

**TEACHERS' WORK IN TRYING TIMES: POLICY, PRACTICE, AND  
PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY**

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by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examined organizational routines and teachers' experiences in two urban public elementary schools. The study advances the scholarship on teachers' work through a nuanced examination of instructional routines in order to illuminate teachers' experiences with accountability based-reforms. Using neoinstitutional theory, this study employed ethnographic methods to examine instructional routines in two schools of varying AYP-status: one high-performing school and one low-performing school. Observations and interviews were conducted with a total of 17 teachers over the course of two school years.

Findings indicated that routines were a recoupling mechanism, used to more closely align teachers' tasks with the goals of accountability policy. The implementation and performance of routines was both similar and distinct between the two schools. There were distinct differences in the intensity and the pervasiveness of mandated instructional routines between schools. However, regardless of AYP-status, routines served to rationalize teachers' instructional tasks by reducing variation in the form and content of classroom instruction. Accordingly, the process of recoupling and the resulting rationalization of teachers' tasks resulted in teachers experiencing reduced professional discretion, depleted intrinsic rewards, and compromised relationships with students and with each other. Under these circumstances, accountability policy moved teaching away from professionalization and undermined efforts to sustain teachers over time.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The tenuous status of teaching remains an ongoing tension in the field of education. Despite waves of school reform that periodically aim to upgrade the status, training, and working conditions of teachers (Quinn, 1997), teaching is still mostly treated as a semi-profession because schools typically fall short on many of the key characteristics associated with professionalization (Ingersoll & Perda, 2008; Lortie, 1975; Milner, 2013b). According to Ingersoll and Perda (2008), movements to professionalize teaching are marked by complications and controversy centered on what it means to be a profession and to professionalize a particular kind of work. For the occupation of teaching, this confusion maps onto waves of education reform that toggle between calls to either control teachers' work or engender teachers' commitment to their work.<sup>1</sup>

Policymakers persistently ignore the topic of teachers' working conditions (Bascia & Rottman, 2010), dismissing it as irrelevant to students' learning outcomes. Yet, the current context of reform, which greatly influences teachers' working conditions, forces this issue to the surface. Accountability policy's focus on student outcomes and equity for all increasingly focuses on the issue of teacher effectiveness - positioning the individual teacher as the most significant variable in a student's academic outcomes (Valli, Croninger & Walters, 2007). At the same time, decreasing confidence in the ability of public schools to significantly improve student outcomes strengthens the federal government's demands for demonstrable annual improvements at the local school

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<sup>1</sup> I intentionally refer to teaching as an occupation because I believe the debate about whether it is a profession or not is unresolved. Though many teachers, including some in this study, view themselves as professionals and their work conditions exhibit some characteristics of professionalized work places, the occupation of teaching still falls short on many key characteristics of professionalized work.

level. Indeed, these are trying times for public school teachers as they are relied upon to improve the performance of the nation's students while their work is subjected to greater controls over what and how they teach. This situation is quite charged in high-poverty urban schools, where federal policies are tied to essential funding and sanctions (Valli & Buese, 2007); thus, policy puts forth a heavier hand in these schools in order to shape teachers' work conditions.

Hoyle (2001) elaborated the relatively generic term *status* and suggested the following three phenomena as a means of doing so: occupational prestige, occupational status (e.g., a profession), and occupational esteem. In my research, I follow Hoyle's lead in considering policymakers' and the public's perception of teaching and whether teaching is treated as a profession, but I use the term in an expanded fashion. Beyond occupational esteem, defined as the regard in which an occupation is held by the general public by virtue of the personal qualities which members are perceived as bringing to their core task (e.g., dedication, competence, and care) (Hoyle, 2001), I argue that status is a lived-experienced, shaped by working conditions.

The extent to which teachers' status fluctuates and/or is targeted by reform is intertwined with larger issues of school performance and the popular perception that public schools are drastically underperforming. While the dialogue on teacher effectiveness is loud and multitudinous, the dialogue on how to organize school working conditions (e.g., organizational structures and sociological features that define teachers' tasks and roles) to recruit and retain highly-effective teachers is muted and marginalized. Accountability policy's emphasis on highly-effective teachers positions the occupation of

teaching as critical to improved student outcomes, as well larger issues of national economic security. This further complicates the status of teachers.

Accountability policy can serve as a mechanism to professionalize teaching because it seemingly elevates the occupational status of public school teachers. However, accountability policy's unrelenting focus on increasing test scores has forced policymakers, at all levels, to direct their attention to classroom teaching, specifying what teachers teach and how they should teach. The result is teachers' work is increasingly controlled as accountability reforms alter teachers' working conditions and exacerbates deprofessionalization by limiting teachers' professional discretion – a teacher's ability to make professional judgments and the capacity to act on those judgments (Boote, 2006). In short, accountability policy gives teachers greater responsibility for student outcomes while removing teacher authority in the classroom. Given the complexity of the current reform climate, in which teachers are both elevated as the most significant element in a child's academic outcomes and deprofessionalized through increased controls on their work, it is critical to understand how schools organize teachers' work and what this means for the experience of teachers.

In this dissertation, I draw from qualitative data collected over a two-year period with teachers in two high-poverty urban schools in order to examine how accountability policy influenced the organization of teachers' work. Through an examination of teachers' tasks and roles, I considered how organizational routines were used to recouple teaching to accountability pressures and what this meant for the experience of teaching. Specifically, I analyzed the role of school status with regard to the implementation of

routines, focusing on teachers' occupational status and professional identity with regard to the experience of teaching.

### **Educational Reforms and the Status of Public School Teachers**

School reform in the United States, as it affects public school teachers' working conditions and status, has undergone three observable waves since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (ANAR, 1983). Embedded in each of these three waves of reform are ideas about the causal relationship between schools as workplaces and school effectiveness. Each wave of reform proposes how to best organize schools and teachers' work, and thus contains explicit and implicit notions about the status of teachers. These reforms and their guiding assumptions illustrate the ongoing debate over the degree to which schools and teachers are and should be controlled by local, state, and federal governments, and the confusion about whether to treat teachers as professionals worthy of exerting influence and discretion over the direction of their work or as employees in need of controls and oversight. Though school reform offers many lines of analysis, for the purpose of this research I briefly consider two: 1) organizational theory and the form it gives to educational organizations, and 2) the structural setting of schools and the consequences for the status and experiences of teachers.

According to Ingersoll (2003a), "a basic tension confronts all organizations – how to harness employee expertise and still meet the simultaneous need for both control and consent, for both accountability and commitment, for both organizational predictability and employee autonomy" (p. 30). This is what Johnson (1990) referred to as the "satisfaction/productivity debate in education" (p. 25). In the field of organizational

theory this tension is framed as “coordination or control,” or as Rowan (1990) described it “commitment or control.” In school reform the tension is often framed as mutually exclusive – professionalizing or bureaucratizing influences on teachers’ work.

Organizational models based on coordination and commitment hold that teaching is a complex and non-routine technology with multiple goals.<sup>2</sup> This approach emphasizes teacher expertise and problem-solving, and assumes that the expansion of teacher authority can enhance teachers’ commitment and improve instruction (Rosenholtz, 1987).

Models of control hold that teaching is a routine technology with clear goals and means, and that a control-based strategy of organizational management can enhance school effectiveness (Rowan, 1990, p. 358). Complicating this further is the *technology of teaching*, which has historically been portrayed as weak and at the very least unclear (Ingersoll, 2003a; Johnson, 1990; Lortie, 1975). That is, the technology of teaching has yet to be both well-defined and well-accepted (e.g., there are few proven, standardized procedures that stakeholders agree constitute good practice). Hence, educational philosophies and reforms, like the three discussed below, are often cyclical and vacillate between these two dominant management strategies and assumptions about the nature and status of teachers.

The first wave of school reform responded to the problem of low achievement in schools identified in the ANAR report. The goal was to ensure that only competent teachers were in classrooms and that only educated students graduated from school

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<sup>2</sup> With regard to teaching, the term *technology* refers to the way in which work is done. More specifically, the *technical core* is “the detailed decisions about what should be taught at any given time, how it should be taught, what students should be expected to learn at any given time, how they should be grouped within classrooms for the purposes of instruction, what they should be required to do to demonstrate their knowledge, and perhaps most importantly, how the learning should be evaluated” (Elmore, 2000)

(Dworkin, 2001). First wave reforms were designed to strengthen the control and coordination of schools and the teachers who inhabited them. Mandated curricula, licensing exams for teachers, and competency tests for students were just a few approaches that reflected the values of a control oriented management strategy and the rationalization of instruction through a bureaucratic model. In addition to curricular controls, such as curriculum alignment and pacing policies, behavioral controls such as training programs and increased evaluation were also popular at this time. Prescriptions for improving schools during the first wave of reform reflected a distinct assumption about the structure of schools and the occupational status of teachers; teachers would become more productive and schools more efficient with standardized training, explicit directions and close supervision (Johnson, 1990 p. 25).<sup>3</sup>

Second wave reforms were driven by the argument that bureaucratic controls over schools were incompatible with the professional autonomy of teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1984) and potentially damaging to teacher morale (Dworkin, 2001). Policy reports (e.g., Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986; The Holmes Group, 1986) shifted the focus from criticizing and controlling teachers' work to making recommendations for improvements in teachers' working conditions as a means to improve instruction and enhance teacher commitment. In this view, organizational effectiveness is enhanced by lateral patterns of communication, and technical work is guided by information and advice from colleagues rather than by centralized and standardized task prescriptions (Rowan, 1990). The strategy of the second wave reformers was to transfer authority for educational design to teachers, making them key

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<sup>3</sup> Occupational status (see Hoyle, 2001) refers to the whether or not teaching is a profession.

change agents in education, and thus unleashing the energy and expertise of committed teachers. Proposals included differentiating teaching roles, creating career ladders to enhance the occupational status of teaching, and implementing a national certification program for master teachers.

Third wave reforms emerged in the early to mid-1990s. According to Dworkin (2001), “the third wave depended upon the use of state-mandated standardized achievement tests, systems of rating schools and school districts, and holding students, teachers, and school administrators accountable for the results of those tests” (p. 72). Taking Dworkin’s definition as a starting point, the third wave continued and culminated in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). NCLB used financial incentives to restructure federal-state relationships, igniting the current climate of accountability measures aimed at teachers’ work.

NCLB spurred reforms at the state level, including the development of standards and assessments, improved data systems, and school turnaround strategies that have had a powerful impact on local teaching conditions, (Bascia & Rottman, 2001; Superfine, Gottlieb, & Smylie, 2012). Most significant, NCLB focused the nation’s attention on student outcomes, as measured by state-standardized test scores, while targeting the technical core of schooling by specifying what teachers teach, at times how they should teach, and acceptable levels of student mastery (Spillane & Kenney, 2012). The system of rewards, sanctions, and interventions impacts school organizations and invariably creates important differences across schools in the same field. Embedded in this wave of reform, particularly in low-performing schools, is a return to control-oriented strategies that move public school teaching away from professionalism and towards the adoption of

standardized practices that undermine or eliminate teacher authority over curricular and instructional decisions (Wills & Haymore Sandholtz, 2009).

Current state and federal systemic reform efforts are impacting education at the local level (Hallett, 2010; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006; Sauder & Espeland, 2009; Spillane, Parise & Sherer, 2010). The modern standards and accountability movement has widened the gap between teachers and teacher management by emphasizing a technical view of teaching in which major decisions are prescribed through policy mandates, and routine tasks are conducted by teachers complying with mandates. Scholarship has revealed a great deal about the ways in which schools are holding teachers more accountable, but there is much less attention on the ways in which accountability is experienced at the classroom level and what this means for the experiences of public school teachers.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Research on teachers' working conditions examines how regulatory, organizational, material, social, and normative factors within schools affect students' and teachers' experiences. This line of research calls attention to the school as a workplace and how that determines what it means to teach in a particular school. In doing so, this research focuses on understandings about the relationship between working conditions and teachers' experiences. Scholars examining teachers' working conditions have emphasized features of teachers' work such as professional discretion (Johnson, 1990), intrinsic rewards (Johnson, 1990; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989), isolation (Ingersoll, 2003a, Johnson, 19990; Lortie, 1975) and goal consensus (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003;

Rosenholtz, 1989). This body of scholarship suggested that policy makers and reformers pay attention to the ways particular strategies shape teachers' working conditions because the environments in which teachers work matter (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2011).

Research has linked teachers' working conditions to teacher turnover (Ingersoll, 2001), personal and collective efficacy (Goddard, Hoy & Woolfolk, 2004), satisfaction (Conley, Bacharach, & Bauer, 1989), commitment (Little & Bartlett, 2002), and even student achievement (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2011). Yet, little explicit attention is given to the relationships between teachers' working conditions and the occupational esteem of teachers. While significant attention is given to how to increase the professionalism of teaching, little attention is given to how working conditions transmit messages to teachers and shape their personal experiences, ultimately challenging their professional identity – the beliefs and values about what is good and right in terms of children and the profession. Issues of turnover, efficacy, satisfaction, commitment, and student achievement are directly related to how teachers' work is organized (i.e., coordinated or controlled) and the embedded messages about the status of teaching.

Research on teacher turnover and attrition illuminates the connections between working conditions, status, and efforts to reform the U.S. public school system. Teachers' dissatisfaction, particularly with their occupational status, and the ebbs and flows of increasing and decreasing professional discretion, contributes to one of the most pressing and persistent policy problems – high rates of teacher turnover, particularly in high-poverty urban schools. On the cusp of first and second wave reforms, Darling-Hammond (1984) argued that until teaching becomes a more attractive career alternative, the problem of attracting and retaining good teachers will undermine the success of other

reforms intended to improve educational programs. Positioning teacher turnover as one symptom of the structural problems of the teaching profession, Darling-Hammond argued that until teaching embraced features that characterize most modern professions such as rigorous entry requirements, supervised induction, autonomous performance, peer-defined standards of practice, and increased responsibility with increased competence; the nation risked facing shortages of qualified teachers. Similarly, Conley, Bacharach, and Bauer (1989), considering the issue of teacher turnover, argued that reform movements tend to deal with teacher commitment and retention without dealing with school organizational and work structures. That is, reforms typically neglect to consider what attracts and retains individuals interested in teaching, and often fail to enhance teachers' sense of professionalism, ultimately decreasing their career satisfaction (Conley, Bacharach, & Bauer, 1989 p. 59).

The focus on teacher working conditions and their relationship to teacher attrition has received attention elsewhere. In an analysis of survey data Ingersoll (2003b) also concluded that teacher shortages were related to organizational characteristics. His analysis revealed staffing problems were rooted in a “revolving door” environment where dissatisfied teachers departed their jobs in order to pursue other work. Job dissatisfaction was typically linked to low salaries, lack of support from the school administration, student discipline problems, and lack of teacher influence over decision-making (Ingersoll, 2003b p. 16). In his view, turnover was a symptom of organizational arrangements that were counterproductive to the unique nature of school organizations that rely on extensive interactions among participants. In an extension of this work, Ingersoll (2007) explored issues of power and control and argued that although school

principals and governing boards often have substantial control over many key decisions in schools, teachers usually do not. The degree of power and control that employees hold over workplace decisions is one of the most important features of professionalism and a key indicator of an occupation's status. Ingersoll's (2007) data revealed that teachers, compared with others in more traditional professions, have limited control over decisions that influence their work (p. 21). Though teaching involves a great deal of responsibility, it involves little real power, and thus continues to be treated as a "semi-profession" by reformers and policymakers (Ingersoll & Perda, 2008; Lortie, 1975; Milner, 2013b).

Though schools exhibit some characteristics of professionalized work places, certainly more or less depending on reform agendas and local leadership, they typically fall short on many of the key characteristics. At this moment in school reform, issues of control should be a key workplace consideration. Control, whether it is conceived of as influence over school decisions (Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo, 2009), autonomy in the form of classroom-based decision-making (Renzulli, Macpherson Parrott, & Beattie, 2011), or professional discretion (Boote, 2006) is associated with teacher retention. More importantly, given the tenuous occupational status of third wave teachers, it is important to understand the experiences of teachers caught between opposing forces that give them more responsibility for improving student outcomes while simultaneously removing their authority by exerting controls and limiting professional discretion.

Though teacher turnover presents a significant and costly problem to school systems, I argue that it is narrowly framed as issues of recruitment and retention. It is my contention that policy and reform must consider how to recruit, retain, and *sustain* teachers such that teachers experience pleasure and joy in the course of their work, and

feel supported to positively participate in school improvement efforts. By including sustainment as an element of this issue, I point toward teachers' experiences and meanings regarding practice and consider the intrinsic rewards associated with teaching. While we know working conditions are a critical component of teacher retention, intrinsic rewards are an important and underexplored element in attracting, retaining, and sustaining public school teachers. At a time when teachers are "short on power, long on responsibility" (Ingersoll, 2007), it is essential to know if the conditions of teachers' work are such that teaching is still an attractive and rewarding career option despite its tenuous status.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To examine how teachers experience and make meaning of their work under accountability policy, I draw on neoinstitutional theories of organizations. Rooted in sociology, neoinstitutional theory considers both how organizations change and how members of the organization make meaning of the process. Neoinstitutional theory argues that the formal structure of organizations reflects the "myths" of the institutional environment – the prevailing concepts of how organizations should operate including their structures and the implementation of technical work (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). According to Meyer and Rowan (1977), organizations increase their legitimacy and their survival prospects by incorporating practices and procedures defined by the institutional environment. Yet, the formal structures of organizations often conflicts with the actual demands of the work within the organization. Consequently, many organizations, especially schools, maintain ceremonial compliance with the formal structure by buffering (e.g., limiting interaction and avoiding inspection) their daily work activities

and becoming loosely coupled, “building gaps between the formal structure and the actual work activities” (Meyer and Rowan, 1977, p. 341).

The term *coupling* is used to describe the interdependent elements of organizations and when they are more or less responsive to (e.g., tightly coupled), and more or less distinctive from each other (e.g., loosely coupled) (Orton & Weick, 1990). Institutional theory has largely used the terms *loosely coupled* and *decoupled* to account for the relatively weak influence of the policy environment on school and classroom practices (Spillane et al., 2011 p. 3). Loose coupling proved to be an important concept in the study of organizations because it is used to explain how an organization can adhere to demands for change while actually maintaining the status quo – that is, the term became an explanation for why student achievement remained low despite multiple waves of school reform (Bidwell, 2001; Orton & Weick, 1990). The concept of coupling is particularly relevant in the realm of school reform and educational policy, where schools are often viewed as loosely structured and relatively uncoordinated and under-controlled.

Neoinstitutional theory makes a conceptual distinction between *organizations* and *institutions*, a distinction that is also important to my study. The school as an institution can be seen as both a formal administrative system for conducting activities around the idea of education, and as the agency responsible for the reproduction of society (Berg, 2007 p. 584). Organizations are smaller units, which carry out specific work. In Berg’s conception (2007), organizations are “the associations through which people act” and institutions are “the interests, group-related norms and conditions for action, which they have to follow” (p. 581). Another way to conceptualize the relationship between

individual schools as organizations situated within a larger institutional environment is to employ the neoinstitutional concept of *organizational field*. An organizational field comprises the set of institutions that are either directly connected to a school (e.g., regulatory agencies, union associations, state departments of education), or share structurally equivalent positions (e.g., organizations that produce similar services or products) (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). For this study, the organizational field is narrowed to focus on the school district as an institution that generates the norms and conditions for local school organizations to follow. Individual schools are treated as organizations that conduct activities that correspond to the institutional values of the school district, which in turn reflects the values of the larger field it is part of. In this conception the school district is the institution and local schools are organizations, but it is important to note that as the field widens the district can also be an organization while state and federal education structures take on institutional status.

Recent scholarship in the field of neoinstitutional theory argued that over time the theory became less engaged with the local dynamics of real working organizations which are inhabited by people and their activities (Hallett, 2010; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006). Whereas old institutionalists considered the values, norms, and attitudes of individuals in an organization, neoinstitutionalists used a wider lens to explain homogeneity and diffusion of practices across organizations (Hallett, 2010), asserting that rules and classifications are the stuff of which institutions are made (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). While this work has been useful in explaining similarities *between* organizations, it has paid less attention to the activities and agencies of individuals *within* the organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Hallett, 2010). This is problematic because organizations

are not static categories of meaning. Consequently, this scholarship has largely ignored the people who inhabit school organizations and failed to capture how meaning is made in that setting. If neoinstitutionalism is going to support the contention that people's actions within organizations are shaped, in part, by political and social forces, then the theory must return to its micro-sociological roots in order to explain how institutional myths are absorbed in organizations and how they are understood. My study "inhabits" (see Hallett, 2010) institutionalism by exploring teachers' experiences with recoupling, the process of tightening the couplings between institutional myths and organizational practices (Espeland, 1998; Hallett, 2010), and the meanings they make from this experience. Despite emerging neoinstitutional research, we still know very little about teachers' responses to the increased controls and conflicting messages about occupational status that characterize the current climate of reform. In particular, we do not know how changes to the context of teaching influence teachers' perceptions of the occupational esteem and intrinsic rewards associated with their work. My dissertation contributes to neoinstitutional research by examining local school conditions and teachers' work activities, and extends it by including the meanings teachers make from these conditions. In this study, I explore school practices legitimated through the institutional myth of accountability (see Hallett, 2010) at two schools of varying AYP status, to learn about the ways teachers interpret this myth, and discern how this myth impacts teachers' experiences.

### **Research Questions**

The current policy climate has contributed to a growing sense that the public education system is failing to adequately educate U.S. students. National attention has

focused on test scores, the achievement gap, and international competition. One result is that teachers' work has been placed at the center of the analysis of educational ineffectiveness. As researchers and policymakers focus on achieving significant reforms for students, via reforming teacher practices, it is important to understand the ways in which the educational policy agenda has changed the climate of schooling and begun to exert greater influence over teachers' work. Placing teachers' work at the center of the analysis of public schools' ineffectiveness has resulted in a moment in history characterized by existential questions about the occupational status and esteem associated with teaching. Over the past decade federal educational initiatives have increasingly focused attention on teacher quality, student assessment as a means to evaluate teacher quality, and data systems as a form of public accountability for teachers (Day & Smethem, 2009). The nature of this situation, and the challenge to the teacher workforce, make this a transitional moment in the history of public school teaching.

Schools were neoinstitutionalism's foundational case. Historically, institutional accounts of schools as organizations asserted that schools and classrooms are loosely coupled and largely buffered from higher levels of change and/or scrutiny (Arum, 2004; Coburn, 2004; Davies & Quirke, 2007; Hallett, 2010; Hamilton, Stecher, Russell, Marsh & Miles, 2008; Meyer and Rowan, 1977), but the notion that schools are loosely coupled is subject to growing debate. With the passage of NCLB there is greater emphasis on monitoring organizational performance at the individual school level and evaluating teachers' based on student outcomes. Thus, it is harder for teachers to act as "street-level bureaucrats," (Lipsky, 1980) making decisions behind closed doors.

Under NCLB, educational reforms move in a top-down manner. National actions influence state actions, state actions influence district actions, district actions influence school actions, which in turn give shape to organizational routines and the ways in which teachers understand their work. Ultimately NCLB and other notable school reform policies aim to promote positive changes in student achievement; however, research cannot ignore that these policies rely on the work of teachers, which makes it important to understand how teachers experience and interpret changes to their work.

In exploring teachers' work through an examination of organizational routines, I document teachers' understandings of how their work is shaped, and the meanings they make about being a teacher at a time when they are identified as the most critical element in a child's academic outcomes yet constrained by tight controls that dictate the content and form of their instruction. In particular, I highlight the ways that two different schools have come to organize their core work, instruction and classroom practices, in response to the larger state and national climate of accountability, and the relationship between these forms and teachers' experiences. Because educational policy is mediated by both individual teachers and school organizations, research needs to better understand how organizational routines shape teachers' work. This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does accountability policy influence the organization of schools and impact teachers' occupational status?
2. How are public schools using organizational routines to recouple teachers' work to accountability pressures?
  - How does school/AYP status influence the implementation of organizational routines at two different schools?
3. What does the experience of recoupling mean for teachers' professional identity?

Following Feldman and Pentland (2003), I use the term *organizational routines* to refer to a “repetitive recognizable pattern of independent actions, involving multiple actors” (p. 95). To count as an organizational routine something has to be repeated over time, recognizable to the organization’s members and involve two or more staff members. Organizational routines in schools are about actions and interactions such as, grade group meetings, leadership team meetings, assessment schedules, data management, observations, and lesson planning. Routines serve various functions in schools, but typically they structure day-to-day practice. Coupling, as mentioned above, refers to how organizations are made up of interdependent elements that are more or less responsive to each other, and more or less distinctive from each other (Weick, 1976). Some scholarship has emphasized organizational routines as a mechanism for recoupling, arguing that mandated instructional routines and techniques embed regulations into the formal structure of schools (Hallett, 2010; Spillane et al., 2011), but little work has examined recoupling and buffering in action.

### **Significance of the Study**

The nature of teaching varies across organizational settings; yet, very few studies have looked at the school as a workplace, the organizational routines that shape teachers’ work and how these might impact teachers’ experiences and meanings about their work. The confusion over how to treat teachers (Conley & Cooper, 1991) and their subsequent occupational status has been debated through each wave of educational reform and manifested in the school as a workplace. Teachers are either glorified as public servants, spending endless hours and countless sums of money in order to meet the needs of the

nation's public school students, or vilified as lazy and too entrenched in union politics to accept accountability for public school students' poor test scores and graduation rates. Teacher turnover is a symptom of this unresolved debate and one way that teachers express dissatisfaction with their workplace conditions (Ingersoll, 2003b, 2007).

As noted above, successive waves of school reform have wrestled with the issue of teachers' occupational status. Teachers are at the center of rhetoric and conflict among school reforms that fluctuate between favoring bureaucratic or professional controls. This is especially relevant today as the institutional environment of schooling emphasizes the significance of teacher quality and effectiveness while simultaneously increasing the controls on teachers' work. Schools are under intense pressure to produce results in the form of improved standardized test scores. Accordingly, the technical core of schooling, teachers' work in the classroom, remains the focus of local, state, and federal policymakers' agendas for change (Spillane et al., 2011). Educational scholarship is beginning to consider the influence of external mandates and reform efforts on teachers' roles and practices (Bailey, 2000; O'Day, 2002; Spillane, 1999; Valli & Buese, 2007). Yet, there remains confusion about how to best organize teachers' work so as to retain and sustain teachers. Policy and reform typically assume a causal relationship between teachers' work and student outcomes, and often seek to reform the former in order to impact the latter. Accepting and applying this logic to the crafting of educational reforms, especially those which aim to build capacity in urban public schools plagued by high rates of teacher turnover, requires an understanding of the ways in which teachers' work should be organized to produce the best possible scenario – teachers rewarded by

the experience of teaching, and committed to remaining and positively participating in school improvement efforts.

Proposals to improve school systems recognize the central role of teachers in improving schools. Indeed, the major educational policy initiatives of the last 30 years: *A Nation at Risk*, *No Child Left Behind*, and *Race to the Top*, have situated teachers' work as the locus of change. Ironically, as each new reform and policy proposal symbolizes the failure of a previous policy, little has been done to examine the possible disjuncture between the assumptions of the reform model and the realities of the school as a workplace – an organization with work routines that respond to the institutional environment, and inhabited by people (e.g., teachers, students, and administrators) doing things together.

Teachers' voices are largely absent from the dialogue on school reform and few reforms consider the experience and meanings teachers make in the course of their work. This is problematic for school reform efforts and sustaining teachers' work commitments. Though some research explores policy pressures at the classroom level and the subsequent changes to teachers' tasks and roles (Spillane et al., 2011; Valli & Buese, 2007), the continued attention to test scores in the U.S. drives increasing demands and controls on teachers, and creates a need to examine the relationships among accountability policy, the organization of teachers' work, and teachers' experiences.

Large-scale reforms and generalized prescriptions for teaching need to consider the features of the workplace (e.g., organizational routines) as well as the features of the work produced. Though certain characteristics of schools are remarkably similar from

site to site, and have remained so for quite some time, there are important differences as well. Johnson's work (1990) demonstrated that workers care deeply about the conditions and context of their work. Furthermore, assumptions about how workplaces should be organized have a significant effect on the way people see themselves and how they behave at work (Johnson, 1990). As policy calls for reforms aimed at teachers, research needs to examine how differences in school settings create particular organizational routines and working environments for teachers, and what this means for the experience of teaching. Since reform and redesign strategies require some degree of teacher cooperation it is important to understand how teachers' experience their workplaces and how the organizational structure of their schools affects this experience.

This dissertation draws from extensive data collected over a two-year period with teachers in two schools to analyze how organizational routines were used as a recoupling mechanism between teachers' work and accountability policy in order to illuminate teachers' experiences under accountability-based reforms. In the chapters that follow, I will show that accountability pressures restructured teachers' working conditions, organizational routines rationalized teachers' work, and that this experience depleted teachers' intrinsic rewards and compromised their relationships with students and with each other.

### **Dissertation Structure**

Chapter two presents a comprehensive review of the literature and theoretical framework that informed this study. Chapter three addresses the design of the study and presents the relevant methodological and analytical considerations. Chapter four

provides important context, describing how accountability policy restructured the organizational field of schooling in the city, and argues that restructuring introduced competing ideas for the design of school and the organization of teachers' work. Chapter five examines how institutional pressures informed the implementation of routines in two different public schools while simultaneously rationalizing teachers' work. In this chapter I argue that the implementation of routines varied according to school status; however, pressures arose and made the schools look more similar than different. Chapter six details teachers' meanings - the ways teachers' experienced a rationalization, or standardization, of work and how this impacted teacher identity. I show that as instructional routines narrowed curriculum, teachers found their professional discretion reduced and their intrinsic rewards depleted. Further, this work context crowded out teachers' opportunities to develop meaningful relationships with students and with each other. Chapter seven presents a summary of overall findings and the implications of this study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Scholars and practitioners have long grappled with the nature of teachers' working conditions. A vast body of research on teachers' work and teachers' lives has emerged, employing a variety of lenses (e.g., organizational, sociological, and psychological) to examine the school as a workplace and consider what teaching does to teachers (Waller, 1967). This research illustrates the relationship between teachers' working conditions and teachers' experiences and meaning-making. Below, I review these lines of research. I begin with early sociological examinations of teaching in order to ground this study in the sociological tradition and to establish a starting point for scholarship concerning accounts of teaching. Next, I examine a tradition of research that extends these early works by considering the school as a workplace with particular attention to how the workplace affects the lives of teachers. Then, I review critical research in education that illuminates the connections between policy initiatives and what actually happens at the local level of practice in schools. This work draws attention to the gaps that exist between the rhetoric of teachers' work and the reality of it. Finally, the majority of this literature review focuses on the impact of external mandates on teachers' work with particular attention to high-stakes test-based accountability and the ways in which it has shaped features of the school as a workplace. This line of research captures contemporary studies of schools as workplaces and teachers' experiences. Though it is a burgeoning body of scholarship, little attention has been paid to the ways in which external pressures become absorbed and enacted within school organizations, and the ways in which they shape teachers' experiences. I draw primarily on research conducted

in the U.S. While there is a wealth of international research on the lives and experiences of teachers (Day & Smethem, 2009; Kelchtermans, 1996; Nias, 1996; Troman, 2008) I focus mostly on research conducted in the U.S. as my concern is with how U.S. policy is absorbed by school organizations and mediated by teachers.

Following the review of literature on teachers' work, this chapter explores neoinstitutional theory and the concept of coupling as a theoretical lens through which schools as organizations, and the resulting work of teachers, can be studied and interpreted. The macro-micro approach advocated by recent applications of neoinstitutional theory is an ideal approach for examining how schools are absorbing external pressures and what that means for teachers' work, their status, and their experiences. Recent applications of neoinstitutional theory to school settings (e.g., Hallett, 2010) are drawing on elements of symbolic interactionism to address the subjective meanings that teachers ascribe to their work settings. This is similar to Waller's early examination of teachers that emphasized the concept of self (e.g., teacher identity), and because teacher identity has largely been left out of the discussion on schools and policy in recent years, neoinstitutional theory is a good fit to extend this body of scholarship.

### **The Sociology of Teaching**

Waller's (1967) *The Sociology of Teaching* is an important foundational study of teaching and schools that explored the occupation of teaching within the institutional context of schools. Hoping to contribute to the reform of teaching and learning in America's schools, Waller took the insights of teachers and the school as a social world

as a starting point. A central question guiding Waller's study was: What does teaching do to teachers? In asking this question Waller foregrounded much of the research discussed below – illuminating how the behaviors required by an occupation can affect and shape the lives of teachers.

In addition to the social standing of teachers, Waller's central question led him to deeply consider teacher personality. He commented on numerous features of the school as a workplace that shaped teachers' experience and thus the construction of teacher "personality" or identity. He argued that the teacher's personality tended to organize around expectations put upon teachers and social relationships between the teacher and the community, but more importantly between the teacher and students. Waller's analysis suggested that teachers' tasks and roles produced characteristics in the teacher that were then used to describe "teacher types." That is, qualities, such as a stiff and formal manner, are engendered in a teacher's personality by the teaching experience (p.381).

In analyzing schools and teachers, Waller framed his recommendations for improving the teaching profession around an image of schools as living organisms, and contrasted this with the institutional formalism he observed. In Waller's conception institutional formalism transformed means into ends and focused on parts rather than the whole (p. 442). For Waller, institutional formalism was captured in the routinization of the behavior of students and teachers and threatened the developmental and learning needs of students. Waller's contention that institutional formalism constrained teachers' interactions with students and narrowly defined success remains highly relevant for understanding the impact of today's external mandates.

In the same tradition, Lortie (1975) aimed to provide insight into the nature of teaching as an occupation. Lortie's book dealt with a variety of issues in the organization of teachers' work, delving into the social position of teachers and the various sentiments teachers hold toward their work. He examined the processes which keep the occupation of teaching going – recruitment, socialization, and the system of rewards – and found that “such processes foster particular outlooks among teachers, specifically the orientations of conservatism, individualism, and presentism” (p. 207-208). He argued that that these patterns derived from the structure of the occupation and the meanings teachers attached to their work. This conclusion was consistent with Waller's findings regarding “teacher types” and the “influence of the occupation.”

Drawing on sociological studies of institutions and occupations, Lortie examined continuities and discontinuities in selected features of teaching to provide background for his analyses of the occupation of teaching. In doing so Lortie identified the balance between continuity and change within the occupation – a balance that has been revisited in numerous examinations of teachers' work (see Apple, 1982; Bailey, 2000; Bartlett, 2004; Cohen & Spillane, 1992; Cuban, 1984; Hargreaves, 1992; Rowan, 1998). One such feature Lortie identified was “the pattern of cellular growth,” comparing the structure of school buildings to egg crates that promote teacher separation rather than interdependence. Based on this feature, Lortie identified consequences for teaching - linking teacher separation to diminished collegiality and high turnover - and potential benefits - claiming that cellular arrangements permitted teachers' latitude (e.g., autonomy and/or discretion) in concentrating their efforts toward areas of the school day that were

more likely to produce psychic rewards.<sup>4</sup> Despite these seeming contradictions, and the importance of psychic rewards in teachers' work experiences, Lortie cautioned against too casual a view of peer relationships among teachers. Lortie's work was quite prescient, as teacher isolation and issues of collegueship, autonomy, and psychic rewards emerged in later examinations of teachers' work and are still fundamental to teachers' experiences today.

### **Schools as Workplaces**

Examinations of schools as workplaces provide rich descriptions of how schools as organizations influence both teachers' decisions and experiences. These works illustrate the dynamic relations in schools (e.g., between learning goals, learning opportunities, and teachers' experiences) and offer a view of school organizations and the teachers who inhabit them. Johnson (1990), Rosenholtz (1987) and Huberman (1993) are three such authors whose works exemplify this tradition by presenting comprehensive accounts of school organization and its effects on the nature of teaching. In these works, the issue of what teaching is, how it is performed, and how it shapes the experiences of teachers cannot be separated from the organization in which it occurred.

Like Waller (1967) and Lortie (1975) before her, Johnson's (1990) account of teachers' work considered the features of schools as workplaces and their influence on the occupation of teaching. Johnson's work was a response to the alarm raised by ANAR's declaration that U.S. schools were failing and the subsequent search for a remedy. With the intention to address a gap in earlier research that largely focused on the

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<sup>4</sup> The term *psychic reward* refers to what teachers find satisfying in the course of their work. This concept is explored in greater detail below.

act of teaching and the interactions of teachers and students, Johnson brought the workplace and the context of teaching as it is experienced by teachers into sharp focus. The aim of this research was to come to a better understanding of what it meant to work in schools, an understanding that would facilitate explorations of the interaction of the workplace and instruction, and to identify potential changes that would promote good teaching and better learning (p. XX).

Through an analysis of interviews and written descriptions of individual's work, Johnson inductively developed a model of the workplace that captured shared features across different workplace settings. Her method revealed that work and workplaces are similarly influenced by an array of physical, organizational, sociological, economic, political, cultural, and psychological features (p.12). In an effort to further distinguish schools as workplaces, Johnson identified and traced distinctive features of teaching to the task and technology of the work as well as its unique social and historical conventions. One notable feature derived from the relatively unspecified technology of teaching was the need for discretion in teachers' work, which then makes teaching challenging to supervise and evaluate. Other features derived from the history of the work include: 1) teachers' reliance on intrinsic rewards given the historically low status and low compensation associated with teaching, 2) the isolation of work given the "cellular pattern of organization" (Lortie, 1975), and 3) the influence of beliefs and values that originated in the movement to bureaucratize public education in the early 1900s. Although schools are remarkably similar from site to site, there are also important differences as well. Johnson asserted that the character of the school as a workplace

affects “the work that even the most talented, highly motivated, well-intentioned teachers can do there” (p.11).

Johnson (1990) considered different features of the school as a workplace and their effects on the tasks of teaching. She described how inadequate resources and bureaucratic structures impeded teachers in their work, the importance of close home/school relationships, the need to reduce isolation and promote collegiality among teachers, and the importance of both extrinsic (i.e. competitive salaries) and intrinsic rewards. Furthermore, she raised questions about teachers’ lack of voice in school governance, and the failures of school organizations to promote professional learning and growth among teachers. In doing so, Johnson set the stage for subsequent research examining features of the school as a workplace in relation to teachers’ experiences.

Rosenholtz (1989) grounded her study of schools and teachers in the recurring conceptual themes identified in the “effective schools” research. Though she considered the complexities of schools as workplaces, she began with the problem of goal consensus – “how to unify and mobilize teachers in pursuit of the same instructional goals” (p.5) and positioned this as an important feature that can differentiate more successful schools from less successful schools. Rosenholtz’s methodological decision to take teachers’ subjective experiences as a starting point to demonstrate that school organization affects the lives of teachers places her alongside scholars like Johnson (1990), who argued that the organization of schools renders meaning to the nature of teaching.

With a focus on goal consensus, Rosenholtz (1989) presented a detailed accounting of teachers’ experiences, showing that ambiguous goals could lead to greater

instructional uncertainty and at times wide latitude that fostered isolation from colleagues. Furthermore, shared teaching goals, or a lack thereof, were important to teachers' learning opportunities. Additionally, Rosenholtz took on teachers' workplace commitment arguing that commitment is a direct function of professional fulfillment as determined by three workplace conditions: 1) teachers' empowerment (i.e., their task autonomy and discretion) gives them the sense that student growth and development results directly from their own instructional efforts, 2) learning opportunities provide teachers a sense of ongoing challenge and continuous growth that makes greater mastery and control of the environment possible, and 3) teachers' psychic rewards ensure their continuous contributions to the school (p. 7). According to Rosenholtz (1989), the absence of these conditions has profound effects for teachers' workplace commitment.

Rosenholtz's work around goal consensus is important because much can be learned about the purpose of schools and the nature of teachers' experiences by examining workday routines. This is particularly important to consider today as the goals of schooling under accountability and high-stakes testing are more explicitly defined and more forcefully thrust upon teachers. More important, Rosenholtz's insights into workplace conditions and commitment demonstrated that teachers' productive contributions to their school settings were a direct function of the professional fulfillment they derived from their work. Given that multiple waves of reform have addressed teachers' work and current iterations of accountability reform are dramatically impacting it yet again, this argument provides support for the continued exploration of workplace conditions, teachers' experiences, and the status of teaching.

