A Tale of Two Policies:

The Role of a Teacher-Based Team in School Reform

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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Graduate Program in Educational Policy and Leadership

The Ohio State University

2017

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Abstract

In the school policy reform discourse and literature, "teacher teams" at the local school and building level have become a promising venue for implementing policy innovations and bringing them closer to the settings and practices they hope to reform. This study examined the implementation of two policies, one federal policy, Race to the Top (RttT), and one state policy, Midwestern State Improvement Process (pseudonym; MWIP), within a single teacher team. Both policies emphasized teacher collaboration and improved instruction, and converged on teachers at Cardinal High School at the same time. Utilizing naturalistic inquiry and ethnographic field work, the study documented the work of a teacher-based team working to make sense of and enact the requirements and expectations of mandated policies from within the practical and professional contingencies of their daily work. This intersection is the focus of the study and its findings. These implementations of policy reform encounter in this teacher team a world whose contingencies may be no less compelling than those of the proposed reforms. The study revealed social, organizational, and professional values in play at the teacher team level that policymakers may not have anticipated, as in how teachers rely on

existing systems and professional relationships to make sense of their new implementation tasks at the teacher-team level.

Dedication

To my nieces and nephews, the next generation of our family,

who will attend the very schools we seek to improve.

May they learn to think critically, ask the difficult questions,

and seek solutions to the world's struggles.

Acknowledgements

This has been a long, circuitous, and ultimately empowering journey. I could not have made it to this point without the continuous support of the many people in my life who believe in me and support me every day.

My friends and colleagues at the Ohio Department of Education are a consistent source of motivation and inspiration. Thank you for stepping in to help when needed, checking on my progress, and providing me with the time and flexibility I needed to complete my degree.

I am indebted to Dr. Macbeth who took me on as an advisee when Dr. Gordon retired. She had shepherded me through the difficult path of identifying my interests and planning my research. Dr. Macbeth pushed me to go further, think more critically about the world, and to trust myself. I am grateful for the guidance and reassurance from Dr. Macbeth, Dr. Allen, and Dr. Gimbert, who stuck with me and kept me moving forward.

I began this endeavor with my very good friend, Dr. Lorie Owens, who reached the finish line before me but never left me behind. I thank her for the unwavering support week after week, and year after year. Thank you for being a sympathetic friend and a critical advisor, both of which were essential to my transition from ABD to PhD.

My community of support includes a small group of old and new friends who were always there to offer encouraging words and provide me with a boost of confidence. You have understood when I canceled plans, couldn't stop talking about myself, and forgot to return your calls. Thank you for supporting me in your own individual ways – I have needed each of you.

It is with a great deal of gratitude that I thank my parents for not only providing me with countless opportunities, but also for raising me to be courageous and independent enough to take advantage of them. I am the independent woman I am today because my family supported me in pursuing my education and empowered me to make my own choices. Thank you to my father, mother, brother, and sister for their unwavering love and support.

My husband and best friend, Darren Kalix, has endured my educational journey with a sense of humor and a great deal of love. He survived many nights of take-out, missed concerts, and postponed vacations; he turned the music down, the TV off, and left me alone when necessary. Then, when I needed it most, he provided the comedy and distractions that kept me sane. I love that he pushes me to stand apart from the crowd, to be ambitious, and, most importantly, to be myself. Thank you for knowing who I am and imagining who I can be.

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Fields of Study

Major Field: Educational Policy and Leadership

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research

Introduction

Throughout the 20th century, the work of education reform in the United States has encountered a multi-tiered, federal system that delegates differing levels of authority and influence in the arena of education policy (Vile, 2015). Local control has been a centerpiece in the organization of public schooling, for reasons historical and political, and while states retain the prerogative to determine educational policy and curriculum, the federal government has found ways to influence state and local policies through program subsidies, civil rights and equity legislation, anti-poverty plans, and a myriad of state, district, and school-level grant opportunities. The influence of federal policy on local control of schooling has long been one of a carrot and stick relationship, and this is not the only formative relationship on the life of public education. Honig (2006) noted that, "The federal government, states, school districts, mayor's offices and others each promote various educational reform agendas that typically converge on schools simultaneously" (p. 2). Coupled with state law and local school board policies, teachers and students are at the center of a sustained policy whirlwind. These intersections become a familiar feature of teachers' professional experiences. How do teachers survive this whirlwind? How

do they negotiate their way through state and federal policies? What messages do they find within the steady stream of policies, legislation and directives, as policies and reforms converge in schools and classrooms?

This study seeks a better understanding of how, as practical matters of their daily work, teachers make sense of the education policy and reform initiatives that enter their professional lives. Having had the opportunity to work in the classroom, in the central office of a school district, and at a state-level education agency, I have witnessed and experienced the often confusing and conflicting federal, state, and local policies meant to improve schools. In 1990, Darling-Hammond wrote that, "A massive geological dig would be required to unearth the tangled influences of the many policy layers that exist in schools, particularly given the peripatetic state-level policy activity that has characterized the last decade of school reform" (Darling-Hammond, 1990, p. 343). Though Darling-Hammond penned this over 20 years ago, the same tangled influences continue today, as does the need to understand how "peripatetic" policy activity intersects with the work of professional classroom teachers.

Today's educators are dealing with multiple reform efforts concurrently, some of which align and some that are contrary to each other. In this climate of competing policies it is not surprising when education researchers find that not all policy gets implemented as intended: "In such contentious, interconnected, and multidimensional arenas, no one policy gets implemented or is successful

everywhere all the time; on the bright side, some policies are implemented and successful in some of the places some of the time" (Honig, 2006, p. 2). Educators routinely are left to struggle to make sense of the information and instructions they receive, as details get lost in translation, and as policies trickle down to teachers through the discourses of state agencies, district administrators, and principals. This study takes interest in how indeed the discourses find their way into an actual school building.

The conditions necessary for school improvement, and indeed the conditions of public schooling itself, have long been debated. The history of crisis and reform is venerable. Though philanthropists, politicians, administrators, legislators and, more recently, researchers, have no clear-cut formula for improving schools, the contemporary literature has consistently highlighted collaborative decision-making, teacher professional development, and some level of standardization as effective levers of improvement, a three–pronged approach that is not entirely relieved of contradiction. Little (1981) provided an early account of the need to view school improvement as organizational improvement, including the importance of collaboration, collective participation, focused interactions and the frequency and duration of collaborative learning opportunities. She formulated multiple design specifications for effective school improvement, much of which remains unfulfilled today even as researchers continue to reiterate her theories. Hargreaves (1994) recapped important lessons learned, or perhaps not learned well enough, about

educational change: change is a process, not an event; practice must change before beliefs; schools need more doing and less planning; change needs to be both top-down and bottom-up; and policy cannot mandate what matters most.

New policy focus

Recent federal and state education policies focus much of their effort on changing practices in schools through teacher learning and collaboration. A new policy focus on teacher collaboration has exposed a gap in educational research at the level of teacher team implementation (Webster-Wright, 2009); neither researchers nor analysts have looked closely at how teachers make sense of and implement education policies in the course of their daily practice. Researchers have routinely looked at policy implementation through a focus on student achievement, determining success or failure based on aggregated test scores (Ravitch, 2010) with little attention paid to the experience of teachers. This focus on outcomes was part of the inheritance of promises of an applied science of education that gauged success through measurable and quantifiable outcomes but largely ignored the practical work that leads to outcomes. Process–product research has never had much use for "process". Darling-Hammond observed

> … the general failure of policy analysts to look at the ways in which policy wended its way toward and ultimately came to rest in schools … With little information about the process of implementing policy or its meaning for those asked to do the implementing, many analysts attributed policy failure to teacher and/or administrator 'resistance' (Darling-Hammond, 1990, p. 341).

"Resistance" became the familiar canard of why reforms did not work.

The study

The purpose of this study is to look more closely at the implementation of two policies, one federal policy, Race to the Top (RttT), and one state policy, Midwestern State Improvement Process (pseudonym; MWIP), within a single teacher team. Both policies emphasize teacher collaboration and improved instruction, and each came to rest on schools throughout Midwestern State at the same time. To this end, I focused my inquiry on how one teacher team received, mediated, and transformed these policy directives into practice.

Context

Federal policy: Race to the Top (2009)

In 2010, President Barack Obama told a civil rights organization that the economic issue of our time is education. President Obama said, "It is an economic issue when we know countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow" (Calmes, 2010). The President strategically used the language of economic competitiveness to frame his signature education initiative, *Race to the Top* (RttT). The Obama administration, including then Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, employed the discourse of economic competition to galvanize support for the market-based reforms of RttT, a competitive grant-based initiative that advocated for national standards, increased accountability for educators, and the

expansion of school choice. For its critics, however, how these implementations were tied to the larger goal, and to each other, was less well developed (Ravitch, 2010).

Throughout the 20th century, education reform in the United States has been represented through differing contexts and analogies that show a common thread, from *Why Johnny Can't Read* (1966), to *A Nation at Risk* (1983), to *No Child Left Behind* (2001) and *Race to the Top* (2009). The first three analogies implied that our system of public education was failing – leaving students—and the nation—at risk or behind (Bracey, 1997). This way of framing education reform placed the moral burden of failure squarely on teachers and schools, but also on their students and families. *Race to the Top* used a somewhat different and opposing analogy, one that put states in competition with each other and with other countries in a virtual race to the top. The "race", however, preserved the honored place of failing teachers and students—there can be no top without its bottom—but accentuated the promise of winners in the competitive arena of education.

The need for educational change in the United States has been increasingly connected to the need to compete in a global economy (Apple, 2001; Levin, 1998). In his discussion of education policy across industrialized countries, Levin (1998) described the emergence of similar themes emphasizing economic imperatives in education. Among the global themes Levin (1998) identified are:

1) a focus on economic competitiveness

2) a regular failure of schools to deliver a workforce with the necessary competencies
3) a move toward schooling as a commercial or market commodity
4) an emphasis on standards, accountability, and testing

Each, it seems, draws on familiar templates, worries, and dispositions.

In the United States, many of these themes could be seen in President Bush's *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) legislation (Ravitch, 2010). NCLB sought to ensure a competitive workforce by setting impossible goals: that all students would be proficient in literacy, mathematics, and science by 2014. The simplicity of the promise is impressive, and also suspect for that reason. The expressed intention was to improve student achievement through high standards, increased accountability, and annual testing. Yet, wherever we find impossible expectations, we also find a hostility towards those of whom the impossible is expected (e.g., Bracey, 1997; Ravitch, 2010). Here, it is a hostility at the highest levels of policy making.

Building on the dissatisfactions with NCLB, President Obama's *Race to the Top* (RttT) extended the theme of economic competitiveness using a direct analogy to a "race" in its branding. It then went on to implement a competitive distribution of substantial federal funding—the first race—to those states who had shown the most potential and willingness to implement market-based reforms. The carrot was never more weighted, offering tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars to states and districts. The stick was of course the possibility of missing out on the windfall.

Secretary of Education Duncan (2009) wrote, "America urgently needs to elevate the quality of K-12 schooling and boost college graduation rates, not simply to propel the economic recovery but also because students need stronger skills to compete in a global economy" (para. 4). Secretary Duncan connected the need for improving education to two economic goals: domestic economic recovery and success in a global economy. He described *Race to the Top* as a new partnership among the federal government and states, districts and unions to "accelerate change and boost achievement. Yet it is also a competition through which states can increase or decrease their odds of winning federal support" (para. 7). A first competition promises a path to success for a second.

