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*EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION AND POLICY ANALYSIS* 2005 27: 23

DOI: 10.3102/01623737027001023

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## **The Role of Nonsystem Actors in the Relationship Between Policy and Practice: The Case of Reading Instruction in California**

**Cynthia E. Coburn**

*University of California, Berkeley*

*Studies of the relationship between policy and practice typically focus on the formal policy system alone. Yet, the public policy system does not exist in isolation. A host of nonsystem actors promote, translate, and transform policy ideas as they carry them to teachers. This study draws on neoinstitutional theories of organization to investigate the role of nonsystem actors in the relationship between policy and teachers' classroom practice. A cross-case, historical design was used to investigate how teachers in two California elementary schools responded to changes in state reading policy from 1983 to 1999. The way in which teachers responded depended in part on the nature of their connections to policy messages, which varied substantially across teachers and across policy initiatives. Policy messages from nonsystem actors were more consequential for teachers' classroom practices. Teachers' connections to nonsystem actors were influenced by the interrelationship between system and nonsystem actors as policy ideas emerged, diffused, and were implemented over time.*

Keywords: *nonsystem actors, policy implementation, reading instruction*

**M**OST studies of the relationship between state instructional policy and classroom practice focus solely or predominantly on how policy ideas move through the formal public policy system (state, county, district) into schools. Yet, the formal policy system does not exist in isolation. A host of nonsystem actors—-independent professional development providers, reform organizations, publishers, and universities—promote, translate, and even transform policy ideas as they carry them to teachers (Burch, 2000; Coburn, 2001a; Cohen, 1982, 1995; Cohen & Hill, 2000; Hill, 2000). Although policy studies have investigated the role of such organizations in the policy-making process (see, for example, Cusick & Borman, 2002; Eilers, 2004; Fuhrman, Clune, & Elmore, 1988; Ogawa, 1994), their role in policy implementation in general and the relationship between state policy and teachers' classrooms more specifically has rarely been explored systematically. Studies that have addressed this issue provide evidence that nonsystem actors are a key mediating link between policy and practice

(Burch, 2000; Cohen & Hill, 2000; Hill, 2000). However, these studies provide little guidance as to how or why nonsystem actors are so influential or what accounts for the nature of teachers' differential connections to them.

Taking up this challenge, the present study drew on neoinstitutional theories of organizations to investigate how teachers in two California elementary schools learned about and responded to changes in state reading policy from 1983 to 1999. How teachers responded to changes in reading policy depended, in part, on the nature of their connections to policy messages, which varied substantially across teachers and across different policy initiatives. Despite these variations, however, policy messages from nonsystem actors tended to be more consequential for teachers' classroom practice. And the nature of those connections to nonsystem actors themselves was influenced by the complex interrelationship between system and nonsystem actors as particular policy ideas emerged, diffused, and were implemented over time.

Reading instruction in California provides a fertile context for this study because California is in the midst of its third major shift in reading policy since 1980. After the rise of a movement toward literature-based instruction in the late 1980s and early literacy approaches in the early 1990s, tremendous activity and controversy since the mid-1990s has led the state and the profession toward varying versions of what is frequently called a “balanced” approach to reading instruction. The intensity and temporal proximity of these shifting policies, as well as the differences in fundamental assumptions about teaching and learning they imply, throw into relief the pathways by which teachers engaged them. By understanding these pathways, we not only gain further insight into the complex relationship between policy and classroom practice but also uncover potential points of leverage for influencing how teachers respond to changes in instructional policy.

### Theoretical Framework

Observers have noted the complexity and fragmentation of what David Cohen has called the system of “instructional guidance” in the United States (Cohen, 1995; Cohen & Spillane, 1993; Rowan, 2001). Teachers learn about new approaches to teaching and learning through a diverse and at times loosely connected set of policies, organizations, and actors. The formal system of public policy and governance is complex and multilayered (Cohen, 1982; Cohen & Spillane, 1993; Meyer, Scott, & Deal, 1981; Scott, 1994). These system actors, as I call them, include the various individuals and organizations that constitute state and local governance of schooling, including state departments, county offices, school districts, and schools.<sup>1</sup> Policy decisions related to instruction are made at the state, district, and school levels, and policy decisions made at higher levels of the system must move through multiple layers of system actors to reach teachers (Cohen & Spillane, 1993; McLaughlin, 1987; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984).

In addition to the public policy system, however, teachers also learn about policy ideas from a range of actors that are not formally part of the system. Rowan (2001) identified three classes of private organizations that play an important role in instructional improvement in U.S. public schools: *for-profit firms*, including textbook publishers, instructional program vendors, and other

service providers; *membership organizations*, such as professional associations, advocacy groups, and networks; and *nonprofit organizations*, including universities, research firms, and quasi-governmental agencies that provide research and development and technical assistance or act as intermediaries. These nonsystem actors, as I call them, play an important role in carrying policy ideas to teachers in the form of information, professional development, technical assistance, and curricular materials.

System and nonsystem actors interact in a multiplicity of ways. Nonsystem actors play a role in the formulation of state policy by participating in state task forces and commissions and by providing intellectual resources on which policy is sometimes based (Cohen, 1982; Cusick & Borman, 2002; Hill, 2000). But nonsystem actors also play a crucial role in policy implementation. States often depend on nonsystem actors to carry out instructional policy in the absence of capacity to do it themselves (Cohen, 1982; Hill, 2000; Honig, 2004). Thus, policymakers provide funds for schools and districts to purchase curricular materials and contract professional development with nonsystem actors. In some states, including California, state funding is linked to specific criteria meant to govern content.<sup>2</sup> Often, however, the content is left up to local discretion (Cohen, 1982). Beyond this, numerous professional development providers and instructional materials are available to teachers that have no connection to the public policy system but nevertheless convey policy ideas to teachers.

In sharp contrast with this portrait of the multiple, interdependent paths from instructional policy to classroom practice, most studies of the relationship between policy and practice focus solely or predominantly on the formal policy system (see, for example, Fuhrman & Elmore, 1990; McGill-Franzen, 2000; Odden, 1991; Valencia & Wixson, 2000). This narrow focus essentially excerpts policy implementation from its broader social context, failing to take into account or investigate the role of nonsystem actors in the relationship between policy and practice.

In this study, I drew on neoinstitutional organization theory to put forth a broader conceptualization of the ways in which policy messages about appropriate reading instruction move in and through the environment and into schools. At root, institutional theory is a cultural approach.

It emphasizes how norms and cultural conceptions are constructed and reconstructed over time, carried by individual and collective actors, and embedded within policy and governance structures (Scott, 2001; Scott, Mendel, & Pollack, 1996). Institutional theorists suggest that policy messages shape patterns of action and beliefs within organizations through *regulative* means as they are incorporated into formal policy, but also through *normative* means as teachers and others feel pressured to adopt certain approaches to maintain legitimacy and through *cognitive* means as conceptions of appropriate practice attain taken-for-granted status as natural or commonsense (Scott, 2001).

This conceptualization highlights the ways in which policy is situated in and interacts with a broad range of actors, organizations, and sets of ideas. In particular, institutional theorists have offered a new unit of analysis to facilitate the study of these interactive relationships: the organizational field. Situated between individual organizations and populations of organizations, the organizational field has been defined as “those organizations that, in aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products” (DiMaggio, 1991, pp. 64–65). The organizational field is characterized by governance structures and actors that are connected with one another through both horizontal and vertical ties and share a “common meaning system” that guides action and interaction (Scott, 1994).

Empirical work outside of education has emphasized how policy emerges from vertical as well as horizontal interactions between the public policy system and professional organizations, university researchers, policy entrepreneurs, and others in the organizational field (Kingdon, 1984; Laumann & Knoke, 1987; Moore, 1988; Scott, Ruef, Mendel, & Caronna, 2000). But it also provides evidence that these nonsystem actors, in turn, shape and interpret policy messages as they move through the system to target organizations (Dobbin, Sutton, Meyer, & Scott, 1993; Dowd & Dobbin, 1997; Edelman, 1992; Pollack, 1997). Rather than proffering a vision of policy implementation in which policy messages move through the system in a top-down, more or less linear manner, this perspective suggests that teachers are

connected to policy messages through a web of interactive and, at times, reciprocal linkages. The analytic task, then, is to understand the nature of these linkages between system and nonsystem actors and how they shape the way in which teachers learn about and respond to policy messages from the environment.

A few studies in education provide initial guidance in this task. These studies have shown that nonsystem actors play a mediating role between state instructional policy and teachers’ classroom practice (Coburn, 2001a; Cohen & Hill, 2000; Hill, 2000). To the degree that these individuals, organizations, and materials provide teachers access to policy ideas that are grounded in the curricula, connected to several elements of instruction, and extended in time, they influence the degree to which teachers make changes in classroom practice in the direction of state policy (Cohen & Hill, 2000; Hill, 2000). Nonsystem actors are especially influential when policy ideas are complex and require substantial changes in modal teacher practice (Hill, 2000). Finally, nonsystem actors shape *what* teachers learn about policy messages. They not only carry policy ideas to teachers but also translate and transform them as well (Coburn, 2001a; Hill, 2000). In this way, nonsystem actors play a key role in shaping teachers’ access to some policy ideas and not others.

The present study builds on and extends this work in three ways. First, I develop a framework for conceptualizing the nature of teachers’ connections to policy ideas in the broader environment. To engage the question of teachers’ connections to messages via nonsystem actors, it is first necessary to develop the conceptual tools for describing and analyzing the broader ways teachers are connected to policy, of which nonsystem actors are one route. Second, I use this framework to provide additional evidence that nonsystem actors play a critical role in shaping what policy ideas teachers are connected with and how they respond to them. In so doing, I move beyond documenting the nature of the relationship between nonsystem actors and teachers’ change in practice to develop an account of *why* these connections are particularly influential. Finally, I discuss the ways in which the interrelationship between system and nonsystem actors in the organizational field influences the nature of teachers’ connections to nonsystem actors in schools.

## Method

This study involved the use of a cross-case, historical, and cross-sectional design. Within a common state policy environment, I compared the experiences of three teachers in two California elementary schools in two districts. By including more than one district and more than one school, I was able to gain insight into how teachers' embedded contexts mediated their connections to shifting policy ideas. Focusing on three teachers allowed for the depth of investigation necessary to capture the nature of teachers' connections to messages from the environment over time. Although not generalizable, the in-depth investigation made possible by the small number of cases provides the opportunity to generate new hypotheses or build theory about sets of relationships that would otherwise have remained invisible (Hartley, 1994).