Though Huberman's (1993) *The Lives of Teachers* examines teachers in Switzerland, his work is important to the discussion of schools as workplaces. Huberman (1993) asked teachers to reflect on their work and from that drew themes familiar to teachers' in the U.S. Looking at how teachers change and develop throughout their careers, Huberman considered the stages of life in the classroom and how teachers were influenced by the school organization. Several themes, such as rapport with students, mastery of pedagogy, and motivation have been considered in the previously mentioned works. However, Huberman also considered the effects of the organizational context – when it was mentioned positively by teachers and when they were critical of it. Smooth transitions into teaching, supportive administrators, and stable teaching contracts encouraged teachers to look favorably upon the organization that employed them. On the contrary, a lack of support, “the weight of the system,” and routinization led to unfavorable feelings and was sometimes used to explain an individual's doubts about teaching as a career.

Huberman's (1993) observations about routinization are particularly relevant to the current context of U.S. public schools, in which teachers' tasks have become increasingly controlled and standardized. Huberman attributed teacher disenchantment, loss of enthusiasm, and a sense of stagnation to routinization. Though the context of routinization was different then, the concept is relevant today. While we know accountability policy influences classroom instruction (see chapter 1), research has paid less attention to the impact on teachers' experiences, particularly their professional identity.

### Critical Research in Education

Like the research described above, critical research in education is interested in the conditions and circumstances of teachers' work. For the most part, the works discussed take change as a starting point, and emphasize the context of change (when and where it is developed and implemented) as well as the human-side of educational change (e.g., teachers' voices, experiences, and meaning-making). This work draws on understandings about the nature of teaching as an occupation (e.g., rewards/incentives, uncertainty, individualism/isolation, etc.), and illustrates the many inherent tensions of teachers as individuals who are members of institutionalized organizations. Whereas extensive studies of American schooling (Goodlad, 2004; U.S. Department of Education *ANAR*, 1983) investigated nationwide patterns in schools, these works zoom in and take a closer look. By peering into classrooms and working with teachers this scholarship illuminated the connections between policy initiatives and what happens at the local level, drawing attention to the gap between reform rhetoric and teachers' reality.

Apple and Weiss' (1983), *Ideology and Practice in Schooling*, responded to a tradition of research that focused on how to get students to learn more while ignoring the context in which schools exist. Each chapter in their book addressed what happens at the level of practice in schools while arguing that there is a need to interpret schools more broadly by considering their social, cultural, and structural influences. Taking on the relationships between education, culture (lived culture and commodified culture, see p. 27), and economy through examinations of the organization, transmission and assessment of knowledge, curricular form and control, and classroom management, Apple and Weiss aimed to supplement interpretive studies of schools with structural analysis. In doing so

they set an important precedent for exploring the relationships between societal and school structures and teachers' work lives.

Extending her earlier work regarding the context in which teachers made curricular decisions, McNeil's (1986) *Contradictions of Control: School Structure and School Knowledge* raised serious concerns about the efficacy of policy solutions, such as ANAR, that suggest tightened control on students, teachers, and curricula. Aiming to show how the administrative context of four different high schools affected the content of the curriculum in classrooms, McNeil drew attention to larger issues of control and educational reform claiming, "The language of control has become the language of education reform" (1986, p. xvii).

McNeil found classrooms lacking in rich and engaging curriculum, in complex knowledge and activities, and in effort from teachers and students. Rather than indicting the quality and professional status of teachers, as ANAR did, McNeil argued that the quality of classroom teaching and learning reflected the responses of teachers and students to the organizational context of their schools. She concluded that policy pressures meant to reform schools by strengthening management controls were putting in tension two traditionally distinct domains, management and instruction, by threatening the professional role of educators. This finding was most pronounced in schools that favored controls over learning, where teachers felt increasingly undermined and professionally threatened. Like Goodlad (2004) before her and Johnson (1990) after her, McNeil noted that beyond the obvious sameness of schools are clear differences in the organizational structures that powerfully affect teachers' experiences. This point is important to the design of my study as McNeil's assertion calls for further examination of

the school as a workplace, particularly at a time when schools are classified and organized based on AYP-status.

Following Lortie's (1975) lead, Cohn and Kottkamp (1993) and Provenzo and McCloskey (1996) assessed change in the experience of teaching. Drawing on the same set of data these two sets of authors pursued inquiries about teachers and the meanings they find in their work. Though these works took different approaches to the same data, they both emphasized the context of schooling and the impact of change on the experiences of teachers. Taking the classroom as the level of analysis, Cohn and Kottkamp (1993) confronted the tensions between "stability and change" and "learning and control" while giving voice to teachers' stories of how their work had become more difficult and less rewarding.

Cohn and Kottkamp attributed a great deal of the change teachers' experienced to larger societal changes; however, they also considered policy shifts and examined teachers' responses to state-level first-wave reform mandates spanning such areas as graduation requirements, curriculum and instruction, and teacher evaluation. Within these reforms teachers perceived limits on their professional discretion, the displacement of their individual goals, and general increases in "dysfunction" accompanied by feelings of confusion, pressure, stress, and vulnerability. While one might consider the two forces of change (i.e., societal change and policy change) conceptually distinct, Cohn and Kottkamp concluded that teachers were telling a story in which a, "culturally derived change in the form of different and more challenging students and parents gave rise to a 'constructed,' deliberately planned change through which external authorities specified how teachers were to handle the problem resulting from natural change" (p. 194). This

conclusion echoed the work of McNeil (1986) and Apple and Weiss (1983) who all argued that schools responded to changes in society by increasing controls on teachers' work at the expense of meaningful learning.

Provenzo & McCloskey (1996) were similarly concerned with change. They found that the fundamental reasons why people were drawn to teaching and the types of individuals who derived a sense of accomplishment from its demands remained remarkably stable since Lortie's earlier examination of teachers; however, the climate of schools as workplaces had significantly changed since the time of Lortie's study. Taking the position that the "ethos," the character and culture, of teaching remained stable while the ethos of schooling changed, Provenzo and McCloskey explored teachers' perceptions that reform initiatives left them with fewer choices. Provenzo and McCloskey were interested in teachers' personal constructions of freedom, authority, and power, and found that teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the imposition of legislated mandates on teaching and the attendant difficulties of those mandates (e.g., when it was more difficult to accomplish expected tasks because of the mandates). Using Wise's (1979) term "legislated learning" to refer to "centralized attempts to improve educational equity and quality through state policy intervention carried out by bureaucratic, regulatory means," the authors signaled a gap between rhetoric and reality by illuminating the different realities faced by teachers and students who inhabit schools and the individuals who attempt to legislate them (Provenzo & McCloskey, 1996, p.17).

Two other important collections of critical research begin with a central tension in the lives of teachers that is still relevant today. Both Little and McLaughlin (1993) and Bascia and Hargreaves (2000) edited collections confronting the paradox of educational

reforms that call on teachers to work better and harder, to participate more in their own growth, while at the same time encouraging greater control over teachers' practices.

Though these books explored different reform initiatives, like the previously discussed scholarship, they emphasized the importance of context (the enormous variations that can occur between states, districts, schools, students, departments, etc.) and the demoralizing effects of top-down control.

Drawing on previously explored themes of isolation and individualism (see Lortie, 1975), Little and McLaughlin's (1993) book complicated these features of teachers' work by exploring them alongside reform initiatives that pressed teachers toward collaboration and collegiality. They asked: How, under what conditions, with what supports, and for what purposes can teachers be colleagues? These answers, of course, depended on the variety and the form a school community took, and the many local conditions that shape and create opportunities for development and participation by and with teachers. In editing this collection of research they pushed for broader and more nuanced understandings of individualism and collegiality, arguing that neither was wholly negative, positive, or as undifferentiated as they are often portrayed to be. The chapters in this book are linked by their exploration of the tensions between choice and constraint, between individual initiative and institutional imperative. They recast and complicate Lortie's negative portrayal of teacher isolation while revealing the ways in which teacher-student relationships shape teachers' orientations to their work and their professional communities – whether they embrace or resist collaboration.

Bascia and Hargreaves (2000) brought together a collection of research examining reforms that challenged the dominant model of teaching as technical work. They asked:

“Why do reforms repeatedly fail to engage teachers’ commitments and expertise, or fade from the limelight after their early promise” (p.15)? Answers, they argued, could be found in deeper, more critical understandings of the systemic, contextual and political nature of public education and people’s attempts to change and control it.

Bascia and Hargreaves (2000) brought together a collection of scholarship that examined lighthouse schools, leadership succession, de-tracking efforts, student-centered learning, school-university relationships, and the task of establishing strong relationships between teachers and parents. In doing so they made five interrelated arguments about the frequent failure or disappearance of educational reforms: 1) schools are often expected to address problems that cannot easily be solved by teachers alone (e.g., social problems like poverty), 2) reforms that address one aspect of teaching often trigger unanticipated or unintended consequences for other parts of the system, 3) even the most creative reform efforts are undermined by logics of political control which lead to excessive standardization and inflexibility that stifle teachers’ involvement as effective change agents, 4) contextual influences (e.g., diversity of students, technological advances, etc.) are increasingly intrusive but regulated within the classroom by a tradition of rationalized control, and 5) the informational, fiscal, and moral supports required to sustain reforms effectively are rarely visible.

Bascia and Hargreaves (2000) concluded that school changes cannot be disengaged from the context of their occurrence, and that schools and teachers cannot simply be objects of change. Rather, educational change must connect teachers to the educational system and society in such a way that see themselves as agents who can and must influence how others perceive and shape their work. This idea is important to

consider as U.S. public schools are in the midst of increased scrutiny and controls on teachers' work. Research must again consider how teachers perceive their workplaces and what that means for sustaining teachers.

### **External Mandates and the Impact on Teachers' Work**

In many ways the literature described above considers how teachers' work is shaped by schools as workplaces and what that means for the experiences and understandings of teachers. Tensions between control and discretion are pivotal to the impact of education reforms on the lives and work of teachers, and central to the debate about the status of public school teachers. Recall from chapter one that this debate concerns issues of commitment and control, accompanied by deep ideological beliefs about which conditions will improve student outcomes in public schools and attain the goals of public schooling as they are articulated in various policy and reform initiatives. In the past 20 years, scholarship on teachers' work has focused greatly on the influence of external mandates and reform efforts on teachers' practices. This work is largely situated in the growth of accountability systems in education.<sup>5</sup> In some ways the literature discussed in this section overlaps with the above body of work, because a critical lens is often used to examine the impact of external mandates on school organizations and teachers' work.<sup>6</sup> However, this body of research both extends and expands the critical

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<sup>5</sup> Accountability has been a feature of the public education landscape for most of the past century, with interests in formalizing accountability systems gaining traction with the release of ANAR (1983) and culminating with the passage of NCLB (2002).

<sup>6</sup> The distinctions I draw between categories of research are in some ways overly simplistic as many of these works inform each other and can be referenced in multiple categories.

tradition with close attention to policy and reform's increasing emphasis on high-stakes testing, particularly the unintended consequences for teachers' work.

With the intent of improving student academic outcomes, policymakers are restructuring the public school system by encouraging reforms aimed at teachers' work – what they do and how they do it. NCLB attached consequences in the forms of rewards and sanctions to student test results in an effort to improve the performance of teachers and students (Pedulla et al., 2003). This policy is particularly influential in high-poverty urban schools where policies are tied to critical funding (Milner, 2013a; Valli et al., 2007). NCLB incited reforms at the state level, including the development of standards and assessment, improved data systems, and school turnaround strategies that had a powerful impact on local teaching conditions including greater emphasis on “scientifically-based” instructional programs that often include prescriptive and scripted curricular materials (Bascia & Rottman, 2011; Bullough, 2008; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Santoro, 2011a; and Superfine et al., 2012). Now, public school teachers' work occurs in the context of what I refer to as *trying times*, increasing bureaucratic control that limits what teachers can and cannot do in their classrooms.<sup>7</sup>

Recent scholarship has examined how accountability reforms are changing teachers' work. This research found that under accountability-based interventions in schools, teachers were experiencing increasing mandates and monitoring (Fusarelli, 2002), and working harder in response to accountability measures (O'Day, 2002).

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<sup>7</sup> Santoro (2011a), drawing on Gardner et al. (2001), used the term “difficult times” to refer to the same idea.

Schools were aligning teachers' work with accountability pressures, specifically high-stakes testing, by emphasizing tested content, prescriptive pedagogies, and learning outcomes (Bullough, 2008; Crocco & Costigan, 2007). Under these conditions, scholars have examined: an intensification of teachers' work (Bartlett, 2004; Gordon, 2008; O'Day, 2002; Valli & Buese, 2007), teachers' negative perceptions about their opportunities for developing a satisfying teaching practice (Crocco & Costigan, 2007), gaps between mandated instructional practices and teacher values (Mintrop, 2012), an erosion of autonomy (Hamilton et al., 2008; O'Day, 2002), challenges to teachers' individual and collective professional identities (Bartlett, 2004; Hallett, 2010; Ingersoll, 2003a; Nichols & Berliner, 2008; Valli & Buese, 2007), and changed student-teacher relations (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Valli & Buese, 2007). These studies indicate that the high-stakes test-based accountability climate, in which schools experience intense pressure to raise test scores each year, has resulted in a situation whereby teachers are once again experiencing greater responsibility for their work but less control over how that work is conducted (Pedulla et al., 2003; Wills & Haymore Sandholtz, 2009).

Taken together, the above works establish evidence that external mandates associated with accountability policy and reforms are contributing to a rationalization of teachers' work, intensification, erosion of autonomy, and challenges to teachers' individual and collective professional identities, all of which complicate the status of teachers. While this scholarship has usefully demonstrated that the changed context of teachers' work affects the experience of teaching, the scholarship remains incomplete without an examination of the mechanism or processes through which the current accountability context affects teachers' professional identity.

## **Rationalization of Teaching**

Efforts to bureaucratize schools and rationalize teachers' core work are related to historical images of schools as loosely coupled organizations with a weak technology of teaching. Organizational theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Weick, 1976) established schools as the archetypal loosely coupled system, and harsh critiques of teacher education and training (see The Holmes Group report, 1986) reinforced the notion that teaching lacked a specialized body of knowledge indicative of other professions. Accountability movements in the U.S., and some efforts to professionalize teaching, have sought to remedy these perceived weaknesses of schools and teaching by targeting the core work of teachers and taking a technical view that assumes teaching procedures can be correctly defined, detailed, monitored, and prescribed through policy mandates and training. These forms of standardized top-down control rationalize teaching and are distinguishing characteristics of bureaucratic modes of organization. The rationalization of instruction through the bureaucratic model is expressed in curriculum guides and frameworks, the formal division of instructional labor, and the accountability of school officials for academic results (Bidwell, 2001).

In education the bureaucratic model is a complicated matter. Whereas bureaucracy is considered the most efficient and functional method for coordinating and controlling the large number of individuals that inhabit school systems, early accounts of schools argued that bureaucratic control was not particularly successful at managing, or perhaps rationalizing, instruction. That is, teachers' work behind closed doors remained largely unaffected or unchanged by policy and reform (Lortie, 1975; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Interestingly, movements to professionalize teaching, which tend to oppose

bureaucratization, have attempted to rationalize teacher training and classroom instruction by establishing a specialized body of knowledge in order to strengthen the technology of teaching and upgrade the status of the teachers (Labaree, 1992). Labaree explained:

The difference is that bureaucratization focuses on organization in the narrow sense of the word, locating power in a hierarchy of offices and thus effecting outcomes by command from supervisor to subordinate; whereas rationalization focuses on organization in the broader sense – as process – embedding power in the principles of formal rationality that shape the discourse and procedures by which people guide their actions (p. 147).

For Labaree (1992), past efforts to develop a science of teaching and raise the professional status of teachers promoted a rationalization of classroom instruction by pressing for authoritative, research-driven, and standardized visions of teaching practice. His view complicated the notion of professionalization, arguing that professionalization, via rationalized instruction, can potentially do more harm than good if rationalization reduced the influence of teachers.

The complexity of bureaucracy and rationality in relation to current educational reform is relevant as accountability movements in the U.S. rely on bureaucratic forms to rationalize schools by reducing variation and discretion in favor of standardized top-down control (Mehta, 2013). Both Labaree (1992) and Mehta (2013) argued that teaching is especially susceptible to rationalization because of its history as a semi-profession with a weak collective practice. Examining three distinct accountability

movements in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Mehta (2013) argued that accountability movements were cases of school rationalization. This is not unlike Mintrop's claim (2012) that accountability systems can be powerful technical drivers of school change. In Mehta's (2013) conception, change is related to efficiency (i.e. increasing the productivity of teachers and the system as a whole) and the process of rationalization reduces variation across schools and classrooms in favor of increasingly formal systems of standardized top-down control.

The modern standards and accountability movement epitomizes reform efforts' attempts at efficiency and rationalization. The rate of improvement expected in NCLB reflects legislators' impatience with the failings of educators (Mehta, 2013 p. 21), and the requirement for annual testing has led to the use of pre-packaged curricular materials, off-the shelf tests, and prescriptive methods that rationalize the process of teaching and learning in order to increase the technical competence of teachers. Whereas Labaree (1992) argued that movements to professionalize teaching reliant on rationalization of professional knowledge are inherently problematic for the occupational status of teachers, Mehta suggested that professionalizing teaching could make it less vulnerable to administrative-led rationalization. These seemingly diametrically opposed positions call for a more elaborate exploration than I present. What is important to consider for the purpose of this study are the challenges to teachers' work wrapped up in the modern accountability movement's efforts to rationalize teachers' work. Weber (1978) warned that rationalization could lead to rigid and inflexible organizational environments that threaten worker autonomy. This is problematic for the nature of teaching, which is inherently personal (Lieberman & Miller, 1984) and requires flexibility (Ingersoll, 2003a;

Johnson, 1990). The problem with promoting the rationalization of teaching is that it tends to foreground the technical dimension of teaching and move the intellectual, socio-emotional, and socio-political aspects (see Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000) into the background. In fact teaching is all of these things and requires elements of personal orientation and professional autonomy in order to be carried out (Ingersoll, 2003a), and, equally important, to sustain teachers' efforts and investment over the course of their careers.

### **Intensification of Work**

One impact of external mandates on teachers' tasks and roles is an intensification of work. Building on Apple's (1988) work, recent research demonstrated that teachers are working harder in response to external mandates (Bailey, 2000; Bartlett, 2004; Gordon, 2008; O'Day, 2002; Valli & Buese, 2007). In an analysis of the changing roles of teachers in an era of high-stakes accountability, Valli and Buese (2007) determined that teacher roles increased, expanded, and intensified and that the impetus for these changes was often imposed mandates (p. 527). They found that teachers were assigned new tasks (e.g. inclusion instruction, data analysis, and differentiating instruction) under accountability reforms, and that an expanded scope of work and heightened responsibility for teaching and learning, driven by classroom-level policy directives, changed teachers' tasks and roles.

The intensification of teachers' work is closely related to the structuring of teacher-time – what they do, when they do it, and for how long. Mandates that seek to control teachers' use of both instructional and non-instructional time are evidence of the

tightened relationship between the actual work of teachers and accountability expectations. According to Bailey (2000) mandated changes, such as those prescribed under accountability systems, increase the busyness and denseness of teachers' work (p. 117). Teachers must devote increased attention to more classroom details as well as to more time spent outside the classroom learning and planning. This means that work is intensified in the classroom, and responsibilities outside of the classroom are expanded as well.

The issue of time is not simply a matter of teachers working longer hours. Teaching-time is restructured under accountability policies that emphasize the importance of aligning instruction with tested content. Kennedy (2005) noted that teachers wrestled with time constraints while teaching, often trying to determine which content to cover and for how long in order to keep pace with curricular expectations. In her study, teachers experienced pressure to limit student engagement in order to allow time for covering tested content. Gordon (2008) echoed this sentiment in an examination of teachers' work conditions under NCLB requirements saying, "Teachers experience a lack of sufficient time, generating the feeling that they are not concentrating on adequately delivering the required curriculum or meeting their students' needs" (p. 116). Feeling like time is at a premium is symptomatic of intensification as Apple (1988) described it, and is accompanied by other symptoms including but not limited to: increased isolation among workers, a tendency to "cut corners," and a reduction in the quality of service provided.

Because accountability reform is premised on bureaucratic ideas about how to coordinate and control the activities of local schools and the teachers who inhabit them,

features of the modern bureaucracy (see Weber) also contribute to the intensification of teachers' work. Paperwork continues to be a hallmark of bureaucratic control and is one factor that contributes to the intensification of teachers' work. In an earlier examination of accountability systems, Cohn and Kottkamp (1993) noted that record keeping/paperwork emerged as a control mechanism; the underlying assumption was that the written record is a valid indicator of a completed process or accomplishment (p. 128). More recent examinations of teachers' work argued that a significant portion of a teacher's time and energy is spent issuing, maintaining and keeping records (Day & Smethem, 2009; Ingersoll, 2003a). Keeping records is a direct means by which organizations coordinate and standardize the work of employees. It is evidence of the extent to which employees are, or are not, complying with external mandates.

Like rationalization, intensification can be read as professionalization or deprofessionalization. In Apple's (1988) intensification thesis negative impacts are emphasized. In a refinement of the thesis, Ballet, Kelchtermans, and Loughran (2006) argued for an alternative form of professionalism as an answer to the intensification of teachers' work around the world. Rather than assuming intensification means a de-skilling for all teachers, as Apple (1988) suggested, Ballet et al. (2006) argued that additional training and increased collaborative work can result in re-skilling and new conceptions of professionalization. Of course, teachers cope with change in different ways. Thus, intensification is not a single experience, but rather is differentiated among teachers. Like bureaucracy and rationalization, the experience of intensification can be convoluted and contradictory within and across schools and teachers. Because we know external mandates intensify teachers' work, it is important to pay attention to how

teachers' experience their work context within the modern accountability movement and what that means for sustaining teachers' efforts in the course of their work.

### **Erosion of Autonomy**

Within the major waves of U.S. education reform the issue of autonomy surfaces in competing claims about the inefficiency of public schools. It is thought that schools either lean too far in the direction of employee autonomy or too far in the direction of organizational control (Ingersoll, 2003a). These claims illustrate a familiar tension in the organization of teachers' work: control and autonomy, each of which are directly related to issues of power in schooling and are central to the work lives of teachers. Like waves of school reform, which tend to be cyclical and contradictory, conceptions of autonomy and the extent to which teachers possess or activate it changes over time. The concept of autonomy is messy with multiple and at time ambiguous interpretations. For the purposes of this paper I follow Ingersoll (2003a) and Boote (2006), who use different terms (*autonomy/professional discretion*) to describe the same idea – “a teacher has adequate (*autonomy*) professional discretion for a particular task when that teacher has the ability to make professional judgments and the capacity to act on those judgments” (Boote, 2006 p. 462; see also Ingersoll, 2003a p. 18). Because their definitions are similar, the terms *autonomy* and *professional discretion* are used interchangeably in this dissertation.

Historically, autonomy is viewed as a feature of the workplace (Lortie, 1975; Johnson, 1990; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Lortie (1975) argued that the weak career incentives of teaching contributed to teacher individualism. This served teachers' purposes and permitted great variation in teachers' work thus undergirding the

achievement of psychic rewards. The “ideology of individualism” Lortie described, and its consequences for organizational inefficiency, were exposed in early images of schools as loosely coupled institutionalized organizations (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) and targeted by first wave reformers. The popular belief was that teacher autonomy crippled the organizational efficiency of schools. As Johnson (1990) stated, “Autonomy, whether intentionally granted by superiors or necessarily seized by teachers behind classroom doors, is a central feature of their [*teachers*] work” (p.15). Early accounts of schools and teachers’ lives affirmed this idea, claiming that teachers were generally satisfied with the amount of autonomy they had in their teaching (Goodlad, 2004; Johnson, 1990).

The restructuring of teachers’ work often hinges on conceptions of autonomy. This is evident in both first and second wave reforms. Accountability frameworks characteristic of third wave reforms aim to centralize the control of schools, standardize curricular and instructional programs, and effectively narrow teachers’ discretion over teaching goals, programs and pedagogy. In third wave reforms teachers are required to be more accountable, efficient and effective in producing measurable student outcomes. Third wave demands for compliance replace second wave calls for teacher empowerment and professionalization.

The ability to make decisions is a key characteristic of professionalism in general, and is at the heart of performing instructional tasks (Johnson, 1990; Boote, 2006; Ingersoll, 2003a). Calls for teacher professionalism argue that teachers have the most sustained contact with students and are in the best position to identify the needs that school organizations ought to address (Shedd & Bacharach, 1991). Yet, accountability systems, specifically the high-stakes test-based accountability that characterizes current

U.S. policy, take aim at the technology of teaching and decrease teachers' latitude in curricular and instructional decisions. This is important to consider. Whereas teaching was historically characterized as loosely organized and early studies of schools demonstrated teachers' satisfactions with their professional discretion, more recent scholarship indicates otherwise. Mandated change, such as that associated with bureaucratic school accountability, directs teachers rather than engaging them, and limits their autonomy (Bailey, 2000; Barrett, 2009; Hamilton et al., 2008; Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009; O'Day, 2002; Spillane et al., 2011).

External mandates limit organizational and individual autonomy through intervention into schools and teachers' work. One contemporary illustration of this can be found in the phenomenon known as *curriculum narrowing*. This phrase conveys the notion that testing pressures associated with NCLB have increased time devoted to reading and mathematics at the expense of other subjects (Au, 2007, 2010; Center on Education Policy, 2006; Dillon, 2006; Milner, 2013b; Stillman, 2011). Crocco and Costigan (2007) used the phrase in an expanded fashion to also capture the curricular and pedagogical impositions of mandated and scripted curricular programs associated with high-stakes testing and NCLB. This movement toward standardization reduces teachers' discretion over their instructional practices.

In public schools, particularly low-performing schools, external mandates often materialize in the form of prescriptive curricular programs, scripted lessons, pacing schedules, pedagogical prescriptions and materials aligned with tested content, and administrative oversight ensuring uniform standards for classroom instruction and appearance. The results for teachers are such that the pace and content of instruction are

being determined by the relevancy of the tests (Au, 2010). Furthermore, teachers are expected to rely on predetermined practices and scripted materials to shape their instructional practices rather than individual professional judgment (Milner, 2013b), thus they find their professional discretion curtailed (Crocco & Costigan, 2007).

Autonomy is neither completely present nor completely absent in the work of teachers. In previous waves of reform and portraits of schools as loosely coupled organizations, teachers were often cast as “street-level bureaucrats” (Lipsky, 1980) making decisions behind closed doors. Now, high-stakes test-based accountability and monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance are an increasingly pervasive factor in the daily work of teachers. These pressures from the environment cause public school teachers, especially those in at-risk schools, to restructure their work in agreement with organizational directives rather than relying on their own expertise and professional knowledge. External accountability policies leave teachers feeling as though they have very little control over the larger institutional decisions that affect their work. Though teachers are not without autonomy altogether, they have a reduced sense of autonomy in the classroom, particularly with regard to curriculum, and feel pressure to make changes to their instruction even when they view these changes as inconsistent with their personal views of how they should teach (Boote, 2006; Hamilton et al., 2008; Milner, 2013a).

### **Challenges to Teachers’ Professional Identity**

It is important to consider how recent educational reform policies move teaching towards or away from professionalization. Analyses of individual reforms reveal a nuanced pattern with evidence and arguments for and against professionalization (Milner,

2013a). Sachs (2001) argued that accountability reforms and the associated changes in working conditions and professional expectations called into question issues of teacher professionalism and professional identity at both the level of policy and practice. Certainly a review of U.S. education policies and reforms will reveal competing views about the nature of teacher professionalism, but what about teacher professional identity? Research suggests that high-stakes test-based accountability coerces teachers to teach to tests and embrace scripted and narrowed curriculum (see above). While these conditions can be read as either professionalization or deprofessionalization, undoubtedly they call into question teachers' professional identity – the values and beliefs that provide a framework for teachers to construct their practice and interpret their work.

Identity, like autonomy, is mired in multiple conceptions and theoretical frameworks. Though research lacks a single definition for teachers' professional identity (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000), there is enough consensus to broadly establish that identity is comprised of values, beliefs, and dispositions about teaching and classroom practices. Further, identity cannot be seen as fixed; it is negotiated. For teachers, it is mediated by their own experience in schools (e.g., school context) as well as their own beliefs and values about what it means to be a teacher and the type of teacher they aspire to be (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Rex & Nelson, 2004; Sachs, 2001).

While issues of professional identity under conditions of change are explored in the international scholarship examining the lives of teachers (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000; Jeffrey & Woods, 1996; Kelchtermans, 1996; Lasky, 2005; Nias, 1989; Van Veen & Slegers, 2006; Zembylas, 2003), there has been little attention to teacher identity in the NCLB era. However, there are conclusions to be drawn about the

relationship between teacher identity and external mandates from some of the research described earlier in this chapter. Ingersoll (2003a) and Valli and Buese (2007), asserted that rapid change and the imposition of controls upon teachers' work ignored professional identity. In other research, teacher identity goes hand-in-hand with an increasing emphasis on the role of emotions in teaching. Rapid and externally mandated change can lead to stress (Valli & Buese, 2007), feelings of marginalization (Bailey, 2000), deprofessionalization (Milner, 2013a), turmoil (Hallett, 2010), anxiety and low-morale (Nichols & Berliner, 2008). In this scholarship teacher identity is impacted by change and therefore needs to be examined in times of increased external mandates.

As discussed above, external mandates and accountability-based reforms can erode teacher autonomy. Reduced professional discretion is one way teachers find aspects of their professional identity called into question. External demands, such as those that call on teachers to shift instructional time and resources to tested subjects, devalue teachers' professional expertise and often contradict their ideas of professional practices that would be most beneficial to their students (Barrett, 2009; Valli & Buese, 2007; Wills & Sandholtz, 2009). This type of work context is problematic because it generates a tension between teachers' internal beliefs and the external demands placed upon them.

Psychic, or intrinsic, rewards are a category of teacher work reward first articulated by Lortie (1975). They arise from subjective evaluations teachers make in the course of their work about their feelings of pleasure and satisfaction from particular instances during the school day. These rewards are unique to each individual teacher, but are often derived from a number of similar sources (e.g., striking success with a student,

gratitude from former students, positive relationships and emotional connections with students, etc.) (Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993; Hargreaves, 1999; Jeffrey & Woods, 1996; Johnson, 1990; Lortie, 1975; Nias, 1996; Provenzo & McCloskey, 1996; Rosenholtz, 1989). More recently, the concept of moral rewards has emerged as a distinct dimension of teachers' work experience that is inextricably connected to the structure of teaching. This scholarship is focused on the moral essence of teaching and ethical professionalism (Campbell, 2008). Santoro's recent works (2011a; 2011b) examined the state of teaching to explore how the structure of teachers' work constrained teachers' access to moral rewards. Though she did not explicitly explore teacher discretion as Lortie did, her work is important to note because it recognized rewards and their relation to the organizational environment - accessing moral rewards requires a work environment in which doing good work can take place (2011b, 2699).

Intrinsic rewards and moral rewards are related. In this study, I intentionally focus on intrinsic rewards because moral rewards are a type of intrinsic reward (e.g., *doing good work feels good*). Though the quantity and quality of intrinsic rewards, as well as the source for such rewards, can vary from teacher to teacher they are considered the most crucial element of teachers' work (Lortie, 1975; Ng & Peter, 2010) and are noted in the literature on working conditions with regard to teacher turnover and attrition (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Rosenholtz, 1989; Santoro, 2011b), satisfaction (Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993; Johnson 1990; Nias 1989) and commitment (Rosenholtz, 1989). Intrinsic rewards rely upon teacher autonomy and individualism (e.g., where and how teachers' direct their energy), and can be constrained by the nature of teaching and its

tasks (Lortie, 1975 p. 101) which makes it an important element of teachers' work to consider with regard to external mandates.

There is much to learn from this vast body of scholarship on teachers' work and teachers' lives. This research has established that the occupation of teaching and the ways in which it is organized influences the lives of teachers. Further, it illuminates the frequent gap that exists between the rhetoric and reality of reform, with particular attention to teachers' experiences. This scholarship has usefully demonstrated that the changed context of teachers' work affects the experience of teaching; yet, it remains incomplete without an examination how the current accountability context affects teachers' professional identity. While we know accountability policy influences classroom instruction, research thus far has paid less attention to how that happens and what the impact is on teachers' experiences, particularly their professional identity. My research aims to extend and elaborate this important body of scholarship by considering how school status impacts school context, mechanisms of change, and the resulting experiences for teachers, with particular regard to their professional identity.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To examine how teachers experience the changing context of education, this dissertation draws on neoinstitutional theories of organizations. Rooted in sociology, neoinstitutional theory considers both how organizations change and how members of the organization make meaning of the process of change. This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant for examining individual school organizations situated within the larger institutional environment of schooling.

## **Institutionalized Organizations**

Meyer and Rowan's (1977) foundational neoinstitutional research argued that the formal structures of organizations reflected the myths of their institutional environments instead of the demands of their work activities. Institutional myths are broad cultural rules that embody the how and why organizations take the form they do. It was Meyer and Rowan's contention that formal organizations, typically understood to be systems of coordinated and controlled activities that arise when work is embedded in complex networks of technical relations, actually arise in highly institutionalized contexts (p. 340). They asserted that organizations increase their legitimacy and their prospects for survival by adopting services, techniques, and programs that are defined by prevailing organizations. This isomorphic process allows new organizations to arise and forces existing ones to incorporate the practices and procedures (e.g., myths) defined as rational by the institutional context.

The growth of institutionalized structures in modern society makes formal organizations both more common and more elaborate. While organizations adapt to their institutional contexts they often play active roles in shaping those contexts as well. Meyer and Rowan argued that many organizations adopt practices ceremonially in order to maintain legitimacy, and buffer their formal structures from the uncertainties of technical activities by becoming loosely coupled – building gaps between their formal structures and actual work activities (1977, p. 341). The result is a form of institutional isomorphism which stabilizes organizations because they remain successful according to institutional expectations while the core activities remain buffered or largely unchanged. The incorporation of institutionalized elements protects the organization from having its

activities questioned and therefore ensures survival independent of its productive efficiency. Below, Meyer and Rowan explained this process with regard to schools:

Thus, American school districts (like other governmental units) have near monopolies and are very stable. They must conform to wider rules about proper classifications and credentials of teachers and students, and of topics of study. But they are protected by rules which make education as defined by these classifications compulsory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977 p. 351-352).

In this argument, public schools in the U.S. are suited for organizational survival because they are matched with and almost absorbed by their institutional environments.

From Meyer and Rowan (1977), and subsequent works that link institutional theory and education, several core ideas emerged as central to institutional analyses of educational policies and practices: 1) the practices and policies adopted by schools and governing agencies reflect the rules and structures in wider society, 2) a form of structural isomorphism exists in which there is a convergence of policies and practices among organizations operating in a similar environment, and 3) the dependence between organizations and their institutional environments produces organizational forms and policy practices that often are loosely coupled with policy makers' intentions (Burch, 2007 p. 85). Taken together these core ideas are central to scholarly examinations of how educational policies and practices interact with institutional environments to shape policy outcomes.

## Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems

The concept of loose coupling is important in the study of organizations as it is used to explain how an organization can adhere to demands for change while actually maintaining the status quo (Bidwell, 2001; Orton & Weick, 1990). Weick (1976) used the term *loose coupling* to convey an image of schools as vague systems with little coordination; composed of elements that are only loosely linked to each other, where rules are often violated, and efficiency and evaluation are problematic. Meyer and Rowan (1977) applied this concept to their examination of formal structures, and argued that empirical research on organizations casts doubt on the assumption that organizations function according to their formal blueprints. That is, the Weberian notion that organizational coordination is routine and actual activities conducted conform to the prescriptions of the formal bureaucratic structure is untrue. In fact, there is a great gap (i.e., loose couplings) between the formal and informal structures (Weick, 1976).

In organizational research on schools, loose coupling is frequently used to explain the unevenness of policy implementation (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Fusarelli, 2002) and the simultaneous existence of rationality and indeterminacy (Orton & Weick, 1990). However, Fusarelli (2002), drawing on Orton and Weick (1990), argued that it is more accurate to say school organizations are made up of multiple linkages – some tightly coupled and others less so (p. 564). Fusarelli's (2002) argument is important to consider. In addition to recognizing the nuances and idiosyncrasies of schools, that they can exhibit both loose and tightly coupled linkages, it drew attention to the changing context of education policymaking and the pressures for tighter couplings between local school organizations and their institutional environments.

Until recently, the idea that schools were loosely coupled organizations sufficed as an accurate description of schools. Though schools were historically portrayed as loosely coupled organizations, recent research examining the concept of coupling in educational organizations has emerged. This work is motivated by two primary concerns: 1) over time neoinstitutional theory became less engaged with the dynamics of real working organizations, and 2) the institutional environment of schooling has changed dramatically as federal and state governments became increasingly involved in education through mandates and the implementation of top-down accountability policies.

### **The Neoinstitutional Drift and its Consequences**

Contemporary neoinstitutional theory was criticized for neglecting its micro-sociological roots (Hirsch & Lounsbury, 1997). Empirically it drifted from “old” institutionalism in a macro direction seeking to explain diffusion and homogeneity across organizations. The theory does this by looking at societal sectors and using event history analysis to measure the adoption of organizational programs signaling compliance to institutional myths (Hallett, 2010). Consequently, Bidwell (2001) suggested that neoinstitutional theory lacked a concern for the work of teachers in school organizations, and instead had a much stronger interest in the institutional linkages that bind schools into their societies and give form to educational organizations.

Hallett and Ventresca (2006) argued that as institutional research evolved to focus on macro-structural environments and inter-organizational relationships the local dynamic of working organizations was pushed aside. This is the primary difference between old institutionalism and neoinstitutionalism. Whereas old institutionalists

considered the values, norms, and attitudes of individuals in the organization, neoinstitutionalists tended to use a wide lens to examine organizations (Hallett, 2010), asserting that rules and classifications are the stuff of which institutions are made (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). While this work has been useful in explaining similarities *between* organizations, it has paid less attention to the activities and agencies of individuals *within* the organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Hallett, 2010). In essence, this scholarship ignored the people that inhabit school organizations and failed to capture how they do things and make meaning.

Neoinstitutionalism's drift from micro analyses to macro analyses is problematic because organizations are not inert categories of meaning. Neoinstitutionalism's shift away from local working organizations, inhabited by people and their actions, has created a situation in which couplings are now treated as a static organizational feature, as opposed to a process that organizational actors engage in (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006). According to Fusarelli (2002), "...the very popularity of loose coupling in education has led to the elevation of the concept to a reified status, which has blinded us both to the nature of couplings in education and to changes in the nature of these couplings over time"(p. 564). Hallett and Ventresca (2006) warned that the concept ought not to be used as a static aside to focus on macro-structural environments; rather, coupling is a dynamic activity and a local process. For this reason, an "inhabited institutions approach" (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006; Hallett, 2010) is required in order to focus on local and extra-local meaning. An inhabited approach allows neoinstitutional research to move beyond treating institutions as "inert categories of meaning," and to consider that they are inhabited with people and their actions (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006). The expansion of accountability

policy has reshaped the institutional environment of schooling, becoming “an acceptable solution for reformers who deemed loose coupling a form of disorganization that limited school improvement” (Hallett, 2010 p. 56-57). This change in the institutional environment of schooling calls for new applications of coupling research (Burch, 2007; Coburn, 2004; Orton & Weick, 1990) such as the inhabited approach that fuses the macro-micro divide (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006; Hallett, 2010).

### **A Changing Institutional Environment**

Some early scholars of neoinstitutional theory allowed for the possibility of tight couplings in education: institutional sectors are neither fixed nor immutable (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). According to Coburn (2004) the institutional and technical environments of schools are not separate but are mutually interactive, and the institutional environment can influence core organizational processes. This point warrants exploration as formal accountability systems, such as NCLB, act as linkages between schools and their institutional environments thereby influencing the school environment.