RttT employed a "grants-in-aid" arrangement (Wong, 2008) wherein the federal government provides funding and sets the programmatic framework for education policy, but leaves the delivery of the services up to state and local agencies. As it had in the past, the use of federal funding and grants to enact reform and anti-poverty policies in schools raised debate as to whether the federal government could utilize grants to overcome constitutional and traditional claims of states' rights and local control (Wong, 2008). The Obama administration used the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (1990, ARRA), a broad spending bill to stimulate the economy during recession, to flow education funds to selected states. Congress approved ARRA as a spending bill with broad parameters that allowed the executive branch latitude in allocating funds in multiple policy areas (e.g.,

infrastructure, education, housing). The administration used the ARRA as an opportunity to circumvent the traditional route that education bills normally travel through the U.S. Congress, limiting the amount of debate and amendment that could take place. The U.S. Department of Education sought grant proposals directly from states willing to use the stimulus funds toward the priorities set by the Obama administration. In contrast, a bill like No Child Left Behind was debated in both houses of Congress and needed bipartisan support to pass into legislation. Obama's RttT fund sidestepped the lengthy and often contentious legislative process.

The RttT fund attempted reform in four areas: 1) adopting internationally benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace; 2) building data systems that measure student achievement; 3) increasing teacher and principal effectiveness and achieving equity in their distribution; and 4) turning around the lowest-achieving schools (ED, 2009). These suggested reforms were difficult to oppose – they represented what had become the agreed upon moral consensus in American educational discourse (Darling-Hammond, 2009). That is to say, education policy leaders in the U.S. had come to rely on the timeworn—if not threadbare—themes of international competitiveness, use of data systems, and equitable access to high-quality education. Yet these very different aims possess very different registers of organizational complexity. Building "data systems" is nothing like "achieving equity" or "turning around" schools. The phrases alone betray nothing of the tasks. Moving

from NCLB to RttT was not then a significant shift in policy. It was largely a relabeling of the same policies to make them sound new and relevant to the contemporary political climate. The central themes and problematics of 20th century educational reform were, once again, reproduced, rather than re-conceived.

In 2010, Midwestern State (MW, pseudonym) secured a $400 million Race to the Top Grant (MWDE website, 2010) to increase high school graduation rates, decrease achievement gaps, and improve college enrollment. The State's ambitious goals were to "… accelerate the academic attainment for all MW schoolchildren and challenge our students to be college and career ready" (MWDE, 2011, p. 3). Again, the aims can hardly be disputed, yet in just the same measure, their promises were well beyond any actual achievement or experience. Participating in MW's RttT initiative were 538 Local Education Agencies (LEAs), representing nearly 58% (986,000) of MW's students. The $400 million awarded was shared among the State Education Agency (SEA) (47%) and participating LEAs (53%) (MWDE, 2011, p. 4). While LEAs received the majority of the funds, the federal and state agencies placed strict limitations on the spending of funds, including the need to align all local efforts with Midwestern Department of Education (MWDE) goals and gain pre-approval for expenditures. While the expectation of pre-approval can hardly find objection, the requirement undermines the notion of local control, putting the reins in the hands of the state and federal agencies.

As part of the grant requirements, MWDE created and submitted to the United States Education Department (ED) a "Scope of Work" document (MWDE website, 2011), that required the state agency to detail their goals and what action steps would be taken toward those goals, all in a fashion reflecting the federal RttT goals and expectations. A recurring theme in the "Scope of Work" was an effort to improve "teacher practice" through "professional development and collaboration". The logic behind this focus was that improved collaboration would lead to improved instruction and therefore student achievement (MWDE, 2010). The good sense of placing the responsibility for improvement on the teaching profession has a long history and essentially turns the conversation from a discussion of the educational system at large to one of classroom practice. This logic renders the teaching profession the lynchpin of educational improvement, including the success or failure of reforms, putting both the blame for negative outcomes and the hope of the future on teachers' shoulders – an unfair assertion at the least, and a diminished analytic compass at best. It also sets the stage for promises of improvement through a combination of both top down and bottom up approaches to reform, wherein experts seek to help the underperforming teachers improve their practice, whose practices will percolate up in measurable improvement in test score achievements.

In pursuit of their RttT goals, the State provided resources and *instructional coaches* to improve the use of formative assessment within teacher-based teams (MWDE, 2012, p. 6). The notion was that collaboratively collecting and analyzing

assessment data would help inform teachers of their students' needs in relation to new academic standards, leading to more focused teaching and learning and therefore improved student achievement[1]. This approach attempted to move away from a top-down model of reform by honing in on the work of teacher-based teams. However, the use of state consultants and independent contractors to train regional coaches to assist schools and teachers in learning about and implementing new practices suggests that the work was not devoid of a top-down organization. Presumably, the coaches know more, or better. The statewide effort engaged approximately 300 LEAs and 40,000 educators in the online professional learning modules (MWDE website, n.d.) and instructional coaching focused on Formative Instructional Practices (FIP).

State policy: Midwestern State Improvement Process (2007)

In 2007, the State provided a grant to create the State Leadership Advisory Council (SLAC)[2], an organization focused on creating and disseminating a school

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[1] Formative Instructional Practices (FIP) was the State's Race to the Top (RttT) professional development initiative to assist teachers with using learning targets and assessments to inform instruction. FIP included online modules, videos, and resources for teacher-based teams.

[2] The Midwestern Department of Education (MWDE) entered into a partnership with the State Association of School Administrators (SASA) to create the State Leadership Advisory Council (SLAC) (SLAC website, n.d.). According to their promotional materials, "SLAC is an advisory and study group comprised of representatives of key professional associations, business and school board representatives, practitioners in leadership roles, higher education representatives, and state department of education personnel … to begin identifying what it means to be a leader and what knowledge and skills it takes to successfully lead". SLAC's stated mission is to, "… provide educators with the structures and resources necessary to develop and support effective leadership at every level".

improvement process, the Midwestern State Improvement Process (MWIP), for statewide dissemination. While MWIP preceded Race to the Top, the two initiatives complemented each other in their aim to develop state-level tools to improve student achievement, with a focus on improving teacher collaboration as a key lever.

The MW Improvement Process (MWIP) began with the notion of shared leadership, requiring districts to create teacher-based teams (TBTs), building leadership teams (BLTs), and district leadership teams (DLTs). MWIP tasked the multiple levels of educator teams to collect and analyze data for making data-based school improvement decisions. Practices of shared leadership and data-based decision making were encouraged through organizations like the National Staff Development Council and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The Formative Instructional Practices of RttT echoed the focus on using data from assessments to make instructional decisions in MWIP. While MWIP required collaborative team structures, RttT advocated for the use of teams to implement reforms.

Teachers and administrators in participating MWIP schools completed training emphasizing the collaborative collection and analysis of data to inform instructional and policy decisions. The overarching notion of MWIP is that the analysis of data at the district, school, and classroom levels will expose strengths and weaknesses, enabling educators to focus their attention on improving areas of weakness, both systemic and instructional (More details on MWIP expectations are included in Appendix C). Much like Race to the Top, but before RttT, trainings were

supported by regional transformation coaches and access to online resources developed in partnership with a local university (i.e., videos, articles, learning modules).

In order to look more closely at how teachers encounter such large–scale policy implementations, this study focused on a teacher-based team as they worked to implement the MWIP along with Formative Instructional Practices (FIP), as per the State's RttT Scope of Work.

Teacher team setting

In order to analyze how teachers interpret and implement these simultaneously occurring federal and state policies (RttT and MWIP) I directed my focus to the teacher team level where the two policies converged. Both policies involved teachers in collaboratively interpreting student data, ostensibly collected through formative assessment, to make instructional decisions. As a result, RttT and MWIP both called for local collaborations of teachers within teams, a unit of analysis on which reform initiatives and researchers have rarely focused. Coburn and Stein (2006) noted that, "… existing research provides little insight into the processes and dynamics by which teachers' interactions with colleagues create opportunities for learning that facilitate or constrain policy implementation" (p. 27). While teacher-based teams were a prominent part of both RttT and MWIP implementation, we have scant research on how teacher teams make sense of school improvement

policies and the expectation that this is the path for turning policy directives into actual practice.

Research Focus

Purpose

Studies focusing on "implementability" have revealed "… implementation as a complex and highly-contingent enterprise in which variation is the rule, rather than the exception" (Honig, 2006, p. 4). In order to document the contingent and situated nature of implementation via teacher teams, this case study examined how a single team of teachers made sense of policy directives. The purpose of the study was to add to the literature on policy implementation models through a close look at how a teacher team interpreted and implemented two policies, one federal (Race to the Top (RttT)) and one state policy (Midwestern State Improvement Process (MWIP)) which both emphasized teacher collaboration and data-driven policy as vehicles for improved instruction.

The case study format allowed me to select one study setting: A single team of high school teachers in a large, urban district. Cardinal High School in City District (pseudonyms) was working to implement first MWIP and then RttT. City District mandated that Cardinal High School participate in both reform efforts in an effort to improve teacher performance and academic achievement. Therefore, the high school administration assigned teachers to content-area teams that met weekly. One

of these teams served as my case study participants and setting. While the promises of these kinds of policy initiatives are very large, our interest in these teacher–based teams is unavoidably very local. The study's aim is to bring these two analytic and practical territories into alignment.

Research questions

The following questions guided this study:

- How does a teacher-based team measure their charge to collaboratively implement school improvement policies?
- How does a teacher-based team make sense of and work through the steps of a mandated improvement process?
- How does a teacher-based team take the measure of their tasks, and what it means to address them, as part of a process of implementing policy directives aimed at improving instructional practice?

Significance of the study

Studies of education policy within schools have been abundant, but limited in scope, often measuring the impact of policy using quantitative measures, routinely students' standardized achievement test scores (Darling-Hammond, 1990). This traditional approach to education research has not addressed the implementation process, just its ostensibly objective, measurable outcomes. The long-standing programmatic expression of educational psychology and educational research is

"process–product" research, and the process is considered specifically opaque. It is only the product—outcomes—that holds interest. Moving away from this traditional approach, Honig recommended that researchers interested in improving the quality of policy implementation, "Should help build the knowledge about what works for whom, where, when and why" (2006, p. 4). The "whom" of teacher teams has not been yet been explored enough to inform policy practice. And among Honig's questions, "how" is conspicuously absent. We know that policy progresses through multiple intermediaries as it makes its way to teachers and classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 1990). The teacher-based team, as conceptualized in MW policy, is a substantial intermediary not represented in current research. Therefore, a focus on teacher-based teams can contribute to the knowledge base around *how* policy wends its way through teams of teachers on its way to improving instructional practice. Honig (2006) further suggested that researchers focus on the conditions underlying implementation, emphasizing *interactions* among policies, people, and places. This dissertation study aims to contribute to the literature on policy implementation by offering a case study of a teacher-based team engaged in the implementation of two major policies, as it does so across the contingencies of their professional days as classroom teachers. Their sense-making tasks, their readings of what is being asked of them, what they are being "coached" to do, and their management of these unavoidable impositions on their tasks as classroom teachers

are the focus of this study. It aims to recover the practical contingencies that every policy initiative, especially the “grand” ones, takes no interest in, and does not see.

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

A short history of the federal role in education policy

States' rights

Constitutionally, control of education policy in the U.S. is reserved as a responsibility of the states. Article I of the Constitution specifies the powers of Congress, while the Tenth Amendment grants state autonomy over all powers not specifically delegated to the federal government. Together, these two segments of the U.S. Constitution reserve power of most domestic matters for state control, often referred to as states' rights. Based on states' rights, public education in the U.S. has been the purview of local and state governments from its inception.

