

**“It’s More About the Program”:
Teacher Sensemaking of Literacy Instructional Practice**

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the teachers, leaders, and support staff in at Kennedy Elementary who work tirelessly to develop the minds, hearts, and spirits of the children you serve. My hope is that I represent your experience faithfully. Thank you for allowing me to be part of your work and thank you for your dedication and commitment to children.

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Abstract

This case study examines the role of standards, organizational structures, and mechanisms on teachers' sensemaking of literacy instructional practice, and how that sensemaking manifests into classroom practice. Participants were teachers and leaders at one elementary school in a mid-sized district in a collar community of a large urban area. This study examines the ways teachers construct meaning of messages from leadership about literacy teaching and learning by using frames for sensemaking. Findings suggest that messages about curricular program adherence and assessment accountability pressure played a role in how teachers understood what should be emphasized and valued in literacy instructional practice. This study also looks at one teacher's classroom practice by highlighting way she acted in agentive ways to meet these demands but also design learning opportunities that reconciled school-level expectations with her own teaching philosophy.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

My interest in teachers' roles in policy implementation has been building since I was a teacher in California in the late 1990s and early 2000s. During my tenure as a primary grades teacher I experienced a range of different policy measures and waves of reform initiatives that attempted to impact teaching and student achievement. I entered the teaching profession during a time of change in California education. In 1996, the California State legislature passed the Class Size Reduction Initiative and in 1998 voters approved Proposition 227, which restricted bilingual education and moved most English-learning children into structured English immersion classrooms. These initiatives contributed to many schools across California filling vacant teaching positions with emergency-credentialed teachers, many of whom had little to no background or preparation for teaching. I was one of those emergency-credentialed teachers trusted with teaching some of the state's most needy children, despite my limited experience in education, few classroom resources, and a weak infrastructure to support teachers in my position.

In 2001, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was reauthorized as No Child Left Behind, and with it a series of top-down mandates dictating classroom materials, methods for instruction, and a barrage of high-stakes assessments. During this time, California transitioned to new learning standards and my district adopted a scripted, phonics-based basal reading program in order to hedge their bets on state assessments and the accompanying punitive sanctions. As I grew in experience, knowledge and, eventually, a full teaching credential, I began to question education policies that did not attend to or acknowledge teachers' roles in policy enactment at the classroom level. Along with my colleagues, I sought to understand what was expected of me from various policies, but I also questioned those that did not reflect the realities of teaching and learning, particularly for low-income urban children. In essence, these

reforms didn't make sense to me and didn't seem to make a difference for students. Though I did not have a name for it at the time, I was engaging in processes to construct understanding of policy and to interpret this understanding into my classroom practice. I was encountering a variety of policy messages that aimed to influence my classroom practices. I was engaging in conversations with teachers and instructional leaders about issues related to policy and reform initiatives. I was drawing upon my own experiences, beliefs and attitudes about how teaching and learning should play out in a second grade classroom. Without realizing it I was shaping education policy as I enacted it in my classroom.

As I moved on from the classroom and into graduate school I was drawn to research that investigated the intersection of policy and classroom practice. This body of research resonated with me because of my personal teaching experience in a top-down policy environment. The researchers most influential to my thinking have been those who investigate macro-level and micro-level processes of policy implementation. And as schools shift into the new policy environment of the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association, 2010), researchers can draw from research at the intersection of policy and practice in order to better plan and understand implementation and understand the complex role of teachers in interpreting policy into their enacted classroom practice.

Research from the policy arena has provided the literacy research community with information about the ways reform initiatives move from broad programs into practice. Within this body of policy-into-practice research, literacy is simply one of several contexts in which policy is studied (Valencia & Wixson, 2001). Literacy research complements this work focusing on literacy teaching and learning that have policy implications such as the need for more professional development, teacher collaboration, and so forth (Wixson & Yochum, 2004).

However, a line of research investigating teachers' sensemaking suggests teachers mediate policy messages in a variety of ways, influenced by a variety of sources. Research on teachers' sensemaking suggests there is much to learn by investigating the complex relationship between teachers' sensemaking of literacy policy and the ways mediated understanding of policy is enacted in teachers' instructional practice (Coburn, 2001b, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Coburn & Woulfin, 2012; Spillane & Jennings, 1997).

Research about reform centered on improving learning has developed and expanded from examining macro-level processes of broad program implementation, to investigating micro-level processes of implementation such as understanding how teachers shape and transform policy through various interpretive processes (Coburn, 2001b, 2006; Cohen & Ball, 1999; Cohen & Spillane, 1992; Jennings, 1996; Valencia & Wixson, 2001) which is of particular significance to my research. This knowledge of the relationship between policy messages and teachers' understanding of these policy messages provides a foundation for systematic research on the impact of teachers' sensemaking processes on literacy instructional practices. Investigation of the way the sensemaking process specifically impacts teachers' implementation of policy is critical to the field of literacy research because teachers are intended to embody literacy reform initiatives through their instructional practice. And as research has shown, it is not so much that policies change teacher practice, but that teachers shape and transform policy through their enactment of policy in their day to day work of instruction (Cohen, 1988). Taking this principle further, teachers may hold even more power to shape the final conceptualization of literacy initiatives as they negotiate policy messages in the context of assessment pressures.

Adding further complication, literacy reform initiatives of the past decade have been increasingly situated in the context of high-stakes accountability. Teachers are faced with

demands for higher student achievement, the indicator of which that actually counts being results on standardized tests, whether at the district, state or national level. The federal demand for accountability through the use of assessment (e.g. No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) has served as a catalyst for classroom level reform. But, while policies can aim to affect change, they cannot dictate what occurs in individual classrooms. It is teachers situated within classrooms—within schools, within systems—who make decisions about content and pedagogy that impact students and learning. Policies can set goals, guidelines and create sanctioning systems, but it is at the individual level that policies are put into action. As a teacher during the shift to No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) and participant in Reading First (Gamse, Bloom, Kemple, & Jacob, 2008), I experienced first-hand the challenges of interpreting policy into classroom practice while balancing the demands of a new accountability system along with the specific learning situations and needs of my diverse student population. As states, districts, and schools shift to the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association, 2010) teachers are faced with similar challenges in understanding expectations for content and instruction using these new standards as well as negotiating teaching with the accompanying accountability requirements (i.e. PARCC and Smarter Balance assessments).

Teachers are on the frontline of implementation of education policy. As was my experience with top-down reform, teachers today are faced with increasing demands for higher student achievement on standardized tests, the expectation to meet the needs of increasingly diverse learners, incorporate 21st century skills into instruction, and understand new education standards and expectations for teaching and learning. As teachers prepare to implement new literacy standards aimed at improving student learning outcomes they must negotiate expectations for content and pedagogy, along with their prior beliefs, understandings, attitudes

and philosophy about literacy teaching and learning. Because teachers are the primary actors implementing policy at the classroom level, there is a need for systematic investigation into teacher sensemaking of new literacy policy initiatives, like the CCSS, that aim to change teaching and learning.

We know from the extant literature that teachers' understanding of policy is shaped by three distinct spheres of influence. These spheres each consist of people, materials and policy messages that have influence on the ways classroom teachers come to make-sense of the expectations and responsibilities of their work. We can categorize these spheres encompassing factors that are institutional, social, or individual in nature. Institutional factors include those that originate from sources that hold some degree of control or influence over the workings of school or teachers' work. Influential forces within this sphere can include, but aren't limited to, district level policies, curricular mandates, and assessment (Coburn, 2004, 2005b; Diamond, 2007; Kontovourki, 2012). Social factors include those that come about through interpersonal interaction between professional peers. For example, professional learning communities and grade level teams are situations in which teachers may discuss literacy initiatives, teaching practice and best ways of attaining their instructional goals (Atteberry & Bryk, 2010; Coburn, 2001b, 2006; Spillane & Jennings, 1997). And, individual factors are individual beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge that influence one's understanding of literacy, teaching, and learning, or the combination of the three (Jennings, 1996; Spillane & Jennings, 1997; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002).

To date, literacy research has investigated various influential factors that generally can be grouped into three areas of concentration that influence implementation—institutional messages and structures, social construction of meaning and relationships, or individual cognitive factors

such as prior beliefs and attitudes. My study considers each of these three spheres of influence as they work in concert with or independently with the process of teachers' sensemaking. In my research I sought to unpack the complexities of teachers' sensemaking as influenced by and negotiated in terms of institutional demands and messages, social norms and co-construction of literacy policy, and individual cognitive factors that influence teachers as they plan for and deliver instruction in the English language arts.

Over recent years, many schools across the U.S. face the ongoing transition to new learning standards with the CCSS. The adoption of new standards was likely not an entirely new experience for most states and the adoption of the CCSS was accompanied with debate from politicians (Klein, 2015; Martin, 2014), parents (Klein, 2014), and researchers (Pearson, 2013; Pearson & Hiebert, 2013). Like all policies, these standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics have potential to shape what teachers do in the classroom and what students learn. As schools transitioned to full implementation of these standards in the 2014-2015 school year, some were looking at authentic ways to meet the standards to push student learning, others were looking ahead to the associated assessments (i.e. PARCC and Smarter Balance), and still others were pushing back against the standards. In the midst of this political situation, teachers are faced with making sense of the new standards and the long-term consequence on student learning, or simply compliance in the short term.

The CCSS emphasizes a common set of Anchor Standards with the stated purpose of preparing students for the complex demands of higher education and the workplace in the 21st century. Each Anchor Standard was then back-mapped downward to establish learning goals in each grade level from K-12 (Pearson & Hiebert, 2013). This initiative set out ambitious expectations for literacy teaching and learning, demonstrating a shift from the previously

dominant federal policy environment that came to embody a basic skills approach to reading and writing (i.e. No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). Successful implementation of the Common Core State Standards initiative, and whatever its next iteration may be, would rest on how literacy teachers understand what the policy means for developing deep and critical literacy abilities in students, expectations for student learning and use of complex literacy tasks, and the pedagogical tools necessary to accomplish these goals.

While some see the CCSS as a potential shift to a more complex view of literacy, the initiative is not without controversy. The standards have been and continue to be debated by education scholars (Pearson, 2013; Pearson & Hiebert, 2013) for their developmental appropriateness in early grades, suggested or implied content (e.g. amount of informational text), lack of attention to students who are English language learners or have special needs, and privileging of specific approaches to reading and writing (e.g. close reading). The purpose of my research is not to debate the validity, importance, or educational consequences of the CCSS. The purpose of my research is to examine the influential factors on teachers' sensemaking and therefore could be set in any shifting policy time. However, the CCSS offers literacy researchers the opportunity to examine implementation processes as teachers enact this policy into classroom practice. This is particularly relevant, because while the CCSS represents the latest shift in standards, and an attempt to nationally align learning standards, it is unlikely that this will be the last change experienced in the standards movement and expectations for more rigorous literacy teaching and learning. No matter the policy, we can all agree, the aim is for teachers to have deep knowledge of literacy teaching and learning, an understanding of how to develop rich and critical literacy abilities in students, and the pedagogical tools necessary to accomplish these goals. When policy is used as a lever to influence teacher practice it is critical for researchers to provide

teachers, administrators, and policy makers with the knowledge on how this process occurs and how to best navigate the obstacles inherent in the process.

Implementation of the CCSS initiative provides a unique opportunity to engage in investigation into the ways teachers mediate literacy policy messages. This policy sets forth ambitious goals and expectations for literacy learning and teachers are faced with many opportunities in which they may need to refer to or rely on policy messages, their professional peers, and their own beliefs and values about teaching and learning. As teachers engage in making sense of the new demands the CCSS initiative brings, some are looking at this as a positive shift, while others are pushing back, or waiting to see what actually takes hold. As teachers work with the standards and work to understand what they mean for their practice, they also need to negotiate the demands of an accountability system that lingers from the previous policy era of NCLB. Understanding the ways teachers sense-make about new literacy policy is crucial in achieving the vision of literacy that is outlined in the Common Core State Standards documents.

Policy that aims to significantly change teaching or learning often does not succeed as it was intended. Teachers are frequently blamed when ambitious policy fails to achieve its intended goals. However, reasons ambitious policy does not result as intended has more to do with the complexity of implementation and interpretation of the policy by teachers (Coburn, 2001b; Honig, 2006; Spillane & Jennings, 1997). My research seeks to expand our theoretical understanding of the dynamic role of institutional, social and individual factors on teachers' classroom enactment of literacy policy. Specifically, the current proposed study aims to add to the growing body of research on micro-level processes of implementation of policy by focusing on teachers' experiences and sensemaking of new standards for the English Language Arts. My

study is of particular importance now because instructional standards are a key lever for reform at the classrooms level and schools across the U.S. were poised for full implementation of the Common Core State Standards in 2014-2015. This study provides insight into the ways teachers come to understand new literacy standards and how institutional, social, and individual factors interplay for teachers and culminate in instructional content and pedagogy. My research provides insight into ways to harness influential institutional, social and individual forces to better plan for school-based professional development and ongoing teacher learning as districts and schools seek to enact ambitious literacy policy, improve pedagogy and advance student achievement in the English Language Arts.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Reviewing literature concerning policy implementation and teacher sensemaking has influenced the decisions I've made in situating my descriptive case study about the intersection of literacy policy and instructional practice, as well as in designing my study. I found three areas to be particularly helpful. First, policy implementation research that addresses issues specific to literacy instruction at the classroom level situates my study in the historical lineage of this area. Second, research bridging macro- and micro-levels of policy implementation has shaped my understanding of the interconnectivity and complexity of policy and classroom practices and directions in which literacy research can move in order to address the specific needs of teachers and students. Finally, research specifically on teacher sensemaking guided me in my methodological choices as well as deepened my conceptual understanding of the complexities of macro- and micro-levels of policy implementation. I review each of these areas, in turn, below.

In the United States education policy has a long history of attempting to impact student achievement by “fixing” what is wrong at the school level. Literacy has often been at the heart of efforts to reform teaching and learning as literacy is typically considered to be the foundation for most school learning. Further, achievement in literacy has great power as it can often hold the reins of a student's overall academic trajectory. It is for these reasons that policy efforts targeting student achievement have often concentrated on literacy teaching and learning. However, these efforts have not always achieved their intended results or desired effects. Failure of these policy efforts can result in additional policy initiatives layered on top of existing programs with teachers and administrators struggling to incorporate often incongruent policy

features (Raphael, 2009). And, as new initiatives are introduced in schools teachers are left to make sense of policy messages and adjust their instructional practice in attempt to reflect new expectations.

Policy Implementation with Intended Instructional Change

Research on the intersection of literacy policy and instructional practice has extended research examining macro-level processes to unpacking micro-level processes of implementation. Macro-level processes of implementation include a variety of features including broad institutional norms or regulations, accountability demands, standards and frameworks (McGill-Franzen, Ward, Goatley, & Machado, 2002; Murphy, 1971; Wixson & Dutro, 1999). Micro-levels of implementation include those processes that take place at the local level, be it school, classroom, or individual teacher (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Courtland, 1992; Jennings, 1996). Historically, policy initiatives with intended literacy outcomes tended to concentrate on understanding how policies and programs were implemented, and not specifically on what was happening in the “black box” of the classroom (Valencia & Wixson, 2001). Policy researchers typically did not examine the day-to-day instruction of teachers, and literacy researchers tended not to examine issues of instruction and learning through a policy lens. Instead, studies from a policy perspective investigated broad, institutional levels of implementation like funding allocation and mandated compliance, while literacy research attended to teaching and learning as they related to policy tools like standards, assessments, and curricular frameworks (Valencia & Wixson, 2000, 2001). In their synthesis of literacy policy research, Valencia & Wixson (2000) note that the relationship between policy and practice is complex and depends largely on how teachers and administrators understand and respond to policy tools and how these in turn influence instructional practice.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was part of President Johnson's War on Poverty and authorized funding for professional development, instructional materials, and resources to support educational programs. Title I, a provision of ESEA, was created to distribute funding to schools and districts with high percentages of low-income families. The primary objective of Title I was to support schools in closing the achievement gap in reading, writing and math for low-income students. This wide-reaching policy can be considered a starting point from which to examine policy initiatives that intended to impact literacy achievement for children in U.S. public schools. This act would later be renamed No Child Left Behind (NCLB) when reauthorized by President George W. Bush in 2001.

While federal education policy during this era had a stated objective of improving reading and writing achievement for low-income students, the research on policy implementation focused mainly on large-scale evaluations and developing broad understanding of the relationship between policy and programs at the macro-level (Cohen, 1982; Kaestle & Smith, 1982; McLaughlin, 1987; Murphy, 1971). Systemic reform emerged from this research and posited top-down support from policy would result in bottom-up improvement in classroom practice. Murphy (1971) found in his review of the research six years after the implementation of Title I that although the provision aimed to improve teaching and learning in reading and writing, the policy was mainly administrative and concentrated its efforts on overseeing funding and did not focus on implementation at the classroom level. In other words, systemic reform in this case was not successful in changing what was happening in classroom instruction to greatly narrow the literacy achievement gap between low-income and higher-income students.

Other reviews of policy research examining systemic reform (McLaughlin, 1987, 2005) revealed that federal policies assumed a direct relationship between inputs and outputs between

initiatives and school-level practices. However, this assumption generally ignored the complexities of the local context of implementation. Researchers concluded the “black box” of local practices, beliefs, knowledge and traditions of schools and teachers were of greatest significance when attempting to implement large education policies focused on instructional change, though these factors were not directly addressed or planned for in large-scale policy initiatives.

With the knowledge that local practices and characteristics impact implementation, policy research turned to explore how initiatives optimally move into practice. In her review, McLaughlin (1987) points out that researchers in this era began to show that implementation dominated outcomes. In other words, even the best policy plans with adequate supports could not ensure individual actors would implement the policy as conceived. Researchers began to acknowledge that while the design of policy is important, policymakers couldn’t mandate how teachers would understand and implement the policy. Local organizational factors such as school capacity and individual factors such as knowledge, beliefs, and motivation can greatly affect implementation. Research not only looked at specific methods, curriculum materials, and assessments, but also considered the professional learning opportunities specifically related to instruction as conceived by policy (McGill-Franzen et al., 2002; Spillane & Jennings, 1997).

Instructional curriculum frameworks and materials grew in interest to researchers as they attempted to examine in more depth the relationship between policy and implementation. Researchers were looking to other nations for evidence of the power of curriculum frameworks and felt these offered the advantage of authority in policy implementation (Cohen & Spillane, 1992). Curriculum frameworks provided a sort of guidebook for districts in integrating new policies into schools. But, as Cohen & Spillane point out, these frameworks were often seen as a

move to get back to basics, and schools began to devise minimum instructional programs in line with the framework. And along with the authority of curriculum frameworks came the manipulation of instructional materials. States with great purchasing power pressured textbook publishers to align curricular materials with state frameworks (Cohen & Spillane, 1992). While alignment of materials with policy can potentially reduce distortion at the classroom level, this alone was not sufficient to guarantee teacher understanding or enactment of these frameworks.

Attempting to get further into the black box of classroom instruction, Spillane & Jennings (1997) drew from the work of the Educational Policy and Practice Study (EPPS) to understand the relationship between policy and practice in nine classrooms in four Michigan school districts. Their goal was to investigate teachers' response to district policies intended to reform literacy instruction. The researchers found that through a broad lens the districts' efforts to align literacy policy with ambitious pedagogy were successful. However, on closer inspection of classroom practices they found goals of complex and challenging changes to classroom practice were often integrated in superficial ways. This suggests some disconnection between the aims of the policy and teachers' understanding, investment, commitment, or capacity to enact the reform agenda. The researchers suggested that aligning curriculum, policy, and pedagogy is an important first, but not final step in policy implementation. In other words, aligning these components is important, but does not address the ways teachers make sense of policy as they go through the process of designing and delivering instruction in their daily practice.

Teachers' opportunities to learn about the instructional changes and practices intended in literacy policy initiatives was also investigated by Spillane & Jennings (1997) as a factor in policy implementation. They found while teachers needed opportunities to learn about the objectives and requirements of policies, the uptake varied depending on teachers' existing

knowledge and beliefs about literacy instruction. In their study, some teachers took the opportunity to incorporate ambitious pedagogy into their practice, while others felt their existing knowledge about literacy instruction and their current practices were superior to the ones the policy promoted. The researchers suggest that policymakers keep in mind what teachers might learn about the goals of policy and how the vision of literacy pedagogy the policymakers put forth may conflict with teachers' existing knowledge and practice. According to Spillane & Jennings, when crafting policy policymakers should consider how to best engage teachers in appreciating the similarities and differences between their current practice and the desired new practice.

Policy research set in the context of literacy has revealed much about macro-level processes of implementation, as well as investigation into some micro-levels of implementation at the classroom level. However, much of the micro-level processes investigated by policy researchers look at literacy as a just one of the subject area contexts in which policies are enacted and not specifically at issues that directly affect pedagogy, curriculum, assessment or content of instruction, to name a few. Literacy researchers, however, have attended to some of these issues in relation to policy implementation. For my research, I draw on several studies by literacy researchers to inform my thinking about classroom practice and policy implementation.

Literacy Research with Policy Implications

Policy research has typically treated literacy as one context for investigating the implementation process while literacy research has typically treated policy as something that effects literacy teaching and learning. In their seminal synthesis for the National Reading Conference (now the Literacy Research Association) Valencia & Wixson (2001) reviewed the

research on literacy policy and policy research that made a difference for literacy. The authors found macro-level processes of concern for policy researchers were often translated into school or district policies that intended to influence the “black box” of literacy instructional quality. For example, research found schools and districts tended to adopt mandated curricular materials, grouping practices, and scheduling in order to align with state policies attempting to change the approach to reading instruction.

Discrete components of policy and alignment at the school level are aspects which literacy researchers have investigated policy implementation. Within their review, Valencia & Wixson describe Goertz et al.’s (1995) work on literacy reform initiatives in Michigan and California and the degree to which teachers’ instruction aligned with policy recommendations. Goertz et al. looked at measureable indicators of policy alignment like number of minutes on specific facets of literacy instruction (e.g. comprehension strategies, phonics, word study, etc.) and the percent of time during the reading block that literature trade books were used, as opposed to basal texts, which was what the policy recommended. Goertz et al. also measured teachers’ perception on the degree to which they felt their instructional practice aligned with policy. Goertz et al. found that although teachers felt they had been influenced by policy requirements, they were most influenced by their own knowledge, beliefs, and the needs of their students rather than by policy mandates.

Allington and colleagues (Allington, 1983, 1984; Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1989) also attempted to peer into the “black box” of instructional quality and found students were receiving differing amounts and type of reading instruction, often depending on which sets of policy rules applied to students. For example, students who qualified for ESEA’s Title 1 funding (then known as Chapter 1) received instruction in the general education classroom that aligned

with those policy regulations. Allington & McGill-Franzen (1989) found that compliance with such regulations does not necessarily result in effective or high quality reading instruction for students.

Standards, Frameworks, and Assessment in Literacy

With the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (Education, 1983), instructional standards began to be used as a lever for reform in literacy, and other subject areas. The theory behind standards-based reform is that in order for schools to change and improve teaching and learning for students, entire schools and systems must adopt high curricular standards. Along with standards came the accountability movement consisting of state-mandated achievement tests to hold schools, teachers, districts and states accountable for meeting the academic goals as envisioned in the standards. In order to meet the accountability demands teachers and schools are expected to change practices to align with the ideas put forth in the standards. However, complications with implementation of standards have been found. Teachers' beliefs about standards have proven to be a barrier to change. The past several decades have been marked with different approaches to reform, and teachers might see standards as another temporary change that will run its course (Payne, 2008). In other words, teachers often do not feel ownership of reform efforts, including standards-based reform, and lack the personal investment and ownership in these initiatives to put forth the needed effort for implementation (Raphael, 2009).

Literacy policy research has integrated macro- and micro-levels of analysis when investigating the ways teachers use standards, frameworks, assessments, and policy documents when interpreting policy into practice (McGill-Franzen et al., 2002; Taylor, Anderson, Au, & Raphael, 2000; Taylor, Raphael, & Au, 2010). This body of research found policy documents

like standards or frameworks can be powerful levers, but the documents alone are not enough to transform literacy practice. Without organized, systemic support for implementing the expectations outlined in these documents, teachers are left to construct their own response. For example, teachers can respond to policy demands in standards or curricular frameworks in relation to their current or historical practice. Differences in teacher response to specific policy messages have been found to correspond to how well the new expectations aligned or did not align with their personal beliefs or their local teaching contexts (Jennings, 1996; Spillane & Jennings, 1997).

Organizational theories suggest change at the organizational level (e.g., changes to standards or curriculum frameworks) will result in pedagogical change at the classroom level. McGill-Franzen et al.'s (2002) research investigating teachers' use of literacy standards, frameworks and assessments questioned theories common in policy research regarding organizational change. McGill-Franzen and colleagues found that broad standards and frameworks were not sufficient for teachers to transform policy expectations into classroom practices. As teachers tried to balance the demands of policies with the needs of their students, they became caught in a web of competing expectations. This research complements what Spillane & Jennings (1997) found investigating this issue from a policy perspective in that teachers play a critical role in using policy ideas and tools in the transformation of practice. Instructional practice is not transformed solely by policy tools, but is part of a complex process of negotiation between teachers' ideas and teaching context.

Assessment demands add complexity to implementation of literacy policy. Literacy researchers have investigated the influence of high-stakes assessments on the impact of literacy policy on instructional practice (K. Au & Raphael, 2007; Diamond, 2007; Kontovourki, 2012).

Research found tests often become a reference point for policy implementation and a guide for teacher practice. Teachers evaluate policy recommendations by the degree to which they aligned with accountability measures. When policy recommendations aligned with assessments teachers may be more likely to adopt the recommended practices. However, curriculum components that do not align with assessment demands can result in narrowing the curriculum and limiting instruction to content and strategies most likely to be found on student achievement tests.

One example of research of assessment driven instructional practice investigated the proliferation of leveled texts in literacy instruction (Kontovourki, 2012). Kontovourki examined the instructional uses and power of leveled texts as vehicles of high-stakes assessment policies. The school of focus in this case study used leveled texts and assessment of third grade students' reading of these texts as a response to state-level testing requirements. The use and emphasis placed on leveled texts as a form of assessing reading proficiency was found to be powerful in shaping the way students viewed themselves as readers and the ways teachers viewed students as readers. Additionally, Kontovourki found that leveled texts were positioned as the context in which students were constrained or allowed to develop as readers. This study is an example of school-level response to state-level assessment policies.

Assessment policies can also act as a reference by which literacy teachers determine the value of innovative instructional practices (Boardman & Woodruff, 2004). Researchers found demands of high-stakes literacy assessment can influence what teachers attend to in their literacy instruction. Boardman & Woodruff suggest the demands of assessment dictate the focus of instructional content for teachers and limit teachers' uptake of student centered pedagogy because teachers did not see it as effective in covering the content of assessments. Put another

way, pressure for students to do well on literacy assessments motivated teachers to focus on teaching what will be on the test, rather than on how to develop high-quality literacy pedagogy.

Literacy scholars have often accused high-stakes assessment policies of leading to a narrowing of the curriculum, leaving teachers to focus mainly on the content that will be on these tests to the neglect of subjects that are not tested (Coburn, Pearson, & Woulfin, 2011; Pearson, 2007). Supporting this idea, Au (2007) conducted a qualitative meta-synthesis of research on high-stakes assessment in the United States and its impact on curriculum. Au found high-stakes testing impacted classroom instruction at three levels: content of instruction, fragmentation of content into testable chunks, and pedagogical control in the form of teacher-centered instruction (W. Au, 2007). While Au's analysis includes subject areas outside of literacy (e.g. history and math) this analysis supports scholars' claims about the impact of assessment policies on instructional practices.

Integration of Macro- and Micro-processes in Policy Implementation

As demonstrated through this review of the literature, policy research has often been concerned with macro-level processes while literacy research has concentrated more on the ways micro-level processes play out at the classroom level. However, interest has been growing in investigating the integration of macro- and micro-level processes at the intersection of policy and instructional practice. This research bridges literacy and policy in order to investigate how policy ideas and tools play out in the context of those actors responsible for implementation at the local level. Researchers in this area (Coburn, 2001b, 2006; Valli, Croninger, & Buese, 2012; Wixson & Yochum, 2004; Woulfin & Coburn, 2012) helped guide my thinking about the complexities of implementation and the effect of multiple sources of influence on teachers. In

the next section, I highlight key studies I found particularly relevant to developing my research questions, design, and tools.

Many researchers have begun to investigate the integration of macro- and micro-levels of policy implementation and concentrate on the impact on literacy teaching and learning.

Specifically, I focused this part of my review on research that has examined the ways teachers interact with policy messages, instructional practice, and the context of the policy environment. Researchers investigating the integration of macro- and micro-levels of policy implementation position teachers and teacher leaders as partners in the co-construction of policy and research-based practice (Coburn, 2004, 2005a; Coburn & Woulfin, 2012). Under this paradigm, teachers are not positioned as servants or technicians of standards or curriculum frameworks (Dutro, Fisk, Koch, Roop, & Wixson, 2002), but have agency and ownership of the ways policy can be interpreted and successfully integrated into literacy instruction to best support learning.

Research focused on cognitive influences at the intersection of policy and literacy examines the role of assessment and teachers' response to literacy policy (Smith et al., 1997). Smith and colleagues investigated Arizona teachers' response to policy in relation to how the specific reading policy aligned or did not align with teachers' beliefs about literacy. Researchers found macro-level policy initiatives intended to reform assessment practices were negotiated by teachers as they responded to conditions for teaching and learning in their individual schools and classrooms. This study also revealed that teachers' practices reflected the district's literacy policy depending on how well the district elaborated and communicated the policy to teachers (Smith et al., 1997).