The study was both historical and cross sectional. I studied the nature of teachers' connections to the policy environment from 1983 until 1999 using document analysis, oral histories of informants at multiple levels of the system, and secondary sources. I also investigated the nature of teachers' connections to the environment as they unfolded in real time during the 1998–1999 school year, relying primarily on in-depth interviewing (Spradley, 1979) and sustained observation (Barley, 1990).

I used purposive sampling to select two urban elementary schools that represented strategic contrasts along dimensions that previous research and theory suggested would be useful for understanding the relationship between classrooms and the environment. In particular, the theoretical literature suggests that the nature of an organization's connections to the environment (D'Aunno, Sutton, & Price, 1991; Popkewitz, Tabachnick, & Wehlage, 1982; Scott, 2001) and prior history of practice (Vaughan, 1996; Weick, 1995) shapes how it responds to pressures from the institutional environment. Thus, I selected schools that had contrasting connections to the environment (in different districts and involved in different reform efforts) and contrasting histories of involvement in reading reform efforts. The two schools ultimately included in the study—Stadele Elementary and Baldwin Elementary<sup>3</sup>—are racially and ethnically diverse, with a substantial portion of students living in poverty (see Table A1 in Appendix for demographic information on the two schools).

Within the two schools, I focused attention on early-grade classroom teachers (first and second grade) because early-grade reading instruction was the main focus of the policy debate in the environment. In each school, I began with breadth, interviewing nearly all teachers in the first and second grades as well as resource teachers, members of the leadership teams, current and former principals, and other teachers about their connections to policy messages and the nature of their classroom instruction. In all, I interviewed 12 current classroom teachers, 4 current resource teachers, and 2 retired teachers at Stadele Elementary and 9 current classroom teachers, 1 current resource teacher, and 1 retired teacher at Baldwin Elementary. Nearly all of the interviews were taped and transcribed.

To capture depth, I used information garnered from the first round of interviews to select three teachers for further study. The focal teachers—Sharon, Marisa, and Deanna—represented the range of approaches to reading instruction in the schools, the range of years of experience, and both first and second grades (see Table A2 in Appendix for background information on the focal teachers). I then conducted additional interviews with and classroom observations of each focal teacher. A significant portion of these interviews was devoted to developing oral histories of teachers' classroom practices by investigating links between teachers' connections to the environment (elicited during initial interviews) and changes in their reading instruction over time. In all, I interviewed focal teachers 28 times in interviews ranging from 45 minutes to 3 hours. I also spent 89 hours observing focal teachers' classrooms. Finally, to capture teachers' connections to messages from the environment during the study year, I conducted extensive observations of teachers' interactions in formal and informal meetings. In all, I spent more than 130 hours in Stadele Elementary and 21.5 hours in Baldwin Elementary observing teacher conversations during formal meetings and professional development activities.<sup>4</sup> In both schools, I also observed countless hours of informal conversations during lunch, before and after school, and in the hallways. While the majority of the analysis presented in this article draws on data from focal teachers, I draw on data from the larger sample of teachers when appropriate.

To understand the dynamics of state-level policy changes in California, I engaged in a strategy of snowball sampling (Hornby & Symon, 1994). That is, I started by asking key players in the field for recommendations, asked their recommendations for recommendations, and so on until I had a list of 23 potential people to interview. I selected 12 individuals to interview who represented different aspects of the field (academics, representatives of the state department of education, representatives of the state board of education, professional development providers) and who were active in different state policy eras. In addition to interviews, I traced policy changes by performing a content analysis of 129 state documents, state legislation, task force reports, media accounts, and documents from state and regional professional development providers. I situated this state-level analysis in the broader national context by consulting secondary sources that charted aspects of the history of reading more broadly (see Table A3 in Appendix for a description of sources of information for the state policy analysis).

Finally, I used a bottom-up strategy to understand the mechanisms by which teachers were connected to changing state policy. Rather than hypothesizing the likely ways that teachers might become connected with policy and investigating those mechanisms (as has been the practice in previous studies exploring the role of nonsystem actors), I started with teachers and identified the actual ways in which they were connected to policy over time through system and nonsystem routes. I then interviewed as many system and nonsystem actors as were possible to locate: six individuals in each district who held positions related to reading instruction, several of whom were directly involved in either Stadelé or Baldwin Elementary, and nine representatives of professional development organizations who had provided professional development on reading instruction to the two schools during the period covered by the study. I supplemented these interviews with content analyses of professional development, policy, and curriculum documents. In all, I analyzed 12 district policy and professional development documents, professional development materials from 18 local providers, 10 curricula, and 9 school-level reports identified through this process.

I used NUD.IST qualitative data analysis software to analyze documents, meeting observations, interviews, and classroom observations. I analyzed the data chronologically, first charting how policy ideas moved through the environment and then coding and mapping teachers' connections to these movements and changes in their reading beliefs and practices. To capture teachers' connections to policy ideas, I identified key "messages" about reading that teachers came into contact with, which then became the key analytic unit for this part of the study. Messages included specific statements or exhortations about how teachers *should* or *must* teach reading that were delivered through such things as professional development promoting a particular approach, new classroom materials, policy documents, statements from principals or district officials about what they expected to see in reading instruction, or media reports concerning the "reading crisis." The three focal teachers encountered 223 messages from the environment.<sup>5</sup> Ninety-five of these messages came from system actors, and 128 came from nonsystem actors (see Table A4 in Appendix for more specific information on the mechanisms by which focal teachers encountered policy messages).

To analyze focal teachers' encounters with messages, I created longitudinal records of teacher interaction with and response to a given message over time. I then used a coding scheme rooted in earlier theoretical work in institutional theory and elaborated through an iterative process of data collection and analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to identify and code for factors that influenced the nature of teachers' connections to nonsystem actors. That is, I began with codes that described, with little interpretation, the dimensions that characterized teachers' connections to policy messages. By grouping together categories and using systematic comparisons (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), I moved to progressively higher levels of abstraction until I ended up with the following codes: mechanism of connection, intensity, content of messages, and voluntariness. I then coded each response as high, medium, or low along the dimensions of intensity and content (see Table A5 in Appendix for the definitions used in coding). Finally, I used descriptive statistics to analyze the relationships between these factors and teachers' responses.

## Reading Instruction in California

Since the early 1980s, the California public school system has been the site of tremendous reform energy focused on changing the way children are taught to read. Three successive movements seeking to redefine what constitutes “good” reading instruction have gained prominence in the profession, become part of state policy, and been carried into schools by professional development providers and instructional materials. This tumultuous period of change began when a movement within universities, the teaching profession, and the policy community began to challenge widespread and deeply institutionalized ways of teaching reading known collectively as the basic skills approach. Advocates of what would become known as literature-based instruction put forth a vision of reading instruction rooted in epistemological assumptions about the nature of teaching and learning fundamentally different from the conventional wisdom at the time. The movement for literature-based instruction gained a particularly high profile in California in 1987, when it became embedded in the state-level framework for English-language arts (California State Department of Education, 1987), which, in turn, was linked to state textbook adoptions, professional development, and, for a short time, standardized testing (Brandt, 1989).

Shortly after literature-based approaches began to gain prominence in the professional and policy world, a second movement—what I call “early literacy”—quietly began to put forth an alternative vision of early reading instruction as it moved from district to district throughout the state. Rooted in the pedagogical principles of Reading Recovery (Askew, Fountas, Lyons, Pinnell, & Schmitt, 1998; Breneman & Parker, 1991), this set of approaches spread throughout the state, ultimately making its way into state policy and spawning a host of professional development providers focused on applying Reading Recovery principles to early-grade classrooms. Initially, this set of ideas spread from district to district as the infrastructure for Reading Recovery developed in the state. From 1990 to 1996, the infrastructure grew to include four regional Reading Recovery training sites at universities linked with 70 districts, 135 trained teacher leaders, and thousands of trained Reading Recovery teachers in California (Neal, Kelly, Klein, & Schubert, 1997; St. Mary’s College, 1998).

Soon many of the pedagogical approaches associated with Reading Recovery moved beyond this infrastructure as independent professional development organizations began to offer training that adapted pedagogical principles of Reading Recovery for the classroom (Literacy Initiative, n.d.; Ohio State University, 1998; Rigby Education, 1997; St. Mary’s College, n.d.; Swartz, Shook, & Klein, 2000). Finally, these ideas began to work their way into state policy. They were carried by a state leadership network that had brought early literacy ideas to nearly 20,000 teachers and administrators by the time it was disbanded in 1995. They played a heavy role in the state’s criteria for textbook adoption in 1994 (Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission, 1994). They also formed the centerpiece of state position statements intended to provide guidance on early reading instruction (California State Department of Education, 1995b).

Then, in the mid-1990s, questions about what constituted “good” reading instruction exploded onto the public stage after the release of test scores that placed California last in the country in reading, tied with Louisiana and Guam (Carlos & Kirst, 1997). In what was dubbed “the reading wars” by the popular press, controversy raged about the root causes of low test scores. Critics began to call for a return to “basic skills.” In 1995, the state responded to the controversy by publishing a task force report calling for a “balanced approach” to reading instruction (California State Department of Education, 1995a), launching the third policy shift in two decades. For the next several years, different groups of actors put forth differing constructions of just what a “balanced approach” is or should be, constructions rooted in divergent assumptions about teaching and learning. Over time, a coalition of state actors and researchers was able to define and embed in state policy a conception of “balanced” instruction. During the second half of the 1990s, the state legislature passed 12 bills allocating nearly half a billion dollars toward reform efforts promoting this approach (California State Board of Education, 1999). With this legislation, the state systematically undid linkages between state policy and literature-based and early literacy approaches, putting in their place policies that defined good reading instruction in terms of this new construction of balance.<sup>6</sup>

## Teachers' Connections to Shifting Reading Policy

Given the multifaceted and multilayered nature of the reading environment, these shifts in reading policy interpenetrated schools and classrooms to varying degrees. The ways in which teachers responded to reading policy depended in part on the nature of their connections to a given policy initiative. Teachers' connections varied both across teachers and across policy initiatives, at times substantially, shaping teachers' access to some policy ideas and not others. Beyond access, however, the nature of teachers' connections—their mechanisms, intensity, and content—also influenced how they responded to the policy messages they encountered. In this regard, teachers' connections with nonsystem actors were particularly important, as they tended to be more consequential for classroom practice than those with system actors. In this section, I begin by providing an overall portrait of the nature of teachers' connections to policy messages about reading through both system and nonsystem routes. In so doing, I identify key dimensions along which teachers' connections to policy vary.