Federal involvement in education increased after World War II with the launch of the G.I. Bill and the National Defense Education Act (Wong, 2008). However, the most significant change in role of the federal government in education was in response to the 1954 Supreme Court ruling on *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (Wong, 2008). The violent end of legal segregation forced the federal government to get involved in what was historically a right reserved for state governments. The federal government had little choice but to intervene in desegregation and ensure the safety of all students.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

With the enactment of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the federal government turned its attention to the needs of disadvantaged and minority students (Wong, 2008). This historic change led to the passage of the federal government's landmark education bill, the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (Wong, 2008). Enacting ESEA was complex and resulted in an "intergovernmental policy system" that required the cooperation of multiple levels of government (Wong, 2008). ESEA, likely the most important federal initiative in public schools, "… signaled the end of dual ['layer cake style'] federalism and strengthened the notion of 'marble cake' federalism" (Wong, 2008, p. 20) wherein responsibilities for education policy were shared among national, state and local governments.

ESEA sought to expand services for minority populations including students in poverty, English language learners, and students with disabilities. Congress, wary of imposing educational policy, leaned toward assisting states through funding state and local policies aligned to national priorities. Therefore, ESEA allocated funds to states with limited oversight, leaving much of the actual implementation of national priorities to the states. President Johnson's administration began multiple programs, including Title I, aimed at reducing poverty and segregation. Subsequently, President Carter's administration continued the redistributive focus of ESEA by providing funding for assisting English language learners (Wong, 2008).

Through the allocation of noncompulsory funding sources, the federal government has imposed its reform priorities on state policy. Because the Constitution does not grant the federal government authority to directly enforce education legislation on states, federal lawmakers have used elective grants that include policy requirements as a condition of funding. For example, if a state chooses to accept special education funding they must meet or enact the accompanying civil rights requirements. Since the enactment of ESEA in 1965, the role of the federal government in education policy has steadily increased (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988) and the emphasis on redistributive, anti-poverty policies has grown substantially. According to Wong (2008), the percent of federal education funding aimed at redistributive programs increased from 36% in 1970 to 63% in 2002 (2008, p. 21). While redistributive education grants to states gained bipartisan support during the 1970s, there have been periodic debates over the significant role for the federal government that has emerged in education and social policy. For instance, during the mid-1990s there was a strong push in a Republican-controlled Congress to limit the size of government, curtail social spending, and restore state control of domestic policies such as education (Wong, 2008).

The Rand Change Agent Study and the beginning of collaboration

Conducted in 1974, the Rand Change Agent Study was a large-scale examination of several federally funded school improvement efforts. Williams (1979) explained that, "A main purpose of this study was to determine why some

school sites were more effective in initiating, designing, and implementing change than others" (p. 98 – 99). The findings of the study called into question the outcomes of previous federal reform efforts and suggested a shift in focus toward professional learning and the consideration of local context.

Some of the newest thinking from the Rand study was about the professional roles of teachers, including professional learning and collaboration. Williams (1979) advised:

> Staff-development should be peer based; teachers and administrators should consider their colleagues as major resources for staff development. This utilization of peers makes it more likely that the services will be appropriate and those who provide them will be credible (p. 99).

The Rand study recommended that staff participate in site-based collaboration and problem solving, be involved in selecting topics for professional learning, and be provided adequate time to focus their attention on professional learning (Williams, 1979). This recommendation of collaboration ushers in a new strain of educational reform that promotes peer relationships, teaming, and shared leadership. This expansion in increased professional responsibility included involvement in collaborative planning and leadership, and significant changes in school organization and culture (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1979).

The results of the Rand study also had implications for the role of teachers in *adopting* and *adapting* innovations (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1979; Williams, 1979). The study found that the process of *adoption* of innovations was more a process of

adaptation as administrators and teachers processed the new information and adjusted it to meet their local context. Though "local context" is a broad phrase referencing everything from physical geography to school culture, the understanding that schools were adapting rather than adopting innovations was a large step toward acknowledging differences among schools and communities and the need for more bottom up reform. McLaughlin and Marsh (1979) wrote about the adaptation of innovations as described by the Rand study:

> In a sense, teachers and administrative staff need to 'reinvent the wheel' each time an innovation is brought into the school setting. Reinventing the wheel helps the teachers and administrative staff understand and adjust the innovation to local needs (p. 87).

The study found that successful implementation of reform efforts was more dependent upon the organizational context and processes than the availability of funds. Organizational climate, extensive teacher participation, and school leadership at the local level were critical factors in the change process (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1979).

McLaughlin and Marsh (1979) discussed some of the many barriers to implementation identified through the Rand study: Teachers often experienced mixed messages about their roles; at times teachers were empowered as decision-makers and professional learners, while at other times administrative regulations made authentic participation difficult, and teachers felt as if innovations were imposed upon them. The Rand findings exposed the difficult position of teachers as

education policies sent conflicting messages about their roles and responsibilities. At times, they were expected to be agents of the state and implement policy as directed through regulations. At other times, they were expected to be active participants in shared decision-making and collaborative planning. And at *all* times they were to be professional classroom teachers.

The Rand study began to highlight the importance of the convergence of policy, people, and places as factors in the success of implementation. In discussion of the Rand findings, Honig (2006) described how, "… implementation unfolds as a process of 'mutual adaptation' as implementers attempt to reconcile conditions in their microlevel context with macrolevel demands" (p. 7). At the local level, teachers and administrators struggled to make sense of how to implement federal and state policies (macrolevel demands) within their local contexts (microlevel). The former had been long studied; the latter not at all. Policies allowing for local interpretation, as much of the original ESEA was written, allowed for administrators and teachers to implement the goals of federal policy in ways that made the most sense locally.

A Nation at Risk

The 1983 publication of a federally commissioned report, *A Nation at Risk,* brought attention to, or perhaps created, a national crisis in education. As with prior cycles of crisis and reform, the ensuing wave of concern about the condition of our nation's schools was fueled by dark prophecies that urged immediate change. Policies of this era aimed directly at improving student achievement and included a

new focus on curriculum, instruction, and teacher professionalism. State Education Agencies (SEAs) responded with policies that increased accountability and mandated systemic changes. However, the result was mainly fragmented, counter-productive practices (Fullan, 2007). Hammond (1997) discussed three waves of reform that followed *A Nation at Risk:* 1) raising standards though curriculum and testing mandates, 2) improvements in teacher preparation and skills (see Holmes Group, 1986), and 3) school restructuring.

Honig (2006) emphasized that research studies during this period found incongruities between policy goals and implementers' beliefs at the local level. Researchers found that policy instruments such as mandates, incentives, and training had minimal impact on implementation if local implementers did not see alignment of policy goals with their goals. Honig (2006) observed "… policy implementation as a negotiated process involving at least the federal government, states, and local districts" (p. 8). *A Nation at Risk* (1983) recognized the need for consideration of people and places as factors in both policy design and research. Following that recommendation, McLaughlin (1991) argued that researchers should move away from mainly trying to understand which policies get implemented, to elaborating on the various conditions that enable effective implementation and practice.

No Child Left Behind

The next critical phase of federal education reform arrived with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001 during the administration of President George W. Bush (Apple, 2001; Ravitch, 2010). With the passage of NCLB, a reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), redistributive education policies once again garnered bipartisan support (Wong, 2008). Bush and his advisors expanded the federal role in public education to include mandated testing and accountability measures built upon a *market-based* model of reform. In an effort to close achievement gaps NCLB required:

1) Annual testing of students at the elementary level in core subject areas;
2) Hiring of 'highly qualified' teachers;
3) Corrective actions to turn around failing schools; and
4) Raising the achievement of subgroups of students (based on race, income, English language ability, and special education designations) (Wong, 2008).

To support this expansion in policy, NCLB hugely increased funding for the Title I program from $1.7 billion to $11 billion annually (Ravitch, 2010).

For these reasons, NCLB policies garnered broad support from both Republicans and Democrats. It produced an irresistible swing in education policy decision-making from the state to federal level as it encouraged the proliferation of market-based reforms including accountability, data reporting systems, charter

schools, and vouchers for private schools, underwritten by an enormous increase in funding.

Moving into the 21st century

Any discussion of education in the U.S. today is unavoidably about how to improve, change, or fix our education system, its teachers, and its students. There is widespread agreement, examined or not, that schools need to be "fixed" or "reformed" in some way (Ravitch, 2010). Policymakers at the federal, state, and local levels have debated and attempted solutions across the 20th century. Solutions often focused on improving teacher practice through the imposition of a myriad of professional development efforts. But, after countless familiar attempts at school reform through professional development, not much has changed in 100 years (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). In their survey of the history of school reform, Tyack and Cuban wrote that, "… it is the rare reform that performs and persists according to plan. Even long-lasting reforms are not static but evolve in ways often not foreseen by their proponents" (p. 60).

Based on evidence of past reform successes and failures, policymakers refocused their school improvement efforts, rethinking the focus on learning opportunities *for teachers*. New policies utilized a more nuanced approach to raising student achievement. Federal policy considered the various actors across institutions and levels of bureaucracy and utilized multiple levers to enact change. Policy tools such as academic standards, assessment, school choice, site-based

decision-making, and teacher professional development were linked to accountability measures and thus funding streams (Apple & Jungck, 1992; Honig, 2006). Professional development initiatives routinely assumed that mandated policies disseminated to practitioners through directives and trainings were automatically assimilated into teachers' practice (Thiessen, 1992; Cohen & Hill, 2001; Webster-Wright, 2009). In an effort to ensure implementation, policymakers often tied grant monies to specific outcomes and content including classroom practice, collaborative structures, and curriculum mandates (Hardy, 2010), as we will see in both Race to the Top and the Midwestern State Improvement Process.

Professional practice

Professional development

Many 20th century researchers and reports expounded upon the poor quality of American schools, describing our nation as at risk and cautioning that we were leaving children behind (Apple & Jungck, 1992). And many of these *school* improvement policies actually sought to change *teacher* practice, which would ostensibly improve student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Fullan, 2007). Teachers became accustomed to this interventionist version of school improvement wherein policymakers, administrators, and reformers alike sought to impose external reform ideas through teacher professional development. Even the phrase "professional development" carries with it the negative connotation of deficiency-

model thinking, as if teachers are deficient as professionals and in need of further developing (e.g., Hardy, 2010; Webster-Wright, 2009).

The assumption was that teachers lacked skills and knowledge to do their jobs successfully or were simply not trying hard enough (Hardy, 20120; Hargreaves, 1994; Thiessen, 1992; Webster-Wright, 2009). More often than not, professional development opportunities surfaced as single-day trainings or workshops provided by external experts. Cohen and Hill (2001) found that most opportunities to learn about mathematics reforms in California were short and superficial: "Superficiality and fragmentation are the rule: the offerings rarely provide opportunities to learn in depth about anything central to instruction" (p. 157). While the content of such trainings is debatable – some are bound to be more useful than others – they are designed without the input of teachers, often with little concern for teachers' identified needs or desires, and are built on the assumption of teacher deficiency (Hardy, 2010).

Hubbard, Mehan, and Stein (2006) concluded that more than two decades of research on professional development that supported job-embedded, collaborative learning over the "Hello – Good-Bye – God Bless You" workshop format had little impact (Fullan, 1991). This traditional training model resulted in decontextualization that, "… disregards the value of ongoing and situated learning, thereby reinforcing the perceived divide between theory (what you learn in a course) and practice (what you do in work every day)" (Webster-Wright, 2009, p.

703). Hubbard, Mehan, and Stein (2006) argued that research supports teacher learning that is collaborative, includes all school staff, extends over time, focuses on classroom practice, and includes instructional coaching. Multiple researchers have argued that teacher learning needs to be a social, collaborative process (see Lave & Wenger, 1991; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Smylie and Evans, 2006; Fullan, 20007; Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007). As we discuss RttT and MWIP we will see both the federal and state departments of education focus in on collaboration as an essential part of their reform policies. How they have done so is a central interest of this study.