Reading policy as enacted in the context of accountability and the impact on teaching and learning is of concern to literacy and policy researchers. In their review of reading policy in the context of accountability, Coburn, Pearson, & Woulfin (2011) found various factors influence teachers' responses to literacy policy. Teachers' responses can be influenced by cognitive and personal factors, such as content knowledge about literacy, philosophical beliefs about the ways children develop literacy, as well as personal values as to what teachers believe would best benefit their students. However, this is not to suggest that personal or cognitive factors are the most influential sources for teachers as policy messages themselves can influence the degree to which policy affects teacher practice. Whether or not new policies align with existing practice, the amount of capacity building supports included in policy, and the degree of voluntariness versus coerciveness are all factors that influence how policy may be understood by teachers. These policy-based factors also provide teachers, administrators and other school personnel with a sense of how doable a policy mandate may be. Coburn, et al. stress research that hopes to understand the impact of literacy policy on instructional change must not only attend to the ways teachers and school leaders respond to policy, but must focus on *why* actors respond in the ways they do, as well as *who* and *what* influences them to respond in these ways.

When moving policy into practice teachers are influenced by both system actors (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012) and non-system actors (Coburn, 2005a). Coburn (2005a) found that non-system actors such as universities, textbooks, and independent professional development providers were highly influential on the ways teachers interpreted literacy policy. Research found teachers were less likely to be directly influenced by policy documents and more likely to understand and make sense of policy messages when mediated through non-system actors.

Messages from these actors were most impactful when heard often and with great intensity, rather than infrequently and with low levels of intensity.

Investigating the ways actors involved in literacy policy interpret, adapt, and transform policy is important to understand the impact literacy policies at the macro-level have on classroom teaching and learning at the micro-level. Sensemaking theory has been applied to research with the aim of understanding how actors negotiate individual policy demands when faced with multiple policies, initiatives, and programs as well as their own personal beliefs, knowledge and perceptions about instruction, learning, and content (Coburn, 2001a, 2005a, 2005b; Coburn & Woulfin, 2012; Spillane, 1999, 2000). Coburn (2001) applied sensemaking theory in her study focusing on the ways teachers mediate reading policy within their professional communities. Coburn found teachers collectively interpret policy messages at the school level via their professional learning communities. In her study teachers applied interpersonal sensemaking to determine which pieces of a reading policy best fit their local context and then adopted, adapted, modified, or ignored suggested instructional practices accordingly.

Another look into sensemaking and the ways local actors construct their understanding of literacy policy messages uses problem framing (Benford & Snow, 2000; Coburn, 2006). Problem framing is the representation of the cause of a problem of teaching, learning, or a policy, highlighting certain aspects of the situation while de-emphasizing or ignoring others. Frame analysis suggests the ways problems are framed influences response. Policy or instructional problems can be framed to assign responsibility to some actors or to create rationales for responding in some ways and not others. In her study using framing to understand teacher sensemaking, Coburn (2006) examined the social processes of problem framing around

reading policy in California aimed at improving reading instruction in the early elementary grades. Her investigation found teachers' response to the reading policy depended in part on how teachers and leaders at the local level framed the problem. For example, teachers in one school who framed poor achievement scores in upper grades with a "whole-school responsibility" frame saw cross-grade cohesion a legitimate undertaking, as opposed to teachers who did not accept that frame. Framing is a significant component to sense making because how individuals and groups frame problems legitimizes certain responses to problems and delegitimizes other responses.

Current Policy Environment

Researchers have investigated the role of policy on instructional practice and the integration of macro- and micro-level processes influencing implementation. Policy research and literacy research are increasingly concerned with the interplay between broad policy mandates and practical enactment at the classroom level. These researchers are attempting to bridge the gap between large-scale vision for education reform in literacy teaching and learning, while understanding the mechanisms influencing teachers at the local level. However, the specific policy environment in which we are currently situated has implications for further investigation into these processes. Next, I briefly explore the current policy environment attempting to influence change in literacy teaching and learning.

Efforts to change teaching and learning have often been done in the name of excellence, equity, or progress (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Reading the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative (National Governors Association, 2010) gives one the impression that this latest effort to transform student literacy achievement, and by which, change literacy instructional practice,

that excellence, equity and progress are the key drivers in development of the standards. The CCSS are a set of grade-by-grade learning standards developed with the aim of preparing students to be college and career ready upon completion of high school. At the time of this writing, there has been widespread disagreement about the validity, appropriateness, and authority of the CCSS (Pearson, 2013) and its near nation-wide adoption. However, where there is near agreement is in the challenges teachers will face in trying to make sense of the instructional demands of the standards in terms of content and pedagogy. A concerning feature, or non-feature, of these standards and their adoption is the lack of uniform messages about implementation. The standards documents themselves read, “The Standards define what all students are expected to know and be able to do, not how teachers should teach” (CCSS, p. 6). Teachers faced with implementing the new standards will need to negotiate policy messages from a variety of sources, interpret the standards into content-centered instruction and make choices about pedagogical tools to employ in order to make sense of the standards and implication for their practice.

Implementation of the CCSS presented a unique opportunity to investigate the ways literacy teachers make sense of new policy initiatives using standards as a lever for change. Unlike the expectations accompanying the Reading First Initiative (Gamse et al., 2008) of No Child Left Behind, strict requirements for curricular materials, professional development or methods of instruction (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodrigues, 2004) did not accompany the CCSS. The authors of the CCSS explicitly laid out expectations for student learning, but also explicitly stated that the standards documents do not prescribe how teachers are expected to instruct students in order to meet those standards (see p. 6 of the Introduction to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts for more detailed explanation on this point). In

other words, the CCSS initiative described for teachers *what* to teach, but now *how* to teach.

This freedom can be viewed as either a great opportunity or an obstacle. On one hand, teachers are being granted the freedom to use their professional knowledge and judgment regarding their students and the most appropriate pedagogical approaches. On the other hand, teachers with a historical background of teaching under strict mandates in a culture of compliance may not be prepared for the freedom the CCSS grants.

Context is an important factor in understanding the nuances of policy implementation and teacher practice. When doing literacy policy research, having an insider's view of everyday practice and the ways teachers make decisions about instruction is important when unpacking the complexities of macro- and micro-levels of implementation. Teachers are the actors most responsible for policy implementation at the ground level. Teachers have intimate contact with students in attempt to enact change in literacy learning and achievement. Teachers are at the heart of the "black box" of the instructional quality that policy seeks to affect. And while policy makers set policies and make decisions impacting the classroom, thus far, it is rare to see teachers asked for or contributing to such policies. However, teachers are not passive recipients of new education policies that seek to change their daily work with students. Implementation of standards like the CCSS provides an opportunity for literacy researchers to investigate the process teachers undergo as they make sense of and respond to policy messages depending on the specific teaching environment in which they find themselves (Jennings, 1996).

Theoretical Framework

Full implementation of the CCSS created an opportunity for literacy researchers to investigate the intersection of policy and practice using new combinations of theoretical lenses.

The need to understand manifestations of policy into practice is hardly a new issue, but implementation of the CCSS provided a timely opportunity to integrate theoretical tools from literacy and policy to facilitate comprehensive investigation into the experiences and negotiation of policy into practice by teachers.

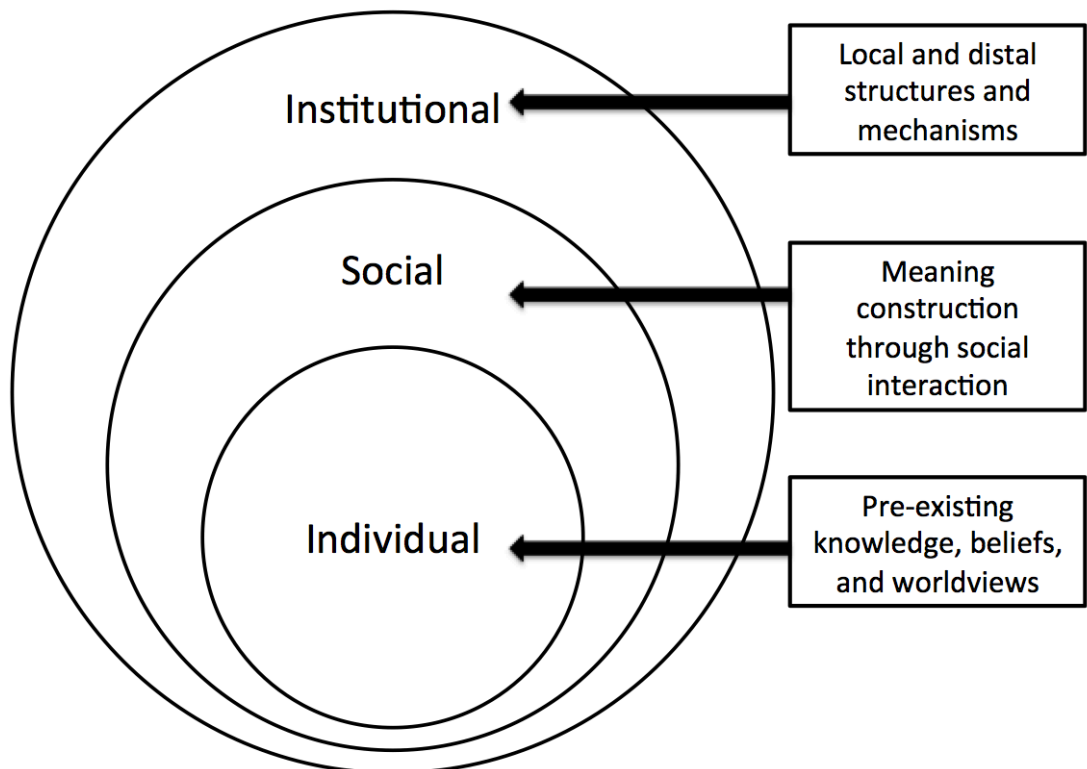
Historically, implementation research from the field of literacy has focused on micro-level processes of teachers using various cognitive and sociocultural theories (Taylor et al., 2010; Valencia & Wixson, 2001; Wixson & Dutro, 1999) to explain how teachers enact policy ideas into classroom practice. Conversely, research from policy has emphasized macro-level processes of implementation and worked using organizational theories building conceptual and practical knowledge of this phenomenon (Cohen, 1982; Cohen & Spillane, 1992). These two fields have begun to converge to explore policy implementation from an integrated perspective (Coburn, 2001b, 2006; Spillane, 1999; Spillane, Reiser, & Gomez, 2006), but the need remains for literacy researchers to investigate this phenomenon to address the complex needs of teachers as they participate in policy implementation.

I argue for the need to investigate implementation of literacy policy into practice using the theoretical framework of sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Sensemaking is an organizational theory that attends to individual, social, and contextual components of learning and interpretation of new knowledge and ideas into one's own practice. This theory provides tools to help understand the ways teachers experience policy messages and the structures and mechanisms that contribute to appropriation and transformation of practice.

Spheres of Influence

As teachers implement literacy policy they move within and between individual, social and institutional spheres of influence (See Figure 1). Each sphere is nested and interconnected as teachers enact policy in various, but inextricably linked contexts with multiple components. A constellation of teachers' knowledge, histories, relationships, as well as local norms, dynamics, and larger policy pressures interact and influence the ways in which literacy policy manifests in classroom instruction. The interconnected, symbiotic, and reciprocal relationships coalesce and require us to examine the complex web of policy implementation. Research investigating this phenomenon without attending to multiple, interconnected spheres of influence can leave the field with vital but fractured knowledge about this process.

Figure 1 Spheres of Influence



Individual Sphere

Literacy and policy researchers have explored individual factors that have potential to influence instructional practice at the classroom level (Jennings, 1996; McGill-Franzen et al., 2002; Spillane, 1999, 2000; Spillane, Reiser, et al., 2002; Webb, 2002). This sphere of influence is situated within the individual and can affect the ways teachers view themselves, their abilities, as well as their will to apply policy initiatives into their professional practice.

Sensemaking is theory that can be applied to education to examine how individual teachers adapt, adopt, combine or ignore environmental messages as they implement policy (Porac, Thomas, & Baden-Fuller, 1989; Weick, 1995). Sensemaking provides tools to understand the ways teachers negotiate and make meaning from policy messages (Spillane, Reiser, et al., 2002). From this meaning making, teachers develop patterns of actions within their classrooms and school environments that align with their understanding of policy messages. Put another way, teachers integrate new policy messages—selectively, with adaptation, or combined with other ideas—with their historical and current practices for teaching.

Sensemaking theory provides a way to examine the way policy messages are mediated by teachers and shape instructional practice as they notice or select messages and ideas from the environment and make meaning with that information. Sensemaking is likely to occur in environments with uncertainty, high levels of ambiguity, abrupt change or interruption, and where familiar routines and procedures no longer guide action (Weick, 1995). New education policies often act to disrupt familiar practices and routines in schools, leaving teachers and administrators uncertain of expectations of them. Schools are complex organizations made of multiple actors who each bring unique skills, beliefs, and perceptions about changes and

challenges to their work. Sensemaking, as described by Weick (1995) is a process directed at constructing plausible interpretations of cues from the environment that are sufficient to sustain action. It is a cognitive process of explanation that consists of seven properties: *identity construction, retrospective, enacted of sensible environments, social, ongoing, focused on and extracted from cues, and plausible*. Sensemaking theory suggests these seven properties have explanatory power over organizational phenomenon. For this research I focus on four properties relevant to implementation of literacy standards by teachers. Next I will give a brief description of each of the four properties of sensemaking on which I draw for this research.

First, sensemaking is *grounded in identity construction*. Who people think they are in a given context shapes how they act and interpret events and information. Complicating this is that people are in a constant state of redefinition with respect to identity construction. Who people think they are is shaped by how they see themselves in relation to other people, paradigms, and organizations. Identity construction relates to sensemaking in that it provides a general orientation of the self to the situation. In schools, teachers are in a continual state of identity construction with respect to the changing nature of their work, new expectations and demands set on them, and how they view their own knowledge and abilities within the organization. Identity is constantly redefining and, in turn, is a key property to the process of sensemaking.

Sensemaking is *enacted of sensible environments*. This property of sensemaking deals with the context in which actors need to construct understanding of new or disruptive information. *Sensible environments* suggests the environment in which one works is not constructed by some monolithic force, but is shaped by the actors working in that environment. In other words, actors are not passive recipients of the environment but are active in shaping it with their actions. However, this property of sense making also asserts that some members of an

organization are more active, and potentially more powerful, in shaping the environment than others. In schools, the perception of the environment and the active work in response to new policy shapes the context in which policy is enacted.

Sensemaking as a cognitive theory can mislead one to think in terms only of implications for the individual actor. However, organizations consist of a network of individuals who share and construct meaning as part of social interaction. The *social* process of sense making acknowledges the impact and influence of others on one's actions, knowledge and beliefs, whether the other actor is physically present or not. Education is an inherently social enterprise with work distributed among and across social actors. Others can shape sensemaking of individuals in schools as they work together, but can also be socially influenced by implied social forces. For example, policy implementation in education often centers on alignment of standards, materials, classroom practices, and pacing. In this way, rules, materials, and assessments are implied social forces that can influence teachers in schools because of the general expectation and pressure to align to these ideas.

The last property on which I will draw is of sensemaking as *focused on and extracted from cues*. People focus on cues, or points of reference, from which they can build understanding. These are often simple, familiar structures actors use to help them decide what new information is relevant and what explanations or understandings are acceptable. These cues offer actors ways to link new ideas to broader understanding of what they are doing. However, extracted cues are dependent on context, which involves noticing and framing (Benford & Snow, 2000). Research on education policy has documented the ways in which actors in schools focus on and extract cues from their environment as a key component of sensemaking (Coburn, 2006).

The four properties of sensemaking outlined above (i.e., *identity construction, enacted of sensible environments, social, and extracted from cues*) provide a foundation for my theoretical perspective for investigation of policy implementation. These properties of sensemaking have been applied by Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer (2000) in developing a cognitive sensemaking framework for implementation of education reform aimed at changing classroom practice. This framework looks at policy implementation from a cognitive perspective and takes into consideration that the key dimensions of implementation are whether and in what ways individual actors come to understand their practice in relation to their beliefs, attitudes and potential change as a result of implementing the policy. This framework seeks to provide an approach to understanding the conditions under which change at the classroom level is possible and the how local actors, such as teachers and leaders, interpret expectations for change. The framework specifically addresses interactions between three key components: individual actors' preexisting cognitive structures, the situation in which they are implementing the policy, and the signals and messages communicated through the policy. This integrated framework approaches implementation as both an individual process of sense making while attending to the social embeddedness of sensemaking within a local context.

Social Sphere

Literacy (Wixson & Yochum, 2004) and policy researchers (Coburn, 2005a, 2005b; Coburn & Stein, 2006) have investigated social factors with potential influence on the ways teachers interpret policy into practice. This social sphere of influence consists of relationships between actors in schools and as well as those located within larger communities of practice. Some examples of social factors include teachers' social networks (Atteberry & Bryk, 2010; Coburn & Russell, 2008; Moolenaar, 2012), collective sensemaking in professional learning

communities (Coburn, 2001b, 2005b), and the role of social capital among teacher groups (Coburn, 2005b; Coburn & Stein, 2006; Coburn & Woulfin, 2012).

A sociocultural perspective forefronts the way learning is situated within social practices (Rogoff, 1994; Wenger, 1998) including those of teachers as they come to understand, interpret and implement literacy policy. The challenges of policy implementation, particularly those associated with standards-based reform, is the need to extend beyond individual cognitive processes into the professional work of teachers within their local communities of practice (Gallucci, 2003; Gavelek & Raphael, 1996). In this case, teachers are learners who collectively construct their knowledge about policy messages through multiple dimensions of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire of collective practice (Wenger, 1998).

Gallucci (2008) examined the usefulness of adopting a Communities of Practice approach to teacher learning and standards-based reform. She argued the implementation problems inherent in standards-based reform are a product of the need for professional learning. New standards require teachers to learn and often reshape understandings of teaching and learning. Gallucci (2003) argues teachers' communities of practice are sites for teacher learning and mediation of standards, which in turn mediate teachers' responses to reform efforts. Characteristics of teachers' communities of practice make a difference in how teachers respond to reform policies across content areas. Gallucci examines how the relative strength vs. weakness and degree of openness vs. closed to learning influences teachers' responses to reform.

Institutional Sphere

Institutional factors also influence teachers' implementation of policy. Factors in the institutional sphere are those that interplay between the teacher and the rules and resources

(Whittingham, 2006) that regulate school level practices. Examples of institutional factors include environmental rules and ideas about literacy instruction (Cohen, 1982, 1988; Cohen & Spillane, 1992; Pearson, 2007), curricular materials (Kontovourki, 2012; Loewenberg Ball & Feiman-Nemser, 1988), standards and frameworks for teaching and learning (McGill-Franzen et al., 2002), assessment demands (Boardman & Woodruff, 2004; Kontovourki, 2012; McGill-Franzen et al., 2002), and outwardly imposed structures on the day to day schedules and activities on teachers.

Each of these nested and interconnected spheres has potential influence on teachers as they make sense of policy messages and the impact on their teaching in the classroom. While research has investigated each of these spheres individually or in pairs, there is a need for knowledge and thick description on how teachers negotiate influence from all three spheres in consort. My research seeks to explore the ways factors within each sphere work with or against factors from other spheres while teachers make sense of literacy policy as they engage in instructional practice. In other words, my research aims to investigate teacher sense making from and within each of these three spheres of influence within the specific context of implementation of the CCSS for English Language Arts.

Conclusion

This literature review highlighted policy research set in the context of literacy to establish the relevancy of my study of teacher sense making at the intersections of policy and practice. Policy research has uncovered much of the fundamental knowledge we have on the macro-level processes of implementation. Additionally, policy research has provided the education scholarly community with important insights into micro-levels of policy implementation as teachers enact

them in their classroom practice. In contrast, literacy researchers have examined the role of policy mandates on instructional practice from cognitive, social and institutional perspectives. Scholars from both research communities have begun to investigate the overlap and integration of macro- and micro-level processes at the intersection of policy and instructional practice. These researchers bridge literacy and policy to investigate instructional practice as teachers work individually and collectively to make sense of policy mandates within their unique instructional contexts. The ideas emanating from those bodies of research are fundamental to my study and guide my thinking and formulation of my argument and research questions.

To inquire into the ways teachers make sense of literacy standards and interpret policy messages into classroom practice I intend to employ a holistic in-depth case study design using ethnographic tools. Two questions guide my investigation:

1. How do standards, organizational structures, and other mechanisms influence teacher sensemaking?
2. In what ways does teachers' sensemaking influence instructional practices?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Case Study Design

I used an in-depth single case study with multiple embedded units of analysis to examine the intersection of literacy policy and teachers' instructional practice. I selected a single school as the case with two levels of embedded units of analysis: grade level teams and individual teachers within those teams. I sought to understand the individual, social, and contextual spheres that influence teachers' work and how teachers make sense of literacy policy. Case study design is appropriate for empirical research that seeks to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context. This method of design is also appropriate for research in which the phenomenon of interest and its context do not have clear boundaries and the contextual conditions are significant to the ways in which the phenomenon occurs (Yin, 2009).

The in-depth observation and immersion possible with case study design provides the opportunity to develop new hypotheses and build theory regarding relationships between actors and phenomena that would otherwise remain unexplored (Stake, 1995). My descriptive case study relies on analytic generalization (Yin, 2009) to link data patterns to literacy standards and instructional practice to the broader theory of sensemaking (Weick, 1995). In doing so, this study serves to expand the literacy research community's knowledge of the ways teachers think about literacy, in particular, as literacy is influenced by sensemaking.

An in-depth single case study with multiple embedded units of analysis bounds the case by events, context, and experiences surrounding multiple teachers in one school (Merriam, 1998). While the phenomenon of interest, teacher sensemaking about literacy policy, is not definitively explained by the experiences of teachers in one school, this study's focus on a

bounded single-case allowed for in-depth investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) into teachers' experiences with the Common Core State Standards in the English Language Arts (CCSS-ELA) and influences on these experiences from a variety of sources. The data collected and subsequently analyzed provides the basis for thick description of the phenomenon of sensemaking in this context. Case study design has been widely used to describe implementation of policy into school-level practice. Researchers have used this method to investigate the intersection of macro-level processes of policy making with micro-level processes of classroom and teacher-based implementation (Coburn, 2001b, 2005b; Coburn & Woulfin, 2012; Kontovourki, 2012; Spillane & Jennings, 1997). This study focused upon influences on sensemaking from contextual, social, and individual spheres of influence and serves to build on theory regarding how teachers negotiate and navigate implementation of literacy policy as they strive to deliver high-quality instruction to the students in their classrooms.

Units of Analysis

Single case studies with multiple embedded units of analysis are appropriate for investigating a phenomenon within a representative case (Yin, 2009). The objective with this design is to capture the common occurrences within a particular context. My study used the case of a one school to examine multiple influential factors on teachers as they make sense of new literacy standards.

I sought to focus on one school that represented typicality in what many teachers across the country are facing as education policies shift and their subsequent practice is expected to reflect that shift. For my purposes, with an interest in mid- to large sized urban districts and the characteristics often found in those districts, typicality refers to a school that has a

racially/ethnically diverse student population, a sizeable representation of English language learners, and a substantial percentage of students who are classified as low-income. Teachers across the country are seeing an increase in the diversity of their students. Culture, language, and socio-economic status can pose challenges to teachers, but as the U.S. grows increasingly diverse, student characteristics can present challenges that teachers must navigate to provide high-quality, equitable education. These characteristics are increasingly considered the norm for teachers in many communities. In addition to characteristics that directly impact teachers' experiences with students, typically schools have a Principal, Assistant Principal, or other specific curriculum or instructional leaders. In this case, the school principal was also the Director of Literacy for the school district, which of course, is not typical for most schools. In addition, a full-time literacy coach was hired to facilitate implementation of the new literacy curricular program and provide expertise in literacy instruction.

Within all schools are individual actors who perform their professional duties alone and in collaboration with others. As individuals, the teachers, administrators, and support staff play a role in moving policy into practice and come together in various configurations to solve the problems of their work. My case study included two embedded units of analysis within the school: grade level teams and individual teachers on those teams. Grade level teams serve as professional learning communities where teachers collaborate and discuss literacy and expectations for their work. Recent increased emphasis on professional learning communities (Horn & Little, 2010) in schools suggests grade level team meetings are potential sites for collective interpretation of literacy policy and influence on classroom practice (Coburn, 2001b).

My study included two different grade level teams as embedded units of analysis nested within the school. For this study I selected the 1st and 3rd grade teams. The reason for selecting

these grades is based on the different emphasis for literacy instruction in these grades. Early childhood grades like 1st grade have increasingly focused on code-related skills and the expectation for conventional reading (NELP, 2008; Teale, Hoffman, & Paciga, 2010). For example, the pilot study I conducted in a kindergarten classroom in a different school in the same district revealed that phonemic awareness, phonics, and conventional reading were emphasized in instruction and as topics for grade level meetings. In contrast, 3rd grade typically has emphasized more advanced literacy skills like comprehension (Gamse et al., 2008; Kontovourki, 2012). Third grade is also the start of high-stakes standardized assessment and reporting, required by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) and is often a high-pressure grade for students and teachers. Along with the CCSS, this district planned to implement the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career assessment (PARCC, 2014) during the year of data collection, which was designed to align with the standards outlined in the CCSS. The pressure of a new accountability tests combined with emphasis of advanced literacy skills at 3rd grade level have the potential to influence the kinds of messages 3rd grade teachers encounter as well as their lesson planning and classroom practices (W. Au, 2007; Kontovourki, 2012).

Both 1st and 3rd grades have unique and complex sets of norms, pressures, and histories that may influence the ways in which teachers make sense of new literacy standards and interpret these standards into instructional practice. This is not to suggest other grades do not have unique sets of norms or pressures. However, 1st and 3rd grade demonstrate differences that make these ideal sites for investigating the similarities and distinct differences in teachers' sensemaking processes when situated in different instructional contexts.

Finally, nested within grade level teams are the individual teachers who, through their sensemaking, enact classroom practices to address literacy standards. Sensemaking is inherently

complex and teachers, as policy actors situated within the larger unit of the school, are the ultimate enactors of policy. Teachers as individuals draw upon cognitive processes as they integrate new knowledge about literacy standards and teaching with their existing knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes about teaching and learning. Teachers have unique histories and trajectories of practice that potentially influence their sensemaking when faced with new expectations for student learning and classroom instruction. Each teacher within the grade level team is an additional unit of analysis in this study. This afforded me the opportunity to investigate each teacher's individual influences on sensemaking. Research on the intersection of policy and practice emphasizes the classroom as the ultimate place of policy enactment (Spillane, 1999; Spillane & Jennings, 1997) and because classroom instruction is of particular relevance to my study, data on teachers' classroom practice were collected as evidence of the manifestation of their sensemaking.

The teachers included in my study represent the range of typicality found in most schools. Teachers ranged from early career, mid-point of career, and veteran with the number of years taught ranging from 4-26. As representative of most teaching staff in elementary schools, the teachers in my study were predominantly female. The majority of teachers in the study and the broader school identified as white, but four participants identified as Latina/o. All teachers who agreed to be interviewed held at least a Bachelor's Degree and certification in Elementary Education, and most also held endorsements in specific subject areas or ELL, and several also held Master's degrees in Education.

In the following sections I discuss my research methodology, case study propositions, the study site, data sources and collection methods, analysis, and my positionality as a researcher.

Propositions

There are three propositions examined with this study. The first proposition is that sensemaking by teachers relies in part on teachers' knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and professional histories. These individual characteristics can influence the ways in which teachers think about and understand a new set of expectations for student learning and ultimately their own teaching. Second, teachers working in grade level teams are likely to collectively negotiate messages about standards-based literacy policy and potentially draw upon and navigate these messages while planning for instruction. Third, organizational and institutional ideas, norms, and mechanisms are likely to shape and steer teachers in their sensemaking of literacy standards. Organizational features of the school (e.g., mandated meeting times and topics, lesson plan templates, curriculum maps, assessment schedules, mandated curricular materials, & instructional leadership) can influence the degree to which literacy policy is enacted in the classroom. These three propositions attend to different units of analysis but also apply to the case study as a whole.

Research Methodology

Prolonged immersion in a school can reveal much about the everyday lived experiences (Heath & Street, 2008) of teachers as they interact with policy messages and interpret them into instructional practice. Immersion in the field can reveal the implicit and explicit institutional rules and ideas about literacy teaching and learning, the social rules and hierarchy between actors and the role of the individual as they move standards into practice. The purpose of immersion in a school is to gain an understanding from both an emic and etic perspective on the context of the phenomenon of sense making. In addition to providing thick description of the context and

actors' position within the context, observation in multiple sites across the school can help uncover the implications of actions, relationships, and outside forces as literacy policy gets interpreted into instructional practice (Purcell-Gates, Perry, & Briseño, 2011).

Within my case study design, I employed a variety of ethnographic methods. Case studies using ethnographic methods require a significant commitment with extensive time spent in the context of the study. As the researcher is the primary tool for data collection, I spent substantial time in three main contexts within the school to gain an emic perspective on teacher sensemaking and influential factors on policy implementation. The three contexts within the school were: teachers' classrooms, grade level team meetings, and literacy leaders' meetings. I collected data using the following methods: observations, interviews, and documents and artifacts.