Teachers were connected to messages about reading both when messages *pressed in* through policy and school- or district-sponsored professional development and as teachers themselves *reached out* to new resources, training, and materials in their proximal environment. Teachers' connections to messages can be described in terms of their mechanism (how teachers learned about policy messages), their content (what they learned), and their intensity (their level of engagement with policy ideas). These variables—the how, what, and how much of teachers' experiences with policy—involved both the formal policy system and nonsystem actors.

### *Mechanism*

Teachers were connected to messages in multiple and at times overlapping ways. All three teachers were connected to policy ideas through formal policy system channels. They received copies of state and district frameworks, standards, and position papers; attended district professional development sessions; were connected through specific district and school policies that promoted particular approaches to reading instruction and assessment; and encountered mes-

sages about appropriate reading instruction as represented by standardized tests. But teachers also learned about state policy ideas through a diverse array of nonsystem actors as they attended professional development sessions with independent professional development providers or school reform organizations, used textbooks or other curricular materials in their classrooms, or learned about reading instruction in preservice teacher education or continuing coursework. In addition, they encountered policy ideas through such informal routes as conversations with their colleagues and media coverage of ongoing policy debates.

As can be seen in Table 1, the three teachers varied considerably in their connections with different policy initiatives. For example, teachers varied in the type and frequency of their connections to ideas associated with early literacy in the mid-1990s. Deanna was connected in multiple, overlapping ways that involved both system and nonsystem actors. She taught in a district that placed an enormous emphasis on early literacy approaches, embedding approaches into multiple aspects of district policy and investing a great deal of resources in district-sponsored professional development. These district-level expectations were reinforced by the school leadership, which both adopted the approach in school policy and brought in additional independent professional development providers to work with early-grade teachers in the school over the course of a number of years. In contrast, Marisa was connected to early literacy ideas in less intensive ways via system actors but reached out on her own to colleagues, curricular materials, and independent professional development providers who carried this set of ideas. Finally, Sharon represented a third pattern. Her primary connection to early literacy ideas was through participation in district-sponsored professional development. Although she had connections to ideas through nonsystem actors, these connections tended to be short-term and disconnected experiences.

The nature of teachers' connections also varied across different policy initiatives. While teachers encountered state policy focused on literature-based instruction through both system and nonsystem means (predominantly textbooks and professional development), by late 1999 all three teachers had learned of state policy promoting

TABLE 1  
*Mechanisms of Teachers' Connections to Policy Initiatives*

Teacher	Basic skills		Literature-based instruction		Early literacy		"Balanced" approach	
	System	Nonsystem	System	Nonsystem	System	Nonsystem	System	Nonsystem
Sharon	State standardized test	Preservice education	School policy	Textbook	Multiple district professional development	Textbook Professional development from independent provider	State policy documents	Awareness of debate in the media
	District standardized test	Textbooks	Principal expectations	Multiple professional development from independent providers	School professional development	Professional development from independent provider	State standardized tests	
	District policy	Curricular materials	State policy	Joint work with colleagues	District policy	District policy	District policy	
	School policy	Multiple professional development with independent providers	State test	University coursework	District professional development	District professional development	District workshop	
	Principal expectations	Colleagues	District professional development		School policy			
Marisa	State standardized test	Professional development with independent provider	School policy	Preservice education	District professional development	Textbook Joint work with colleagues	State policy documents	Awareness of debate in the media
	District standardized test	Interaction with senior colleagues	District professional development	Curricular materials	School professional development	Curricular materials	State standardized tests	Professional development with independent provider
		Curricular materials	Principal expectations	Multiple professional development from independent providers	District policy	Multiple professional development from independent providers	District policy	
Deanna	State standardized test	Preservice education	District professional development	Textbook	District professional development	Textbook Curricular materials	State standardized tests	Awareness of debate in the media
	District standardized test	Textbook	State policy	Professional development from independent provider	District policy	Multiple professional development with independent providers		Professional development with independent provider
	District policy	Curricular materials			School policy	University coursework		
	School policy	Multiple professional development with independent providers			State policy			

the “balanced approach” to reading instruction largely through system actors (especially via copies of policy documents). In instances in which teachers did learn about the balanced approach via nonsystem actors, it was through their awareness of the debate in the media and when these ideas were alluded to as small parts of professional development more representative of earlier state policy.

### *Intensity*

The intensity of teachers’ connections, or the degree to which teachers had opportunities to engage with policy ideas in a sustained way, also varied enormously. At one end of the spectrum, teachers encountered messages in brief and fleeting ways such as a momentary mention in a faculty meeting, casual conversations with a colleague, or a brief look through a policy document; that is, they encountered messages with a low degree of intensity. At the other end, teachers at times were connected to policy messages in sustained, iterative ways including professional development efforts stretching over many weeks or months or the day-to-day use of curricular materials; that is, they encountered messages with a high degree of intensity.

To characterize the overall level of intensity of individual teachers’ encounters, Table 2 presents a description of the multiple ways in which teachers were connected to messages associated with a particular policy. Here, as with the mechanism of connection, overall intensity varied both among teachers and among policy initiatives. For example, the teachers’ encounters with literature-based instruction tended to come in the form of curricular materials and professional development that was sustained and intensive. For Sharon and Marisa, these opportunities were also linked with intense and ongoing conversations with colleagues about policy ideas, adding more salience and longevity to the encounters. Thus, all three teachers were connected with ideas re-

lated to literature-based instruction at a medium or high degree of intensity. In contrast, teachers’ encounters with the state’s rendition of a balanced approach tended to be fleeting: a casual look through a policy document, momentary mention in professional development, or reading about it in the newspaper.

### *Content*

Finally, teachers’ connections with policy messages varied greatly. Teachers with different connections often had access to substantively different sets of ideas, tools, and instructional approaches, as messages were not only carried but also reinterpreted and, at times, transformed as they moved into schools. Previous researchers have noted that state policy is frequently reconstructed at lower levels of the formal policy system (McLaughlin, 1987; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984), especially the district level (Hill, 2001; Spillane, 1996, 1998, 2000). The present study suggests that this phenomenon characterizes the activity of nonsystem actors as well. For example, although textbooks in California are adopted at the state level according to a set of criteria linked to state policy, the degree to which textbooks reflected underlying shifts in pedagogical principles depended greatly on the particular series. Some publishers responded to policy shifts with major reorganizations in structure and approach. However, many responded by layering new approaches and sometimes new language on top of the structure and approach of previous editions.<sup>7</sup> In this way, these and other nonsystem actors played an important role in shaping what teachers learned about state policy ideas.

Here I characterize the content of teachers’ connections in terms of two dimensions: degree of depth and closeness to the classroom. Degree of depth refers to the extent to which policy messages addressed surface structures (such as specific activities or classroom organization) or underlying pedagogical principles. Closeness to the

TABLE 2  
*Intensity of Teachers’ Connections to Policy Initiatives*

Teacher	Basic skills	Literature-based instruction	Early literacy	“Balanced” approach
Sharon	High	High	Low	Low
Marisa	Medium	High	Medium	Low
Deanna	High	Medium	High	Low

*Note.* Intensity is defined as the degree to which teachers had opportunities to engage with a message in sustained, iterative ways.

classroom refers to the degree to which policy messages came in forms that teachers found to be easily translatable into classroom practice. For example, policy documents outlining overarching visions had little proximity to the classroom; teachers often experienced these documents as abstract, with little guidance for classroom practice. In contrast, textbooks and other curricular materials had a high degree of proximity to the classroom, as they often were created to be easily integrated into classroom practice.

As with the other dimensions, individual teachers varied (see Table 3). For example, the teachers varied in the degree of depth with which they were connected to literature-based instruction. Both Deanna and Sharon were strongly connected to messages associated with policy ideas that emphasized using heterogeneous groups for reading instruction. But neither was connected to pedagogical principles underlying this recommendation or specific pedagogical approaches for teaching reading differently using this organizational structure. In contrast, Marisa not only was familiar with heterogeneous grouping but also had access to philosophical arguments underlying the approach and pedagogical principles consistent with teaching reading using this organizational structure.

The content of teachers' connections also varied with varying policy movements. For example, all three teachers were connected to messages about the balanced approach with a low degree of closeness to the classroom. They were primarily connected via policy documents and media coverage of the public debate that were quite general and abstract. Consequently, all three teachers were aware of the call for an increased emphasis on phonics instruction and of the call for "balance." But they had only limited connection with the specific approaches to reading in-

struction advocated by state policy. At the other end of the spectrum, all three teachers were connected to messages associated with early literacy approaches via curricular materials or in the form of particular pedagogical tools that allowed them to make clear connections to their classrooms.

**Nonsystem Actors and Teachers' Response to Policy**

Teachers responded to policy ideas about reading in ways that varied tremendously, from rejecting ideas outright to bringing new approaches into their classrooms in ways that caused them to reconstruct their program and rethink assumptions about how children learn to read. Here nonsystem actors played a crucial role. Teachers' connections to policy ideas via nonsystem actors tended to be more consequential for classroom practice than those coming through the formal policy system. To provide evidence for this claim, I first characterize the nature of teachers' responses to policy ideas. I then show that teachers were more likely to respond to connections via nonsystem actors by making substantive changes in classroom practice and less likely to reject, ignore, or respond symbolically to them. Finally, I argue that the nature of teachers' connections to nonsystem versus system actors helps account for their different responses.

*Teachers' Response to Policy Messages*

I identified five ways that the three teachers responded to their connections to policy ideas: rejection, symbolic response, parallel structures, assimilation, and accommodation.<sup>8</sup>

*Rejection*

Given extensive reform activity related to reading during the time period covered by the study, teachers encountered multiple messages. Often, teachers rejected or simply ignored policy ideas

TABLE 3  
*Content of Teachers' Connections to Policy Initiatives*

Teacher	Basic skills		Literature-based instruction		Early literacy		"Balanced" approach	
	Depth	Closeness to classroom	Depth	Closeness to classroom	Depth	Closeness to classroom	Depth	Closeness to classroom
Sharon	High	High	Low/medium	High	Low	Medium	Low	Low
Marisa	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Low
Deanna	High	High	Low	Medium	High	Medium	Low	Low

Note. Depth is defined as the degree to which policy messages address underlying pedagogical principles. Closeness to classroom is defined as the degree to which policy messages come in forms that teachers find to be easily translatable into classroom practice.

they encountered. For example, early-grade teachers at Stadele Elementary attended a district professional development day in which the presenter suggested that teachers use individualized instruction as a way to meet children's diverse needs in reading. Later, Sharon declared to her colleagues that individualized instruction was entirely inappropriate. She said: "How can you possibly teach reading without putting kids in groups? That's crazy!" Having rejected the idea out of hand, Sharon continued using reading groups. Overall, of the 223 responses to messages, 27% involved rejection.