Move toward teacher collaboration

In an effort to counteract the deficit-thinking of traditional professional development, state governments and national professional organizations developed professional standards outlining expectations for teacher learning and practice. In 2005, the State adopted *Standards for Educators* (MWDE, 2005), which included standards for teachers, principals, professional development, and school treasurers. The standards emphasized collaboration, teaming, and job-embedded learning, practices supported by both Race to the Top (MWDE website, n.d.) and the Midwestern State Improvement Process (SLAC website, 2014).

This move toward collaboration seems to have followed the suggestion of researchers to design policies and initiatives that encourage teacher collaboration, making use of existing local teacher communities and networks and foster their

development where they do not exist (e.g., Coburn & Stein, 2006; Hargreaves, 1994; Little, 1981). Over 30 years ago, Little (1981) outlined the need for interaction amongst educators as a critical component in school improvement. Little recommended the following collegial interactions as critical:

- Teachers frequently talk about instructional practice
- Teachers and administrators frequently observe each other's practice
- Teachers and administrators collaborate on the design and development of instructional materials
- Teachers and administrators share practices and learn from each other

Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) argued that what goes on inside the classroom is closely associated to what goes on outside of the classroom. They wrote that the quality of collegial relationships and professional experiences outside of the classroom affected the quality of teachers' classroom practice. Thus, they concluded that student learning was dependent upon teachers' professional experiences and relationships, making teacher collaboration that much more important. Hargreaves (1994) noted that the creation and support of collegial relationships among teachers was a pre-requisite for effective school-based instructional collaboration, teacher learning, and curriculum development.

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) wrote about tensions between the perceived and actual professional learning needs of teachers. They emphasized the need to shift educational policies from those that control teacher practice and

learning to those that foster collaboration. Among the characteristics of effective professional learning they recommended, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) advocated for three that are especially critical to RttT and MWIP:

- [Professional learning] must be grounded in inquiry, reflection, and experimentation that are participant-driven.
- [Professional learning] must be collaborative, involving a sharing of knowledge among educators and a focus on teachers' communities of practice rather than on individual teachers.
- [Professional learning] must be sustained, ongoing, intensive, and supported by modeling, coaching, and the collective solving of specific problems of practice (p. 2).

Researchers continued to argue that in order to improve teachers' learning experiences, there needs to be a shift from looking outward toward the expertise of others and instead a focus on collaborative learning, empowering teachers to create communities of practice as they work together to improve their practice within their school context (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Fullan, 2007). Context is more than just the physical school building location in which professional collaboration and learning occur. Context encompasses workplace expectations, insider discourse, social structures, institutional history, and more (e.g., Hargreaves, 1994; Lave & Wenger, 2001; Webster-Wright, 2009). By these accounts, the nature of the context of

professional experience is an essential component in the success or failure of reform efforts and teacher learning (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992).

Idealized collaboration and community

Lave (1990) proposed an approach to learning that emphasized the building of communities of practice. Subsequently, Lave and Wenger (1991) expanded upon communities of practice and used the term in a very specific way:

> A community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice. A community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage (p. 98).

When we apply Lave and Wenger's (1991) conception of communities of practice to the teaching profession, practice is communal and ongoing and, as Coburn and Stein (2006) noted, the negotiation of meaning becomes an essential part of learning. Hargreaves (1994) echoed this thinking, suggesting that, "… teachers are not just technical learners. They are social learners too" (p. 11).

In communities of practice, learning is social and embedded in the everyday interactions of teachers as they make sense of their work; meaning is negotiated within communities and it is within these communities that teachers make sense of new policies and implementation unfolds (Coburn & Stein, 2006). Spillane, Reiser, and Gomez (2006) considered social cognition and how it impacts policy

implementation. They argued that sense-making is a social activity and policy implementation relies on how communities make sense of policy.

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) provided a clear description of what professional learning looks like in this paradigm:

> Teachers learn by doing, reading, and reflecting (just as students do); by collaborating with other teachers; by looking closely at students and their work; and by sharing what they see. This kind of learning enables teachers to make the leap from theory to accomplished practice. . . such learning requires settings that support teacher inquiry and collaboration and strategies grounded in teachers' questions and concerns (sec. 2, para. 2).

Similarly, Smylie and Evans (2006) advocated for improving social structures that support increased communication amongst teachers. They argued that communication improves the sharing and development of new information, practices and skills.

Coburn and Stein (2006) noted that policymakers and reformers must not only address the change in practice they hope to see, they must also design the social infrastructure to foster learning. Collegial relationships are a significant aspect of teachers' work life and there is evidence that suggests that collegiality and collaboration enhance teacher learning under the right conditions (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Raymond, Butt & Townsend, 1992; Webster-Wright, 2009). "Sharing knowledge is a critical function of the collaborative process because it leads to common understanding" (Scribner, Sawyer, Watson & Myers, 2007, p. 88). Teachers and their colleagues are the most significant resources available to each other

(Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992). In order to encourage these collaborative relationships, schools must address the organizational structures of schools, rethinking schedules, grouping and teaming, leadership structures and even the scale of the workplace (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) found that teachers afforded opportunities to discuss instructional practices and set common goals were able to respond more effectively to the diverse needs of their students. Effective teacher communities focus on learning goals and instructional strategies, reevaluating them on a routine basis (Honig & Hatch, 2004). Teachers who work with colleagues to improve their practice are more likely to adopt reforms and try new instructional strategies (Cohen & Hill, 2001).

Policy implementation through collaboration

The reconceptualization of teacher learning and practice as collaborative has significant implications for implementing education policies. Wenger (1988) discussed the important role of negotiation and discourse as teachers make meaning of new policies and ideas. Thus, it is within the context of teacher communities that teachers negotiate and make meaning of policies in an effort to implement them. Spillane and colleagues (2006) wrote that, "… sense-making is not a solo affair" (2006, p. 56), suggesting that teachers need to make sense of policies through discussion within social networks and communities of practice. Likewise, Coburn and Stein (2006) viewed policy implementation as a process of learning that

requires the negotiation of meaning among teachers. Teachers learn, adopt, adapt or reject new policies as they engage in discourse with their colleagues. As teachers interact over time they negotiate meanings and develop shared understandings of practices and policies, essentially creating a filter for reforms as they are implemented (Spillane, et. al., 2006). Working from this view of shared understandings, Spillane and colleagues (2006), emphasized the need to frame implementation research around how teacher communities interact with and make sense of policy. They posited that focusing research in this way, "… will generate new insights into how reform ideas get implemented in practice" (p. 61).

Contrived collegiality

In 1979, Miller and Wolf acknowledged the inherent tension teachers experienced as they tried to balance their personal and professional needs with the institutional needs of the schools in which they worked. Staff development and staff developers generally exacerbated this tension by challenging teachers' professional practices and the institutional systems in which they work. Leiter and Cooper (1979) concluded that professional development providers were coming to realize what many teachers had known all along, that teachers learn best from each other and respond best when given the opportunity to participate in determining the content of professional learning. Fullan (1983) also recognized the need for reform to be school-based and include educators working collaboratively, in small groups

within the school community. These are the hallmarks of *organic* communities of practice, not of the *mandated* teaming that is the reality in many schools.

Though much of the research on teacher teaming and collaboration provides an image of a powerful, positive change in practice (Calderon, 1999; De Lima, 2001), there are some limitations and liabilities. Hargreaves (1994) warned that the result of *mandated* collaboration is often *contrived collegiality* and not the organic communities of practice for which Lave and Wenger (1991) advocated. Contrived collegiality is administratively regulated, compulsory, implementation-oriented, fixed in time and space, and accountable for outcomes known in advance (Hargreaves, 1994). Hargreaves (1994) identified five aspects of successful collaborative working relationships among teachers: Spontaneous; voluntary; development-oriented; pervasive across time and space; and unpredictable. He further stipulated that in effective collaborative cultures teachers determine the function and purpose of the group, rather than working to implement imposed mandates.

Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin, (1995) and Hargreaves (1994) all warned that true collaborative cultures are not regulated; they emerge and operate according to the needs of their participants. However, school administrators and policymakers have difficulty allowing for this unpredictability. While scheduled meetings may be a necessary part of institutional operations, scheduled meetings do not have to limit group interactions and impose arbitrary parameters to

collaborative conversations (Hargreaves, 1994). When administrators mandate the composition of learning communities, designate scheduled meeting times and control the agenda, the result is not a collaborative environment, but one of contrived collegiality.

Most political and administrative approaches to teacher-based teams disregard the existing culture, needs and desires of teachers (Hargreaves, 1994). Policies that disregard local culture and context are often at odds with local practices and met with resistance. Teachers may have established their own organic communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 2001) based on their own norms and values. When policies seek to impose structure or content onto these communities from the outside, the collaborative nature of the networks is broken down. Coburn and Stein (2006) addressed the adverse interaction of policy and school communities:

> When policy enters schools, it enters into multiple, overlapping communities that have developed their own norms of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and repertoires of practice. In many cases, policy seeks to interrupt or reconfigure this practice (p. 30-31).

In an effort to "improve" teacher practice, policies mandating shifts in educational goals and instructional practices override local collaboration and decision-making. Thus, policies that mandate collaborative decision-making often result in contrived collegiality rather than the organic collaboration necessary for effective teacher growth and practice (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

Collaboration and autonomy

Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, and Myers (2007) described teams as having either an open or a closed purpose. Teams with an open purpose have no strict agenda or constraints because they are formed naturally, often with few parameters. Teams with a closed purpose are likely to be focused on a mandated topic, policy or problem and do not stray from the established agenda. Teams with a closed purpose are likely to fit into Hargreaves' (1994) conception of contrived collegiality in that they do not allow for teacher-directed agendas or organic collaboration and focus instead on required, imposed topics (Scribner, Sawyer, Watson & Myers, 2007, p. 79).

Teacher teams experience differing amounts of autonomy depending on local context and requirements. Scribner and colleagues (2007) argued that the amount of autonomy a team is able to exercise correlates to their ability to engage in collaborative planning and learning. They described two opposing versions of autonomy: Enabling autonomy and disabling autonomy. Depending on the constraints imposed upon a team by the administration, a team can be enabled to make decisions about group purpose and organization. When autonomy is limited, the ability of a group to establish their own purpose is essentially disabled, resulting in what Scribner and colleagues (2007) referred to as closed purpose. Malen and Cochran (2008) discussed the degrees of discretion granted to site actors and argued that site autonomy has been constrained by federal, state and local policies

that limit local decision-making through a web of rules embedded in policies intended to control implementation.

Policy incoherence: The impact of multiple external policies

Policy incoherence

Honig and Hatch (2004) illustrated how multiple policies, from multiple levels of government, merge at the school level, often creating confusion and overwhelming educators whose primary responsibility is classroom instruction. They referred to this as policy incoherence and described it as occurring when "multiple external demands converge on schools" and subsequently "compete with each other for funding, time, and attention" (Honig & Hatch, 2004, p. 16). Multiple policy demands converging at the school level often have a negative influence on the work of teachers and administrators. Some schools struggle to make sense of and balance competing demands, resulting in inconsistent and sometimes damaging implementation; while other schools respond positively and can thrive in such an environment (Honig & Hatch, 2004). Unsurprisingly, policy incoherence correlates with mismanagement within schools, poor and inconsistent classroom instruction, and teacher turnover.

In response to the pervasive existence of policy incoherence, Honig and Hatch (2004) argued for policy coherence which they refer to as "crafting coherence". As they described it, crafting coherence involves: 1) schools setting

school-wide goals; 2) schools using those goals as the basis for deciding which external demands to adopt or adapt; and 3) central offices supporting schools in their goals and decision-making processes (p. 17). Crafting coherence is about schools and districts using local decision-making processes that allow them to interact with external demands productively.

Systemic reform and policy coherence

Darling-Hammond (1990) wrote that policymakers behave as if the policy process has been finished once a bill passes or regulations and guidelines are completed. Contrary to many policymakers' views, the focus on legislation, regulation and directives does not address actual implementation.

