachers, but also mentioned by the Big City teachers.

As one teacher responded, summarizing her concerns about the well-being of her students and the implementation of the policy initiatives, “We don’t always see the forest through the trees.”

In Chapter 5, the second factor within *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework* was considered. In the reform-minded era of accountability that has developed since No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top initiatives, the policy goals of TES, RtI, and PBE were more highly visible to communities and the public. Traditionally, public schools have been allowed to buffer themselves from the public community, but that was no longer commonly tolerated. As a result, each of the two school districts was working on some phase of implementing the initiatives, addressing the demands of statutory compliance and public opinion. However, all the interviewees suggested that the development of structures, resources, and relationships needed to actualize optimal conditions for compliance readiness were lagging.

Of the three components that constitute compliance readiness - ideological readiness, organizational capacity, and power to resist - the participants did not identify a personal lack of ideological readiness to be a significant negative factor. All expressed agreement with the goals and supported the implementation efforts. Each participant was able to articulate the potential connections between those initiatives and the goal of improving student achievement. On the other hand, each also expressed concerns with the manner in which the policy initiatives were being implemented within their classrooms. They did not specifically focus on a particular reason that implementation efforts were not optimal, but some of the

participants believe that more teacher input into the planning and implementing of policy should be considered in the future.

The remarks of the two teachers from Small Towns suggested a lack of active participation and directives from leadership may have allowed some of their colleagues to merely “talk the talk” when it came to implementing the initiatives. Their remarks implied that some teachers were able to make choices about their commitment toward implementation efforts, without obvious consequence. Lack of full staff compliance with, and effort toward implementation, of some policies was an irritant that slowed progress for these participants. That suggests a system of lax accountability with respect to the policy implementation process. The comments of the two teachers suggested the situation may involve several factors. Among them are: (1) inadequate mechanisms of supervision; (2) excessive confidence that an apparently veteran staff will continue to produce effective outcomes without instituting changes; or (3) limited resources at the administrative or leadership level to maintain needed oversight. Regardless of the cause, without strong commitment on the part of district and school leadership, inconsistent levels of ideological readiness were perceived to slow school-wide policy implementation.

Organizational capacity was found to be a major factor impeding the progress of policy implementation in both schools, although the kinds of deficient resources differed between the two schools. Organizational capacity has three elements: human capital; social capital; and financial capital. Instability within the elements of organizational capacity may have a significantly negative impact on policy implementation efforts.

First, insufficient human capital - the commitment, disposition, and knowledge of employees - may influence social capital, and impede the development of compliance readiness (Coburn & Russell, 2008). The teachers from both Big City and Small Towns suggested that instability within leadership positions had been a hindrance to moving initiatives forward. Changing leadership can slow progress on initiatives, for priorities may change and resources be reapportioned.

That was a logical response from staff. Knowledge levels of leadership may be variable. There is little assurance that new leadership possesses the same understanding or priorities as previous leadership. As a result, some employees may move cautiously as they attempt to discern the level of commitment new management possesses. A lack of leadership continuity may cause stress or reluctance to develop among teachers, assuming a stance of "wait and see" instead of responding with dedicated effort. It also may have a negative impact on the development of social capital and trust within a school.

The language arts teacher in Big City cited the frequent shifting of leadership in the district central office as disruptive. The Small Towns participants' remarks suggested leadership was remote or absent, leaving the teachers to establish priorities and their own gauges of adequate progress. Those perceptions might be alleviated if the mission or goals were clearly and consistently communicated throughout the school system. Personnel or responsibilities may change, but a feeling of stability can be maintained when organizational objectives

are continuously and consistently maintained and communicated throughout the system.

The two Small Towns teachers also expressed concern about another area of human capital: collegial dispositions. Both suggested that some colleagues were not appropriately oriented toward change and that leadership tolerated that to some degree. A negative impact on the development of a climate of trust, an important component of social capital, had resulted. Social capital is perhaps the most complex aspect of organizational capacity. It is the manner in which individuals relate to one another (Coburn & Russell, 2008). It requires the coordination and development of leadership, staff, community, and trust. Social capital is not just established, but develops and grows over time. Trust within the school culture must be established during implementation of new policies, for when learning something new, people often make mistakes. A trusting community is thus important support for risk-taking. However, in Small Towns siloed thinking and isolation appeared to be tolerated without consequence. The two teachers suggested that slowed implementation, for it limited meaningful sharing, collaboration, and problem solving.

The Small Towns teachers' remarks suggested that trust and ties among colleagues had not been developed sufficiently for the staff to openly share and problem-solve. One of the teachers explained that the collegial environment was not devoid of collaboration, but without trust, substantive work that would raise the rigor of teaching and learning to the level required by CCSS and PBE was not occurring or lacked depth: "Not enough. There's collaboration, but not enough of

that kind of collaboration. There's collaboration of activities or assignments, resources, and that's good stuff too, but not enough." Progress toward new initiatives is impeded when teachers withdraw to their own classrooms. An environment established on trust and safety will lead toward change by improving organizational capacity, and thus aid compliance readiness.

The three teachers of Big City suggested that while social capital may be present within their school, it was absent in their relationships and communications with the district administrative offices. The teachers stated that they would advocate for different priorities if they were provided with a voice about the allocation of funding. They themselves did not believe that they had enough information or understanding to know why decisions were made, but they would like input to the process. They attributed the absence to the instability of leadership at the district level.

The two most veteran teachers from Big City shared that they dealt with the lack of communication by focusing on the teaching and the students. They admitted that some of their colleagues did the same, motivated by a distrust of central office directives. They suggested that professional development sessions seemed to be required and prescriptive, leaving little room for discussion or input from teachers. Communication between their school and central office was primarily top-down. When communication is absent or stilted, the development of trust, and therefore social capital, may be negatively impacted.