### *Symbolic response*

Teachers responded to some policy messages by making changes in the appearance but not the substance of their work. For example, in response to pressure from the district for schools to use a district rubric to score performance assessments, Deanna and other teachers at Baldwin Elementary posted the rubric on their classroom walls but did not use it in their assessment practice. Sharon and some of her colleagues at Stadele Elementary exhibited a similar response to word walls, an instructional approach that engages students in interactive word play intended to help them learn high-frequency words and letter-sound correspondence (Cunningham, 1995). Sharon put lists of words up on the wall but neither referred to them in class nor used them in instructional activities with her students. Just over 7% of teachers' responses to policy messages were symbolic.

### *Parallel structures*

At times, teachers balanced multiple and conflicting priorities by creating two or more parallel approaches that corresponded with different pressures or priorities. For example, Deanna and other teachers at her school balanced conflicting pressures from the principal to use a textbook that was above most children's reading level with pressures from district and independent professional development providers to teach with reading materials at children's instructional level by creating two parallel systems for reading instruction. In Deanna's case, she taught using the textbook in the morning to "expose all children to the curriculum and what they need to know" and conducted guided reading groups at another point in

the day to provide opportunities for students to learn "at their level." Thus, she essentially constructed two parallel structures for reading instruction that were rooted in different instructional approaches and met different goals. Just over 8% of the 223 teacher responses involved creating parallel structures.

### *Assimilation*

Because teachers drew on their tacit beliefs and assumptions to construct their understanding of messages from the environment (Coburn, 2001a; Guthrie, 1990; Jennings, 1996; Spillane, 1999; Spillane & Jennings, 1997; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002), they often interpreted and enacted messages in ways that transformed them to fit with their underlying assumptions. Or, in the language of cognitive learning theorists, they assimilated new knowledge or experiences into existing schemas or ways of doing things (Fosnot, 1996; Piaget, 1978). In so doing, teachers tended to respond to messages by making changes in materials or classroom organization but not the underlying pedagogical or epistemological assumptions that guided their approach.

For example, Sharon participated in several professional development activities that emphasized using thematic approaches to encourage reading comprehension and put forth a view of student learning as the active process of making connections across subject matter rather than mastering isolated skills. However, Sharon drew on her view of reading comprehension as mastering a sequence of skills and came to understand thematic instruction not as a fundamentally different approach to student learning, as promoted in the professional development offerings, but as a way to make sequenced skills instruction more interesting to children. She rearranged her room into centers and created a series of activities for students to do at the centers that related to the story. However, these activities remained rooted in sequence skills instruction, with a heavy reliance on worksheets. In this way, Sharon and other teachers brought messages into their classrooms in ways that altered surface manifestations of their practice (classroom organization or materials) without affecting the underlying beliefs and assumptions about teaching and learning that guided their work. Echoing findings from the broader literature on teacher change (Guthrie, 1990; Jennings, 1996; Smith, 2000; Spillane,

1999; Spillane & Jennings, 1997), this response was widespread in the present study. Forty-nine percent of the 223 teacher responses resulted in assimilation.

### *Accommodation*

In rare instances, teachers in this study engaged with policy ideas in ways that caused them to restructure fundamental assumptions about the nature of reading instruction or student learning. Or, in the language of cognitive learning theorists, teachers transformed their preexisting knowledge structures to accommodate new information or experiences (Fosnot, 1996; Piaget, 1978; Smith, 2000). For example, Marisa grappled with new messages about reading comprehension in ways that caused her to restructure her conception of the cognitive processes involved in comprehension and effective pedagogical strategies to help students develop in that area. Earlier in her career, Marisa, like Sharon, saw reading comprehension as a collection of discrete skills that students needed to master to capture the meaning inherent in the text. Thus, her instruction involved reading stories and answering a series of disconnected comprehension questions at the end that usually focused on recall and low-level inference. For example, in one observation that took place at the start of her fourth year of teaching, Marisa had the children read the story chorally and then asked questions that tested their literal comprehension of the events that had unfolded in the story.

During the course of that year, however, Marisa participated with her colleagues in professional development that put forth a view of reading comprehension as an active process wherein students make meaning by drawing on their beliefs and experiences as well as the text. After repeated engagement and experimentation with this set of messages through participation in an ongoing study group with her colleagues, Marisa gradually began to restructure her view of reading comprehension. At the end of the year, she declared:

Teaching reading comprehension is not just about giving them a paragraph and asking little questions about it. . . . It's not just the words on the page are what you comprehend. You comprehend because of the experiences that you've had, the other books that you've read, what your neighbor just said. . . . It's just the whole inner web that we have of thinking and knowledge.

This revised understanding of reading comprehension was accompanied by new instructional approaches. Classroom observations later in the year provided evidence that she had begun to adopt instructional strategies to encourage children to make connections among their prior knowledge and experiences, other texts, and the selections they were reading. For example, in one representative observation, Marisa began the lesson by talking with the children about how good readers make connections between what they know and the story. They then brainstormed what they knew about gardens (drawing on work they were doing in a thematic unit on gardens in science), read a story about gardens, and jointly worked to create a chart comparing their experience growing vegetables with the experience of the main character in the story. In this way, Marisa moved from a pedagogical strategy of asking questions with correct and incorrect answers to a strategy of encouraging students to develop comprehension by making connections between what they know and what they are learning in the text.

Thus, Marisa responded to messages about reading comprehension in a way that went much beyond the introduction of a new classroom organization or materials. Instead, encounters with messages caused Marisa to challenge and restructure the underlying pedagogical approach that guided her interaction with children in the classroom. Overall, accommodation accounted for only 9% of teacher responses.

### *Teachers' Response to Nonsystem Versus System Actors*

Significantly, the three teachers in this study were more likely to respond to connections with nonsystem actors in ways that brought messages into the classroom in substantive ways. In this sense, teachers' connections with nonsystem actors were more consequential for their classroom practice. As can be seen in Table 4, of the 128 connections to policy messages via nonstate actors included in this analysis, teachers responded to just over 75% by bringing approaches into their classroom in a way that influenced classroom practice (parallel structures, assimilation, accommodation). Furthermore, of those they brought into their classroom, they responded to nearly 11% in ways that caused them to reconstruct their underlying pedagogical or epistemological assumptions (accommodation). In terms

TABLE 4  
*Teachers' Responses to Connections via System Versus Nonsystem Actors*

Response type	System (n = 95) (%)	Nonsystem (n = 128) (%)
Rejection	33.7	21.8
Symbolic	13.7	2.3
Parallel structures	9.5	7.0
Assimilation	36.8	57.8
Accommodation	6.3	10.9

of nonsystem actors, the teachers' connections with independent professional development providers, university coursework, and curricula were most likely to lead to substantive incorporation. Teachers incorporated 67.3% of 49 messages from independent professional development providers (with 12.2% leading to accommodation), 8 of 10 messages encountered via university coursework (with 2 leading to accommodation), and 72.7% of 55 messages carried by curricula (but with only 1.8% leading to accommodation). At the same time, teachers responded to only 25% of messages from nonsystem actors by ignoring them or responding symbolically.

In contrast, of the 95 connections made through formal system channels, teachers responded to just over 50% by bringing new approaches and ideas substantively into their classroom. Furthermore, teachers responded to only 6% of messages in ways that caused them to rethink some aspect of their practice. Again, professional development from various system actors was most likely to lead to incorporation. Teachers incorporated 51.8% of 27 messages from district professional development providers (with 14.8% leading to accommodation) and 4 of 5 messages encountered through school professional development providers (with 1 message leading to accommodation). However, professional development accounted for a smaller percentage of teachers' connections to system than nonsystem actors. At the same time, teachers responded to a much higher percentage of messages from system actors by rejecting or ignoring them than messages from nonsystem actors. Teachers responded to more than 47% of the messages from system actors by rejecting or ignoring them or by responding symbolically. Teachers were most likely to reject messages they encountered through state and district policy documents, rejecting 8 of 13 messages encountered through state policy

documents and 11 of 22 messages encountered through district policy documents. They were most likely to respond symbolically to school policy messages, doing so in the case of 7 of the 11 messages encountered in such a way.

#### *Accounting for the Influence of Nonsystem Actors*

Why are nonsystem actors so consequential in the relationship between policy and practice? Nonsystem actors connected teachers with policy messages in ways that tended to have greater intensity, greater proximity to the classroom, greater depth, and were more likely to be voluntary. When teachers' connections had these characteristics, teachers tended to respond in more consequential ways. Here I discuss each factor in turn, providing an explanation of why it appears to encourage more substantive responses and comparing teachers' connections to system versus nonsystem actors along the dimension in question.

#### *Intensity*

Teachers were more likely to respond to policy messages in ways that influenced their beliefs and classroom practice when their connections with them were of higher intensity, such as sustained and ongoing interactions with high-quality professional development or one-on-one interaction over time with a key carrier.<sup>9</sup> High- and medium-intensity connections—especially to the degree that they involved interaction with colleagues—provided the opportunity for teachers to engage in a process in which they experimented with practice and then reflected on their experience in ways that helped them shift practice over time. Greater intensity thus allowed teachers to work with messages in an iterative fashion, constructing understandings of new ideas and approaches that often started with assimilation but, at times, pushed toward accommodation.

For example, in the mid-1990s Deanna participated with her colleagues in 18 months of on-site professional development on early literacy offered by an independent professional development provider—a connection with a high degree of intensity. This professional development offered a model of reading instruction that differed significantly from Deanna's underlying beliefs about how children learn to decode. At that time, Deanna taught decoding by using a structured phonics program that taught skills in a systematic and largely decontextualized way. She also worked on decoding when she listened to children read in round robin reading groups, taking care to correct them when they made mistakes. The professional development program, in contrast, put forth a model of decoding that emphasized using multiple sources of information (or cueing systems) to decode, rather than a sole or predominant emphasis on using phonics. It also emphasized teaching decoding in the context of stories rather than teaching it separately. Finally, it emphasized a facilitative approach to teaching. Rather than correcting children when they made a mistake, the professional development encouraged teachers to ask children questions about their reading (Does that look right? Does it sound right? Does that make sense?) so that children would develop the ability to be self-monitoring and self-correcting readers (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Neal et al., 1997).