Fusarelli (2002) identified three critical forces at work in the U.S. educational system: 1) external environmental pressures for tighter coupling, 2) the emergence of powerful new institutional actors, and 3) an emerging institutional capacity, coupled with isomorphic processes which encourage tighter institutional couplings (p.562). Each of these forces prompted a changed context of education policymaking. Early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century external forces began to exert major pressure on the field of education. International competition, declining resources, and an increasingly diverse population

spurred calls for schools to produce improved results. Since the passage of NCLB the federal and state governments have asserted a stronger role in policymaking through mandates and top-down control structures. There is now greater emphasis on monitoring school performance, making it harder for school and district administrators to buffer the work of teaching and learning from institutional pressures. In consideration of these changes, Burch (2007) argued that a recent explosion of rational organizational models for improving teaching and learning warranted a wider institutional lens: “The vision behind these reforms...is that by establishing clear mandates, aligning policy strategies and using data to make policy decisions, policy makers can achieve meaningful improvements in classroom teaching” (Burch, 2007 p. 91). The fact that policy has reached the classroom level, or at least is more forcefully attempting to do so, warrants an examination of the relationship between institutional pressures and local practices.

Recent neoinstitutional scholarship calls for closer attention to coupling as a process (Hallett, 2010; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006; Sauder & Espeland, 2009; Spillane et al., 2011). Spillane et al., (2011) argued that the changed institutional environment of schooling has focused increasingly on the core technical work of schools, specifying what teachers should teach and acceptable levels of student performance. This research focused on school level responses to the shifting policy environment, exploring how school leaders used organizational routines to couple teachers’ work with government regulation.

Most recent, Hallett (2010) returned neoinstitutional research to the school site in order to examine how accountability reforms encouraged recoupling, the process of creating tight couplings where loose ones once existed (Espeland, 1998), between the

institutional environment and local practices within schools. Hallett (2010) treated accountability reform as a macro-cultural institutional myth that models how schools should operate. According to Hallett (2010), accountability reforms “encourage a recoupling between the institutional environment and local practices by making it difficult for schools to enact ceremonial compliance while doing different things behind classroom doors” (p. 57). Formal accountability systems, which require schools to demonstrate accountability for student learning through quantitative measures, make it difficult for organizations to buffer themselves from new institutional pressures. While Hallett’s (2010) work made an important contribution to examinations of coupling, he also issued a call for neoinstitutional theorists to “inhabit” examinations of organizations with the people who interpret and act on organizational activities in order to return to the theory to its micro-foundations. My research heeds this call by examining local school practices and the meanings teachers’ make from them.

### **Moving Forward**

Nearly three decades ago ANAR, the groundbreaking report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, warned of a “rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people” (ANAR, 1983). Today, the U.S. is once again consumed with concerns regarding the costs and products of public schools, further straining the tenuous status of public school teachers. Over the past decade federal educational initiatives increasingly focused attention on teacher quality, student assessment as a means to evaluate teacher quality, and data systems as a form of public accountability for teachers (Day & Smethem, 2009). The nature of this situation, and the challenge to the teacher workforce, is indeed a transitional moment in the history of

public education. Further, it is evidence of a still changing institutional environment. As budgets shrink and initial gains made in the early years of NCLB begin to level out, powerful institutional actors are beginning to exert greater pressures on local school districts which are undoubtedly changing the nature of teachers' work.

The attention and legitimacy given to standardized test scores reduce schools' abilities to protect their practices from environmental pressures. Schools are less able to buffer themselves from new and increasing institutional pressures because of growing demands to demonstrate accountability by formal quantitative measures. Neoinstitutional examinations of schools and teachers' work have begun to approach the relationship between environment and organization from a new direction by exploring the factors that precipitate recoupling and discourage buffering. This research has explored the links between high-stakes testing policies and instructional practice (Diamond, 2012), school administrators' responses to the changing institutional environment and the ways that a school's status mediates this response (Spillane et al., 2011; Diamond & Spillane, 2004), and the resulting "turmoil" from efforts to create stronger links between the policy environment and instruction (Hallett, 2010). Though this research is beginning to document the changing relationship between environmental pressures and organizational responses, this field is still largely void of empirical work. Too little attention is paid to how schools as organizations absorb accountability pressures, organize teachers' work in response, and what that means for the status and experience of public school teachers.

Organizational routines are one way to examine how schools respond to external pressures. They represent an important vehicle for school administrators to begin to couple or recouple teachers' work with external mandates. However, it is equally

important to know about the ways in which teachers respond to routines and pressures. Given the persistent problem of teacher turnover in urban public schools, the unresolved debate between the commitment and control organizational models for teachers' work, and the tenuous occupational status and esteem of teachers it is important to examine teachers' understandings of their work within the changing institutional context of education. This dissertation contributes to neoinstitutional research by examining local school conditions and teachers' work activities, and extends it by including the meaning teachers make from these conditions. In this study, I explored school practices that became legitimated through the institutional myth of accountability (see Hallett, 2010) to discern how this myth impacts teachers' experiences.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

Advances in neoinstitutional research call for closer attention to the microsociological foundation on which the approach is built (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006; Hallett, 2010). I answered that call and examined how schools of differing AYP status use organizational routines to recouple (i.e., create tighter links) teachers' work with accountability policy, and to consider how this process affects the experience of teaching. Further, this work sought to uncover meaning-making at the micro-level by learning how organizational routines shape teachers' experiences and understandings about their work. The research questions examined, repeated from chapter one, were:

1. How does accountability policy influence the organization of schools and impact teachers' occupational status?
2. How are public schools using organizational routines to recouple teachers' work to accountability pressures?
  - How does school/AYP status influence the implementation of organizational routines at two different schools?
3. What does the experience of recoupling mean for teachers' professional identity?

Because my research questions required an in-depth understanding of the context of public schools and how teachers engage with and apprehend organizational routines, qualitative research methods, specifically an ethnographic approach, were the most useful and allowed me to capture reality from the participants' perspectives. This qualitative study was conducted over two school years: year one (September 2011- June 2012), and year two (January 2013- June 2013), at Adams and Emery, two urban elementary schools in City School District, a low-achieving, high-poverty, urban school district.<sup>8</sup> In year

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<sup>8</sup> All names that appear in this dissertation are pseudonyms. To help readers distinguish between names, schools and teachers were given pseudonyms whose first letter corresponds to that of the organizational

two, budget reductions, changes in central leadership, and new plans for regional leadership and the Common Core State Standards changed the external demands and monitoring placed on schools in year one. Extending the data collection allowed me to explore if and how teachers' tasks and meaning-making changed alongside contextual changes at the schools. While the data from year two revealed some important findings with regard to organizational structure and teachers' professional identity I focus largely on data from year one, as that is when accountability interventions were at their greatest.

Adams and Emery represented two different organizational models developed by City School District's central administration as part of a strategic plan responding to NCLB policy pressures. These two schools were selected purposefully in an effort to examine how different organizational requirements within the school district shaped routines for teachers' work. Data collection procedures included weekly observations at each school and semi-structured interviews with consenting participants.

### **Assumptions and Rationale of Qualitative Research**

The qualitative approach to research fosters particular ways of asking questions and thinking through problems. This approach falls primarily into a constructivist or interpretive tradition (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010) that focuses on subjective experiences and understanding. The paradigm that governs qualitative research does not accept that there is one true reality. Rather the constructivist and interpretive paradigms accept a relativistic notion of reality, one which can be represented only through the joint construction of meaning by the researcher and

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model. Thus, the Achievement school pseudonym begins with "A," and all Achievement teachers' pseudonyms begin with "A."

the researched. The assumption is that reality, or meaning, is put together as people interact with each other and participate in shared activities (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). This study utilized qualitative research methods to examine how teachers' interact with mandated routines and the feelings and meanings these interactions generated.

Qualitative research stresses the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In this approach meanings are situated. They are located in and affected by numerous contextual characteristics (e.g., social, political, institutional, and economic, etc.) that influence how people think (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). I employed a qualitative approach in an effort to make sense of how individual schools organize teachers' work, and the ways in which those choices inform teachers' experiences at work.

### **Design of the Study**

Prior to beginning this study City School District created a unique delivery model in which high-performing schools were awarded and replicated, and failing schools were closed or transformed. The district designated four basic school models: Achievement, Traditional District, Enrichment, and Turnaround. Achievement schools were classified as high-performing schools that outperformed similar schools and continually met annual performance targets. In recognition of their achievements these schools were granted greater autonomy as they tried to continue to meet annual performance targets. Traditional District schools were treated as such and provided the same level of resources prior to the enactment of the model. The multiple strategies embraced by the district

were primarily focused on serving Traditional schools and the Enrichment schools. Enrichment schools were struggling schools that were provided additional support in an effort to get them back on track. Finally, schools that consistently under-performed were transformed into Turnaround schools. These schools worked with both internal and external partners to attempt dramatic improvements in student achievement.

Adams and Emery, the two schools selected for this study, represented the Achievement and Enrichment models. Adams was designated an Achievement school because of past high academic performance. Achievement schools were granted autonomy in certain areas (e.g., budgeting, scheduling, curricular materials, and academic interventions) so that they could plan for and reach the next levels of success. At the time this study was proposed (spring, 2011) there were 25 Achievement schools in the district. Enrichment schools were struggling schools that received additional supports to help them improve and meet their performance targets. Prior to district-wide budget cuts instituted during the first year of data collection, Enrichment schools received additional staffing, professional development and instructional strategies specific to the model, as well as greater monitoring from central administration. At the time this study was proposed there were 107 Enrichment schools although approximately 21 had already been reclassified as Turnaround schools.

The study was limited to two sites so that I could spend extended time in each school organization. This design allowed me to examine if, and how, different organizational arrangements within a school district shaped teachers' work. The Achievement model and the Enrichment model represented opposite ends of the organizational continuum with the former allowing for greater autonomy from central

administration, and the latter exerting greater controls from central administration.<sup>9</sup> Inherent in these two models were different ideas about the occupational status of teachers, and the use of coupling as a means to organize work at individual school sites. Achievement schools were allowed greater autonomy and self-responsibility based on students' past academic achievement. Along with the distinction of being an Achievement school, these schools were allowed greater flexibility and received less monitoring and oversight from central administration. This organizational arrangement signaled a move away from the more traditional structures which organized schools through regulations and top-down control seen in the Enrichment model.

In selecting schools for this study, I strove to identify two elementary schools that were similar in as many ways as possible. Initially I reached out to several schools in each category. While a few administrators at Achievement schools responded to my request to conduct research, Adams was best suited for study because its student body was characteristic of the district's demographics in terms of race and socioeconomic status, and the school had demonstrated a solid record of academic achievement going back several years. It took considerably longer to identify an Enrichment school that was similar enough to Adams, with an administrator willing to participate. Ultimately I pursued and selected Emery because it was like Adams in some important ways. While the two schools, a pre-K-6 Achievement school and a K-8 Enrichment school, were not identical in grade configurations they were both located in the same academic "region," a geographic area created by the school district and supervised by a regional team of

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<sup>9</sup> A turnaround school, the true opposite end of the continuum, was not selected because at the time this study was proposed the turnaround initiative had just begun. The turnaround schools were undergoing such an extreme intervention they would have been difficult to compare to other district schools.

administrators and support personnel. Also, both schools served predominantly African American students receiving free lunch (see Table 3.1 and 3.2).

The study was limited to elementary schools for two important reasons. First, the structure of elementary schools, age-structured classrooms headed by a single teacher, is an important factor to consider when examining how organizational characteristics shape work. Without the department and team arrangements characteristic of middle and high schools there are fewer imposed divisions in the organizational hierarchy. Though Emery contained a middle school within its elementary school designation, middle-years teachers worked in pairs to deliver major content areas and were not excluded from participation in this study. Second, elementary teachers teach the basic skills that build the foundation for deeper learning. These skills are heavily-targeted on state standardized tests; therefore, there is considerable pressure to organize the work of elementary schools in order to meet annual accountability targets.

Though I originally intended to collect data for one school year I decided to extend data collection due to several changes I believed might potentially impact teachers' work at each school. Prior to the start of the 2011-2012 school year City School District's CEO abruptly left her position putting the district under interim leadership for the duration of the school year. At the same time the district was also responding to a massive budget crisis by laying-off numerous employees and reducing services. Enrichment schools like Emery were affected early as additional resources (i.e., staffing and financial) dedicated to this model were removed. Furthermore, the regional offices that supported schools, particularly Enrichment schools, were largely dismantled over the course of the school year. By the end of the 2011-2012 school year (year one of

data collection) it was clear that school district's organizational models would undergo changes as new plans for school and leadership cohorts were underway. At Adams it was unclear what this would mean. At Emery, this inevitably meant a change in external monitoring and mandates. All of this coincided with the district's early implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Based on these anticipated changes I asked participating teachers if they would be willing to participate in a third interview the following school year (2012-2013), and I applied to both Temple University and City School District for the requisite research extensions.

**Table 3.1: School Demographics (2011-2012)<sup>10</sup>**

Demographics	Adams Elementary (K-6)	Emery Elementary (K-8)
Enrollment	530 (approximately)	450 (approximately)
Ethnicity:		
African American	97.8%	90.5%
White	0%	0.7%
Asian	0.2%	1.1%
Latino	0.7%	5%
Other	1.3%	2.7%
Economically Disadvantaged	73.4%	89.4%

**Table 3.2: Test Score Data (2011)**

Demographics	Adams Elementary (K-6)	Emery Elementary (K-8)
% proficient/advanced in math	97.5	68.3
% proficient/advanced in reading	90.2	42.5

<sup>10</sup> Data labels and ethnic categories mimic the language of City School District.

## **The Research Sites**

### **Adams Elementary School**

Adams is a pre-K-6 elementary school located in the far northwest section of the city. Adams' principal was a white woman who had been at the school for 12 years and with the district much longer. The student body was predominantly African American (97.8%) and economically disadvantaged (73.4%). Long before NCLB this school had a good reputation because of its record of academic achievement and low rate of violent incidents among students.

Adams was built in 1948. It is a squat two-story building with a basement, and the length of the city block on which it sits. An additional single-story wing was added at a later point in time and leads to a massive black-top school yard that is adorned with minimal play equipment and a few basketball hoops that the school acquired with a grant from a local athlete's foundation. Adams' principal stressed several points of pride when I first visited the school. There were student teachers each semester for the two years I collected data. Kindergarten classes received weekly instruction in French in year one, and older elementary students were eligible for instrumental music lessons. There were also numerous civic partnerships, frequent assemblies and field trips, as well as an active Home and School Association at Adams.

### **Emery Elementary School**

Emery is a K-8 elementary school in the upper north section of the city. Emery's principal was a black woman who had been at the school for five years, though with the district for over 30 years. The student body was mostly African American (90.5%) and

economically disadvantaged (89.4%). Formerly a junior high school and now converted to a K-8, Emery is quite large. Built around 1922, the school is a three-story brick building in the Colonial Revival style. The projected center entrance pavilion, arched entrance, and brick parapet are visually stunning, rivaled only by the grand marble foyer that envelops visitors upon entering the school.

Emery's reputation was not as favorable as Adams'. The school was historically low-performing and struggled with issues related to student behavior and school climate. Though there was a core group of teachers at Emery who had had been there five-plus years, there were high-rates of teacher turnover. In the first year of data collection several teachers quit before the school year was completed. Two of the teachers participating in this study left at the end of year one, with four more leaving at the end of year two. Despite these challenges, staff members highlighted several accomplishments at Emery. The school was a certified Advancement Via Individual Determination program site, maintained a partnership with a local university's mentoring group, offered after-school athletics, an instrumental music program, and a partnership with a local organization that supported service learning projects.

### **Participants**

In year one of data collection, I asked all teachers at both schools if they were interested in participating in a study on teachers' work routines. Participation required that teachers were willing to be observed once every other week for approximately 45 minutes for the duration of the school year. Additionally, teachers were asked to participate in two formal interviews about their work context and subsequent feelings

regarding work. Eight teachers out of 27 at Adams, and nine teachers out of 30 at Emery agreed to participate (see Tables 3.3 and 3.4 for teacher demographic information). A total of 17 teachers participated in year one. All of the teachers were certified and many possessed multiple certifications and advanced degrees. Teachers' experience ranged from 3 to 26 years. All teachers were female, 14 were white, and 3 were black. Teacher demographics largely reflected each school's teacher population. In addition to the 17 teacher participants, I also interviewed the instructional leader at Emery, the principal at each school, and one regional superintendent to learn about the theories of action that guided school organizations and mandates related to teachers' work.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The superintendent interviewed did not oversee the schools in this sample, though Emery was previously included in his region. He was interviewed for this study because the current regional superintendent overseeing Adams and Emery was unwilling to participate in a formal interview.

**Table 3.3: Adams Elementary Teacher Demographic Information**

<b>Teacher Pseudonym</b>	<b>Total Years Teaching</b>	<b>Years at School</b>	<b>Certification(s)</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
Ms. Anderson	20	4	Elementary Education (K-6)	white
Ms. Atkins	24	10	Early Childhood Elementary Education (K-6)	white
Ms. Amos	13	13	Elementary Education (K-6)	white
Ms. Alba	26	8	Reading Specialist Elementary Education (K-6)	white
Ms. Agnew	10	9	Early Childhood Elementary Education (K-6)	white
Ms. Aponte	22	15	Reading Specialist Alternative Education Elementary Education (K-6)	white
Ms. Accardi	13	9	Instructional Technology Elementary Education (K-6)	white
Ms. Aiken	18	4	Elementary Education (K-6)	white

**Table 3.4: Emery Elementary Teacher Demographic Information**

<b>Teacher Pseudonym</b>	<b>Total Years Teaching</b>	<b>Years at School</b>	<b>Certification(s)</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
Ms. Edwards	10	3	Elementary Education (K-6) ESOL	black
Ms. Eccles	8	4	Elementary Education (K-6)	white
Ms. Engler	7	3	Elementary Education (K-6)	black
Ms. Earnhardt	13	13	Elementary Education (K-6)	white
Ms. Ellis	3	3	Elementary Education (K-6)	white
Ms. Easton	12	1	Elementary Education (K-6) Reading Specialist Principal (K-12)	black
Ms. Erikson	7.5	7.5	Special Education Middle-years English Middle-years Math	white
Ms. Embry	7	4	Elementary Education (K-6) Middle-years English Middle-years Social Studies Reading Specialist	white
Ms. Epps	15	15	Elementary Education (K-6)	white

## **Data Collection Procedures**

An ethnographic approach allowed me to uncover the routines that organized teachers' work and to focus on the experiences and perspectives of teacher participants. Though I had many casual conversations with teachers and school staff, and collected school documents such as memos to teachers, school action plans, meeting agendas and monthly calendars, the primary data analyzed for this study were collected through observations and semi-structured interviews.

### **Observations**

Observation is characterized as the base of all research methods (Angrosino & de Perez, 2003), and is critical to ethnographies in order to understand a natural setting over a prolonged period of time. I spent a significant amount of time at Adams and Emery in order to develop a deep understanding of each school. To that end I observed each participating teacher for approximately 45 minutes every other week over the course of the 2011-2012 school year for a total of approximately 62 hours of classroom observation at Adams and 67 hours at Emery. In year two the scope of data collection was much smaller, and I only conducted a few observations with teachers who participated in a third interview in order to ascertain any changes that may have occurred as a result of the district's dissolution of school organizational models and the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, and to verify the accounts teachers gave in interviews (see Table 3.5 and 3.6 for a summary of data sources).

The primary focus of observations was teachers at work in their classrooms. I visited each school once a week and observed half of the participating teachers over the

course of a school day. Though I was often at schools on the same day each week so as to not disrupt continuity among teachers and school staff, I varied the times I visited teachers, enabling me to observe each teacher across the course of the school day. In addition to classrooms, I observed a variety of organizational routines including leadership team meetings at Adams, grade group meetings at Emery, professional development sessions and other varied school events such as assemblies. Combined with classroom observations this resulted in approximately 200 total hours of observation between the two schools.

I used observations as a tool for learning about teachers and the work they did. I took detailed fieldnotes during observations and following casual conversations with teachers. I used thick descriptions to capture all of things that took place in the classroom and stayed close to teachers' and students' exact words. Observations in classrooms focused on the physical environment, teaching and learning tasks, and teacher-student interactions. Though I paid attention to students and how they interacted with each other, I was much more focused on the teachers and the various tasks and roles they performed. Fieldnotes informed the development of interview protocols and served as form of triangulation for data collected during interviews.

## **Interviews**

The qualitative interview attempts to understand the world from the subject's point of view and to interpret people's experiences. This study employed semi-structured interviews to learn about the lived reality of teachers' work at Adams and Emery. In using semi-structured interviews I relied on a pre-determined set of questions but allowed

latitude to let participants talk about what was of interest or important to them. I tried to ask each participant to respond to a certain set of questions in order to compare among participants, but also allowed conversation to flow as naturally as possible because interviewees often had information or knowledge that I had not thought of in advance. Furthermore, the timeframe and setting varied for each interview. These differences dictated the priority different questions were given. As well, teacher personality influenced how strictly I adhered to the interview protocols. Teachers who were more talkative and less guarded required fewer questions. Those who were less talkative and more guarded about their feelings required greater adherence to the protocol and often more follow-up questions to discern examples and feelings about tasks or situations they described. This process was flexible because my constructivist approach necessitated that teachers communicate their experiences in their terms.

I conducted 36 interviews with teachers and administrators in year one, using the semi-structured interview protocols to capture thoughts about teachers' work and its context (see Appendices A, B, and C for teacher interview protocols). I interviewed each teacher early in the year to learn about the routines that organized teachers' practices and their feelings about working in the ways specified by the school structure. I asked teachers to describe various routines, to consider the benefits and consequences of these routines, and how they understood their tasks and roles to have changed over time. I conducted a second round of interviews later in the school year to learn about changes that occurred during the course of the year, to inquire about early emerging themes such as relationships and professional status, and to capture teachers' thoughts and feelings about being a teacher at a time when the school district was beginning to implement

additional reform plans and budget cuts. Because I had observed teachers for much of the school year and had a firm grasp on instructional routines, the second interview was concerned more so with understanding teachers' meanings regarding their occupational status and professional identity.

Teacher interviews took place before school, after school, and during teachers' preparation periods. They lasted between 45 minutes (the length of a preparation period) and 90 minutes, and most often occurred in teachers' classrooms with the exception of a few interviews at locations outside of school. While most interviews were conducted with just the teacher and myself present, occasionally teachers conducted interviews with students present in the classroom, or as they monitored students in other areas of the building during times when they had anticipated being free. Also, it was not uncommon for phone calls or visitors to interrupt interviews conducted in schools.

In addition to participating teachers, I interviewed the principal at each school to learn about decisions that organized teachers' work. At Emery, I also interviewed the instructional leader because she was instrumental in organizing classroom instruction. Finally, I interviewed one regional superintendent to learn about the district's theory of action and how this related to what teachers should be doing in each school (See Appendix D, E, and F for teacher leader, principal, and superintendent protocols).

In year two I reached out to the original 17 teachers and requested a third interview. These interviews took place in the second half of the school year and prior to conducting additional classroom observations. I was able to interview 15 of the original 17 teachers as well as Emery's instructional leader. Again, I used a semi-structured

interview to learn about if, and how, teachers' work had changed as the district underwent rapid change and the organizational models disintegrated. I also used these interviews to explore themes that had emerged during analysis of year one data. All interviews, from year one and two, were transcribed and coded using ATLAS.ti

**Table 3.5: Year One Data Sources**

<b>Year One: (2011 – 2012)</b>			
<b>Adams Elementary School</b>		<b>Emery Elementary School</b>	
<b>Observations: Approximately 100 hours</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom instruction</li> <li>• Professional development sessions</li> <li>• Leadership team meetings</li> <li>• School events (e.g., assemblies and award shows)</li> </ul>	<b>Observations: Approximately 100 hours</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom instruction</li> <li>• Professional development sessions</li> <li>• Grade Group Meetings</li> <li>• School events (e.g., assemblies and award shows)</li> </ul>
<b>Interviews: Total 17</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 participating classroom teachers each interviewed twice</li> <li>• 1 school principal</li> </ul>	<b>Interviews: Total 20</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 participating classroom teachers each interviewed twice</li> <li>• 1 school principal</li> <li>• 1 school-based teacher leader</li> </ul>
<b>Additional Data Sources:</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 Interview with a school district regional superintendent</li> <li>• Volunteer hours at both schools</li> </ul>			

**Table 3.6: Year Two Data Sources**

<b>Year Two: (2012-2013)</b>			
<b>Adams Elementary School</b>		<b>Emery Elementary School</b>	
<b>Observations:</b> <b>Total 9.5</b> <b>hours</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom instruction</li> </ul>	<b>Observations:</b> <b>Total 6 hours</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom instruction</li> </ul>
<b>Interviews:</b> <b>Total 6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 of the original 8 participating teachers</li> </ul>	<b>Interviews:</b> <b>Total 9</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 of the original 9 participating teachers</li> <li>• 1 school-based teacher leader</li> </ul>

**Note:**

- Not all of the original teachers were willing or able to participate in year two.
- Two of the original 9 Emery teachers left Emery after year one. Subsequently they were interviewed at their new school sites in order to reflect on their work at Emery and make comparisons between their former and present work settings.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative research involves an ongoing process of data analysis with continual reflection about the emerging data. It is not distinctly separate from other activities in the research process and as a result can become what O'Reilly (2009) referred to as the "messy business" of making some sense of it all. Ethnographic research in particular is a reflexive process in which decisions made and relationships formed with the participants guide the researcher as he or she constantly reflects on what they are seeing or hearing. The process is a spiral approach where the collection of data will raise questions, which in turn lead to more data collection, analysis, writing and the ongoing development of ideas (O'Reilly, 2009 p. 15).

In this study data collection and analysis proceeded simultaneously. I frequently used observer comments in my fieldnotes to ask questions and note things to pay attention to. Questions that were raised in my notes, or following conversations with

teachers, further modified or clarified what I thought I knew about each site and sometimes shaped the lens I took in future observations or conversations with teachers. This is because in qualitative research the overall picture never becomes clear all at once. It slowly emerges, thus the iterative and inductive processes of data collection and analysis.

In this study, the early analytic process was flexible and driven by insights made by interacting with the data as it was collected (Charmaz, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Throughout data collection I frequently read and interacted with fieldnotes to write analytic memos that identified and explored concepts, themes, and theoretical possibilities (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). This grounded process allowed me to focus data collection, and at different points in the study I paid attention to different features of teachers' work and asked specific questions about things I was wondering in order to fill gaps in my data or to test emerging concepts. After all data were collected in year one, I continued this grounded approach (Charmaz, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), sticking close to the data and constantly testing out ideas. I used the analytic approach to denote constructs derived from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and to focus on teachers' meanings about their work (Charmaz, 2003). Through this process I was able to capture the major organizational routines (i.e., "non-negotiables" – see chapter 5) that shaped teachers' work at both schools and the functions they served. Non-negotiables, so named because the regional superintendent of Emery and Adams considered these mandates a must-have in every classroom, were the primary routines that organized teachers' core work. The above process was two-fold: 1) I was able to capture the structure of each school (e.g., mandated routines and monitoring procedures),

and 2) I was immersed in emerging concepts and themes, such as lack of professional discretion and emotional responses as a filter for processing changes to work, that I began to look for across teachers and schools; searching for related phenomena at the same level of connectedness and complexity, specifically how teachers perceived their tasks and roles (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). This process began to reveal teachers' meanings and captured the ways they apprehended their mandated tasks, and it informed the development of year two interview protocols.

I continued a grounded approach after all data were collected and began the process of open coding – breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990 p. 61). Simultaneously I began axial coding, the act of relating concepts/categories to each other (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), resulting in set of about 30 codes, derived and developed from the data (see Appendix G). Codes captured the work teachers' performed (e.g., *tasks, the test, change over time*), the conditions under which it occurred (e.g., *school status, monitoring, flexibility, support*), and teachers' responses to their work (e.g., *emotions*). Some codes were simply the inverse of each other (e.g., *positive emotions* and *negative emotions*) in order to manage large quantities of data, others were in-vivo codes to capture actual moments described with common language by teachers (e.g., *no fun*), and some were used to sort through observations made in fieldnotes (e.g., *the vibe, teacher characterization*). Codes, like *positive emotions* and *negative emotions*, were higher-level categories that rested on a solid foundation of data. I made connections between and among categories, validated those relationships, looked for negative cases and categories that needed further refinement and development until I reached conceptual saturation (Corbin & Strauss,

2008). To seek teachers' meanings I had to look at their views and values (what they said) as well as their actions (what they did). Through this process of analysis I arrived at the findings - the explanatory story of accountability policy, teachers' work routines, and teachers' meaning making - presented in the following chapters.

### **Methods of Verification**

The issue of credibility in qualitative research is problematic when viewed from a psychometric perspective that revolves around validity, reliability, and generalizability. Framing qualitative research from this quantitative paradigm creates a bad fit and is confusing when a term from one domain is reassigned to another. As this study takes a constructivist approach, relying on descriptions of schools, events, routines, and meaning it is a complex endeavor to adequately address typically quantitative referents for verification. Nevertheless, the following sections attempt to address these issues by drawing on the qualitative research literature.

#### **Reliability**

In quantitative research, reliability refers to consistency across constructs and generally refers to the "replicability" of findings. While this is fairly straightforward in quantitative research, it is less so in qualitative research where the phenomenon under study, the context in which it occurred, and the study participants would likely change over time. Lincoln and Guba (1985) reconceived the concept as "dependability," an estimation of how consistent the findings would be if the study were repeated. This concept can be strengthened to some degree by various methodological and analytical choices (see Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011, p. 53). Above, I have included a detailed

description of the procedures utilized and the manner in which data was collected. I also used semi-structured interviews. Although they allowed for flexibility on the part of the respondent, they ensured that the same or similar questions were asked across participants. Also, I was the only person to conduct interviews which maximized the consistency of data collection across participants and schools.

### **Validity**

In qualitative research validity has to do with description and explanation, and whether or not the explanation fits the description (Janesick, 2003). Whether or not a researcher's explanation of phenomena is credible or not is complicated, as qualitative research often claims there are no "correct" interpretations (Janesick, 2003; Stake, 2003), but researchers can check their work by applying the suggestions of others. Creswell (2003) suggested eight strategies to check the accuracy of findings, a few of which were employed in the course of this study.

Data triangulation, a common technique, was used to build a "coherent justification for themes" (Creswell, 2003). Triangulation is generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning (Stake, 2003). Different data sources, fieldnotes and interview transcripts, were examined and used to build conceptual themes in the course of analysis. Though I did not analyze documents collected in school sites, they did serve as an additional data source and were used as a reference to explore themes. Because I employed ethnographic methods to study of teachers' work, I spent a prolonged time in the field. This is enabled me to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study and convey detail about the schools and the teachers. This

is another strategy that lends credibility to the account presented in the following chapters (Creswell, 2003). Finally, I was attentive to negative or discrepant information. Real life is composed of different perspectives and I had to figure out how to think through contrary information such as when teachers expressed different opinions about the relative value of a mandated organizational routine.

### **Ethnographic Research**

This study employed ethnographic research methods in order to focus on teachers' experiences and meanings at the school level. Ethnography has its early roots in anthropology, evolving when the Chicago School of Sociology adapted ethnography to the study of American communities (Murchison, 2010). Ethnography is a method for collecting data and gaining insight through firsthand involvement with the research subjects. Ethnographic research, like much other qualitative research, is an iterative-inductive approach. It evolves in design throughout the course of the study. The approach draws on a variety of methods involving direct and sustained contact with participants in order to produce richly written accounts of how individuals make sense of their lived reality.

In ethnography both the role of the researcher and theory are important (O'Reilly, 2009). Ethnographic researchers are required to think critically about the context and the act of research. It is a process of synthesizing, clarifying, and producing meanings and understandings with the intention that the ethnography will offer an important contribution that will extend beyond the site studied. The ethnographer conducts research by interacting with other humans that are part of the study. The idea of "being there" is rooted in the assumption that certain types of information are only obtainable

through firsthand research (Murchison, 2010). Ethnographers use prolonged observation, participation in the daily life of the group and a wide range of techniques; however, ethnographic techniques can and will vary across settings and populations.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In ethnographic research the researchers are the instrument of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2003). This introduces a range of strategic and ethical issues into the research process and thus requires that researchers explicitly identify their positions. Having worked in City School District for 11 years prior to beginning this research, I brought a range of experience and familiarity with the school district and its policies and practices that I assumed positioned me as an insider to the schools studied. That is, accounting for local differences in organizational models and administrative practices, I was familiar with teachers' situations – the range of district mandates and policies and the increased attention to standardized test scores. In my last few years with City School District I experienced a rapid succession of mandates aimed at controlling teachers' practices in order to improve student outcomes. This coincided with district's creation of a strategic plan and organizational model that categorized and supported schools based on AYP status. I became increasingly curious about the experiences of teachers, especially as it related to varied working conditions (i.e., high-performing and low-performing schools).

As a former teacher and teacher-leader in the school district under study I presumed my work history would afford me an insider status, and establish my research intentions as good and sincere with the administrators and teachers I was asking to

participate. While I think this worked toward my advantage in connecting with the principals at Adams and Emery to discuss the possibility of conducting research in their schools, I was not warmly received by all of the teachers at either school. Most teachers were not eager to participate and have me observe them every other week. I quickly learned that this word, *observe*, no matter how I defined and qualified it connoted judgment and evaluation – something I had not intended to convey. Many teachers were hesitant to participate and had questions. They wanted to know what I intended to do with my research, and one teacher asked tough questions about my integrity based on her experience participating in another research project at the school.

Certainly my status fluctuated throughout the course of data collection and among different participants. Some teachers quickly warmed-up to me and established a comfortable rapport, but others remained skeptical about my intentions to observe their work and stayed guarded much longer into the research process. Though I eventually established a good rapport with all of the participating teachers, I was never accepted as a member of either school community. I attended various school events and ate lunch in teachers' lounges, but this did not change the dynamic. Teachers, participating and non-participating alike, for the most part were not interested in eating lunch with me or socializing with me beyond what good manners and the established boundaries of our relationship called for. This is not meant to imply that I felt isolated or intentionally treated as an outsider. Rather, I say this to note that despite having previously shared a similar status (i.e., classroom teacher) I was now a researcher and not a full member of the teacher communities at Adams and Emery.

Though I was familiar with school as a setting, I lacked knowledge about the particulars of Adams and Emery which made many aspects of each school unfamiliar to me. Further, because there were plenty of teachers at each school who did not participate, and early reticence on the part of some who did participate, I was forced to ask questions and seek information that I may have taken for granted had I been immediately and fully accepted as an insider. However, the explicit goal of this and other ethnographic research is to gain an insider perspective and to uncover emic views through the collection of insider accounts. This meant that I had to in some way become an insider within each school's community. Here, I think my experience teaching and my familiarity with district policies informed my rapport with participating teachers, and allowed me to establish myself as a credible observer and inquisitor of their work activities.

Ethnographers listen to participants and attempt to understand their world from their point of view. The goal of this research was to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of their work. The intent was to make sense of the meanings teachers made about their work worlds. One advantage of insider ethnography, being familiar with the situation studied, is the reduced risk of "othering" the teachers and administrators participating in the study, but it also challenged the qualitative call to make the familiar seem strange. Accordingly, it was important for me to remain cognizant of the extent to which I controlled the data, and to remain flexible and open to participants' interests and concerns. To this end, I immersed myself as much as possible in the life of each school, attending and participating in events beyond the bounds of

classroom observations, and asking lots of questions so as not to presume that my experience in a district school paralleled anyone else's experience.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The ethnographer's responsibility is to faithfully document the world of the study participants. Ethical responsibilities to informants are paramount, especially because of the long-term nature of ethnographic research. Facts or information are produced through human interactions and an ethnographer does not want to produce a work that will harm or exploit participants in any way. This study was conducted under the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Temple University and City School District's Office of Research and Evaluation to insure that the school district, schools, and participating subjects were protected.

For the purpose of this research, I worked simultaneously with the above entities as well as local school principals to gain permission to conduct research both within the school district and at each school site over the long-term. Once granted access to Adams and Emery, I provided all teachers with a brief presentation outlining my research aims, requests, and the requisite informed consent paperwork. Participation in the study was voluntary, volunteers were able to refuse to participate without any consequence, and all participants were guaranteed anonymity in any future writings about this work.<sup>12</sup> The study, I believe, was conducted with minimal disruption to each school and teacher's schedule. Observations were conducted during the school day and with teachers'

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<sup>12</sup> One participant withdrew from the study early in the first school year.

approval, and interviews were conducted at times and in locations selected by each participant.

O'Reilly (2009) argued that ethnography is less exploitative than other methodologies because it is long-term, engaged, and involves careful access (p. 20); however, researchers, even when insiders, are guests in the participants' world (Stake, 2003). In this study, participating teachers, willing to share their thoughts and opinions about the ways their work was structured, risked exposure in their school settings. Some participants expressed concern about the audience for this study – who would know what they said? Some participants took precautions, choosing not to disclose certain information, selecting off-site locations for interviews, or whispering during interviews so as not to be heard by others in the vicinity. In recognition of the risk participating teachers assumed, I discussed limits and parameters with all teachers. I always let teachers know when I was coming to observe and asked permission before entering their classrooms. I was flexible with my scheduling and expectations in terms of when and how observations were conducted. I promised teachers' anonymity in terms of work products, and agreed that nothing they said would be attributed directly back to them. Finally, I listened carefully to teachers but always attempted to check my understanding by repeating back key phrases, asking for examples, and checking thoughts or hunches I had in the course of data collection and analysis. While the value of the best research is not likely to outweigh injury to a participant exposed, my manners were good and my ethics were strict (Stake, 2003).

## **Benefits of the Study**

For the most part, participants did not directly benefit from this study. Though I was willing to volunteer in teachers' classrooms to help in ways that made sense to them, only a few teachers took me up on this offer. In these classrooms I conducted individual learning assessments, completed paperwork (e.g., grading, filing, and bulletin boards), and tutored students. I also participated in committee meetings and leadership team meetings, lending a hand whenever I could. It is possible that teachers participating in this study became more cognizant of the ways in which organizational routines shaped their practice and their work experience. Several teachers expressed gratitude for my willingness to listen, and for providing them with an outlet to talk candidly and in-depth about their work and their feelings.

Understanding the experiences of teachers at work and the organizational conditions under which it happens is important to consider at a time when there is growing concern with the effectiveness of public education, and the work of public school teachers. As research considers reforms aimed at teachers and the rapidly changing public school policy context, it needs to examine how teachers understand their work and the organizational routines that shape it. Such work is required in order to address issues related to teachers' occupational status and teacher turnover as a consequence of teacher dissatisfaction with urban public school systems.

## CHAPTER 4

### **SUBSTANCE AND SYMBOL: THE INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND THE EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING**

NCLB reshaped the institutional environment of public schooling through a system of rewards and sanctions tied to compliance and performance. The Act prompted new positions, instructional programs, and a standardization of practices across public schools, particularly low-income urban schools where student achievement remained low despite prior waves of reform. Scholarship suggests that these new environmental pressures (i.e., standards and test-based accountability) have made it past the classroom door influencing what and how teachers teach (Au, 2007; Booher-Jennings, 2006; Diamond & Spillane, 2004; McNeil, 2000; Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009).

This chapter is designed to provide context for the following chapters that will discuss how instructional routines rationalized the work of teachers, thereby challenging teacher identity. In this chapter I set up the conditions for examining changes to teachers' practices and experiences by focusing on the local level response to the changed institutional environment of schooling, exploring how an urban public school district absorbed accountability pressures by reorganizing schools according to AYP status. I argue that the local level response to accountability policy restructured the organizational field of schooling in the city by introducing diverse strategies for the design of schools, and competing ideas about how to treat teachers and organize their work.

I make two main arguments here. First, City School District's enactment of a delivery model that transformed the formal structure of schools based on AYP status introduced variation into the field of public schooling and embraced two competing

approaches about how to promote effective teaching: professionalization and standardization. Second, messages about the status of teaching (e.g., worthy of professionalization or in need of standardization) embedded in the organizational models were mediated by pressures from an institutional environment that emphasized attention to student test scores and structures that coordinated and controlled teachers' activities. These arguments are situated in a neoinstitutional analysis of accountability policy demonstrating that test-based accountability has transformed the institutional environment of schooling through the enactment of new beliefs and rules about how schools should operate (Hallett, 2010).