Another component of organizational capacity, financial capital is more than just money. It is also the staffing, time, and materials available within the

professional community (Spillane & Thompson, 1997). Given that broad definition, the lack of financial capital was an area of great concern among all the participants.

All the teachers suggested that there was not enough time to learn about and implement the policy initiatives. For example, there had been an emphasis on TES in Big City during professional development time over the past school year. Time had been dedicated to learning about the goal and yet they did not have specific information on the actual implementation process.

Additionally, all five of teachers expressed fear that the minimal professional development that had been directed to RtI and PBE thus far was all that was planned. They had no indication that more opportunities for organized learning would occur. They felt like they were immersed in an environment of uncertainty, as one participant explained, "...building the boat as we sail it."

Funding fluctuated, impacting levels of staffing and resources in Big City, which directly affected policy implementation. While the three teachers knew that resources were limited, variable and unpredictable, and had been for some time, they expressed a sense of anger that the needs of their students did not appear to factor into the decisions made during resource allocation.

The implementation of CCSS, RtI and PBE were directly impacted by levels of staffing and classroom materials. When budgetary resources are limited, they must be balanced between competing demands. Trade-offs concerning the allocation of time, materials, and staffing are made: some initiatives receive insufficient resources. The teachers understood that, but did not possess the

knowledge of, or input into, the process by which funding priorities are set. For the Big City teachers, that negatively impacted the school's compliance readiness.

Overall, it is evident from the findings that the lack of organizational capacity was a significant problem within the policy implementation process for the teachers and the schools in which they worked. That problem is not quickly or easily solved. For example, more time is not easily created. Structural and substantive revision to the school calendar, school day, teacher contract, or working conditions may be solutions, but has multiple impacts on other areas of organizational capacity, and therefore is not easily undertaken. Likewise, the development of human capital is a long term and costly process. Even more complex, but perhaps most important, is the development of social capital, for without trust and openness, changes are difficult to implement.

However, if those mid-career teachers are indicative of the larger teacher domain, it may be inferred that some of their peers possess the competence and dispositions to work within a developing system while being scrutinized, and held accountable for their own development and student learning. Yet there were indications that some of their colleagues were reticent. While additional money or funding may help, it is not a panacea. A continuous and pragmatic approach for developing and balancing the needed components of organizational capacity should be part of an implementation plan when policy initiatives are conceived. The plan must be revisited throughout the implementation process, especially as conditions change.

The final component of compliance readiness is the power to resist: the perceived ability of the teachers to redefine the standards of performance or resist their administrative supervisors (Zald, 1978). Environments in which trust is high among colleagues usually experience little resistance and isolation and, therefore, low levels of the power to resist.

In the Big City middle school where, according to the participants, a collegial, collaborative culture had been deliberately developed, the power to resist was low. Each of the teachers revealed that the entire school staff had been trained in conducting effective team meetings, and in applying principles of collaborative teamwork. Collaborative teamwork was a theme that was continually articulated by leadership and teachers. In the past, resources were dedicated to developing norms and structures that established a culture of efficient and respectful teamwork. Meeting agendas and notes were created and made public by the teachers. Administrative leadership frequently attended teacher content meetings and team meetings that occurred throughout the week. They were included as active participants. Additionally, the teachers welcomed TES, for they wanted their practices to be evaluated by either peers or administrators, even though they were not certain what the process might actually look like. They trusted their peers, and were enthused about opportunities that allow them to visit others' classrooms.

On the other hand, the Small Towns teachers suggested that a degree of teacher autonomy and isolation was tolerated within their middle school. Both Small Towns teachers expressed frustration that the environment stymied efforts to move forward quickly on policy initiatives such as PBE and RtI. They supported

the common targets provided by CCSS, believing all students deserve an appropriately rigorous curriculum. They wanted each of their colleagues to be held responsible for making sense of the initiatives, and implementing curriculum and strategies to implement the initiatives.

Teamwork, collaboration, and collective sense-making are needed within schools. No teacher works in isolation. The process of educating a child is collective, a process that takes many years and individual teacher efforts. Every teacher should be obligated to rise to changing expectations. Waiting for teachers to decide to open their doors and build collaborative relationships is not a strategy to be recommended. Tolerating isolation, a discontinuity or “gaps between entities, time, and spaces” should not be tolerated (Spurgin, 2006). It is important that policymakers and educational leadership understand that “gaps” allow individuals to organize their own information. That compounds, and allows for, gaps to increase in number or magnitude as information is permitted to be organized for personal use, creating interpretations that tend to conserve individual schema. To overcome that condition requires a balance of personal responsibility and accountability to a collective goal.

Active, informed leadership is needed at all levels of policymaking. Ineffective or complacent leadership that tolerates teacher isolation results in a delay of policy initiatives. Developing a trusting, open culture of continuous learning for teachers and students takes time, but should be an explicitly stated priority enhanced through leadership that starts at the top. Establishment of effective two-way communication aids that effort. Leadership must seek

information and require accountability. Without clarity about (1) how funding and time are being used; (2) how this use aligns to policy initiatives, district goals and individual needs; and (3) continuous evaluation of whether an increase in student achievement is a result of current initiatives and strategies, scarce resources may be wasted, and trust throughout the organization may diminish.

Chapter 6 provides information about the processes of teacher professional development as the five teachers and their colleagues learn about and implement TES, RtI, and PBE. That is the final factor in the *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework*. Cognitive sense-making occurs both individually and collectively; new information is filtered and integrated through existing scripts and schema. The sense each person makes is dependent upon the sense each already possesses (Spillane, 2004). Individuals work to navigate complexities: individual sense-making. They look to collaborative efforts to create structures and provide cohesive understanding: collective sense-making. The requisite skills of effective collaboration are not inherent in an organization, however. (Kim, 2014a; Dixon, 2014; Conklin, 2012). High levels of social capital, time, participant disposition, and knowledge of effective collaboration skills are needed. However what is required additionally is the ability to draw on, not only the knowledge, but also the sense-making capabilities of organizational members. By bringing together cognitively diverse employees into structured conversations, new perspectives are brought to bear on the issues.