When Deanna began working with the professional development provider, she started to make

incremental shifts in her practice. She began teaching phonics in the context of stories but did not shift her understanding of the reading process in any significant way. But as she continued to work with the professional development provider, Deanna extended her experimentation, discussed her experiences with colleagues, and received ongoing feedback from the professional developer that guided her experimentation toward a deeper and more substantive response. She began to see decoding as a complex process involving more than attention to phonics and began prompting children to pay attention to semantic and syntactic cues in addition to phonemic information. And, perhaps more significantly, she reported that she learned a more facilitative way to interact with students while they were reading stories. Rather than interrupting students when they made mistakes and correcting them, she began to ask questions to help children figure out words on their own. For Deanna, this change represented a fundamental shift in pedagogical strategy from a transmission model wherein teachers tell students the answer to a teacher-as-coach model wherein teachers ask students questions to help them develop strategies of meta-cognition and self-correction—a change encouraged by long-term participation in professional development activities over time.

As can be seen in Table 5, connections with nonsystem actors were more likely to be at a high or medium level of intensity than were those with system actors. Just under one third of teachers'

TABLE 5  
*Nature of Teachers' Connections to System Versus Nonsystem Actors*

Nature of connection	System ( <i>n</i> = 95) (%)	Nonsystem ( <i>n</i> = 128) (%)
Degree of intensity		
Low	51.6	17.2
Medium	34.7	50.0
High	13.6	32.8
Closeness to the classroom		
Low	55.8	7.8
Medium	26.3	42.2
High	17.9	50.0
Degree of depth		
Low	64.2	42.2
Medium	29.5	37.5
High	6.3	20.3
Voluntariness		
Normative	24.2	1.0
Regulative	75.8	99.0

connections via nonsystem actors were of high intensity, and half were of medium intensity. In contrast, just under 14% of connections via system actors were of high intensity, and just over a third were of medium intensity. In part, these differences in levels of intensity were due to the fact that a greater percentage of the teachers' connections with nonsystem actors came in the form of ongoing professional development. But even when teachers participated in professional development with system actors, these experiences tended not to be as sustained as those involving nonsystem actors.

### *Closeness to the classroom*

The closer the connection was to the classroom, the more likely it was to influence teachers' beliefs and practices. Policy documents, resource guides, standards documents, and even discussions taking place at professional development sessions at times felt very abstract to teachers. Without mechanisms to translate these abstract ideas into the concrete realities of the classroom, teachers were not always able to find ways to bring them into the classroom in meaningful ways. For example, at Stadele Elementary, school leadership engaged teachers in a series of activities designed to better familiarize them with the new district standards. They engaged in a process of writing grade-level indicators for district standards on decoding and assessed themselves on progress toward the meeting the standards. Yet, the conversations remained on an abstract level, and teachers found it difficult to envision how some of the key ideas in the standards would be reflected in classroom instruction. Ultimately, early-grade teachers simply copied district indicators as their own, with minimal discussion or consideration. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that observations of teachers' classrooms showed little evidence that teachers were influenced by the work they did writing decoding standards. Approaches to decoding remained as they had prior to standard writing and, in many cases, were quite different from the approaches emphasized in the standards.

In contrast, curricular materials, classroom assessments, and professional development activities that were close to the classroom brought policy messages into teachers' classrooms in concrete ways.<sup>10</sup> For example, Sharon participated in professional development on an assessment instru-

ment designed to provide formative information that could be used to adjust instruction. Prior to the professional development, Sharon engaged in formal assessment only at the beginning of the year to place children in reading groups and at the end of the year to fulfill district requirements. However, the assessment instrument and the accompanying protocols for planning based on results of the assessment brought the idea of formative assessment into her classroom in a concrete way for the first time. By the end of the year, she was assessing all children on a monthly basis and adjusting the composition of her reading groups on the basis of the information provided by the assessment.

Teachers' connections with nonsystem actors were influential in this regard. Connections with nonsystem actors were more likely to be close to the classroom than connections with system actors. Fifty percent of messages received via nonsystem actors involved a high degree of closeness to the classroom, as compared with just under 18% of those received via system actors (see Table 5). In part, this disparity was due to the fact that teachers' connections to messages about reading from system actors often came in the form of policy documents—standards, task force reports, frameworks—and exhortations from school, district, and state leaders. Teachers often experienced these documents and statements as abstract, with few mechanisms allowing connections to be made to the classroom.

### *Depth*

Teachers were more likely to make consequential changes in their classroom practice in response to policy messages when the messages presented policy ideas with a high degree of depth. When teachers were connected to policy messages that went beyond surface structures (e.g., specific activities or ways to organize the classroom for reading instruction) to address underlying pedagogical principles, they were more likely to examine and refine their assumptions about teaching and learning, leading to accommodation. Deanna's engagement with early literacy ideas about decoding, discussed earlier, provides a good example of this phenomenon. In the course of this professional development, Deanna not only learned new activity structures for teaching reading (guided reading) and incorporated new materials within these structures (leveled texts), she

also learned about underlying principles of student learning (that students learn to read by relying on multiple cueing systems) and pedagogical principles (teacher as facilitator to develop self-monitoring, self-correcting readers). That is, the professional development provided a connection to the approach with a high degree of depth.

In contrast, when Deanna and other teachers encountered instructional approaches or organizational structures without underlying principles, they tended to do one of two things. In the first scenario, they tried to incorporate these approaches or structures into their classroom but transform them significantly through the lens of preexisting practice. In these cases, underlying classroom norms and assumptions about teaching reading remained unaltered, leading to assimilation. In the second scenario, they experimented with approaches, found them difficult to implement absent a deeper understanding of the pedagogical principles involved, and failed to sustain them. For example, in the early 1990s, both Deanna and Sharon experienced pressure to use whole-class instruction. However, both teachers were connected to these ideas with a low degree of depth. That is, they learned about the organizational structure but had virtually no professional development on instructional approaches to use in this structure or the underlying theory of student learning at its root. After initially reorganizing their reading programs to do whole-group instruction, Sharon abandoned the approach when she could not figure out a way to make it work with the pedagogical approaches she used, and Deanna successively modified whole-class instruction over time until it resembled her original approach.

Teachers' connections with nonsystem actors tended to have a higher degree of depth than their connections with system actors. Just over 57% of teachers' connections to nonsystem actors were at a medium or high degree of depth, as compared with just over 35% of their connections with system actors (see Table 5). In part, degree of depth was linked with degree of intensity, in that greater intensity seemed to allow teachers to encounter policy messages that pushed beyond superficial manifestations to include underlying pedagogical principles. Interestingly, however, in comparison with nonsystem actors associated with a high or medium degree of intensity, system actors associated with a high or medium de-

gree of intensity (usually district or school professional development actors) were much less likely to be associated with a high or medium degree of depth.

### *Voluntariness*

Finally, degree of voluntariness influenced teachers' responses to policy messages. The vast majority of messages teachers were connected with via both system and nonsystem actors (just under 90%) came in the form of *normative* pressure. That is, these messages put forth ideas about what teachers *should* do, specifying valued ends for instruction or the appropriate means to get there (Scott, 2001). Thus, while teachers were encouraged to change their practice in a certain direction, ultimately it was a voluntary decision. However, teachers' connections to 23 out of 223 messages—all but one from system actors—were accompanied by *regulative* pressures. That is, they involved rule setting, monitoring, or sanctioning (Scott, 2001). Teachers were mandated or required to teach in a particular way, to particular ends, or using particular curricular materials, and as a result the messages were seen as involuntary. Regulative pressures most often accompanied school policy and, to a lesser extent, district and state policy messages.

As illustrated in Table 5, teachers were more likely to respond to normative messages than regulative messages by incorporating them into their classroom and doing so in ways that altered preexisting practice. Two thirds of teacher responses to normative pressure involved changes in classroom practice, while just over half of teacher responses to regulative pressures did. However, when teachers did respond to regulative pressure by making changes in classroom practice, they did so by developing parallel structures when the messages had a medium degree of congruence with their preexisting practices (seven messages) and assimilating messages that had a high degree of congruence (two messages). (Teachers did not incorporate regulative messages at all when they had a low degree of congruence.) Thus, when teachers responded to mandates by bringing them into their classroom, they did so in ways that left their underlying pedagogical and epistemological assumptions intact.<sup>11</sup> Regulative messages accounted for nearly one quarter of all of the teachers' connections to policy messages

via system actors, hence accounting for some of the failure of messages related to system actors to influence teacher practice.

### **Interrelationship Between System and Nonsystem Actors**

Thus far, I have argued that (a) teachers' connections to policy messages vary considerably in their mechanism, intensity, and content and (b) messages carried by nonsystem actors tend to be more influential for classroom practice than those carried by system actors. But if teachers' connections with nonsystem actors are so consequential, what factors shape these connections? In this section, I argue that the interrelationship between system and nonsystem actors plays a key role in structuring teachers' access to and experience with nonsystem actors. There are three key elements of this interrelationship. First, at the state level, changes in policy influence the content of teachers' connections to messages via nonsystem actors by helping to define and create legitimacy for particular conceptions of "good" reading instruction. Second, within the context of these state-level shifts in conceptions of good reading instruction, local system actors play a mediating role between teachers and nonsystem actors. This accounts in part for the variation observed among teachers. Third, the specific ways in which system and nonsystem actors interact as particular policies emerge—the different roles played by actors at different historical moments—have an important impact on the mechanisms by which teachers come into contact with nonsystem actors during policy implementation. This last factor accounts for variation in teachers' connections with nonsystem actors during different policy initiatives.

#### *Influence of State Policy Shifts on Content of Connections*

As discussed earlier, previous research has documented the way in which policy emerges from and is affected by interaction with nonsystem actors such as professional organizations, university researchers, policy entrepreneurs, and others (Hill, 2000; Kingdon, 1984; Laumann & Knoke, 1987; Moore, 1988; Scott et al., 2000). But state policy also seemed to influence the content of messages carried by nonsystem actors to schools. As conceptions of good reading instruction shifted in state

policy over time, so too did the content and focus of the professional development and instructional materials each teacher encountered via nonsystem actors. Figure 1 shows that, after the shift in state policy from basic skills to literature-based instruction beginning in late 1987, Sharon's connections to policy ideas via nonsystem actors began to shift from an exclusive basic skill orientation toward literature-based instruction—a trend that continued throughout the first half of the 1990s. After a brief period with limited connections via nonsystem actors, Sharon began to be connected to messages associated with early literacy and, to a lesser extent, "balanced" instruction via nonsystem actors after policy shifts in the early and mid-1990s.