**Institutional Myths and the Changed Institutional Environment: “I came into teaching right when this all started to change.”**

Following the passage of NCLB, City School District responded to federal and state calls for greater accountability in schools with early reform efforts geared toward aligning instruction with state standards and ultimately the state's standardized assessment. One such effort was the district's core curriculum, a series of documents that describe the skills and concepts students must learn in each subject at each grade level. Referring to the year in which the core curriculum was implemented across all city schools, Ms. Accardi, a fifth grade teacher quoted above, identified the implementation of the core curriculum as a moment in time “when this all started to change” – when accountability began to redefine the institutional environment of schooling in a way that was discernible to teachers. The creation and implementation of the core curriculum marked a pivotal moment in the work of teachers in City School District because it effectively reduced teachers' instructional discretion. The documents were designed to help teachers know what and how to teach and were accompanied by the purchase of

standardized reading and math materials for all district schools. The core curriculum was aligned to state standards, required teachers to pace instruction, and was meant to “help teachers move students to the proficient level of performance on standardized tests” (reference suppressed), thus beginning to align City School District’s work with the rationalized rules and beliefs put forth by accountability policy.<sup>13</sup>

The implementation of the core curriculum initiated a series of mandates that targeted teachers’ work in City School District. The core curriculum changed the formal structure of schools by outlining what skills and content teachers taught and when they taught it. Below, I analyze more recent reform efforts that further illustrate how accountability policy changed the institutional environment of schooling in City School District and introduced competing strategies for organizing schools and teachers’ work.

**The Local Response: Introducing Variation into the Organizational Field: “An Enrichment school is a school that has masses of students underperforming. An Achievement school has masses that are performing.”**

In April of 2009 City School District’s governing body approved a unique delivery model that classified and reorganized schools according to AYP status (see chapter 3 for a description of the model). This model was created as part of the district’s then five-year strategic plan and reflected accountability rhetoric about how to treat high-performing and low-performing schools. In the above quote, Mr. Cervantes, a regional superintendent in City School District, explained that the district’s delivery model was based on measures of student performance. It is important to note that this delivery model was layered on an existing structure in which the core curriculum, curricular materials, and recommended pedagogical practices formed the core technology of city

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<sup>13</sup> Reference suppressed to maintain the anonymity of the school district.

schools. The pre-existing structure represented an early and ongoing response to pressures from the institutional environment to control and coordinate teachers' work in an effort to improve student outcomes.

Public schools exist in a highly institutionalized environment which means they resemble each other because they adhere to rules and requirements that ensure their legitimacy. City School District's delivery model introduced diversity into the organizational field of public schooling by altering the formal structure of Enrichment schools and Turnaround schools. Though district leaders expected that Traditional schools would use the recommended instructional programs and strategies put forth by central and regional administrative offices, the formal structures at Enrichment and Turnaround schools were redesigned to include new positions, chains of command, instructional programs, and organizational routines. By nature of the district's decision to create diverse models based on AYP status, two competing strategies for the organizational design of schools emerged. The first strategy assumed that satisfactory schools, such as Achievement and Traditional schools, could operate on the "logic of confidence and good faith" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). That is, confidence in these schools' abilities to outperform similar schools in the field was maintained through discretion – granting autonomy and avoiding close inspection. The second strategy assumed unsatisfactory schools, such as Enrichment and Turnaround schools, must be monitored because their failure to perform signaled organizational instability.

For this study, I selected one Achievement school, Adams, and one Enrichment school, Emery, and because these organizational models embody the different strategies for the design of schools and ultimately teachers' work: the former model allowing for

greater autonomy from central administration, and the latter exerting greater controls from central and regional administration. During a formal interview with Mr. Cervantes, he elaborated on the relationship between student outcomes and school models, contrasting the practice of rewarding successful schools with the practice of increased administrative intervention into struggling schools. He said:

In an Enrichment school the district is going to say well here's a large number of students, the majority of the school, or in some cases overwhelming majority, who are not performing well and they haven't over many years, so we're going to prescribe to you exactly what we think you should use - not only because we think we should do that but also because the federal government and the state department require us to do some type of that type of work. (Interview, 5/1/12)

In this explanation, Mr. Cervantes noted that the school district's response was guided by the broader institutional environment's press for change at the local level. While the school district responded to high-performing schools by granting them greater autonomy from central administration, they responded to low-performing schools with prescriptions about curricular materials (i.e., "what we think you should use"). Furthermore, Mr. Cervantes began to set up how the model created variance in the organizational structures of individual schools and effectively transmitted competing ideas about how to treat teachers and organize their work.

During the interview Mr. Cervantes mentioned that he had thought quite a bit about a model that introduced variation into the field of public schooling in City School District. Though his thinking had evolved such that he questioned the value of a model

that treated schools and thus teachers differently, he was able to trace back some of the initial assumptions that informed the creation of this model. He said:

What I think the bigger problem was in terms of teaching is that in the Enrichment schools there was a lot of new teachers, a lot of turnover. There was a lot of people who didn't have a sense of collaboration so you kind of have to tell them how to do it because they are not working with each other on how to do it. . . I think Achievement schools, for the most part, not all, have a system where the teachers work together, collaboratively, positively, and make good decisions around their students. I'm not saying Enrichment schools are not making good decisions because they're intentionally not, but I've seen teachers not make good decisions around teaching in Enrichment schools for a variety of reasons. . . .A lot of people didn't really want to be there, it was their last pick. They weren't invested in the school. They couldn't wait to get out of there till the next year. . . So there's not a sense of ownership, if you will, and with that, that's when we have to come in and say, 'Well then you got to do this if you're going to be here.'

(Interview, 5/1/12)

The assumption that Achievement schools, "for the most part," "have a system where teachers work together" to make good decisions and thus are awarded greater autonomy, versus Enrichment schools, where teachers generally are not "invested" and unwilling to make good decisions and thus told what to do put forth different ideas about how to treat teachers: engender their commitment through rewards like increased autonomy, or control their efforts through prescriptions and monitoring.

City School District's model introduced the possibility for organizationally distinct teaching experiences across the school district by drawing on competing organizational strategies: commitment and/or professionalization versus control and/or standardization (Rowan, 1990; Wills & Sandholtz, 2009), as a means for both sustaining and improving teacher quality. In the former, high-performing schools, like Adams, were rewarded for their achievements with "autonomy" – authority over decisions with an emphasis on, or trust in, administrator and teacher professional judgment. In the latter, low-performing schools, like Emery, were reformed through centralized efforts to improve curriculum and instruction, with an emphasis on surveillance of teachers' work.

School status and designations such as Enrichment and Achievement are associated with changes in the institutional environment which pressed to classify, reward, and sanction schools. This system of classification created messages about schools and the people who inhabited them. From these messages teachers constructed understandings about their work experience. Below I consider the impact of school status on the experience of teaching at Emery and Adams. Because teachers noticed messages and constructed understandings of them, I relied mostly on interviews with teachers in order to capture how they made sense of the organizational models assigned to their schools. I argue that school status transmitted messages to teachers about their occupational status. However, accountability pressures from the institutional environment and the implementation, or lack thereof, of the Enrichment and the Achievement model mediated these messages. In the case of Emery, where reform was real and considerable, the messages about teachers' status were reinforced. In the case of

Adams, where reform was more theoretical and symbolic, the message to teachers was weakened.

**Substantive Reform at Emery School: “...we are a failing school...”<sup>14</sup>**

“It basically means that we are a failing school, that kids aren’t making the achievements they expect them to make,” Ms. Earnhardt, a kindergarten teacher, concluded when I inquired about Emery’s Enrichment status (Interview, 6/4/12). In this quote, the pervasiveness of the message was clear – Emery was a failing school. While the Enrichment title marked failing schools as such, it also signaled to teachers a message about their work and their status. At Emery, the Enrichment status denoted failure and was accompanied by prescriptions for teachers’ practice and increased surveillance of their work. The messages to teachers about their work and their professional status were congruent with the institutional environment’s calls for increased accountability in low-performing schools.

Emery’s failing status shaped the experience of teaching by generating a press for improved status for both the school and its teachers. That is, teachers absorbed messages implicit in the model and its mandated practices that suggested their work should be standardized, and acted on this in order to improve the AYP status of the school and ultimately their own occupational status (e.g., working toward greater control over the direction of their work). Marked as a failing school, the Enrichment status sharpened the focus of teachers’ work at Emery. In regard to the school’s status, Ms. Ellis, a fifth grade teacher said, “Basically we are a failing school and we have to meet certain criteria in

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<sup>14</sup> Both schools and their organizational models are described in greater detail in chapter three.

order to keep, maintain ourselves within the district.” Referring to the desire to come out of Enrichment status she added, “Keeping our school alive...the fact that we’re an Enrichment school we want to stay in the City School District.” At the time of this study, City School District was turning around low-performing schools through charter conversion, as well as implementing a facilities plan that called for closing under-enrolled schools in order to reduce operating costs and address a massive budget crisis. Emery, a low-performing and under-enrolled school was a suitable candidate for either of these options. Improving the school’s status was one way to avoid either potential fate. Ms. Eden, the school’s principal, alerted teachers to this reality during a staff meeting. During what was a rather tense introduction to the afternoon’s agenda, she stood in front of her teachers and sternly told them to “be mindful” of what they do because Emery is “an Enrichment school and next year 40 more schools are slated for closure” (Fieldnote, 10/19/11). Ms. Eden’s reminder to teachers captured pressures related to school status. At Emery, moving out of Enrichment status was important because not only was it undesirable to be a failing school but also because it was even less desirable to be a closed school.

The Enrichment model was a substantive reform that reshaped Emery’s formal structure, with a strong focus on the technical core – classroom instruction. Early iterations of the Enrichment model included the creation and implementation of positions and programs aimed at addressing school culture and strengthening the home-school connection. These positions and programs were eliminated prior to the start of the 2011-2012 school year during the district’s initial round of budget reductions. By the time I entered Emery the Enrichment model largely comprised instructional mandates including

but not limited to: a prescriptive literacy program accompanied by increased assessment and daily scripted reading and math interventions for grades 2-8. Walkthroughs to monitor teachers' compliance and performance of mandates still occurred, though on a slightly reduced schedule. Ms. Earnhardt had been at Emery for 13 years. She began there when the school was still a middle school, worked under several principals, transitioned from middle-years to kindergarten, and experienced the implementation and evolution of the Enrichment model. Sitting in a little chair around a hexagonal student table she explained:

The reading programs, having to do reading interventions – those were things because we're Enrichment. Different professional developments we had to take because we're Enrichment or different assessments we have to give because we're Enrichment. Basically that's pretty much the changes, not like school climate or anything like that; more toward how you're teaching the kids has changed.

(Interview, 6/14/12).

Ms. Earnhardt's response noted changes that targeted the technical core. She was keen to point out that the structure did not change the climate of the school, referring to student conduct and teacher morale, but rather the content and process of teaching changed. Her description of the changes highlighted the substance of the organizational model, the technical core, and sharply contrasted with Meyer and Rowan's (1977) assumptions about the tendency of school organizations to ceremonially adopt programs.

Whereas early neoinstitutional and organizational thinking endorsed the image of schools as loosely coupled organizations where formal structures did not match core

activities, school practices under current accountability policy have challenged this notion. Accountability, particularly in failing schools, holds that people must be monitored, making it difficult to enact ceremonial compliance with instructional mandates. Now, it is more difficult for schools to enact ceremonial compliance while doing different things in the classroom, or as Ms. Edwards, a third grade teacher, explained regarding her instructional routine, “The expectation is definite. If it’s on our schedule or in our lesson plan when she [the principal] walks in the room, that’s what needs to be seen” (Interview, 12/14/11).

At Emery, external mandates were accompanied by increased surveillance of teachers’ work: “Because we’re an Enrichment school they want to see exactly what it is, what we’re teaching, what materials we’re using and how we’re assessing them,” (Ms. Earnhardt, Interview, 1/5/12). Under NCLB, school districts are responsible for assisting low-performing schools. City School District provided resources to Enrichment schools – the curricular programs and instructional strategies – and monitored schools to ensure that teachers implemented changes. In addition to regular observations by the school’s principal, a team of regional administrators periodically visited Emery to monitor compliance with mandates and progress toward goals. On my first formal visit to Emery in mid-October, the school staff was gathered for an afternoon professional development session on three topics: school-wide literacy strategies, writing mastery objectives, and enhancing math instruction through differentiated activities. Before the sessions began, the principal, Ms. Eden, took the floor to review a document that summarized the regional team’s most recent walkthrough data. The document was organized according to weaknesses and strengths. With a tone and a facial expression reminiscent of a parent

chastising a child, Ms. Eden began by reading the identified weakness: less than 100% of classrooms had objectives posted and/or communicated, and less than 100% of classrooms had procedures and rules posted (Fieldnote, 10/19/11). Her focus on weaknesses reinforced the regulative pressures of the Enrichment model: teachers were mandated to act in a certain way and their compliance was monitored. Teachers, mostly avoiding Ms. Eden's gaze, sat quietly as if the news was uncomfortable yet familiar.

Framed through the lens of federal policy-making, monitoring is part of a larger effort to assist schools in implementing improvement strategies; however, at the local level teachers experienced this quite differently. Consider the following quote from Ms. Engler, a fourth grade teacher who was quite matter-of-fact about the perceived benefits and consequences of Enrichment mandates:

Enrichment means to me under the microscope, I would say. When you think of the term *enrichment* it seems as though you are going to get assistance or support to be better and I don't necessarily see that. More so, we have had walkthroughs, and different regional personnel would come in and you would feel like you were under scrutiny, and you know there may have been written reprimands for you know – lack of something, but I don't see where the support side came in or the enriching side. Enriching teachers, enriching students, I don't necessarily see that so I would definitely say it just felt like you were under the microscope.

(Interview, 5/3/12)

Ms. Engler contested the official language of the model, noting that the walkthroughs and mandates did not “enrich” her or her students. For her, the experience of monitoring was

incongruent with the ostensive message of the Enrichment model. Rather than the implied support and assistance, she perceived the monitoring as an examination of her work with the implicit message that something was likely wrong and worthy of a “written reprimand.”

At Emery, instructional mandates and district monitoring were interpreted as a consequence of distrust, and viewed as instruments of control meant to limit teachers’ professional discretion. On working in an Enrichment school, Ms. Erikson said, “The district kind of looks at the schools and says, ‘You guys can’t manage this on your own so we’re going to come in and manage it for you.’” Ms. Erikson’s interpretation of her school’s model drew attention to an element of accountability policy: increased centralized authority focused on aligning curricular objectives, instructional materials, instructional strategies, and state tests. The way she made sense of the Enrichment model demonstrated the intensity of the message to teachers about their professional status. City School District’s central and regional administrative offices designed and monitored the Enrichment model – selecting instructional materials, setting performance targets, and reviewing school performance. Representative of accountability policy’s drive for efficiency (Mehta, 2013) – if the teachers cannot “manage” then the district will come in and manage for them – City School District’s administrative efforts to standardize curriculum and teaching methods in order to improve student academic outcomes were perceived as a message of distrust and as a statement about teachers’ competence.

Whereas Ms. Erikson alluded to the sense of distrust conveyed by instructional mandates, Ms. Ellis, a fifth grade teacher, explicitly and angrily stated, “I feel like the district doesn’t trust us in making decisions on how to run our classrooms and that’s why

they try to run everything down to what we're supposed to say" (Interview, 1/18/12). Not only did the Enrichment status assign failure to the school, it also conveyed a message of doubt and distrust – “the district doesn't trust us” – about the abilities of Emery's teachers to make curricular and instructional decisions that would improve student outcomes. At Emery, there was strong congruence between mandates, monitoring, and messages to teachers about their professional status.

A drive for efficiency and reduced variation across classrooms, rooted in distrust, or at the very least assumptions about teachers in low-performing schools (see Cervantes comment above), fueled control strategies meant to routinize the core technology of schools through mandates about curriculum and instruction. Ms. Easton, a kindergarten teacher with 12 years of experience but new to Emery in year one of this study, asserted her early impressions of the Enrichment model:

It means district-control. . . .They don't give you the freedom, and I don't know if it's because the staff isn't experienced. I'm not sure. I guess the higher-ups think that the school needs this and that in order to be able to meet the students' needs" (Interview, 5/30/12).

Ms. Easton perceived the model to be about controlling her work, and offered some possible reasons for the controls she experienced despite that fact that she had 12 years of experience as a classroom teacher, teacher leader, and Reading First coach. The lack of freedom she experienced intensified the message of control and coordination for teachers. Ms. Erikson, the middle-years special education teacher at Emery, echoed this interpretation, “Being an Enrichment school, it's really difficult because we're really

structured in terms of what we can and cannot do, so there's not much room to wiggle.” Later she added, “A lot of teacher freedom has been taken away, and I mean that instructionally.” Both teachers interpreted Enrichment mandates as an attack on their professionalism in which reduced “freedom” and little “room to wiggle” discounted teacher expertise and professional discretion. This condition was the direct result of a model that standardized and scrutinized teachers’ work. Importantly, Enrichment was a model that involved rule-setting (i.e., instructional mandates), monitoring, and sanctioning (i.e., “written reprimands”) that pressured teachers to change their practice. The congruence between the actual model and the model’s messages about teacher status gave substance to this reform effort and had a real effect on teachers’ practice.

The Enrichment model aimed to restructure failing schools and improve student outcomes. Ultimately there was congruence between the broader institutional environment’s pressures related to accountability and the implementation of the Enrichment model. Pressures from both emphasized the same thing – coordinating and controlling teachers’ work in order to improve student outcomes and ultimately school status. At Emery, teachers responded to pressures to improve their performance by implementing mandated instructional routines, thus trying to prevent the school from further sanctions such as charter conversion or closure. These routines, which are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, constrained teachers’ work and limited their professional discretion, ultimately conveying the message that Enrichment teachers could not be trusted to improve student outcomes without serious intervention into their work.

**Symbolic Reform at Adams School: “...we’re one of the bet schools in the city...”**

Under the school district’s strategic plan, Adams was one of 25 schools in a district of approximately 250 schools awarded the Achievement title. By nature of the small number of schools awarded this status, the title denoted success. City School District’s strategic plan described these schools as “high-performing schools” that “continually meet annual performance targets.” With regard to the school’s status, Ms. Agnew, a fifth-grade special education teacher commented, “It means we’re one of the best schools in the city – that we have the top scores and the best teachers, I guess” (5/24/12). This perception is a marked contrast to the messages of failure experienced by teachers at Emery. At Adams, there was no reason to worry that the school would be converted or closed in future iterations of school reform. Thus, the Achievement title reinforced the message that Adams was a successful school, “one of the best,” in a field of mostly struggling schools. However, the case of Adams and school status was more complex than this. The Achievement title denoted success, and the ostensive model proposed to afford successful schools greater autonomy from central administration, which it did by decreasing the external monitoring of schools. Yet, teachers’ perceived a lack of congruence between the message and the model. Institutional pressures related to accountability pushed aside messages about success and rewards, and instead emphasized standardized practices aimed at improving test scores. Whereas the intensity of the Enrichment message was high at Emery, the intensity of the Achievement message was low at Adams because accountability pressures from the broader institutional environment were more intense and more pervasive. Thus the incentive to stay the course, with existing prescribed practices and programs that led to earlier successes, was greater than the desire to seize autonomy.

The Achievement model did not bear the weight that the Enrichment model did. The hint of doubt expressed at the end of the Ms. Agnew's above comment referred to the lack of clarity around Achievement status as a tangible reward versus a symbolic designation. Consider Ms. Anderson's, a kindergarten teacher, response when I asked her what it means to work in an Achievement School:

I think when that happened [the Achievement Status] our scores were high and we were doing so well academically and maybe we had low behavior/suspension type things. We were told that we had more autonomy and we could just maybe have more freedom with how we run the school. Other than that it did not really affect me that much. (Interview, 6/1/12).

Here, Ms. Anderson touched on an idea that was commonly shared among teachers at Adams - the Achievement status was more symbol than substance. Most teachers believed their practice remained unaffected by this prestigious title. They struggled to identify changes as a result of the school's status. "I really don't know," Ms. Alba, a fifth grade teacher with over 26 years of teaching experience, told me. "At first we were all excited. I have not seen...from what I was told we have complete autonomy. We're still using the same texts books as the other schools are" (Interview, 5/31/12). Indeed, earlier reform efforts in City School District such as the implementation of the core curriculum and its accompanying curricular programs, and the pressure to raise test scores each year, standardized teachers' work across much of the school district.

The coercive pressures of accountability forced compliance with City School District's existing programs that emphasized curriculum pacing and alignment, and the

Achievement designation seemingly failed to incite innovation at Adams. According to the teachers, they used the same materials and mostly worked as they had prior to being awarded the Achievement title. Ms. Aponte, a first grade teacher, echoed Ms. Alba's above sentiment, "It means nothing," she said dismissively during a formal interview. "We still follow the curriculum of the city. We still have the same text books. We're still on the same planning and scheduling timeline. . . . And we still care about scores. Where's the latitude we're supposed to have to change things?" (Interview, 5/24/12).

Ms. Alba noted the pressures of high-stakes test-based accountability as she questioned the lack of implementation with regard to the school's autonomous status. Her comment also pointed to an important difference in the intensity and pervasiveness of the messages conveyed by school status. Whereas messages about failure were pervasive at Emery because of intense pressures to conform to mandates, messages about success failed to arise in a substantive way at Adams. Rather, messages about accountability and AYP were more pervasive and more influential in shaping action, or in the case of innovation around autonomy, inaction.

It was not entirely clear why school administrators and teachers at Adams were unable to capitalize on their autonomous status. The lack of change teachers experienced could be indicative of the principal, Ms. Abad's, unwillingness/inability to change, or perhaps reluctance from regional and central offices to relinquish control and support the implementation of greater site-based management. Undoubtedly, pressures related to accountability were critical to the lack of change teachers' perceived. Consider the following quote from Ms. Accardi, a fifth grade teacher. Thinking through the anger she felt about "teaching to the test," she said:

I think the pressure is on her [the principal, Ms. Abad]. Our school is so high achieving that it almost...the pressure to achieve higher is unreachable. Like, if we scored 85% proficient in reading last year, they want 90% this year. Well, you know that's a jump. That's high, you know, and you don't want to be the school that doesn't do it. ... the pressure that she [the principal] puts on us, is not because she wants to put it on us, but I think it's on her and so it trickles down. (Interview, 12/9/11)

Ms. Accardi's rationale for the pressure she experienced with regard to "teaching to the test" directly indicted the school district and the requirement to annually raise student test scores. Her analysis removed responsibility from the school's principal, and suggested that any pressures placed on teachers with regard to aligning their instructional practice with the state test were a result of pressures placed upon the principal. Her thoughts reflected the intensity and pervasiveness of messages about accountability, not about past success.

While there could be multiple conditions influencing the lack of innovation at Adams, it was clear that teachers did not experience increased autonomy because of the school's status. In fact, there was a shared sentiment that the school failed to innovate under its prestigious status: "There's so much that we could be doing out of the box. . . . we have youth here [referring to younger teachers] that could take us in so many experimental directions and to me that's what attaining Achievement is" (Ms. Atkins, Interview, 5/24/12). Ms. Atkins' perception that the Adams school failed to innovate underscored the notion that the Achievement model was more symbolic than substantive with regard to teachers' work. Unlike the Enrichment model which was organized

around instructional mandates and increased surveillance, the mere awarding of autonomy failed to materialize in any concrete form at Adams.

While there seemed to be little observable difference in practices or structures for teachers at Adams, the lack of monitoring associated with the Achievement model was in fact noted and interpreted as a reward for being a high-achieving school. If increased surveillance at Emery was perceived as a sanction, or at the very least as a consequence of distrust, then Adams was rewarded with a lack of monitoring. The principal of the school, Ms. Abad, called Adams an “outlier school.” In her candid manner she said, “I call us an island. Other than [name of acting superintendent] coming for 32 minutes in October we haven’t had a visitor in 11 years.” Ms. Abad explained that the school’s reputation had allowed staff members to operate without monitoring, “We always did well and there were very few complaints and they [other schools] just had their share of problems and we were always Adams, sort of doing OK, and no problems, and they just left us alone” (Interview, 12/1/11). The island effect Ms. Abad described was in fact a reward because teachers interpreted the increased monitoring associated with the Enrichment model as undesirable. Ms. Atkins, a fourth grade teacher, noted that being an Achievement school means, “I’ve gotten away with not being under the microscope another year” (Interview, 5/24/12). This comment stood in stark contrast to Emery, where the Enrichment status was synonymous with being “on the district’s radar.” Adams’ status signaled the opposite. The absence of monitoring implicitly conveyed the message that Adams was a good school and could operate without increased surveillance.

Though autonomy did not materialize in any tangible way at Adams, the idea of autonomy and the lack of external monitoring that accompanied it was significant enough

to focus teachers' attention on maintaining the school's Achievement status. Ms. Aiken, a second grade teacher said, "We're high-performing and the last thing we want is people breathing down our back so in order to do that we have to meet the standard" (Interview, 12/13/11). Ms. Aiken positioned the formal structure of Adams in opposition to that of Enrichment schools, like Emery, where teachers were subjected to greater scrutiny. In this regard, Adams and Emery shared a similar drive related to school status. At Emery, the Enrichment status and what it represented – failure and control – generated a form of pressure to improve the school's status. At Adams, the Achievement status was akin to a carrot dangled in front of teachers – they must keep chasing it to avoid undesirable sanctions. Recall the above quote from Ms. Accardi, a fifth grade teacher, in which she attributed pressure to teach to the test to forces outside of the school. In an extension of that conversation she angrily added:

Our school is so high-achieving, the pressure to achieve higher is unreachable. . . . How do you go higher than that, and why is it not OK if they score a 91 this year, or an 87? But it's not, and you don't want to become that school that has people watching. (Interview, 12/9/11).

Ms. Accardi's sentiments echoed Ms. Aiken's above comment, clearly signaling that external monitoring is undesirable. In this case the lack of monitoring induced teachers to maintain the school's desirable status, and this was perhaps a condition that contributed to the lack of substantive change at Adams. At Adams, when teachers experienced pressure to raise test scores and to rely on district-recommended practices, they can become risk-averse – unwilling to do things differently for fear of becoming "that school that has people watching."

Though City School District aimed to reward high-performing schools such as Adams with the Achievement title and greater autonomy, teachers perceived this organizational model as symbolic of a school system that makes changes in name only. While the Achievement title designated Adams as “one of the best in the city” there was little substantive change to teachers’ work. In fact, the school’s status operated mostly at a theoretical level. There were no programs or professional development attached to the model as was the case with the Enrichment model. In terms of reputation and lack of monitoring, the Achievement status combined with broader institutional pressures motivated teachers to avoid increased scrutiny of their work and encouraged a focus on test scores and student performance. A model in which students’ past performance on standardized testing denoted organizational success that was rewarded with a lack of external scrutiny did little to fundamentally change practice at Adams. In fact, messages from the institutional environment related to accountability pushed aside the idea of innovation. In the next chapter, I develop this argument in more detail by showing how institutional pressures incited a form of mimetic isomorphism where Adams, despite its status, was pressured to adopt Enrichment school practices, thereby further reducing autonomy.

### **Conclusion**

Accountability acts as a powerful myth, modeling how schools should operate, and forcing change in the institutional environment of schooling. City School District responded to this myth through the creation of a delivery model that introduced variance into the organizational field of public schools, and changed the formal structure of schooling in low-performing schools by mandating a set of programs and practices aimed

at further standardizing teachers' work. In creating this model City School District uniquely embraced competing approaches for promoting effective teaching: professionalization and commitment versus standardization and control.

The competing strategies for the organizational designs of Achievement and Enrichment schools demonstrated different ideas about how to treat teachers and organize their work. Conflicting notions of professionalism were at play as teachers within the same school district, and in this case the same geographic region, were viewed and treated differently with regard to the monitoring of their work. In the Enrichment model, centralized efforts aimed to improve curriculum and instruction. Rather than a system based on professional discretion at the classroom level, the responsibility for developing and interpreting curriculum shifted from teachers to the district level. In the Achievement model, the approach emphasized teacher expertise and professional judgment in the form of reduced external oversight. In theory these models proposed two drastically different experiences for teachers. While the Enrichment model ushered in genuine change at Emery, the awarding of autonomy at Adams was much less tangible and much harder to seize given accountability pressures. At Emery the rhetoric of reform became reality as teachers were expected to enact mandates. At Adams, there was no rhetoric or reform as the Achievement model was simply less monitoring, and teachers perceived their practice as unchanged by the school's autonomous status. Effectively the coercive pressures of accountability increased changes to teachers' work at Emery, but the prestigious Achievement designation failed to alleviate the coercive pressures of accountability solidified in earlier district-wide reform efforts that standardized teaching and learning through the core curriculum and its accompanying curricular programs.

Despite variance in the organizational models, the experience of teaching at both schools was profoundly shaped by the high-stakes test-based accountability system enacted under NCLB. In both settings, school status induced a focus on student performance as a means to either improve or maintain school status. Even at Adams, where teachers were theoretically given more latitude to make decisions around teaching and learning, the desire to maintain a school status derived from student achievement on standardized tests constrained instructional practice. At both schools teachers were working to improve test scores. At Emery, improving test scores meant improved status for teachers. There, teachers' professionalism was reduced because they were unable to make many of the decisions that guided the work they did in classrooms. At Adams, the idea of professionalism was more complicated. Whereas status conveyed prestige and notions of professionalism, institutional pressures related to accountability policy undermined these messages and exerted pressure to stay the course with regard to district-recommended structures and programs.

Exploring teachers' perceptions of school status demonstrated how teachers' experiences and occupational status were being reshaped by the changed institutional environment. While teacher discretion was deliberately constrained at Emery, the generalized pressures related to AYP impacted teachers in real ways at Adams as well. The emphasis on standards, transparency, standardization, monitoring, and increased centralized authority put forth by NCLB reshaped public schools. Though the experience of deprofessionalization was greater at Emery because of the Enrichment model's constraints on teachers' work, both schools were confronting strong pressures from the

institutional environment. In the next chapter I explore how teachers' work was organized in response to such pressures.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE RATIONALIZATION OF TEACHERS' WORK: RECOUPLING AND SCHOOL STATUS

In the previous chapter I examined how City School District's delivery model introduced diversity into the organizational field of public schooling. To illustrate this, I examined two public schools operating under different organizational models based on performance status, and focused on how teachers perceived the models to impact their day-to-day tasks and routines and thus their occupational status as teachers. In this chapter, I use neoinstitutional theory as a tool to analyze similarities and differences in teachers' work across the two models. I make two main arguments. First, I argue that Adams and Emery absorbed environmental pressures through the implementation of centrally mandated instructional routines (see Table 5.1). Routines, that recoupled classroom instruction with accountability policy pressures, rationalized teachers' work. The implementation of instructional routines, the non-negotiables mentioned in chapter three, varied according to school status with greater attention to recoupling in the Enrichment school, where demands were greater and pressures to change were of a regulative nature that involved rule setting, monitoring, and sanctioning. Second, I argue that as the Adams school's legitimacy was called into question, pressures to recouple, or create tighter links between teachers' instruction and regional mandates, generated a form of mimetic isomorphism in which Adams was expected to adopt Enrichment practices and ultimately look more like Emery. Furthermore, I demonstrate that Adams' context shaped its efforts at recoupling and encouraged strategic buffering, efforts to improve external monitors' perceptions of the school, as a form of impression management in an effort to maintain the legitimacy conferred by the Achievement status.

Table 5.1 Non-Negotiables

Function	Tasks
<b>Curriculum Pacing</b>	<b>Core Curriculum</b> – follow a planning and scheduling timeline that delineated what concepts to cover and when to cover them <b>Instructional Interventions</b> – daily scripted reading and math programs for all grades 2-8 Emery students
<b>Curriculum Alignment</b>	<b>Constructed Response</b> – a pedagogical approach that prescribed a structure for teaching students how to respond to open-ended test questions <b>Test Prep</b> – implementing pre-packaged curricular materials and released items that aligned with tested content <b>Do Now</b> – instructional hooks for reading and math (standardized at Emery to mimic the form and content of the state test) <b>Classroom Appearance</b> – teachers were required to post a variety of materials that reflected state standards, designated instructional strategies (i.e. the constructed response format), and test-taking strategies, in addition to numerous other items mandated by administrators at the regional and local level
<b>Data-Related Tasks</b>	<b>Data Walls</b> – maintain and display student data in the classroom <b>Data Binders</b> – maintain records of all student data <b>Measurable Objectives</b> – a standardized format for writing daily learning objectives in which the targeted result of students’ work was quantified (e.g., with 80% accuracy)

### **Coercive Pressures and the AYP-Induced Rationalization of Teaching**

In City School District, all schools, regardless of performance status, were subject to the regulations, mandates, rewards, and punishments associated with NCLB. These were coercive pressures that gave rise to new beliefs about teaching and learning and forced schools, and therefore teachers, to behave and respond in certain ways in order to meet goals, earn rewards, and avoid sanctions. One result was new technologies, such as the routines described below, designed to create uniformity of practice across schools. Because all schools were responding to the same coercive policy pressures, they used similar routines, mandated by central and regional administrators. Recall from chapter 4

that this structure was one reason why the Achievement model failed to materialize in any sort of substantive change at Adams. At both Emery and Adams, teachers' core work was recoupled with policy pressures through four main instructional routines: 1) curriculum pacing, 2) curriculum alignment, 3) constructed response, and 4) data-related tasks. These instructional routines, widespread throughout the school district, rationalized teachers' work by reducing variation and discretion among teachers. They dictated what teachers should teach, when they should teach it, how they should teach it, and how to monitor one's efforts and successes.

Though the above routines were common throughout the district, they must be viewed in light of each school's context. Diamond and Spillane (2004) argued that school responses to high-stakes accountability are situated in a school's status with regard to accountability policy. Similarly, I found differences in the implementation and performance of instructional routines at Emery and Adams. A key element of this difference was related to the messages and pressures accompanying each school's status designation. At Emery, a failing school, messages about the need to comply with institutionalized mandates were more intense and more pervasive. Leadership team meetings, professional development sessions, walkthroughs, and observations all served to reinforce and/or refine the implementation and performance of centralized mandates. These messages were regulative in that they involved mandates concerning practice, and were monitored by administrators who conducted walkthroughs or observations and collected student data as a means to infer teacher performance. At Adams, a high-performing school, messages about practice were less intense and less pervasive. Teachers did not encounter messages from central or regional administrators because

they rarely visited the school. Messages about teachers' practice were less regulative and more normative (e.g., good teachers do these things) because teachers at Adams were rarely observed by anyone, including their principal. Below, I describe how the four primary routines (curriculum pacing, curriculum alignment, constructed response, and data-related tasks) were apprehended in each school setting.

**Curriculum Pacing: “Follow the PST. Do not deviate.”**

On the first day back to work, approximately 40 teachers and staff members packed a section of the Adams' school library for the principal's meeting. The agenda was full with back-to-school information and there was a sense of urgency as Ms. Abad, the principal, dressed in a brown pantsuit scurried about the room passing out papers and directing people to be seated. Through a megaphone Ms. Abad led the meeting, calling on various school personnel to share information relevant to the day's agenda. In the midst of the two teacher leaders' presentation about curriculum and instruction related information, Ms. Abad moved to the center of the room, interrupted, and began a lengthy talk about the new regional superintendent and the changes she would be making. Her speech was stream of conscious, talking about the new superintendent, the new expectations, and various other connections that popped in her head. Eventually she paused, looked up, and sternly issued the following warning, “Follow the PST. Do not deviate.” Referring to the new superintendent she added, “She wants a schedule of what you are doing and when” (Fieldnote, 9/1/11). As she said this, teachers groaned and shifted in their seats, already overwhelmed with the amount of new information conveyed that morning. The emphasis placed on adhering to the PST reflected the institutionalization of this task – monitored by external authorities at the regional and

central level – and the ways in which it was meant to rationalize teachers’ practice by ensuring consistency between classrooms and across schools.

Beginning in the fall of 2003 with the rollout of City School District’s core curriculum, the accompanying planning and scheduling timeline (PST), and new math and literacy curricular programs, teachers’ work became increasingly rationalized. The core curriculum rationalized teachers’ work by both standardizing instruction across classrooms (e.g., teaching every third grader in the city the same lessons each week) and reducing teacher discretion (e.g., dictating what to teach and when to teach it).

In this study, the more experienced teachers often cited the core curriculum as an example of how teaching changed over the course of their careers. Reflecting on how her work changed during her nine years at Adams, Ms. Accardi discussed curriculum pacing. Sitting in her classroom during a preparation period she said:

Well, when I came to Adams it was the first year we had a core curriculum and I think that the emphasis that has been put on the core curriculum has become more intense as the years have gone by to the point where really we are held to the standard of this is the page you are supposed to be on, on this day. (Interview, 12/9/11).

Ms. Accardi noted the push to rationalize teachers’ work, explaining the expectation that she maintain daily pacing, a form of curricular control, down to the page number.

Accordingly, much of teachers’ talk about their work was often about keeping pace with the core curriculum. The standardized timeline, and the expectation that teachers adhere to it as closely as possible, reduced teachers’ discretion and rationalized their work. Consider the following quote about the core curriculum from Ms. Edwards, a

third grade teacher at Emery with ten total years of teaching experience. While describing her daily instructional schedule she said:

It really is very demanding. Where I want to spend some more time, sometimes I will if I know that they [the students] are really not ready. I'll take another day or two just to reteach it before they take the test, just because I know they need the skill, but then on the same token then I have to double up in another area so I'm not that far behind in the curriculum because when they check the lesson plans they want to see if you're aligned with what the school district has for you to do at that point, so we're allowed to be, I think, one or two lessons behind but no more than that before it becomes a real issue. (12/14/11)

Ms. Edwards described not only a challenge of curricular pacing – moving on despite students' readiness – but also a consequence, noting that her failure to maintain pacing could become a “real issue.” In this case, the “real issue” is a warning, either verbal or written, from her administrator noting the failure to comply.

While administrative warnings were not common at Adams, Adams' teachers still felt pressured to maintain curricular pacing. During an afternoon observation in Ms. Alba's fifth grade classroom I noted how pacing influenced her instructional decisions. The students, just back from lunch, pulled out their math notebooks and turned their attention to Ms. Alba as she stood with her teachers' guide atop the overhead projector in the center of the room. Looking up from her guide Ms. Alba said:

I know it is going to say to use a slide rule. We're not doing that. I'm going to show you how to do it with a calculator and without a calculator. From what I've been told we are really behind the other fifth grades classes so I'm moving it along. (Fieldnote, 2/6/12)

In this case, Ms. Alba's decision-making was influenced by pressures to maintain curricular pacing so that she was aligned with her grade partners.

Though the district's curricular pacing routine was a primary mechanism for rationalizing teachers' work at both schools, there were differences in how these routines were apprehended and implemented at each site. Primarily the pressure to keep pace was both more intense and more challenging at Emery because additional Enrichment school mandates added instructional time to the pre-existing requirements for each core subject. At Emery, Enrichment mandates compromised teachers' ability to stay on pace and to accomplish the required number of instructional minutes for each major content area. Below, Ms. Engler, a teacher with seven years of teaching experience that included out-of-state experience, explained that the addition of intervention periods into the daily schedule precluded her from delivering the district's required 90 minutes of daily math instruction. Baffled by the requirements, she said:

Mathematics is cut short. I only have one period a day for mathematics and that's the last period of the day and you have the transition from preps and then transitions to go home. . . . The program is developed to be at least 90 minutes. I have less than 45 so it's very difficult to do the program as it's designed and you have the frustration of trying to be creative to get everything implemented to meet the objectives in a limited amount of time. (Interview, 12/14/11)

In this quote, Ms. Engler expressed the difficulty of curriculum pacing when the demands of the Enrichment school day exceed the actual length of the day. Indeed, I witnessed this one Monday afternoon in mid-November. Math was scheduled for the last period of the day, bookended between a prep period and dismissal. With the time lost at both the start and the end of the period for the necessary transitions, Ms. Engler's lesson was less than the allotted 45 minutes (Fieldnote, 11/17/11). In this way, Enrichment teachers were set up for frustration as they could not cover all of the required material at the designated pace.