A challenge in using ethnographic methods in addition to the large time commitment is the degree of flexibility required in collecting data. While my preliminary conversations with teachers and staff at the school lead me to assume certain contexts within the school day would be ideal for data collection, once in the field I found it was difficult to predict where and when the richest data indicating teacher sensemaking would occur. And while schools work within daily schedules there were often times when competing demands for time meant meetings were canceled or rescheduled, classroom instruction was interrupted for special events, and meetings for the grade levels I observed had conflicting times. As the researcher I needed to choose where I believed I would be best situated to gather the most useful data to answer my research questions. As a result, the data collected and analyzed for this study are not exhaustive of all of the conversations, messages, and interactions teachers had around literacy instruction, but

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present what I believe to be representative of how teachers in this school typically experienced their work in regards to literacy standards and instruction.

Table 1 Data Sources

	Observations	Interviews	Documents
School	Grade level data meetings Professional Development	Principal Literacy Coach	Curricular materials Standards documents
Grade Level Team	Grade level team meetings		Curriculum maps Lesson plans Curricular materials
Teachers	Classroom observations	Formal initial interview Formal final interview Informal interviews/conversations	Curricular materials Assessment materials Classroom artifacts/documentation

Research Site

Kennedy Elementary (pseudonym) is a PreK-5 school situated in a mid-sized district in a collar suburb of a large city in the Midwest. The suburb in which Kennedy is set has historically been working-class but has experienced the beginning waves of gentrification over the past several years and in more recent years the township has embarked on a marketing campaign to attract middle-income families. According to U.S. Census data for 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), Hispanics and Latinos made up approximately 59% of the population of the town.

According to the school district's website, there are six elementary schools and two middle schools in the district, with student enrollment between 350-660 students per building.

During the year this study took place, Kennedy served approximately 500 ethnically and racially diverse students with a range of academic needs. Student demographics included 91% Hispanic or Latino, 5% White/Anglo, 1% Multi Racial/Ethnic, 1% African American/Black, and 1% Asian. Thirty-nine percent of students' parents indicated a language other than English was spoken at home. Eighty percent of students were considered low-income based on eligibility for free or reduced priced lunch. Ten percent of students qualified for special education services. Mobility rates at Kennedy were low at 5% compared to the overall district's average of 13%. Average class size for Kennedy the year of the study was 26 students, but because of a district wide initiative to reduce class sizes in K-2 classrooms the 1st grade classrooms in my study had an average of 15 students. The third grade classrooms included in my study had more students with approximately 25 students per class. The most recently available state standardized assessment scores (i.e. ISAT) for 2013-14 show 39% of 3rd graders at Kennedy are meeting or exceeding standards, a substantial decrease from the 87% achievement rate in 2012. However, this large decrease in reading scores may partly be due to the recent change in cut scores for this particular assessment.

However, while Kennedy represents typicality on a variety of conditions in relation to student characteristics and demands teachers face, in many ways the school was not typical. Despite being situated in a low-income area, over the past few years Kennedy and the district have invested in providing resources in attempt to boost student achievement. For example, in the year prior to my study the district hired one full-time literacy coach for each elementary school. Among other duties, coaches were tasked with assisting teachers in implementing a

literacy workshop model for instruction as well as the use of curricular (Calkins, 1986) and assessment materials (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010). Kennedy also staffs two full-time reading interventionists to work exclusively with struggling readers in grades 3-5 and two full-time ELL resource teachers. In addition to these staff investments, Kennedy adopted a co-teaching model in which each grade level has one full-time special education teacher who co-teaches exclusively in one classroom but also serves as a resource for all classrooms at that grade level to provide special education services and support.

In addition to investments in human capacity, Kennedy, and other schools in the district, launched a technology initiative to achieve a one-to-one learning environment. Students in K-1 each have their own iPads and students in grade 2-5 each have a MacBook Air that they use in school and also take home. Technology coaches for the district work with teachers across schools and large amounts of professional development time have been devoted to developing pedagogical routines to integrate technology into all areas of the curriculum.

Reasons for Choosing Kennedy Elementary

The phenomenon in which I am interested centers on literacy instructional practice within the context of a new literacy policy initiative. Therefore I selected an elementary school in the beginning stages of implementation of the CCSS-ELA. An elementary school is an ideal context for my study because literacy instruction in K-5 has been in the national spotlight over the past decade with multiple programs and initiatives targeted at improving student achievement in these grades (Coburn et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2010). Kennedy Elementary or the district did not participate in any specialized initiatives to prepare for implementation of the CCSS.

Research suggests schools need to establish certain essential supports (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Easton, & Luppescu, 2010) before there can be an expectation of positively transforming instruction. There is a range of ways in which infrastructure can affect teacher sensemaking, from strong and supportive to weak and dysfunctional (Coburn, 2005b; Seashore Louis, Mayrowetz, & Smylie, 2009; Spillane, 2000). In order to guard against confounding sensemaking with infrastructure issues I sought a school that had the infrastructure and leadership to support teacher collaboration on instruction. Through conversations with teachers and administrators during my pilot study I learned of Kennedy Elementary and its reputation of being highly organized with an emphasis on strong leadership and ambitious literacy instruction. I met with, Jacob, the school principal, to discuss the current condition of literacy teaching at Kennedy, his beliefs about the purpose and changing nature of literacy, and his goals for teaching and learning at the school. His statements made it clear that he believed in moving past a compliance mode of teaching and had strong faith in the knowledge and expertise of the teachers in the schools. In addition, Jacob spoke at length about his belief in collaborative leadership and decision-making. His statements also assured me that he believed in allocating resources for staff, materials, and professional development to maintain an inclusive and supportive environment to best meet the needs of students.

When wide reaching policy initiatives come out there can be a range of responses from leadership and teachers (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2015; Jennings, 1996; Spillane, 1999; Spillane, Diamond, et al., 2002; Spillane & Jennings, 1997; Valli & Buese, 2007). Responses can fall on a continuum from rejecting the initiative to deep immersion with extensive support and professional development. For my study, I looked for a school that fell at the center position on that continuum. Specifically, I sought a school where the new standards were something teachers

and leadership were aware of and concerned about, but the school was not engaged in any formal work toward implementation. With the CCSS, the district, state, and federal governments mandate instruction be aligned to standards. However, given that the CCSS are an unfunded, uncoordinated initiative adopted at the state level, I believe a school such as Kennedy represents a situation that many other schools find themselves in attempting to implement the standards.

Participants

There were a total of 11 participants in my study, including 9 classroom teachers, 1 literacy coach, and 1 administrator. In consenting to participate in the study they agreed to formal and informal interviews, observations during meetings, and classroom observations. Two teachers elected to partially participate in the study. Annie (all names are pseudonyms) agreed to classroom observations but not to be interviewed, and Adam declined to be interviewed or be observed during classroom instruction. Both agreed to be observed during meetings.

Other staff including the school psychologist, reading interventionists, ELL interventionists, and coaches from other schools were present at some meetings I observed. I obtained consent from these individuals but did not collect specific demographic data on them nor do I consider them full participants in the study. Data from these individuals are included to provide contextual information about literacy teaching and learning.

Teachers: First Grade

The first grade team consisted of five teachers: Natalie, Dahlia, Tiffany, Monica, and Adam. Natalie was a special education teacher who co-taught with Dahlia. Natalie was in her second year at Kennedy and in her seventh year of teaching during the time of data collection. She held an Elementary Teaching Certificate and a Special Education Certificate. During the

second semester of the study Natalie began taking classes to obtain a Master's in Reading and her Reading Specialist license. Students entering first grade with an IEP and students who struggled in kindergarten were placed in Natalie and Dahlia's class. Natalie was responsible for planning the literacy block and took the lead teaching role during that portion of the school day. Dahlia typically facilitated guided reading groups and conferred individually with children on reading or writing. At other times of the day Natalie also worked with struggling readers from the other first grade classrooms in small groups or individually. The workshop model was followed during the literacy block, but phonemic awareness and a read aloud occurred at a different time of the instructional day.

Dahlia was in her 21st year teaching first grade during the year of data collection, with all of those years occurring at Kennedy. Prior to Kennedy, Dahlia had taught second grade for three years in another state in a Spanish-English bilingual program. Upon moving to the state in which Kennedy was located, Dahlia obtained her Elementary Education Certificate, but did not pursue bilingual certification. She stated the reason for not pursuing a bilingual certificate was because she did not feel she was a strong enough teacher in Spanish, particularly in writing. However, Dahlia holds an ESL endorsement and two Master's degrees in education. During the interview Dahlia said she felt her strength in teaching was in math and not literacy. The classroom was decorated with many teacher-made posters that emphasized components and routines for reading and writing. Books in the classroom library were organized by reading levels in clearly marked bins.

Tiffany's 24 years of teaching experience all took place in the same district. Most of her teaching experience was at Kennedy and primarily in first grade. In addition to her Elementary education degree, Tiffany held a Master's in Teaching and Leadership and ESL endorsement.

She held very strong beliefs about what she considered to be developmentally appropriate instruction for her students and strove to maintain a child-centered classroom. Tiffany's classroom was brightly decorated with a Hollywood theme including a stage and working microphone for students to use to present their work to classmates. Her classroom was a print-rich environment with many teacher-made posters around the room with tips for choosing books, word attack strategies, a word wall, and labeled classroom objects. Tiffany's library was abundant with books that were organized by genre and reading level. She stated she spent a lot of her own time investigating unique ways to integrate technology into the curriculum and often had her students publish their writing using video or animation apps. Tiffany was mentioned by many people in the school as an expert in literacy instruction and someone whom others went to for advice.

Monica was in her first year teaching first grade at Kennedy and had spent three additional years teaching bilingual classes in other districts. Monica held a Bilingual/Bicultural Education degree, Elementary teaching certificate, ESL endorsement, and a Language Arts endorsement for Middle School. During the study she stated she planned on pursuing an administrative Master's degree in the upcoming years with the intent of eventually moving into a leadership position. Monica's classroom was sparsely decorated with a few teacher-made or commercially produced posters and decorations. What classroom print were present included posters with book selection tips, decoding strategies, a limited word wall, and classroom management charts. Monica's classroom library was organized by reading levels, however, she did not have as large of a collection of books as other first grade classrooms at Kennedy. Monica followed the workshop model closely and used guided reading primarily for small group and

individual conferring on reading strategies, word attack skills, sight word practice, and administering running records.

Adam was the bilingual first grade teacher. Adam agreed to be observed in all locations for the study, but he declined to be interviewed or to have his class observed. Adam was a very quiet member of the first grade team and often did not speak during grade level meetings. Adam did not attend several grade level meetings. The other first grade teachers often remarked that they felt like Adam's class did completely different things than their classes.

Teachers: Third Grade

The third grade team at Kennedy consisted of four teachers: Tonya, Julie, Annie, and Antonio. Tonya had the most teaching experience of the four focal teachers, with 26 years of service all at Kennedy Elementary. Tonya split her tenure almost evenly between 3rd and 4th grade. The year of the study, Tonya was in her second year of teaching 3rd grade again after spending more than a decade teaching 4th grade. In addition to her Elementary degree and certification, Tonya also completed a Master's degree in education and an ESL endorsement. Tonya decorated her third grade classroom with yellow smiley paraphernalia and, while crowded with desks and books, was bright and cheerful. Tonya followed the workshop model for literacy, and integrated technology into student independent work time. Tonya often expressed frustration about the expectations she felt pressured to meet during her language arts instruction for content, pacing, and technology use.

Julie was the third grade special education teacher who co-taught with a general education teacher in the same classroom. Julie's co-teacher, Annie, agreed to be included in data collection for all meetings and observations, but declined to be interviewed as part of this study.

Julie planned all of the language arts instruction for the classroom. Julie was in her 8th year of teaching, all at Kennedy, and in her first year co-teaching in third grade. Prior to the study year Julie had primarily co-taught in a fourth grade general education classroom. Julie was hired as a special education teacher and held a teaching certification in special education and as a Reading Specialist. Julie had ambitious plans for her literacy instruction but expressed feelings of being constrained by the curriculum. Julie often disagreed with the literacy coach during grade level meetings about how teachers should structure their lessons and the pressure to keep pace with the curriculum map. Julie was also vocal about her skepticism of the workshop model and believed her students needed more guidance and were not benefitting from long stretches of class time doing independent work. However, Julie's literacy block followed the components of a workshop model, if in structure only. Julie relied on mini lessons and guided reading or skills review during small groups time with students reading leveled texts.

Antonio taught the bilingual class in third grade. Antonio held a bilingual certificate for elementary teaching and was in his 12th year at Kennedy. Prior to teaching at Kennedy, Antonio had taught for many years in Mexico in both formal and informal settings. Antonio was a vocal member of the third grade team, but because he taught his class in both English and Spanish he generally followed a different plan than the other teachers in third grade. Antonio ran a warm, but strict classroom that somewhat followed the workshop model. However, instruction in his classroom relied on whole group reading, lecture, and skills practice.

School Literacy Leadership: Principal and Literacy Coach

During the year of the study, Jacob was in his third year as principal of Kennedy. Prior to this he was an Assistant Principal for three years and a Dean of Students in a Junior High for two

years in two suburban school districts. Before entering into administration, Jacob was a teacher in multiple grades in multiple schools, including Kennedy. He primarily taught upper elementary grades and eventually middle school math in the same district as Kennedy. In addition to his teaching degree, Jacob holds a Master's degree in Leadership and was pursuing a Ph.D. in Curriculum & Instruction during the time of the study. He also held endorsements in Social Studies and Math. In this school district all principals were given district-wide leadership responsibilities in different curricular areas. Jacob also served as the district's Literacy Director and was responsible for making decisions about literacy teaching and assessment. He also oversaw the work of the literacy coaches in the district and implementation of the workshop model and adopted curricular programs. Jacob stated that while he does not have a background in literacy he relies on experts at the school and research to guide his decision-making.

During the year of data collection, Marsha was in her second year as literacy coach at Kennedy. Marsha had spent 20 years of her teaching career teaching grades from kindergarten to third grade in a large urban district. She also served as a literacy coach and district literacy director for seven years until she retired from that school district. Jacob was familiar with Marsha's expertise as a coach and literacy leader and recruited her out of retirement to come to Kennedy to help implement the newly adopted literacy program and workshop model. In addition to holding an elementary teaching certification, Marsha also completed a Master's in Education, Master's in Leadership, and held several endorsements including Social Studies and Language Arts. Marsha main responsibilities the year of the study were to oversee the implementation of the literacy program and workshop model in all grades, conduct individual coaching sessions with teachers who requested her help, and instruct an accelerated book club

with students in upper grades. Marsha spent the bulk of her time in grade level meetings guiding teachers in planning literacy instruction.

Table 2 Participant Demographics

Participant*	Assignment at Kennedy	Additional Professional Duties at Kennedy	Years of Teaching Experience	Race	Gender
Natalie**	1 st grade co-teacher	1 st grade special-education co-teacher, PBIS team	7	White	F
Tiffany	1 st grade teacher	Writing core leader, ELA Curriculum Team	24	White	F
Monica	1 st grade teacher	Afterschool club	4	Latina	F
Dahlia**	1 st grade teacher	Math Curriculum Team	21	Latina	F
Adam^	1 st grade teacher	NA	12	Latino	M
Antonio^	3 rd grade teacher	NA	12	Latino	M
Tonya	3 rd grade teacher	ELA Curriculum Team	26	White	F
Julie**	3 rd grade co-teacher	3 rd grade special education co-teacher, PBIS team	8	White	F
Annie**	3 rd grade co-teacher	PBIS team	7	White	F
Marsha	Literacy Coach	Interventionist, Core reading leader	25	African American	F
Jacob	Principal	District Literacy Director	13	White	M

All names are pseudonyms **Co-teachers. ^Bilingual classroom.

Data Collection Methods

Observations

Direct observation provides a way of learning about participants' behavior within the context the behavior occurs (Maxwell, 2005). The classroom is a place that can be understood as how it defines literacy and ways of learning from instructional practices. Prolonged immersion within the classroom is necessary to understand the work of teachers and the intentional literacy-learning environment created by the teacher. Because I am interested in literacy instructional

practices within the context of implementation of the CCSS-ELA my primary observational time in the classroom was during the language arts instructional block. The language arts instructional block is defined as the scheduled time each day for reading, writing, listening, and speaking instruction for the general education class. This included whole group instruction, small group instruction, individual conferring with students, read alouds, and any other instructional practice initiated or arranged by the teacher in the classroom during this time.

I choose to observe all teachers during language arts instruction and then selected classrooms in each grade to conduct further, more in-depth observations. Targeting observations this way allowed me to develop rich descriptions of focal cases that can be compared within the grade level and across the two grades represented in this study. Observational field notes served as the primary form of data for classroom instruction. Field notes are important in that they preserve experiences as they happen, and help to move beyond description to interpretation (Heath & Street, 2008).

In addition to teachers' classrooms, I collected data at each grades' grade level team meetings. In recent decades teachers' professional communities have served as a way for teachers to plan for instruction, analyze student assessment data, and otherwise engage in professional learning activities with colleagues (Horn & Little, 2010). Observation in this context served to provide insight into teachers' sensemaking processes with respect to interpreting the CCSS-ELA into instructional practice while acting within a professional community. The literacy coach structured the meetings to serve as job-embedded professional development sessions and facilitated approximately half of the meetings I observed. Professional development in various forms can serve as a vehicle through which macro-level policy messages

about literacy can be transmitted to micro-level of implementers (i.e. the classroom teacher) (Little, 1993; Wixson & Yochum, 2004).

I hypothesized grade level team meetings are spaces where teachers engage in collective sensemaking (Coburn, 2001b) about the ways in which their instructional practice might adapt, adopt, integrate, or reject the standards in relation to their current teaching practices. Teachers at Kennedy Elementary met three times per week in grade level teams to collaborate and plan for instruction. I selected to only observe each team's one 70-minute weekly meeting because that was the meeting solely devoted to literacy instruction and the one attended by the literacy coach, at least at the beginning of the study.

I also conducted observations at literacy coach meetings, grade level data meetings, and district-wide professional development days. These meetings were held occasionally over the year and, while not central to my data collection, provided useful data for purposes of identifying broader messages about literacy teachers experienced, as well as triangulation of data. Field notes of meetings were collected and used to build understanding of the messages and ideas promoted about literacy standards, student achievement, and instruction. See Table 3 for a breakdown of observations.

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Table 3 Observation Breakdown by Participant

Participant	Assignment at Kennedy Elementary	Number of Team Meetings Observed	Number of Classroom Observations	Total Minutes Observed
Natalie**	1 st grade co-teacher	15	3	1290
Tiffany	1 st grade teacher	17	7	1745
Monica	1 st grade teacher	14	6	1310
Dahlia**	1 st grade teacher	17	3	1430
Adam^	1 st grade teacher	14	0	980
Antonio^	3 rd grade teacher	12	1	900
Tonya	3 rd grade teacher	12	6	1245
Julie**	3 rd grade co-teacher	12	4	1050
Annie**	3 rd grade co-teacher	10	4	910
Marsha	Literacy Coach	11	1	800

**Co-teachers. ^Bilingual classroom.

Table 4 Minutes Observed in Meetings

Meeting Type	Total Minutes Observed
1 st grade meetings	1190
3 rd grade meetings	770
Coaches' meetings	360
Formal professional development-District	480
Grade level data meetings	330

Curriculum planning meetings	300
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Interviews

Interviews provide a narrative account of actors' experiences, ideas, attitudes and perspectives (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) on the intersection of literacy policy and instructional practice. The goal of interviewing was to seek understanding of teachers' point of view about literacy policy, literacy instruction and how they understand the role of literacy policy and its relationship to their classroom teaching practices.

To investigate teacher sensemaking (Spillane, Reiser, et al., 2002; Weick, 1995) about literacy policy as it moves into instructional practice I needed to understand teachers' perspective on the new literacy standards and what it means to each of them for practice. I conducted one initial formal structured interview using the same questions, but due to variations in participants' responses, ranged from 35 to 70 minutes. I had two purposes in conducting the initial interview. First, I wanted to establish an understanding of teachers' perspectives and attitudes toward the CCSS and how teachers' practice is potentially impacted by policy (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006). Second, the initial interview was the site to collect background data on teachers including their teaching history, formal teacher education, professional development history, philosophy toward teaching literacy, self efficacy as a literacy teacher and general attitudes, beliefs and perceptions about education policy and literacy teaching (see Appendix A for interview protocol). In addition to the initial interview, focal teachers were interviewed at the end of the study. These interviews lasted between 35-80 minutes. See Table 5 for breakdown of interviews by participants.

In addition to the initial formal interview, over the course of the study I conducted informal interviews after each classroom observation, after observing meetings, and – still more

informally – when participants had a moment to talk with me during my visits. During these informal interviews, I probed for information about events I had observed and for which I wanted further insight or clarification. Consistent with the fast paced and time-crunched life of a classroom teacher, these interviews often lasted only a few minutes and were spaced over transition times in the classroom – while escorting students to the gymnasium, waiting for children in the hallway during their restroom break, or rushing out to the playground to pick up students after recess. Informal interviews and conversations were recorded as field notes as soon as I had the opportunity after the conversation.

To provide critical context about the institutional messages and organizational environment in which teachers work, I conducted interviews with the literacy coach and school principal. Literacy coaches often are charged with transmitting and transforming institutional messages and ideas through their role as providers of professional development and instructional coaching (Woulfin, 2014). They can also serve as an influential social force depending on the coach's relationship with classroom teachers. For my case study I conducted one formal initial interview and several informal interviews with the school's literacy coach in order to develop an understanding of the literacy environment and intended trajectory for instruction. The formal interview attended to the coach's background, professional training, experiences teaching at Kennedy, sources for ongoing professional learning, roles within the school and district, awareness and connection to the CCSS-ELA as well as other literacy policies present in the school or district (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012). Consistent with teacher interviews, I audio recorded and transcribed the formal interview but recorded informal interviews as field notes as soon as possible after these conversations.

I interviewed the school principal to gain further contextual depth in understanding the school environment, professional stance toward literacy policy and instructional practice, and implementation of the new literacy standards (Coburn, 2005b). The principal of Kennedy Elementary also serves as the Director of Literacy for the district, has spearheaded the literacy agenda for the district, and was a potential source of influence on teacher sensemaking. The principal was formally interviewed one time for 120 minutes. This interview was audio recorded and transcribed. As with the teachers and the coach, I had many informal conversations with the principal over the year and these were recorded as field notes as soon as possible after each conversation.

Table 5 Participant Interviews in Minutes

Participant	Initial Interview	Final Interview	Total Minutes
Natalie	40	60	100
Tiffany	70	70	140
Monica	35	60	95
Dahlia	60	60	120
Antonio	60	NA	60
Tonya	70	80	150
Julie	45	60	105
Marsha (Literacy Coach)	45	NA	45
Jacob (principal)	120	NA	120

Documents and Artifacts

Written documents and artifacts were collected for three units of analysis: school, grade level team, and individual teachers. Documents and artifacts as key data for the school include those that pertain to school or district wide goals for literacy teaching and learning. These include, but are not limited to curricular materials, photographs of the classroom environment, lesson plans, and standards documents. These data provided information on the overall literacy goals and priorities for the school, grade level teams, and individual teachers. Data specific to instructional planning provided insight into what teachers prioritized and selected for instruction.

Data Interpretation and Analysis

To answer my research questions, I applied qualitative data analysis techniques that were both inductive and ongoing. I used constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to identify emerging themes. My analysis focused on data collected through observations of meetings and classroom practice, participant interviews, and classroom documents to develop themes on teacher sensemaking, and also focused on individuals to examine how their understanding of literacy standards and instruction developed in response to policy messages. I aligned data sources with each other, such as comparing observation field notes with interviews of teachers as well as with field notes and interviews with school leadership to identify supporting and/or confounding evidence of themes. Data sources were examined in relation to each research question and theoretical framework of sensemaking. See Table 6 for details.

Table 6 Research Questions with Corresponding Data Sources and Triangulation Methods

Research Questions	Data Sources	Triangulation
1. How do standards, organizational structures, and other mechanisms influence teacher sensemaking?	Interview data, grade level meeting data, lesson plans, classroom observation data, classroom artifacts data	Researcher's memos, researcher qualitative coding, observational field notes
2. In what ways does teachers' sensemaking influence instructional practices?	Interview data, grade level meeting data, lesson plans, class room observation data, classroom artifacts data, grade level data meeting observation data, professional development observation data	Researcher's memos, researcher qualitative coding, observational field notes

Constant Comparative Analysis

In my case study, I drew primarily on the theoretical construct of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) with a framework for education reform implementation (Spillane, Reiser, et al., 2002) to uncover patterns of ideas and behaviors of teachers as they interpret policy messages from various sources into classroom practice. I used constant comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) as a way of deriving theory from data. Constant-comparative analysis is an inductive and ongoing method that provides a way of deriving theory that is grounded in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Constant comparative analysis allows the researcher to constantly interact with the data by asking questions and making comparisons that lead to theory development that is rooted in the data. This method of analysis gives the researcher a way to build theory rather than test an established theory. For example, previous research suggests teachers are influenced by a variety of factors as they make sense of policy such as institutional messages from administration, their colleagues, and curricular materials (Coburn, 2001b, 2005b; Spillane, 1999;

Spillane & Jennings, 1997). My research sought to describe sensemaking as teachers interact with literacy standards and enact them in classroom instruction. Constant-comparative analysis aligns with case study design in that descriptive case studies can be ideal for building theory and has been used specifically in other research investigating the intersection of policy and classroom practice (Coburn, 2001b; Coburn & Woulfin, 2012; Jennings, 1996).

I applied systematic coding of the data to derive larger conceptual themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and refined them with subsequent passes through the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Constant-comparative method of analysis allows the researcher to establish coding procedures and categories early in the data collection process and then confirm these categories and codes as data collection and analysis continues. In this way, data collection and analysis are recursive and serve to constantly inform the other. Additionally, constant-comparative method provides the researcher with ways to identify disconfirming data, which serves to further theory development (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

I approached data analysis in three phases. Phase I focused on cataloguing and summarizing data as they were collected. As I progressed with data collection I systematically catalogued and summarized data type, topic, source, and duration using an Excel file to aid in quick reference to a record in the entire corpus of data. This also allowed me to have access to the scope of what data had been collected and what additional data was needed in each category.

Phase II also occurred during data collection. As I conducted interviews and observations I transcribed interviews and transferred field notes to NVivo, a computer software program for qualitative research. In doing this I reread these texts and conducted initial open coding to identify topics addressed, preliminary categories, and theoretical links to my organizing

framework of sensemaking. During this phase, codes applied to the data were primarily descriptive. Examples of some descriptive codes include “assessment”, ‘leveled texts”, and “student achievement.” Throughout this phase I wrote analytic memos to summarize the data and record what I saw as possible emergent themes. For example, one memo I wrote pertained to how leveled texts dominated the ways teachers in first grade thought about reading instruction.

The example below of a memo and the accompanying data sources assisted in developing the codes *usefulness of benchmark assessments*, *teacher agency and instruction*, and *impact on students*. Lines 3-4 summarize first grade teachers’ perception of a usefulness of the leveled text benchmark assessment.

Jacob (principal) spoke at great length about his strong belief that appropriate instruction begins with teaching children to read according to their ‘instructional level’ as determined by Fountas & Pinnell assessments. First grade teachers reported they found the assessments useful as an indicator of decoding.

Teachers believed benchmark assessments had a role in their work with students, but as lines 4-9 illustrate, teachers took action to deviate from the testing protocol because the criteria for success on the assessment did not align with their standards for comprehension.

But they also said that they distrusted the comprehension section of the assessment felt it was not rigorous enough. To counter this, teachers in first grade reported using what they considered a more rigorous, though informal, scoring system to assess comprehension and often placed children into lower reading levels. In sum, teachers said they would use their own judgment to determine if the students really comprehended the texts. Teachers would say things like the test was “too basic” and they “expect more” of their students.

Teachers explained this practice as a way of holding high expectations for students. They would make comments like, “She can read, but I don’t think she’s really ready for the next level” and “The only reason he did so well on that level was because it was about hurricanes and we just talked about hurricanes the other day. That book was all about hurricanes and if we didn’t do it, he wouldn’t know.”

Lines 16-21 reveal the consequences for students from teachers’ decision to hold them to higher expectations on these assessments.

While high expectations are a good thing, teachers used the lower reading levels to determine which texts they should offer to students and which texts they used for small group instruction. Teachers constrain the range of texts that children can choose from, limiting choice to those that are in or near their level. In this way teachers are limiting children’s exposure to a more wide range of texts with more challenging vocabulary and range of topics (Memo, 4/14/15).

The initial phase of coding of the entire data set generated 113 codes. I printed these codes and sorted based on what I determined to be thematic similarities. This process resulted in needing to return to the data to more fully understand the context in which these codes emanated. In so doing, I revised and added detail to these codes until I was able to confidently combine them into 43 categorical codes. For example, the codes *usefulness of benchmark assessments*, *teacher agency and instruction*, and *impact on students*. were sorted into the category of *leveled text as mechanism that shapes instruction*.