Knapp, Bamburg, Ferguson, and Hill (1998) defined "systemic reform fallacy" as the belief that multiple external reforms "can be handled at the point of policy formation by conglomerate policies that subsume the different strands of reform activity into one carefully-orchestrated whole" (p. 416). Knapp and colleagues recognized that local actors struggle to make sense of multiple reforms and are rarely able to implement policies as intended by outside policymakers. When discussing external demands, the role of parents, community organizations, and unions, among others, who place multiple demands on schools are often overlooked (Honig & Hatch, 2004). Systemic reform fallacy critiques the belief that external policy demands, along with the broader context of local politics and community influences, converge upon schools in a clear and productive manner that allows for

local implementation of school improvement efforts. Instead, research shows that external demands are often conflicting and complicate school improvement efforts (Knapp, et al., 1998; Honig & Hatch, 2004).

Darling-Hammond (1990) also discussed the convoluted nature of implementation, noting that time spent on creating policy is often three times greater than the time allotted for implementation. Information about educational policies filters down through state and local administrators to teachers who are expected to implement the simplified, watered-down version that reaches them (Darling-Hammond, 1990). Much of the communication teachers receive around new policies is limited to either directives or admonitions, without the requisite dialog and learning. Darling-Hammond witnessed that teachers cannot "…fully engage [the policy's] implications intellectually, for they had too little information to do so and too little opportunity to discuss their ideas with others" (p. 342). During implementation, "teachers interpret the thin guidance they've received, they fill the gaps in their understanding of the policy with what is already familiar to them, creating a 'mélange' of practices…" (p. 342).

Honig and Hatch (2004) continued the discussion of incoherence in implementation with their concept of "subjective reality of coherence." They argued that all practitioners do not experience and understand policies and reforms similarly and do not have similar visions for coherent implementation of those policies and reforms. Honig and Hatch turned the conversation back toward social

constructions of meaning and meaning in context as described by Lave and Wenger (1991) and a great many others before them. “In this view, coherence as a state of affairs is not a technical matter but a social construction produced through continual interactions among teachers, students, organizational structures, curriculum and other tools of school” (Honig & Hatch, 2004, p.18).

Honig and Hatch (2004) also studied reform strategies that promote inside-out or bottom-up thinking, encouraging the setting of goals and strategies locally rather than at the federal or state level (Honig & Hatch, 2004). Through the development of decision-making frameworks that engage local actors, an inside-out approach can “promote ongoing local sense-making” (p. 18). They found that this approach resulted in local choices to adopt and adapt just portions of reforms; local actors strategically selected reforms that aligned with local goals and fit into the local context. They concluded that both outside-in and inside-out approaches to policy coherence fall short of creating coherence because of an inherent misalignment among federal, state, and local goals. Instead, they suggested a view of coherence as a process of negotiating internal and external demands. They viewed policy coherence as a “continual process of negotiating the relationship between schools’ internal circumstances and their external demands” (Honig & Hatch, 2004, p. 18).

Simplification and symbolic adoption

In their review of research on policy coherence, Honig and Hatch (2004) found that schools find strategic ways to bridge and buffer external demands as they work to create goals and strategies within their schools. Rather than react passively and adopt externally developed reforms, school leaders look for opportunities to engage with policies that complement their local goals or find ways to adapt policies to better fit their local context.

As local practitioners work to make sense of external and internal demands, they often employ what Honig and Hatch (2004) referred to as "simplification systems". By simplifying the policy requirements and translating complex ideas into manageable pieces, local practitioners can fit the language of policy expectations into their existing context. Local simplification of external demands encourages local *adaptation* of policies rather than pure *adoption* of policies as written. Simplification also allows for local 'ownership' of new policies as local decision-makers adapt policies into locally developed goals and strategies (see Darling-Hammond, 1990, 1999; Fullan, 2007; Honig & Hatch, 2004).

Honig and Hatch (2004) found that via this simplification, schools may adopt external demands, "symbolically but not allow those demands to influence core organizational activities" (p. 25). An organization might publicly align its goals and mission to better reflect the expectations of external demands, symbolically adopting the intended reform, while intentionally leaving its day-to-day work

largely unchanged (see also Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Spillane & Zeuli, 1999; Westphal, et al., 1997). Researchers have observed that teachers may incorporate the language of reforms into their lexicon, describing their practice and beliefs in terms that reformers have introduced, yet those same teachers may not actually integrate the reforms into their daily practice (Cohen & Ball, 1990; Honig & Hatch, 2004; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Spillane, 2000; Spillane & Zeuli, 1999).

Another form of symbolic adoption occurs when organizations already practicing the current reform will publicly espouse their adoption of the reform to meet external demands, though the organization has not changed anything in their current practice (Honig & Hatch, 2004). This symbolic adoption provides the school or district with the ability to promote their willingness to adopt reforms and meet or exceed external demands while not actually having to make any formal changes to practice, avoiding further scrutiny and oversight by external agents.

Fidelity of implementation

"Implementation" has long been a concern for policymakers and those who study policy making. In the contemporary literature, a great many studies have framed the contingencies of implementation through the lens of "fidelity", or how well original aims and purposes and preserved over the contingencies of implementation. Researchers define fidelity of implementation in many ways. O'Donnell (2008) framed it as the "determination of how well an intervention is implemented in comparison with the original program design" (p. 33). O'Donnell

noted that other definitions of fidelity depended on the type of research and the field of study. Her review of literature included fidelity of implementation studies in mental health and public health, as well as education. Though she found multiple definitions, O'Donnell (2008) found the definitions were quite similar in kind, and were all focused on assessing practice in relation to the intention of innovation or policy. This view of fidelity concurs with Fullan's earlier definition, "to implement it faithfully in practice – that is, to use it as it is 'supposed to be used,' as intended by the developer" (2001, p. 40).

Although definitions of fidelity tend to align, how to measure fidelity of implementation is much more difficult to pin down. How to measure fidelity is dependent upon the nature of the innovation or intervention being implemented (O'Donnell, 2008). Another variable is the scale of the innovation. For example, Desimone (2002) wrote about the difference between whole-school program implementation, requiring the participation of an entire system, and the fidelity of small scale interventions implemented in single classrooms or teacher by teacher.

It seems sensible to assume that the higher the fidelity of implementation, the better the outcomes and vice versa (Harn, Parisi, & Stoolmiller, 2013). However, drawing such a conclusion is premature if the nature of the innovation or policy implemented is not already proven "effective". For example, significant change or outcomes may exist even when fidelity of implementation is low, suggesting an alternate cause for the changes observed (Harn, Parisi, & Stoolmiller, 2013). In

educational research measures of fidelity of implementation are generally used to provide evidence that positive outcomes are related to the faithful implementation of the intended reform. But, there is not a general agreement on how to meaningfully measure fidelity *and* account for local differences in implementation that may impact outcomes positively and negatively. Variation in implementation across classrooms and across schools or districts complicate the measurement of fidelity (Kisa & Correnti (2015). Variation becomes even more problematic as districts expand the use of a reform across more sites, involving more trainers, administrators, and teachers. "Fidelity" can be heard as a critique of contingency, variation, and innovation, and an alignment with "first intentions".

Kisa and Correnti (2015) suggested that studies of fidelity include two distinct measures: Process and content. They observed that teachers are often more successful in implementing the content aspects of an innovation as opposed to the processes. Their suggestions for researchers included examining fidelity over time because the focus on implementation tends to decrease after the first year of a reform project. Looking at change in practice over time also allows for researchers to establish a baseline to identify changes in practice.

Considering the outlined purposes and caveats for measuring fidelity of implementation, it was not sensible to utilize a formal measure of fidelity in this ethnographic study. The focus of the study is not on how well the teacher team implements either policy, but how they make sense of the policies and work toward

meeting the expectations as they understand them. There is situational and contingent nature to their work which we can see more clearly through observation than formal measures of how faithful they are to the intentions of policymakers. In Chapter 5, I utilize emergent themes as a construct to allow for analysis of how the teachers at Cardinal high school interpreted and made use of the policy intentions within their work. The format of Chapter 5 is intended to be descriptive rather than comparative.

Gaps in research: Policy implementation at the teacher team level

Honig (2006) advised that researchers move beyond the question of "what's implementable and works" to inquiry into "what is implementable and works for *whom*, *where*, *when* and *why*?" (p. 2, emphasis added). A review of scholarly literature exposes a gap in research that explores the implementation of policy at the teacher team level, a particular site of *whom* and *where*. Educational research ought to explore the *interactions* among policies, people, and places in an effort to explain implementation outcomes (Honig, 2006). For policymakers to create reforms that work, they need a better understanding of how teachers learn about and make sense of policies within their professional communities (Webster-Wright, 2009).

Coburn and Stein (2006) explained their view of policy implementation as a process of adaptation, "… that involves the gradual transformation of practice via the ongoing negotiation of meaning among teachers" (Coburn & Stein, 2006, p. 27).

However, they noted, existing research does not provide much insight into how teachers' collegial interactions influence policy implementation. This view is echoed by multiple researchers who have identified similar gaps in the research on communities of practice in the context of policy implementation (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Scribner, Sawyer, Watson & Myers, 2007; Spillane, et al., 2006; Webster-Wright, 2009).

Darling-Hammond (1990) noted that the traditional "input-output" approach to policy research and analysis fails to account for the ways that policy is adopted and adapted. Webster-Wright (2009) observed that there is little evidence of how communities of teachers interpret policy and make it part of their practice. Researchers need to consider the ways that educators seek to understand and incorporate reforms into their practice (Darling-Hammond, 1990). Spillane and colleagues (2006) emphasized the need to frame policy research around how teacher communities interact with and makes sense of policies. They argued that focusing research in this way, "… will generate new insights into how reform ideas get implemented in practice" (Spillane, et al, 2006, p. 61). The next generation of policy studies should examine the transformation of policy into teacher actions from the vantage point of the teachers and should question how teachers understand and interpret the intentions of new policies in light of their own context (Darling-Hammond, 1990).

Although teacher teams are being created in schools across the country, researchers have not looked closely at diverse ways teams are formed, what work they do, or their role in policy implementation (Scribner, Sawyer, Watson & Myers, 2007). Spillane and colleagues (2006) suggested that focusing research on how teachers make sense of policy could provide new insights into how ideas become practice. Similarly, Coburn and Stein (2006) concluded that current research does not provide the needed insight into the ways that teachers' interactions with colleagues create opportunities for policy adoption or adaptation. Research is needed that explores the role of teacher teams within schools, where teacher learning, policy implementation, and local context intersect (Webster-Wright, 2009). Both Webster-Wright (2009) and Spillane, et al., (2006) advocated for situated, holistic research that seeks to understand the experience and perspective of professionals participating in learning communities.

Until recently, only a small number of studies focused on teachers' responses to formal collaborative structures (e.g., Little, 2002; Ronfeldt, et al., 2015). As state and federal policy have moved toward the use of collaborative teams, there is a growing literature on how school systems work to redesign their organizational structures (Spillane, Shirrell, & Hopkins, 2016).

Parise and Spillane (2010) noted that "on the job" learning, as is expected to happen in teacher teams, supplements teachers' initial training and have a positive effect on student achievement. However, policymakers and reformers tend to make

the assumption that organizing teachers into teams would naturally result in collaboration and shared instructional decision-making. Parise and Spillane (2010) cautioned that without guidance teachers may not know how to talk about instruction.

Spillane, Shirrell, and Sweet (2017) studied the physical structure of schools to analyze how proximity influences teacher interactions. Their work situates the study of teacher teams within the literature of workplace studies by framing the school as the teachers' workplace. They concluded that research on staff interactions should consider teacher interactions as a social network dependent upon propinquity and formal school organizations. They also suggested that future work examine how the physical organization of schools impacts teacher interactions, collaboration, and social relationships.