Increased monitoring, a feature of rationalized work, also shaped how Emery teachers apprehended pressures related to curriculum pacing. When I asked Ms. Easton about how monitoring influenced her work she dryly said, "You have to be doing what the curriculum says." She elaborated on this response with a story about a colleague who was "written up" (issued a formal administrative warning) following a walkthrough in which she was observed by regional administrators using a text other than the one designated by the PST. She said, "She was coded red (red was one of three colors used to code teacher performance and indicated the worst possible performance) because she wasn't using the curriculum materials" (Interview, 12/21/11). Though this incident did not directly affect Ms. Easton, the message to her was clear – failure to adequately perform the curricular pacing routine translated into sanctions such as being "written up" or "coded red."

The message to Emery teachers regarding pacing and fidelity to curriculum materials played out in the classrooms I observed as well. Consider the following excerpt from an observation in Ms. Earnhardt's kindergarten classroom:

Ms. Earnhardt's students were gathered on the large round carpet at the foot of her rocking chair as she sat with the teacher's guide in her lap. She shook her head from left to right, indicating that she was not pleased, as she began the next phonics activity. She had to segment the beginning part of a word from the ending part, and the students had to blend it together. The words were awkwardly segmented, '/televi/ /sion/,' and there were several examples to practice. When she completed the last awkward example, '/handso/ /m/,' she looked at her students with relief and said, 'Thanks. That is so hard for me.' (Fieldnote, 12/15/11)

Ms. Earnhardt's behavior illustrated her discomfort with how the material was presented; however, she maintained pacing expectations by not just completing the day's assigned lessons, but completing them as the teacher's guided indicated. In this example, the element of control that undergirded the Enrichment model played out in a routine kindergarten activity, and Ms. Earnhardt dutifully performed the assigned task ensuring that she would not be "written up" for straying from the day's prescribed lessons.

At Adams the expectation that teachers abide by the curriculum pacing documents was just as great; yet, teachers had more latitude in terms of when and how they implemented curricular programs. Because they were unencumbered by intervention periods and the prescriptive literacy program used at Emery, there were fewer constraints on instructional time. This meant that teachers at Adams had some leeway to allow lessons to carry over into other parts of the day, and there was less urgency to complete a lesson in a designated time frame. I frequently witnessed this when I would arrive at a classroom expecting to see a lesson indicated on the roster and find that the teacher was

still covering material from earlier in the day.

Not only did teachers at Adams feel less pressure to stay on pace throughout the course of the day, the ostensive message that they were trusted professionals worthy of some discretion colored their interpretation and performance of curriculum pacing. Ms. Aiken, a seasoned second grade teacher, believed the Achievement status afforded her more latitude with the core curriculum. In our first formal interview, as we drank coffee and chatted in Dunkin Donuts, she said:

We're supposed to go off scope and sequence (i.e. core curriculum). It's pretty much laid out from the district now what we do and when we do it. Adams does have a clause that because we're not being looked at that we can vary, you know, if we're not on *Johnny Appleseed* on such and such a date they're not going to breathe down our throats about it so that's good. (Interview, 12/13/11)

The “clause” referred to Ms. Aiken’s personal interpretation of the Achievement status. She understood the “clause” as a perk of the Achievement status that facilitated her flexibility in the classroom, and also limited strategic oversight of teachers’ work – “they’re not breathing down our throats.” This afforded her some flexibility with curriculum pacing without fear of sanctions such as being “written up” or “coded red” as was the case at Emery.

The idea that there was some flexibility inherent in teachers’ work at Adams was shared by other teachers as well. With regard to working at Adams, Ms. Aponte, a teacher with 22 years of teaching experience said, “I like that I do have the freedom to do what I want in my classroom as long as I’m not making waves (Interview, 5/24/12). The idea of “freedom” was a personal interpretation Ms. Aponte used to guide her approach

to teaching and learning. It was her belief that as long as she did not attract the principal's attention she could use her discretion as to what she did and did not do in her classroom. Ms. Aponte's perceived freedom was in marked contrast to the worry Emery teachers experienced with regard to curriculum pacing and implementation.

Indeed the freedom Ms. Aponte perceived was often enacted as teachers took liberties to adjust pacing and curriculum implementation to suit their own beliefs and/or the needs of their class. For example, the first time I observed Ms. Agnew she met me at her classroom door. The following occurred:

I asked Ms. Agnew if it was OK to visit her and she hesitated to answer. She made a face, a wince, because she was supposed to teach Corrective Math (a scripted math intervention for special education students) this period, but had decided not to. Because we did not know each other well yet she was nervous that I might judge her poorly for straying from the daily schedule. I assured Ms. Agnew that I was not there to evaluate her and she invited me in. When the students were ready she handed them each an activity page and said, 'We are going to do something different today for Halloween.' (Fieldnote, 10/31/11).

Though Ms. Agnew expressed worry that I would judge her poorly for skipping the designated lesson, she was able to change her lesson and focus on the holiday rather than the intervention because she knew that it was unlikely anyone would take issue with this. The lack of monitoring at Adams, as well as a less punitive environment, enabled a degree of flexibility with the performance of curriculum pacing that did not exist at Emery.

Whereas the structure at Emery required teachers to adhere closely to pacing directives, teachers at Adams had more latitude. The result was that teachers at Adams were often able to take more time for challenging lessons and to supplement their curricular programs with activities and lessons they believed either extended learning or enhanced the school day (e.g., a Halloween activity). Though the performance of the curricular pacing routine varied between schools, the end result was a formal system of top-down control that served to rationalize one element of teachers' work by directing what teachers taught and when they taught it.

**Curriculum Alignment: “Everything comes down to that test, getting the kids prepared academically.”**

Curriculum alignment, a routine that required teachers to align curricular content and supplementary materials to the state test, was another mandate that rationalized teachers' work. The alignment routine imposed by administrators limited teachers' flexibility and was assigned the utmost priority as evidenced in the above quote by Ms. Embry. This task went beyond pacing and sharpened the focus on curricular materials and instructional pedagogies aimed at preparing students for standardized testing. The coercive pressures of accountability policy legitimated standardized testing as a reliable measure of student achievement, and public schools in general have increased instructional time devoted to tested content areas at the expense or exclusion of other subjects (Au, 2007; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Jerald, 2006). At Emery, a school with AYP concerns, curriculum alignment “looks like gearing every breath, every second, all of our attention to what's called ‘eligible content’ on the [state test] and making sure that all of our instruction completely focuses on the things that students will be assessed on” (Ms. Epps Interview, 12/15/11). Ms. Epps shared this interpretation during our first

formal interview in the school auditorium as she monitored a lunch-time detention, emphasizing the pervasiveness of this task by noting that it consumed “all of our attention.”

Though there were more tasks mandated at Emery (described below) in order to align curriculum and standardize teachers’ work, both Emery and Adams absorbed pressures to align curriculum with tested content. In early November, the Adams school staff gathered for a full day of meetings and professional development. At the end of a presentation on special education compliance Ms. Asher, one of the teacher leaders, broached the topic of “checkpoints,” bi-weekly assessments designed to prepare students for standardized testing. Quickly, before wrapping up her special education presentation she sighed and said, “Checkpoints, I always say they are OK but we are really doing a disservice to kids by not giving them checkpoints that are multistep for math.” She emphasized the need to create more challenging checkpoint assessments in preparation for the state test. When teachers grumbled and shouted that the assessments were copied from district’s PST and thus followed the district’s core curriculum, Ms. Asher snapped back, “If you want to prepare them [the students] you have to do more” (Fieldnote, 11/11/11). Her response implied that in order to improve test outcomes teachers must go above and beyond designated curricular materials and produce items that better aligned to the state test.

While mandated tasks, such as constructed responses (described below) were designed to closely match the form of the state test, teachers were expected to perform curriculum alignment throughout the course of their regular instruction by incorporating tested, or “eligible content,” that was not covered in the core curriculum. Ms. Alba

frequently mentioned the test to her students and noted when they were working on a tested concept. One February morning, during the morning literacy block, Ms. Alba illuminated an overhead transparency as students searched in their desks for their literacy notebooks. It said “Main Idea and Details: Text Structure.” To her students she commanded, “I suggest that we highly pay attention to this. The [state test] is in three weeks. You will definitely have main idea questions” (Fieldnote, 2/22/12). Explicit reference to the test was a common strategy and reflected teachers’ efforts to align curriculum with tested content, as well as to draw students’ attention to these efforts. Consider a different lesson at Emery, during which Ms. Epps’ sixth grade math students solved open-ended problems. Circulating the room to assess and support students as they worked she paused and asked her students, “Friends, will you score a three on the [state test] if you do not include your unit?” (Fieldnote, 1/10/12). Her question referred to the open-ended format for math problem solving and emphasized the structure of the response in which a student must include the designated unit in order to earn all possible points on a test item.

The emphasis on curricular alignment intensified as testing drew nearer. During a grade group meeting for teachers in grades 3-5, Emery’s instructional leader reviewed data and different avenues towards AYP. In the school’s library, the small group of teachers gathered around a few rectangular tables as Ms. Eagle, the instructional leader, displayed recent assessment data on a screen alongside the AYP targets. After a quick review of the numbers she announced to the group, “The focus is reading” (Fieldnote, 2/9/12). The explicit message to teachers was to increase the time devoted to reading

content, as this is where the school needed to make larger gains, while the implied message was to reduce the amount of time devoted to other content areas.

Curriculum narrowing, a form of curricular alignment, occurred at Adams despite the school's status. In our first interview, Ms. Accardi nonchalantly explained that as the test nears the school's principal emphasized tested content:

It gets to a certain point in the year where we know we're supposed to be following certain things in the curriculum but it's like are these the skills that you have to hit with your class by March because the [state test] is coming in April... You know what I mean? I do think she [the principal] looks very carefully at what's going to appear on the test and you have to hit that.

(Interview, 12/9/11).

In Ms. Accardi's perception, the message was to prioritize tested content. Alignment of the curriculum with the state test was such a concern in both schools that as the testing cycle approached teachers were expected to maximize students' learning opportunities on the content of the test. This, of course, was to the exclusion of untested content and content areas.

While both schools emphasized curriculum alignment, particularly leading up to the testing cycle, the emphasis on "test-prep" materials and activities was greater at Emery where initiatives like "Test-Taking Thursday" required teachers to emphasize test-prep lessons each Thursday. Furthermore, additional routines mandated only in Enrichment schools served to more closely align curriculum with tested content. These routines are explored in more detail in the next section.

**Constructed Response: “Make sure you TAG.”**

“Make sure you TAG,” Ms. Amos told her third grade students as they set up their notebooks to answer the “Think and Respond” questions following a story in the literature anthology (Fieldnote, 1/18/12). Her directive referred to City School District’s constructed response routine. Curriculum alignment was such an important task that City School District developed additional instructional routines to support alignment efforts. The constructed response routine was one such effort, and designed to standardize the teaching of open-ended items that appear on the state test. The creation of a response structure, “TAG” (Turn the question into a statement, Answer the question, Give evidence) rationalized teachers’ work by reducing variation across classrooms and schools. Institutional logic undergirded the creation of this routine as TAG structured teachers’ pedagogical performance. In reminding her students to use the TAG structure Ms. Amos was attempting to ensure that each student’s response would take the same form and presumably meet the criteria for a full score on a reading open-ended test item.

The priority assigned to this routine was such that all students at Emery and Adams, regardless of grade level, practiced writing constructed responses. Ms. Aiken explained that her second grade students practice the routine in preparation for standardized testing in third grade. Of the Adams’ routine she matter-of-factly said, “We start in first grade because by the time they are in third grade they can at least get most of the TAG down” (Interview, 12/13/11). Beyond preparing students for standardized testing, this routine rationalized teachers’ work by requiring them to simply implement a routine created by others.

The constructed response routine was created and monitored by external authorities (principals, regional administrators, and central administrators). Administrators created schedules dictating when teachers should perform constructed responses. In fact, this routine was given such priority that teachers were required to maintain folders for each student's constructed responses, and to display students' constructed responses as evidence for administrators visiting schools and classrooms. One day as Ms. Epps' students entered the classroom she congratulated them on having 16 constructed responses completed and in their folders (Fieldnote, 1/10/12). Full folders signaled her compliance with the routine.

Because this routine arose in response to the coercive pressures of accountability that drove City School District to enact instructional routines aligned with state testing, the ostensive structure of the routine – TAG – was similar across both schools. Variation in how Emery and Adams performed this routine related to frequency, with Emery teachers practicing TAG more often with their students. Ms. Edwards explained Emery's constructed response routine during our first formal interview. She said:

They are now requiring for us to do a constructed response for reading and math every other week. That is given to us by the school. Then there's the off-week – we're supposed to have one for the kids. Essentially they are supposed to have a constructed response every week. (Interview, 12/14/11).

At Emery, the school leadership team created and assigned bi-weekly responses, with the expectation that teachers assign additional responses on the in-between weeks. Questions and content areas covered in the “off-week” were left to each individual teacher's

discretion; however, compliance was monitored by administrators looking for responses posted in the classroom, filed in folders, or recorded in data binders.

At Adams the constraints and frequency of the routine were fewer. Teachers created their own responses and only completed two responses a month. Ms. Accardi explained:

We are expected to do constructed responses once a month, a reading and a math. I think its third grade up hands something into Ms. Abad (the principal). The question is not provided by her. It's provided by us, but we are on a certain time schedule with that (Interview, 12/9/11).

Though constructed responses were performed less often at Adams, the routine rationalized teachers' work in that it prescribed pedagogy – the method for teaching students to answer open-ended responses. Accordingly this routine reshaped the technical core, classroom instruction, by specifying how and when open-ended responses were taught to students.

### **Data-Related Tasks: “Do you know your data?”**

“Do you know your data?” was a question commonly affixed to displays of student data in classrooms at Emery. The emphasis on collecting, analyzing, displaying, and responding to student achievement data, particularly in math and reading, is an innovation widely adopted across public schools. These tasks act as a coupling mechanism between the structure of schools and the policy environment, ultimately lending legitimacy to schools emphasizing data in an effort to improve performance. Emery and Adams, like many other public schools striving for legitimacy in an era of

increasing accountability and wavering confidence in the quality of urban public schools, implemented data routines as means to direct attention to student outputs. Data routines required teachers to display “data walls” and complete “data protocols” that analyzed assessment results and assisted teachers in refining and aligning instruction. These routines are an element of rationalized work because accountability policy asserts that teaching is more effective and more organized when it is data-driven.

“OK, so I’m meticulous about a data wall,” Ms. Abad, Adams’ school principal, told me during our one formal interview. She added, “I feel that because it’s the region’s initiative, and she’ll [the regional superintendent] be looking for it when she’s walking through” (Interview, 12/1/11). Her explanation indicated that her emphasis on this routine was rooted in a desire to please the regional superintendent. In this case, the coercive pressures of accountability and the threat of surveillance forced her attention to this routine. While Ms. Abad’s comment might suggest simple compliance with a regional directive, it also signified an effort to establish legitimacy. Data routines help establish an organization’s legitimacy because they represent efforts toward improved student outcomes and reflect institutional conformity (e.g., all schools in the organizational field enact data routines).

In addition to data walls, teachers at both schools were also required to complete data protocols – forms that analyzed student assessment data and included plans to adjust future instruction accordingly – and share them with the school principal. When I asked Ms. Alba about data routines at Adams she explained:

We have to analyze the data. We look for our weaknesses and our strengths.

What are we going to do to improve the weaknesses? What's our planning?

What are we going to do for homework? What students really scored well below proficiency? We attach the data and we hand it in. (Interview, 11/28/11).

The routine that Ms. Alba described occurred similarly at Emery, prompting Ms. Embry, a seventh grade language arts and social studies teacher to angrily say, "Whenever a standardized test comes out we have to go question by question and figure out how did we teach this, what needs to be fixed. It's almost like a statistician, which I hate" (Interview, 12/14/11). At both schools, the work of teachers was made more elaborate and rationalized by administrators' direct inspection of protocols. Data protocols served not only as evidence that teachers reviewed student data, but they also prompted the task of refining or aligning instruction based on data.

The use of data is particularly relevant in schools with AYP concerns, where there is greater emphasis on improving student outcomes and restoring organizational legitimacy. One consequence of the increased regulation of teachers' work under the Enrichment model was additional tasks related to data collection and data use. In addition to displaying student data in the classroom, Emery teachers were required to maintain data in other ways as well. When I asked Ms. Ellis to tell me about what she did with all of the data she collected she laughed and headed to her desk to retrieve her "data binder." Her laugh was not because I had asked something funny, rather the enormity of the data routine she was about to present seemed ridiculous to her. As she approached me with her bursting 5-inch data binder, she said "For me to try to put everything into words, it's easier to be looking at it." We sifted through portions of her

data binder as she listed items. Below is an excerpt from a lengthy explanation about the binder:

I have to keep a binder, which is about five inches thick already, so I literally have to enter grades just for the literacy program in my binder, in my [grade] book, in the computer. Then I'm supposed to be entering stuff into another program on the computer and they want us to actually delineate this kid, this test. (Interview, 1/18/12)

Ms. Ellis's convoluted explanation illustrated the denseness of data keeping at Emery. This task, conceived of by administrators, aimed to rationalize teachers' decisions about instruction by requiring them to interact with student data in numerous and often repetitive ways.

In addition to collecting and maintaining student data, teachers were expected to act upon data as well. At Emery this routine was further standardized by a task conceived of by the school principal called "focus students." Focus students, similar to "bubble kids" (students on the cusp of scoring proficient) were identified during data reviews, noted in lesson plans, and targeted for additional attention during specific lessons. Ms. Epps explained this task to me after I observed a lesson where I noted she repeatedly returned to one particular student, constantly pushing and praising her. She said:

We list the focus students that we're going to focus on in class to make sure that they are working at a proficient level. For example, today I tried to focus on Jackie and Steven. . . . So in our lesson plans we indicate the focus students and

we pay a lot of attention to those focus kids to move them to proficient levels. In our lesson plans we're looking at the kids who aren't there yet, but who have the most potential to move, or the kids who are there but are barely there. . . . They're [the focus students] data driven. I didn't just make them up in my head. They came from test scores. (Interview, 12/15/11).

It's not just that Ms. Epps was collecting and posting data. She had to document how she was using that data, and do so accordingly. The implementation of these additional data-related tasks are one way the Enrichment model pushed schools like Emery to be more rational and better coordinated in working toward AYP.

### **Summary**

The above routines, created at the district level, arose in response to the mandates and pressures applied by the institutional environment of schooling. Coercive pressures incited the creation of new norms permeating public school organizations in the NCLB era. As school organizations work to cover tested content, and develop routines and strategies to improve student academic outcomes, new practices emerge in schools and they begin to look similar over time. The enactment of these routines at Adams and Emery conveyed legitimacy within the organizational field. That is, these schools were expected to perform routines in order to demonstrate attention to student outputs and efforts toward constant improvement. Below, I will show how the rationalization of teachers' work was accelerated at Emery through additional mandates that further redefined teachers' tasks

### **The Enrichment Agenda: Institutionalized Routines and the Rationalization of Teachers' Work**

The rationalization of teachers' work was greater in Enrichment schools like Emery because of their history of low-achievement, and the need to convince outsiders that the school was engaged in efforts to improve. The occupation of teaching in an Enrichment school was subject to more frequent inspection and increased controls, via mandated routines. At Emery the addition of Enrichment-specific mandates further redefined teachers' tasks and rationalized the means for improving both student outcomes and the school's status. Below, I discuss four additional routines mandated to Enrichment schools. In addition to the district-wide routines discussed in the previous section, the following four routines: 1) *do now*, 2) instructional interventions, 3) measurable objectives, and 4) classroom appearance first appeared in City School District's Enrichment schools.

#### **Do Now: "We provide them with that do now."**

The do now represents yet another effort to rationalize teachers' work in Enrichment schools by standardizing the form and content of instruction. "We provide them with that do now," Mr. Cervantes, a regional superintendent, explained with regard to Enrichment schools. Guided by the assumption that Enrichment schools suffer from a weaker core technology, which according to regional superintendent Mr. Cervantes (quoted in chapter 4) partially resulted from the quality of teachers, Enrichment schools were mandated to begin reading and math lessons with a do now – a teaching strategy designed to engage students at the start of a lesson. In the popular literature on effective teaching, the do now is often included as a classroom entry routine and serves a basis for

creating a strong classroom culture (Lemov, 2010). City School District institutionalized this routine by purchasing workbooks in which the content and form of the work was closely aligned with state test. Mr. Cervantes explained “In the Enrichment school they have to start out the lesson with a 5-7 minute do now...” (Interview, 5/1/12). By mandating the routine and providing the content for it, City School District further rationalized teachers’ work.

The do now, standardized in the form of pre-packaged curricular materials, served as another mechanism to align curriculum with tested content. Do nows were composed of content and questions that mimicked the format of the state’s test, and thus often required more than the 5-7 minutes noted by Mr. Cervantes. Frustrated by an additional task that compromised her curricular pacing, an exasperated Ms. Eccles explained the do now:

They (the publishing materials) say it takes about 15 minutes of a do now book and that’s basically a prep (test prep) book in reading or math that helps them to get prepared for the [state test]. Really, they said the do now is supposed to take 15 minutes. . . . Sometimes I feel like the do now takes a little bit longer and then you don’t really have time for science and social studies. (Interview, 12/21/11)

While Ms. Eccles’ explanation of this routine pointed to the way in which it served to align curriculum – “basically a prep book” – her comment about the amount of time devoted to this task illustrated one way that curriculum pacing was more challenging at Emery than Adams. As the number of tasks increased at Emery, teachers were expected to cope with multiple innovations that sometimes conflicted with each other.

The fact that the do now was not a quick warm up was evident in classrooms. During observations I often noted how much instructional time was devoted to this routine. One afternoon in December, Ms. Embry's seventh grade students entered from their homeroom next door. At 12:09, the start of the period, they immediately began working in their do now books. Below is an excerpt from this observation:

Ms. Embry told the students that they would focus on problem/solution, fact/opinion, and multiple meaning words – all tested skills. She read the title of the passage students would read and refer back to as they answered questions on the stated skills. The students began to take turns reading the text aloud as Ms. Embry paced around the classroom. When they were done reading she grabbed her teacher's guide and read through a series of multiple-choice questions. It was 12:30 when they moved to a section in which students had to answer questions on their own. She told the students they had five minutes and should just “bullet answers.” As students worked she paced them. Two minutes in she said, “You should be halfway through question two.” At 12:35, exactly five minutes after they started she interrupted the students to quickly review answers. At 12:36 the students passed their books forward and Ms. Embry transitioned to homework and announcements. (Fieldnote, 12/15/11).

In this excerpt, the do now used nearly 20 minutes of a 45 minute class period. This observation illustrated the denseness of the do now (multiple skills practiced), and the challenge this task posed to issues of curricular pacing.

This task spilled over into data-related tasks as well. Enrichment teachers experienced heightened responsibility for teaching and learning driven by classroom level policy directives, like the do now, but also the record keeping these tasks required. At Emery, teachers were expected to maintain a log detailing completed do nows, ensuring that regional administrators could track implementation of the routine. Controlling and inspecting the do now further rationalized teachers' work at Emery.

**Instructional Interventions: “We were forced to do it.”**

Instructional interventions, scripted reading and math programs designed for small groups of students, were mandated in every Enrichment school – or as Ms. Engler noted, “We were forced to do it.” (Interview, 5/23/12). At Emery, that meant that every student in grades 2-8 received one 45-minute period a day of a scripted reading intervention, and one 45-minute period a day of a scripted math intervention. Reading and math interventions were given such a high priority that the middle school schedule effectively eliminated science and social studies by moving those subject areas into the 39-minute morning advisory period. In an interview Ms. Embry, annoyed, explained the priority assigned to instructional interventions at the exclusion of other content areas:

In order for us to fit the necessary allotted time for literacy and math, and for the students to still receive a prep that was the only period of the day that we could give them because we still have to do Corrective Math and Reading. (Interview, 12/14/11).

City School District's efforts to improve standardized test scores, and strengthen the core technology of teaching within tested content areas, shifted the structure of teaching at

Emery such that schedules were changed to accommodate mandates and curricular content was narrowed.

The mandate to implement instructional interventions at Enrichment schools promoted the rationalization of teaching by forcing a research-driven, standardized version of teaching practice. Regional and central administrators monitored the implementation of intervention programs, pushing for absolute fidelity to the script and thus total standardization of teachers' practice. Ms. Edwards discussed the push for standardization of the reading intervention which called for teachers to tap on a surface in order to evoke a unison response as students read aloud. She said:

The principal will check in occasionally to see if the interventions are being done correctly, and I also had a couple of the regionals [administrators] come in to look during that time also to make sure that I'm following the script, that the children are responding, even if I'm tapping as they're reading – cause I got called on not tapping when they are reading. Although to some [students] it's more distracting for them if I tap, but they [administrators] think that tapping while they're reading helps them keep the rhythm so... (Interview, 12/14/11)

Ms. Edwards' ability to make decisions based on feedback from students is constrained by a scripted program that is monitored by various administrators. Here, her decision to break script and not tap because it seemed to distract her students resulted in her getting "called on" – reprimanded for not adhering to the standardized program.

The scripted program and the inspection of teachers' performance forced teachers to perform in a standardized fashion. Before beginning a reading intervention lesson, Ms.

Eccles firmly reminded her second and third grade students, “You have to answer on signal. Remember that” (Fieldnote, 11/22/11). Ms. Eccles issued this command to her students because that is what the program called for, not because she felt particularly strongly about all of her students answering in unison on her command. In fact, the students’ inability to answer in unison and on cue was a chronic source of frustration during the lesson, and one that could have been avoided had Ms. Eccles ignored this part of the scripted program.

**Measurable Objectives: “It’s like a checking-up system on the teacher to make sure that we are doing what we need to do.”**

As efforts to rationalize instruction evolved, the press to standardize teachers’ work manifested in a variety of instructional routines, one of which was the performance of writing a measurable learning objective for each major content area lesson. The idea that this routine was about rationalization rather than improving pedagogy was captured by Ms. Edwards when she uttered the above quote (Interview, 12/14/11). The measurable objective routine required teachers to abide by a designated structure for writing daily learning objectives. Though learning objectives, in some form, have long been a facet of teachers’ planning process, measurable objectives became a tool for rationalization as City School District designated the form and structure of learning objectives. Early in the school year, following a visit from the regional walkthrough team, which identified that “less than 100% of classrooms had objectives posted and/or communicated,” Emery teachers received a short professional development in order to improve their performance of this routine. Time was set aside for teachers to practice writing objectives that were “specific, measurable, and describe the end result [of a lesson].” Ms. Eagle, the school’s instructional leader, stood in front of a group of teachers in the school’s library and

presented a PowerPoint presentation defining and describing measurable objectives. She then distributed several handouts on how to write measurable objectives and directed the group of teachers to practice writing objectives based on their current lesson plans. Some teachers struggled to make certain objectives measurable, but Ms. Eagle persisted and worked with teachers until everyone had at least one measurable objective. At that point, the short session was adjourned with a reminder to teachers that objectives should be “specific, measurable, and describe the end result [of a lesson]” (Fieldnote, 10/19/11).

During the course of the school year this routine was revisited through ongoing professional development. “Today’s grade group meeting was refocusing on writing goals and objectives according to the school district mandate” Ms. Embry told me when I inquired about her grade level meeting earlier that morning. This wasn’t the first time teachers were asked to work on this. In an annoyed tone, she added:

We have to do these objective statements. We have to talk about the behavior, the condition, and then the criteria of how we’re going to observe whether or not it was achieved. We went over verbs you could use, and how you could set it up, and what verbs are not appropriate and what verbs are. (Interview, 12/14/11)

The emphasis on the form of learning objectives represented one effort to reshape instructional practice in Enrichment schools, and because I was interested in routines that organized teachers’ work I looked for evidence of this in classrooms as well. Ms. Engler, a fourth grade teacher, was quite diligent about completing measurable learning objectives each day. One morning as she quietly dealt with a few students gathered around a table I scanned her classroom and noted the objectives. For reading she had

written across the blackboard, “Students will monitor their understanding of the text by pausing to ask questions and summarize in order to complete a graphic organizer and score a 3 on the constructed response” (Fieldnote, 4/12/12). This objective, one of the several measurable objectives that appeared on her chalkboard that day, illustrated the structure emphasized by City School District. Given the weak position of Enrichment teachers, as evidenced in Mr. Cervantes’s earlier comments, measurable objectives were yet another routine that asserted control and further rationalized classroom instruction.

**Classroom Appearance: “That’s another little stress, knowing if you have the right things posted.”**

Enrichment mandates regarding classroom appearance were “... another little stress...” (Ms. Edwards, 6/12/12). Typically rationalization refers to the technical aspects of teaching (instruction), but in this case classroom appearance was treated as a component of teachers’ technical competence and served as another link between the formal structure of schools and the accountability environment. At Emery, teachers were expected to display a variety of standards and strategy posters, word walls, concept boards, weekly focus skills and strategies, weekly vocabulary and spelling words, testing countdowns, as well as student work and data. Additionally, elementary teachers, with the exception of K, were expected to arrange student desks in a u-shape in accordance with the recommendations of the literacy curricular program purchased for Enrichment schools. In fact, at the October professional development described earlier, the principal praised two classrooms that were cited by the regional walkthrough team as “model classrooms” based on their appearance. This included the arrangement of desks. (Fieldnote, 10/19/11).

Every classroom at Emery was plastered with posters displaying the state standards, the school's designated focus strategies, district recommended test taking strategies, word walls, student work, and display materials from curricular programs. Ms. Engler, who was quite diligent about her measurable objectives as noted above, spent a great deal of time maintaining her classroom's appearance too. I noted appearance in all classrooms but Ms. Engler's stood out because her room was quite small and the massive display of information was visually overwhelming (see Figure 5.1 for an excerpt from an observation detailing her classroom's appearance).

Materials Posted on the Blackboard and Around the Classroom:

Motto: The only place where SUCCESS comes before WORK is in the dictionary.

*What's Rot! Nature's Mighty Recycler*

By: Elizabeth King

Objective: I will monitor (keep track of) my comprehension (understanding) of the text by pausing to ask questions and summarize in order to complete a graphic organizer and score a 3 on the constructed response.

Genre – Expository Text (nonfiction/Informational)

### Comprehension Focus Skill

Fact and Opinion

Fact	Opinion
Statements can be checked and proven.	Statements that cannot be proven.
To recognize a fact ask yourself, "Can this statement be proven?"	They tell you what someone thinks or feels
	Clue Words – think, feel, believe, seem, etc...

When I read expository text I learn *information* that contains real facts about real people, places, and things.

### Comprehension Focus Strategy

Summarize - Add up the most important information from the text (long-story short)

This week's featured strategy is: summarizing, visualizing, making connections

Objectives:

Math – Students will review place value to extend the base ten place value system to decimals in order to complete a number line.

Three charts hang from the board to make a KWL – on the K and the W there are post-it notes students completed sharing what they know and what they want to know about the topic.

There is a spelling list written on an easel - 20 words plus 2 challenge words. On the other blackboard where she recorded homework, housekeeping, and the morning routine she listed the workshop assignments in a t-chart style that matched the labels in students' workshop folders.

Must Do	May Do
Constructed Response Revisions	Vocabulary Quilt
Spelling p. 99-102, 109-110	Spelling Story
100 Book Challenge	Writing Wonders/File Activity

The concept board was updated with questions about decomposers, and the testing/data wall indicated that there are only 16 weeks until the test.

Figure 5.1. Classroom Appearance. (Fieldnote, 11/29/11).

The above excerpt provides just a glimpse into the appearance of this particular classroom. What I didn't mention were the numerous posters and papers that covered bulletin boards, window shades, and every available inch of wall space in order to display school-wide instructional strategies, state standards, rubrics, a concept board, word walls, and student work displays. Given City School District's and Emery's mandates around classroom appearance, Ms. Engler's efforts served to inform observers that her class was working on the content and strategies prescribed. Ironically, hers was not a model classroom because the desks were not in the recommended u-shaped configuration.

Issues of control were relevant to mandates about classroom appearance. While Ms. Engler's efforts may have been over-the-top compared to some of the other classrooms at Emery, teachers undoubtedly perceived that they lacked control over the displays in their classrooms. During my first formal interview with Ms. Earnhardt we sat in her classroom after school. I asked about her classroom's appearance because kindergarten rooms tend to be quite busy. I was curious about the items she displayed and which ones were mandated. Slowly she gazed around the room and said, "Pretty much everything that is here except for...well, I was going to say except the student work but that's a lie because the student work needs to be in here." (Interview, 1/5/12). Both teachers' comments exhibited the lack of discretion teachers experienced when tasks are institutionalized in order to rationalize teachers' work.

### **Summary**

The above routines, prescribed to Enrichment schools served to further rationalize teachers' work by exerting more control over what they did and how they did it. In many ways teachers at Emery were experiencing heightened responsibility. In an effort to improve the school's status by improving students' test scores, teachers were asked to do more. This is an important point. Though Emery and Adams were similar in many ways, and grew increasingly similar over time, low-performing schools like Emery are routinely subjected to greater intervention into the work of teachers, right down to seemingly simple tasks such as arranging the desks in the classroom. Next, I will show that even though Enrichment schools were initially distinguished from Achievement schools by the above mandates that further controlled teachers' work, accountability pressures forced a process in which teachers at Adams were expected adopt Enrichment routines.

### **Increasing Homogenization: Mimetic Isomorphism and the Diffusion of Non-Negotiables**

Organizations within the same field tend to adopt like practices. One way this happens is for organizations to mimic other organizations – to incorporate legitimated and rationalized elements into their formal structure to maximize their legitimacy, and increase their resources and survival capabilities (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 352).

Throughout the course of observations at Adams, I noted that the principal was emphasizing some of the practices prescribed to Enrichment schools. Surprised by this, I asked Mr. Cervantes, a City School District regional superintendent, his thoughts on this phenomenon. He said:

Some of things, hopefully, that we've done in the Enrichment schools are best practices. They're research-based ideas for good teaching. Now again, the way we've done it is say, "You have to do it." So I don't think it's bad that some of the Achievement schools may be adopting some of that because we've gotten all of those things from best practices around what would be good for students.

(Interview, 5/1/12)

In this quote, Mr. Cervantes described the process of mimetic isomorphism that occurred as Adams and Emery began to look similar despite differences in performance status.

This process is not unusual as homogenization is common among organizations within the same field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), and in fact should be anticipated as sustained legitimacy relies on success in becoming isomorphic or similar. Even high-achieving schools, like Adams, must continually raise test scores. In an institutional environment shaped by the myth of accountability, any decline or stagnancy in the annual percentage

of proficient and advanced students calls into question a school's legitimacy. In this context, the Adams school, faced with the challenge of raising test scores already in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile, attempted to adopt practices mandated at Emery because those practices represented an effort to improve student outcomes, legitimacy, and chances for survival within the field.

The process of mimetic isomorphism, the process of imitating the Enrichment organizational structure, at Adams was also a process of recoupling, in which the regional administration attempted to create tight couplings where loose couplings were once in place (Espeland, 1998). This process was prompted by changes in the environment surrounding Adams. During the 2011-2012 school year three events occurred that generated uncertainty at Adams – a historically high-performing neighborhood school: 1) Adams was named in a district-wide cheating scandal, alleging that student exams were altered to improve outcomes, 2) a new regional superintendent aimed to implement non-negotiables, some of the same instructional routines that standardized teachers' work in Enrichment schools, at all schools in the region, and 3) as part of a new regional initiative Ms. Abad, Adams' principal, was placed in a cohort of principals, which put her in greater contact with colleagues and nearby schools. Though the allegations against Adams were later downgraded and the school's cheating status reduced from Tier 1 to Tier 3 (a less serious case), the accusation and the subsequent investigation generated much unease among the school community (teachers and parents alike) for most of the school year. While the allegation was notable for different reasons, in the context of this study, it delegitimated Adams' reputation as a high-performing school. In order to mediate the environmental shock levied by the above three events Ms. Abad, the

principal, attempted to change the formal structure of schooling by implementing the region's non-negotiables.

**Creating Coherence: “You should see what the Enrichment schools are doing.”**

“You should see what the Enrichment schools are doing,” Ms. Abad warned her staff as she detailed the new regional superintendent's expectations (Fieldnote, 9/1/11). During the 2011-2012 school year, the three circumstances described above created uncertainty, or doubt, within the organizational field and within Ms. Abad as to whether teachers were doing enough to improve test scores and meet the expectations of the new regional superintendent. Efforts to restore Adam's organizational legitimacy were enacted through attempts to implement the new regional superintendent's non-negotiables. Consider the meeting on the first day of school at which Ms. Abad addressed this issue. Dressed in her suit, Ms. Abad was full of a frenetic energy on this first official day back to work. Frequently she interrupted other presenters to interject additional information. Below, is one example:

Ms. Abad moved to the center of the library where the teacher leaders stood discussing changes to this year's Planning and Scheduling Timelines and said, “Can I be Susan Abad real?” She no longer held the megaphone and appeared more relaxed. It's not that she was no longer the boss, but it seemed like she let her guard down just a little and was aligning herself with the staff instead of just dictating information. She wanted to discuss the new regional superintendent, and the changes made under her leadership. She went over a handout from the regional superintendent detailing what principals should look for during “quick

visits” to teachers’ classrooms. Ms. Abad was sympathetic to teachers saying, “She [the regional superintendent] has forgotten a lot of the operations side of schools,” but she was also exacting. After noting what the regional superintendent’s team expected to see in schools, she sternly looked at the group and said, “You better be doing what you are supposed to be doing.” She listed some routines: progress monitoring folders, data walls, objectives, curricular pacing, lesson plans, and student work. Teachers around me were grumbling at the idea of more work to which Ms. Abad replied, “It will be less work if we do what we are supposed to be doing. Student work (referring to the requirement to display current student work), don’t get caught on that. Don’t embarrass me. . .” (Fieldnote, 9/1/11)

In this excerpt, Ms. Abad fluctuated. She was simultaneously sympathetic to the increasing demands placed upon teachers, but also firm that teachers should abide by the region’s expectations and not “get caught” unprepared. Through this lecture, she began to press for conformity and recoupling, tightened links between instruction and mandates, by admonishing teachers to comply with external mandates.

### **Recoupling in Practice: “Why can’t we have our own look?”**

Immediately I notice some of the changes made in preparation for the regional walkthrough. Items that had not been posted all year suddenly appeared around the classroom. A daily schedule was posted on the front board, a wordwall up high above the coat closet, and there was a schedule behind the computer center to indicate which student groups rotate through and when. Ms. Aponte did not speak to me until she was finished on the computer at which point she noted the

posted items and commented, “Objectives are next.” Apparently she was one of the teachers Ms. Abad has selected for Thursday’s regional walkthrough.

(Fieldnote, 1/23/12)

The above fieldnote excerpt described how Ms. Aponte, a first-grade teacher, enacted compliance with external demands by posting evidence around her classroom in the days leading up to a regional walkthrough. Though Ms. Aponte complied with the expectations in anticipation of a visit to her classroom, she also questioned the press for recoupling at Adams. During a formal interview she responded to question about increasing non-negotiables by asking, “Why can’t we have our own look?” Though her question was fairly straightforward, recoupling at Adams was not.

Recoupling is a dynamic process, and can be quite nuanced given a school’s context. Such was the case at Adams, where a number of circumstances influenced teachers’ adoption of new routines. First, Adams was long considered a high-performing school and subsequently subjected to very little monitoring over the years (e.g., “the island effect”), effectively buffering teachers by limiting contact between classrooms and administrators. Second, most teachers at Adams were veteran teachers, with the school district for more than ten years, and witness to many waves of reform in which non-negotiables or other best practices came and went. Teachers knew they could provide short term demonstrations of compliance (e.g., when someone was watching) with external demands, as was the case in the above observation of Ms. Aponte’s classroom. Third, teachers did not meet in grade level teams, nor was there strong instructional leadership devoting sustained effort to develop teachers in the performance of new instructional routines. The lack of instructional leadership occurred both within the

school and at the regional level. For instance, whereas teachers at Emery were provided with scripted do nows, teachers at Adams were not, thus enabling greater variance in each teacher's understanding and performance of that routine. In some ways this too was a form of buffering. Though regional administrators may have expected conformance to new routines in the field, Adams' teachers were never well-trained with regard to how these routines should happen. Taken together: infrequent monitoring, teacher experience, and inadequate professional development created a context in which Adams' teachers only loosely and symbolically complied with new instructional mandates.