Finally, in Phase III, which was the most time consuming and recursive, I focused on teachers talk in observed meetings. Because sensemaking can be a social (Weick et al., 2005)

and collective process (Coburn, 2001b) I wanted to examine teachers' talk as they worked with their grade level peers. I organized the observation field note data of grade level meetings using four broad categories for sensemaking based on the dominant trends in my overall coding: Assessment, Instruction, Curricular Programs, and Standards. I created frequency figures to identify which categories dominated teacher talk as they worked with their peers. See Figure 2 for frequency counts by grade level and Figure 3 for breakdown of percentages. From this information I was able to focus on teacher data and make links back to data from leadership policy messages and also to individual teacher-level data (i.e. classroom observations and interviews). I organized these data using the analytical tool of frames, cues, and connections to identify and confirm major findings of the study. See Table 7 Example of Data Organized by Frame, Cues, and Connections for 1st Grade for an example of data organized by frames, cues, and connections.

Figure 2 Number of Grade Level Meetings in which Teachers Discussed Topics

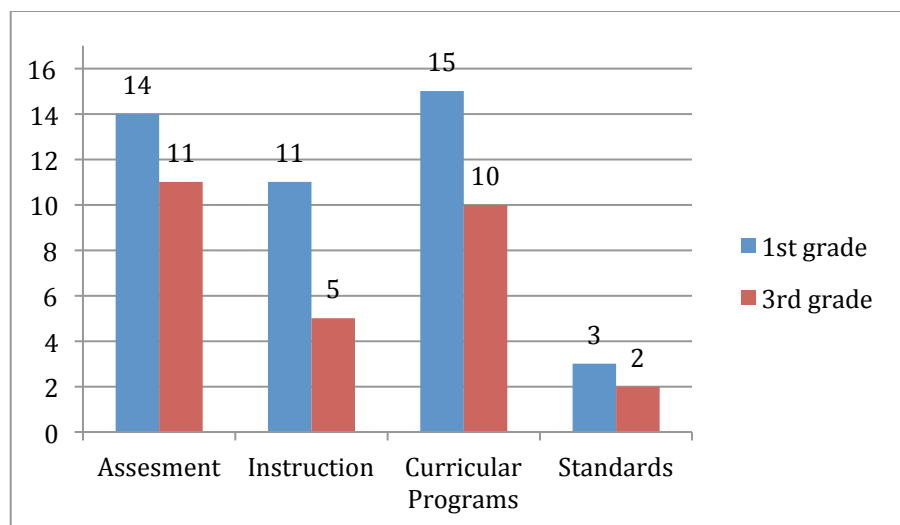


Figure 3 Percentages of Grade Level Meetings in which Teachers Discussed Topics

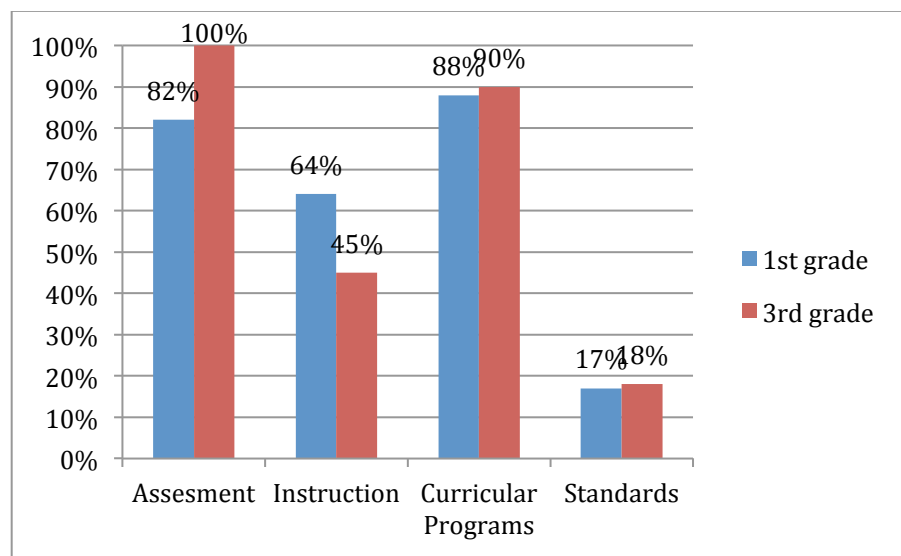


Table 7 Example of Data Organized by Frame, Cues, and Connections for 1st Grade

<p style="text-align: center;">Frame</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Assessment</u></p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Cues</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Expectation to meet reading level benchmark in F&P</u></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Connections</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Reading achievement is measured in levels</u></p>
<p>“I think we have to get kids to a certain level in their reading ability and then add [comprehension] strategies on top of that. I think it's so difficult to ask kids who are reading one or two levels below their grade level to now read at grade level and then apply strategies to that. We have to first get them to a high level of reading ability before we can tackle some of that critical thinking. But we aren't there yet.” ~Principal, Interview, April 7, 2015</p> <p>“I believe data should be shared publicly. During my first two years here I knew the average F&P score for every classroom and I'd share that with parents and show them the trend of the school. That was extremely motivating [for teachers].”~Principal, Interview, April 7, 2015</p>	<p>The year went well. I had higher expectations, so I didn't really meet my own expectations of what I wanted to accomplish this year. I really thought I'd get their reading levels higher across the board, but there were things that got in the way like attendance issues. ~Interview Tiffany, 1st grade teacher, June 2015</p> <p>The kids really grew in reading levels. All of them grew a significant amount, by my standards. By school standards, maybe not as much. My low guys started out low and they stayed kind of low, but they still grew. I've seen each of them grow and improve. ~ Interview Monica, 1st grade teacher, June 2015</p> <p>I've got one boy who is an A or sub-A reader and he's...it's like he almost didn't even go to kindergarten. It's almost like he's a brand new student. He's at a whole different stage than everybody else, so it's like he's holding us back. It's something I'm struggling with. I don't know how to handle it. I know I can't get mad at him, it's not his fault, but I want to keep going and we have to keep moving or we are going to farther behind.~Interview Tiffany, 1st grade teacher, June, 2015</p>

Positionality

It is important to acknowledge and explain my position as the researcher in this study. As a former primary grades teacher myself who taught during the induction years of No Child Left Behind and worked in a Reading First grantee school, I acknowledge that my personal experiences and biases may have contributed to how I chose to capture and interpret data through memos and field notes. I chose to use ethnographic methods for this case study with extensive time in the different contexts outlined in this chapter. However, no amount of time and similar experiences of my own could have transformed me into a true insider. I took on this study knowing that I could never tell the stories of the Kennedy teachers from a neutral point of view. I tried to remain objective, but acknowledge that all findings must be viewed as interpreted by a researcher who has shared some of the same experiences as the teachers in this study.

Overall, the teachers and other staff members of Kennedy welcomed me into their classrooms, meetings, and in some cases their personal lives. Initially, when I met with the teachers in a group to recruit them for the study, they asked in return for their participation that I follow their classroom Facebook pages and “Like” their posts. At the time, they explained that they were under pressure from the administration to frequently post class updates on Facebook and were publicly praised by the administration if their posts received many “Likes”. I agreed to their request. Eventually, Tiffany and Dahlia personally “Friended” me on Facebook where we occasionally shared casual conversations about our personal lives.

Perhaps because of the time I spent with them, perhaps because of the similarities in our experiences, or perhaps because I was someone who listened and wanted to know their stories, the teachers in my study were extremely generous with their time and willingness to be candid.

Several times, teachers shared details and opinions about their experience working in a high-pressure environment that could potentially put them in ill favor with the administrator. Each time I asked if they would like me to erase or ignore that part of the conversation but they always wanted their full statements included. On several occasions teachers told me they wanted the truth to come out; wanted others to know what it was like to do the work they do with such dedication and devotion, while feeling like they were always being told to do more. Because they were so welcoming, open, and generous with sharing their experiences with me I feel it is my obligation to tell the stories of these teachers as faithfully, and to the best of my ability, as possible.

CHAPTER 4: WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT STANDARDS

This chapter addresses my research questions concerning the ways standards, organizational structures, and mechanisms influence teacher sensemaking and how that sensemaking influences classroom instruction. Data collection occurred in 2014-2015, the year full implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) was required in the state in which this study occurred. The standards established ambitious expectations for literacy instruction, demonstrating a shift from the previous dominant federal policy environment that came to embody a basic skills approach to reading and writing (i.e. No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). The Common Core writers describe the standards as a ‘vision of what it means to be a literate person in the twenty-first century’ (National Governors Association, 2010). This vision includes a literate person who is a critical, attentive reader of complex literature. The introduction to the CCSS-ELA describes literate students as follows:

Students who meet the Standards readily undertake the close, attentive reading that is at the heart of understanding and enjoying complex works of literature. They habitually perform the critical reading necessary to pick carefully through the staggering amount of information available today in print and digitally. They actively seek the wide, deep, and thoughtful engagement with high-quality literary and informational texts that builds knowledge, enlarges experience, and broadens worldviews. They reflexively demonstrate the cogent reasoning and use of evidence that is essential to both private deliberation and responsible citizenship in a democratic republic. In short, students who meet the Standards develop the skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening that are the foundation for any creative and purposeful expression in language.” (National Governors

Association, 2010)

However, standards are just one of the many mechanisms that influence teachers as they construct understanding of about the work they do with children in their classrooms. There are other, competing factors that influence what is valued, expected, and what occurs in schools with respect to literacy teaching and learning. As such, results of this study suggest that standards are something teachers and administrators consider as one tool to guide instruction and assessment. But, for the teachers participating in this study, standards were not a major lever to impact how teachers talked about and planned for classroom instruction. The teachers in this study demonstrated that standards essentially fall to the background while district-wide adopted curricular programs and assessment moved to the forefront of what they drew upon to make sense of their work in classrooms. Despite the rhetoric in the district and school of the importance of the new standards, the teachers responded to cues from the environment that activated pre-existing frames through which they made sense of what they were expected to emphasize during literacy instruction and what constituted success on the part of their students.

Specifically, teachers experienced pressure in their immediate and distal environments to adhere to packaged curricular programs and assessment benchmarks, despite the sometimes-contradictory rhetoric of the importance of Common Core. Although teachers at Kennedy Elementary were told they had the authority and freedom to decide how best to teach their students, implicit and direct pressure to adhere to the curricular program and assessment benchmarks overpowered their autonomy in instruction. Despite CCSS being mandated for full implementation the year of the study, third grade facing a new statewide assessment (i.e. the PARCC) aligned to those standards, and teachers' and the principal's expression of positive

attitudes toward the new standards, other immediate demands took precedent over deep exploration and integration of the new standards into existing classroom structures.

The following section explicates ways teachers at Kennedy Elementary were influenced by standards, organizational structures, and other mechanisms as they make sense of literacy instructional practices and in what ways this sensemaking influences classroom practices.

Analysis suggests teachers' sensemaking at Kennedy Elementary was influenced by messages at the school level that emphasized curricular programs and assessment. These messages activated frames through which teachers interpreted messages to create understanding of expectations for literacy teaching and learning. Analysis also found that the principal was a key influence in activating the frames through which teachers constructed understanding of policy messages. The principal, in his role as school leader and, ultimately, evaluator of teachers' work, stressed programs and assessments as immediate concern to student achievement. Consequently, the standards that purported to be levers of instructional change were not highlighted as a guiding document for teachers and were not able to compete with the messages related to programs and assessments.

Influences on Sensemaking

To address the first research question, *How do standards, organizational structures, and other mechanisms influence teacher sensemaking?* Primary data sources analyzed to answer this question were participant interview data, grade level meeting data, and grade level data meeting observation data. Secondary data used to triangulate findings were classroom observation data, professional development data, researcher memos, and observation field notes. I draw on Sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005) and the codes and categories that pointed

to how teachers understood their work as situated in a time when they are expected to meet the demands of literacy teaching and learning as conceptualized by the CCSS-ELA. Sensemaking involves taking circumstances and understanding them in a way that results in a springboard for action (Weick, Sutcliff, et al 2005, p.409). Therefore, sensemaking is a useful lens through which to explore the ways teachers come to construct meaning of standards that are expected to spark change in teaching. In my study, implementation of the CCSS-ELA serves as a heuristic to understand the ways broad policies that intend have large impacts are understood and influence teachers and the work they do.

Teacher Understanding of the Common Core State Standards

As discussed in Chapter 3, Kennedy Elementary was a typical in many ways. It was situated in an urban collar community, had a considerable percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch, a sizeable number of students whose first language is not English, and struggled with achievement as measured on state standardized assessments. Kennedy also was in the second year of school wide implementation of a new core curricular program (Calkins, 1986) following a pacing plan. In addition to this, teachers were required to use other purchased literacy programs for phonemic awareness (in the first grade classrooms observed), phonics, spelling, two digital libraries for independent reading, and a reading assessment program with predetermined benchmarks (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010).

Much criticism has been hurled at the CCSS as being an unfunded initiative that assumes schools and teachers will build their knowledge of the standards in ways they best saw fit. Like many schools, Kennedy Elementary did not participate in any structured or ongoing professional development devoted to working with or understanding the standards. To understand what

teachers' knowledge and understanding was of the CCSS-ELA I explicitly asked teachers during formal interviews (N=7) what professional development they experienced and also what their general thoughts were about the standards. When asked to recall any professional development activities, meetings, or other conversations about the CCSS-ELA in which they participated, teachers reported with broad recollections of introductory work with the standards. Research suggests policies that attempt to achieve changes in practice will not be successful or sustainable when not accompanied by organized and sustained learning (McGill-Franzen et al., 2002; Raphael, 2009; Raphael, Au, & Goldman, 2009; Wixson & Yochum, 2004).

All teachers at Kennedy reported involvement in learning about the CCSS. When probed regarding the amount and depth of professional learning they experienced, none of the teachers recalled more than one event. When describing the professional learning they experienced, six of the seven teachers I interviewed were dissatisfied with the content or depth of information shared with them about the standards. Next, I share four examples that characterize teachers' recollections of the learning in which they engaged. The first three examples are from veteran teachers whose statements suggest disappointment with what they've experienced in using or understanding the standards. These three quotes exemplify the weak impact of the learning experiences they experienced thus far with the standards and an implied desire to engage in work with the standards they find applicable and meaningful to their work. The fourth example is from Monica who was in her fourth year of teaching and her first at Kennedy. Monica's recollection of the content and experience of professional learning about the standards is much more positive than her colleagues.

Dahlia, (first grade) initially did not recall any professional development or guidance with the standards in recent years when asked during an interview. Later, however, she

remembered attending a reading conference with the principal and two other teachers previous school year. Her memory of the conference was that it focused on the standards, but that it did not have lasting impact on her thinking or practice. In Dahlia's statement about her experience at the conference she expressed feelings of being presented with information and examples of how to implement teaching based on the goals of the standards. What Dahlia did not recall was active engagement with the standards to promote ownership of the work. Instead, as this excerpt from her interview details, what Dahlia recalls, or how she remembers the event, was as information she was being given by others who had already done the work of making sense of the standards.

I just remembered I went to a Common Core reading conference last year. It was about reading and understanding components of the CCSS. I thought it was hard. They broke it up into so many pieces and I didn't get that. They broke it down by Kinder, 1st, and 2nd so you could see where they overlapped, where they were going, where there was a gap, and it was just a lot of information. We didn't go through every standard, but we did talk about examples of how to meet those standards. They gave us practical examples of what it would look like in my class, but it didn't really make sense to me they way they did it. I remember question stems and how they wanted us to use those to have kids come up with a question that was related to what they were reading. I have no idea what I did with that and I don't think I ever did it. (Dahlia, Initial Interview, 11/18/14)

In Dahlia's statement about her experience at the conference she expressed feelings of being presented with information and examples of how to implement teaching based on the goals of the standards. What Dahlia did not recall was active engagement with the standards to promote ownership of the work. Instead, as this excerpt from her interview details, what Dahlia recalls, or how she remembers the event, was as information she was being given by others who

had already done the work of making sense of the standards (lines 2-3 and 6-8). Further, the way Dahlia retrospectively expresses her understanding of the conference, she implies the weak effects it had on her by explaining that she did not integrate the experiences of the conference into her classroom practice (lines 9-10).

Tonya (third grade) also recalled an instance of attending an optional professional development workshop facilitated by the school's reading coach, Marsha, during an all-district institute day the previous year. Institute days in this district were structured so teachers had a variety of professional development workshops to attend based on their own interests; much like a conference is structured. Although Tonya chose to attend a workshop on the CCSS-ELA, it did not appear to have strong impact on her and suggests the information and activities provided did not assist in deepening her understanding of the standards. Like Dahlia, Tonya recalled a superficial overview of the standards and weak impact on her as a literacy teacher.

I think this was an institute day last year and Marsha started to walk us through the CCSS. We were just starting to look at the ELA standards then. She just pointed out what the standards were and she probably gave us a few examples, but I have a poor memory and I don't really remember. (Tonya, Initial Interview, 11/20/14)

Much like Dahlia, Tonya has weak recollection of the details of the workshop she attended facilitated by the school's literacy coach (lines 3 and 4). Her memory of the event included that it was introductory (line 1) and similar to Dahlia's experience, structured as a transmission model with presentation of information (lines 2 and 3). Her recall of the workshop does not suggest transformation of knowledge or practice.

Tiffany (first grade) recalled participating in a book club as part of a summer professional development activity offered through the district. As evident from this quote, the experience did not leave Tiffany feeling as if she gained a deeper understanding of the standards or how they should shape instruction in her classroom.

We had that book...it was a book club kind of a thing. I can't think of the name of the book and don't see it on my shelf... I think Lucy Calkins was involved in writing it. I got it and read it on my own because I thought it would help explain the standards more. The district had a PD about it and we were highly encouraged to attend over the summer. It wasn't mandatory, but it was kind of expected. But I didn't feel like [the PD] did much to explain...you were told and shown how [the CCSS-ELA] builds...ok, fine. I don't feel like I ever had any great PD on it. (Tiffany, Initial Interview, 11/6/14).

Unlike the conference or workshop attended by Dahlia and Tonya, Tiffany's experience attempting to gain deeper understanding of the CCSS seemed to have greater potential to offer more opportunities for teachers to construct their understanding through dialogue as often happens in a book club or other collective learning space (line 1) (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996; Raphael & McMahon, 1994). However, much like her colleagues' experiences, this context for learning was not dialogic. Nor did it provide teachers the chance to engage in thoughtful work with the standards. Instead, the experience left Tiffany feeling like she was "told and shown" what the standards mean (lines 5-6).

Dahlia, Tonya, and Tiffany were able to recall that they had been exposed to the CCSS-ELA through organized professional learning, but none expressed that they felt a greater understanding of the standards because of these events. Only Monica reported that the activity in

which she participated about the CCSS helped her understand or work with the standards better. Monica (first grade), a new teacher to the district, and in her fourth year of teaching, positively recalled an optional professional development session she attended during the summer facilitated by Marsha, Kennedy's literacy coach.

Marsha gave us [a summer PD] on unpacking the CCSS that I really liked. That made so much sense. First we took the anchor standards. Those are the ones that stretch across all grades, right? We organized them by Bloom's taxonomy levels to understand what we were doing and where. Then we looked at the progression of how those standards looked over the years. So, it was developing the core understanding of what they were supposed to be doing. It was really helpful. How the standards relate to each other was really helpful. It made sense. Instead of something being thrown at us like, here you go teach these standards, I finally understand why these were created. (Monica, Initial Interview, 11/14/14)

The content of this session is similar to the session Tonya described, but Monica's experience was more positive than Tonya's. The way she recalled the session indicates she felt like an active participant in constructing her understanding of the standards and how they fit into the larger progression through the grades. Throughout this statement Monica used the pronoun "we" (lines 2, 3, and 4) to talk about her work in the PD, suggesting she was invested in the work and how the work was directly applicable to the goals she would set for her students (lines 5-6). Monica's retrospective account of the standards suggests she felt some ownership of the work she was expected to accomplish with her students and did not see implementation of the standards as a top-down mandate and a list of compliance tasks to which she must attend.

While the teachers in this study did not recall much in the way of learning about the standards, most expressed positive attitudes toward the standards. This is important because research has revealed that resistance has shown to be a barrier when attempting to implement new initiatives (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Eisenhart, Cuthbert, Shrum, & Harding, 1988; Payne, 2008). The first and third grade teachers, principal, and literacy coach at Kennedy all reported optimism toward the CCSS-ELA and the potential they held for more rigorous and cognitively demanding approaches to literacy teaching and learning. Many participants expressed their desire for the standards to push students to engage in deeper learning and move away from the skills based approach of the previous policy era of NCLB. Next I share three examples of typical responses from teachers and the principal at Kennedy of their attitude toward the CCSS-ELA.

Dahlia and Monica (both first grade) believed the CCSS-ELA pushed their students beyond basic skills and sought to break the boundaries of what is often thought possible from young learners (Dahlia lines 2 & 3; Monica line 1). Monica also appreciated that the standards aligned across states and would increase teacher dialogue and collaboration on a broader scale (Monica lines 4-6).

I like [the standards] because I think it's amazing how these kids can do what they can do at their age. I like the fact that they are challenging. It's makes me feel good when we've taught something and the kids get it and I'm thinking wow, you guys are little and you can do that. That makes me feel great. We just have to push them, you know? (Dahlia, Initial Interview, 11/18/14)

I think it's great that the expectations are so high. They are getting higher and higher. I think it's great that there is more unification now, especially between the states, because everyone had such different experiences and different opinions about what kids can and can't do but now we should all be speaking the same language [with respect to learning]. I think it's going to increase collaboration a lot. It's helping us be able to talk to other teachers around the country about [instruction]. (Monica, Initial Interview, 11/14/14)

Kennedy's principal also expressed positive views about the standards and believed it had potential to push teaching to deeper levels and prepare students for complex thinking as adults (lines 1-3).

I love the CCSS. I think that it really pushes us to teach at a deeper level and to focus our goals on more realistic views of how we as adults think and what we need to do to accomplish a successful schooling and college experience. I'm a big cheerleader of the CCSS...And so to have standards set upon our profession, it will be and has been a tough process but I think they make sense. (Jacob, Initial Interview, 4/7/15)

Two teachers, however, saw the standards as a positive change but were also skeptical that with the public and media backlash against the CCSS, the lack of funding to support implementation, and the pressure attached to the associated assessments would make the initiative unsustainable. Tiffany, a veteran teacher who has experienced many waves of change over her career expressed her concern over the new standards and the associated programs and assessments.

I have mixed feelings about it. It's really sad; I'm going to be totally honest... I love, love, love the idea that it is common across the country that we are teaching the same

things, that the expectations are the same. If only the funding could back that up and be the same. I'm not completely 100% dissatisfied with it, and a lot of what they are asking us to do we've been doing, so I'm fine with that. So, I'm kind of caught and I'm still trying to figure out what I don't like. If I don't like the standard itself or if I don't like what we've been given to teach it and then assess it. (Tiffany, Initial Interview, 11/6/14)

Tonya (third grade), another veteran teacher who also experienced many waves of reform during her tenure, felt the standards created new pressures on teachers and students. Like Tiffany, Tonya felt that the associated programs and assessments overwhelmed the intent for learning outcomes of the standards.

I understand the need to have standards. That's just a given. I really just feel that some of it is demanding a lot. Just looking at the writing alone and some of the reading, I don't know if the kids are at that stage with their thinking. And I have high expectations, I really do, but when you have to be measured against them and everything is based on that, that's the part that I wish wasn't there. Let us teach and help the kids grow. I don't hate the standards. I know we have to have expectations, I just wish they were a little more realistic for what [each kid needs]. (Tonya, Initial Interview, 11/20/14)

Kennedy's principal and teachers' views on the CCSS-ELA suggest that they see the standards as something with the potential to positively impact literacy instruction, but also as a tool they are expected to use to guide their teaching. Teachers are also aware of the national and local attention paid to these particular standards and implications for accountability assessments aligned to the standards. Despite this, standards were not something teachers greatly used to guide their reading and writing instructional planning. Instead, teachers tended to look to the

curricular program and pacing guide and the associated assessments to make sense of literacy teaching and learning expectations.

Examination of teachers' experience, broad understanding, and attitudes about the standards suggests that first and third grade teachers at Kennedy had some exposure to the standards and a general conceptualization of the intent of the documents. Overall, teachers in the study held positive opinions about the CCSS-ELA and the potential held for pushing student learning to greater depth. However, as the next section details, the messages of these standards were not able to permeate the messages teachers encountered about more immediate concerns at the local level about curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

“It’s More About the Program”

Although the year of the study was the first for mandated implementation of the CCSS and administration of the standards-aligned PARCC assessment in grades 3 and up, standards were not at the forefront of literacy messages at Kennedy Elementary. In this section I present data from leadership and teacher interviews, grade level meetings, and grade level data meetings to illustrate the ways programs and assessments were brought to the foreground in environmental messages teachers experienced at Kennedy. With this analysis I argue that the data indicate teachers were not afforded the cognitive space or indication of urgency as was with the adopted curricular program and reading level assessments. Despite having generally positive attitudes toward the CCSS-ELA and some level of exposure to the organization and goals of the standards, teachers experienced an abundance of messages and pressures to adhere to the instructional program and meet reading level benchmark assessment targets and therefore had little time or space to consider the standards that purported to guide the work they were doing to

prepare students to be college and career ready at the culmination of their K-12 schooling. What follows is a presentation of the data that suggests these conclusions.

Organizational Emphasis on Literacy

All grades level teams at Kennedy Elementary had a 70-minute protected planning meeting each week devoted to literacy. In addition to this meeting all grades also had two 35-minute weekly grade level meetings for math and general planning. Jacob, the principal, arranged the schedule this way so teachers would have opportunities to collaborate with their peers and be supported by Marsha, the literacy coach. In an interview Jacob explained that the intended goal of these meetings was for teachers to collaboratively examine student work and base their instructional planning on the needs of students (lines 1-3).

My goal is [for teachers] to look at student work and see what students are able to produce and focus on student learning rather than teacher doing. I think a lot of the time is spent on 'what are you doing? What is your lesson going to look like?' and not necessarily students. With the addition of the literacy coach last year I really wanted a strong focus on literacy during those meetings. That has been a challenge. I think there is a good level of collaboration going on in the classrooms, and teachers are aware of what is going on in each other's classrooms, but there can be more. As we shift to standards based grading we will really be looking at what students are doing, but we aren't there yet. (Jacob, Initial Interview, 4/7/15)

This goal, however, seemed to contradict how the literacy coach understood the purpose of those meetings and her role in them. Marsha, the literacy coach, stated her primary role was to assist implementation of the curricular program and help teachers understand how to plan for and

deliver the model (lines 1-6). Observations of grade level meetings found that student work was facilitated and examined once during first grade meetings with guidance from the coach and not at all during observed third grade meetings. Instead meetings were dominated by discussion of the curricular program and the demands of assessments. Teachers were required to collectively plan using a lesson-planning template. The template centered on the unit of study and reading and writing skills and strategies emphasized in the curricular program. Marsha explained her understanding of the grade level meetings and the lesson-planning template (See Appendix B) during an interview. Her understanding of the purpose of the template was to align content and pacing of lessons across classrooms.

I think the rationale for [the template] was to make sure there was some coherence across the grade level in what was taught. Jacob was seeing how inconsistent that was and wanted something documented that he could refer to in terms of his own observations. My focus is the unit [in Lucy Calkins] and then the standards and essential questions are laid out on it. For ELA, the requirement is that the standard is on [the template]. The template itself becomes the agenda for those meetings. We plan according to the template. I always start with asking them if they had any questions from the current week with what we planned and what do you think needs to be carried over and why.
(Marsha, Initial Interview, 11/7/14)

Not surprisingly, analysis of field note observations from grade level meetings revealed that the 70-minute grade level meetings had a program-centric focus as teachers worked to complete the lesson-planning template each week and turn it in to the principal. Teachers were under pressure from the administration to follow the curriculum map and adhere to an instructional sequence. Teachers needed to make sense of multiple cues from the literacy coach

and administration on what they were expected to accomplish in their meetings. All teachers revealed in initial interviews that they believed they were expected to use the curricular program and adhere to the curriculum map. Teachers confirmed the expectation from the principal to turn in the lesson plan template weekly with programs having primary status for those plans.

Standards, therefore, became a compliance component that teachers were expected to align to the existing curricular program. Tiffany's statement about programs and the superficial treatment of standard was typical of teachers at Kennedy. In explaining how she saw the standards fitting into her work, Tiffany responded with a compliance approach (lines 1-3) relying on the program to address the standards (lines 3-4, 5-7).

I use [the standards] because I have to write them into the lesson plan. That's pretty much it. I review them on occasion to see what we've done and what we haven't done just to make sure we are on track. But since these programs are just naturally aligned to what we do, especially in first grade it's really easy. Everything I you do is them following directions, them reading, them writing, it was just naturally part of what we do. The programs we are using are aligned so I really don't look at them. I just follow the programs. Is that terrible? It's what we are mandated to do. (Tiffany, Initial Interview, 11/6/14)

Dahlia expressed strong feelings of pressure to concentrate on following the curricular program and not having the freedom to teach with autonomy to meet the standards (lines 1-6).

I use the curriculum to help me, but I don't think we have the liberty to do what we think we need to do to meet the standards. We are supposed to follow what they tell us to do and make it work. Tie it all in, but we have to use Lucy. Although they say we can do

whatever we want, we really can't. With reading it's, 'Well what does Lucy say?' It's funny. I hear more that we have to follow Lucy Calkins instead of the CCSS. It's all reading, reading, reading, but it's more about the program. (Dahlia, Initial Interview, 11/18/14)

Julie's (third grade) statement in an informal interview captured the pressure teachers felt to adhere to the curricular program. Specifically, Julie relates the expectations of fidelity (lines 3-4) to the program as counterproductive to meeting the expectations of the standards. She also points out that she felt she did not have the freedom to deviate from the program even if it was to address standards that are not aligned to the program.