Another way of considering the structure of collaborative teams is as part of the organizational routine of a school (Spillane, Shirrell, & Hopkins, 2016). By studying teams as a "new" organizational routine, Spillane and his colleagues suggested a broader approach that seeks to look at teams system-wide, within a larger district level context. Though they were studying the use of teams, which they refer to as professional learning communities (PLCs), their work looked at a system-level effort to design and deploy an organizational routine that would support learning and collaboration. Their work utilized a mixed methods approach to study the work of 98 PLCs in 14 elementary schools (p. 105). They concluded that the

functioning of PLCs depends on both bureaucratic structures and collegial structures.

The current study examines the "gap" in a different fashion. It provides an ethnographic account of a single teacher team as they encounter multiple bureaucratic mandates (federal, state, and local). Rather than looking at the impact of those mandates on a broad, system-wide level, or as a formal organizational intervention, this study focuses on how a group of mathematics teachers attempts to work within seemingly new organizational structures to meet new expectations put upon them by policy decisions made elsewhere. This study seeks to help fill this gap in the research literature ethnographically, by addressing how a teacher team discovers, makes sense of, and enacts simultaneous policies delivered from the state and federal levels. The goal is to provide insight into how a team of teachers works together to interpret and implement policy in the contexts of their local settings and history, while also attending to the daily tasks as professional high school math teachers.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

> In Ethnography, the writer is his own chronicler and the historian at the same time, while his sources are no doubt easily accessible, but also supremely elusive and complex; they are not embodied in fixed, material documents, but in the behaviour and in the memory of living men. In Ethnography, the distance is often enormous between the brute material of information – as it is presented to the student in his own observation, in native statement, in the kaleidoscope of tribal life – and the final authoritative presentation of the results (Malinowski, 1922, p. 3).

> At its best, an ethnography should account for the behavior of people by describing what enables them to behave sensibly with others in their community (McDermott, 1977, p. 200).

Problem statement

This study aims to contribute to the limited literature on the role of teacher teams in the implementation of federal and state education policy at the local level. Utilizing naturalistic inquiry and ethnographic field work, this study documented the work of a teacher-based team working to make sense of and enact the requirements and expectations of two coincident mandated policies, one state, and one federal, from within the practical and professional contingencies of their daily work.

Conceptual framework

Naturalistic inquiry, ethnography, and qualitative research are broad terms and phrases that encompass multiple approaches to studying social phenomena within a naturalistic paradigm (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Sparkes (1989) described a research paradigm as a, "… constellation of assumptions, questions, strategies and methods" (p. 133). It is often said that all forms of inquiry are value-laden. A researcher's view of the nature of reality and sociocultural relations informs their view of what it means to study that reality, what is deserving of study, what questions are interesting and possible, and those that are not. These are matters of one's research paradigm too, and they are never simply technical questions. As Sparkes (1989) argues, social inquiry is never independent of philosophical issues. Research is never not conceptual. Ontological and epistemological positions orient researchers to worldviews and the methods that align with them. They lead how we take interest in ordinary worlds and their practical organizations, and how we propose to study them.

Sparkes (1989) compared positivistic and naturalistic research (see also Blumer, 1970; Geertz, 1972), describing the underlying assumptions of both research paradigms, arguing that each makes assumptions about the world and what constitutes appropriate research in that world. The unambiguous contrast created by Sparkes (1989) was intentional, as he confessed, and served to characterize philosophically different forms of inquiry. He made the point that

researchers need to align theories of inquiry with their conceptualization of the world they are studying. He stressed, "It is not the problem that determines the method but rather a prior intellectual, emotional, and political commitment to a given philosophical position," that points toward the most appropriate inquiry paradigm (Sparkes, 1989, p. 138).

In the naturalistic paradigm, the nature of reality is "multiple, constructed, holistic, internal and dynamic" and results in outcomes that are "time and context bound" (Sparkes, 1989, p. 134). Though the term "constructivist" is also used in lieu of naturalistic, other researchers have made similar arguments about a worldview that recognizes that reality is socially constructed, temporal, and context-bound, with multiple realities and meaningful interpretations possible for single events (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The constructivist researcher addresses the processes of how people make sense of their world and the contexts in which people interact. The constructivist or naturalistic researcher's intent is to describe the sense made of the world by others, or in Malinwoski's famous phrase, "the native's point of view" (Malinowski, 1922; see also Creswell, 2007; Sparkes, 1989). And that sense, as Blumer (1970) argues, is local, contextual and tied to the "distinctive expressions" of its occasion.

Guba noted that, "The term naturalistic describes a paradigm for inquiry, not a method" (1981, p. 76). In considering the tools of naturalistic inquiry, Sparkes (1989) suggested the use of fieldwork that includes narrative vignettes,

observational field notes, interviews, maps, commentary, and theoretical discussion. Essentially, Sparkes described the tools and practices of ethnography.

Similarly, in their case study of the work of a teacher team constructing curriculum at a private school, Nolan and Meister (2000) found that an effective approach to studying implementation, "… is to gather detailed, descriptive information about what is occurring … " (p. 21). They looked at the experience of participants *in situ* as they encountered a new phenomenon, observing teachers as they organized their work and strove to meet goals set for them by school leaders. Rather than the correlational and causative relations promised by positivist measures, ethnographies of work result in instructive descriptions of the practical tasks and organizations of the workplace. Ethnographies of work reveal the situated and contingent nature of practical actions and the systems within which they occur (Luff, Hindermarsh, & Heath, 2003). There is a growing field of workplace studies that focuses on how technology impacts the workplace and how the workplace can in turn influence the development of technology. Ethnographic studies of the workplace can reveal, "… the essentially situated and contingent character of collaboration and technology use" (Luff, Hindermarsh, & Heath, 2003, p. 18).

Malinowski provided a succinct statement regarding the ultimate goal of ethnography: "This goal is, briefly, to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world" (Malinowski, 1922, p. 19, emphasis in original). Wolcott (2008) described the aim of ethnography as presenting the, "… native's

point of view *as understood and relayed by the ethnographer*" (p. 145, emphasis in original). McDermott discussed ethnography "as a tool for the study of relations between people" and "any rigorous attempt to account for people's behavior in terms of their relations with those around them in differing situations" (1977, p. 200). Similarly, Wolcott (2008) discussed ethnographic research as a way to describe what people ordinarily do in a particular place, under ordinary *and* particular circumstances. Malinowski, McDermott, and Wolcott all urged the researcher to immerse herself in the setting or community in order to understand how the "natives" see their world. These views of ethnographic study align to the goals of this inquiry into how a team of teachers makes meaning of policy initiatives. In this light, the first analysts on the scene are *not* the disengaged researchers, but are rather the engaged participants, engaged in making sense of their tasks.

Wolcott enumerated some of the advantages of an ethnographic approach to research. Among the most pertinent to this study are that ethnography can be conducted entirely by one individual and be carried out almost anywhere. It allows for the researcher to draw upon personal skills and strengths, requires no expensive equipment, and offers the opportunity to integrate professional and personal life (adapted from Wolcott, 2008, p. 66).

Ethnography requires researchers, through careful observation, reflection, and interpretation of actual tasks, settings and engagements, to develop considered descriptions of how group members tend to speak, act, and make sense of their

everyday lives (Wolcott, 2008). Those ethnographic accounts, however, follow from the work of understanding singular occasions of how meaningful worlds are expressed. Geertz (1983) observed how ethnography is "essentially contestable" and "essentially incomplete" because a researcher can never fully understand or describe or exhaust the "natives'" point of view or the worlds they encounter. More than a caution, there is a sense of relief: there are no 'complete descriptions' of meaningful social worlds; every description could be extended by another aspect of the setting and its participants.

Smith (2001) discussed the benefits of an ethnographic approach to studying the workplace, describing how the observations of ethnographers, "… has allowed a degree of penetration into the inner workings of an occupation or a work setting that is not easily attained by other approaches" (p. 223). Smith described how ethnographers are uniquely positioned to, "… detect how power is exercised, control asserted and maintained, conflict and resistance expressed, and social inequalities manipulated and recreated" (p. 224). Ethnographies of work can uncover understandings that are not obtainable through surveys, interviews or experiments in controlled settings. Fieldworkers have the opportunity to, "… convey vivid, dynamic and processual portrayals of lived experience" (Smith, 2001, p. 229). The unpredictability of the work setting necessitates that researchers be available to observe the unexpected and be ready to take advantage of opportunities to witness crises, changes, and other disorderly situations (Smith, 2001). Charmaz and Mitchell

(2001) explained that ethnographers encounter complex situations that may be fraught with puzzles, contradictions, and paradoxes, emphasizing that we cannot know a scene until we are in it. Some of the workplace dynamics fieldworkers may encounter include dissonance between formal systems of control and workers' reactions, workers refusing instructions of their supervisors, workers conducting their work in opposition to formal policy, withholding information from leadership and even sabotaging the workplace (Smith, 2001). In my observations, the workplace and work dynamics were not as chaotic or dissonant as Smith suggested some may be. However, some of these themes were present but masked by compliant behavior.

The aim of ethnographic field studies is instructive description; they offer accounts that reveal a fabric of meaning and contingency that are unavailable to formal instruments and conventional wisdoms about "the natives." Its aim is not to adjudicate disputes, moral registers or authorizations, the compliance or not of employees, the impositions or not of superiors, the wisdom or not of policies and their contingent implementations. The aim is rather to see, as actual enactments in all their practical contingencies, how indeed tasks are formulated, organized, assigned, taken up and accomplished, however they are so done, as the actual tasks and expectations of the parties engaged. For this study of the practical life of policy implementation in its particulars, we hope to contribute to a fuller understanding of

what the phrase and its stable of phrases, logics, relationships, expectations, and achievements, mean.

Data Collection

This inquiry takes interest in the daily work of a teacher team, and how they organize their work to meet the expectations of public policy as implemented in their district. I collected data through a series of observations of team meetings, on-site interviews, and off-site interviews beginning in March 2014 and concluding in June 2014. Wolcott (2008) advised that it is, "what ethnographers do with data that transforms ordinarily commonplace observations into ethnography" (p. 253).

In the line of authority from policy creation to implementation, teacher teams have become a familiar organizational structure for the process of policy implementation. My research focused on a single team of teachers as they worked with their mandated tasks and resources to implement state and federal policies aimed at improving instruction. This unit of study (the single team) allowed for inquiry limited to a particular, bounded case. Following the path of naturalistic inquiry and ethnography, the site was not selected through sampling, but instead a local setting was chosen based on the recommendation of local professionals. The choice to focus on a teacher team, however, was the result of not only an examination of the terms of the policies currently in place, but also a need to address a gap in the research literature of contemporary school reform.

Coburn and Stein (2006) argued for further research at the teacher team level:

> The community of practice perspective on implementation also has important implications for research design. First, it focuses attention on a new unit of analysis for studying the process and outcome of policy implementation. Typically, studies of policy implementation treat either the school or individual teacher as the key analytic unit. However, this theoretical approach suggests that communities of practice are the social location where meanings are negotiated, actions are undertaken and interpreted, and implementation unfolds (Coburn & Stein, 2006, p. 43).

The case of a single team serves as an instance of a professional and policy-relevant phenomenon – a teacher team has been assigned to make sense of externally mandated policies and to implement them. My aim was to understand their tasks, expectations of and for them, and what it meant to perform them.

The selection of the studied case was dependent upon multiple factors. The primary criteria were: 1) a district participating in RttT; 2) a school within the district that has chosen to participate in MWIP; and 3) a school within the district that has regularly scheduled team meetings. Regional school improvement specialists representing the Midwestern State Department of Education helped to identify a district and school participating in both improvement programs, Race to the Top and the Midwestern State Improvement Process. Within the identified district and school, two teams were invited to participate with the hope that one would agree, by consensus, to participate.