In the face of complicated issues, individuals tend to hit their mental capacity sooner than a collective sense-making effort might. Just like the story of the blind men and the elephant, the experiences of the participants reveal that one

person's subjective experience can be true, but her experience is limited by its inability to account for other versions or a totality of truth (Kim, 2014a). An individual's unique experiences and biases are the platform from which she constructs understanding or truth. Over time, that impacts the culture, social structures, cultures and routine of the organizations to which they belong (Coburn, 2006; Conklin, 2014; Kim, 2014a; Kim, 2013; Dixon, 2014).

That is especially true when multiple complex problems are presented and there is a lack of resources to address them. Individual efforts at sense-making can only achieve so much before the individual reaches a maximum level of mental capacity. To overcome such circumstances, individual efforts can be combined to enable a collaborate effort. Joining of individual sense-making into a collective effort allows a group to push longer and harder toward a solution.

Science supports the notion that individuals are limited in our ability to change. In particular, we do not seem biologically capable of accelerating our abilities to process things emotionally. However, groups are capable of transcending the limitations of its individual members, provided that are structured optimally and that they interact effectively (Kim, 2013).

Collective sense-making is more powerful than individual sense-making, but it requires deliberate practices and skills aimed at achieving productive group practices. That requires the development of a culture of shared ownership in which people are comfortable with making mistakes as a part of the learning process (LLC Staff, 2014). Other experts state that in today's world the mission of

organizations must be to get better at tapping into the intelligence and creativity of groups (Groupaya, 2014).

The days of strategy being developed by outside consultants in a black box, or by the top leadership team alone, are numbered. When your people have been handed a strategy to implement, they respond to the inevitable barriers to successful implementation by giving up. When they have participated in developing the strategy and have a sense of ownership of it, they use their creativity and skills to turn barriers into opportunities (Groupaya, 2014).

Establishing an organization in which high levels of collective sense-making can take place requires an environment in which trust, shared understanding, and shared language have been developed (Kim, 2014a). In other words, high levels of social capital, time, participant disposition, and knowledge of effective collaboration skills are required. These elements are needed to bring together cognitively diverse employees in structured conversations, so that new perspectives are brought to bear on the issues.

The summary of the teachers' remarks highlights a scarcity of information and professional development or learning about the three policy initiatives. Individual sense-making was the predominant mode of professional learning about the policy initiatives and implementation. The five teachers revealed their efforts to educate themselves. They committed their personal time to learn about the initiatives, but felt they had been provided with incomplete and inadequate

experiences within their schools and school districts. Their interactions with peers indicated a patchwork of comprehension about the initiatives. Progress toward implementation was perceived to be developing inconsistently across their schools.

The participants were most comfortable sharing about the professional development processes that had occurred in preparation of the TES implementation. That is not surprising, for TES had absorbed a majority of organized teacher professional development time during the preceding year. There were details about which they were still uncertain, however, and they were waiting for more information and opportunities to learn.

The RtI initiative was acknowledged to be under development by all five participants, but had only received a cursory discussion in the Big City middle school. In Big City a reference book was provided to each team of teachers to aid the documentation process, but without context, it was found to be of little use by two of the three teachers. Those two also understood RtI to be merely an interim step of documentation that must be conducted for students who may eventually warrant a special education evaluation. They were not able to articulate the full potential of the initiative, and therefore it is concluded that they did not understand the depth. They had not been provided with the time or opportunity to collaboratively learn about and fully apply the system. The Small Towns teachers expressed the importance of the initiative, but shared that there was not a systemic approach to RtI, and thus teams of teachers were implementing it uniquely. Differentiation was a part of their school-wide vocabulary, but confidence as to

how that should, or would, look within RtI was low. An understanding of Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions was not shared by any of the participants in either setting.

All the teachers expressed an "uncomfortableness" when speaking about PBE. In both middle schools it was apparent that little had been formally discussed concerning the topic. While all participants were proponents of CCSS, and were implementing them within their classrooms, they did not perceive a systemic approach to PBE was being constructed. They may be correct in that as their school districts appear to be juggling many mandates.

Big City teachers admitted that minimal effort had been expended to bring teachers together across the district for discussions about PBE. That was a concern to them because compulsory state testing at each grade level in the mathematics and English/language arts would occur within the year.

Small Towns teachers expressed irritation in their beliefs that efforts to move the initiatives forward were stalled. They attributed that to an apparent tolerance for "teacher academic freedom" when constructing and teaching curriculum within individual classrooms. They suggested discussion and understanding about CCSS and PBE had not progressed very far. There was a lack of obligation or consequence communicated from leadership about moving forward, although they did not know if this was a result of building or district directives. One shared that it took much of her time and energy to try to figure out what teaching and learning was actually occurring in the grade levels below hers : "none of that was presented. It was things I have to figure out." The process of implementing RtI and PBE would be facilitated if collegial, collective discussion

occurred, she believed. “I need more time to sit down with other people to come up with ideas to do this.”

Both Small Towns participants expressed that they would support greater direct guidance from district and building leadership. They wanted their colleagues to join those discussions in a more productive manner. Until the doors of collegial practices were opened, the potential for PBE would be delayed. They felt that the policy mandates were intended to fulfill the need to make all students college- and career- ready. Therefore, PBE and RtI should be embraced as complimentary initiatives. That was not universally understood by all of their colleagues, however. They thus wanted leadership to help teachers understand the big picture, to help connect the dots and fit the pieces together.