Deanna exhibited a similar pattern in her connection to nonsystem actors. When Deanna reentered teaching in 1990, she experienced a major shift from what had been exclusively basic skill messages when she started teaching in the early 1970s (not represented in Figure 1) to a heavy connection with messages associated with literature-based instruction that continued through the mid-1990s. Starting in 1993, her connections to nonsystem actors began to shift to early literacy, a trend that continued through the late 1990s. After the emergence of the state's version of "balanced" instruction in 1995, she was connected to a few messages carrying these ideas via nonsystem actors. Finally, Marisa entered teaching during an especially active period of state policy-making; literature-based instruction and early literacy messages were being challenged at the state level by the movement toward balanced basic skills. Thus, she experienced these shifts in a highly compressed fashion. Initially, Marisa's connections to messages via nonsystem actors heavily favored literature-based instruction, but shortly thereafter she became increasingly connected to early literacy ideas. Finally, near the end of the decade, as state policy-making focused on balanced instruction increased, she began to be connected to these ideas via nonsystem actors as well.

This pattern whereby teachers' connections to nonsystem actors shifted with changes in state policy was especially pronounced in the case of nonsystem actors with direct connections to the state policy system. For example, given that textbooks are adopted according to a set of state-developed criteria, it is not surprising that the

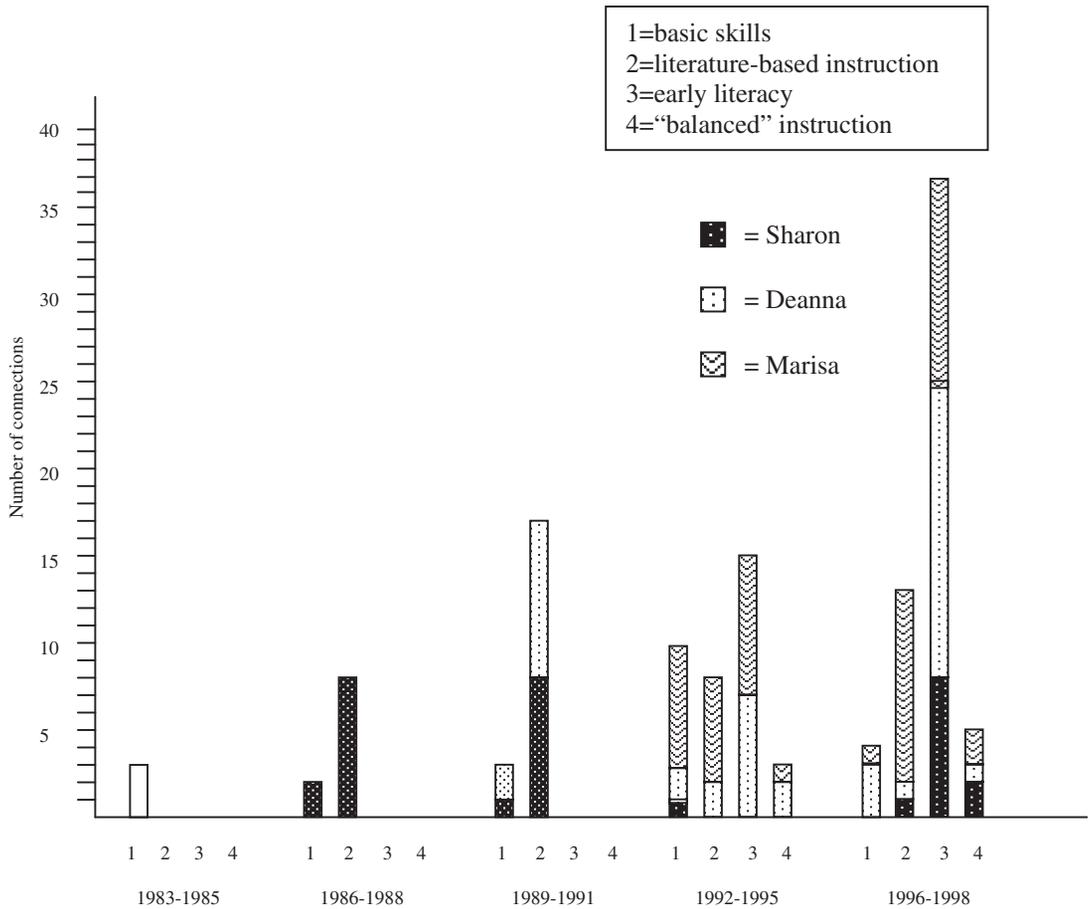


FIGURE 1. Teachers' connections to policy ideas via nonsystem actors.

content and format of textbooks changed with these criteria, albeit to varying degrees. However, this phenomenon also occurred when nonsystem actors had no such direct connections, as was the case for the majority of teachers' connections to messages via nonsystem actors (75 of 128 messages).

Changes in state policy seemed to influence the content of teachers' connections to nonsystem actors on both the supply and the demand side. On the supply side, state policy played an important role in influencing the nature of what nonsystem actors offered. Analyses of professional development and instructional documents available at the local, regional, and state levels indicate that the content of nonsystem actors' work evolved (to varying degrees) with the shifting ideas about what constituted good reading instruction in the policy and professional environment. Thus,

from 1983 to 1985, 60% of curricula and professional development activities promoted basic skills, and 40% promoted literature-based instruction. By 1989–1991, this balance had shifted, with 40% emphasizing basic skills and 60% emphasizing literature-based instruction. Finally, during 1996 through 1999, the balance shifted yet again, as 3% of curricula and professional development offerings from nonsystem actors were literature based, 68% promoted early literacy, and 29% promoted balanced instruction. Thus, it appears that there were different resources available to teachers from nonsystem actors at different historical moments. In a particularly vivid example, the same independent provider of professional development on literature-based approaches to both Baldwin and Stadel Elementary in the late 1980s provided professional development to teachers in the region on systemic approaches to

phonics and phonemic awareness associated with the state's version of balanced instruction in the late 1990s.

On the demand side, the nature of teachers' connections to nonsystem actors changed as teachers, schools, and districts began seeking out different kinds of messages about reading in ways that coincided with changing state policy. As messages linked with a particular policy became increasingly salient and legitimate in the environment, teachers, schools, and districts began to be aware of their presence and began to hear about them from their colleagues. This salience, coupled with recommendations from trusted others, contributed to the sense that particular approaches represented "best practices" in reading instruction. For example, at the district level, both districts adopted Reading Recovery after district officials learned about the program from officials in other districts at conferences or meetings. At the school level, school leaders often made decisions about professional development or materials on the basis of recommendations from trusted colleagues or an emerging awareness of the pervasiveness of a given approach. For example, the school leaders at Stadele Elementary provided training on a particular approach to reading comprehension as they became increasingly aware that many other schools in the region were using it. The principal explained, "Everybody had always been talking about [the approach] and how helpful it is." Similarly, all three teachers repeatedly explained their decisions to participate in a particular type of professional development or coursework with reference to recommendations from colleagues or their sense that everyone was doing it.

Thus, as suggested by institutional theorists, shifts in state policy, themselves often part of broader movements whereby particular sets of ideas were legitimized, furthered the legitimization of these ideas. Nonsystem actors—both those with direct ties to system actors and those without—shifted their content and approach in subtle and not-so-subtle ways in response. And decision makers at each level of the system reached out to nonsystem actors in ways that brought teachers into contact with favored messages. In this way, state policies shaped messages teachers encountered not only through organizational means, via the formal policy system, but through normative means, by helping to

define what constituted good instruction. This, in turn, influenced both the content of professional development, teaching materials, and reform efforts and teachers' decisions to reach out to new ideas and approaches.

#### *Mediation of Access by Local System Actors*

Within the broader context of shifting content, teachers' access to policy messages via nonsystem actors was mediated at the local level by district and school leadership. Local leaders influenced what nonsystem resources teachers had access to by making decisions about contracting with independent professional development providers, purchasing instructional materials, providing resources for teachers to attend professional development activities on their own, and, in recent years, working with local universities to provide coursework for uncredentialed teachers. By choosing to allocate resources for curricular materials and professional development, and by contracting with some nonsystem actors and not others, district and school leaders influenced not only the quantity and variety of connections teachers had to policy messages but the content and intensity of these connections as well. As a result, teachers in different districts and schools at times had access to substantively different messages about reading policy. This local mediation in part accounts for the variation observed among the teachers in the areas of mechanism, content, and intensity (see Tables 1–3).

At the district level, this phenomenon can be illustrated by comparing teachers' connections with policy messages concerning early literacy. While both districts in the study were strongly connected with and supportive of policy messages linked to early literacy, differences in approach shaped how and to what aspects teachers were connected. Deanna's district not only invested enormous resources to bring policy messages about early literacy to the school but relied on a strategy that simultaneously involved using district personnel to provide instructional guidance to schools (e.g., hiring district literacy coaches to work with elementary schools to improve reading instruction) and contracting with a range of independent professional development providers to provide an enormous amount of professional development to K–3 teachers in the district. Deanna and the 11 other teachers interviewed at Baldwin Elementary were thus

connected to policy messages about early literacy in multiple ways involving both system and nonsystem actors.

In contrast, Sharon and Marisa's district devoted fewer resources to learning opportunities for teachers related to early literacy in general and had a philosophy of providing opportunities for professional growth using district staff rather than contracting out with independent professional development providers. Thus, while the district personnel were for a time deeply committed to early literacy ideas, and these ideas influenced many aspects of district policy and professional development, Sharon, Marisa, and the 16 other teachers interviewed at Stadel Elementary had far fewer connections with early literacy policy messages via nonsystem actors. As can be seen in Tables 2 and 3, Marisa and Sharon's connections to early literacy were less intense and less deep than were Deanna's.

School leadership also played an important role in mediating teachers' connections to nonsystem actors. This phenomenon can be illustrated by comparing Sharon and Deanna's connections to policy ideas related to literature-based instruction. In the early 1990s, the principal of Sharon's school was a key advocate of literature-based approaches to reading instruction. She engaged the staff in whole-school experiences with independent professional development providers on portfolio assessment and thematic teaching, provided resources for early-grade staff to attend professional development activities involving shared reading, and devoted enormous resources to purchasing children's literature. As a result, Sharon and the 11 other teachers interviewed who were present at the school at that time were connected to multiple nonsystem actors promoting literature-based approaches. Many of these connections were characterized by high degrees of depth and intensity.