Lucy isn't aligned to the standards. She doesn't do all of the 'about the text' standards. Like, how the author wrote, or why they included certain things, or text features, or figurative language, or stuff like that. I think because people are so focused on following Lucy Calkins, we lose site of the bigger picture. All we hear is Lucy Calkins, Lucy Calkins, what lesson are you on? (Julie, Informal Interview, 1/16/15)

Analysis of interviews and field notes suggest that emphasis was placed on attending to the curricular program with little focus on the content of what to teach. Teachers and the coach characterize the main purpose of planning for and delivering instruction was to deliver the lessons and literacy components addressed in the program. Teachers expressed a compliance attitude and sense of powerlessness in deviating from the curricular plan. Standards fell to the background during planning. Additionally, although in an interview the principal suggested that data, in the form of student work, was his goal for teacher collaboration in grade level meetings,

teachers expressed feelings of pressure to plan for and document the ways they would implement the curricular program.

Organizational Context of Literacy Instruction at Kennedy

Field notes of classroom observations (N=28) revealed that all teachers participating in this study used the workshop model to organize their classrooms for literacy instruction. The workshop model implemented at Kennedy generally followed a balanced literacy approach that combined the phonetic skills of reading and mechanics of writing as well as more holistic approaches like reading authentic children's literature and writing for a variety of purposes. Analysis of weekly grade level lesson plans from first and third grade demonstrated teacher planning for a variety of learning activities during the literacy block using the adopted curricular program (i.e. Lucy Calkins Units of Study) as well as other adopted programs including Michael Heggerty Phonemic Awareness (Heggerty & VanHekken, 2003), Words Their Way (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2008), and Reading A-Z ("Reading A-Z," 2016). Field notes of classroom observations confirmed that literacy instruction in the classrooms included in this study all demonstrated attention to various components of balanced literacy including read alouds, shared reading and writing, word work, comprehension strategy instruction, guided reading, and independent reading using these programs. Students in first grade classrooms also engaged in literacy activities using computer tablets and third graders used laptop computers.

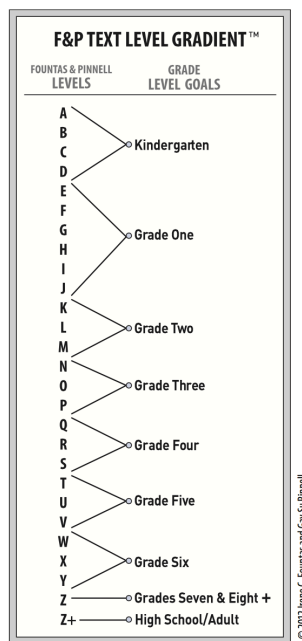
Analysis of classroom observations (N=28) field notes and memos (Dahlia & Natalie, 12/11/14, 4/21/15; Tiffany, 1/22/14, 4/20/15, 5/15/15; Monica, 3/5/15, 4/20/15, 5/7/15; Antonio, 4/13/15; Tonya, 4/13/15, 5/22/15; Julie, 1/16/15, 4/24/15) provided a way to take descriptions of the literacy blocks in different classrooms to compile a typical day at Kennedy for literacy

instruction. The structure of the daily literacy block followed the workshop model and consisted of a progression through several components. Typically teachers began with a mini-lesson where they modeled a skill or strategy often using the children's literature text from the read aloud. Next, students moved to independent reading where they independently read leveled texts, worked on writing, or completed word work on their tablets or laptops. During independent reading teachers pulled students for guided reading or intervention lessons in small groups. During guided reading teachers engaged students in a variety of activities including practice of high frequency word reading (first grade only), guided reading with leveled text, reading skills, and comprehension strategies. Guided reading was also a time when teachers would conduct running records with students to measure their reading progress (all classrooms). Typically, reading workshop concluded with a short session of student sharing of the work they did during independent time.

Typically, after the mini lesson most students would shift to independent work. However, as earlier described, during this time teachers would work with small groups of students usually on guided reading of leveled text. This portion of the reading block usually lasted between 30-40 minutes in each classroom and teachers usually saw between 2 and 3 groups of students for about approximately 12 minutes per group (field notes and memos, Dahlia & Natalie, 12/11/14, 4/21/15; Tiffany, 1/22/14, 4/20/15, 5/15/15; Monica, 3/5/15, 4/20/15, 5/7/15; Antonio, 4/13/15; Tonya, 4/13/15, 5/22/15; Julie, 1/16/15, 4/24/15). Some days, teachers would use this time to administer running records in order to monitor student progression through reading levels. The year of the study all teachers at Kennedy Elementary were required to use the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System three times per year as an official assessment for reading. Teachers were also required to turn in scores to the administration for these benchmark

assessments. In addition to these assessments teachers were required to conduct periodic progress monitoring with running records at least every two weeks with students who were reading on- or above-level and once every week with students reading below-level. According to The F&P Text Level Gradient (Fountas & Pinnell, 2014), students in first grade should progress through levels D-J over the course of the school year and levels N-P for third grade students (See Figure 2).

Figure 4 F&P Text Level Gradient (Fountas & Pinnell, 2014)



Reading of leveled texts has become an assumed practice in many elementary classrooms across the U.S. over recent years. Working under the assumption that beginning readers learn more efficiently when following a progressive sequence of difficulty, the practice of structuring and assessing reading along these progressions has become normalized in the elementary classroom. Many schools have taken lengths to purchase large collections of texts and organize them by gradient of levels in order to make easy selection and use of these texts for instruction. Additionally, publishers have caught on to the marketing power of leveled texts by issuing texts

specifically designed to fit specific levels as well as labeling existing trade books with levels corresponding to various leveling systems (e.g. Fountas & Pinnell, Lexile, etc.). A system of leveling and labeling texts theoretically allows for the teacher to easily match students' assessed reading ability to appropriate texts and result in instruction that is specifically designed to meet individual students' needs.

Leveled Text and Benchmark Assessments

During the year of the study, teachers at Kennedy were required to formally assess students' reading three times a year. Analysis of field notes from grade level meetings (N=28), teacher interviews (N=7), and data meetings (N=2) reveal that benchmark expectations were a prime mechanisms within the school that had influence on the ways teachers at Kennedy came to understand literacy teaching and learning. I draw on the ways teachers in this school reacted to messages about leveled texts by activating frames of assessment to make sense of literacy as a measureable achievement they were responsible for developing in their students. This section provides evidence for the way administrative messaging and the constructed situated environment of reading development and assessment influenced teachers' understanding of the purposes of leveled text and the associated benchmark assessments. Within this environment, coupled with their own identities as literacy teachers and their interactions with colleagues, teachers came to make sense of leveled text as an indicator of reading achievement for students, as well as for marking their abilities as a teacher. The teachers in this study collectively constructed an understanding of reading achievement based heavily on the leveling system adopted in their school.

I draw on both direct and implicit messages teachers experienced to provide evidence that assessing reading using leveling activated frames through which teachers came to construct their understanding of the desired focus of instruction and how teacher and student success would be measured. Jacob, the principal, shared a strong focus on data, stating data should inform everything they do at this school. He communicated this to teachers during data meetings. These meetings were a setting that reinforced and further legitimized the principal's authority to prioritize the reading level assessment protocol to mark reading achievement. Teachers were held responsible for patterns in their students' reading levels, explain why some students were not meeting the benchmarks, and present plans to remedy the situation.

Principal Beliefs about Assessment Data in Reading

When asked about reading, the teachers at Kennedy used reading levels as a way to describe their work and student achievement. The teachers participating in this study used the construct of reading levels as a frame for making sense of messages in their environment. Guided reading with leveled texts had been implemented in the school two years prior to the study along with the F&P Benchmark Assessment System to assess students at the beginning, middle and end of each year. Test results were shared with the administration and used as a primary determinant of student reading achievement during grade level data meetings (Field notes, 1/9/15, 1/14/15).

The principal of Kennedy, Jacob, believed strongly in the construct of reading levels to drive curriculum and instruction. Research suggests that school principals play a role in teachers' sensemaking (Burch & Spillane, 2003; Coburn, 2005a, 2006; Spillane, Diamond, et al., 2002). Leadership in general takes on a role of authority in a school, but Jacob, as Director of Literacy

for the district had the added power to set rules and expectations for reading instruction and assessment. Positional authority, or the power that is bestowed on a principal and confirmed and legitimized by the norms that authorize the role of a principal, (Dornbusch & Scott, 1975), enabled Jacob to have a degree of influence that others did not. Layering on his additional role as Director of Literacy, Jacob was able to shape teachers' framing processes by making decisions about curriculum, teaching, and assessment. For example, Jacob believed deeply that learning to read moved along a predictable progression beginning with decoding as a foundational skill (lines 1-2, 4-5). He believed in this so strongly that when asked how he felt about the controversy surrounding leveled text versus complex text as expected with the CCSS-ELA, he responded viscerally and that asking children to read challenging text was harmful to their reading success. He believed in reading levels and felt that students needed to be able to easily decode before focusing instruction on comprehension or more complex purposes of literacy. This interview excerpt shows Jacob's strong belief in that reading is built on a foundation of decoding words fluently before more complex literacy learning can happen (lines 1-2 and 4-5). In an interview Jacob said:

I think we have to get kids to a certain level in their reading ability and then add [comprehension] strategies on top of that. I think it's so difficult to ask kids who are reading one or two levels below their grade level to now read at grade level and then apply strategies to that. We have to first get them to a high level of reading ability before we can tackle some of that critical thinking. But we aren't there yet. (Jacob, Initial Interview, 4/7/15)

Jacob also influenced teachers' framing of reading by setting assessment expectations and a focus on data. During his initial formal interview Jacob described his attitude toward data-

based decision making: “I believe data is important. Data doesn't lie. There's no such thing as bad data. It's always going to tell you something. Data tells us what are the important things to look at here.” This attitude was communicated to teachers in a variety of ways, and noticeably during data meetings. Data meetings occurred three times a year after all students had been assessed using the F&P Benchmark Leveling System and students’ current reading level was identified. These meetings were a setting that reinforced and further legitimized the principal’s authority to prioritize reading levels and use levels as a marker of reading achievement. During first grade data meetings all teachers gathered to discuss reading and math scores for their students. In addition to the classroom teachers, the principal, assistant principal, literacy coach, school psychologist, ESL teacher, and three reading intervention teachers attended the data meetings. The purpose of data meetings was to discuss student achievement at three levels, the grade, the classroom, and for individual students. For reading, the data was from the F&P benchmark assessments. Teachers were asked to explain patterns in their students’ reading levels and why some students were not meeting the benchmark (field notes, 1/9/15, 1/14/15). Interventions were planned for students reading below the benchmark level, which included them being pulled from class to work with a reading intervention teacher, additional guided reading group time in class, or individualized computer-based interventions. Thus, data meetings were where great attention was paid to reading levels and consequences for not meeting expected levels were determined. Jacob explained his reason for data meetings, “I believe data should be shared publicly. During my first two years here I knew the average F&P score for every classroom and I'd share that with parents and show them the trend of the school. That was extremely motivating [for teachers].” Given Jacob’s beliefs about the power of reading levels coupled with his desire to use public sharing of data as a motivational tool for teachers, it is

reasonable that assessment with leveled text emerged as a primary frame for first grade teachers to make sense of reading.

Data Meetings

Data meetings were held three times a year (i.e. beginning of year, middle of year, end of year) and were a place where teachers, administrators, and support staff gathered to examine student progress in reading and math. In general, teachers in first and third grade viewed the meetings as productive and that examining student data would help them better understand achievement and how to best meet the needs of struggling students. The meetings lasted between 150-180 minutes and teachers were provided substitute teachers to cover their classes while they participated in the meetings. The meetings were divided between data analysis of reading and math assessment scores, but for purposes here I will only address the portion of the meetings devoted to reading. Meetings were not divided evenly between topics; with approximately two-thirds of the meeting length spent on reading (Field notes, 1/9/15, 1/14/15). Meetings were structured so teachers could first share successes they and their students experienced. Next, the principal asked teachers a series of open questions inquiring into the general structure and patterns they saw in teaching and learning in their classrooms. After the meetings I confirmed with teachers and the principal that this meeting was not atypical from the other data meetings they have held (Field notes, 1/14/15).

The following field note segment from the first grade data meeting at mid-year (1/9/15) captured the progression of the meeting observed. All first grade teachers attended this meeting as well as the principal, assistant principal, two reading intervention teachers, the ESL intervention teacher, the literacy coach, and the school psychologist. The meeting was lead by

the principal and each teacher talked about literacy instruction in their classrooms. After discussing reading and writing successes and challenges, teachers' classroom's reading level scores were projected on a large screen on the wall for the entire group to examine. Teachers were asked to discuss the data for their classrooms and try to explain patterns. All participants in the meeting offered suggestions for interventions for student not meeting benchmark reading scores. In this segment teachers first talked about positives they saw occurring with their students' reading (lines 5-9), followed by the principal commenting on the benefits of positive environments on young children's reading (lines 10-11). One teacher, Natalie, commented on one benefit of technology being the ability to monitor the amount of reading by students and the levels of the books they read at home when they access the online digital library (lines 15-17).

The group is gathered in the coach's office to discuss data for 1st grade. The group is chatty and seem comfortable with the task ahead. Jacob begins the meeting with the agenda. They will talk about the 1st grade curriculum, data in reading and math, and interventions. Jacob asks teachers to share what is going well.

Natalie: The kids are eager to learn and actively engaged. They are very positive and happy.

Tiffany: The kids like to read, it's never a struggle to get them to read.

Natalie: They are actively engaged in partner reading. I think it's because the groundwork was laid in Kindergarten.

Jacob: Some say kids in kindergarten and 1st graders can't read, but this proves that wrong. A positive environment promotes reading.

Natalie continues to discuss positives and anecdotes about students' reading.

Dahlia: They are making connections throughout the year. Their comprehension is growing.

Natalie: But they don't read at home. One of the benefits of technology (tablets and software programs) is being able to monitor the amount of time they read at home and what level of book they are reading. Sometimes they don't read or read the wrong level.

The meeting shifted to talk about instruction. When asked about guided reading and workshop, Dahlia responded that they followed the curricular program (lines 18-20). Teachers continued the conversation about instruction and the struggles they experienced juggling the demands of different programs and finding the time meet every students' needs (lines 21-24).

Jacob: Tell me about guided reading and workshop.

Dahlia seems unsure how to answer this question. "We follow Lucy. We do guided reading groups after the mini lesson."

Natalie talks about the difficulty juggling the different demands of the different programs like Lucy Calkins, Words Their Way, and Michael Haggerty for phonemic awareness. She talks about the time needed to fit everything in and how to adjust teaching for students who need extra support.

Jacob then turned the discussion to reading level data. He projected classroom data on the screen and pointed to the lack of growth in narrowing the gap of students who were not meeting benchmark expectations (lines 29-31). As teachers discuss possible reasons students are not progressing more quickly through reading levels they mention reading skills they think students are lacking (lines 34-35). Despite teachers' earlier comments about feeling they didn't have time to do everything they needed, Jacob suggested teachers target these children for more

individualized and small group work (lines 36-39). At the conclusion of this discussion Jacob reiterated that teachers, particularly in first grade with small class sizes, should be focused on student growth as measured through reading levels (lines 43-44).

Jacob talks about the F&P continuum and the *Next Steps to Guided Reading* book. “F&P should be the guide for what to do with guided reading groups.” He projects F&P data on the screen in the front of the room. “Here are the scores from last year. [Last year] there were larger class sizes, no real curriculum pacing guide, and workshop was new.” Then points out scores from mid-point of the current year. “There is no change in scores between fall and winter. The scores are staying steady. Everyone is moving but the gap isn’t closing for the lowest kids.”

The teachers talk about distribution of student scores below, basic, meets, exceeds. They discuss the students who are below and not moving up in F&P levels. Kids who are below are stuck around level C. Specific issues they see are not knowing sight words, fluent reading of phrases and words, and not tracking words with fingers.

Jacob: Low kids mean they need more time to practice in reading groups. Where can we fit more in? Can it fit into some other part of the day? Are they using Lexia with fidelity? What are some ideas to encourage more use of Lexia for the below and basic kids? Should we have a bulletin board to monitor the number of minutes and goals on Lexia? Do you want to have a paid parent meeting to show parents how and why kids should engage in Lexia at home? With smaller class sizes there isn't any reason for the scores not to go up.

Jacob refers back to F&P scores and says teachers shouldn't feel like they need to push more in but use time differently. (First grade data meeting, Field notes, 1/9/15)

The meeting continued on with teachers being asked to discuss why individual students were not meeting the benchmark goals. Teachers and support staff developed intervention plans for each student who was scoring below the benchmark level. These interventions included additional guided reading groups in the classroom and additional time on skills-based software programs. The excerpt from this meeting demonstrates the way the principal emphasized reading levels as a key marker of success for students and communicated to teachers that they were expected to ensure all students were achieving the benchmark scores. Interventions and changes to instruction in the classroom were in reaction to moving students into the desired benchmark range on the leveled text assessment. Additionally, Jacob pointed out to teachers that with smaller class sizes they should be able to find the time to address each child's needs to bring them up to the expected reading level; which implied the reason students were not achieving was due to classroom instruction.

The third grade meeting progressed similarly beginning with positive experiences and successes in the classroom and then shifting to examination of assessment scores. Reading levels were a topic of concern in the third grade data meeting, but the group also discussed their concerns about assessment and instruction directly related to the curricular program and workshop model. The group spent time discussing the new upcoming PARCC test and speculated on how students might perform. However, the excerpt below presents discussion during the data meeting that directly and indirectly addressed reading levels. The segment below focuses on Julie and her students' F&P scores. Julie's students were evenly split between scoring below benchmark and meeting/exceeding the benchmark expectation (Field notes, 1/14/16). In

this field note Julie expressed concern about students reading skills related to comprehension (lines 4-6), even for those students who met the benchmark expectation. When the reading intervention teacher suggested that the retelling component should accurately measure students' abilities in these areas, Julie expressed frustration with the criteria of the reading assessment (line 9).

Julie: Their reading stamina has increased. The on-level kids are staying on level without me having to meet with them often.

Jacob: What's not working with reading instruction?

Julie: They are struggling with main idea, inferring, text structure. Based on their small group work and when I listen to them turn and talk, they aren't getting it, even the on-level kids are struggling.

Reading Interventionist: If their retelling is strong on F&P, then they should be able to do those things.

Julie: But that's F&P. That's an easier, looser criteria.

Antonio: Does F&P help predict how kids will do on the PARCC?

Jacob: I don't know...we might get a PARCC beginning of the year assessment, but I'm not sure about the funding available for that yet. Plus we don't know what will be on the PARCC. Let's get back to F&P. There's lots to celebrate. Some classrooms had major gains.

As occurred in the first grade data meeting, Jacob suggested Julie give students not meeting benchmark scores more targeted instruction. Julie pointed out that would include half the

class and presented challenges for instruction (lines 20-21). Jacob responded by emphasizing the need to focus on reading levels (lines 22-23).

Julie: Four students moved from basic to meeting the benchmark. This is because I make them read a lot in class and their parents support reading at home. The lowest kids aren't doing this and that's why they aren't moving.

Jacob: Can you shift instruction so the higher kids have more independence and keep working with lower students?

Julie: That's half the class and a major challenge for instruction. Plus they are struggling with comprehension of more complex texts.

Jacob: We really need to hit the below basic kids hard to help them keep moving in reading levels. I want to close gap before 4th grade.

Despite Julie voicing other concerns beyond reading levels, the conversation was steered toward suggestions to get students on level. Interventions planned for her class and the students scoring below expectations were similar to first grade in that they would have additional guided reading groups, skills-based computer programs, and, in addition, be pulled out of their classrooms to work with a reading intervention teacher several days a week on word attack skills.

These data meetings provide examples of direct and implied messages about the importance of reading levels and the value placed on these levels by the principal. Data meetings were an opportunity for teachers to be held accountable to administration, staff, and grade level peers for the achievement of their students as captured in reading level assessment scores.

Regardless of other concerns teachers had about reading instruction or learning, reading levels and the associated assessments were a key mechanism that influenced how teachers made sense

of expectations for literacy teaching and learning. Based on the data, it can be concluded that because of the principal's understanding of reading as developing along a gradient system, the attention to testing and monitoring students' reading levels, the semi-public accountability atmosphere of data meetings, and reorganization of instruction in classrooms to target student reading levels, that teachers' frames of assessment made sense of these messages about reading levels to understand reading levels as a marker for success. Next I present data that unpacks this conclusion.

Reading Levels as Success or Failure

Teachers are important as shapers of reading programs as they consciously and subconsciously select, reject, adapt and adopt ideas from and components of the curriculum to fit their existing beliefs and knowledge about reading development and achievement. What teachers believe and understand about the construct of reading achievement and reading levels has important implications for how they plan for instruction, choose materials, and structure their classrooms for literacy learning.

The teachers at Kennedy demonstrated a broad conception of literacy and discussed CCSS-ELA standards as a way to push their teaching and student learning to be deeper and more critical. Their instruction, for the most part, reflected these beliefs with rich literacy practices using a balanced literacy approach within a workshop model. However, I also noticed a trend in how teachers talked about reading during meetings and in my conversations with them. When they talked about reading, student achievement, or their role as the teachers, they tended to talk about it in relation to assessment, and specifically reading levels of students. The principal's role in constructing an environment and sending messages to teachers about expectations for student

achievement as quantified with reading levels set teachers up to activate a frame of assessment within which to make sense of the cue of the expectations of students to meet benchmark levels.

At the end of the year I asked Monica how she thought the school year had gone. She replied, “The kids really grew in reading levels. All of them grew a significant amount by my standards. By the school’s standards...maybe not as much.” Monica’s answer typified the way teachers at Kennedy understood reading achievement using a frame of assessment. To get at how teachers make sense of literacy standards it is useful to know what they draw on to construct meaning (Weick, 1995). What teachers draw upon suggests activation of a frame within which they can notice cues and construct new meaning.

Identifying students as ‘on-level’ or ‘below-level’ is one sign that reading achievement is understood through the frame of assessment. Teachers at Kennedy used this language when discussing success of students, but to also reflect on their own accomplishments as teachers. Four teachers (Tiffany, Dahlia, Tonya, and Julie) directly associated student reading levels with their own success or failure as teachers and expressed fear that they would be judged as ineffective or poor teachers if their students failed to reach reading level goals on benchmark assessments. These teachers talked about the pressure they felt to constantly demonstrate that they were doing everything possible to move students’ reading levels. Tonya and Dahlia’s statements capture the way the teachers felt pressure and responsible for having students meet benchmark levels on assessments.

Tonya (third grade) commented on the pressure she felt to constantly attend to reading levels (lines 1-3 and 8-12). Tonya expressed the desire to work with students where they were developmentally and push them to grow, but not place so much pressure on meeting the

benchmark level.

I feel a lot of [pressure]. I really do. I don't know if it's self-inflicted or not, but I really feel pressure to get the kids to perform. And we've been on warning here, where we were not making the grade...Not all kids come in at 3rd grade level and can do all of the things that are expected to them. If they all came in on-level I could take them to where they need to go, but we are not in a perfect world...Why can't we test them at their level and see how they grow?...We never used to have data meetings. I'm not saying that they aren't good. It's good to sit down and look at your class data and see how the kids score and see how the kids are doing and lining up. That's good, you need to have that information, but when they start saying stuff like, "you have this many kids below..." and then you are having to do all of these interventions and then you are getting emails asking why aren't these kids on this [computer] program to help them, but then make sure you are doing Lucy and reading and writing and then there are the homework issues...(Tonya, Final Interview, 6/1/15)

Echoing that sentiment was Dahlia, who also felt that her students' reading level growth was a reflection on her own abilities as a teacher. However, she was also conflicted, as Tonya was, about assessment results based on benchmark scores and not on individual growth of students. Dahlia also expresses her discomfort in the fact that lower achieving students get more individualized attention from the teacher leaving other students to stagnate (line 9 and 11-14).

I feel [pressure] with F&P. The kids take it 3 times a year, and yes, [the administrators] ask us why the kids didn't improve. And with smaller size classes you expect them to move up a lot. They should make gains because you give them more individualized attention. So, yes, I feel pressure. The pressure comes from the administrators, but of

course I want them to do well too. At the data meetings we analyze all this data and they say ‘Your kids are here when they should be here. Why didn't they go up?’ Last year was the first year we had the data meetings, and the low kids made gains, and the higher kids- -because with F&P the higher levels are harder to move, you don't move as quickly. So the middle group didn't get more support and didn't move. They moved up one or two but maybe not as much as they should have. They all made gains but when you looked at my list it looked like they didn't make as much as the other kids. So, Jacob asked me why and I told him it was because they didn't get a lot of attention. The lower ones got all of the intervention. The higher ones made gains but their texts are different and you only meet with them once a week, they are more independent. The others were just surviving. (Dahlia, Final Interview, 6/1/15)

All teachers in this study used reading levels to talk about student success. Coupled with the pressure they felt to perform as evidenced by student growth in reading levels, teachers discussed students using reading levels for both success and failure. Julie, who struggled with the pressure to conform to reading levels was excited to share a student's growth on F&P at a grade level meeting.

Lupita has made so much progress this year! She went from level L to level P. That's incredible! She's also growing in writing and I think that's because she's finally reading at level. (Julie, Field Note, Grade Level Meeting)

Conversely, teachers expressed frustration with the pressure to quickly increase students' reading levels. Tiffany, another teacher who struggled to make sense of the messages she

encountered about programs and assessments expressed frustration with a student who tested at a far lower level than what is expected at the beginning of first grade.

I've got one boy who is an A or sub-A reader and he's...it's like he almost didn't even go to kindergarten. It's almost like he's a brand new student. He's at a whole different stage than everybody else, so it's like he's holding us back. It's something I'm struggling with. I don't know how to handle it. I know I can't get mad at him, it's not his fault, but I want to keep going and we have to keep moving or we are going to farther behind. (Tiffany, Initial Interview, 11/6/14)

In addition to these ways of relying on the reading level to label student success, teachers approached the leveling assessment with skepticism. Tonya, who struggled with the pressure to have students make reading level gains but also meet the demands of the other mandates expected of her, questioned the validity of the assessment. She remarked about certain students who tested high on the scale, but lacked the ability to fully comprehend those same texts.

I have kids who are at levels Q-Z, but are they really performing at that level which is 4th, 5th, 6th grade? Maybe one or two might be, but the rest, yeah, they can read but I don't think their higher order thinking is there and they really aren't performing at that level. I had some kids jump really high in the middle of the year and they just stayed there. I think a lot of the test is subjective too. I tend to grade harder on F&P then maybe some of the other people who come in to test them. I think F&P gives you a good baseline for where they are, but it's not everything. (Tonya, Final Interview, 6/2/15)

This skepticism was repeated by Dahlia and Natalie who believed the assessment, while valuable, was also flawed and not as rigorous as they would have liked. Dahlia and Natalie were

co-teachers in first grade the year of the study and modified the way they assessed students in their class. However, these co-teachers decided to subvert the testing protocol and rely on their professional judgment and knowledge of their students and hold students at lower levels if their comprehension didn't meet what they believe is higher criteria.

My only problem with F&P is that I think it's too easy. When I have my group I expect so much more than the comprehension questions asked. The expectation for answering the questions according to F&P is pretty low. For me, if they can't tell me the main idea then how can they be on this level? With my kids I didn't let them move up right away.

(Dahlia, Final Interview, 6/1/15)

We had kids that we didn't move up. We had two kids we left at Level I that could have moved to J to be on grade level, but they don't get the big picture (comprehension). Even though F&P would pass them, they don't really get it. We know the kids. And then they go to 2nd grade and it looks like they are on grade level but they aren't! Accuracy with F&P is pretty much spot on, but it's comprehension that is really basic. (Natalie, Final Interview 6/1/15)

In this way, Dahlia and Natalie attempted to reclaim some of their professional autonomy by refusing to adhere to the testing and scoring protocol. This seems contradictory, in that if they had conformed to the testing protocol, those students would meet the benchmark expectation and possibly relieve some pressure off the teachers. However, both Dahlia and Natalie believed they were holding students to higher expectations than the assessment, and pushing back against the frame of assessment as a way to make sense of reading achievement.

Up to this point this chapter has focused on how literacy standards essentially fell to the background for teachers at Kennedy Elementary and how programs and assessments moved to the foreground as key ways teachers made sense of the messages they encountered in their environment about teaching and learning. Given the role programs and assessments played in teacher sensemaking one might expect to see classroom practices that rigidly reflect that understanding. However, teachers at Kennedy demonstrated a wide range of instructional practices while also adhering to the general tenets of the purchased program and workshop model. In the next section, I focus on classroom instructional practice and how teachers' sensemaking through the frames of curricular programs and assessment blended with individual beliefs about teaching and learning.

Classroom Instruction

While teachers experienced messages about programs and assessments that affected the way they conceptualized certain aspects of their work with students, their literacy instructional practices showed that teachers acted in agentive ways to provide students with learning experiences beyond the confines of the program and assessments. Across classrooms teachers installed a variety of routines, practices, and employed language that aligned to curricular programs and accompanying assessments. Teachers also organized their literacy blocks to expose students to rich and authentic children's literature, engage them in meaningful discussions around text, and write for a variety of purposes and audiences. The teachers at Kennedy Elementary felt both an obligation to respond to the pressures and maintain pace with the curricular map and assessment demands, but also understood that ethical teaching required them to move beyond the confines of purchased programs and materials.