Each of the five participants conveyed she had a developing sense of what expectations for demonstration of proficiency should be. Each also recognized that hers was a singular perspective, not a collective one. In the absence of adequate collective sense-making process, the teachers spent much personal time seeking information and knowledge that would aid them in understanding the policy initiatives, implementing them and becoming more effective as teachers. All of the participants explicitly expressed the need and desire for time to collaborate with their peers, especially around the PBE initiative. They were concerned that their inability to do so would ultimately reflect poorly on their students and their schools.

If those highly regarded, experienced teachers were struggling to make sense of the initiatives, the researcher wonders how some of their peers were

surviving with the implementation of the policy initiatives. The sense-making needs of teachers with regard to TES, RtI, and PBE appeared to be underestimated by those that control and develop professional learning opportunities. The study participants tried to navigate the complexities within education, but they feared the exhaustion they sometimes experienced would overtake their efforts. Hitting capacity can cause individuals to fall into isolated thinking, to close the classroom door. Each expressed a desire to resist doing so, but admitted she had seen colleagues reach that point.

In summary, whether it is embraced or not, change is a constant. It cannot be stopped; it can only be responded to. Due in large measure to the ever-escalating rate of technological change, globalization, and the increasing emphasis on transparency, schools are challenged within the rapidly evolving environment of the 21st century, and with the responsibility to prepare all students with the knowledge and skills required for successful participation as workers and citizens. Policymakers act with the intent to promote that goal. As a result, public schools are charged with higher levels of accountability as they institute standards-based education systems and meet the unique learning needs of all learners.

It is probable that highly regarded teachers in part earn that status because of their ability to accept and adapt to the environment of continuous change and challenge in which they practices. It is their capacity and willingness to take on the volume of change that partially defines them as highly regarded practitioners. It is also likely that their primary focus is the welfare and educational progress of their

students. One would like to expect that to be the norm throughout public education, but the label itself, "highly regarded," suggests it may be more the exceptional than the rule. That may be cause for concern, given the environment and challenges that appeared to exist according to the five teacher participants. As a group, the participants presented themselves as holding up well to the policy implementation challenges that were impacting contemporary public education. They followed a path of pragmatism through the implementation of the policy initiatives that were daily affecting their students, their schools, and their own classroom practices. However, their perceptions of the constantly evolving policy initiatives and implementation processes in public education warrant consideration, concern, and caution for moving forward.

Implications for Policymakers and Educational Leadership

The challenges of education involve many stakeholders. They have been around for a long time, often influenced by technical and social complexities. There are no proven processes that lead to robust solutions. Narrowing the scope of problems, or rushing to the implementation of hopeful solutions, is not likely to result in long-term or desired successes. In today's, rapidly paced, complex era, traditional notions of "command and control" of the staff, or "one and done" communications do not work. Sustaining initiatives over time is challenging. Policymakers and educational leaders must acknowledge and accept that there are few simple problems or rapid solutions in the institutions of public schooling.

"You can't stop change, you can only decide how to respond" (Denison, 2013). Successful implementation of complex initiatives is a dynamic and long-

term process. The notion that really smart people can work really hard, come up with the "right" solution, transmit that information effectively, and exert control over other individuals to implement that solution, does not work in times of complexity (Kim, 2013). In fact, as highly regarded, mid-career teachers, the participants in this study are presumed to be some of the "really smart people" that their schools depend upon, and yet their own words conveyed a lack of confidence or certainty that appropriate changes were occurring. It is wrong to confuse a simple narrative with true understanding. It is even more inappropriate to suggest that mere understanding will lead to the ability to replicate. New policy initiatives are complex and require sustained, deliberate efforts if they are to be implemented successfully.

As global institutions change, the organizations within public school education must change as well. The realities of policymaking and implementation require that the culture of education transforms, becoming less one of compliance and more one of empowerment. Such transformation requires deliberate actions at all levels within the policymaking process. And teachers need to become more directly involved within the process, establishing a culture of professionalism.

Based upon the experiences shared in this study by the highly regarded teachers, the following recommendations may maximize all three components that influence the policy implementation framework: policy coherence; compliance readiness; and cognitive sense-making.

Learn With and From the Efforts of the Private Sector. The business sector may have knowledge and strategies to share with the public school sector

about research and experiences concerning change-management approaches. For some time, segments of industry have focused on the change process, trying to narrow the gap between what is actual and what is possible. That process often requires adoption and implementation of new initiatives, strategies, and organizational structures. Business has dedicated huge sums of resources to understand the complexities of the change process so that it can potentially improve organizational responses to change.

Bryk, Yeager, Hausman, et al. (2013) advocated such an approach: leveraging what has been learned about improvement research in the private sector to create an environment of continuous improvement within education. They called for the construction of “networked improvement communities.”

The research on academic mindsets shows significant promise for addressing important problems facing educators. However, the history of educational reform is replete with good ideas for improvement that fail to realize the promises that accompany their introduction. As a field, we are quick to implement new ideas but slow to learn how to execute them (p. 3).

They stated that educators must “learn in and through practice to improve” (p. 6). The business sector has been involved with intriguing research and applications that may lend themselves to education.

According to Kim (2014a) complex social change requires about 20 years, or what is commonly considered a “generation.” That seems a long time, but not when considering that many people avoid change, thus slowing the organizational

processes that change mindsets and structures. In that cynical view, only the replacing of old leadership and workers with new will effect real change. occur as a new generation assumes leadership and the older generation leaves. That is not an acceptable condition when the futures of students are involved. It is thus fortunate that steps can accelerate that timeline. Indeed, this study offers ideas to policymakers and educational leaders.