In contrast, the principal of Deanna's school was skeptical of approaches associated with literature-based instruction. In the early 1990s, she spent funds to purchase packaged phonics approaches and train teachers on them to supplement what she saw as a lack of attention to phonics in the state-adopted reading series. She also brought in a researcher from a local university to provide professional development on approaches to decoding that she saw as moving away from literature-based instruction. Thus, while there were teachers at Deanna's school who were con-

nected to literature-based approaches through their credential program, most of the seven teachers interviewed who were present at the school at that time, including Deanna, had relatively few connections to such approaches. As illustrated in Tables 1–3, Deanna was not connected to messages about literature-based instruction in as many ways, or with as much intensity, depth, and proximity to the classroom, as was Sharon in the early 1990s.

It is important to note that while local system actors such as districts and schools played an important role in mediating teachers' access to non-system resources, they were not the only influences. Teachers became connected to messages via nonsystem actors as they reached out on their own to materials, coursework, and professional development available in their environment. In addition, they encountered messages as they interacted with their colleagues in their proximal teacher communities. Teachers in different micro-communities of practice, even at the same school, at times were connected in different ways to non-system actors in the environment.

#### *Process of Policy Emergence*

Finally, the ways in which system and non-system actors interacted in the environment as a given policy emerged influenced the mechanisms by which teachers ultimately learned about new policy ideas. Nonsystem actors played distinctly different roles in bringing about changes in state-level policy during different historical periods. To simplify greatly, the movement toward state policy emphasizing literature-based instruction involved the confluence of top-down state policy and a grass-roots teachers' movement. The attempts of Bill Honig, the state superintendent of instruction, to bring high-quality literature to children through an early form of state systemic reform intersected with a burgeoning grass-roots movement promoting whole-language approaches to instruction spreading through the state via local teacher study groups. The early literacy movement spread more at the middle level of the policy system. Reform ideas spread as nonsystem actors (primarily universities connected with Reading Recovery and professional development organizations) formed alliances with local districts. It was only after the movement had begun to spread from district to district that it became embedded in state policy.

In a third pattern, the movement toward a “balanced” approach was predominantly top down. While members of professional associations were involved in task force commissions in the early years, the particular configuration of “balance” that was built into policy came from a coalition of researchers and policymakers, and participation on the part of professional associations and local educators was more limited. The state did interact with some professional development providers, but it did so by providing funds to local districts that could be used only to contract with a relatively small number of professional development providers that passed state certification for the content of their approaches.<sup>12</sup>

Each of these sets of interrelationships had implications for the nature of teachers’ connections to policy ideas via nonsystem actors. Perhaps because state policy promoting literature-based instruction grew out of a broader movement involving professional organizations and professional development providers, Deanna, Sharon, and other teachers who completed interviews and were present at the school at that time were more likely to be linked to policy ideas through independent professional development providers (and the associated school-level decisions) than during later policy movements.<sup>13</sup> Twenty-six percent of teachers’ connections during the era of literature-based instruction were via independent professional development providers, while only 16% of connections during the era of early literacy and 7% during the era of balanced instruction involved such providers.

In contrast, given the key role of the district and its relationship to statewide reform organizations during the early literacy movement, Deanna, Sharon, and other teachers at both schools who taught during all three periods were much more likely to be connected to policy ideas via the district than via other means during the early literacy movement. Just over 30% of teachers’ connections to messages during the early literacy era came via the district, while only 17% of messages during the era of literature-based instruction and 5% during the era of balanced instruction came via the district.

Finally, perhaps because of the limited involvement of either districts or professional organizations with the state’s version of “balance” in the early stages of the movement, teachers

were not connected with policy messages either through the district or through nonsystem actors such as professional development providers to the same extent as in previous movements.<sup>14</sup> Rather, at least during the first 4 years of this policy movement, the main ways in which these teachers learned about ideas associated with the state’s version of “balanced” instruction were through widespread media coverage and standardized testing, routes that are long on reach but short on detailed information regarding the specific approach to reading instruction involved in the policy.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, the process by which particular sets of ideas about reading instruction gained legitimacy and became embedded in policy influenced the mechanisms by which teachers ultimately were connected to these ideas. The nature of teachers’ connections, in turn, influenced whether and how teachers made changes in their classroom practice in response to shifting state reading policy. Policy changes that came about in partnership with nonsystem actors, who had greater capacity to bring policy ideas close to the classroom in more sustained ways, tended to result in connections for teachers that had more depth, intensity, and proximity to the classroom. This was the case with literature-based instruction and early literacy. In contrast, the policy change that emerged with limited engagement of local districts and the multifaceted set of nonsystem actors—the state’s version of the balanced approach—seemed to result in fewer overall connections for teachers with state policy ideas and connections that were less sustained and less close to the classroom.

## **Conclusions**

Scholarship on policy implementation often excises policy from its broader social and cultural environment. Scholars focus primary attention on the way policy ideas move through the formal policy system and into schools, paying little if any explicit attention to the myriad nonsystem actors that interact with the system throughout the implementation process. A few researchers have argued that nonsystem actors are a key mediating link between instructional policy and classroom practice (Cohen & Hill, 2000; Hill, 2000). The present study echoes this point, providing evidence that teachers’ connections with nonsystem actors tend to be more consequential for changes in classroom practice as well.

Because teachers tend to have connections with nonsystem actors that are more intense and involve greater depth, proximity to the classroom, and voluntariness, they are more likely to respond to policy messages carried by nonsystem actors by bringing approaches into the classroom, at times rethinking assumptions and reconfiguring instruction in substantive ways.

But in this study I go further, arguing that the interaction between system and nonsystem actors at both the state and local levels influences the nature and content of teachers' connections to nonsystem actors. Policy emerges out of movements in the environment whereby particular sets of ideas gain legitimacy over time in ways that are influenced by nonsystem actors. Policy, in turn, creates further legitimacy for these ideas, influencing what is available to teachers via nonsystem actors. The particular ways in which system and nonsystem actors interact during the emergence of policy influence the mechanisms by which teachers become connected to policy during implementation. And, at the local level, teachers' connections are further mediated by school and district leaders, who shape access for teachers to some nonsystem actors and not others.

These findings have important implications for policy and research. First, this portrait of the role of nonsystem actors complicates notions of policy congruence along several dimensions and levels. Calls for increased policy coherence have become increasingly widespread in the educational policy community (Fuhrman, 1993; Smith & O'Day, 1991). The argument is that teachers are more likely to make changes in their practice in a particular direction if the policy system promotes these approaches along multiple dimensions (Cohen & Hill, 2000; Spillane & Jennings, 1997). And, indeed, California was one of the early states to link aspects of instructional policy together in a move toward congruence (Carlos & Kirst, 1997; Massel et al., 1994). In reading instruction, the state linked instructional frameworks (and later standards) to textbook adoption, assessment, and professional development starting in 1987.

However, the strategy of policy coherence seems to assume that policy messages are the primary or, at least, most influential source of messages about instruction for teachers. This study documents the ways in which teachers are connected to messages about instruction through a

wide range of system and nonsystem routes. While the strategy of linking state reading frameworks to textbooks, professional development, and assessment both in 1987 and then again in the late 1990s created a great deal of normative pressure around each set of policy messages and shifted the focus of nonsystem actors to some degree, teachers continued to be connected to a range of messages about reading instruction associated with earlier policy initiatives. The notion of congruence becomes even more complicated when the temporal element is introduced. At any given time, teachers are not only connected to current policy but also connected to previous policies as they have become embedded in teaching materials, local teaching practices, and routines in their proximal community. Shifts in the professional and policy world introduce ideas into the system in ways that persist long after the policy has gone away. Thus, while elements of the state policy system may be coherent to varying degrees, teachers continue to be connected with ideas related to previous policy in their day-to-day work in schools.

All of this suggests that coherence is more than a property of the policy system at a fixed time. Rather, coherence should be seen as a property of the broader environment for instructional guidance. This recasting highlights the enormous challenge in bringing about coherence, especially when the policy change envisioned is a large one along multiple dimensions, as has been the case with recent shifts in reading and other instructional policies. It further suggests that if coherence is the goal, policymakers and others must employ a much broader range of strategies than targeting the formal policy system alone. Coherence seems to require connections with a broader range of actors at multiple levels and from multiple sectors of the environment. Chief among these actors are the professional networks, resources, and reform organizations that work most closely with teachers and schools.

However, this study also suggests that policymakers face trade-offs in relying on nonsystem actors in this manner. On the one hand, as suggested earlier, many nonsystem actors have a greater capacity than policy actors to reach teachers in ways that are substantive, sustained, and situated in their day-to-day work in the classroom. On the other hand, nonsystem actors, like local policy actors (e.g., districts), tend to trans-

form messages as they carry them to teachers. As a result, nonsystem actors are a powerful yet not entirely controllable mechanism for reaching teachers.

In California, different policy strategies vis-à-vis nonsystem actors, during both the emergence of policy and its implementation, emphasized these two dimensions to different degrees. As the formal policy system increasingly worked with or through nonsystem actors, teachers were increasingly connected to policy messages in substantive but often somewhat transformed ways. State efforts in the late 1990s to control messages from nonsystem actors resulted in more uniform connections. Because the state scaled back informal relationships with a range of teacher professional associations and networks, however, the teachers in this study were connected to recent reading policy in ways that were less intense and further from the classroom than was the case with previous state initiatives. In a policy system as complex and fragmented as that of the United States, policymakers must think carefully about how to manage strategic trade-offs between reaching teachers and controlling their message.

Finally, these findings highlight the need for policy researchers to pay greater attention to the ways in which the formal policy system is situated in the broader social and cultural environment. Formal policy is one part of a larger social and organizational web through which teachers are connected with ideas about instruction. By focusing solely or predominantly on the formal policy system, most policy research misrepresents the policy implementation process, failing to take into account the ways in which the reciprocal relationship between system and nonsystem actors influences what and how teachers learn about ideas associated with shifting instructional policy.

Furthermore, perhaps ironically, focusing on policy alone may tend to underplay the influence of policy shifts on classroom practice. In emphasizing policy's direct influence on classroom practice, this approach often fails to capture the way policy influences practice indirectly through normative means. By playing a key role in defining what constitutes good reading instruction, state policy influences the content of professional development, teaching materials, and reform efforts. And in making decisions about teaching materials and independent professional develop-

ment providers, local policymakers indirectly influence teachers' connections to policy by shaping the nature and intensity of their connections to nonsystem actors. This suggests the need for policy researchers to expand implementation studies to include careful attention to the full range of mechanisms by which teachers are connected to policy messages, moving beyond system actors to include the myriad of nonsystem actors as well.