The implementation and performance of new instructional tasks, such as do now and measurable objectives, varied from classroom to classroom. Some teachers implemented these routines, and some teachers did not. In contrast to Emery where teachers' performance of routines was highly standardized, performance at Adams varied greatly from teacher to teacher. Some teachers embraced one or both of the practices and incorporated new mandates into existing instructional routines, while other teachers simply adopted the language of reforms but left their day-to-day practices largely unchanged. This is what neoinstitutional scholarship refers to as "first-order change" - when organizations align stated goals and strategies to reflect external demands but intentionally leave the day-to-day work unchanged (Argyris & Schon, 1996; Spillane & Zeuli, 1999).

Below, I analyze recoupling efforts and reveal buffering strategies in practice by examining Adams' efforts to incorporate the do now and measurable objectives routines into the formal structure of schooling. Whereas uncertainty in the environment incited pressures to recouple the instructional core with regional instructional mandates, the

school's context (e.g., lack of monitoring, teacher experience, and inadequate professional development) was conducive to more symbol than substance. For the most part, teachers symbolically adopted new routines, minimally and inconsistently changing their practice. This symbolic adoption was largely ceremonial in that new routines were performed with greater fidelity during times of surveillance (walkthroughs and observations). Symbolic adoption, or ceremonial compliance, is a form of buffering in which staff members adopted the language of reforms but not the activities, and only worried about demonstrating compliance during times of inspection. At Adams, the principal strategically engaged external demands by intensifying the messaging around the non-negotiables prior to an event where it was important to show compliance. Doing so allowed the Adams school organization to appear as though it incorporated legitimated practices, and prevent the school from having its conduct questioned by external monitors.

**Do Now: “Most of us that have been teaching for a number of years and are adept at it, do our own thing, whether we call them do nows or whether we call them ‘Hey, get a load of this.’”**

In the case of the do now routine, years of experience influenced how teachers interpreted this task, and because there were no mandated materials, as there were at Emery, teachers performed the task as they saw fit. Experienced teachers perceived the do now simply as a change in terminology and not a change in practice as evidenced in Ms. Atkins quote at the start of this section. Ms. Alba, Ms. Atkins' close friend and colleague, similarly said:

I just feel it's a change in terminology. Morning work is no longer morning work. I now have to change it. It's called do now. Well, my do now is the same thing I did but I called it morning work, so it has a new name. (Interview, 11/28/11)

Because Ms. Alba perceived this task as an incremental change, she actually did not change her practice, just simply changed the terminology. This is strikingly different from Emery where do nows were standardized and closely aligned with tested content.

In a discussion about non-negotiables Ms. Anderson dryly said, "I don't get stressed out about that. I've worked with City School District for 18 years so I'm used to it. This year it's the do now, next year it's going to be the do later" (Interview, 11/28/11). Teachers' years of experience desensitized them to change and facilitated ceremonial compliance with this new mandate.

I asked Ms. Abad, the school principal, about efforts to incorporate new routines during our one formal interview. Specifically, I wondered how a more established and more experienced staff influenced the process of implementing new routines. She was wishy-washy about whether her teachers were more or less responsive, and eventually she shared an anecdote from a professional development meeting that I did not attend. She said:

Well, Julie [regional superintendent] is coming, and I respect her, and she is now using the Enrichment informal observation for everyone. So I went ballistic [on the teachers] on October 19<sup>th</sup> and said, 'It's not your fault. It's me, it's me – that we're not doing do nows and everybody else in the whole world is and you're doing math message and its ridiculous.' I like screamed at them, not screamed but

I said, ‘We’re like hicks. I mean they’re gonna come and you’re not even doing a Do Now. You don’t know what that is.’ (Interview, 12/1/11)

Ms. Abad’s anecdote emphasized the importance of beginning the math and reading blocks with a do now activity. While she acknowledged that her teachers were not quick to adopt this mandate, she absorbed some responsibility for the lack of rapid change while noting her concern that teachers would be observed not performing this new required routine.

Discussion about the do now routine permeated meetings throughout the school year because it was an observable routine that would signal legitimacy to external monitors looking for evidence of non-negotiables. However, I did not observe do nows in most teachers’ classrooms. Only two of the eight teachers I observed routinely posted a do now on the blackboard, others simply did not attempt to, or only did so sporadically. Efforts to implement this routine persisted throughout much of the year. At a November professional development meeting, Ms. Abad arranged for all teachers to visit three classrooms, where teachers (two of whom did not participate in this study) shared how they performed do nows (Fieldnote, 11/8/11). Later in December, at an early morning leadership team meeting I observed, Ms. Abad stated that during her most recent classroom observations she did not see any do nows and wondered what the team could do to make this happen before the upcoming regional walkthrough (Fieldnote, 12/15/11). In an effort to press for coherence she decided to temporarily suspend assigning test prep materials so that teachers could focus on implementing the do now. In this case, instructional priorities shifted in response to practical considerations – strategically engaging external demands in times of monitoring. In essence, Ms. Abad’s actions were

a form of organizational buffering in which she encouraged teachers to ceremonially adopt the routine in anticipation of the upcoming walkthrough.

As the January regional walkthrough neared, teachers tuned into the need for ceremonial compliance. Ms. Accardi attempted to articulate the teacher experience when I asked her about the upcoming walkthrough. She said:

We will all be scared when the walkthrough happens because the pressure will be really on as to what she [Ms. Abad] wants to make sure happens. She'll probably have a lot of time going through the rooms to make sure everything is up to par for when they [regional administrators] come through. (Interview, 12/9/11)

Ms. Accardi described how the messaging around compliance intensified as the regional walkthrough drew near. Ms. Abad, who was typically not in teachers' classrooms, would spend more time "going through rooms" to make sure teachers were performing the mandated routines and increasing her messaging about the importance of doing so. Because the region informed principals of upcoming visits Ms. Abad was able to enact buffering strategies by encouraging and checking for compliance in the weeks leading up to a walkthrough.

Ms. Abad also emphasized the importance of displaying and using the phrase *do now* to ensure that Adams was perceived as a legitimate institution – a school implementing non-negotiables in an effort to improve teachers' instructional methods and thus student outcomes. During our interview Ms. Abad shared a strategy she learned from a colleague, an Enrichment principal, with regard to demonstrating compliance during walkthroughs. She explained:

They [her colleague's school] were having a different walkthrough every day, and they would get faulted – ‘No do now’ – when in fact they had completed it. She said, ‘You have to teach your teachers to restate it.’ If somebody walks in mid-lesson, restate ‘Remember our do now.’ It’s almost like you have to summarize for your observer because they come in and they’re there for a few minutes and you really have to teach your teachers to be savvy. (Interview, 12/1/11)

Ms. Abad knew that legitimacy depended on demonstrating compliance. She emphasized ceremonial compliance by encouraging teachers to use the language thereby creating the appearance of compliance.

Indeed, the press for ceremonial compliance was effective. Whereas I noted the absence of non-negotiables in most teachers’ classrooms September through December, my January fieldnotes were filled with observations of the words “do now” posted in classrooms and included in daily instructional agendas. Even Ms. Anderson, a kindergarten teacher who I never saw perform a do now, posted a sign near an easel on her classroom carpet – “Do Now” – seemingly indicating that the routine was performed in that area of the classroom, though I never saw her conduct one during the many math and literacy lessons I observed (Fieldnote, 1/18/12). On the day I noticed her sign, I also spotted students’ work with characterization, the school’s literacy focus strategy, hanging about the room as further evidence that she was complying with instructional mandates. While she incorporated the appearance of the practice into her classroom around the time of the regional walkthrough, less than a month later, I noted that the “Do Now” sign, as well as some other items that had popped up in the month prior, were no longer there (Fieldnote, 2/13/12).

At Adams, the do now was not easily absorbed into teachers' daily routines as there was little consequence to teachers for not doing so and many perceived the mandate as yet another change in terminology (e.g., they already did something like this) or passing fad within the school district. Subsequently, Ms. Abad emphasized ceremonial compliance, in effect buffering teachers from greater scrutiny of their work by encouraging and reminding them to incorporate the practice during times of inspection.

**Measurable Objectives: “Only 12 Days Until our Walkthrough!!”**

On January 26<sup>th</sup>, a memo appeared in all staff members' mailboxes exclaiming, “ONLY 12 DAYS UNTIL OUR ACADEMIC DIVISION WALKTHROUGH!!” Listed under this heading were seven items teachers should attend to. In bold capital letters item number four stated, “**DOUBLE CHECK TO MAKE SURE YOU ARE DOING A DO NOW AND WRITING YOUR OBJECTIVE ON THE BOARD FOR THE LESSON.**” Measurable objectives, another non-negotiable that mimicked the mandates prescribed to Enrichment schools were also a focus throughout my first year at Adams. It was one of the first things I looked for when I visited classrooms, and more often than not I did not see measurable objectives posted in classrooms as I did at Emery. Most teachers I observed at Adams listed a daily schedule and perhaps one or two objectives indicating what students would work on during reading or math instruction. Consider the following examples from Ms. Agnew, a fifth grade special education teacher's classroom:

- *Be able to define words using context clues*
- *Use number models to solve for area* (Fieldnote, 10/31/11)

Objectives like these, if any at all, appeared on the board in Ms. Agnew's room throughout the school year. They were quite different than the objectives I observed at Emery, which were lengthy descriptions of the behavior (what students will be able to do), conditions (how they will be able to do it) and criterion (degree of accuracy observed). At minimum, the above examples captured behavior (define words) and conditions (use context clues) but neglected to include a criterion. In other classrooms at Adams, teachers posted similar statements noting what students were working on in literacy and math each day, while some teachers posted broad learning objectives that rarely changed, and others did not bother to post any type of objective at all.

Just as the Do Now was an important element of recoupling, a routine that demonstrated responsiveness to the region's press for conformity among schools, so too was the task of writing measurable objectives. Ms. Abad briefly mentioned instructional objectives to teachers during the first-day-of-school staff meeting. While reading aloud to the staff from a list of items regional administrators looked for during "quick visits" to classrooms, she simply told teachers, "When you write your objectives you need to write, 'Students will be able to...'" (Fieldnote, 9/1/11). That short statement was all she said with regard to objectives, and there was no further discussion about writing objectives on that day. Teachers at Adams did not abide this order. They did not write instructional objectives for each lesson taught, and they certainly did not write specific and measurable objectives as emphasized in Enrichment schools like Emery.

Early one morning in Ms. Amos' third grade classroom her students worked quietly on morning journals and independent reading as Ms. Amos scurried about the room writing objectives, checking-in with students, and generally getting organized for the

morning. On a small dry erase board perched on the ledge of her much larger chalkboard were the following objectives:

1. *Wild Shots* – story vocab and word study
2. EDM 3.5 Pattern Block Toss
3. Geology Logs – Get Started!
4. Make good, wise decisions. (Fieldnote, 10/31/11)

The list of work to complete that day was descriptive (what the class would/should do) rather than specific and measurable learning statements, or even reflective of the simple statement Ms. Abad asked for in September.

Again, teachers' interpretations of this routine shaped their performance and compliance. When I asked Ms. Aponte, a teacher with 22 years of experience in City School District, about non-negotiables she said, "I don't think measurable objectives for the kids are important, but I'll play the game because they are coming to my room for the walkthrough so I have to play the game next week" (Interview, 1/17/12). Ms. Aponte's comment was noteworthy for two reasons. First, she didn't believe in the practice so she didn't do it, and because the principal rarely visited classrooms her lack of effort was inconsequential. Second, she understood the importance of ceremonial compliance, strategically engaging external demands when regional administrators visited her room. In this case, buffering was enacted by her ceremonial performance to prevent administrators from questioning her compliance, and by Ms. Abad who informed Ms. Aponte that she would likely be visited during the walkthrough.

Despite the fact that "instructional objective for each lesson" was on the regional walkthrough team's observation checklist, I frequently noted that teachers did not write objectives on the board for the lessons I observed. In November, Ms. Abad placed a

copy of an email and its attached documents from the regional superintendent in the mailbox of every staff member. The email asked that principals share with staff members copies of the documents used during administrative “walkthroughs,” “especially the Data Collection Tool document,” the team’s observation checklist. At the top of this document was a box for measurable objectives and indicators of this practice to look for in classrooms. Disseminating these documents to teachers, as well as the above memo reminding teachers of the upcoming walkthrough (e.g., “Only 12 days...”) intensified the messaging around ceremonial compliance.

Teachers at Adams did not have regular grade group meetings, and though the principal disseminated quite a bit of information through a constant stream of memos and announcements, the school staff did not meet for most of the school year. In April, several months after the regional walkthrough, the staff gathered for a professional development day. At this meeting, in addition to numerous other items that would be covered on that day, Ms. Abad told the assembled group that they would work on measurable objectives because this was the focus of the January walkthrough. Her comment referred to the feedback she received following the walkthrough in which it was identified that Adams’ teachers were not writing measurable objectives. Unfortunately, the teacher leader scheduled to deliver this portion of the professional development was not there that day leaving Ms. Alba to struggle through the presentation.

Unfamiliar with the presentation, Ms. Alba attempted to lead the group through a PowerPoint and accompanying documents on writing measurable objectives. Because this PowerPoint was recycled from a previous regional office professional development and there were some issues with the formatting of the presentation, Ms. Alba abandoned

the PowerPoint and instead focused on two documents providing examples of measurable objectives – what they are and what they are not. She drew the group’s attention to a document listing verbs teachers could use to write objectives, and then skimmed through some examples of measurable objectives, finally concluding to the group “it really isn’t what we’re doing now,” and emphasizing that they need to add the measurable piece (i.e., 80% accuracy). As I looked around the room, the teachers appeared confused and muttered to each other. From her seat Ms. Amos called out, “I just realized my objectives suck.” Attempting to intervene, Ms. Abad, the principal, got up and tried to rewrite a few objectives using the measurable objective guidelines. She was struggling to think on her feet and the group seemed to be losing focus. They chatted amongst themselves and the volume in the library increased. Noting this, Ms. Abad abruptly halted her efforts and released the teachers to meet in grade groups and address the next item on the agenda effectively ending the professional development on writing measurable objectives (Fieldnote, 4/24/12).

Though teachers at Adams were introduced to the idea of measurable objectives much earlier in the school year, there was still confusion and inconsistency at the end of April. The lack of professional development, monitoring, and perhaps for some teachers a willingness to change, in addition to buffering practices meant to strategically engage external demands resulted in ceremonial compliance – the illusion that Adams was implementing and performing “non-negotiable” routines in effort toward continued improvement.

## Summary

Whereas historically Adams had been isolated from external evaluations and free from prescriptive mandates such as those at Enrichment schools, changes in the field around the school (e.g., an alleged cheating scandal, a new regional superintendent, and the implementation of principal cohorts) introduced uncertainty and created pressure to tighten the couplings between Adams, its organizational field, and the larger institutional environment. However, recoupling is a dynamic process and one that is shaped by a school's context. At Adams, there was little examination of teachers' work from either the principal or external monitors. The teachers at Adams were veterans of the school district and witness to many waves of reform and innovation, and furthermore there was little professional development provided to Adams' teachers to prepare them to implement change. This context influenced the process of recoupling and teachers' efforts to incorporate non-negotiables were sporadic and varied. This created a situation in which the principal and the teachers buffered their work from close inspection, strategically engaging non-negotiables in times of surveillance.

## Conclusion

Organizational survival is contingent upon an organization's performance as measured by some form of outputs. In the case of public schools, student test scores serve as the main indicator of performance. However, in City School District administrators look for observable teacher behaviors such as the implementation of mandates, organizational and instructional routines, to signal a school and/or teacher's efforts toward sustained improvement. In City School District, mandated organizational routines arose from both coercive and mimetic pressures, and served to rationalize teachers' work

as schools strove for efficiency and legitimacy in the organizational field of public schooling.

Issues related to teachers' occupational status and professional identity were embedded in the efforts to rationalize teachers' work. Throughout this chapter the discussion of how routines rationalized teachers' work explicitly noted the reduced professional discretion, a hallmark of professionalism, teachers' experienced as they complied with mandated routines. In the next chapter I consider how limits on professional discretion challenged teachers' occupational status and professional identity.

## CHAPTER 6

### **“THERE’S NOT A WHOLE LOT OF ME IN MY TEACHING ANYMORE.” : TEACHERS’ MEANINGS REGARDING MANDATED PRACTICES**

In the previous chapter I argued that coercive pressures in the institutional environment of schooling forced change at the local level. Change manifested in the creation of mandated instructional and organizational routines (i.e., non-negotiables), though the implementation and performance of these routines varied slightly according to school status. However, organizational differences between Emery and Adams became smaller as mimetic pressures forced Adams to adopt Enrichment practices in order to maintain legitimacy within the organizational field. Whereas scholarship in the institutional tradition has been useful in examining similarities *between* organizations, it has paid less attention to the activities and agencies of individuals *within* organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Hallett, 2010). In this chapter I look beyond the implementation and performance of routines to consider teachers’ meaning-making – the ways in which they experienced the rationalization, or standardization, of their work.

The slew of mandated routines that organized teachers’ work at both schools, and the emphasis on raising test scores, reduced teachers’ professional discretion and changed the nature of teaching such that it was challenging for participants to enact the values and beliefs that comprised their teacher identities. In this chapter, I make two main arguments. First, I argue that reduced professional discretion resulted in the depletion of teachers’ intrinsic rewards. Second, I argue that the scope of mandates related to improving student test scores crowded out teachers’ opportunities to build and develop meaningful relationships with students and with each other, though this unfolded in

slightly different ways at each school. Together, these two circumstances compromised teachers' occupational status and professional identity.

### **Why Intrinsic Rewards Matter**

I have always loved learning and there's no other job where you can always continue to learn and make learning fun for other people too. It really does have to do with feeling like you can make a difference, and that you want others to feel the love that you have for learning. It's the best job for that. For as much as you can go home after a really bad day and feel really bad, if you have a really good day or they get something – there is no other feeling. (Ms. Accardi, Interview, 4/3/13)

Intrinsic rewards, like the “feeling” Ms. Accardi described, attract and retain teachers, and are a crucial element of teachers' work (Lortie, 1975; Cohn and Kottkamp, 1993; Ng, 2006; Ng & Peter, 2010). Recall from chapter two, they are subjective evaluations teachers make in the course of their work about features of the work that make them feel good (e.g., great success with a student or visits from former students). While intrinsic rewards are influenced by personal factors (i.e., what each individual teachers finds satisfying and pleasurable in the course of his or her work), they are connected to teachers' work context. That is, the manner in which teaching is defined and organized at the school-level makes intrinsic rewards more or less available to teachers (Lortie, 1975; Santoro, 2011a).

At Adams and Emery, the recoupling of teachers' tasks with accountability policy pressures rationalized instruction, changing the way teaching was defined and organized.

Routines rationalized teachers' work by dictating what teachers should teach, when they should teach it, how they should teach it, and how to monitor one's efforts and successes. One consequence of this context was a narrowed curriculum. At Adams and Emery, requirements to implement routines that narrowed curriculum constrained teachers' professional discretion, and hindered their access to intrinsic rewards.

### **Narrowed Curriculum and Teachers' Experiences**

Teachers at Emery and Adams repeatedly noted the emphasis placed on improving student test scores. Indeed many of the routines described in chapter five illustrated the importance placed on preparing students for standardized testing. During my first interview with Ms. Epps, a teacher who was initially reluctant to participate in this study, we sat in the school auditorium side-by-side as she monitored lunch-time detention. After asking her about how she came to work at Emery, I asked her to describe the school's mission. Ms. Epps had been at Emery for 14 years and was guarded at the start of our relationship, cautious not to reveal too much. By this point, though, she replied candidly:

The mission and the common goal, and I don't know if it's necessarily what we philosophically believe in, but the mission or the goal is to get every child to be proficient and advanced on the math and reading [state test]. (Interview, 12/5/11)

Ms. Epps' response pointed to a gap between what she perceived as the school's goal and a seemingly shared philosophical position among herself and her colleagues. Within this gap, teachers are positioned as implementers of curriculum rather than creators of curriculum. When teachers believe they are unable to be responsive to learners because curricular decisions are predetermined for them it is problematic for their intrinsic

rewards. Ms. Epps' assertion that the way she worked was not "necessarily what we philosophically believe in" revealed constraints on both her professional discretion (e.g., acting in a way that did not align with her teaching philosophy), and the intrinsic rewards associated with teaching.

Teachers' experiences with narrowed curriculum are important to consider. Not only do they capture the effects of high-stakes testing for teachers and students, but in this study, they illuminated challenges to teacher professional identity. Though Emery was designated a failing school and subject to greater intervention into teachers' work, Adams too was vulnerable to the coercive pressures of accountability policy in which the press to annually raise relatively high test scores even higher resulted in a narrowed curriculum for teachers to focus on content most likely be tested.

At Adams, teachers' attributed the intense focus on the state test to the principal's desire for Adams to remain a high-performing school. When I inquired about the Adams school's mission and goals, Ms. Agnew, a special education teacher, said, "I know her [the principal] big goal is teaching to the proficient level and the [state test] scores are really, really important to her." Ms. Agnew was not terribly talkative, often giving a succinct reply to questions I posed. Wanting to know what this looked like, I asked for more detail and she added, "A lot more constructed responses (practice with open-ended responses), a lot of test prep, and trying to expose them [the students] to as many of the things that are going to be on the test." I asked Ms. Agnew to consider the benefits and consequences of teaching in this way. She said:

I feel like some of the consequences are that I don't feel like I'm hitting their IEP goals as well as I need to because I'm focusing more on the test and I know they need to make progress on those goals in order to keep going, but the benefit is that they do end up doing OK on the [state test]. (Interview, 12/14/11)

In this response Ms. Agnew described a trade-off. Her students, who represent an important subgroup calculated in the school's AYP, do "OK" on the test. However, she neglected the goals indicated in each student's individualized education plan (IEP), and thus not only failed to meet a legal mandate of educating children with learning differences but also failed to perform work she perceived as right in terms of the students and her responsibility to the profession of special education. The pressure to narrow curriculum (e.g., constructed responses, test-prep materials, and eligible content) makes it difficult for teachers to respond to the context and realities of their work. This was the case for Ms. Agnew as she traded-off IEP goals for test preparation.

At both schools, regardless of AYP-status, instructional mandates and testing pressures that favored a narrowed curriculum diminished teachers' professional discretion. Teachers' expertise and professional judgment are important characteristics of occupational status (Wills & Haymore Sandholtz, 2009). These characteristics were ignored when teachers were not allowed to rely on their discretion to make curricular decisions for student learning, thereby creating a work context that moved teaching away from professionalization rather than toward it. This was problematic for the achievement of intrinsic rewards as well. As professional discretion was diminished by the implementation of non-negotiables, teachers struggled to act in ways that aligned with the values and beliefs that comprised their teacher identity. Below I show two conditions

related to narrowed curriculum that challenged teachers' identity. First, teachers perceived that limited professional discretion constrained their ability to enact their visions of good and pleasurable teaching. Second, when teachers had to limit or exclude non-tested content areas from their instruction, they worried that they were not working in the best interest of students. Not only were these circumstances unrewarding, but they directly challenged teachers' professional beliefs and values.

**Limited Control over Content: “The subject that has been thrown out of my classroom is social studies and not by choice.”**

Teachers at Adams and Emery perceived many of their instructional decisions to be constrained by pressures and routines aimed at raising test scores. Ms. Atkins, a fourth grade teacher, said, “I don't feel like I have flexibility. . . . The subject that has been thrown out of my classroom is social studies and not by choice” (Adams). With a resigned expression on her face, she explained that she no longer taught social studies because of the pressure to devote instructional time to tested content areas. Her phrasing – “not by choice” – was purposeful, meant to convey the lack of control she felt over her work. Instructional routines that emphasized narrowed curriculum did not facilitate Ms. Atkins' decision-making in ways that allowed her flexibility to cater to her own and students' curricular interests.

I observed the perceived lack of discretion Ms. Atkins described in classrooms as well. Consider the following excerpt from an observation of one of Ms. Embry's seventh grade language arts periods:

Ms. Embry's students were taking a practice test in preparation for the state exam.

She circulated the room, walking up and down the rows of desks, reminding

students of strategies they should use. The students were restless – squirming in their seats and chatting with each other, seemingly uninterested in the assignment. A student complained aloud, ‘I’m bored,’ to which Ms. Embry replied, ‘I can’t help the fact that we have to do a practice test.’ (Fieldnote, 11/17/11)

At Emery, Thursdays were “Test-taking Thursdays” and teachers were required to teach and practice test-preparation strategies. Ms. Embry complied with this directive and submitted to her students that she had no choice in the matter. In this moment, Ms. Embry positioned herself as powerless to change the course of the class. Not only did she not want to give the practice test, but she also had to deal with the consequence when students were not engaged by the assignment.

At Adams and Emery standardized curriculum and instructional strategies, embedded in non-negotiables, ignored teacher expertise and experience. Ms. Easton, a kindergarten teacher, noted this effect as she discussed changes to teaching over the course of her career. Ms. Easton had quite a bit of expertise in literacy instruction, as she was formerly an instructional coach for the federally funded Reading First program. She prided herself on her wealth of knowledge, and her ability to activate it in order to help students learn to read. As we sat across from each other in little kindergarten chairs, she said, with a look of disbelief on her face:

They want you to do now-a-days a lot more direct instruction, like where you’re reading a script and even if it’s not a script they want you to say certain things and have the children respond a certain way. They have kind of taken the teaching out of teaching. (Interview, 12/21/11)

In the previous examples, Ms. Atkins and Ms. Embry perceived that they had little choice over matters such as teaching social studies or assigning test-preparation materials. Here, Ms. Easton explicitly cited prescriptive and scripted curricular programs that eliminated the need for her to draw on her expertise and years of experience. The conditions she described stifle professionalization. When she is reading from a predetermined instructional guide she is not drawing from her professional knowledge and judgment. Further, this condition is unrewarding. It is difficult for teachers like Ms. Easton to teach in ways that align with their sense of good instruction when mandates and materials call on them to “say certain things.”

The idea that teachers’ professionalism was circumscribed by the context of teaching was shared among teachers at both schools. Curricular controls embedded in non-negotiables reduced the range of practices available to teachers. Reflecting on the mandates that guided her work, Ms. Accardi disappointingly said:

It’s too much you have to do this and not enough trust that the teacher is going to hit these things without having to be told this, this, and this. . . . There’s not a whole lot of me in my teaching anymore. (Interview, 12/9/11)

After a long explanation about how she often ignored her own ideas because they would disrupt curricular pacing and alignment routines, she woefully added, “I thought that teaching was going to be creative and I was going to make a difference because of my talent, and I think that is just completely pushed aside now” (Interview, 12/9/11). When teachers feel a lack of control over the development and implementation of curricula, they feel disconnected from the act of teaching as Ms. Accardi asserted in her comment.

For her, the very elements that drew her to teaching were corrupted by a narrowed curriculum that limited her creative input. Teachers at Adams and Emery did not experience the occupational norm of autonomy documented by Lortie (1975). At these schools, in conditions of intense pressure to raise student test scores by means of a narrowed curriculum, teachers stopped seeing themselves as actively constructing their practice. Rather they saw themselves removed from the process, with little control over the direction of their work and therefore less influence over their intrinsic rewards.

Milner (2013b) noted the deprofessionalization of teachers through scripted and narrowed curriculum that discouraged teachers from relying on their professional judgment, and the consequent sacrifices of higher-level learning, creativity, flexibility, and breadth of learning (i). The sacrifices he noted played out at Adams and Emery as teachers attended to pacing guides and program materials. Accordingly, not only did teachers perceive a lack of flexibility with regard to curricular content, they believed that they were unable to find time to remediate instruction as needed. Pressures to abide by curricular pacing schedules (see chapter 5) and to cover content aligned with the state test prevented teachers from significantly slowing down or remediating instruction in response to students' needs.

Consider the following excerpts from two different observations. The first occurred in April as Ms. Atkins was teaching math. The students had just returned from lunch and Ms. Atkins was beginning to review for an upcoming math test. With math workbooks in front of them, the students were instructed to let Ms. Atkins know if they have any questions about the work covered in this particular unit. To a girl who raised her hand and posed a question about a particular problem, Ms. Atkins replied:

Well my dear, this is going to be tough for you because in order for you to be able to do this you need to know your times tables. Quickly she modeled some mental math for calculating the answer, but the girl was still confused, to which Ms. Atkins responded, “I can’t help you in fourth grade with work from third grade. (Fieldnote, 4/20/12)

This exchange appeared harsh. Out of context, an observer might label Ms. Atkins an unresponsive teacher, unwilling to work with a struggling student. But consider this event alongside the following note from a staff meeting that occurred at Emery just a few days later. As the spring weather was warming up the building, the teachers gathered in the library to plan for the next school year. Seated in grade-level teams, around rectangular tables, teachers were asked to think of things they needed their students to know at the start of each school year:

The meeting ended with teachers sharing concepts children need to master before moving to the next grade level. Ms. Engler, a fourth grade teacher, told the third grade teachers that she needs students to know their multiplication facts because “the first three math lessons in fourth grade assume this, and there is no time to teach it.” (Fieldnote, 4/24/12)

Alone, either incident might strike an observer as alarming – teachers unwilling to remediate instruction. Taken together, in the context of high-stakes testing and mandated routines at Adams and Emery, these events present an image of teachers unable to adjust instruction, to be flexible, when the demands of the job call for them to move on. Teachers do not want to sacrifice creativity, flexibility, and learning opportunities, but the

call to standardize and narrow curriculum left them unable to activate their professional knowledge and discretion. Equally problematic is witnessing students struggle or fail because this is not intrinsically rewarding and certainly calls into questions one's beliefs about performing good and pleasurable work.

**Narrowed Content and Narrowed Rewards: “Obviously, more time is given to the literacy and the math.”**

Pressures related to testing led teachers to teach in ways that contradicted their ideas of sound instructional practice. Ms. Alba was a twenty-six year veteran of the school district and an alumna of Adams. During our first formal interview we sat in the hallway outside of her classroom. I had already observed Ms. Alba three times and wanted to get a sense of how she viewed the instructional priorities at the school. In a straightforward manner she said, “Obviously, more time is given to the literacy and the math. I will tell you that if I get to science and social studies that’s a bonus” (Interview, 11/28/11). Because Ms. Alba told me this early in the first year of data collection, I asked if this aligned with her priorities. She said:

It has to. I mean, to be honest, I am totally up-to-date if you go on the planning and scheduling guidelines and where I am on the story and in the literacy. I might be a day or two behind in the math, but the science and social studies, like I said, if we get to it, it’s a plus. (Interview, 11/28/11)

Ms. Alba’s answer was revealing for several reasons. One, she emphasized that she was “up-to-date” with the literacy and math pacing schedules, and noted that getting to science and social studies was a “plus.” Two, she was unwilling to firmly indicate whether the instructional routine aligned with her values, preferring to say “it has to.”

Her reticence captured the trying times public school teachers experience as their ability to know the right thing (e.g., teach science and social studies) and do the right thing are at odds because the conditions of schooling increasingly emphasize a narrowed curriculum.

Ms. Alba's tacit agreement with the conditions of narrowed curriculum were on display late one afternoon when I entered her classroom expecting to see a science or social studies lesson as the schedule indicated. I arrived at 2:15, surprised to find a math lesson still in progress, when she greeted me and announced, "We are doing a math marathon." Later, as the class was packing up for the day she informed me that the lesson began at 12:30 and that sometimes it can take that long to get through all of the day's required content (Fieldnote, 1/19/12). In this observation, science and social studies content were pushed aside because math, a tested content area, called for extended time. While this might reflect the priority assigned to high-stakes testing in the NCLB era, it conflicted with teachers' standards for good and pleasurable practice, as captured when Ms. Alba's acquiesced that her values had to align with the priority assigned to reading and math instruction.

Knowing the right thing to do in today's public school system, particularly in high-poverty urban schools, is simply not enough to sustain teachers' efforts and interests in the occupation of teaching. In order to reap the intrinsic rewards that attract and sustain teachers, teachers must be able to do the right thing. Narrowed curriculum associated with the rewards and sanctions of NCLB has created an untenable situation that challenges teachers' sense of what is good, right, and pleasurable in teaching. Consider the following comment from Ms. Engler, a fourth grade teacher with a

reputation for producing test scores gains. During our first formal interview, as we sat in the school's library late in the afternoon, she said:

I would like more time to teach outside areas, content areas, social studies, science. We don't have a lot of time for that. It's kind of like wherever you can fit it in. On paper it says we have time, but in actuality we do not have enough time to teach those subjects. (Interview, 12/14/11)

Although Ms. Engler was a teacher commended for her focus on testing and her ability to produce improved outcomes, her personal values lay elsewhere and included the desire to teach non-tested subject areas. At Emery, the mandated daily reading and math intervention periods significantly reduced the amount of time that was available for teaching science and social studies. Despite the fact that the school district's pacing schedules called for a minimum number of instructional minutes per week in each content area, the reality was that the prescriptive literacy and math programs, test preparation lessons, and mandates such as the do now and constructed responses all related to tested content and pushed aside science and social studies instruction.

In December I noted that Ms. Engler's designated bulletin boards for "geography" and "science" were empty (Fieldnote, 12/15/11), and in March she bemoaned the upcoming fourth grade science standardized test.<sup>15</sup> She was concerned because the test was cumulative (content from K-4), an obvious challenge "since science is often cut in favor of math and literacy" (Fieldnote, 3/23/12). Finally, in April as the science portion of standardized testing neared, I noticed a measurable objective for science displayed on

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<sup>15</sup> In compliance with state guidelines, City School District only administered the science standardized test to students in grades 4 and 8.

her chalkboard. It read: “Science – Review eligible content and [state test] released items in order to complete a constructed response and score 2 out of 2 on the constructed response” (Fieldnote, 4/19/12). Even in this instance, when Ms. Engler finally included science content into the course of the school day, the experience was corrupted by testing pressures as her measurable objective indicated that the lesson was aligned with the form (i.e., “constructed response.”) and content (i.e., “eligible content”) of the test.

Teachers’ inability to circumvent mandates that emphasized narrowed curriculum compromised their personal integrity and it undermined their sense of effective teaching. Ms. Ellis was quite unhappy with this situation and ultimately left City School District at the end of year-two data collection in search of a work environment with less focus on test scores. After school one January afternoon she wearily said, “The social studies and science curriculum, I don’t even really know if I like them because I don’t have time to teach them in the way that they should be taught and that’s really frustrating because I love science” (Interview, 1/5/12). In this example, Ms. Ellis’ word choice is telling. The phrase “should be taught” made a distinction between how she was teaching the material, glossing over it, and how she believed she should teach it. Ultimately, the disjunction between practice and beliefs about practice compromised her ability to feel rewarded by her work.

The incongruity between beliefs about how to teach and the actual practice of teaching as described by Ms. Ellis was on display in other classrooms as well. Early in the school year in Ms. Earnhardt’s kindergarten classroom a science lesson was given a mere 10 minutes of instructional time. At 2:15 the students were cleaned up from writing numbers in shaving cream on their desks. As Ms. Ellis settled the students on the carpet

she said, “OK, let’s move to science. We’re learning about trees. Tell me something you know.” The conversation began with students contributing responses and Ms. Earnhardt asking clarifying questions. After about 10 minutes the conversation came to a natural lull as the students were seemingly out of information about trees. Ms. Earnhardt informed the students she was waiting for her classroom volunteer to finish cleaning the tables and set up the day’s math lesson. From there, the students went back to their seats and practiced math games from 2:30 until dismissal time (Fieldnote, 11/1/11). In this example, even kindergarten classrooms were not immune to the pressures of a narrowed curriculum. Whereas the math lesson was part of a curricular program in which the end-of-day games reinforced previously learned math skills and required substantial time to complete, only a mere 15 minutes was given to science instruction on this day.

Teachers’ intrinsic rewards are connected to the values and goals they set for students and themselves. For Ms. Eccles, intrinsic rewards were connected to lessons and experiences she hoped to accomplish with students. The goal of broadening students’ knowledge was one element that drew Ms. Eccles to teaching in an urban area. She explained:

I feel like science and social studies are important because it broadens knowledge, and its things they [students] might not be exposed to outside of school. . . . I wish I could get to them more, but it’s just sometimes impossible to do that. (Interview, 12/21/11)

Connecting students to new and different ideas is an established source of intrinsic rewards (Lortie, 1975). For Ms. Eccles, these subjects are interesting and thus

pleasurable to teach. Further, she believes science and social studies have a unique impact on students' lives, which gives her the sense that she has changed students in positive ways. However, narrowed curriculum and limited discretion prevented Ms. Eccles from concentrating her energy toward content areas that were important and rewarding to her.

At Adams and Emery, the conditions of teaching and learning under NCLB and high-stakes testing were such that teachers had less control over the direction of their work. I observed Ms. Eccles' dilemma one day when I entered her classroom expecting to see a scheduled science lesson. Though the roster indicated she should be teaching science at the time I visited her classroom, she was just beginning the reading do now, a mandated daily test-prep activity. As Ms. Eccles distributed do now workbooks to the students they groaned and she replied, "If we finish this quickly then we can look at our minerals." Approximately 30 minutes later the do now was complete and minerals were passed out for students to observe and note their properties. After about 10 minutes, Ms. Eccles announced that it was time for lunch. Again, students groaned as the science lesson was abruptly ended (Fieldnote, 11/10/11). In this example, the day's science lesson was pushed aside by an instructional mandate focused on reading. The students' collective groans were evidence of their disappointment. In this context, Ms. Eccles' inability to activate professional discretion (e.g. skip the do now in favor of presenting a complete science lesson) prevented her from accessing intrinsic rewards, a marked contrast with Lortie's (1975) assertion that teachers can direct their efforts toward achieving intrinsic rewards.

Tensions between a narrowed curriculum and doing good and pleasurable work spilled into other facets of teachers' work responsibilities. The emphasis on math and language arts meant that science and social studies were given scant attention. Nonetheless teachers were required to grade these subject areas. At the end of one marking period, Ms. Aponte, a no-nonsense first grade teacher noted the tensions in her work:

Our day is supposed to have reading, math, social studies and science along with specials, lunch and of course breakfast... What you really have happen[ing] is reading and math, and maybe one day they get social studies and one day you get science in... Right now, I'm at the end of the report period. You're trying to play catch-up to get grades for social studies and science because when push comes to shove you've got to make a decision between assemblies, behavior management and everything else. It may come down to you got reading and math in that day and that was a good day. (Interview, 1/17/12)

For Ms. Aponte, the emphasis on math and reading forced her to make decisions that reduced the amount of time she devoted to science and social studies resulting in a situation where she had to play "catch-up" (squeeze in assignments at the end of the marking period to justify a grade in those subject areas). With the exception of the school-wide science fair, in which students completed projects at home to display in the hallways during report card conferences, I did not observe evidence of science instruction in her classroom until May. Indeed, when she considered everything else that might arise during the course of school day, such as assemblies and behavior management issues, the decision to cover only reading and math redefined the notion of a "good day." However,

this is not truly what Ms. Aponte believed was good or right in professional practice. When I asked Ms. Aponte if the value placed on reading and math aligned with her priorities for her students she simply said, “No, because I really think social studies and science are important.” Her last comment pinpointed the complexities of work that required teachers’ to make difficult choices (e.g., what content to cover and what to exclude) at a time when attention to standardized testing and narrowed curriculum was massively misaligned with the priorities of classroom teachers at Adams and Emery.

The dearth of science and social studies content and the consequences for students exacted a psychic toll on teachers. Ms. Embry, a seventh grade literacy and social studies teacher, commented on this topic when she discussed how high-stakes testing impacted her instructional routine. Visibly frustrated, she said:

Because everything ends up being based on these scores – I mean that’s why we don’t have a real science and social studies period. It’s kind of a detriment to think that we’re sending kids off to high school that have gotten a quarter of a year’s worth of that education ever and I know that the lower grades barely touch on it too so it’s a huge burden in that way. I’m only on page 104 in the social studies text book but if I was following the PST as a real social studies teacher, with a real built-in schedule, we’re supposed to be like 100 pages over that so they’re not really getting introduced to concepts that they should because of scheduling. I think that a lot of time is given to test prep and that’s not really teaching anything. (Interview, 12/14/11)

Ms. Embry's comment on the consequences for students of this intensive focus on math and reading highlights both her sense that students suffer as a result and how this awareness affected her as a teacher. Ms. Embry experienced her narrowed curriculum as a "burden" – a weight she bears knowing that she did not adequately cover the social studies curriculum. Her word choice was significant. "Burden" conveyed both her lack of input about what goes on in her classroom, and a gradual sort of wearing down that occurs over time when teachers work in ways that are out of synch with their values and beliefs.