I draw on my analysis of field notes from classroom observations, documents and artifacts, field notes from planning meetings, and interview transcripts to answer my second research question *In what ways does teachers' sensemaking influence instructional practices?*

I conducted observations of all classrooms and draw my conclusions from analysis across the entire data set and give specific examples from classrooms that illustrate themes and patterns found through coding the data. Specifically, I looked for ways that teachers made sense through standards, programs, and assessments were actualized in their practice. Results found that teachers responded to their sensemaking in ways that held implications for students. The first is that teachers tended to organize their classrooms and according to the structure of the curricular program and workshop model. The other major finding is that teachers restricted students' selection of reading material to books at and adjacent to their tested reading levels. The following sections unpack these findings.

Organizing the Classroom: Read at Your Level

While teachers at Kennedy Elementary created rich literacy environments for their students, the ways teachers organized classroom libraries and sanctioned texts for students closely aligned to the F&P leveling system. In all classrooms books were arranged in bins labeled with reading levels of the books. Teachers talked about how they had worked to either locate levels for books or determine levels for books themselves. These leveled bins of books represented the majority of each classroom's library. Some teachers, however, also had a few bins or racks to display books with their covers facing out that were not organized by level, but by theme. For example, Monica's first grade classroom had no evidence of books grouped by theme or genre, but did have a magazine rack labeled "monthly books" that were all related to

winter or winter holidays [Field Note, December 12, 2014]. However, these books were also labeled with reading levels.

Teachers at Kennedy had authentic children's literature in the classroom to supplement the guided reading texts they used for reading instruction. In one grade level meeting with first grade teachers, Monica and Natalie were discussing the balance of fiction and informational texts of their classroom libraries. Both felt their collections were off balance with Natalie's library having more narrative fiction and Monica's collection having more informational texts. They both agreed that their students needed to be exposed to and read more nonfiction and informational texts, but also expressed frustration with the limited availability of informational text at their students' specific reading levels [Field note, March 4, 2015].

However, during that same meeting as Monica and Natalie planned for the following week's reading lessons the conversation returned to texts. They discussed options for a research unit on a spring-related topic. Monica had an informational text on rainbows that she felt would work well for modeling informational text features. "We'll never find enough rainbow books at their levels," replied Natalie. Eventually they agreed to use the rainbow book as an example but will locate other texts with spring-related topics at students' reading levels. This exchange shows how the teachers' decisions about curriculum and instruction remain in the frame of leveled text.

In all classrooms, teachers set structures in place during Reader's Workshop that constrained students' choice of reading materials to texts near their level. In Dahlia and Natalie's classroom children had canvas bags that hung on the backs of their chairs with a selection of books only at their reading level. These were the books children were expected to read during independent reading time.

Teachers also attributed reading level growth stagnation to the fact that students were not reading texts within their level. Julie discussed how she intervened with students in her classroom that weren't showing growth on reading assessments because they were reading beyond their level.

The kids I had who weren't making a lot of gains weren't picking their just right books for independent reading. They were picking really hard books! I started giving them a basket of the leveled books they should be reading like D, E, F and then switch the books out every week or so. And those kids really went up a lot after that. (Julie, Final Interview, 6/5/15)

Tonya believed it best to restrict her students to texts within their level. She also organized her classroom library by reading level, but felt it was overwhelming to make sure students were only reading books at their tested level during independent reading.

I think towards the middle of the year I really lost track of the kids being in their just-right books. I saw some kids with *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* which could be a Level T and some of the kids are trying to read it but they aren't at that level...it's hard when you have 28 kids and there is only one me to keep up with all of that. I think we kind of lost the kids (being able to choose their own just-right books) so we might have to do a little more re-teaching with that. (Tonya, Final Interview, 6/2/15)

The final way teachers organized and attempted to restrict student independent texts to their tested reading levels was using online digital libraries. All teachers were required to use an online library called MyOn reading program. This subscription-based program was a digital library of texts organized by a variety of indicators including reading levels that closely aligned to the F&P leveling system as well as theme and genre. Teachers at Kennedy were required to

have students read on MyOn and were often publicly praised if their students read the most minutes per week or over school breaks. Teachers reported mixed feelings over MyOn and the types of texts as well as the pressure to have students using it. One common critique from all teachers was that MyOn did not have enough books at lower reading levels. For example, Monica talked about the limited availability of leveled texts on MyOn.

I have not used MyOn that much. I would like to but I just haven't found anything that works yet. I have to look within the levels--that's super important--and see what will work from that selection of books, you can't just pick any old book. (Monica, Interview, 2/11/15)

Julie was also dissatisfied with the offerings from MyOn for some of her lower-level readers. She didn't feel that the digital library offered enough texts for her students to read at low-levels (lines 3-4) and that they were not of interest to 3rd graders (lines 5-6).

I think MyOn is a piece of junk. I appreciate that we have it to give kids access to more books however; there aren't that many books on it. So for my two lowest kids I searched for all of the Level A books and there were like four. Then I widened the search for books from A-D and there were only about maybe 48 books for them to read at their level for the whole year. And if we have to read fiction or nonfiction, It's not enough. Plus they aren't interesting to them. They're boring. (Julie, Final Interview, 6/5/15)

Dahlia felt frustrated by the pressure to use MyOn as part of her instructional day or to assign MyOn for homework. Dahlia explicitly spoke about the ways the administration publicly praised specific teachers in meetings or through emails for logging the greatest number of minutes per month or over school breaks.

I hate MyOn because the levels are hard to navigate and there aren't enough books at each level. The kids are going to read what they want and not necessarily at their level anyway. I've tried to shut off the *Read to Me* option, but they turn it back on. You can't really control it. We give the kids a specific [number of minutes] target to read each week or month. There is pressure to have the kids read more. It feels like a competition. The administrators will say so-and-so 'got first place, they used MyOn this many minutes' or whatever. We feel the pressure. We give it for homework every day. And that gets back to time. It takes time to do it in class plus it takes me time to have to check each kid's account to make sure they were reading each day and the level. (Dahlia, Final Interview, 6/1/15)

Field notes at a 3rd grade grade level meeting captured a conversation about a district-wide competition to read the most minutes on MyOn over winter break.

Talk turns to an upcoming dance celebration on Friday. Dance seems to be to celebrate MyOn reading over break. All schools were in a competition over the winter break to see which school could log the most minutes on MyOn. The principal and teachers sent out Facebook reminders to read over the break and updates of minutes read by each school were also posted publicly on Facebook over the break on the Kennedy School page.

(Field Note, 3rd grade Grade Level Meeting, 1/14/15)

But there were some advantages to the online digital library, according to first grade teachers. The first grade teachers routinely assigned reading on MyOn for homework for their students. Teachers agreed that they liked being able to monitor which texts students were reading and making sure they were reading books at their level, both in school and at home. They also saw it as a way to involve parents and communicate the need for parents to monitor children's

reading and reading levels at home. During a data meeting Natalie shared some positives and negatives with reading in her classroom. The following field note captures the way Natalie talked about the convenience of technology for monitoring reading at specific levels.

Natalie agrees with Tiffany who comments that kids aren't reading at home. She talks about the benefits of kids having iPads to take home so teachers can monitor how much time students read at home and what levels of books they read. She also said it was a good way to provide feedback to parents to get parents involved in making sure kids read and what level kids should be reading. Dahlia and Monica nod their heads in agreement.

(Field note, Data Meeting, 11/8/14)

Teacher Agency and Instructional Practice

This final section focuses on ways teachers engaged in literacy practices that adhered to the curricular program and workshop model while also signaling teachers' commitment to retaining professional agency in their work with students. I explore specific aspects of teachers' practices that present examples of how they worked in agentive ways to build rich literacy environments for their students. I drew primarily from one teacher, Tiffany, who revealed the greatest personal and professional conflict about the curricular program and pressures to focus their instructional practices in service of the pacing map and reading levels. I chose to focus on this teacher because she was one who struggled the most with the shifting demands on teachers and tried to both comply with mandates for job security, but also align her instructional practice in ways that were consistent with her beliefs about teaching and learning.

I drew on my analysis of field notes of classroom observations, grade level meetings, and informal conversations, as well as interview transcripts and photographs of the classroom to

construct this section. I highlight findings related to instructional practices that Tiffany demonstrated despite the strong messages of adherence to programs and emphasis on reading levels. Data used for this close-up look at one teacher's practice is inclusive of data collected across the study as well as additional classroom observations and extensive conversations I had with Tiffany over the year of the study. Included here are field notes from the 17 grade level meetings in which Tiffany participated, transcripts from her formal interviews, field notes from two district wide professional development sessions, field notes from one curriculum planning meeting, field notes from one data meeting, field notes from informal conversations, field notes from eight classroom observations, lesson plans, and photographs of Tiffany's classroom. While Tiffany is only one teacher who participated in this study, she represents a common theme I saw teachers grappling with as they discussed and planned for their work with students. Close examination of Tiffany's instructional practice can reveal the complex ways in which teachers' talk about their understanding of what they should emphasize in literacy instruction does not directly translate into action in the classroom. And although research has told us much about the ways teachers feel about fidelity and accountability pressures (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Taylor et al., 2010; Valli & Buese, 2007) we know less about the ways teachers counter these messages through their instructional practices. Looking at Tiffany's instructional practice can provide a view at how teacher agency can shape the classroom experience despite experiencing pressure to conform to program and assessment demands.

Administrative Pressure and Beliefs about Instructional Practice

When asked in her initial interview to define literacy Tiffany responded with a definition that combined conventional conceptualization of literacy with the broader notion of literacy as a

tool to make sense of the world. In this excerpt, it is clear that she struggles with school ideation of literacy and her own beliefs about the construct:

I think it's anything that has to do with printed language, I guess. Not even necessarily printed, people can be literate in music, art, whatever. Is literacy what you use to understand the world? I think so, but I don't know...there is a broad spectrum for it. But for teaching it's reading and writing basically. That's what it comes down to.

Like many teachers, Tiffany was conflicted about the demands of her job and pressure to conform to mandates, but also had strong philosophical beliefs about how young children should be taught. Tiffany revealed doubt in her professional expertise as a literacy teacher of young children, even after 24 years of experience. During her tenure she experienced multiple waves of reform efforts and various policy environments with different emphases on accountability demands. At times her fatigue with constant change and institutional demands were evident. When asked about what she would tell a new teacher is essential to know about literacy teaching at her school in her grade she revealed the effects of mandates on her thinking, as evident in the following interview transcript.

Tiffany: Readers' Workshop and Writers' Workshop. Lucy Calkins: follow her! (Laughs)

Interviewer: Why?

Tiffany: Because that's what we are mandated to do

Interviewer: Let's pretend you didn't have those and they weren't mandated, what would you want that teacher to know?

Tiffany: Good question! That's a tough one! Without a curriculum how would I teach literacy? Basically, you have to keep it fun. The kids have to buy into it so you have to

immediately keep it interesting, and keep it fun. You have to watch them, let the kids guide you a little bit. More than your plans because if they don't get it you have to go back and review so they do get it. I don't need Lucy to tell me, it's all right there!

Interviewer: And what components of literacy would you tell a new teacher, "These are the things you have to teach"?

Tiffany: Phonemic Awareness, word work, and strategies for decoding, comprehension, and writing. Writing is everything! Poems, songs lists, letters...what am I missing? That's a big chunk of it, right? Word work, comprehension, decoding, fluency...

Despite her years of experience, Tiffany first responded within a compliance frame of what teachers should focus on in literacy instruction (lines 1-3). After she is asked to pretend that those are no longer mandates, she goes on to explicate different components of reading and writing that she believes are important for her students' literacy development (lines 6-15). Tiffany's reactionary response is not surprising considering the strong messages of program adherence. When asked what practices she thought were important for first grade literacy instruction, Tiffany responded with very child-centered practices to foster growth and that aligned to best practices in teaching.

They need to model, model, model! They have to do phonemic awareness. A lot of people want to skip that but you can't. You have to give them time to actually read. The small group instruction is huge. You gotta sit down with them and read with them and keep making new goals for them and making them aware of their goals. With writing they have to actually be writing on paper with a pencil and again you have to keep them

moving. You have to keep moving, keep setting new goals and increasing their expectations.

Like the other teachers in this study, Tiffany felt pressure from the local leadership and broader district administration to adhere to the program and follow it with fidelity. She felt the role of the literacy coach was to monitor the teachers and implementation of the curricular program (lines 4-6). She talked about the pressure feeling so extreme at times that she and other colleagues experienced physical symptoms (lines 8-13) of stress and anxiety that if there is deviation from expectations that their jobs are at stake (lines 20-26).

Right now they're (the administration) not saying 'this is how you have to teach it' (using the curricular program) but they are saying it. In our latest contract negotiation there is a statement in there that says 'teachers will be able to teach how they choose to meet the standards'. Then you've got someone like our literacy coach coming into our meetings and yelling at us basically if we are not doing it the way she says we should, which is how the district wants us to do it. So, it's that cookie cutter thing. It's that constant pressure to do what they think we should be doing, not what's always best for the kids. I've never felt so overwhelmed as I have in these past couple years. Last year it was a health issue for a lot of us here. For me, I was going home with chest pains. I had my first panic attack I've ever had just because you are being beat up all the time. Working in a school like this you always feel like you are just not quite getting it done. We are always at the bottom of the pile. And then when you feel like you can't do your job and we always felt like we didn't know what we were doing. They gave us everything brand new all at one time. New Readers' Workshop, new Writers' Workshop, new math curriculum, new leadership, new apps (for iPad), new everything. You know, all of us

veteran teachers were going home feeling like really shitty teachers. And we know we are not. We used to know we could do it and now we question ourselves all the time. I guess I don't know what I'm doing. You feel awful all the time. I like being in my room and what I do here. I enjoy that. I enjoy the kids. But I know how bad it can be because I've been through it, that if the principal doesn't like you or feel like you are on board, you are going to be put on a list and you will be harassed until you are fired or quit. And it's happened over and over. I was on that list once and I ended up quitting teaching at one point. With a bad principal you could be done forever. Now we are seeing it more and more and it's kind of a natural fear that it could happen. Even though I respect Jacob a lot, that fear is always in the back of your head. Plus those of us who are getting older they are getting rid of us faster. If you look around our district its a very young teaching staff right now. That's not good...There's also the peer pressure. My colleagues could be doing really well at something and you feel like you have to be as good as them. But then, you are actually doing something better than them at something else. You know what I mean? There's just pressure from everywhere. From each other from administration. It's not from the parents, it's not from the kids...it's internal. You think after 24 years of teaching I should be amazing. I should be one of the best teachers in the building. I'm not. It's ok that I'm not but I also don't want to think I'm one of the worst ones. You need to stay up to date and get on board with everything. With the standards, with technology, with the newest, coolest thing out there.

Tiffany did not agree with some of the demands and levels of pressure to conform to programs and assessments and held strong beliefs about what made for appropriate practice with students at her grade level. Given these strong feelings, Tiffany was a teacher who demonstrated

deep and rich instructional practices in her classroom instruction. Tiffany's created a child-centered environment that was designed to promote learning and be motivating for students. However, Tiffany's practice cooperated with many of the components emphasized by the curricular program and the literacy coach. Despite this, Tiffany worked to infuse her literacy block with motivational and supportive instruction that fostered an inclusive environment that built on the needs of all students in her classroom.

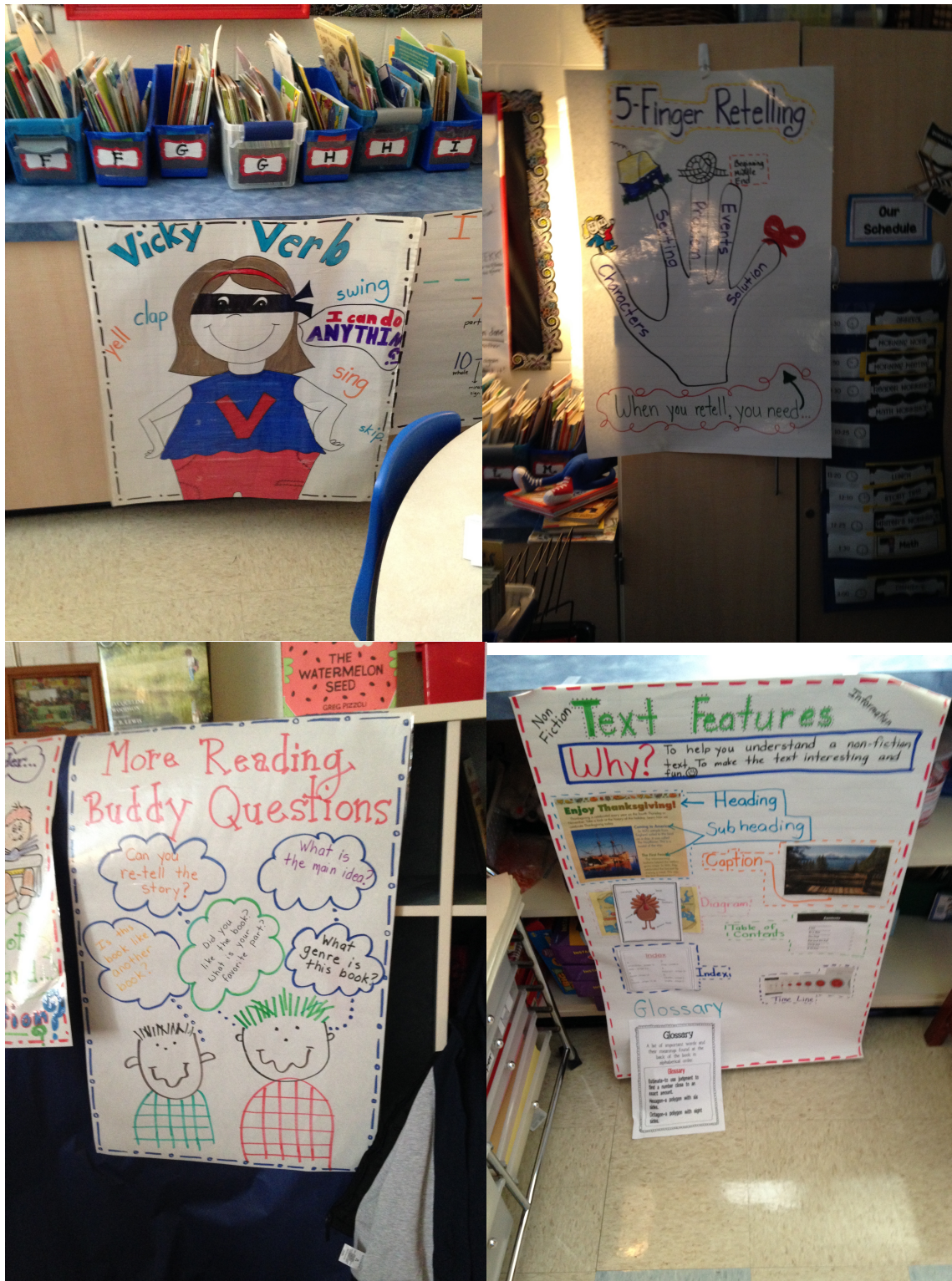
Tiffany believed the physical environment of the classroom was important to learning. She organized her classroom so students sat at cooperative group tables that allowed for peer support. Her classroom had a large library with books organized by F&P reading level and additional organization of genre or theme. Her classroom had the overall theme of "Hollywood" complete with paparazzi decals, red curtains, a director's chair, a lighted stage and working microphone for student presentations (See Figure 5). In addition to this, Tiffany created many large posters with reading, writing, and organizational rules and tips based on the curricular program, but decorated with lively colors and illustrations (See Figure 6).

Figure 5 Tiffany's Classroom



TEACHER SENSEMAKING AND LITERACY STANDARDS

Figure 6 Examples of Tiffany's Classroom Print



Tiffany's classroom environment blended her beliefs about creating a child-centered environment with tenets of the curricular program and the reading leveling system. Her instructional practice also reflected this blending. Tiffany used the workshop model for literacy to structure time for reading and writing. As described earlier, her classroom followed the suggested structure for workshop including a mini-lesson, independent student work time, guided reading, mid-point check in, and summary time for students to share their independent work. Tiffany's organized her daily work in literacy around mini-lessons using authentic children's literature based on her own knowledge of quality books for specific teaching points. Her students, representing a range of learning needs, were observed to be cooperative, attentive, and excited to participate in class. Tiffany's language with students demonstrated and modeled respect and the notion that the classroom was a community of learners. Tiffany also worked to personalize lessons in the classroom and relate abstract concepts to concrete examples. The following field note describes a typical lesson observed in Tiffany's classroom.

Tiffany is conducting a direct mini lesson on character traits. She prompts kids often to give their ideas and about character traits and also incorporates word work (phonics). Students are taking notes in their student notebooks. Students are engaged, attentive, and participatory. Concludes direct instruction on character traits and then sits on chair and engages students in discussion about how to identify character traits. Relates it to what students know about her. Reviews read a loud book from yesterday, *Not Norman*. Asks kids to infer character traits from illustrations in *Not Norman*. Discusses how to use illustrations with text to make inferences. Explains how she wants kids to apply character traits during their independent time. Group 1: Read fiction books on MyOn, place at least 2 sticky notes with what character traits you identified. Tiffany then works

with a group of 4 at her table on high frequency words (HFWs). As Tiffany reviews high frequency words with 2 students, the other 2 students partner-read a leveled text. When Tiffany finishes reviewing HFWs with students turns to the readers and asks for general summary of book. She discusses how to use text features (title and headings) to predict what the book will be about. This discussion leads to writing a sentence 'One day in winter I would like to try-'. Shifts to new leveled text for other students: *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*. Two students whisper-read, one student reads aloud while Tiffany takes a running record. When all students finished reading the group comes back together and Tiffany leads a discussion about character traits. She uses *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* to apply character traits. She uses words and pictures to infer characters' traits. Tiffany then passes out word cards of words from the book for kids to read. She challenges kids after reading is to put them in ABC order and guides them in how to do this. She does the first word with kids and then has them work together to complete the task on their own. After a few minutes she announces time to switch groups. Kids clean up and move to next center group.

This excerpt from one portion of Tiffany's literacy instruction in first grade and one guided reading group shows the amount of content, skills, and strategies (see underlined text in field note above) she embedded into instruction. The mini-lesson and group activities were fast paced, engaging, and efficient. It was clear during observations that Tiffany was aware of the multiple teaching opportunities she had within these contexts to instruct on a variety of topics and skills. In small groups she instructed students in guided reading, making inferences, identifying character traits, and alphabetical order. In addition to this she also completed a running record with one student. All of these things occurred the span of about 15 minutes before

dismissing the group to independent work and convening another small group to work on different differentiated lessons and skills. This example details the ways in which Tiffany combined whole group, small group, and independent practice consistent with the workshop model, and skills and strategies based on the curricular unit as detailed on the curriculum map.

Kennedy Elementary had a one-to-one technology initiative with first graders each having their own tablets for use in school and at home. Like the other teachers in this study, Tiffany struggled with the role technology should play in young learners' lives. Like the other teachers, Tiffany also struggled with meeting the demands to incorporate technology into her instructional practice. However, Tiffany strove to integrate technology in ways that went beyond reading digital texts or doing Internet searches. Classroom observations and discussions with Tiffany revealed her belief that if she was required to have her first grade students use technology then it should enhance their conventional literacy skills. Tiffany established a classroom blog on which students could publish their digital compositions to share with their peers and parents. Observations of grade level meetings and classroom instruction revealed several ways in which Tiffany designed learning to be engaging, technology infused, and aligned to the demands of the curricular program. For example, Tiffany had her first grade students write personal narratives on something they did one day. Students were encouraged to take their tablets with them on an outing and take a photo to use in their narratives. The students composed sentences about their experience and inserted the photograph to illustrate their narratives. Students were also encouraged to include digital-text emojis to illustrate emotion in their narratives. Students then published these narratives on the classroom blog and orally presented them to their peers. See Figure 7 and Figure 8.

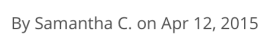


Figure 8 Student Personal Narrative Example 2



Today I whasht the Cubs game.The Cubs are loosing😞😓.But thay still Rule!!!!❤️💚💙💙💛
💖💖💖💋💖💖👑👍👍

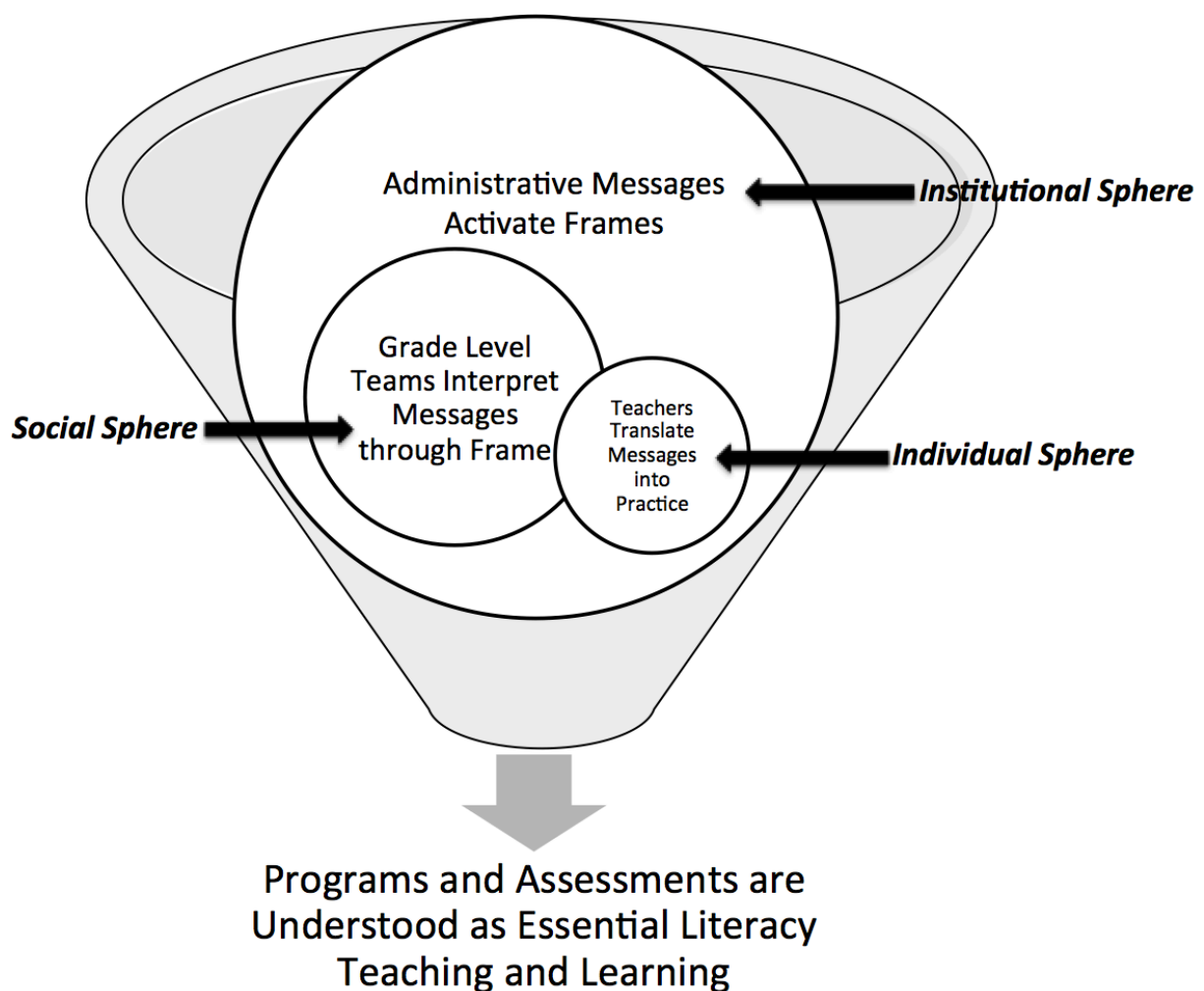
Teacher Sensemaking of Literacy Instruction

Teachers at Kennedy made sense of literacy teaching and learning within three spheres of influence: individual, social, and institutional. There has been abundant work on individual and social spheres of influence on sensemaking (Coburn, 2001b; Coburn & Woulfin, 2012; Spillane & Jennings, 1997; Woulfin & Coburn, 2012) and the roles those spheres play as teachers come to make sense of their work. Research on sensemaking suggests that individual beliefs, knowledge, and worldviews impact teacher sensemaking (Spillane, 2000; Spillane et al., 2006), resulting in constructing understanding of new information based on individual circumstances. Research on social construction of understanding in the form of collective sensemaking (Coburn, 2001b) has demonstrated how teachers come to make sense of loosely defined constructs with peers. For the teachers at Kennedy Elementary, individual and social spheres did not appear to be as influential in their sensemaking as research would suggest. Instead teachers at Kennedy were more influenced by extracting cues from institutional messages they encountered from school leadership.