## Notes

I wish to thank Betty Achinstein, Larry Cuban, Meredith Honig, Nathan MacBrien, Teresa McCaffrey, Milbrey McLaughlin, Janet Schofield, Charles Thompson, and Stacey Rutledge for comments on earlier versions of this article. Support for data collection was provided by the Center for Research on the Context of Teaching at Stanford University. Data analysis and writing of the article were supported by a dissertation fellowship from the Spencer Foundation and by support from the School of Education and the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh.

<sup>1</sup>Following Scott and his colleagues (2000), I use the term *actors* to refer not only to individuals but also to collective actors such as organizations and associations.

<sup>2</sup>For many years, California has provided funding for districts to purchase reading textbooks provided that the districts choose textbooks that are approved by the state according to a set of state criteria. However, since 1997, the state has extended the use of criteria beyond textbooks in an attempt to control the content of professional development supported by state funds. Under AB 1086, professional development providers had to submit professional development plans to the state to be approved in order for districts to contract with them.

<sup>3</sup>All school and teacher names used here are pseudonyms.

<sup>4</sup>The large difference in observation time in Stadele versus Baldwin Elementary reflects the fact that Baldwin Elementary had significantly fewer structured opportunities for teachers to meet. In part, this difference stems from district-level policy decisions. The state provided both districts 3 pupil-free professional development days that could be used for teachers' meetings. However, Stadele's district funded 6 additional pupil-free days, such that Stadele had 9 pupil-free days devoted to professional development during the 1998–1999 school year. In contrast, Baldwin's district did not elect to provide funds for any additional days to supplement those provided by the state, and thus Baldwin had only 3 pupil-free days. Beyond district decisions, however, the amount of time teachers

had to meet in the school depended on how school leaders decided to allocate building-level resources. The school leaders at Stadele devoted a significant portion of their discretionary resources to providing opportunities for teachers to meet, paying teachers to meet after school once a week and hiring substitutes to release teachers for a half day per month to work on reform-related projects. In contrast, school leaders at Baldwin did not choose to devote resources in this way. Thus, teachers at Baldwin met for only 1 hour after school three times per month to work together, fulfilling the requirements of their contract.

<sup>5</sup>All three focal teachers encountered roughly the same number of messages. This is somewhat surprising because one of the three focal teachers, a beginning teacher, taught for only 4 years of the study. However, this disparity can be attributed to the fact that this teacher was connected to messages about reading through multiple state and district programs and professional development activities targeted to new teachers, programs that did not exist when the other two teachers entered the profession.

<sup>6</sup>For a more in-depth analysis of changes in reading policy in California from 1983 to 1999, along with characteristics of particular movements, see Coburn (2001b).

<sup>7</sup>See Hill (2000) for a similar conclusion about math textbooks in Connecticut. See Rowan (2001) for an explanation of this practice rooted in the market pressures faced by textbook publishers.

<sup>8</sup>For a more elaborated discussion of this typology, see Coburn (2004).

<sup>9</sup>Cohen and Hill (2000) offered further support for this point, providing evidence that greater time spent in professional development results in greater change in teachers' practice.

<sup>10</sup>See also Ball and Cohen (1996) on this point concerning textbooks.

<sup>11</sup>This finding should be viewed as tentative given that it is based on a small number of messages.

<sup>12</sup>See Coburn (2001b) for a more extended description of the dynamics of shifting policy.

<sup>13</sup>For the analysis reported in this section, I relied on data from teachers who taught through all three policy movements. Thus, I used data on connections to policy messages from Sharon, Deanna, 11 additional teachers at Stadele Elementary, and 7 additional teachers at Baldwin Elementary.

<sup>14</sup>In fact, the districts, with their heavy emphasis on early literacy resulting from their previously strong connection with it, tended to reconstruct state policy messages through the lens of early literacy, such that increased state policy-making toward balanced instruction resulted in increased district activity promoting early literacy. First, both districts adopted textbooks from the state list of approved texts that tended to favor early literacy approaches rather than those that

were closer to the state's vision of balanced reading instruction. Second, as mentioned earlier, the state provided grants to districts to make available professional development for K–3 teachers on elements of the balanced approach as specified in state legislation. The state attempted to control messages about reading by requiring professional development providers to submit plans to the state to be approved in order for districts to contract with them. However, districts could bypass this approval process by creating their own professional development. Both of the present districts took this route and created their own professional development for K–3 teachers in ways that reinterpreted the state's rendition of balanced instruction through the lens of an early literacy approach.

<sup>15</sup>It is important to note that the study was conducted relatively soon after state-level policy changes promoting the balanced approach. (The study was conducted during the 1998–1999 school year. State policy promoting the balanced approach began in 1995 and continued at an aggressive pace through the study year and beyond.) Relative to other approaches, policy ideas associated with the state's rendition of balance had not had as much time to work their way through the system and into schools. It is possible that teachers' connections to nonsystem actors carrying messages about the state's version of the balanced approach have increased in the time since the present data were collected. However, especially in the case of literature-based instruction, teachers' connections with nonsystem actors began in close proximity to the policy change itself. In cases in which there was more participation in the movement toward new sets of ideas about reading instruction by nonsystem actors, teachers were connected more quickly to these ideas through nonsystem actors than appears to be the case with more recent policy initiatives.

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### Author

CYNTHIA E. COBURN is an Assistant Professor, Graduate School of Education, University of California, 3643 Tolman Hall, Berkeley, CA 94720; cecoburn@berkeley.edu. At the time this article was written, she was an Assistant Professor in the School of Education and a Research Scientist at the Learning Research and Development Center, both at the University of Pittsburgh. Her areas of specialization include the relationship between policy and practice, organizational theory, urban schools, and qualitative research methods.

Manuscript received February 22, 2003

Revision received November 9, 2004

Accepted December 17, 2004

## Appendix

TABLE A1  
*Demographic Profile of Schools*

Characteristic	Stadele Elementary	Baldwin Elementary
Number of students	692	524
Student race/ethnicity (%)		
Asian	43.4	2.9
Latino	28.5	11.5
African American	12.9	82.8
Filipino	12.3	0.4
White	2.9	1.3
Pacific Islander	0.1	0.2
Percentage of students who qualify for free/reduced-price lunch	67.0	88.9
Percentage of students who are English-language learners	47.8	14.3
Number of teachers	32	27
Teacher race/ethnicity (%)		
White	56	36
Asian	24	7
African American	10	36
Filipino	5	4
Latino	5	14
American Indian	0	4
Ranking on California Academic Performance Index (1998–1999)		
All schools	6 <sup>a</sup>	2 <sup>a</sup>
Similar school	7 <sup>a</sup>	7 <sup>a</sup>

*Note.* Data were derived from Ed-Data (1998–1999; <http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us>).  
<sup>a</sup>Out of a possible 10.

TABLE A2  
*Characteristics of Focal Teachers and Their Classrooms*

Teacher	School	Age/race	Years teaching	Grade level	Classroom student composition
Sharon	Stadele	Late 50s; White	34	First ELD	20 students 7 Chinese 4 Filipino 4 Latino 2 African American 1 Tongan 1 Vietnamese 1 White
Marisa	Stadele	33; biracial	4	Second ELD	20 students 9 Chinese 4 African American 3 Latino 2 Filipino 1 Arab 1 White
Deanna	Baldwin	Mid-50s; White	13 (4 years in the early 1970s and 9 years starting in 1990)	Second	20 students 18 African American 1 Latino 1 Arab

*Note.* ELD = English language development.

TABLE A3  
*Documents Analyzed for State Policy Review*

Type of document	Number analyzed
State legislation	12
State policy documents and reports	34
State professional development materials	3
Task force reports	7
Materials from state and regional professional development providers	24
Media accounts (newspaper and magazine)	49
Secondary sources on history of reading	11

TABLE A4  
*Mechanisms by Which Focal Teachers Were Connected to Messages*

Source	Mechanism	Number	Percentage of total
System	State policy	13	5.8
	State standardized test	8	4.5
	District policy	22	9.8
	District professional development	27	12.1
	District standardized test	3	1.3
	School policy	11	4.9
	School professional development	5	2.2
	Principal expectations	4	1.8
Nonsystem	University coursework (preservice)	8	3.6
	University coursework (in-service)	10	4.5
	Independent professional development provider	49	22.0
	Curriculum materials	55	24.7
	Colleagues	5	2.2
	Media	3	1.3

TABLE A5  
*Definitions Used in Coding*

Factor	Definition
Intensity	Degree to which teachers had opportunities to engage with a message in sustained, iterative ways
Low	Brief or fleeting interactions, including mentions in faculty meetings or professional development, casual conversations with colleagues, quick look through documents or materials, or participating in a single workshop or event
Medium	Interaction was sustained over a brief period of time or was intermittent over a long period of time, including professional development experiences that were in-depth but short term, curricular materials that teachers used for short periods of time in class, pressures for standardized tests recurring year after year but (in these schools) confined to a single season of the year, and interaction with a key carrier on an occasional basis
High	Interaction was sustained over a long period of time, including daily contact with curricular materials, intensive professional development that stretched over at least a year and involved opportunities for dialogue between ideas and experimentation in the classroom, interaction with a key carrier on a daily basis, or incorporation of messages from professional development into ongoing dialogue or planning with workplace colleagues
Content: depth	Degree to which a message addressed underlying pedagogical principles
Low	Policy message focused solely on surface structures (i.e., specific activity structures, materials, or classroom organization) without attention to underlying pedagogical principles (i.e., theories of pedagogy, models of the reading process, assumptions about how students learn)
Medium	Policy message focused primarily on surface structures but included some attention to underlying pedagogical principles
High	Policy message focused primarily on underlying pedagogical principles alongside attention to surface structures
Content: closeness to classroom	Degree to which policy messages came in forms that teachers found to be easily translatable into classroom practice
Low	Teachers reported that the message was difficult to use in the classroom, required significant translation or invention to use in the classroom, or had no connection to their classroom
Medium	Teachers reported that messages could be translated with moderate effort into classroom practice or that it required some degree of invention to create connections to their classroom
High	Teachers reported that messages were easy to use and able to be readily incorporated into classroom instruction with little translation or invention