### **Summary**

As chapter five demonstrated, the conditions of teachers' work changed as Adams and Emery teachers implemented mandated instructional routines designed to recouple teachers' work with institutional pressures for greater school-based accountability. Under these conditions teachers' work was rationalized: curriculum was narrowed to increase the instructional time devoted to tested content areas, and teachers had less control over their work due to mandates that limited curricular content and pedagogic options. At Adams and Emery, this experience moved teaching away from professionalization, and was fundamentally out of synch with teachers' beliefs and values about doing what was right in terms of students and the profession. Narrowed curriculum limited teachers' opportunities to respond to students and depleted teachers' intrinsic rewards. Teachers did not feel good about delivering an incomplete or unresponsive educational program.

### **Forging Meaningful Relationships**

The scope of mandated routines and an emphasis on raising student test scores resulted in a narrowed curriculum that compromised teachers' professional values. This condition challenged teachers' professional identity in other ways as well. Though individual teachers varied in their response to specific mandates, finding some worthwhile and others useless, one theme that emerged throughout teachers' discussions about work was the issue of relationships. Changes to teachers' working conditions that were facilitated by mandated instructional routines and the pressure to raise test scores compromised teachers' abilities to forge meaningful relationships with students and with each other. Research on the lives of teachers emphasized the importance of developing emotional connections with students (Jeffrey & Woods, 1996; Nias, 1996). Relationships with students are both an attractor to teaching (Huberman, 1993) and an important source of intrinsic rewards (Lortie, 1975; Johnson, 1990). Recent research on the effects of high-stakes accountability argued that changes to teachers' work had unanticipated, and often negative, consequences for teachers' relationships with students (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Jeffrey, Auger, & Pepperill, 2013; Valli & Buese, 2007; Wellman, 2007). Whereas this research explored particular aspects of relationships such as demonstrations of care and bridging social differences, I show that teachers simply lacked time to connect with students in ways that felt meaningful to them. The scope of instructional routines crowded out teachers' opportunities to consider the needs of the whole child, to develop and/or maintain relationships with students, and to connect with colleagues. These circumstances were directly related to the expanded definition of

narrowed curriculum, in which prescribed curriculum and pedagogies limited teachers' ability to be flexible and responsive with students and with each other.

### **Unrealized Relationships: No Time to Connect**

The intense pressure to improve standardized test scores at Emery and Adams created an environment where teachers perceived a shift away from connecting with students and developing relationships as a foundation for successful teaching and learning. Though teachers at both schools experienced similar professional frustrations with regard to narrowed curriculum, a testament to the coercive pressures of accountability policy, the challenges to relationships unfolded in slightly different ways between Emery and Adams. The idea that relationships between teachers and students were compromised, due to narrowed curriculum that emphasized tested content and prescriptive programs, was heightened at Emery. There, mandated instructional interventions resulted in students moving into homogenous groups twice daily. The frequent transition of students for interventions meant that teachers had limited time to complete lessons and even less time to stop and connect with students. Furthermore, instructional interventions were scripted and that meant teachers had less discretion in terms of being responsive to students. Emery also used a highly-prescriptive literacy program, and there was greater urgency around test scores (e.g., reviewing data, grouping students, targeting students). These features of the workplace, combined with instructional interventions and the requisite bell-to-bell schedule set Emery apart from Adams and created differences with regard to teacher-student relationships. Though Adams' teachers experienced many of the same mandates prescribed to Enrichment schools (as noted in chapter 5), they simply had more uninterrupted time with students in

the classroom and thus more time, if they desired, to listen to students and plan assignments that were responsive to students' interests.

**Teacher-Student Relationships: “I personally did not get into teaching to teach, which may sound really crazy, but I got into it to have an impact on the lives of kids that need it the most.”**

Many teachers, like Ms. Engler, the passionate fourth grade teacher quoted above, enter the profession to make a difference in the lives of students (Fullan, 1993; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). During our first interview together Ms. Engler uttered the above statement to explain her decision to teach at Emery. She felt particularly drawn to Emery as she grew up as a member of a nearby church, and had even left a school district in Maryland to return to the neighborhood surrounding Emery. The above quote captured the thrust of her work – “impacting the lives of kids.” Ms. Engler’s sentiments are not unusual among teachers. Ms. Aponte, the first grade teacher at Adams, similarly alluded to her desire to make a difference beyond academic achievement. In our final interview together she said, “I do believe teaching is a vocation. Not everyone is meant to be a teacher. . . . I have 25 people in front of me that are mine, and my job is to get them through this day safely; teach them, guide them” (Interview, 2/27/13). Both Ms. Engler and Ms. Aponte stressed the importance of working with children and looking beyond the spotlight on academics and testing; however, this desire was constrained by the nature of curricular and pedagogical changes stemming from mandated routines that limited teacher discretion and emphasized narrowed curriculum.

At Emery, the implementation of a highly-prescriptive literacy program in the elementary grades (K-6) eliminated the small group reading instruction (i.e., guided reading) that defined teachers’ reading practice in prior years. The literacy program

paired with the reading intervention program eliminated the need for teachers to interact with small groups of students during guided reading instruction. Now, reading instruction was whole-group (a mix of homogeneously grouped students from various classrooms and grade levels) and teacher-led. This change, facilitated by prescriptive and scripted programs that characterize narrowed curriculum, was one example of a condition that reduced teachers' opportunities to connect with students. Ms. Edwards sadly explained:

I really miss doing the guided reading. . . . I really miss the personal attention of being able to have my five [students] at the table and then have them share and go around listening to them and hearing how they're thinking. I miss that side of it.

(Interview, 12/14/11)

The change to instructional programming at Emery limited Ms. Edwards' opportunities to learn about her students as individuals (e.g., "how they are thinking."), but also to connect with them (e.g., "the personal attention") on issues and topics that move beyond the focus on tested content. The whole group structure with scripted lessons limited her discretion with regard to grouping and responding to students. Ms. Edwards' opportunities to connect with students in ways teachers deemed important and meaningful were dissolved as curricular mandates emphasized whole group didactic instruction.

The use of prescriptive and scripted curricular programs stymied Ms. Edwards' desire to connect with and know her students in more robust ways. Ms. Anderson made comments similar to Ms. Edwards'. Rather than noting a specific feature of instructional

programming (e.g., the absence of guided reading), Ms. Anderson pointed to the current emphasis on intense academic instruction to suggest that there was little room for her young elementary students to find time to play and rest. Ms. Anderson had taught kindergarten for many years and was frustrated by changes that increasingly emphasized academic progress over social/emotional development. Exasperated, she said:

When I started we did not have the reading assessments. We did not have the DIBELS. We did not have all the structure with the core curriculum. That's changed a lot. The standardized testing has changed and we did not have a curriculum like that. It [school] was a lot more fun and less stressful for the students. They actually did get their playtime. Every day we would squeeze in 30 minutes of community playtime, sharing. It was just more fun, more kind of developmentally appropriate. I do feel like what I'm doing now is not developmentally appropriate for the children. (Interview, 11/28/11)

Ms. Anderson's language was precise and informed by her professional identity – her beliefs and values about “developmentally appropriate” kindergarten classrooms. She was not concerned about students. She was concerned about “children,” and the impact the structure of the school day would have on them. The absence of playtime and sharing in kindergarten, a consequence of increased assessment and a schedule intensified by mandated instructional routines, reshaped her relationships with students. There was no longer non-standardized time for Ms. Anderson to interact with her students and develop the rapport that is vital to success with young students. That is not to say that Ms. Anderson never seized opportunities for her students to engage in “playtime;” however, it was her perception that her schedule did not allow for it, and her discretion was limited

enough that this type of activity was largely eliminated from her kindergarten schedule. Ultimately, this condition is unrewarding for teachers like Ms. Anderson who value the importance of meeting the needs of the whole child, a foundation for successful relationships with students.

The increase in formal assessment with young children was one way teachers experienced changes to their relationships with students. Ms. Earnhardt, who had been teaching kindergarten for seven years but elementary and middle school for much longer, also noted the increased use of formal (e.g., paper-based) assessments in her classroom. She attributed this to the Emery's mandated literacy program that included "a lesson assessment almost every other day." Indeed, I noted the frequency of assessment in her classroom during several observations of her literacy block, and I regularly volunteered by helping her to administer one-on-one assessments. Late one November morning, as her students cleaned up from literacy centers and she quickly looked over the work they produced, she announced that there were 25 minutes until lunch and four tests to take. She said, "We have four tests to take. . . . We can take them and go to lunch on time or we can take them and go to lunch late. Either way, we are taking these four tests." Following this announcement, the children moved to their "testing seats," and dividers were raised to prevent wandering eyes (Fieldnote, 11/17/11). On this occasion Ms. Earnhardt was able to test the whole class at once, but on many other days the students were tested individually on multiple skills and concepts taught during the literacy block. These observations confirmed Ms. Earnhardt's comments about the frequency of assessment and underscored Ms. Anderson's above comments about the routinization of the kindergarten classroom.

Increased assessment accompanies the overwhelming nation-wide emphasis on testing and academic achievement, and the narrowed curriculum ushered in by the slew of instructional routines mandated to schools and teachers in City School District. While these changes are likely viewed positively by proponents of increased accountability for schools and teachers (e.g., more student data collected to inform instruction), I noted that changes in practice (e.g., prescriptive programs that eliminated small group instruction and increased formal assessment among even the youngest students) put teachers' actions in conflict with their beliefs about developing positive relationships with students (e.g., meeting with small groups), and their ideas about their responsibilities to young children (e.g., ensuring time for play and rest).

Narrowing the curriculum created additional strain as teachers experienced stress from trying to cover increasing amounts of content and having to teach to the test, stress that manifested in their classroom interactions. Perhaps the strain on teacher-student relationships at Emery was best captured by Ms. Erikson, who left Emery at the end of year one seeking better working conditions in a city charter school. When I reconnected with her in year two and asked her to reflect on her seven years at Emery she said, "Everything was just so punitive for teachers and students. It strains the relationship." Acting out a hypothetical interaction between herself and a student, she put on an exasperated voice and said, "Well, I have to get all this stuff done or I'm going to get yelled at, and I don't care if you are having a bad day. You just have to get it done" (Interview, 2/11/13). Ms. Erikson shared this interaction to demonstrate how the intensity of mandates pushed aside students' concerns. Her demonstration conveyed the stress she experienced – "get all this stuff done" – and how that circumscribed her ability

to focus on students' needs. The scale and scope of instructional routines took a toll on teacher-student relationships, pushing aside teachers' desires to connect with students, and undermining the flood of potential rewards that result from caring relationships with students.

Teacher-student relationships were redefined under these conditions. The pressures to prioritize standardized curriculum, high-stakes testing, and annual targets narrowed the ways teachers desired to know students. In a conversation about the pressure related to testing, Ms. Amos, an affable third grade teacher at Adams, referred to a former school district slogan - "Children First." She said:

Children First? It doesn't feel that way here. It doesn't, it doesn't, not at the level where I am anymore. Do you know what I mean? I don't feel like they're put first. I feel like there are so many other things like the attendance and the constant for AYP, and AYP, and AYP. (Interview, 12/1/11)

Ms. Amos relished time with her students. I frequently observed her listening to their stories, commenting on their personal lives, and filling her classroom with activities and crafts connected to special occasions and students' interest. Yet, the attention to AYP, and even attendance (one indicator of a school's progress) seemed to supersede her desire to put children first. In some ways, a teacher's desire to put children first, or to sit and talk with students, is connected to the ethic of caring (Noddings, 1984), in which teachers create caring relationships with students by talking, listening, sharing, responding, and generally knowing students well. The ability to do this was complicated when the focus

was seemingly on the information or data that students produced and not on the student as a child or individual.

Under accountability policies, test scores and AYP designations are an important way to know students and schools, but teachers at Adams and Emery contested this. At Emery, Ms. Ellis objected to the strong focus on data, finding it in conflict with how she wanted to know students. She explained:

You know, year after year I come in and I get a list of kids and *basic, below basic, advanced, proficient*. I mean this is how the kids are labeled. I don't know the kid yet. I don't know what they look like, but I know their scores. That's very frustrating to me, and it's frustrating to the kids as well (Interview, 5/1/13).

Ms. Ellis shared this anecdote as she explained her decision to leave City School District at the end of year two. The way Ms. Ellis wanted to know students was in conflict with a system that prioritized test scores, and expected her to respond to students based on that information. Getting to know students is personally important to teachers (Valli & Buese, 2007), and intrinsically rewarding. This becomes complicated when instructional tasks and narrowed curriculum emphasize using data rather than personal relationships.

Though there were several factors that contributed to teachers' perceptions that their relationships with students had changed (e.g., prescriptive curricula that replaced small group instruction, increased assessment and data to know and respond to students, an intensified schedule that pushed aside student concerns), it also seemed that a narrowed curriculum facilitated a "busyness" and "denseness" (Bailey, 2000) in teachers' work that simply made it difficult to slow down and connect with students. Recall, from

the beginning of this section, Ms. Engler's professed desire to have an impact on the lives of students. In fact, she stated that this is what attracted her to teaching. However, in a subsequent exchange about how she worked toward her goal of impacting students' lives it was clear that this goal was compromised by the busyness of the school day. She explained:

I'm definitely reaching out to them [students] to try to establish relationships with them, as well as some of the older students, so I can say just building relationships that comes with having the students come visit me during my lunch, after school, whenever I have an opportunity to talk to them one-on-one. (Interview, 12/14/11).

While relationships with students are important to Ms. Engler, they are obviously constrained by a schedule that includes trying to cover increasing amounts of tested content but precludes time from talking with them "one-on-one." Because there is so much to accomplish in the classroom, Ms. Engler must use her out-of-classroom time (e.g., lunch and after school) to try to establish the relationships she believes are at the core of her work.

Though Ms. Engler's Enrichment schedule was denser than teachers' schedules at Adams, Ms. Aponte agreed that there was less time during the course of the day to form relationships with students. Even Ms. Aponte, who often found ways to circumvent mandates because of the lack of monitoring at Adams, said:

I think with the students you don't have as much time to get to know them and be friendly with them because you just don't have that time. It's always (rapidly claps her hands together to indicate the pace of work) this has to be turned in.

...You never really have that time to sit down and relax and talk to them.

(Interview, 1/17/12)

Teachers derive their most important rewards from interactions with pupils (Huberman, 1993), but Ms. Aponte perceived that she lacked time to “know” her students and “be friendly” with them. While accountability policy has elevated the discussion about academic rigor and effective teaching, it has ignored the importance of personal and caring relationships with students (Nias, 1999; Shacklock, 1998; Bailey, 2000; Hoyle, 2001).

**Teacher-Teacher Relationships: “...we’ve never been as disconnected as a staff as we are now.”**

While Lortie (1975) understood that teachers’ “psychological world” was shaped by a commitment to students, he was terse in his treatment of teachers’ relationships with each other. However, more recent scholarship on teachers’ working conditions suggests that teachers’ rely on each other for personal and instructional needs (Johnson, 1990). Though the structure of schooling has rarely been conducive to teacher relationships, as teachers are typically isolated from each other much of the school day, the culture of isolation was exacerbated at Adams and Emery as teachers worked to meet the demands of the non-negotiables in place in each school. As Ms. Amos noted above, she was feeling quite disconnected from her colleagues.

Teachers look to each other to meet their personal needs of social interaction and psychological support (Johnson, 1990 p. 156). Despite her 13 years at Adams, Ms. Amos was feeling particularly isolated the first year I met her. She spent her entire day in her

classroom and worked through her lunch period. She attributed this to busyness of her work under increasing mandates:

I feel that through the past 12 years we've never been as disconnected as a staff as we are now. I feel like we used to do and have a lot more time together, you know as professionals and as teachers, whether it be inside of school or outside of school. It just seems that now everybody is very busy and running from one thing to the next and trying to get as much done as they can in a short period of time and we don't have...there's really no such thing as faculty meetings anymore and if they are, they're jammed packed with a lot of things and you don't get to talk to anybody anymore. There's no...the whole socialization thing is just not there anymore and I wish that we could go back to it being like that. (Interview, 12/1/11)

Genuinely saddened as she conveyed this to me, Ms. Amos longed for the time when she was able to connect and socialize with other teachers. In her perception the daily lives of teachers at Adams had simply become overwhelming. At Adams, the increasing number of instructional routines resulted in feelings of disconnection among teachers.

Social interaction can serve as a remedy to the isolation of teachers' work.

Whereas Lortie (1975) associated teacher isolation with teacher autonomy because he believed teachers possessed wide latitude behind classroom doors, this was not the case at Adams and Emery. Increased feelings of isolation were one consequence of working conditions that increased teachers' tasks, limited their discretion, and precluded time to eat lunch or sit and chat with colleagues. But, mandates and narrowed curriculum altered

relationships in other ways as well. As teachers became busier trying to implement prescribed curricular programs and pedagogies, and align curriculum to tested content, they generally experienced more stress and pressure related to their workload. Ironically, although Ms. Earnhardt, a kindergarten teacher located in one of the three basement classrooms, craved social interaction she readily acknowledged that changes to her work generated a level of stress that prevented her from interacting with others. She explained:

Your stress level is more and more stress leads you to not to have more time to talk with people or deal with people. Then stress causes people to be short-tempered, or like you pass by and you're thinking about things and that person is like "Oh, you didn't say hi." Well I got a million and one things on my plate. It's not that I didn't see you and I didn't want to say hi, it's just I'm trying to get here, there and everywhere. (Interview, 1/5/12)

Social encounters, limited as they may be in a school hallway, were strained when teachers like Ms. Earnhardt felt too busy to greet each other. While her example may seem extreme, it was conveyed with great emotion. Her body rose out of her chair, her shoulders moved closer to her ears, and her voice changed – all of her physical responses emphasized the stress she felt and its impact on her relationships with other teachers. Whereas the intrinsic rewards of teaching are reduced when teachers feel unable to connect with students, stressful or incomplete relationships with colleagues also compromised feelings of pleasure and enjoyment in the workplace.

Beyond personal needs, teachers also rely on each other as sources of ideas and pedagogical advice (Johnson, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1989). Collaboration and informal socializing allows teachers to share strategies and professional insights thereby

addressing doubts or questions about instructional practice. This was true at Adams and Emery even as teaching became increasingly standardized. Consider the following quote from Ms. Accardi in regard to the grade level meetings that no longer existed at Adams.

Irritated, she shared:

I really need one for just time to talk to my peers. I really want to know if you are having these same difficulties. My kids are really having a hard time with division. . . . What are you doing to get your kids to understand? (Interview, 12/9/11)

In this example, Ms. Accardi explained the need for greater interaction with her colleagues in order to improve her practice and potential success with students. The lack of formal time for teachers to meet with each other at Adams, combined with narrowed curriculum that prioritized student test scores, compromised teachers' relationships and reinforced uncertainty because there were not opportunities to share technical or content knowledge.

Collegial relations were further strained at Emery because the school was low-performing, and the pressure to raise test scores in order to avoid more extreme sanctions pervaded most aspects of teachers' work. The idea of sharing expertise was corrupted in a climate characterized by pressure to raise test scores and the competition to do so. Like many schools, Emery was data-focused and teachers were routinely made aware of how their students' performance compared to other classrooms. This atmosphere strained teachers' relationships with each other. Ms. Edwards alluded to this when she explained her decision to leave Emery at the end of year one data collection. I caught Ms. Edwards off guard when I asked if she had any doubts about returning to Emery. She nervously

laughed and replied “yes!” and looked around the library to make sure no one overheard her as she revealed that she accepted a position at another school. Surprised to hear her say this, I wanted to know what she was looking for. She said:

I was looking for a non-Enrichment school. I didn't feel as if I was able to actually learn more from teachers here although they've been here for a while. I have grown and I did learn, but I wanted to be surrounded more where there was a closer family environment, where people didn't mind sharing. Here, I kind of got the feeling, almost like a so-so feeling – like “I'll share it with you but...” They were almost afraid, like “are you going to use this the right way? Are you going to take it over and claim it as yours? Am I still gonna get the props for knowing that I developed it?” It was kind of like a grey area on to how much they wanted to help. I was really looking for another family environment where I can learn from the seasoned teachers and just grow professionally. (Interview, 6/12/12)

Certainly, Ms. Edwards desired greater collaboration from her colleagues, but she couched this in ideas about relationships as well, noting the idea of a “family environment.” Ms. Edwards indirectly noted feelings of unease and competition among teachers – “Are you going to take it over and claim it as yours?” – that resulted from an environment characterized by a narrow focus on raising test scores. Ultimately she was unhappy at a school where she was unable to depend on colleagues to help her improve her practice.

In this study, especially at Emery, the pressure to raise test scores was damaging to teachers' relationships with each other. As teachers' work was increasingly controlled,

whether it was through pacing schedules, prescriptive curricula, or instructional protocols, the manner in which teachers related to each other changed as well. At Emery this was evident in how teachers' talked about what testing did to their relationships with each other. The first year I met Ms. Engler she was newly partnered with another fourth grade teacher who did not participate in this study. Ms. Engler and this particular colleague were friends outside of school. They were both regarded as strong teachers, and other colleagues imagined they would be great partners in fourth grade. At the end of the school year, Ms. Engler reflected on this relationship. She said:

I have experienced it [tension] within the grade level, primarily because I have, and over time have had many instances of high scores, or outperforming students, or larger gains. My new partner felt a level of competition, not that it was anything I put on her. It was from herself. We always have the beginning of the year meeting where the scores are now put up and this is what this grade is doing and this is what that grade is doing and it became a major strain this year because she felt as though she needed to beat my scores. . . . It was just a level of competition that I did not understand. In the past I have always been in a place where we worked as a team and it was always about the fourth grade team, the fourth grade scores, so this was the first time I really felt that and experienced that and I know it's all because of the testing because outside of that you know we're really good friends. (Interview, 5/23/12)

Ms. Engler was genuinely bothered by this, and she explicitly indicted the culture of testing and competition as the source of strain in her collegial relations. She elaborated on the stress between herself and her colleague and noted how uncomfortable it was

when the school's administrators shared and discussed student data across grade levels and across teachers.

Perhaps the strain on teacher-teacher relationships resulting from accountability pressures was best captured by Ms. Embry. Ms. Embry was a pretty no-nonsense seventh grade teacher. She didn't believe in many of the practices she was required to undertake, her implementation of them waivered accordingly, and she was actively looking for opportunities outside of Emery. Despite having several close friendships with some of her middle-years colleagues, with regard to the state test and the way it impacted teachers she was clear:

When the scores get shown at the end of the year, you can see there's definitely like internal strife and internal fighting over the scores. Then there's all these rumors of cheating like, "You know that group cheated." . . . It got really like this nasty intense vibe and that's what the [name of state test] does to you.

To her, pressures related to testing, and therefore the instructional tasks associated with it, created a "nasty intense vibe," essentially undermining teachers' trust in one another.

Time to meet with each other and build trusting relationships that can serve as a source of personal and instructional support is crucial for teacher development and general satisfaction. At Adams and Emery teachers had little time to attend to their relationships with each other because they were simply too busy. This situation was exacerbated at Emery where the school culture emphasized test scores and utilized practices (e.g., sharing teacher data) that generated competition and distrust among teachers. Accountability heightens expectations for teachers, regardless of school status.

Not only are teachers doing more, but they are experiencing greater uncertainty. Collegial relations as a source of personal and instructional support are an important element of creating conditions conducive to teachers' needs, yet in this uncertain context teachers were actually less able to rely on one another.

### **Conclusion**

Efforts to recouple teachers' practices with accountability policy dramatically influenced teachers' experiences. The limits on professional discretion teachers experienced as a result of routines that controlled many aspects of the instructional core fundamentally altered the experience of teaching at Adams and Emery. Limited discretion compromised teachers' ability to be flexible and responsive to students' needs and to their own values and beliefs. Ultimately, reduced discretion, an indicator of teaching's move away from professionalization, challenged teachers' identity, their values and beliefs, and created a situation where teaching was less rewarding. Teachers' inability to deliver more robust curricula, to be responsive and flexible with students, and to connect with each other in ways that alleviated feelings of isolation and uncertainty was unrewarding. These conditions are particularly problematic for efforts to retain and sustain teachers in high-poverty urban schools. If teachers cannot connect with students in ways they deem meaningful, access collegial community, and derive intrinsic rewards from the work they do then the occupation of teaching is threatened. As resources for public schools are reduced and performance expectations increased, it is essential that teachers feel able to derive pleasure and enjoyment in the course of their work.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

This study examined organizational routines and teachers' experiences in two high-poverty urban public elementary schools. Through an ethnographic examination of teachers' work, the study provided a nuanced and contextualized view of how accountability policy is reshaping the experience of teaching. The primary aim of this study was to examine routines as a recoupling mechanism in schools of varying status, and to illuminate how that shaped teachers' experiences.

Through long-term observations and in-depth interviews with teachers, I found that the experience of recoupling, tightening the links between, teachers' tasks and accountability policy was both similar and distinct between schools in the same geographic and administrative region. Further, regardless of school status and variation in the process of recoupling, teachers collectively experienced reduced professional discretion, depleted intrinsic rewards, and compromised relationships with students and with each other. In this environment, accountability policy appeared to move teaching away from professionalization and to undermine efforts to retain and sustain teachers over time.

#### **Variation in the Organizational Field: Substance and Symbol**

Recall that City School District classified schools according to their performance status: Achievement, Traditional District, Enrichment, and Turnaround. This model was one way to enact the policies of NCLB that call for rewarding high-performing schools and sanctioning low-performing schools. In between the two ends of City School District's model were a variety of supports and services provided to schools at the

district's discretion. This model created a system in which not only were rewards, sanctions, and organizational structures introduced into the organizational field, but so too were competing ideas about the organizational design of schools and the occupational status of teachers. The first organizational strategy assumed that satisfactory schools, such as Achievement and Traditional schools, could operate on the "logic of confidence and good faith" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). That is, the district signaled its confidence in these schools by awarding them a desirable schools status, and proposed to maintain that confidence through deliberate acts of discretion – granting autonomy and avoiding close inspection. The second strategy assumed unsatisfactory schools, such as Enrichment and Turnaround schools, must be more closely controlled and monitored because their failure to perform signaled organizational instability.

While the broader institutional environment pressed for change in local schools based on student test scores, the resulting changes to the organization of schools in City School District also rehashed first and second wave reform ideas about the occupational status of teachers. Embedded in the district's competing strategies for improving schools were ideas about the teachers who inhabited those schools. That is, in theory, the organization of high-performing schools moved teachers closer to professional status by awarding the school a degree of discretion needed to maintain and grow the school's efforts toward constant improvement. The organization of low-performing schools moved teachers away from professionalization by mandating prescriptive programs and increased monitoring to ensure that the school was making progress toward its annual goals. This model made City School District a theoretically interesting case as there are many issues to consider when school status and subsequently teachers' work are

organized according to student test scores. However, coercive pressures in the institutional environment, such as the attention to constantly increasing student test scores, corrupted the enactment of school models. As a result teachers' day-to-day work was not vastly different across the two schools I selected.

The assertion that teachers' work across schools was not terribly different may seem unsurprising given the well-documented consequences of high-stakes testing (Diamond & Spillane, 2004; McNeil, 2000; Valli & Buese, 2007). However, the way in which teachers in this study experienced the implementation, or lack thereof, of the Enrichment and Achievement models was quite unique and highlights the value of ethnographic methods that allow researchers to capture the lived experiences of participants. In the case of the Emery Elementary, the Enrichment model was real and considerable. While much of the model, including additional funding and support personnel, disintegrated under the district's ongoing budgets woes, prescriptions for teachers' practice and close surveillance of their work reinforced the message that Enrichment teachers were not considered professionals. In the case of Adams Elementary, the Achievement model was a symbolic reward. Limited changes to the school's structure and programs in conjunction with the implementation of non-negotiables actually resulted in little autonomy to make substantive changes at the school level. Thus the message of professionalism was weakened as teachers experienced their work as largely controlled by district mandates.

At Emery where the Enrichment model had been in place for three years, teachers' tuned into the notion that NCLB guidelines and district models considered Emery a failing school. The Enrichment status both denoted and connoted failure, and

was accompanied by prescriptions for teachers' practice and increased surveillance of their work. This shaped the experience of teaching by generating a press for improved status for both the school and its teachers. That is, teachers complied with mandates, regardless of their personal interpretations of such mandates, in an effort to improve the school's status and thus the status of the teachers. The shared wisdom was that if the school could move out of Enrichment status then teachers would earn greater discretion to direct the course of the work in the classroom.

The Enrichment model was a substantive reform with a strong focus on the technical core. The model included a prescriptive literacy program, daily scripted reading and math interventions of all students in grades 2-8, and numerous mandates about how teachers should teach (e.g., pedagogies and practices), how they should arrange classrooms, write learning objectives, and collect student data. Whereas teachers perceived these changes to do little to positively impact the climate and culture of the school, they understood them to have changed the content and the process of teaching. Accordingly, mandates and their associated monitoring were interpreted as consequences of distrust. That is, teachers at Emery believed that district officials did not trust them to accomplish the requisite goals for school improvement without serious intervention into their work.

At Adams the Achievement experience was quite different for teachers. The Achievement title was only awarded to a small number of schools in the district and thus symbolized success and prestige. The ostensive message was in sharp contrast to the message of failure experienced by teachers at Emery; however, teachers perceived a lack of congruence between the message and the model. That is, their day-to-day work was

largely unchanged from the work they did prior to acquiring the distinguished title. There were no discernable efforts on the part of the Adams' administration to seize the autonomy the school was granted. Institutional pressures related to accountability and test scores pushed aside messages about success and autonomy, instead emphasizing standardized practices, much like those in Enrichment schools aimed at improving students' test scores.

The Achievement model was much more symbol than substance. The mere awarding of autonomy did not materialize in any concrete way that teachers could point to, and the lack of change teachers' experienced with regard to curriculum and instruction undermined messages of professionalism. While there was little tangible change in terms of teachers' practice, the lack of monitoring associated with the Achievement model stood out as a particularly desirable feature of the model. In essence, the lack of monitoring from regional and central administration was a reward, though it did not translate into curricular and instructional innovations. In some ways teachers' desire to retain the Achievement status and thus discourage increased surveillance of their work undid the possibilities that increased autonomy could have provided. That is, the Achievement status was akin to the metaphorical carrot before a cart. Teachers had to keep chasing the Achievement status by relying on the tried-and-true practices of the school district, in order to continually raise test scores and avoid sanctions. While the Achievement title designated Adams as one of the best performing schools in the organizational field, the reality of the reform resulted in little substantive change to teachers' work.

### **Recoupling and the Role of Routines**

The context created by accountability pressures in the institutional environment pressed schools and teachers to incorporate routines created by the school district in an attempt to produce uniformity of practice across schools. Instructional routines, mandated at Adams and Emery as the regional superintendent's "non-negotiables," acted as a recoupling mechanism – tightening the links between teachers' practices and accountability policy pressures (Espeland, 1998). Further, routines rationalized teachers' work because they promoted standardization and transparency among teachers' practices.

Regardless of school status, Emery and Adams were subject to the coercive pressures of NCLB – the regulations, mandates, rewards, and punishments that gave rise to new beliefs about teaching and learning. Because all schools in the organizational field of City School District were responding to the same coercive pressures, both schools implemented similar routines that recoupled teachers' work with accountability policy. The four predominant routines discussed in chapter 5 were: 1) curriculum pacing, 2) curriculum alignment, 3) constructed response, and 4) data-related tasks. Diamond and Spillane (2004) argued that school responses to high-stakes accountability are situated in a school's status with regard to accountability policy. Similarly, I found differences in the implementation and performance of instructional routines at Emery and Adams. A key element of this difference was related to the different messages and pressures put upon each school based on its status designation. At Emery, a failing school, messages about the need to comply with institutionalized mandates were more regulative because compliance was monitored by administrators who conducted walkthroughs and observations, and collected student data as a means to infer teacher performance. At

Adams, because teachers were rarely observed by anyone, including their principal, messages about teachers' practice were less regulative and more normative (e.g., good teachers do these things).

Though the four routines mentioned above were performed differently at each school, with greater attention to standardization and fidelity (e.g., performing routines each day) at Emery, the end result was the same. Teachers' instructional tasks were increasingly rationalized by mandates that reduced instructional variation and teacher discretion across classrooms. Further, these routines signaled each school organization's efforts toward legitimacy. At Emery, where messages about compliance were more intense, teachers' days were filled with mandated instructional routines thus signaling their serious efforts toward school improvement. At Adams, where messages about compliance were less pervasive and teachers' performance of these routines more varied, compliance, minimal as it was, signaled efforts at continued success.

Because Emery was a failing school, and had been labeled so for several years, its legitimacy was seriously weakened within the organizational field and thus the Enrichment model emphasized additional routines that were presumed to improve upon teachers' effectiveness and students' academic outcomes. Routines such as do now, instructional interventions, measurable objectives, and classroom appearance further rationalized teachers' work by ensuring greater uniformity of practice across classrooms at Emery. These routines exerted even greater control over Enrichment teachers' practices by prescribing what they did in their classrooms, when they did it, and how they did it. The additional routines reflected the deficit assumption with which reformers approach low-performing schools. Despite the varied years of experience and expertise

among the Emery staff, seemingly ordinary tasks such as the arrangement of classroom desks were controlled through administrative mandates. Further, the additional routines heightened the responsibility for teaching and learning at Emery. There was simply more that had to be done in the course of the school day, which meant there was less time and latitude to alter routines or the structure of the school day. This is perhaps another reason why there was greater fidelity to routines at Emery than Adams.

Unfortunately for teachers at Adams the conditions of NCLB are such that good test scores are simply not enough to secure a school's long-term legitimacy. Schools must improve each year, moving closer to the 100% proficiency goal. The uncertainty around increasing student performance each year combined with other recent events at Adams, such as accusations of altering standardized tests and a new regional superintendent, threatened Adams' legitimacy. Together, these events culminated in a process of mimetic isomorphism, pressures to mimic other organizations, in which teachers at Adams were asked to implement some of the same practices mandated to Enrichment schools. In fact, the new regional superintendent included mandates such as do now and measurable learning objectives as her "non-negotiables" for all schools, regardless of status, in her region.

The process of recoupling at Adams was not without challenges. Little professional development to show teachers what new routines should look like, infrequent monitoring of teachers' work, and a collective sense among the staff that these new mandates would fade over time as others had before them resulted in varied and sporadic performance of these routines among teachers at Adams. This process in which some teachers attempted to implement new routines while others ignored them forced a

situation that called for organizational buffering. In this context, the school's principal encouraged "first-order change" (Argyris & Schon, 1996; Spillane & Zeuli, 1999), in which she aligned the schools' stated goals and strategies to reflect the external demands of the region, while the day-to-day work of teachers remained largely unchanged.

First-order change was accomplished through strategic buffering, or avoidance strategies, such as a stream of memos to teachers, leadership team meeting agendas, and agendas for the few available professional development days all of which documented efforts to comply. This resulted in a form of ceremonial compliance in which teachers largely adopted the language of reforms but not the activities, and only worried about demonstrating compliance during times of inspection (e.g., regional walkthroughs). Doing so allowed the school organization to weather the tides of regional change, and to appear as though it had incorporated legitimated practices thus preventing the principal and teachers from having their conduct questioned.

Whether the noted differences in teachers' performance of instructional routines resulted in better instruction at one school versus the other is important to consider, but beyond the scope of this study. To do so would require, at minimum, an extended consideration of effective teaching and measures of student achievement. That said, instruction, in general, was not terribly different between schools even with the sporadic performance of routines at Adams. At both schools, instruction was primarily teacher-led and focused on literacy and math content. Routines like do now, measurable objectives, and classroom appearance did not alter content so much as they altered the structure of a lesson. Further, data-related tasks that called on teachers to respond to student performance did little to radically change instruction because both schools were relying

on the same pacing guidelines, which mitigated any significant changes that might have occurred in response to student data. With this in mind, I will note that teaching was more rigid at Emery. There was scripted instruction, additional programs that intensified curricular pacing, and more explicit test-prep. At Adams, where these programming features did not exist, teachers had more time to cover content and to occasionally supplement content with lessons and topics that appealed to them and their students. Certainly, this note is worth further exploration. However, in the context of this study, data clearly indicated that the coercive pressures of accountability rationalized teachers' work and altered the experience of public school teaching.

### **Teachers' Meanings Regarding Mandated Practices**

Despite differences in performance status and the implementation of non-negotiables, teachers at Adams and Emery experienced the increasing rationalization of their work in similar ways. The slew of mandates and routines that organized teachers' work at both schools and the emphasis on raising test scores reduced teachers' professional discretion. Thus it was challenging for participants to enact the values and beliefs that comprised their professional identities and allowed them to secure pleasure and enjoyment in the course of teaching. The implementation of mandates narrowed curriculum and reduced teachers' professional discretion. The context of each school was such that the various combinations of reduced discretion, urgency around raising test scores, and monitoring of teachers' tasks required teachers to work in ways that depleted their opportunities to secure the intrinsic rewards of teaching. Additionally, the scope of mandates related to improving students' academic outcomes crowded out teachers'

opportunities to build and develop meaningful relationships with students and with each other.

Inherent in this study of teachers' work are issues related to teachers' occupational status. This issue concerns confusion over how to treat teachers and organize their work. In City School District the creation and implementation of a delivery model that organized and supported schools according to student test scores introduced competing ideas about teachers' occupational status. However, coercive pressures from the institutional environment forced schools to look more similar than different. Competing notions of status were less relevant as teachers at both Adams and Emery found their work increasingly regulated. Mandated routines limited teachers' discretion and directly challenged notions of professionalism, and often, as seen in the many examples throughout this dissertation, deprived teachers of the agency required to act in accordance with their own beliefs and values.

Teachers at Adams and Emery repeatedly noted the emphasis placed on improving student test scores. Indeed many of the mandated routines focused on preparing students for standardized tests which in effect narrowed the curriculum and forced teachers to devote increasing amounts of time to math and literacy instruction. These requirements were problematic for teachers because reducing or excluding science and social studies instruction violated teachers' beliefs about good practice and serving students well, thus challenging their teacher identity. The focus on improving or maintaining school status, the surveillance of teachers' work, and both normative and regulative messages about what good teaching looked like created a situation where teachers felt unable to ignore mandates that violated their beliefs about good practice.

Ultimately the conditions of teaching had changed such that it was challenging for teachers to secure pleasure and enjoyment in the course of their work.

In addition to narrowed curriculum, changes to teachers' working conditions that were facilitated by mandated instructional routines and the pressure to raise test scores compromised teachers' abilities to forge meaningful relationships with students and with each other. In this study, the scope of mandates crowded out teachers' opportunities to consider the needs of the whole child, to develop and/or maintain relationships with students, and to connect with colleagues. These circumstances were directly related to narrowed curriculum, in which prescribed curriculum and pedagogies limited teachers' ability to be flexible and responsive with students and with each other. The lack of connection teachers experienced with students, when attributed to the demands of their instructional routines, left teachers feeling unfulfilled as relationships with students are both an attractor to teaching and a primary source of intrinsic rewards (Hargreaves, 1999; Huberman, 1993; Johnson, 1990; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989). The same was true for teachers' relationships with each other. Whereas this relationship is given limited consideration in the scholarship on psychic rewards, teachers in this study were unsatisfied by the lack of time available to connect with colleagues as sources of both personal and professional advice.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This study contributes to neoinstitutional research by examining local school conditions and teachers' work activities, and extends it by including the meanings teachers make from these conditions. By taking an inhabited approach (Hallett &

Ventresca, 2006; Hallett, 2010) this study shows the nuances of recoupling related to school context, and how organizations like Adams adapt buffering strategies in order to absorb threats to their legitimacy (e.g., accusations of cheating, new mandates, and new external supervisors). Further, by considering teachers' understandings of the actions taken to recouple their work, and including the meanings they made from these actions, this study expands the boundaries of institutionalism to encompass a richer understanding of school organizations.