Teachers at Kennedy experienced a variety of messages about the importance of the school-wide adopted curricular programs and focusing on reading level assessments. Direct messages about adherence to the program aligned with the implicit messages teachers experienced through aligned materials, professional development topics, data meetings, and pacing plans. Teachers extracted cues from these messages that activated frames for constructing meaning. In the case of Kennedy teachers, administrative messages dominated their sensemaking, and social and individual influence apparent within the institutional sphere. In this study, social construction of understanding of what literacy teaching and learning means took

place at grade level team meetings where teachers reacted to and responded to messages about program adherence and assessment pressures. Additionally, teachers' individual influences on sensemaking were also nested within the institutional sphere of influence as teachers drew on their own knowledge, beliefs, and worldviews about teaching and learning as they worked to reconcile institutional expectations and their work with children. See Figure 9 for a conceptual model of the sensemaking occurring for teachers at Kennedy.

Figure 9 Conceptual model of sensemaking for teachers at Kennedy Elementary



Conclusion

Data analyzed for this chapter suggest that the way components of reading instruction and assessment data were organized and valued in the school provided teachers with structures and mechanisms that influenced their sensemaking of reading achievement. Teachers interpreted messages about achievement and reading within a frame of assessment to come to the understanding that reading levels were of high value in their school (Kontovourki, 2012; Spillane & Jennings, 1997). Teachers also remained concerned and felt pressure to stay on pace with reading benchmark goals. Teachers framed students and themselves as either successful or unsuccessful based on reading levels. However, despite these pressures, some teachers resisted the power of the test protocol and relied on their own judgment and different expectations for students by holding students at lower reading levels.

The power of curricular programs and assessment demands are powerful pressures for teachers to confront in an era when job security is unknown and teachers are held accountable for student achievement of standardized tests. Teachers' sensemaking of reading achievement at Kennedy are a reflection of the larger system of standardization, accountability policies, and the desire to quantify student achievement into measureable units. The ways in which assessments and curricular programs infiltrated teachers' meaning making of their work as literacy educators speaks to the power of these messages both in teachers local and broader contexts.

Teachers relied on assessment-derived reading levels to guide text selection with students, grouping practices, text availability, and organization of guided reading groups. Despite this, teachers also drew on their knowledge of literacy teaching, child development, and the specific needs of their students to provide instruction and learning experiences that blended the demands of programs and assessments with personal beliefs about literacy.

As schools shift into the policy environment of the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association, 2010), researchers can draw from research at the intersection of policy and practice in order to better plan and understand implementation and understand the complex role of teachers in interpreting policy into their enacted classroom practice. The teachers in this study constructed an understanding of standards that relied on the school-wide adopted curricular program and reading level assessments. This study found that although teachers in this school were required to teach to the standards, and teachers overall had positive regards toward them, standards generally fell to the background and focus turned to programs and assessment demands.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The inspiration I had for this study was a result of my experiences as an elementary teacher struggling to make sense of my work as a literacy educator in a policy environment that was shifting to new expectations and high stakes assessments (i.e. NCLB). I was interested in the way teachers today make sense of the messages they experience about their work as they are faced with implementing new learning standards. Within this environment I was particularly interested in examining the ways environmental messages and teachers' existing beliefs resulted in shaping the ways teachers think and how that thinking influenced what teachers believed to be of high value in their work. The questions that guided my work were:

1. How do standards, organizational structures, and other mechanisms influence teacher sensemaking?
2. In what ways does teachers' sensemaking influence instructional practices?

In launching this study I planned on examining the ways teachers negotiate meaning of standards with their grade level peers while navigating messages they encountered from the local and distal environment. All of this was premised on the fact that the Common Core State Standards were to be formally implemented the year of the study and Kennedy Elementary presented as a school that was organized and dedicated to meeting the needs of students. However, even with the political attention and associated high stakes assessments, the standards receded to the background for teachers at Kennedy Elementary. What moved to the foreground were matters of more immediate concern like the curricular program and benchmark assessments.

This study explicates the complexity of what it means for teachers to make sense of their work in literacy. This is not a story of top-down mandates and teachers mindlessly adhering to the demands of leadership. Nor is it a story of dictatorial leadership oppressing the professional judgment of teachers in the pursuit of increasing assessment scores. This is the story of a likely typical school in a mid-sized district in a collar community of a large urban area. Kennedy faced many of the same issues found in urban districts, including a large percentage of students on free or reduced lunch, many students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, and overall low test scores on state assessments. Instead, this is the story of well-meaning leadership and teachers caught in a time of policy shift where the demands on schools for increased student achievement are ever increasing. The case of Kennedy Elementary shows us the complexity of sensemaking and teaching in a time of policy shifts with great expectations and limited alignment and clarity between curricula, assessment, and instruction. Through this study we see how teachers respond and construct understanding within frames of curriculum and assessment when activated by cues from leadership and accountability demands. Also, through this study we see how one teacher reconciled the conflict between adjusting her teaching to programmatic and assessment demands and her professional beliefs and knowledge about teaching and learning. The examples from this teacher offer insight into what it means to teach in an environment that is organized in response to policy demands.

In this chapter I review key findings and then discuss how they fit together. I also describe the limitations of the study; implications for research, policy makers, and teacher and leader professional development; and directions for future research.

Discussion of Findings

This case study examined the role standards, organizational structures, and mechanisms had on teachers' sensemaking of literacy instructional practices as well as how that sensemaking impacted the classroom. I illustrated how teachers made sense of messages from the environment about the curricular program and assessment demands to understand literacy within those specific frames. I examined the ways the literacy leadership at Kennedy Elementary was a key source of sense giving (Cosner, 2011) for teachers as they constructed meaning for their practice in a shifting policy environment. Teachers at Kennedy recognized the importance and potential changes that were possible with the CCSS-ELA and were optimistic about their implications on their practice. Ultimately, though, the immediate pressures and demands to adhere to the curricular program and pacing map and align instruction to conform to and accelerate reading levels moved to the foreground for teachers.

Research on the intersection of policy and practice has investigated macro-levels and micro-levels of implementation. This study adds to the growing body of research that examines this intersection (Coburn, 2001b, 2005b; Valencia & Wixson, 2000, 2001; Woulfin & Coburn, 2012) with a focus on literacy. By integrating the macro-levels of implementation like the CCSS initiative with micro-levels of implementation at the school, classroom, and teacher levels this study revealed the ways teachers made sense of their work by making meaning of administrative messaging through their existing frames (Benford & Snow, 2000; Coburn, 2006). This study purposefully did not examine implementation of new policy through the lens of fidelity because of the growing body of literature that points to policy interpretation being a complex process that suggests local interpretation is shaped by individual (Jennings, 1996; McGill-Franzen et al., 2002; Spillane, 1999, 2000; Spillane, Reiser, et al., 2002; Webb, 2002), social (Coburn, 2001b; Gallucci, 2003; Gavelek & Raphael, 1996), and institutional influences (Boardman & Woodruff,

2004; Cohen, 1982; Cohen & Spillane, 1992; Kontovourki, 2012; Loewenberg Ball & Feiman-Nemser, 1988; McGill-Franzen et al., 2002; Pearson, 2007; Whittingham, 2006). Expanding the ways we look at policy implementation as influenced at multiple levels allows us to see the ways teachers make meaning of policy. Often, teachers are blamed for poor policy implementation, but this study suggests that teachers are strongly influenced in their sensemaking of literacy instruction by messages encountered from sources within their environment to align their teaching to curricular programs and assessment expectations. Policy implementation is less reliant on how teachers understand aims of initiatives and more dependent on how local leadership comes to understand these aims and communicates that to teachers. Additionally, this study illustrates how one school leader, in this case the principal, was able to influence what counts and is valued in literacy teaching and learning. In this sense, policy initiatives are not just outside mandates intended to influence teaching and learning, but are an additional layer to the way schools respond from the inside to accountability pressure.

The need to understand the ways policy influences practice, and how ideas from policies move through multiple actors and parts of the educational system is not a new issue. Standards-based reform initiatives, like the CCSS, provided the opportunity to investigate this phenomenon by integrating theoretical tools from literacy and policy. Using the theoretical lens of sensemaking (Weick, 1995), I attended to four properties of sensemaking: *identity construction*, *enacted of sensible environments*, *social*, and *extracted from cues*. These properties have been applied in policy research but offer literacy researchers ways of investigating how teachers and leaders come to interpret policy mandates, like the CCSS-ELA, and better understand how that influences school-level and classroom practices. Sensemaking provided a way to not only look at outcomes in practice, but to attend to individual actors' preexisting knowledge and

beliefs, the local environment for implementation, and the signals and messages communicated through the policy via intermediaries like administrators. Further, it provides a way of considering the role of social configurations, like grade level teams, as an additional source of influence (Coburn, 2001b; Gallucci, 2003) on their understanding of policy and teaching expectations. At Kennedy, individually and collectively, teachers worked in an environment that was constructed to support literacy teaching and achievement as conceptualized through programs and assessments.

The findings of this study also point to the importance of understanding teacher sensemaking about literacy within individual, social, and institutional spheres of influence and how those sources converge. Teachers are individuals with individual knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes about what it means to be an effective teacher of literacy. The findings of this study suggest that teachers can act in agentic ways and design literacy instruction in ways that align with their philosophical and theoretical beliefs about literacy. However, this study also explicates that social and institutional spheres of influence are also powerful sources that shape teacher sensemaking. The organization of Kennedy supported teachers' constructed understanding of what was of most importance for literacy teaching. When Jacob, the school principal, moved to Kennedy he restructured the school day so teachers were able to meet in grade level teams for 70-minutes each week specifically to plan for literacy instruction. In addition to this, he organized the installation of literacy coaches in schools across the district, including Kennedy. Marsha, the literacy coach at Kennedy, believed her main role was to guide implementation of the curricular program and assist teachers in understanding how to deliver instruction accordingly (Marsha, Initial Interview, 11/7/14). To accomplish this she attended grade level literacy meetings with teachers and guided the conversation in accordance with the required

lesson-planning template aligned to the program. Restructuring of the school day for meetings and hiring a literacy coach to facilitate meetings all point to strong institutional messages teachers experienced about expectations for literacy teaching. These findings suggest teachers were working in an environment designed to accommodate and facilitate the demands of the curricular program and the content within it.

The findings of this study also suggest that the curricular program was a guiding frame for instruction and classroom organization. Despite general consensus among teachers that they were unhappy with the pressure they felt about adhering to the program, teachers deferred to the program for instructional direction. In many ways, teachers and leadership placed great faith and trust in the workshop model and adopted program for literacy instruction. Under pressure to follow the program teachers treated it as if it were a physical person telling them what they had to do. Dahlia captured this when she said, “We have to use Lucy. Although they say we can do whatever we want, we really can't. With reading it's, ‘Well, what does Lucy say?’ It's funny. I hear more that we have to follow Lucy Calkins instead of the Common Core.” (Dahlia, Initial Interview, 11/18/15) The curricular program, in some ways, was a substitute for setting instructional goals and standards for learning. Reliance on a program can threatened to ‘teacher proof’ instruction and reduces teacher decision-making. There are also complications that can arise when teacher judgment is discouraged and market-driven programs shape what happens in the classroom. As Julie remarked in frustration, “Lucy isn't aligned to the standards. She doesn't do all of the 'about the text' standards. Like, how the author wrote, or why they included certain things, or text features, or figurative language, or stuff like that” (Julie, Informal Interview, 1/16/15). When responsibility for instruction falls on the shoulders of program developers and publishers, schools are also giving up control of the curriculum to the publishing market (Burch,

2016). That teachers constructed understanding within a frame of curricular programs (Kontovourki, 2012; Loewenberg Ball & Feiman-Nemser, 1988) to make sense of literacy can also be traced to a institutional sphere of influence. Specifically, messages and expectations set up in an environment constructed around implementing a curricular program were key sources of influence on teachers' thinking and work in planning and delivering instruction.

Reading levels and benchmark assessments were a mechanism through which teachers made sense of student achievement as well as their own success as literacy teachers. While leveled texts and their use in classrooms has become routine and even expected, researchers have examined this practice and the construct of levels with a critical lens. For example, the overemphasis on leveled texts and assessing students against an expected progression of growth shapes the ways teachers think about reading instruction and students (Kontovourki, 2012). Critique has also been raised on limitations to texts outside of students' assigned levels as narrowing exposure to others that may be otherwise motivating to readers (Glasswell & Ford, 2011; Rog & Burton, 2002). Others have cast a critical light on the generic aspect to leveling and ignoring the role of students' social and cultural identities impact the ease or difficulty of a text (Dzaldov & Peterson, 2005). "Leveling mania" has been used to describe this trend and refers to the vast amounts of time, money, and energy devoted to purchasing texts, determining levels, stocking classroom libraries and school bookrooms, assessing students' levels, and planning classroom instruction (Dzaldov & Peterson, 2005).

The school's emphasis on reading level assessments was a response to external pressure on schools to increase student achievement. Jacob believed so strongly that reading moves along a measureable progression he effectively narrowed teachers' thinking on what can be considered reading success and failure. As a result, teachers felt pressure to focus on reading levels in the

classroom and restrict texts for students based on levels. Reading levels and assessments became a reference point for teachers' thinking about instruction and achievement (K. Au & Raphael, 2007; Boardman & Woodruff, 2004; Kontovourki, 2012). In this way, Kennedy responded to broader state-level policies by adopting school-level practices using the construction of reading levels. The desire to structure a complicated, multidimensional, and largely abstract concept like reading results in constructed scales to measured growth. Measuring reading achievement on a scale or gradient like reading levels fits neatly with the current culture of accountability in education that requires quantifiable means to label success or failure. This, however, is in stark contrast to the ethos of the CCSS-ELA, which calls for an expansive re-definition of reading, and of course, all other domains that constitute the construct of literacy.

Research has shown us that ambitious policies that attempt to reach in to the classrooms often do not achieve their intended goals. Research has shown us that federal initiatives often assume a direct relationship between inputs and outputs between the policy and classroom practice (McLaughlin, 1987, 2005). Local contexts for implementation present challenges for impact, especially when focused professional learning opportunities about the initiative are not available to teachers and leaders (McGill-Franzen et al., 2002; Spillane & Jennings, 1997). This was the case at Kennedy where teachers reported shallow knowledge about the CCSS-ELA and limited professional learning. Conversely, teachers experienced a great deal of messaging about reading levels and the curricular program from the literacy coach during grade level meetings. Thus, without professional learning on the standards they fell to the background while immediate messages about the program and assessments moved to foreground of teachers' sensemaking.

The way the structures and mechanisms supported installation of the curricular program and emphasis on reading levels is problematic because a key mechanism that was expected to

have influence fell to the background. The CCSS-ELA did not present to be of much concern to the teachers in this study, even though they all were aware of expectations for implementation, had some knowledge of the standards, and believed the standards to be a positive change for the expectations for literacy teaching and learning. Instead, adherence to the curricular program, pacing map, and concentration on students' reading levels were privileged over the new learning standards. Quality literacy teaching was implicitly defined as attending to the program and assessments, and teachers felt apprehensive about being viewed as unsuccessful with those components.

Sensemaking provides ways to understand how teachers negotiate and come to understand policy messages (Spillane, Reiser, et al., 2002). They then develop patterns of actions within their classrooms and school environments that align with their understanding of policy messages, integrating historical and expected practices for teaching. Individual spheres of influence can shape teachers' sensemaking of literacy instructional practice. Teachers' individual knowledge, beliefs, and understanding of literacy can influence how they implement policies in their classrooms (Jennings, 1996; McGill-Franzen et al., 2002; Spillane, 1999, 2000; Spillane, Reiser, et al., 2002; Webb, 2002). Findings from this study confirm the difficulty in studying policy implementation particularly when peering into the black box of the classroom (Valencia & Wixson, 2001). As presented in Chapter 4, teachers acted in agentive ways to retain their professionalism and engage students in learning activities that both adhered to the aims of the program, relied on leveled reading materials, but also expanded students' classroom experiences to include meaningful and engaging lessons. At the same time, teachers were unsure if they were acting with professional autonomy, or subverting the explicit and implicit rules set by school leadership. The teachers in this study were aware of the disapproval they faced by leadership if

they did not follow the program or show growth in students' reading levels. And whether real or not, teachers believed their jobs were in jeopardy if they did not conform to the expectations of leadership.

This study supports the literature that shows that policy implementation is complex and involves many spheres of influence on ground-level actors' sensemaking of what the policy means and what is their role in its implementation. As researchers continue to explore the integration of macro- and micro-levels of policy implementation it is critical to position teachers and teacher leaders as partners in the co-construction of policy and research-based practice (Coburn, 2004, 2005b; Coburn & Woulfin, 2012). The findings of this study also support the literature on the need for teacher ownership of reforms that attempt to impact instruction (Raphael et al., 2009). The teachers represented in this study responded to institutional messages from leadership about literacy teaching and learning, subsequently interpreting and translating them into practice through the frame of programs and assessment. While teachers drew upon their individual knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learning, these were ultimately influenced through the dominating frame of adherence to programs and test expectations.

This study also speaks to the complexities of understanding the processes of policy initiatives as they move into classrooms. This study explicated a few of the mediating effects that can occur when messages about literacy teaching and learning move from document to enactment. Research on policy initiatives has identified lack of evidence of intended practices or impact once the policy has reached the classroom (Gamse et al., 2008; Jennings, 1996; Spillane & Jennings, 1997). These studies imply that large-scale or national reform efforts are not successful for reasons that include support, beliefs, and time (Payne, 2008). This study highlights the multiple influences on teachers' constructed understanding of policy and the individual,

social, and institutional pressures that can shape enactment. In many ways, teachers can exercise their professional knowledge and respond to student needs and not accountability pressure, but in many ways they are torn between what they know and believe and what is expected of them as actors within a larger system that demands measureable growth.

The pressure on teachers to produce student level data that suggests academic growth does not naturally position them as agentive actors and secure professionals. Instead teachers are positioned as workers expected to produce a product that meets certain criteria. Their work then moves from being a professional educator who knows the specific strengths and needs of each student in the classroom, to someone who is merely a manager of time and activity. Findings from this study suggest that teachers are torn between the role of professional and the role of a worker who is at the mercy of a larger system demanding results. This is a precarious situation for education to be in, as it gives up power to marketed materials and test developers to decide what it means to be a literate person and what it means to be an effective teacher. Teachers are bombarded with layered policy and pedagogical messages that ask them to both attend to the specific developmental trajectory of a student while also ensuring all students are attaining a benchmark goal. The result is a distortion of literacy goals and practices where educational opportunities are constricted to the goals of materials and assessment developers.

Implications for Research

This study widens our understanding of teacher sensemaking and specifically the multiple spheres of influence in which teachers exist. In support of other studies that show the affects of policy on teachers and classroom (W. Au, 2007; Diamond, 2007; Dutro et al., 2002; Kontovourki, 2012; McGill-Franzen et al., 2002; Woulfin & Coburn, 2012), this study

demonstrates the need for literacy researchers to adopt tools and theories from policy when investigating classroom implications of policy initiatives. When combining theories and tools from these two areas literacy researchers can explore the multiple spheres of influence on teachers as they are faced with policy implementation. In this way literacy researchers can attend not only to individual and social conditions that impact teachers' sensemaking of their work, but also to the institutional demands teachers face in the age of accountability. By integrating literacy and policy research, we are able to investigate multiple and layered conditions that shape literacy teaching in schools. Sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) offers literacy researchers the ability to attend to multiple sources and components in teachers' and leaders' experiences to understand not just what happens or does not happen as a result of new policy initiatives, but how actors constructed their understanding of aims, expectations, and constructs within education policies.

Literacy researchers can use findings from this study to further theory on the role of sensemaking on teacher agency and power relationships between teachers, leaders, and external stakeholders. The field needs to consider how to investigate teacher practice with consideration for what teachers have the power to control and where control is delegated to an outside party, be it a principal, assessment program, or curricular materials. This knowledge, blending tools and theory from policy and literacy, has the potential to expand our theoretical knowledge of how policies that aim to impact literacy classroom instruction are adopted, adapted, or ignored at the classroom level and how research can inform practice on ways to better develop and prioritize professional learning about the intersection of literacy and policy.

Implications for Policy Makers

For policy makers, this study shows the complexity of the way the intents of policy are distilled to the school and then classroom. Specifically, this study shows that without organized and ongoing professional learning to help teachers and leaders construct understanding of the policy, in this case literacy standards, more immediate demands linked to accountability will move to the forefront of teachers' and leaders' minds (Spillane & Jennings, 1997). When policy expectations are vague local actors are left to make sense of them drawing on their own resources of knowledge, experience, and external expectations. Without clear guidance, schools will rely on the marketplace to supply materials that claim to be aligned to the policy (Burch, 2016). Professional judgment becomes unnecessary and fidelity to the program becomes paramount. While some may see this as an easy solution to policy ambiguity, it also results in loss of professional expertise, teacher autonomy, and ownership of their work. Rather than evaluating a policy through scores on a test or teacher change in practice, policy makers should be asking how teachers and leaders can best be supported in making sense of the intended aims of policy and examine their current practices for alignment before adopting prepackaged programs that claim alignment to policy.

Additionally, this study raises questions about the affects of accountability pressure on classroom practice. Teachers at this school revealed the way external pressure through assessment practices shaped the ways teachers and leadership narrowly viewed the construct of reading. Ironically, this is in direct contrast to the aims of standards that aim to broaden and deepen the purpose and use of literacy in schools and people's lives (National Governors Association, 2010). For policy makers, these findings reveal the complexities of negotiating multiple and often conflicting messages about what literacy should embody, and highlights the power behind local influence on teacher practice by foregrounding some messages and back

grounding others. Rather than asking why teachers don't comply with policy, policy makers should be asking what else are teachers being asked to do that might overshadow other policies that come down the pipe.

Implications for Professional Development and Preservice Education

This study widens our understanding of what occurs as teachers discuss, plan for, and deliver literacy instruction. Teacher educators, both pre-service and in-service, need to recognize the importance of policy and the roles it plays in teachers' lives. Part of the process of preparing teachers to work in diverse settings demands teachers be aware of the policy environment. The reality of working in education in the era of accountability calls on teachers to have well developed theoretical and practical knowledge of literacy teaching. Teacher education needs to prepare teachers with deep conceptual knowledge of the work they will do with children in order to best navigate and understand local reactions to policy. When teachers enter the field, or when a new policy comes in with pressure to change practice, they may be faced with altering their practice in ways for which they were not prepared. It is important for teachers to understand the theoretical links between their current practice and the expected changes. The work of teaching occurs in a political context with direct impacts on the ways teachers integrate policy messages with their existing knowledge. Preparing teachers, pre-service and through continuing in-service education, is critical so that the social and institutional spheres of influence do not overwhelm the individual professional knowledge of the teacher.

We know the impact leadership has on a school and the importance of leadership on instructional change (Bryk et al., 2010; Seashore Louis et al., 2009). This study finds a need for more research on the ways leaders make sense of literacy, balance that knowledge with external

pressure for achievement, and ultimately communicate their understanding to teachers. Leaders also must be prepared to understand the current policy environment and how to evaluate and respond to changing political contexts. As teacher educators we must be aware that leaders have influence on teacher sensemaking in that they can shape the social and contextual environments of schools. The ways leaders interpret external pressures they face can have a direct impact on expectations for classroom practice and specific aspects of literacy that are more or less valued. Accountability sanctions cannot be ignored and are a reality for all educators today. Leaders, like teachers, are under increasing pressure to raise test scores and often turn to what seem like easy solutions in the form of standards-aligned programs and assessments. Increasingly, leaders are charged with making decisions that impact teaching and learning at the classroom level. However, some school leaders, like the principal of Kennedy, may make decisions about programs and assessments that are well intentioned, but shortsighted and ultimately not likely to make an impact on learning.

Limitations

I purposefully designed this study to focus on teachers who did not participate in any organized professional learning about the CCSS-ELA, but were part of a school that was organized and had strong and respected leadership. Because of the criticism that the CCSS was an unfunded mandate I wanted to examine a school that was essentially expected to make sense of its meaning and expectations for instruction. I did this intentionally because I was interested in how teachers respond to messages from the environment, combined with their own knowledge, beliefs, and experiences to make sense of a new policy that purports to change practice at the classroom level.

A limitation to this study is that not all teachers in the school participated. The experiences of these teachers are, therefore, not represented in the study and it is possible that their experiences could reveal insightful differences in their sensemaking and response to literacy instructional messages and may have presented different findings.

Another limitation is that I chose to focus on first and third grade for two reasons. First, I wanted to examine a lower elementary grade that was not under pressure of high stakes state level testing and a grade that was under pressure of these tests. As it turns out, both grades felt the pressure of assessments, though these were local and not state level assessments. Part of the reason third grade did not exhibit strong reaction to the pressures of the state accountability assessment (i.e. PARCC) may be due to the fact that the year of the study was the first year this test was to be administered and teachers did not yet know what would be on the test. Teachers in this study were more concerned with the technological details of the test than the actual content. The second reason I chose to work with these grades was because the leadership specifically suggested I recruit them because he thought they would welcome participation and were strong teachers.

Future Research

This study is the beginning for me in exploring the experiences of teachers in shifting and often ambiguous policy environments. I'm interested in further exploring in depth the ways teachers experience local messages about expectations for literacy teaching and learning, how those messages align with the intended goals of the policy, and how teachers construct meaning from messages and interpret those into classroom instruction. On the one hand it is important for me to express how local leadership is crucial for the ways messages are distilled from policy to

practice, and the ways immediate accountability demands can override intended policy outcomes. On the other hand, it is also important for me to reveal the struggles teachers experience as they strive to respond to local and distal demands and also engage in meaningful work that aligns with their theoretical and philosophical beliefs about literacy teaching and learning. In response to my call for more research that looks at teacher agency in response to policy demands, I will continue to investigate this phenomenon by working with in-service teachers as they navigate change. In addition to this I would like to work with pre-service teachers to better understand how their sensemaking of policy, specifically those that attempt to directly reach into the classroom, during their teacher preparation plays a role in their ability to act in agentic ways once in the classroom.

Another area of research in which I am interested is in response to how students and parents view the purposes of literacy and expectations for literacy outcomes in the era of accountability and the drive for college and career readiness. This study primarily considered teachers' beliefs and expectations in a policy environment that is centered on looking forward to adulthood at the earliest ages of schooling. Particularly with the public controversy and the increasingly vitriolic reactions many teachers, parents, and politicians have toward accountability testing, I would like to explore the thinking of students and parents and understand how they come to make sense of literacy in and out of school.

Given the role of leadership in filtering policy to teachers in this study I would like to explore how local school leadership makes sense of policy messages for literacy teaching. Specifically I am interested in how leaders decide which messages to transfer to their school environments and how those messages evolve from policy to mandates for practice. When schools are expected to respond to large policy shifts leaders are key levers for bring those

concepts and ideas to the school. How and what leaders choose is essential to examining down the line into the classroom.

Finally, one other line of research I would like to explore relates to the role of professional development in teachers' sensemaking of literacy in a shifting policy environment. As Kennedy Elementary did not take part in any organized professional work with the standards, I would like to explore teachers' sensemaking in schools similar to Kennedy, but who were engaged in ongoing professional learning aimed at impacting classroom practice. This could be crucial information both for teacher development and for professional development design and duration.

Conclusion

This case study of teachers in Kennedy Elementary addresses important questions about what happens when teachers are confronted with messages in their local environments that focus their attention on programs and assessments, instead of learning goals for students. The experiences of teachers at Kennedy show the complexity of literacy teaching within a larger state and national policy environment centered on impacting practice at the classroom level. With pressure to align instruction to a specific program and meet benchmark expectations on one assessment, school leadership can communicate messages that can narrow teachers' thinking about what is important in their work. These messages can push broader goals for literacy to the periphery, while elevating skills and reading level progression to most valued status. Local leaders have great leverage over teacher practice because of the demand for measureable student data demonstrating growth, coupled with the loss of job security and new teacher evaluation systems many educators currently face. However, this study also highlights the opportunity

leaders can harness to shape teacher sensemaking in ways that can potentially shape classroom practice to focus on conceptual goals for literacy learning and practical ways for teachers to design and implement learning environments to meet those goals. In this study I emphasize the pressure teachers felt to conform to the expectations of leadership, but I also juxtapose that with the promise teacher agency holds in combating the negative effects of narrowing literacy teaching to measureable goals only. Teachers and leadership must question quick fixes and curricular programs and assessments that claim to be standards-aligned in response to accountability pressure. Teachers respond to local leadership messages and need support from that same leadership to craft a literacy teaching and learning environment that serves to support students in their growth toward being purposeful literate adults, and not only in attempt to measure achievement on assessments.

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APPENDIX A

Initial Interview Protocol for Teachers

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I'd like to talk with you about your background as an educator, your ideas about literacy teaching and learning and the Common Core State Standards.

BACKGROUND

1. Would you tell me about your teaching experience?
(Ask subquestions if not answered spontaneously):
 - a. How long have you been teaching?
 - b. What certifications and endorsements do you hold currently?
 - c. Why did you become a teacher?
 - d. What are some of the things you most/least enjoy about teaching?
 - e. Other grades taught?
2. Tell me about your own educational history.
 - a. What was your undergraduate major? Masters? Did you feel prepared to enter the classroom?
 - b. What was your teacher preparation experience like?
3. Can you tell me about some of the professional development in which you have participated lately?
 - a. What topics of PD do you recall?
 - i. What did you like about that PD?
 - ii. How did you use information from the PD in your teaching?
 - b. What was the last PD you had on literacy?
 - i. What did you think of that PD?
 - ii. How did you use information from the PD in your teaching?