Clarify Goals Continuously. High standards alone are not enough. As the Reverend Theodore Hesburgh puts it, "...you have to have a vision. It's got to be a vision you articulate clearly and forcefully on every occasion. You can't blow an uncertain trumpet." Policy coherence, compliance readiness and cognitive sense-making can be improved if the goals of initiatives and implementations are continuously clarified.

An organization changes only as a result of change in individuals. People have needs. They want to succeed and be recognized for doing a good job. That requires that goals are clearly articulated and that all stakeholders understand their functions within an implementation plan. It is important to communicate what "success" should look like, supply feedback about the efforts that have been expended, and update the process that lies ahead.

The rationale behind change should be communicated as well. Goals should be shared with stakeholders, over and over again, for as challenges are encountered, stakeholders focus on, or revert back to that which is already familiar. Continuous reiteration will help maintain the desired outcomes. Discussing a changing environment and the implications of changes, while restating expected outcomes

may alleviate suspicions and fears, thus building cultures in which smoother, more productive implementation may occur.

High performing organizations have clear mission statements, which fosters loyalty, enthusiasm, and devotion among group members. When desired values and outcomes are well defined, a distinctive culture will develop. That can lead toward an organization that supports and sustains its mission, even in times of inherent instability and change. Allowing the mission or desired outcomes to emerge or define themselves can frustrate stakeholders and slow implementation. Commitment to goals must be explicitly and implicitly communicated in order to maintain the support of the target group.

Plan for Nonlinear, Continuous Implementation. Policy coherence, compliance readiness, and cognitive sense-making can all be enhanced if and when policy initiatives are developed, a process of continually monitoring the implementation is also set in motion. Change demands commitment from the top. Organizational theory suggests that senior management of any organization must plan before initiating change: create the goals; make conscious choices about resources and priorities; set a sequence of strategies. But policymakers, educational leadership, teachers, and other stakeholders must be alert and responsive to needed revisions. Implementation plans seldom proceed as they have been created, especially when the focus is on "wicked problems."

A wicked problem is a social or cultural problem that is difficult to solve because of its inherent complexities, ones that may result in incomplete, contradictory, and/or changing requirements. "A problem can be incredibly

difficult to solve, but cannot be characterized as wicked until it has an indeterminacy of scope and scale” (Austin Center for Design, 2014). Such problems may involve poverty, sustainability, equality and health and wellness: the very issues policymakers are charged to consider when creating educational policy initiatives. For every solution that is offered, new aspects of a wicked problem are revealed, requiring adjustments to potential solutions .

Policies that seek to impact wicked problems cannot be undertaken with orthodox linear-design methods. According to Conklin (2005), “Wicked problems are so commonplace that the chaos and futility that usually attend them are accepted as inevitable. Failing to recognize the 'wicked dynamics' in problems, we persist in applying inappropriate methods and tools to them” (p. 3). Wicked problems cannot be solved using traditional thinking, or employing a linear, top-down process. Gathering and analyzing information about the problem does not lead to simply formulating and implementing a solution. Understanding the problem, and therefore designing appropriate implementation continuously, evolves far into the implementation process. That is the nature of wicked problems.

First conceived more than 40 years ago by Horst Rittel, wicked problems require a novel approach when working toward solutions: a structure of rational dialogue between a diverse group of stakeholders. At its core, a wicked problem requires human relationships and social interactions to achieve movement toward solutions. To begin, according to Rittel, it is important to recognize that the definition of a problem is subjective. Thus, when defining problems, all

stakeholders, experts, and designers are equally knowledgeable or unknowledgeable (Rith & Dubberly, 2007). The people who are involved with wicked problems must talk to one another, deliberate, and argue. Knowledge about actions, not just facts, is necessary, requiring input from all important stakeholders. Argumentation is "key and perhaps the only method of taming wicked problems" (Rith & Dubberly, 2007). Not surprisingly this process may become political in nature.

Allowing for a creative, evolving, non-linear learning process will potentially enable more successful implementation efforts to progress. The more complex and novel the characteristics of the problem, the more the processes involve learning about the problem while trying to formulate solutions.

You still have experts, but it's no longer possible for them to guide the project down the linear waterfall process.... problem solving and learning are tightly intertwined, and the flow of this learning process is opportunity-driven (Conklin, 2005, p. 6).

Additionally, the concept of fragmentation is inherent within wicked problems.

Fragmentation suggests a condition in which the people involved see themselves as more separate than united, and in which information and knowledge are chaotic and scattered. The fragmented pieces are, in essence, the perspectives, understandings, and intentions of the collaborators (Conklin, 2005, p. 2).

The inherent complexity may lead policymakers toward attempting to tame the problem and problem solving process by limiting access to discussions,

but that thwarts productivity in the long run. An inclusive process during the planning stage builds trust among stakeholders, and allows participants to develop a sense of shared responsibility, greater understanding and commitment. It also has the potential for surfacing unseen obstacles, producing more viable options and setting appropriate priorities and timelines.

The wicked problem under consideration in this study is how to actualize society's goals for public education: provide equitable access to an adequate education to provide the potential for equitable opportunities for all students. Resources available to accomplish this goal are constrained by the limits of public funding.

While policymakers and educational leadership might try to structure educational policy initiatives in today's global society as linear in nature, with a knowable problem and domain in which the process and tools for solving it are understood, "most projects in the knowledge economy operate much more in the realm of learning than already knowing" (Conklin, 2005, p. 6).

It is necessary to seek continuous input from all stakeholders within the educational policy process, including teachers, while constructing and implementing a plan that will lead toward successful achievement of the desired goals. That approach is supported by the participants' comments that suggest that if teachers voices were included in creating and planning policies, the process would be more coherent, and policy convergence that results in policy incoherence could be mitigated.