The emergence of a more elaborate technical environment in the education sector which includes standards and high-stakes testing has led schools to face much stronger institutional pressures on their core technical work (Coburn, 2004; Fusarelli, 2002; Spillane et al., 2011). As previous research demonstrated, local school organizations are tightening the couplings between school practices and government regulation (Coburn, 2004; Diamond, 2007; Fusarelli, 2002; Hallett, 2010; Spillane et al., 2011). This study contributes to that scholarship by examining the process of recoupling to consider how organizational routines are absorbed and implemented at the local level, and what role school status plays in this process. Similar to Diamond and Spillane (2004) I found that school responses to high-stakes accountability depend, somewhat, on the school's accountability status. I found that there was greater attention to recoupling at Emery, where the failing status was used to message teachers about complying with demands. In a context like Emery's, where the surveillance of teachers' work was institutionalized and conducted regularly by external administrators, where the threat of school closure was real, and messages to teachers' about their occupational status were intense and pervasive there was greater attention to implementing and performing routines with accuracy. At

Adams, where there was little surveillance of teachers' work, no threat of school closure, more normative and less regulative messaging about what good teaching looks like, and more collective teacher experience and history with City School District reforms there was less attention to implementing and performing routines with fidelity. This nuanced examination of organizational routines at two schools illuminates components and possible outcomes of recoupling.

Indeed, local school context not only shaped recoupling efforts but it stimulated buffering at Adams. The school's unique context encouraged symbolic compliance even as the field around the school encouraged stronger recoupling. While teachers at Emery attempted to improve the school's legitimacy through the adoption and performance of mandated routines, teachers at Adams were slower to change their practice. Threats to Adams historically good reputation, including statistically suspicious student test results and a new regional superintendent with an eye toward regional standardization, were mediated with symbolic or ceremonial changes to teaching and learning. At Adams, the buffering of teachers' work from external inspection took place in various forms and was mediated by teachers' preexisting beliefs and practices, and the nature of the messages themselves.

This study revealed how a school organization can adopt buffering strategies in order to mitigate threats from the organizational field. An examination of buffering at Adams revealed that when teachers were slow or reluctant to change their practice, the principal encouraged teachers to strategically engage demands in limited ways. Buffering strategies on the part of the principal included placing the discussion of non-negotiables on the agendas for leadership team meetings and professional development days. This

created evidence that the school was working toward absorbing new mandates. Additionally, the principal encouraged teachers to ceremonially adopt mandates during times of inspection. In anticipation of scheduled regional walkthroughs, which were frequently rescheduled, the principal flooded teachers' mailboxes with memos reminding them of non-negotiables and/or letting them know that they would be visited. For their part, teachers complied and updated classroom displays and performed routines in the days leading up to a walkthrough. Teachers responded to intermittent pressures for compliance with temporary responses. Some teachers posted "Do Now" signs but did not perform this routine. Others assimilated by enacting routines in ways that reflected their understanding of the routine, such as the assertion that a do now as no different from daily morning work when in fact it looked quite different in Enrichment schools. At Adams, the principal and the teachers did not blindly dismiss new demands; rather, they strategically engaged them in times of surveillance.

While the above offers an important examination of recoupling processes, perhaps more salient was the finding that the coercive pressures of accountability forced Adams and Emery to look more similar than different, regardless of their performance status. NCLB's call to reward high-performing schools and City School District's attempt to do so through the awarding of the Achievement status were meaningless in a climate of high-stakes testing. Because test scores are a school's primary means for demonstrating legitimacy in the field of public schooling, Adams and Emery became more similar than different while attending to district-mandated routines aimed at improving student test scores.

Whereas scholars in education have drawn on institutional theory to examine interactions between educational policies and school and classroom practices (Burch, 2006; 2007; Coburn, 2004; Diamond, 2007; Gamoran & Dreeben 1986; Sherer & Spillane, 2011 ), there has been less attention to how institutions are “inhabited.” Though institutional scholarship demonstrates that institutions penetrate organizations, it has largely ignored the actions and meanings of those people who comprise organizations (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006). With the exception of Hallett (2010) neoinstitutional theory has empirically drifted in a macro direction (Hirsch & Lounsbury, 1997) and overlooked local processes. This study linked macro and micro approaches by moving beyond a simple examination of how institutional myths are coupled to, or embedded in, actual work, and explored teachers’ meaning-making to reveal the ways that recoupling can challenge teachers’ occupational status and professional identity.

Attention to both structure and meaning are important. While organizational routines rationalized teachers’ work at Emery and Adams by making teaching and learning more standardized and more transparent across classrooms and schools in the region, this study’s inhabited approach revealed that this process moved teachers farther away from professionalization and depleted intrinsic rewards. Rationalization challenged how teachers viewed themselves and their occupation. The difficulties teachers experienced with regard to enacting their professional identity and improving their occupational status contrasts with the occupational norm of autonomy that has historically granted teachers a high degree of control in making decisions about classroom practice (Goodlad, 1984; Lortie, 1975). This is a critical understanding as the occupation of teaching, whether it

moves closer to or farther from professionalization, attracts individuals who rely on intrinsic rewards to sustain them in work that is often uncertain.

Sustaining teachers in the course of their work was a unique finding that emerged from this study. Whereas policy and reform related to teacher turnover tends to focus on recruiting and retaining teachers, my data indicated that sustaining teachers such that they feel rewarded by the experience of teaching, and committed to remaining and positively participating in school improvement efforts is critical. The psychic toll exacted on deprofessionalized teachers, treated as implementers rather than agents of reform, is equally as, if not more, problematic than teacher turnover. It is simply not enough for teachers to survive in public schools; rather, policy and working conditions should allow them to thrive.

Research employing sensemaking theory has argued that understandings are socially constructed over time through interpersonal interaction and in dialogue with messages from the environment (Coburn, 2004; Spillane, 2004). This process of interpreting organizational change informs teachers' actions. In this study, messages from the environment were undoubtedly consequential in teachers' adoption and performance of routines. However, the meanings teachers constructed from performing mandated routines were not primarily rooted in interpersonal relations; rather, teachers' made meaning based on how mandates did or did not align with their values and beliefs about good teaching. Here, teachers' professional identity was critical to teachers' experiences and should not be ignored in local level studies of educational change.

## Conclusions

The U.S. educational policy environment continues to exert great pressure on schools and teachers. The national landscape of states that submitted, withdrew, were approved or denied NCLB waivers since 2011 continues to evolve as some early approvals are now being revoked for failing to meet the provisions of the waiver. Washington State's waiver was revoked because the state failed to link its teacher evaluation system to student test scores. Oklahoma's recent withdraw from the Common Core, a provision of its waiver, was deemed unacceptable by the federal Department of Education and the state is once again operating within NCLB's parameters. The case of Oklahoma highlights the continued debate about the creation and adoption of Common Core State Standards. Despite the fact that the Common Core controversy continues at the federal, state, and local levels, many school districts are implementing new standards, curricular materials, professional development and pedagogical techniques while confronting shrinking budgets for public education. Public school teachers, particularly in high-poverty urban areas, are undoubtedly feeling the pressure as stakes increase and resources decline. As the policy environment continues to emphasize data-driven improvement and accountability, it is essential to develop a better understanding of teachers' experiences regarding the organization of their work and their status within a system that continues to question their effectiveness.

Accountability policy and reform have significantly complicated the occupational status of teachers. On the one hand teachers are positioned as the most important variable in a child's educational outcomes (Valli et al., 2007). On the other hand, the effectiveness of public schools and public school teachers is called into question by

reforms that control and narrow the scope of teachers' work, thus suggesting that teachers do not have the knowledge, skill, or willingness to teach effectively. In this study, organizational routines were a mechanism by which the school district recoupled school structures and teachers' work with the accountability environment. At the same time, these routines rationalized teachers' work. Whereas the process of rationalizing teachers' work can be read as a move toward professionalization because it targets the historically weak instructional core and emphasizes a research-driven standardized vision of teaching practice, in this study rationalization reduced the influence of teachers. Rather than moving teachers toward professionalization, routines standardized teachers' core tasks, reduced teachers' professional discretion, and treated them as implementers rather than agents of reform. Further, this process was damaging to teachers' professional identity as teachers in this study found their beliefs about good teaching compromised by routines that called on them to act in ways that misaligned with their values.

As accountability continues to drive educational change, the notion of good teaching needs to be thoughtfully considered. Without a doubt teachers and the qualities they bring to the classroom affect their teaching and their students. But policies and reforms that act to limit teachers' discretion, and control teaching and learning through prescriptive curricular and pedagogical mandates, are both reactive and shortsighted. Rather than being proactive and thinking through teacher training, hiring, and professional development programs, policy and reform that heavily target the instructional core assume deficits in the qualities of individuals attracted to the occupation. The enactment of such policies and reforms are shortsighted because they set

strict parameters on the scope of what constitutes good teaching and fail to consider teachers' input about what they believe is important.

Teaching attracts individuals who seek to do good work in spite of the occupation's weak status, relatively low pay, and well-documented challenges. In order to sustain this type of work, teachers must believe that what they do is important and that it is conducted in ways they believe are right. At Adams and Emery, there was no doubt that teachers believed teaching was an important and honorable occupation. However, teachers expressed serious concern with the ways that teaching was conducted. The context of teaching, and the practices of each teacher, was largely dictated by organizational models that capitulated to accountability pressures and relied on routines to dictate the core work of teachers. Teachers in this study found their work untenable and unrewarding due to curricular and pedagogical restraints that prevented them from enacting their visions for good and pleasurable teaching. Routines that rationalized teachers' work circumscribed what teachers could do under the presumption that there was one right way to teach. Over time, successful teaching was narrowly redefined as annual improvements in students' standardized test scores and this was disconnected from teachers' beliefs about good teaching.

Good teaching allows the full expression of teacher identity and thus not only retains teachers but sustains teachers in working at their best over time. This not only serves students well, it yields personal gratification and provides vital sustenance to teachers and the profession. Teachers need a sense of success (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003) and a sense of doing good work (Santoro, 2011a). In this study, teachers' occupational status and professional identity were circumscribed by working conditions that emphasized

high-stakes testing, narrowed the scope of instruction, and replaced teachers' ideas about good teaching with a contracted definition of successful teaching. The experiences teachers lived and spoke of in this study raise important questions about the future of the occupation. Despite earlier waves of reform that attempted to professionalize teaching, teaching remains a semi-profession (Ingersoll & Perda, 2008; Milner, 2013a), teacher satisfaction is on the decline (MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 2012), and enrollment in teacher preparation programs is down (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Teachers leave schools when they are overwhelmed by the demands of the job, and when there seems little hope for improvement or success (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). In this study, Ms. Edwards and Ms. Erikson left Emery at the end of year one in search of schools that better aligned with their ideas for professional practice, with Ms. Erikson ultimately selecting a charter school. At the end of year two, Ms. Engler, Ms. Ellis, and Ms. Embry all resigned from City School District. These three teachers cited concerns with a culture that emphasized test scores and felt unsupportive of teachers desiring to do more than teach to a test. The sample of participating teachers at Adams was more stable which was unsurprising given that teachers perceived the school's location and climate as more favorable than other city schools. However, at the end of year two both Ms. Alba and Ms. Atkins retired earlier than planned due to frustrations with their work context, and Ms. Aponte secured a voluntary transfer to another district school she hoped would be more inclusive of teachers' voices. Whereas teacher failure and teacher attrition are often attributed to deficiencies in the personal character of individual teachers, Kennedy (2010) argued, "It is time to look beyond the teacher to the teaching situation itself: the

school, the classroom, the teacher's schedule, and the teacher's resources" (p. 591-592). Accountability policy has introduced rationalized rules and beliefs about education, emphasizing standards as a way to promote equity, and external pressure as a means to improve transparency and efficiency (Hallett, 2010). Embraced as an acceptable solution for reforming school organizations, particularly low-income urban public schools, accountability has changed the context of teaching. Rather than focus solely on the attributes and perceived effectiveness or ineffectiveness of individual classroom teachers, this study demonstrated that policy must also focus on the context of teaching and how that shapes teachers' collective experiences.

The U.S. continues to use accountability policies to try to improve student test performance, but these policies fail to consider the role of working conditions in the drive to attract, retain, and sustain high-quality teachers. Acknowledging the importance of teachers' experiences, in the context of working conditions, is at odds with accountability policies that aim to rationalize and standardize teaching. Teachers, especially those in high-poverty urban schools, often work in intense, uncertain, and exhausting environments where extrinsic rewards and external supports are in short supply. This makes teachers' experiences a crucial element of teachers' work. Policy and research need to include examinations of teachers' experiences and document their beliefs about how their work is organized to learn if they are engaged in teaching that is pleasurable and fulfilling so that generations of future teachers are attracted to the profession, and the current teaching force is able to sustain their best efforts and selves.

### **Directions for Future Research**

From this study emerges a real need for more research that examines how to sustain teachers over the course of their careers. Further understanding this element of the occupation can guide policy and reform focused on teachers' tasks and roles. While it is certainly problematic that large numbers of individuals leave the teaching profession each year, particularly in high-poverty urban areas, it is equally problematic to have classrooms staffed by teachers disengaged and unrewarded by their work.

Alongside issues of sustainment are the emotional lives of teachers. While the emotional experiences and responses of teachers are infused into the discussion of professional identity, more explicit research in this field is warranted. Teaching is emotional work (Bullough, 2009), and emotion is inseparable from the process of change (Hargreaves, 2004; Kelchtermans, Ballet & Piot, 2009) such as that experienced by teachers at Adams and Emery as their work was recoupled to the institutional environment via routines that rationalized the form and content of classroom instruction. Important to consider is the emotional labor (Hochschild, 2012) accompanying changes that challenge teachers' beliefs and values. In situations like this, teaching calls for emotional management in which teachers must suppress feelings and beliefs in order to comply with mandates (e.g., non-negotiables) that ensure the legitimacy of the organization. Hochschild (2012), concerned with the "human cost" of emotional labor, argued that emotional labor can lead "the worker to become estranged or alienated from an aspect of self..." (p.7). Undoubtedly emotional labor impacts teacher sustainment; thus, it is important for future scholarship to consider what emotional labor does to teachers, and what the consequences are for classroom instruction and culture.

One important step in exploring the issue of teacher sustainment is to consider conceptions of professional discretion, particularly with regard to curriculum. Under increased accountability teachers have experienced the proliferation of policies that delimit their choices and discretion. These policies ignore the details of teachers' professional identities, often creating a mismatch between what teachers value (e.g., teaching a well-rounded curriculum) and what they are able to accomplish (e.g., teaching to a test). This situation is troublesome for sustaining teachers in the occupation, and calls for research that explores how curriculum policy development and implementation can adapt to teachers' values and professional growth.

Another important area for future research is to consider how school leadership can respond to teachers in ways that recognize a continuum of strengths and weaknesses among a school staff. Though in this study numerous prescriptive mandates rationalized teaching and learning such that teachers felt removed and belittled by the process, individual mandates were not entirely unpleasant. The relative utility of a mandate such as constructed responses varied among teachers with some teachers finding the practice more valuable than others. This suggests that school leadership can better respond to the professional needs of teachers by considering a variety of tools and resources that are adaptable based on individual, rather than collective, teacher needs.

In consideration of the overarching issue to sustain teachers over the course of their professional lives, research should attend to reform approaches that view teaching as collaborative and teachers as professionals. This line of research should explore ways that teachers can be supported to collaborate and interact with each other in order to solve professional problems. Further, it should illuminate how teachers' relationships are

related to teachers' ability to thrive in their chosen field such that public school systems elicit the best possible performance from teachers and students.

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## APPENDIX A

### TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (1)

#### **Interviewee Background**

*First I have some general questions about you and what it means to work here at XX School. After that, we will talk more about the routines that structure your work and your roles here at XX School.*

1. Please repeat for the tape your name and you position at the XX School.
2. Just to clarify, how long have you been teaching at this school?
  - Other positions in the school?
3. Please describe the mission of the school as you understand it.
  - Benchmarks the school or yourself have set for improvement?
  - Understanding of issues and initiatives at the school?
4. Before we begin with more specific questions would you please describe for me your typical roles and responsibilities during the average work week?
  - How do you define your responsibilities?
  - What formal/informal routines do you engage, day-to-day work activities?

#### **Routines that Guide Work**

*Let's talk about some of the routines that structure your work.*

5. Beginning with lesson plans. What is the lesson plan routine?
  - How are they to be completed?
  - Who monitors lesson plans, and how often?
  - How important are these plans to the work you do in the classroom?
6. Moving on to instruction. How is instruction coordinated?
  - What is your day supposed to look like?
  - Describe the routines, strategies, or structures that guide your instruction?
  - Which of these routines are standardized across the school building?
  - What does the instructional routine prioritize? Does this align with your priorities for the class/school?
  - How have these routines changed during the time that you have worked here?

- How is instruction monitored? How does regulation/monitoring figure into the performance of your routines?
7. Though assessment is an important part of instruction I want to talk about it separately. Please describe the formal assessment routines here at XX School.
    - What are the goals of these routines? What are they meant to accomplish (e.g., target intervention strategies for underperforming students, monitor progress of goals, focus professional development)?
    - Are there protocols for reviewing data and acting on data? How is this done, documented, monitored?
    - What are some of the benefits and or consequences of these routines?
    - How do these routines impact your schedule, program implementation, resource allocation, classification of students....?
    - How does regulation/monitoring figure into the performance of the routines?
    - How have these routines changed during the time that you have worked here?
  8. Let's move on to routines for meetings ( i.e., grade group meetings). What is the routine for grade level meetings?
    - What are the meetings meant to accomplish?
    - How is this/was this conveyed to you?
    - What does the routine enable you to do or learn?
    - Are these meetings monitored? If so, how?

*Now I have just a few general questions about routines here at XX school.*

9. Who designs routines and prepares the staff to implement them?
  - Are teachers given a role in making decisions about routines?
  - Are there routines that engage teachers in developing improvement strategies?
10. Are routines more likely to be developed and/or implemented for certain subjects, grade levels, or areas of concern?
  - Are you more likely to implement some routines than others? If so, why?
  - What factors influence your implementation of a formal routine? What influences the likeliness that you will implement a routine with fidelity, disregard a routine, or implement it symbolically?
11. What do you see as some of the general benefits and/or consequences of the routines that formally structure teachers' work here at XX School?
12. Does the formal structure of the school (the rules and routines concerning instruction and assessment) align with your beliefs about teaching practices? In

other words, is the work you are expected to do in synch with your vision of best practice?

13. Are there any other routines that you would like to discuss at this point, instructional or otherwise?

### **Teachers' Tasks and Roles**

*At this point I want to spend some time thinking about your various roles at work.*

14. Before we explicitly talk about roles, please take a minute and list the tasks you perform as a teacher here.
15. How have these tasks changed during the time that you have worked here (increased, intensified, expanded)?
- What has influenced those changes? What are the benefits or consequences of those changes?
16. How do teacher tasks impact your relationships with students?
- With staff?
  - With leadership?
  - Your professional identity? In other words, how do you feel about teaching at this point in time?
17. How have the tasks you perform changed your role as a teacher?

### **Overall Thoughts**

18. I want to ask you to think broadly about your work here at XX School. What do you think are the expectations and goals of the school or the school district that influence your work?
19. Finally, is there anything I have not asked you during this interview that you think is important for me to know about you work?

*Thank you very much for taking time to talk with me. This has been a very helpful conversation.*

## APPENDIX B

### TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (2)

1. Before I get into specific questions, I would like to get a general sense of your experience this year. How did it go?
  - Can you tell me about any changes you experienced this year? (probe for cause of change and benefits or consequences of change)
  - Can you tell me about a high point this year – a moment when things were going really well or that you really enjoyed? A low point?

#### **The School Context**

2. How would you describe your school – the people and programs-to someone who doesn't know it?
3. What is it like to teach here?
4. Is there a common sense among teachers of what teachers in this school should do in their work? Are there certain norms and expectations?

If *yes*:

- Could you describe these norms and expectations?
- Where do these norms and expectations come from?
- How do you know, or how did you learn, what is expected of you?
- Do you share these norms and expectations?

If *no*:

- Why do you think that is the case?
5. One of the reasons why I choose this school was because of its Vanguard/Empowerment Status? What does that status mean to you? Why?
    - Can you tell me about some of the ways work has changed since the school was designated Vanguard/Empowerment? (If no: why do you think that is/)

#### **Stress**

6. If I asked you about stress at work, what would you say contributes to whether you feel stressed or not?
  - How do you cope with those sources of stress?

7. You teach \_\_\_\_\_ (which is a tested/non-tested grade/subject). How do you think that impacts the pressure you feel (more or less pressure)? How do you think that impacts your relationship with other teachers? Do you ever feel that a divide has been created between tested and non-tested grades?

### **Satisfaction**

8. What do you like about teaching at your school? Are there things you dislike? What could make it better?

### **Commitment**

9. Do you have any doubts that you will be back at this school next year?

If *yes*:

- What are you looking for?

If *no*:

- What keeps you here? Why?

10. How long do you plan to stay in teaching? What influences that decision?

### ***If planning to leave teaching:***

What would it take to keep you in teaching longer?

11. I know that sometimes commitment can ebb and flow. There are times when you can feel really great about being a teacher and times when you wonder why you are doing it? Can you tell me a story about one of those times?

### **Professional Status**

12. Has teaching been what you expected? Why? Why not?

- What did you expect before you entered?

13. What messages do you receive about your professional status and/or value as a teacher (from the public, from the SDP, from the principal, from parents)?

- How does that make you feel?

14. How would you describe the professional culture here at this school?

- Where does that come from? How does that happen?

15. What about relationships with colleagues? How does that happen when you have so little time together?

- When you do get together, what do you *genuinely* talk about with your colleagues?

### **Next Year**

16. The SDP is currently undergoing a transformation process. Do you think or hope this will change what you do here next year? Why or why not?

### **Final Thoughts**

There are certain topics I am interested in researching: teacher stress, satisfaction, commitment, and professional status. Given these topics, is there anything else that you would like to add?

## APPENDIX C

### TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (3)

#### Background

1. Before I get into specific questions, I would like to get a general sense of your experience thus far. How is it going this year?
  - Any high point this year – a moment when things were going really well, or low points that stand out?

#### The School Context (new status, less monitoring (?), no interventions, common core)

2. Thinking about this year – the people, the programs – how would you describe the school as it exists at this point in time?
3. What is it like to teach here this year? (Last year you were...is that different this year?)
4. Can you tell me about any changes you have experienced in your work this year (probe for cause of change, benefits and consequences of change)?
  - What's new or different? What does that look like/feel like?  
Benefits/consequences?
5. Is there a common sense here of what teachers in this school should do in their work?

If *yes*:

- Could you describe these norms and expectations? In other words, how are you supposed to be working?
- Where do these norms and expectations come from?
- How do you know, or how did you learn, what is expected of you?
- Do you share these norms and expectations?

If *no*:

- Why do you think that is the case?

6. What about how that pertains to your goals? If you think about goals you have for your classroom, or your students (can you tell me about them?), what helps or hinders you in reaching those goals? Specifically, are there ways that the Empowerment model, and the ways in which you are expected to work, that help or hinder the achievement of your goals – what you want to get done with students?
  - Reaching students? Does this environment, the regulations, the curricula, the mandates and monitoring, impact your ability to reach students?
7. What's something you think this school does really well? Something you would like to see changed?

### **Professional Status**

8. How do you see yourself as a teacher?
  - Are you able to be the teacher you want to be in this school? Why or why not? When or when not?
  - How have you changed as a teacher? Good and bad? Causes? Consequences?
  - Are you able to develop here as a teacher? Do you feel able to, and supported, in becoming a better teacher?
9. Some people were excited for the Common Core and hoped that it would allow for greater autonomy in the classroom. Has teaching been what you expected this year? Why? Why not? What's missing?
10. How do your working conditions, the ways in which your work is organized (the tasks and roles required of teachers in this school) make you feel?
  - What messages do you receive about your professional status/or value as a teacher?
  - Is this different from last year? If so, how?
11. How would you describe the professional culture at the school this year? (how are you viewed, treated? What does the way you work is organized, the things you are expected to do, say to you about your status as a teacher?)
  - Where does that come from? How does that happen?

**Strained relationships – vibe of school** (seemed like the intensity of work, the fast pace and the sheer amount of work to do, could at times make it difficult to connect with co-workers or even develop the kinds of relationships you want to with student, any truth to that?)

- Student behavior ( a lot of people were frustrated by student behaviors – those that disrupted the day, were more challenging than others, seemed like there was a lack of support for this) Do you think this is even more challenging in a place like this where there is a rush to get so much in?

**Intensity of work – Paperwork, CSAP, mandates amount of time** (curious about how much time you think you spend prepping, planning, and keeping up with paperwork, how does that feel, does it get in the way of other things, how much of it actually feels necessary or useful to you)

- What about how you use your time this year? I know there are mandates about how many instructional minutes for each subject, but the lack of time to do everything, or even to add additional stuff, seemed like a source of stress for many? What about this year? Are you able to use your time differently? Does it still feel like there is not enough time to do everything that is required of you? Pressure to keep moving and covering content?

**Experiences under the Empowerment model** – how is that different from previous experiences, what did you used to do that you can't do now

### Concluding

12. It seems like there is a pretty deep or intense commitment to this school, and/or teaching in general among the staff here? How do you sustain that commitment?
  - Thoughts about next year?
13. At this point in time are you still happy being a teacher? If you had to go back and do it again, would you?
14. What would you tell someone who is thinking about becoming a teacher?

## APPENDIX D

### TEACHER LEADER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Before I get into specific questions, I would like to get a general sense of your experience this year. How did it go?
  - Can you tell me about any changes you experienced this year? (probe for cause of change and benefits or consequences of change). Can you tell me about the decision to end interventions?

#### The School Context

2. How would you describe your school – the people and programs-to someone who doesn't know it?
3. What is it like to teach here?
4. Is there a common sense among teachers of what teachers in this school should do in their work? Are there certain norms and expectations? Ideas about teaching and learning?

If *yes*:

- Could you describe these norms and expectations?
- Where do these norms and expectations come from?
- How do you know, or how did you learn, what is expected of you?
- Do you share these norms and expectations?
- Are teachers more likely to implement some routines than others? If so, why?

If *no*:

- Why do you think that is the case?

5. One of the reasons why I choose this school was because of its Vanguard/Empowerment Status? What does that status mean to you? Why?
  - Can you tell me about some of the ways work has changed since the school was designated Vanguard/Empowerment? (If no: why do you think that is?)
  - Specifically, how has teachers' work changed over time?
  - Are there any ways, positive or negative – benefits/consequences, in which these changes have impacted staff?

6. Walkthroughs – how was focus decided/feedback given?
7. PD – how is that decided?
8. Coaching structure?
9. Grading – do you use a consistent system? Do all third grade teachers use the same criteria to arrive upon final grades?

### **Stress**

10. If I asked you about stress at work, what would you say contributes to whether people feel stressed or not?
11. Cooke is under pressure to meet AYP, specifically to raise PSSA scores in reading. How do you think that impacts the pressure people feel (more or less pressure)? Do you think it impacts your relationship with other teachers? Do you ever feel that a divide has been created between tested and non-tested grades?

### **Satisfaction**

12. What do you like about working at your school? Are there things you dislike? What could make it better?
  - a. Teachers leaving? What do you think makes that happen? What makes this a “hard” place to work?
13. You work with a lot of the staff and people here really seem to trust you and feel comfortable confiding in you. What do you think your teacher colleagues like/dislike about working here?

### **Commitment**

14. Do you have any doubts that you will be back at this school next year?

If *yes*:

- What are you looking for?

If *no*:

- What keeps you here? Why?

15. How long do you plan to stay in teaching? What influences that decision?

***If planning to leave teaching:***

What would it take to keep you in teaching longer?

16. I know that sometimes commitment can ebb and flow. There are times when you can feel really great about being a teacher and times when you wonder why you are doing it? Can you tell me a story about one of those times?

### **Professional Status**

17. Has teaching been what you expected? Why? Why not?
- What did you expect before you entered?
18. What messages do you receive about your professional status and/or value as a teacher (from the public, from the SDP, from the principal, from parents)?
- How does that make you feel?
19. How would you describe the professional culture here at this school?
- Where does that come from? How does that happen?
20. What about relationships with colleagues? How does that happen when you have so little time together?
- When you do get together, what do you *genuinely* talk about with your colleagues?

### **Next Year**

21. The SDP is currently undergoing a transformation process. What do you think or hope will be different here next year?
22. If you could change something here, what would you change?
23. Do you have any worries about next year if you are not here?

### **Final Thoughts**

Is there anything else that you would like to add?

**APPENDIX E**  
**PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

**Introductory Questions**

1. Just to clarify, how long have you been the principal at \_\_\_\_\_ school?
  - What brought you here?
2. What are the most important challenges in leading \_\_\_\_\_ school?

**Goals/Expectations**

3. Please describe mission/vision of the \_\_\_\_\_ school as you understand it.
  - What objectives are you working toward this year?
  - Who sets these objectives?
  - How are they communicated to you?
  - 
  - How do you communicate them to your staff?
  - How are they monitored?
  - How have they changed over the years?
  - What has influenced these changes?
  - Are there any consequences to these changes?

**Instruction**

4. How would you describe the district's vision for high-quality instruction?
  - What do you see as the district's main strategies for achieving that vision?
5. Can you tell me about what it means to be a good teacher here at \_\_\_\_\_?
  - What are some of the things you would expect to find a teacher actually doing in the classroom for instruction to be of high quality?
  - What types of routines or tasks would you expect teachers to engage in beyond what you can observe during a lesson?

6. To what extent do others in your school differ in their view of high quality instruction from what you just described?
  - How do you know?
  - Does your leadership team share the same view of high quality instruction?
7. Could you give me an overall assessment of the quality of teaching in your building in relation to what you have described?
8. Have you seen changes in the instruction in your school from last year to now?
  - If so, can you please describe those changes?
  - What do you attribute those changes to?
  - Are there additional changes you would like to see? What will it take to get there?

### **Instructional Routines**

9. Please describe the lesson plan routine.
  - When are they collected?
  - Who reviews them?
  - What is the reviewer looking for?
10. Can you tell me about instructional pacing? What are your expectations? How much leeway do teachers have to stray from the planning and scheduling timeline?
11. How is data used here at \_\_\_\_\_ school?
  - What forms of assessment are reviewed?
  - How often?
  - What is the protocol for reviewing data?
  - What is the purpose of this process?

### **Support for Teachers**

12. What are you doing in you school to support teachers to improve their instruction?
- Is there time provided in teachers' schedules to collaborate?
    - i. Are there specific things you expect teachers to do during this time?
    - ii. Who leads collaborative time?
    - iii. What role do you or a leadership team member play in facilitating teacher collaboration?
  - How do you determine the topics for school-based professional development?
    - i. Who plans the professional development?
    - ii. Who leads the professional development?
    - iii. How often are professional development sessions held?
  - Do you or members of the leadership team ever have conversations or meetings with teachers about how to use materials like standards, curricula, or pacing guides?
13. Are there ways in which you are developing teacher leadership? Please explain.

### **Principal Accountability**

14. What do district leaders expect you will do to be seen as an effective instructional leader?
15. How does the district monitor your work?
- Who evaluates your performance as a principal?
  - What factors are considered in evaluating your performance? How and when do you receive feedback?

### **Supports for Principals**

16. What supports exist for principals attempting to improve instructional and academic performance at a school?

**The Current National/State Policy Environment**

1. In the last year have there been any changes in the state with respect to standards, testing or accountability that impacts your efforts?
2. What other state or district initiatives have/are impacting your school right now?

**Closing question**

17. Is there anything I have not asked you that you feel would help me better understand your role in the school and the district?

## APPENDIX F

### REGIONAL SUPERINTENDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### Regional Initiatives

1. Maybe to begin you could briefly tell me about some of your main responsibilities as a regional superintendent. Particularly I am interested in how you supervise and support schools within a division. What does that look like?
  
2. This year I am observing teachers in one Vanguard school and one Empowerment school because I want to understand how teachers experience work in different contexts. Can you tell me about the key differences between the two models and expectations for teachers and principals?
  
3. I am interested in learning how Vanguard and Empowerment Schools are supported/directed at the regional level. Based on what you said previously (regarding supervision and support of schools – question one) can you tell me about how regional support/direction may or may not look different in these two types of schools?
  
4. There are a variety of ways to support and direct the work at individual schools but what about monitoring those schools? How is work monitored in Vanguard and Empowerment schools? How do you determine if a school's program is aligned with the district's or the region's goals for that school? **Other than walkthroughs, how is work monitored?**
  
5. I know that walkthroughs are one form of monitoring and support for schools? What is the focus of a walkthrough?
  - How is this decided and why is it important?
  - How do you decide how much time to devote to observing what's happening in schools and then to providing specific feedback? Different at different schools?

6. When you observe a classroom or walk through a building in a school, what do you look for to decide whether teachers' instruction is aligned with the region's or district's priorities for that school?
  - **What are some of the things you would expect to see the teachers doing?**
  - **In terms of Vanguard and Empowerment, are there different ideas about what good teaching looks like?**

### **Observation-based Questions**

7. Based on what I have seen this year, it seems to me that there is not that striking of a difference between the two models. The Empowerment School certainly feels different because of the interventions and the heightened urgency around improving academic outcomes but in general a lot of what I see looks the same. Does that fit with your understanding?
  - Why do you think that is?
  - Empowerment practices adopted by Vanguard schools (Do Now) – this seems ironic given that Vanguard schools are higher performing so in theory they should have established best practices but in my case I see the Vanguard adopting the Empowerment school practices. Have you seen this happen as well? Why do you think this is?
8. One of the things I have noticed this year during my observations is that measurable objectives and data walls were a focus of walkthroughs in both schools. What is your sense of how the district arrived upon these practices? Why does the district think this is important?

### **The Current National/State Policy Environment**

9. If you think of the last year what changes have most affected teachers' work, what teachers do in day to day practices? In your opinion, what is driving these changes?
  - (Only ask if nothing has changed this year) What about over time, in your experience as a district administrator in Philadelphia how have schools and subsequently teachers' work needed to change? In your opinion, what is driving these changes?

10. Funding has been one major change that has affected school programs this year.
- What is your understanding of how this has changed what the region can do to support schools?
  - What about how this has affected how schools are able to preserve their models – keep doing what they need to do to show growth and meet objectives?

**Closing Question**

11. Is there anything I have not asked you feel is important for me to know?

## APPENDIX G

### CODE BOOK

1. **Autonomy/Flexibility** – when does it exist, what does it look like, who has it, who doesn't' this will include decision-making and possibly elements of trust; sometimes using this as **agency**
2. **Change over time** – references to how work or feelings have changed over time, “new this year”, role shift – things they do now that they didn't before
3. **Directives/Mandates/Must-haves** – anything that is a non-negotiable, school-based directive from principal, regional directives, district directives, (data walls, measurable objectives, testing countdown, concept board, student work, homework, u-shaped arrangement, word wall, comprehension and problem solving strategy posters, state standards, TAG3, ) Do I want to make a distinction here for Enrichment mandates?
  - *Think about source and isomorphic pressures (coercive, mimetic)*
4. **Emotions** – broad code (This should capture pressure, stress, satisfaction, professionalism, messages to teachers (i.e. how it feels to be a public school teacher) etc...)
  - Positive: feeling supported, meeting goals, ...
  - Negative: misalignment of priorities, intensification, lack of support, deprofessionalization, student behavior, ...
5. **Goals** – Things people want to get done. This could be goals that teachers bring to the classroom, or for their own professional development. It could also be goals that someone (principal, regional admin) has set for the school.
6. **Interruptions** – I don't know if this will be important, but there are a lot of them and they are a source of frustration because as teachers are trying to “get it all in,” life at the school still goes on and people are constantly coming in or calling about other things. Interruptions disrupt the rhythm of a class and most likely disrupt goal accomplishment.
7. **Interrupting Events** – Events/mandates (school, district, or state level) that interrupt the normal schedule, and compromise use of time – temporarily shift

priorities. This is different from precipitating events because the change is more temporary.

8. **Isomorphic Pressures** – things that force schools to resemble other schools; coercive, mimetic, normative
9. **Monitoring** – walkthroughs, observations, references to these things
10. **No Fun** – emic code that describes how teaching has changed, lack of fun in the school day, speaks to the unique emotional connections between elementary school teachers and students, and possibly to the psychic rewards of the job (are emotional connections a reward?)
11. **Precipitating Events** – Something that is happening or has happened that causes a change in practice (walkthroughs, lawsuits, conferences, PD; budget/position cuts); this is different from interrupting events because it is meant to capture what has changed after an event (i.e. the cause of a more permanent or long-term change in practice)
  - In some ways this is becoming a default for the **context of ed** (changes and temperaments beyond simply the local issues) and **messages to teachers** about their work (although this should be captured in emotions)
12. **Putting it on/Taking it off** – akin to emotional labor, the things teachers to do get through the day, to engage and support students, to feel good, things people to do fly under the radar, especially the things the Achievement school does to stay off the district's radar – this seems to be an important theme here, there's a lot of gaming the system, also use to capture individual personal events that teachers navigate – the family stuff that you cannot let through; taking it off is the de-stressing, the coming down
13. **Roles** (have increased, expanded and intensified (expanded responsibilities outside of the classroom/outside of instruction and intensified work within the classroom) – what does this look like in these settings?)– sets of activities (that have similar functions): instructional, institutional, collaborative, learning, and relational (see Valli & Buese, p. 529 – 530)
14. **School status** – what does it mean to each participant

- 15. Standardization of Practices** – continuity among what is in classrooms and on board, content covered, strategies used; also when it is absent as in the case of Edmonds where schedules are much more flexible
- 16. Support** – This is important on two levels: 1) teachers are doing a lot to support each other (mostly at Enrichment) because of the stressful conditions (challenging students, tons of work to do, high stakes), and 2) feeling supported or unsupported by the principal is an important mediating event that affects other feelings and emotional responses to work. Despite the challenges of the conditions created by accountability, support from the principal can negate some of the negative feelings around this.
- 17. Lack of support**
- 18. Student Behavior** – I think this gets captured in the support and emotions category but I will code for it, especially in the case of fieldnotes where it might not be picked up by the other codes
- 19. Tasks** – work related activities, I don't know if I will code this as one big category or do a separate analysis that looks through data to identify specific tasks that teachers are performing and create distinct labels for those tasks that have distinct characteristics and are a substantive part of teachers' work (e.g., **Paperwork** – this is an element of tasks but is connected to time – how much time and how they are using their time) **Do not code this! Do a separate analysis.**
- 20. Teacher characterization** – data from fieldnotes that describes the teacher's disposition during that observation, when I make a note about them as a teacher
- 21. Teacher's Guide** – every time I noted seeing them teaching directly from a book (might be related to autonomy). In the case of the Enrichment school it is a mandate, but not in the case of the Achievement school. However, the increase in basal series that have accompanied standards-based reform can translate into very standardized teaching. For some this is a welcome change – less planning and preparation for them. For others it represents their diminishing control in the classroom – lack of voice, and lack of fun. This is mostly meant to capture observed instances and be used to support quotes around other codes/themes.

- 22. The Test** – any reference to standardized tests, not to capture other types of classroom assessment (these are a task)
- 23. The Vibe** – how classrooms and schools feel, as noted during observations, the vibe can come from different sources and might be because of the admin’s behavior,
- 24. Time (pacing)**- anything related to schedules, tracking of time, keeping up with PST, time spent preparing and/or working outside of the school day
- **Getting it all in:** emic code, the pressure/rush to fit everything into the day, the week, the marking period that needs to happen, often moving things around and cutting others out to do this, multitasking – seeing teachers do multiple things at once
- 25. Values/Priorities** – broad code for what is deemed important by teachers, administrators (regional, district), what people think is important, when one’s work aligns with one’s values and when it doesn’t, what they put first in their work or want to put first
- Tested content: triaging subjects and students
- 26. What stood out and why?** – from my fieldnotes, creates a chronology of changes (physical changes to classrooms and schools, emotional changes in teachers) as they were happening through the school year
- 27. When it feels good/Psychic Rewards** – emic code, related to psychic rewards, moments when goals are met
- Psychic Rewards – personal, emotional – subjective valuations made in the course of work, “Teachers perceive their psychic rewards as a scarce, erratic, and unpredictable. They are vulnerable to the ebb and flow of pupil response...” (Lortie, p. 211)
- 28. Absence of psychic rewards/lack of reward**