LITERACY AND INSTRUCTION

4. When you read or hear the word literacy – from educators, in newspapers, on TV, etc. – what does the term mean to you?
5. If you were mentoring a new teacher in your grade, what aspects of literacy would you tell them to focus on? Why?
 - a. What do you think teachers of literacy should know?
 - b. What do you think literacy teachers should do regularly to be effective?
6. As a literacy teacher of (1st/3rd grade) what are your strengths?
7. What do you want to learn more about?
8. Take me through a typical day during your language arts block.
9. Tell me about the ways you plan for language arts instruction.
 - a. What do you think are the most important things you do to help your students develop their literacy skills? Why?
10. Tell me about the programs, materials or frameworks you use for literacy instruction?
 - a. Why do you use these materials?
 - b. How do you use these programs and materials?
 - c. Is there a pacing guide/curriculum map?

- i. How was this developed?
 - ii. How do you use it?
- 11. Tell me about the assessments you administer to your students. (3rd grade teachers ask questions that address the demands for PARCC).
 - a. What do you think about these assessments?
 - b. How do you use the results of these assessments?
 - c. What part do these assessments play in your grade level meetings?
 - d. Do you get any messages from the administration about assessment?
- 12. What are the expectations for teaching literacy at this school?
 - a. From the administration?
 - b. From the literacy coach?

STANDARDS/CCSS

- 13. I'd like to turn the conversation to standards, particularly the Common Core. Given your experience, what is your reaction to them?
 - a. How do you use them?
 - b. What kinds of PD or preparation have you had for using the CCSS?
 - c. How do you think these standards will affect your teaching?
- 14. What has the administration been telling you and the staff in general about CCSS?
 - a. What do you think about this?
 - b. Does anyone else talk much about these standards?
- 15. What do you think about the media attention given to the standards and the controversies around them?
- 16. What impact will/has the CCSS have on your work?
- 17. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about any of the things we discussed today?

Sample Semi-structured Ongoing Interview Questions for Teachers

Post Lesson Observations

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I would like to talk with you about the lesson I observed today.

- 1. Why did you teach that lesson today?
 - a. (ask follow up questions if lesson connected to any work in GLM or PD)
- 2. Can you summarize the main point of your lesson today and what goals you had in mind (in preparing and in teaching the lesson)?
(Ask subquestions if not answered spontaneously)
 - a. Tell me how you planned for that lesson.
 - b. Does this lesson address any specific standards?
 - c. What were the objectives for that lesson?
 - d. How did you choose teaching and/or student materials for this lesson?
- 3. How do you feel about the lesson now that it is over? Do you feel the lesson addressed the standards you hoped it would?
- 4. I noticed you used XXX (e.g. anchor charts, guided reading, peer feedback) during this lesson. How did you decide to use XXX?

- a. (ask follow up questions if lesson connected to any work in GLM or PD)
5. If I were to observe the follow up to this lesson what would I see?
6. How does this lesson fit in with your overall learning goals for your students?
7. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about this lesson?

Sample Semi-structured Ongoing Interview Questions for Teachers

Post-Professional development

1. What did you think of that professional development?
2. Have you had PD on this topic before?
3. What big take-aways do you have from that PD?
4. Do you think you will use any XXX in your teaching or planning?
5. How does XXX look in (1st /3rd grade)? Do you think it was applicable to your grade?
6. What kind of follow up do you expect from this meeting?
7. How do you think you might apply this information to your teaching?

Sample Semi-structured Ongoing Interview Questions for Teachers

Post-grade level meetings

1. What did you think about that meeting?
2. Why did the group decide to talk about XXX?
3. What next steps are you going to take about XXX in your classroom?
4. I noticed there was a lot of discussion about XXX. Is there anyone you can turn to for support on that? How can that person support you?
5. How do you plan on applying XXX in your classroom?

Sample Semi-structured Ongoing Interview Questions for Teachers

Post-coaching sessions

1. What did you think about the coaching session?
2. What were the objectives?
3. Why did you focus on that topic?
4. I noticed you and the coach talked about XXX. How do you see that fitting into your teaching?
5. What are your next steps after this coaching meeting?

Interview Protocol for Administrators

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I'd like to talk with you about your background as an educator, your ideas about literacy teaching and learning and the Common Core State Standards.

BACKGROUND

1. Would you tell me about your experience as an educator?
(Ask subquestions if not answered spontaneously):
 - a. Teaching experience?
 - b. Experience as an administrator?
 - c. Number of years at Kennedy?
 - d. What degrees and/or certifications do you currently hold?
2. Tell me about Kennedy School.
 - a. If you wanted me to teach here, what would you tell me about the school?
 - b. If I was to ask a teacher what it is like to work here what you that person tell me?

LITERACY AND INSTRUCTION

3. When you read or hear the word literacy – from educators, in newspapers, on TV, etc. – what does the term mean to you?
4. If you were mentoring a new teacher, what aspects of literacy would you tell them to focus on? Why?
 - a. What do you think teachers of literacy should know?
 - b. What do you think literacy teachers should do regularly to be effective?
5. If I were to walk in to any classroom in Kennedy during language arts, what would I see?
 - a. What would you hope I would see?

STANDARDS/CCSS

6. I'd like to turn the conversation to standards, particularly the Common Core. Given your experience, what is your reaction to them?
 - a. How have you or the district been planning for full implementation of the CCSS?
 - b. What do the teachers here think of them?
 - c. What kinds of PD or preparation has the school had for implementation?
 - d. How do you think literacy instruction will be effected by the CCSS-ELA standards?
7. What has the district been telling you and the staff in general about CCSS?
 - a. What do you think about this?
 - b. Does anyone else talk much about these standards?
8. What do you think about the media attention given to the standards and the controversies around them?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about any of the things we discussed today?

Thank you again for taking the time to talk with me about these topics today.

Sample Semi-structured Ongoing Interview Questions for Administrators

1. What did you think of the PD on XXX?

2. Has the staff ever heard about this before?
3. How was that topic chosen?
4. What impact do you hope it has on teachers?
5. What follow up is planned for this PD?

Interview Protocol for Literacy Coach

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I'd like to talk with you about your background as an educator, your ideas about literacy teaching and learning and the Common Core State Standards.

BACKGROUND

1. Tell me about your own educational history.
(Ask subquestions if not answered spontaneously):
 - a. What was your undergraduate major? Masters?
 - b. What was your teacher preparation experience like?
 - c. What certifications and endorsements do you hold currently?
2. Would you tell me about your experience as an educator?
 - a. How long have you been a coach
 - b. Other teaching experience?
 - c. Why did you become a teacher?
3. Tell me about your duties as a coach.
 - a. What is a typical day like for you?
 - b. What are some of the things you most/least enjoy about your role?
 - c. What kinds of professional development do you provide?
4. As a literacy coach, what are your strengths?
5. What do you want to learn more about?
6. Tell me about the coaches meetings you attend. What do you typically do in those meetings?
 - a. What topics do you discuss?
 - b. How are the agendas set?
 - c. What happens after those meetings?
7. Can you tell me about some of the professional development you have delivered to Kennedy teachers?
 - a. What topics of PD do you recall?
 - b. What PDs went very well? Why do you think so?
 - c. What PDs didn't go so well? Why do you think so?

LITERACY AND INSTRUCTION

8. When you read or hear the word literacy – from educators, in newspapers, on TV, etc. – what does the term mean to you?
9. If you were mentoring a new teacher in (1st/3rd grade), what aspects of literacy would you tell them to focus on? Why?
(Ask subquestions if not answered spontaneously):
 - a. What do you think teachers of literacy should know?
 - b. What do you think literacy teachers should do regularly to be effective?
10. If I were to walk in to any classroom in Kennedy during language arts, what would I see?
 - a. What would you hope I would see?

STANDARDS/CCSS

1. I'd like to turn the conversation to standards, particularly the Common Core. Given your experience, what is your reaction to them?
 - a. How have you or the district been planning for full implementation of the CCSS?
 - b. What do the teachers here think of them?
 - c. What kinds of PD or preparation have you had for implementation?
 - d. How do you think literacy instruction will be effected by the CCSS-ELA standards?
 - e. How are you expected to work with teachers and these standards?
2. What has the district been telling you and the staff in general about CCSS?
 - a. What do you think about this?
 - b. Does anyone else talk much about these standards?
3. What do you think about the media attention given to the standards and the controversies around them?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about any of the things we discussed today?

Sample Semi-structured Ongoing Interview Questions for Literacy Coach

Post-Professional development

8. Thinking about the PD you lead on XXX, how did you decide on that topic?
9. What did you think of that professional development?
10. Has the staff had PD on this topic before?
11. What big take-aways do you want the teachers to have from that PD?
12. What kind of follow up do you expect from this meeting?
- 13.

Sample Semi-structured Ongoing Interview Questions for Literacy Coach

Post-Coaches' meetings

1. What did you think about that meeting?
2. Why did the group decide to talk about XXX?
3. What next steps are you going to take about XXX in your school?
4. I noticed there was a lot of discussion about XXX. Is there anyone you can turn to for support on that? How can that person support you?
5. How do you plan on applying XXX in your school?
6. How do you expect the teachers to respond?

Sample Semi-structured Ongoing Interview Questions for Literacy Coach

Post-Coaching sessions

1. What did you think about the coaching session?
2. What were the objectives?
3. Why did you focus on m,mthat topic?
4. I noticed you and the teacher talked about XXX. How do you see that fitting into the goals for teaching?
5. What are your next steps after this coaching meeting?

APPENDIX B

First Grade Lesson Plan Template					
Reading Unit					
Part					
Description					
Length					
Primary Reading Standards					
Secondary Reading Standards					
Reading Foundational					
Speaking and Listening					
Essential Questions					
Assessment	Reading Checklist				
	Running Record				
	Retelling Rubrics				
Small Groups	Guided Reading	Book Clubs	Strategy		
	All classrooms have made individual guided reading plans.	n/a	n/a		

Conferring	Individual teachers have chosen either Evernote or paper notes.				
Resources					
Writing					
Writing Unit					
Bend					
Description					
Length					
Language					
Primary Writing					
Secondary Writing					
Essential Questions					
Assessment	1. Individual conferring 2. On Demand Writing piece at the end of the unit				
Small Groups	Individual conferring schedules in each classroom				
Conferring					
Resources					
Differentiation	For those needing some additional support, the teacher will talk with them individually or in small groups to help them to get started thinking about their small moment idea and planning their story, taking dictations when appropriate.				
Reading					
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Mentor Texts					
Material					

Is/Anch or Chart					
Teachi ng Point					
Shared Readin g					
Playlist					
Writing					
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Frid ay
Mentor Texts					
Materia ls/Anch or Chart					
Teachi ng Point					
Shared Writing					
Playlist					
Word Work					
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Frid ay
Short Vowel	Introduce sorts in small groups. Groups work together to the first stop sign.	Introduce sorts in small groups. Groups work together to the first stop sign.	Students work in small groups from the first to second stop sign.	Students work in small groups from the first to second stop sign.	Stud ents not pres ent
Digrap h					
Blends					
Long					

Vowel					
Math					
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Lesson :					
Daily Routine:					
Math Talk:					
Objective:					
M					
A					
T					
H					
Homework					
ELL strategies used:					

Third Grade Level Literacy Reporting Template

Core Planning Resource Links:

-unpacked units of study:

Balanced Literacy Site:

****note: team has planned sequence of lessons together and discussed all sections of this template together. The different columns are for each teacher to make notes to themselves if needed. If a section is left blank, teacher is using or doing same as other teachers****

70 minute ELA Grade Level Meeting Agenda

A. ELA Common Core State Standards and Balanced Literacy Planning/Resources Share

B. Collaborative Analysis of Student ELA Work/Data Discussions

C. Celebrations of Student Success

Grade Level: 3

Date:

<p>Unit Name:</p> <p>Unit Description</p> <p>Length:</p>	<p>Unit</p> <p>Assessed Standards:</p> <p>Essential Questions:</p> <p><u>Writing:</u></p> <p>Unit</p>
<p>Common Core Standards <i>Primary</i> <i>Secondary</i></p>	<p>Reading: Assessed Standards:</p> <p>Writing: Assessed Standards:</p>

Essential Questions	Reading Essential Questions:		
Read Aloud Title and Author	3J	3A	3T
Shared Reading and Writing	Reading:		
	3J	3A	3T

	Writing: <table border="1" style="margin-left: 20px;"> <tr> <td>3J</td><td>3A</td><td>3T</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table>				3J	3A	3T						
3J	3A	3T											
Mini-lesson Teaching Points	<u>Reading:</u>												
		3J	3A	3T									
	Monday												
	Tuesday												
	Wednesday												
	Thursday												
	Friday												

	<p>Writing:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td></td> <td>3J</td> <td>3A</td> <td>3T</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Monday</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tuesday</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Wednesday</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Thursday</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Friday</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>					3J	3A	3T	Monday				Tuesday				Wednesday				Thursday				Friday			
	3J	3A	3T																									
Monday																												
Tuesday																												
Wednesday																												
Thursday																												
Friday																												
Conferring (Check and list teacher)	<input type="checkbox"/> Evernote <input type="checkbox"/> Penseive <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher Created notes <input type="checkbox"/> Other																											
*Guided Reading Strategy Groups Book Clubs	<p>*Guided Reading: All classrooms have made individual guided reading plans.</p> <p>Strategy Groups: Reading:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>3J</td> <td>3A</td> <td>3T</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p>Writing:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>3J</td> <td>3A</td> <td>3T</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>				3J	3A	3T				3J	3A	3T															
3J	3A	3T																										
3J	3A	3T																										

	Book Clubs:		
Word Study and Vocabulary			
	3J	3A	3T
Formal Assessments (D) Diagnostic (F) Formative (S) Summative	Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Writing about reading entries in notebooks● Writing: Word Study: Spelling city test		
Texts/ Resources	Reading:listed above Writing: Word Study: spelling city		
Differentiation Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● leveled groups● varied graphic organizers if needed● Working with a partner● box of Just Right books if needed		



Illinois State Board of Education

100 North First Street • Springfield, Illinois 62777-0001

www.isbe.net

Gery J. Chico

Christopher A. Koch, Ed.D.

FACT SHEET

TEACHER EVALUATIONS

August 2014, ISBE Division of Public Information

Administrators and teachers are working together to implement new educator evaluation tools that better reflect the caliber of instruction happening in the classroom. The Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA), signed into law in 2010, changed how teacher and principal performance is measured by requiring new evaluation models that offer comprehensive feedback and consider student growth as well as professional skills and practices.

The new evaluation systems provide clear, consistent descriptions of what outstanding teaching and leadership should look like as well as give local districts the time and opportunity to design their own systems that meet state rules and the needs and culture of their schools and community.

To meet the professional practice component, qualified evaluators conduct evaluations aligned to the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards. In order to be an evaluator, educators must successfully complete a State Board pre-qualification program. The program involves rigorous training and an independent observer's determination that the evaluator's ratings properly align to the State Board's requirements. Evaluators must observe, collect evidence and provide timely feedback as part of the evaluation process. Teachers and principals are evaluated using a system of four ratings: Excellent, Proficient, Needs Improvement and Unsatisfactory. Districts are also working to strengthen the professional development opportunities for teachers to support student improvement.

PERA also requires that, for the first time, principal and teacher evaluations will be tied to data and indicators of student growth as a "significant factor." While early implementer districts such as Chicago Public Schools (CPS) have already begun incorporating student

New Educator

Evaluations in Illinois

- Ratings are based on the evaluation of teacher practice and student growth.
- Districts form agreements with teachers or union representatives to develop their own evaluation systems that meet minimum state standards.
- Districts default to the state model for matters regarding the use of data and indicators of student growth that could not be agreed upon.

performance into evaluations, state law staggers the implementation of teacher evaluations that include student growth. All Illinois districts are required to fully implement the student growth component into their evaluation systems no later than the 2016-17 school year. This requirement does not mean that educators' jobs depend on standardized test results. Rather, student growth is one portion of a teacher's performance evaluation rating, specifically at least 25 percent in the first and second years of implementation. From the third year on, student growth must be at least 30 percent of the rating.

Local control is an important part of the new evaluations as districts have options to create an evaluation system that best meets their unique needs. For teacher evaluations, a Joint Committee composed of equal representation selected by the district and its teachers or, where applicable, the teachers' exclusive bargaining representatives, has the ability to design its own evaluation system that meets minimum state rules. The first meeting of a Joint Committee must occur by **Nov. 1** of the school year immediately before the school district's implementation date (for example, Nov. 1, 2014, for a district with a 2015-16 implementation date). The committee has 180 days to agree on how to incorporate data and indicators of student growth into its own evaluation system. If the committee cannot agree on its own plan, the district must then implement those aspects of the state model regarding the use of data and indicators of student growth about which the Joint Committee is unable to agree. The administrative rules require that student growth comprises 50 percent of the performance evaluation. The State Board's proposed rules for incorporating student growth under a state model was published for public review, with feedback due in late August. The State Board will then consider the model for approval in September.



PERA requires that, for the first time, principal and teacher evaluations will be tied to data and indicators of student growth as a “significant factor.”

Public Feedback

The state model for incorporating student growth was published in the [Illinois Register](#) and on the ISBE website for public feedback for 45 days. . To see the proposed rules, visit www.isbe.net/rules/proposed/default.htm and look for “Proposed Amendments to Part 50 (Evaluation of Certified Staff under Articles 24A and 34 of the School Code) ”

Illinois Administrative Code Part 50 outlines how student growth should be incorporated into evaluations, including a definition of “significant factor” and the type of assessments to be used.

Read more at www.isbe.net/rules/archive/pdfs/50ARK.pdf. Additional information is available on ISBE's website at www.isbe.net/PERA.

APPENDIX D

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT CHICAGO

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS)
Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research (MC 672)
203 Administrative Office Building
1737 West Polk Street
Chicago, Illinois 60612-7227

Exemption Granted

September 17, 2014

Melanie Walski, MA Ed
Curriculum and Instruction
3704 S. 61 Court
Cicero, IL 60804
Phone: (213) 304-0638

RE: Research Protocol # 2014-0823
“Teacher Sense-Making of Literacy Standards”

Sponsors: None

Dear Ms. Walski:

Your Claim of Exemption was reviewed on September 17, 2014 and it was determined that your research meets the criteria for exemption. You may now begin your research.

<u>Exemption Period:</u>	September 17, 2014 – September 17, 2017
Performance Site:	UIC
Recruitment Site:	Kennedy Elementary School
Subject Population:	Teachers, administrators and students
Number of Subjects:	120

The specific exemption categories under 45 CFR 46.101(b) are:

(1) Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods;

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note the Review History of this submission:

Receipt Date	Submission Type	Review Process	Review Date	Review Action
08/27/2014	Initial Review	Exempt	09/07/2014	Modifications Required
09/10/2014	Response to Modifications	Exempt	09/17/2014	Approved

You are reminded that investigators whose research involving human subjects is determined to be exempt from the federal regulations for the protection of human subjects still have responsibilities for the ethical conduct of the research under state law and UIC policy. Please be aware of the following UIC policies and responsibilities for investigators:

Amendments You are responsible for reporting any amendments to your research protocol that may affect the determination of the exemption and may result in your research no longer being eligible for the exemption that has been granted.

Record Keeping You are responsible for maintaining a copy all research related records in a secure location in the event future verification is necessary, at a minimum these documents include: the research protocol, the claim of exemption application, all questionnaires, survey instruments, interview questions and/or data collection instruments associated with this research protocol, recruiting or advertising materials, any consent forms or information sheets given to subjects, or any other pertinent documents.

Final Report When you have completed work on your research protocol, you should submit a final report to the Office for Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS).

Information for Human Subjects UIC Policy requires investigators to provide information about the research protocol to subjects and to obtain their permission prior to their participating in the research. The information about the research protocol should be presented to subjects in writing or orally from a written script. When appropriate, the following information must be provided to all research subjects participating in exempt studies:

The researchers affiliation; UIC, JBVMAC or other institutions,

The purpose of the research,

The extent of the subject's involvement and an explanation of the procedures to be followed,

Whether the information being collected will be used for any purposes other than the proposed research,

A description of the procedures to protect the privacy of subjects and the confidentiality of the research information and data,

f. Description of any reasonable foreseeable risks,

Description of anticipated benefit,

A statement that participation is voluntary and subjects can refuse to participate or can stop at any time,

A statement that the researcher is available to answer any questions that the subject may have and which includes the name and phone number of the investigator(s).

A statement that the UIC IRB/OPRS or JBVMAC Patient Advocate Office is available if there are questions about subject's rights, which includes the appropriate phone numbers.

Please be sure to:

☐ Use your research protocol number (2014-0823) on any documents or correspondence with the IRB concerning your research protocol.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research. If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the OPRS office at (312) 996-1711 or me at (312) 355-2908. Please send any correspondence about this protocol to OPRS at 203 AOB, M/C 672.

Sincerely,

Charles W. Hoehne, B.S., C.I.P.

Assistant Director

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

cc: Kimberly Lawless, Curriculum and Instruction, M/C 147

Taffy Raphael, Curriculum and Instruction, M/C 147

Melanie M. Walski

3704 S. 61 Court, Cicero, IL 60804 Phone: 213-304-0638 E-Mail: mwalsk2@uic.edu

Education

University of Illinois at Chicago 2011-2016 (expected)

Ph.D., Curriculum & Instruction: Language, Literacy & Culture, Chicago, IL

Dominican University 2008-2010

MAEd, Reading Specialist, River Forest, IL

Southern Illinois University 1992-1996

B.S., Clothing and Textiles: Design, Carbondale, IL

Other Educational Experience

University of Chicago 2013

SSAD 61500: Urban Education and Education Policy with Prof. Charles M. Payne, Chicago, IL

California State University 1998-2002

Elementary Education, Multiple Subject Teaching Credential, Los Angeles, CA

University Teaching Experience

Adjunct Faculty, University of Illinois at Chicago 2013-2014

CI 503: Advanced Foundations of Literacy Instruction, K-8. Master's course in the College of Education. Design curriculum and delivered instruction in advanced methods for literacy teaching in grades K-8 with an emphasis on examining cognitive, social, developmental perspectives; relationships between language and literacy; and aligning instruction, assessment, and standards. (Fall 2013)

ED 257: Foundations of Literacy Instruction, K-8. Undergraduate pre-service teaching course in the College of Education. Designed curriculum and delivered instruction in methods for literacy teaching in grades K-8 with an emphasis on examining cognitive, social, developmental and cultural perspectives on literacy teaching and learning. This course also included a survey of children's literature and its relationship to teaching and learning. (Spring 2014)

Adjunct Faculty, Dominican University, River Forest, IL 2011

EDU 582: Children's Literature. Master's course in the School of Education. Designed curriculum, delivered instruction, designed and assessed candidate work focused on children's and young adult literature with a concentration on culturally responsive education through high quality literature. (Spring 2011)

EDU 533: Reading and Writing Instruction and Improvement. Master's course in the School of Education. Designed curriculum, delivered instruction, designed and assessed candidate work focused on theories and methods of literacy learning and teaching. (Summer 2011).

School Teaching Experience

Reading Specialist, Dominican University, River Forest, IL 2010-2011

Technical Assistance. Observed and mentored urban and suburban reading intervention teachers in parochial schools to reach target literacy goals for students in need of academic support. Teachers were located at various sites around the metropolitan area. Funding provided through a grant from the Beck Foundation.

Classroom Teacher, Los Angeles Unified School District, CA 1999-2008

2nd-4th grades Classroom Teacher: Glen Alta Elementary School. General education, multiple subject, self-contained classroom teacher. Responsibilities included standards-based instruction in all areas of the elementary curriculum including Language Arts,

Math, Science, Social Studies, and character education. Literacy education included English language arts curriculum as well as language development for ELL students.

Intensive Academic Support Teacher: Glen Alta Elementary School. Self-contained classroom teacher for intensive 2nd grade retention students. Students in this class were retained in 2nd grade and were in need of intensive remediation and support to master foundational literacy skills as well as scaffolding to master grade-level skills and content in all subject areas, but primarily in language arts and math.

Teaching Assistant, Vista Del Mar ED/LD Therapeutic School, Los Angeles, CA 1998-1999

Educational and behavioral support provider for middle school teachers. Responsibilities included supporting the lead teacher in delivering language arts instruction to students in 6th and 7th grades.

Research Experience

Graduate Research Assistant: Center for Literacy, University of Illinois at Chicago 2013-present Director: William Teale

Data collector: Collect qualitative and quantitative data for early childhood research projects associated with the Center for Literacy

Data Analyst: Report qualitative and quantitative data for research projects associated with the Center for Literacy.

Other duties: Complete and maintain IRB documentation.

Graduate Research Assistant: Center for Literacy, Early Reading First, University of Illinois at Chicago 2011-2013, Principal Co-Investigators: William Teale, Jeffri Brookfield, Maureen Meehan

Data collector: Collect qualitative and quantitative data in pre-K classrooms for mixed methods study on literacy engagement in learning centers.

Assessor: Assess pre-K students with PPVT and PALS assessment tools and conduct classroom ELLCO observations.

Data Analyst: Report data for ELLCO observations.

Other duties: Train assessors on ELLCO tool, compile data for annual reports to US Department of Education, IRB annual renewal.

Independent Research Project: Building Bridges Between Home and School, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2013, Principal Co-Investigators: Melanie Walski, Jaime Madison Vasquez, Arthi Rao

Mixed methods study on the perception of role of stakeholders in a dual language school. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected and used in the final analysis to develop an understanding of the perceived roles and responsibilities of parents, teachers and administrators in a Spanish/English dual language school in a large urban area. Data collection methods included individual interviews, focus groups, and surveys of teachers and parents. Findings were presented to the administration of the school to provide guidance in how to best coordinate parent involvement opportunities and communication tools to enlist parents more deeply and meaningfully in their child/children's education.

Other Professional Experience

Consultant: SchoolRise, LLC., Chicago, IL 2014-present

Consultant and professional development designer and provider specializing in K-8 literacy curriculum and instruction with an emphasis on standards-based change.

White Papers

Walski, M. M., Hoffman, E. B., & Teale, W. H. (2015). *Kindergarten readiness: What Head Start and Early Head Start parents and staff think and do about it*. (UIC Center for Literacy Research Paper). Chicago: University of Illinois at Chicago Center for Literacy.

Teale, W.H., Walski, M. M., Hoffman, E.B., Meehan, M., Whittingham, C.E., & Colaner, A. University of Illinois Center for Literacy. (2015) Early childhood literacy: Policy for the coming decade. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Center for Literacy.

Under Review

Teale, W.H., Hoffman, E.B., Whittingham, C.E., Walski, M. M., Meehan, M., Colaner, A. (under review). *Early childhood literacy: Policy for the coming decade*

Peer-Reviewed Presentations

Vasquez, J. M., Walski, M. M., & Fortune, A. J., (2016, April). Transcendence through transformation: Teacher learning in the Vygotsky space. Paper presented at the American Education Research Association Annual Conference, Washington, D.C.

Walski, M. (2016, February). Teacher Sensemaking of Literacy: Complications of Using Leveled Text In First Grade. Paper presented at the National Council of Teachers of English Assembly of Research, Ypsilanti, MI.

Teale, W.H., Hoffman, E.B., Whittingham, C.E., Walski, M., Meehan, M. (2015, July). *Early Childhood Literacy: Policy for the Coming Decade*. Poster session at the International Literacy Association, St. Louis, MO.

Teale, W.H., Hoffman, E.B., Whittingham, C.E., Walski, M., Meehan, M., Colaner, A. (2015, June). *Early Childhood Literacy: Policy for the Coming Decade*. Early Childhood Research-Policy Forum, Naperville, IL.

Walski, M., Hoffman, E.B., Whittingham, C.E., & Teale, W.H. (2015, June). *What Does it Take to be Ready for School?: Head Start Perspectives*. Early Childhood Research-Policy Forum, Naperville, IL.

Vasquez, J., Walski, M. & Rao, A. (2014, March). Building bridges between home and school. Paper presented at the Illinois Reading Council, Springfield, IL.

Vasquez, J. & Walski, M. (2014, May). Home-school communication: Partnering with linguistically diverse families. Paper presented at the International Reading Association Conference, New Orleans, LA.

Walski, M. (2014, Dec.). Examining the intersection of literacy policy and instructional practice: A perspective on cognitive, social, and institutional spheres of influence. Paper presented at The Literacy Research Association, Marco Island, FL.

Grants

Walski, M. (2015) *The Intersection of Policy and Practice: Teacher Sensemaking of Literacy Standards*. University of Illinois at Chicago Office of Research Dissertation Grant. (\$500 funded).

Professional Organization Membership and Professional Involvement

Graduate Student Representative, College of Education LLC Faculty Search Committee, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2015

Student Member, College of Education Student Leadership Advisory Board, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2014-present

Student Representative, College of Education Equity and Diversity Committee, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2012-2013

Co-Founder, COE Doctoral Student Forum, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2012-2013

Student Representative, The Butler Children's and Young Adult Literature Center, Dominican University, 2009-2010

Panelist, The Truth About Beginnings Conference, 2009

Panelist, The Truth About Discovery Conference, 2010

Member, International Reading Association

Member, Literacy Research Association

Member, National Council of Teachers of English

Member, American Educational Research Association

Certificates and Training

Illinois Type 10 Reading Specialist, grades K-12 with Middle School Endorsement

Illinois Type 03 Elementary Teaching, grades K-9

California Multiple Subject Teaching Credential with a Cross-cultural, Language & Academic Development Emphasis, K-12

Collaborative Institutional Review Board (IRB) Training Initiative's initial (basic) human research training and consecutive credits for Social and Behavioral Sciences.

References

Taffy Raphael, Ph.D. Professor and University Scholar (advisor)

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