Communicate. It is important to recognize that individuals involved within the change process have needs, not the least of which are the desires to be informed, to be heard, to trust, and to succeed. High performing organizations convey respect for people through strong communication and information-sharing systems. The effectiveness of initiatives and their implementation depends upon establishing of a system of high-quality communications throughout policy formulation and implementation. All components of the *Influences on Policy Implementation Framework* have a greater potential to be maximized when communication between and among all stakeholders has a high priority. Communication involves both sending and receiving information. Structuring opportunities for open, transparent dialogue at different junctures, illustrated in *The Policy Path: From Societal Goals to the Classroom Teacher*, will create an environment that supports and empowers stakeholders. It also allows for a sharing of insights that might uncover unanticipated problems or unintended consequences. Performance can be improved by increasing involvement and empowerment. When individuals understand the desired outcomes and feel that they are instrumental to achieving them, they will help (Flatbear, 2014).

Additionally, transparent, continuous communication is a foundational condition of establishing a culture of trust. Trust is an important element of a synergistic and efficient work environment. When persons encounter challenging conditions, they benefit from communication that clearly establishes or reinforces goals and expectations (Rogers & Riddle, 2003; Bowman, 2014; Maxwell, 2015). It is important that people feel they are involved in making decisions and determining

directions. Communication should flow between all layers of an organization and may aid motivation when goals are perceived to be mutually-serving and appropriate.

Trustworthy communications can be established if a reliable practice of communicating is modeled from the top. Trust is more easily developed when goals, communication, expertise, and resources are reliable or stable. It can be strengthened when all parties are invested in the process. The concept of truthfulness and reliability are mutually reinforcing. Everyone within an organization must feel that they are working together on a goal that is clearly communicated and understood.

In the current environment of public schools, people rarely work in isolation. Individuals must trust themselves and their colleagues. A structure that encourages timely, dependable, reliable communication will go far in building an organizational environment that supports the development of trust. Trusting relationships allow individuals to work through situations where they would not venture on their own. Sims (as quoted in Maxwell, 2015) reflected that without trust, organizations do not function efficiently or effectively.

Without trust, you will be painstakingly slower...Without trust in your teammates you will only do as much as your faith in your own limited abilities will take you. You will not risk stretching your own expertise or experience, and you are unlikely to learn as much from those around you. Each person will revert to being an island, placing trust only in their own abilities and therefore limiting individual and corporate horizons (as quoted in Maxwell, 2015).

Reliability and communication are important components in a trusting culture and a trustworthy work environment.

Communication is needed throughout the continuous process of policymaking, implementation and sense-making. As conditions change, peoples' perceptions, ideals, and priorities may also shift, for as individuals encounter "bumps in the road," they tend to conserve the familiar and avoid the complex. They are less likely to do so when they perceive themselves to be a part of an organization that values open, honest communication and has established structures for this to reliably occur. Leadership at all levels of the policymaking hierarchy should value opportunities to develop a structure that facilitates sharing and soliciting information within the dynamic processes that culminate in implementation.

In the arena of public education, many factors are beyond the control of policymakers, administrators, and teachers. Workplace conditions and decisions are subject to public funding, and to a political environments that respond to national and global forces. Communication must be established between all parties in the policymaking process, for the journey from policy creation to implementation is subject to those variable conditions. The trust that is developed as a result of fluid, two-way communications helps maintain momentum toward achieving goals, in spite of outside factors.

Anticipate and Provide Adequate Resources. Anticipating and providing adequate resources to accomplish implementation will help to maximize the component of compliance readiness. In a quid pro quo relationship, placing

expectations on someone requires providing the tools needed to attain success. Stable financial capital is important for maintaining organizational capacity. Adequate funding resources are necessary for successful policy implementation; there must be a means of providing necessary materials, staffing, and learning opportunities.

Time, however, may be one of the most important resources. Sufficient amounts of time are needed for learning to occur, changes in disposition to develop, and trust to be established and strengthened. Time must be provided to allow for shared understanding to develop. Investment in the time for relationships of trust to develop can aid the process of getting through complex, expensive, embroiling issues. Promoting the development of relationships and trust is especially important in multi-stakeholder initiatives (Kim, 2014b). Everybody makes mistakes, especially when learning something new. People need a culture of trust and safety if they are to take the risks associated with learning and change. If organizational capacity cannot be provided at adequate levels, implementation goals should be revised accordingly.

There must be processes in place that allow for adapting the course of policy implementation. It is important to possess flexibility and seek feedback, or the need to adjust may be missed. That is informed by learning from the experiences of others and maintaining knowledge of emerging research.

Resource stability is a desired, but unrealistic target, however. Change, especially in personnel or material resources, is a norm in today's world. Recognition of potential instability must become a part of the planning and

implementation processes. Performance expectations need not be as variable, however. Desired, sustainable expectations and targets can help establish stability at all levels within the policymaking and implementation process.

Develop and Emphasize Synergy. Cognitive sense-making will be maximized if opportunities are taken for improving understanding and identifying synergies to be leveraged before and during implementation efforts. Synergy refers to the interaction of initiatives as well as the target agents. Synergic forces combine so that the resulting effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects. All individuals within *The Policy Path: From Societal Goals to the Classroom Teacher* will benefit from a deliberate effort to recognize and enhance synergies.

The process is not simple or quick, but a focus placed on collective sense-making during the process of policy creation and implementation can help. Individual sense-making efforts are vulnerable to inconsistent understanding throughout an institution. Goethe is credited with underscoring this point when he said, "No one would talk much in society if they knew how often they misunderstood others." Thus, the importance of collective sense-making should be recognized and preferred, for it helps to eliminate inconsistencies and aids in moving organizations to higher levels of understanding overall. A purposeful process of information sharing and discussion aids the development of a trusting professional culture, retention of learning, and a greater depth of understanding.