I gained district approval for participation through a formal process already in place at City District (pseudonym). City District suggested Cardinal High School

(pseudonym) because the school staff worked in teams to implement both policies. The principal of Cardinal High School explained that teachers were organized in teams by curricular area and narrowed the selection to two teams with regularly scheduled meetings: the English and mathematics teams. I met with both teams, separately, during their regularly scheduled team meetings, to introduce the project, answer questions, and present teachers with the IRB-approved Participant Consent Form. My goal was to find a team wherein all principal members agreed to full participation. After my initial visit, the team leaders agreed to discuss the research project with team members during the next team meeting without my presence. The team leaders then communicated to me their consensus decision regarding participation. After discussion, the English team declined participation and the mathematics team agreed with the exception of one member who did not attend team meetings. The participating team, and the focus of this study, was thus a high school math team, which I will discuss in more detail later.

Once the mathematics team came to a consensus and agreed to participate, I reviewed the Participant Consent form with five team members and allowed time for discussion and questions prior to participants signing the consent form. A sixth teacher assigned to the team was not engaged in discussion regarding participation in the study. I attempted to talk with him separately, but he indicated that he did not regularly attend team meetings and was not interested in participating.

The institutional setting

City District serves approximately 53,000 students in 109 schools. The district struggles with 79% of its students identified as economically disadvantaged. City District reported a four-year graduation rate of 77% and an attendance rate of 91.7% in 2014 (Spirit of Success report, 2014). City District reported uneven results in meeting state requirements, with some success in improving reading achievement and closing achievement gaps. The Midwestern State Department of Education report card for City District during 2013-2014, however, indicated an "F" in both student achievement and closing of achievement gaps (2013-2014 data from MWDE website).

Cardinal High School is a small high school with just 396 students. The statewide data system classifies students as 94.8% black, with 89.7% identified as economically disadvantaged and 22.2% identified as students with disabilities. In 2014, the school had a below average four-year graduation rate of 74.7% (district average was 77% and the state average was 82.2%), earning them an "F" in this category on their annual report card. The school employed 28 teachers, all of whom had at least a Bachelor's degree and 42.9% who had a Master's degree (2013-2014 data from MWDE website).

All Cardinal High School teachers were assigned to a "teacher-based team" (as per MWIP), most often reconfigured from curriculum content area (i.e., English, mathematics, science, social studies).

In addition to the mathematics team members, study participants also included a "transformation coach". The coach was assigned by the regional State Support Team (a sub-contractor of the MWDE) to assist the district and the school. He visited the school on a regular basis, met with the principal, and participated in teacher team meetings. Chapter 4 discusses the study participants and their roles on the teacher team.

Schedule of work

The study of the work of this teacher team entailed observations of team meetings over a sustained period. The team met once a week in the same location at the same time. I conducted observations, which included sound recordings and written notes, over three months in the winter and spring of 2014. Observations did not include their classroom practice as teachers or their interactions with students. The focus was their interactions as team members.

Consistent with the conceptual distinctions and program of field work and naturalistic observation, I took on the role of observer as participant (Merriam, 2009). In this role, while the researcher's main focus is observation, the researcher also participates peripherally in the local context. In this setting, I had professional experience too. I shared with the team members some basic information about my teaching and professional background and my role at MWDE. The participating teachers asked questions about my teaching experience but showed little to no interest in my work at MWDE. I do not think my role at MWDE—or the MWDE

itself—was of particular relevance for them. That I had been a teacher, however, and in a school not so different than theirs, did seem to have relevance for my reception.

During early observations, I sat at a side table during team meetings, but was later invited to join the team at their table. This was an inflection point in my participation. I was not yet, and would not be, a team member. But, I was permitted a closer and more trusting view of their work. My role alternated between spectator, observer as participant, and colleague through the subsequent data gathering process.

Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) offered a number of useful suggestions and caveats for observation and writing of ethnographic field notes:

- Look closely at *what members say and do*
- Pay attention to the words, phrases and categories that members use in their everyday interactions
- Ask intentionally open-ended questions about topics which members find meaningful
- Consider diverse versions of events to provide insights into how members construct and make meaning of the same event
- Seek out members' explanations for when, why, or how particular phenomena happen
- Focus on talk-in-interaction
- Listen to the stories that are told, and what work the telling is doing
- Be alert to imposing exogenous meanings

(adapted from Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995).

Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) emphasized the importance of focusing on members' situated interaction during observations. Field notes should document, "…how members *construct meaning* through interactions with other members of the

group, how they actually interpret and organize their own and others' actions" (p. 14, emphasis in original). This emphasis on constructing meaning aligns with Lave and Wenger's (1991) discussion of situated learning, and the study's goal of documenting how teachers make sense of and worked to discover and meet the expectations of new policies and procedures.

To gain insight into the experiences of multiple participants, I utilized a combination of semi-structured and unstructured interviews. This allowed for the collection of some standardized information, and unstructured commentary (Merriam, 2009). All interview questions focused on teacher experience, knowledge, and practice, as well as how the team received and understood the particulars of their tasks. The discussions did not venture into discussion of individual students, ensuring adherence to the proposal approved by the IRB. Some conversations were recorded, and all participants approved the recording of our conversations.

Like Emerson, et al. (1995), Mishler (1986) argued that the everyday discourse is an exercise in the joint construction of meaning and thus the interview process is as well. It is what we do in talking together. Because meaning is context-bound and situated, the meanings of questions and answers cannot be standardized, and variation among interviews is unavoidable. Rather than a problem for the interview process, "variation" is endemic. Interviews, like all interactions, are a process of making meaning. The discourse between interviewer and respondent is discursive in nature as both participants develop their understandings of what is

being asked and said. “Interviewers and respondents, through repeated reformulations of questions and responses, strive to arrive together at meanings both can understand” (Mishler, 1986, p. 65). Both the researcher and the participant bring with them their perspectives and expectations, and through discussion they arrive at common understandings of how they are speaking. This work of achieving understanding, normally excluded from the interview protocol, becomes part of the research data. Indeed, it constitutes the data of “questions and answers” (Rapley, 2001).

I originally planned a three-interview sequence for the team members, as suggested by Nolan and Meister (2000). The series reflected my thinking about how a progression of topics about the work of the teams might develop. However, the logic of my series failed to anticipate the relevance of topics for the participants. Mine was a formal sequence of topics; theirs was a situated field, and the first set of interviews produced ample data that indicated the need for a change in the original research plan. During the first set of interviews participants discussed topics that went well beyond what the planned first set of questions could have imagined, and provided responses to many of the second set of interview questions as well. As they finally emerged, the interviews established participants’ background, prior knowledge of the identified policies, and their expectations and understandings of what the tasks of teacher teams would be in implementing the policies. Participants also discussed their experiences with a “transformation coach,” which indicated a

need to expand the interviews to include this additional participant and his place in the work of the team.

Wolcott (2005) provided thoughtful guidance for fieldwork, reminding us of the crucial balance between collection of data and data analysis, "…recognizing when to be unmethodical, when to resist the potentially endless task of accumulating data and to begin searching for underlying patterns, relationships, and meanings" (p. 5). Wolcott argued that qualitative research ought to avoid rigid, step-by step approaches and instead allow the researcher to adjust the course of inquiry based on our understandings as they develop. Following Wolcott's guidance, I felt confident that adjusting the planned interview and observation sequence would enhance, rather than diminish, the study[3].

I also collected documents as they became available during observations and interviews, including meeting agendas, meeting minutes, testing data, and sample test items. As teachers shared documents within the team I was provided a copy. Additional district-level documents obtained from the City District and MW State websites included district-level performance data, professional development plans, and Race to the Top "Scope of Work." These formal documents provided background on school and district organization, organizational beliefs about professional development, and expectations for teacher participation in decision-making. We might also think that they shaped the team's sense of the parameters of their tasks

[3] See Appendix B for interview questions.

but, I did not observe any evidence that the team discussed these "higher-level" documents, and interviews showed a lack of knowledge or interest in the documents that the larger reform agencies produced as the basis of the expectations for the work of teacher teams. Collection of team, state, and district-level documents allowed for analysis of sanctioned messages with respect to actual practice.

Merriam (2009) described some of the benefits and drawbacks of using formal or official documents in qualitative research. She noted that such documents, "… are nonreactive, that is, unaffected by the research process. They are a product of the context in which they were produced and therefore grounded in the real world" (p. 156). She cautioned that these documents exist outside of the practical research setting, and may be in a format that is not easily usable, accessible, or relevant. The RttT Scope of Work and district professional development plans were produced for a bureaucratic, insider audience. This was their readership. Because of my role in the MDE, I was familiar with their format and language and was able to utilize both documents in my data collection and analysis.

Difficulty of accessing an urban district

Smith (2001) examined the difficulties ethnographers encounter in accessing workplaces including obstacles put in place by organizational leaders, timing issues, and access to workers. In my efforts to select a site and team of teachers for my inquiry, I ran into barriers similar to those described by Smith. She noted that many fieldwork reflections discuss the, "… appreciable amount of time it can take to

simply get permission to enter a particular worksite or set of worksites" (p. 226). Organizational "gatekeepers" often delay access to researchers because of concerns about how the data will be used, a reasonable concern for any organization and especially for a public organization like an urban school district. Smith (2001) further argued that differences in fieldwork methods are often the result of real constraints under which researchers work. Difficulties with access and external time constraints limit the ability of researchers to engage in uninterrupted, sustained fieldwork.

Gaining access to Cardinal High School included the need to gain approval from multiple layers of administration. City District has its own Research Proposal Review Committee that requires the submission of an approved IRB proposal and research plan. Once approved, City District requires researchers to gain approval from the principal at potential schools prior to contacting teachers. While these steps are pragmatic for the district, they caused a delay in my access to Cardinal High School and the number of teacher team meetings I could observe before the end of the school year. See Chapter 3 for a more detailed account of the selection of study participants.

Making sense of the story

Because the aim of qualitative research is not the testing of law or hypothesis, but rather the development of revealing descriptions that get at the organizations and multiple understandings at play in the ethnographic setting, the

discourses on validity and reliability criteria may be misplaced (Merriam, 2009). Nolan and Meister (2000) proposed that qualitative researchers ask ourselves, "How can the researcher persuade the audience that the findings of the inquiry are worth taking note of, worth taking account of?" (p. 44). Perhaps a more direct measure is whether the study shows the reader things that she may not have known or imagined or appreciated before, and what is formative about them. In my research, I strove to achieve trustworthiness by creating descriptions that readers will find useful and instructive. This steps away from the traditional scientific terms used to evaluate research and an attempt to better align research expectations with the naturalistic paradigm. Sparkes (1989) contended that an essential part of the assumptions of the naturalistic paradigm is that,

> … there can be no independent, absolute, or external criteria on which to decide between two plausible causes; there may simple [sic] be no court of last resort to appeal to in order to sort out trustworthy interpretations from untrustworthy ones (p. 144).

Sparkes' (1989) argued that an engagement with relativism is at the heart of naturalistic research and the criteria for an inquiry lie within the inquiry itself. That is to say, there are no stable, formal or external criteria or expectations that can be applied to an assessment of naturalistic research. The paradigm requires that the research be reviewed relative to its purpose and the adequacy of the research to meet that purpose: "… the notion of purpose becomes central to the research process … differing purposes will inevitably result in different criteria" (p. 145).