Superficially, the educational policy initiatives of RtI, PBE, and TES may appear to be easily approachable, but as this study suggests they are, in fact, complex and influenced by the contexts and individuals who are involved in

understanding and implementing them. Conklin (2010) suggested that the more novel and complex the problem, the more the search for solutions involves learning about the problem. It is important to explicitly detail how new initiatives will change existing processes, and how they will complement them. It is necessary to help people connect the dots. Collective sense-making, socially shared cognition, can aid the search for understanding, and create greater uniformity of knowledge. Maximizing opportunities for collective sense-making can overcome some of the limitations of individual capacity.

Developing shared understanding through collective sense-making is an important process. It is a foundational step in establishing sustainable cooperation and collaboration. Collective sense-making requires the commitment of time and other resources. However, the result is potentially deeper, more sustained, universal learning and focus. Universal understanding requires multiple opportunities for purposive communication between all stakeholders.

With frequent or deliberate opportunities for collective sense-making to take place, the process of understanding can be enhanced. According to Darling-Hammond (2014), strong professional learning communities can aid in establishing the vision of high-quality instruction for all students. They establish expectations that individuals will work together to actively seek and process information to achieve understanding as they make meaning of teaching and learning.

Collective sense-making is especially important with respect to the policy initiatives. The process represents opportunities to extract and enact comprehension. Individuals react to the collective sense of plausibility and

understanding. The process is dynamic: an individual simultaneously tries to shape and react to the environments in which she is a part. When involved with group interactions, especially established, predictable, fixed relationships, individuals extract the most substantial, collective themes and understanding. Construction of structures for collective sense-making will create synergy, and potentially achieve a combined effect that is greater than the sum of the individual effects.

Speaking directly to policymakers, one of the participants suggested that collaboration should take place between the various levels of the educational hierarchy.

...There are really, really, really good teachers out there who deserve better. (Policymakers) are dictating and expecting.

It's going to take a really collaborative, positive, professional relationship between administrators and teachers.

Collective sense-making can help to bridge gaps in understanding between individuals. It can become opportunities to create a culture of generative networking and problem-solving. That is important especially when undertaking larger, more transformative changes, but has many applications. Importantly, the process may provide the intangible reward of helping to establish a professional environment in which respect and empowerment are valued.

A process of collective sense-making may be initiated by bringing the teacher perspective to the policymaking process. An innovative fellowship program, sponsored in part by a grant from Hope Street Group, recognizes the potential benefits of creating opportunities for select teachers to become involved and contribute their ideas and expertise to help shape national, state, and local

policy. The State Teacher Fellows Program sponsors fellows as local spokespeople for educators' ideas and solutions. Fellows help drive policy impact. Most recently the state of Tennessee has become the fourth to launch the program, following Kentucky (2013), Hawaii (2014), and North Carolina (2015). The model in Tennessee creates a partnership with the state Department of Education, the state's largest teachers union, Hope Street Group and one other advocacy group. Classroom teachers and instructional coaches who are recognized as leaders among their peers are encouraged to apply for the 12-month program that advances professional development opportunities. Selected teachers receive a stipend, learn about state policy initiatives, meet directly with state policymakers to share the views of educators and present educator-generated solutions (Tatter, 2015). This approach brings expert perspectives into the mix, encouraging teachers to share their unique professional knowledge as policies are developed and implemented.

Collective sense-making can bring together stakeholders throughout the process by which the information is received and comprehended. By creating greater understanding through a synergetic process, collective sense-making can improve the implementation process and create greater understanding, help to eliminate some of the conditions that cause policy incoherence, and anticipate conditions needed for compliance readiness to be improved.

Future Research

Change is a constant in today's world. It must be managed. Future research should focus on understanding the conditions by which change is introduced and

communicated throughout public education. Research should seek answers about how to improve educational policymaking and implementation efforts.

Gaining an understanding of the teacher perspective is important. This phenomenological interview study has only begun that process, focused on a small purposive sample. Additional research could be designed to include field observations within classrooms or document analysis, either of which would provide a wider range of perspectives on the same question. Also, greater depth of understanding may be gained by studying a different or a larger sample of teachers. Similarly, a longitudinal study would provide important information about the succeeding processes and experiences of classroom teachers during implementation of policy initiatives.

Furthermore, while understanding the view from the classroom teachers is important, there are other levels of policymaking that are being taxed as well. School leadership, district administrators, school boards, and state departments of education should also be examined within the context of policy implementation. Each of those levels serves as a conduit of information: receiving data, analyzing it, and communicating it to others. Research aimed at studying the impacts of contemporary educational policy demands on those different elements and actors may prove to be beneficial in setting attainable goals, improving communication, and allocating appropriate levels of resources and help at the bottom level.

Additionally, more research needs to be conducted to understand how changes in the external environment due to policy initiatives have affected the relationship and structure that exists between school administrations and the

classrooms. Traditionally seen as an exemplar of loose coupling, the relationship between school administrative roles and the classroom appears to have tightened. Spillane, Mesler, Croegaert, and Sherer (2004) suggest that most studies "predate dramatic shifts in the external environment of schools that feature the technical core more prominently. Indeed, more recently scholars have questioned the notion that schools are necessarily loosely coupled" (p. 8). Furthermore, the data provided by the classroom teachers herein the current study suggests that these highly regarded teachers would not object to organizational routines that create a more tightly coupled structure. On the other hand, some researchers such as Labaree (2010) contend that teacher resistance continues to thwart reform efforts and strives to maintain the loosely coupled structure that allows for greater autonomy within the classroom. It is suggested the continued existence of the teacher tenure system that is supported by teacher unions and codified within teacher contracts allows the classroom to be buffered from the environment outside the school. The existence of these multiple of viewpoints suggests this is an area that would benefit from further research.

Educational institutions and policymakers should also be encouraged to participate and invest in research concerning the creation of networks that focus on improving educational outcomes. For example, initiatives funded by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching are committed to developing networks of ideas, individuals, and institutions to improve the teaching and learning process. Recent efforts advocated for "accelerating the field's capacity to learn in and through practice" (Bryk, Yeager, Hausman, et al., 2013)

through support for networked communities of educators engaged in improvement research. They suggested that networked communities of educators may improve reliability of implementation efforts when they are taken to scale. More efforts like this need to be constructed, supported, and shared.

Moreover, business and nonprofit organizations are facing increasingly complex issues as a result of rapid globalization and technological change – issues so complex that they demand entirely new approaches (Dixon, 2014). Contemporary organizational theory and business consultancies offer intriguing ideas that may inform the processes of change within public education as well. Mutually beneficial relationships between educational institutions and businesses should be encouraged in the endeavor to share research concerning improvement research.

Building collective sense-making skills is one such innovative area that is being explored within the business sector. While individual sense-making has been studied for decades, research and understanding of the processes and impacts of collective sense-making, especially within the sector of public education, are scant.

The goal of a collective sense-making is to help individuals endure greater complexity than we normally can handle. At some point, we still have to simplify the system in order to process it as individuals, but the hope is that, by raising the overall bar, you might end up at a higher place than you were before (Kim, 2014).

Collective sense-making seeks to produce a system-wide view of issues, creating awareness of the whole and the assets of other parts of the organization.

What is needed is the ability to draw on, not only the knowledge, but also the sensemaking capability of organizational members. By bringing together cognitively diverse employees in structured conversations, new perspectives are brought to bear on the issues (Dixon, 2014).

Organizational consultants have identified three situations in which collective sense-making may have a significant impact:

1. When an organization is faced with complex or ambiguous challenges.
Defining the issue and searching for the means to resolve it may be uncertain;
2. When a widely distributed workforce results in a loss of coordination or collaboration;
3. When employees comply but do not take initiative (Dixon, 2014).

Those conditions sound very similar to those encountered by 21st public education. There are lessons to be learned from the business sector.

Finally, moving from individual toward collective sense-making is challenging. It requires time in order to create a culture of trust. This also requires the deliberate development of several qualities within the organization. Stable, supportive leadership is another important component for developing positive social capital. Research may aid in optimizing the development of positive cultures within the institutions of public school. Development of collaborative skills for teachers and educational leaders should be addressed so that collective understanding and communications can be productive and sustained.

The issues of public education are so complex that they demand entirely new approaches. There is a growing recognition that no one person has the sense-making capacity needed to deal with truly complex issues. Research into the application and viability of collective sense-making approaches within all components of public education are warranted.

Conclusion

Since its inception, the vision of public education's promise has been lofty - the cultivation of a citizenry that is ready and able to productively participate in and support the ideals of a democratic society. In contemporary society, the goals have expanded to include issues of globalization and cultural literacy, as the world becomes more interconnected. American society believes that equitable access to appropriate education should produce equitable opportunities for all. A variety of state and federal educational policy initiatives have been rolled out over the past several decades, attempting to make these goals a reality for as many students as possible. However, judging effectiveness of the policies cannot be totally quantitative, focusing only on some measurement of specific reform efforts. It is also necessary to study the processes of change within schools as policy initiatives are developed and implemented. Feedback must focus on the process of change as well as the desired end product: improved teaching and learning.

The inherent challenges are significant. In general, teachers are being asked to teach in distinctly different ways than they themselves were taught or personally experienced. The traditional curriculum was designed to meet societal needs that no longer exist. Leinwand (2004) states

No longer are schools expected to serve as society's primary sorting mechanisms. Instead, schools must become empowering machines.

Schools cannot remain perpetrators of the bell curve, where only some were expected to survive and even fewer to truly thrive; education must be a springboard from which all must attain higher levels (p. 543).

Finally, it can be argued that the most disorienting element to many is the rate of change and therefore, one needs to be aware that there are limits on how much change should be and can be absorbed. Feeling overwhelmed by too much change is a rational human response, for no one can be an expert on everything. An optimal amount of change may be highly individual, nevertheless, awareness that there are limits is important. Those limits may be improved, however.

Education is collaborative and incremental. It requires vertical alignment, coordination, good leadership - and students who care to reciprocate. The success of ...students (is) the work of many hands... (Hahn, 2014, p 80).

When people communicate and work together toward solutions and implementation, much more can be achieved.

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BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Jane Heselton Crowley was born in the State of Maine into a family that valued life-long, liberal arts education. She graduated magna cum laude from Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine with a degree in government studies and was inducted into the Phi Beta Kappa Society. Post-graduate experience in the business sector led to enrollment in the College of Business at the University of Kansas where she earned a masters in business administration. After moves to Chicago and Connecticut, she shifted gears, earning certification as a classroom teacher and then became a middle school teacher in Long Valley, New Jersey. Eventually she and her family returned to Maine, settling in Yarmouth. In 2008, she earned a certificate of advanced studies from the University of Southern Maine, focused in educational leadership. She is a candidate for a Ph. D. in the Muskie School of Public Policy at the University of Southern Maine with a concentration in public policy and educational leadership. She has been elected as a member of member of the Golden Key International Honour Society and The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi.

As classroom teacher for twenty years, she has taught sixth, seventh, and eighth grade social studies, language arts, and mathematics. Her passion is working with students who struggle with reading and writing. She has held a variety of leadership roles within the schools in which she worked: developing curriculum and professional development programming; serving as a literacy coach; and coordinating RtI programming. Above all, she believes that being a teacher, helping students access and appreciate their worlds is a worthy vocation.