According to Sparkes, ethnographers and other researchers working within the naturalistic paradigm differentiate between "a good piece of work and a bad one" based on the criteria appropriate to the particular inquiry and framework used (p. 145). Prior to Sparkes, Geertz (1972) discussed the importance of "thick description", as different than "thin" description, and also explanation. Of the thick and thin pair, he spoke of the difference between "winks" and '"blinks." The former are produced as social actions; the latter are mere specks of behavior. With this type of description in mind, we can assess the usefulness of an account not by standardized criteria but by its completeness, coherence, and internal consistency, all in relation to the stated purpose of the inquiry.

Most qualitative research approaches include discussions of the importance of recognizing the role of the researcher (e.g., Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Peshkin, 1988, 1998; Smith, 2001; Wolcott, 2005). "What results from any *particular* ethnographic inquiry represents a coming together of a personality and personal biography in the persona of the ethnographer, interacting in a particular place in a unique way" (Wolcott, 2008, p. 94, emphasis in original). Thus, the integrity of qualitative research is not anchored to schedules of identical practice. Rather, it lies substantially in the position and discipline of the researcher. In this case, my professional role at the MW Department of Education connected me directly to at least part of the implementation of policy at Cardinal High School. At the time of my research I was employed at the MW Department of Education (MWDE) and working

on Race to the Top (RttT) implementation. In my professional role, I worked with regional school improvement specialists and an outside contractor on the development of the FIP resources (as described in Appendix C). This provided me with abundant background information that would serve as the jumping off point for my research. My view of the policy implementation landscape at the time was limited to what I could see from the state consultant level. It was the implementation at the local building within the team that I knew least about; the first one to be instructed by this study would be me.

One of my responsibilities at MWDE was to monitor the work of thirteen regional school improvement specialists who supported MWDE's RttT Scope of Work. The charge of the regional specialists was to work with local districts/schools on behalf of the state agency. My responsibilities did not require direct interaction with local administrators or teachers. Because I had no direct authority over the work of teacher teams implementing RttT policy, nor any professional stake in the implementation of the policy, I felt strongly that my professional responsibilities would not interfere with my study.

Because all qualitative research is necessarily local and situated, as are the worlds it studies, the perspective, role, and theoretical stance of the researcher are formative of the usefulness of the project's findings. In Kanuha's (2000) discussion of "Going Native", she addressed the role of the insider researcher:

> For each of the ways that being an insider researcher enhances the depth and breadth of understanding a population that may not be accessible to a

> nonnative scientist, questions about objectivity, reflexivity, and authenticity of a research project are raised because perhaps one knows too much or is too close to the project and may be too similar to those being studied (p. 444).

Can knowing too much or being too close to a project be a problem? I had some concern about this prior to the start of my study, but found that my insider perspective was more helpful than not. The task of understanding the "natives" point of view is all about knowing local ways of knowing. My professional experiences as an educator allowed me access and understanding of the setting and context of my research. However, those same experiences also made familiar notions of a formal, disengaged objectivity almost impossible. The task of qualitative inquiry is not then to attempt objectivity and avoid subjectivity. It is rather to describe what counts for the parties who do that accounting, and how the team does it. The teacher team in this study was actively engaged in taking "objective" measures and discussing their own "subjective" understandings. How they did so in pursuit of their professional tasks and assignments as a teacher team, and also classroom teachers whose days begin and end in the classroom, are central to the aims of this study and the organizations and understandings it hopes to describe.

Principles of State's improvement process[4]

Midwestern Improvement Process (MWIP) focused on developing capacity for instructional leadership and the improvement of instructional practice and performance through shared leadership and a collaborative approach to improving professional practice (SLAC website, 2014). The principles of the improvement process, as shown in Table 1, emphasize collaboration and teamwork along with the use of data to make instructional and systemic decisions.

Seven Principles of the Midwestern Improvement Process
1. Aligns vision, mission and philosophy
2. Is continuous and recurring
3. Relies on quality data interpretation
4. Is collaborative
5. Ensures communication with those who are affected by the success of the district or community school at each stage
6. Produces one focused, integrated plan that directs all work and resources
7. Establishes the expectation for positive changes in student performance and adult practices

Table 1. **Principles of MWIP (SLAC website, 2014)**

For participating Local Education Agencies (LEAs) this meant systemic change to create the necessary structures and time for team meetings, data collection, data

[4] This is a brief introduction to MWIP. For more detail see Appendix C.

sharing, and collaborative decision making. Figure 1 shows the four stages of improvement designed to encourage the use of data to inform development, implemention, and monitoring of school improvement plans. LEAs were guided through the four stages of improvement by transformation coaches and a series of data-based questions and forms known collectively as the Decision Framework.

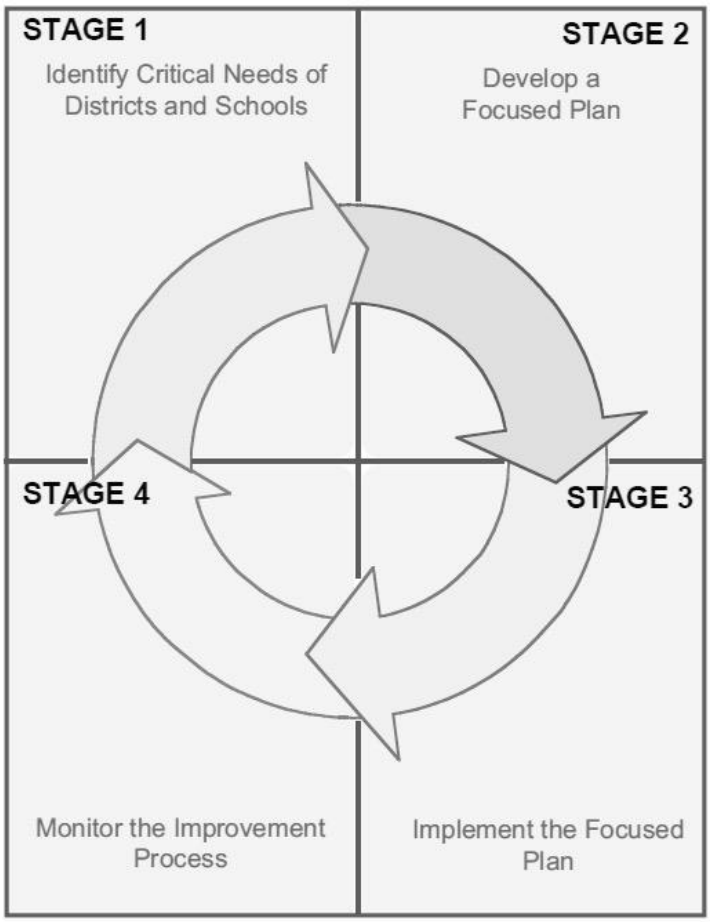


Figure 1. **Stages of the MWIP (SLAC website, 2013)**

Team structures

The State's improvement process stressed the use of data to make decisions at multiple levels: teacher/classroom, teacher-based teams, building leadership teams, and district leadership teams. State Leadership Advisory Council (SLAC) and the State advocated for the use of teams and shared leadership, referencing, "… a growing body of evidence" (SLAC website, 2014) in support of teacher-based teams, distributed leadership, and the use of protocols to guide data-based decision making.

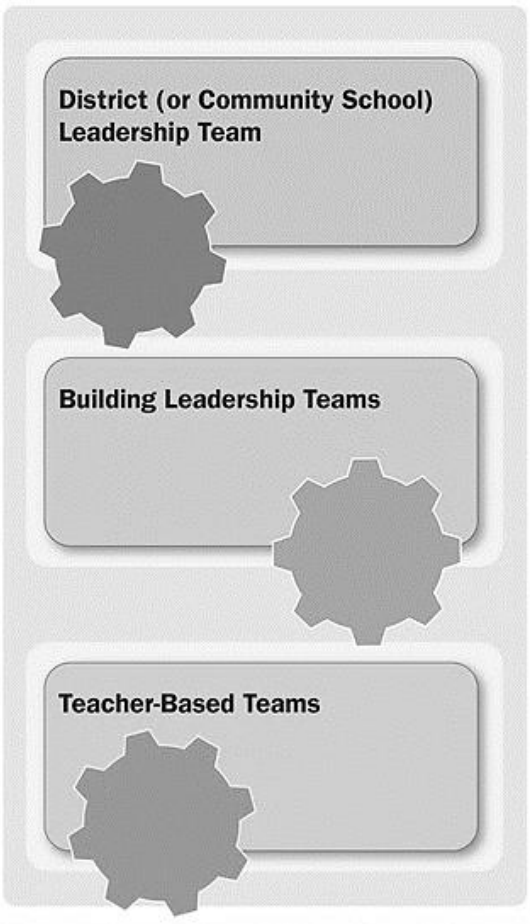


Figure 2. **Collaborative leadership teams (SLAC website, 2014)**

Participating LEAs were required to create three levels of teams. The multi-level teaming structure was designed to share information and decision making up through the teacher-based teams to building leadership teams and then to the district leadership team. Concurrently, data and decision-making would be shared down from the district leadership team, through building leadership teams to teacher-based teams (see Figure 2).

5-Step Process

A cornerstone of the State's improvement process, the "5-Step Process" served as the guide for data-based discussions during team meetings, primarily teacher-based teams. This protocol was designed to encourage a repeating cycle of collection and analysis of data, planning for change, impelementation of specified changes, and then a return to the collection and analysis of data (see Figure 3). The State worked with SLAC to train transformation coaches to work with LEAs as they implemented the protocol in their teams (SLAC website, 2014). Teacher-based teams were encouraged to use the process as a way to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of their instruction.

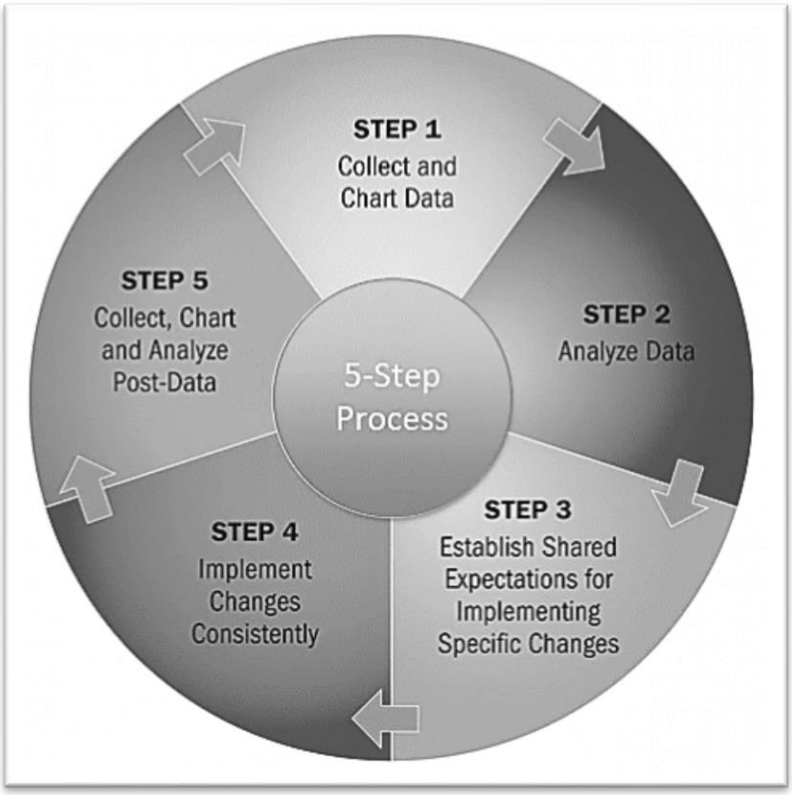


***Figure 3*. 5-Step Process (SLAC website, 2014)**

Chapter 4: Observations at Cardinal High School

The mathematics team at Cardinal High School served as a case study of the implementation of school reform through teacher-based teams. While the team, the setting and their histories were certainly unique, they were also ordinary, embedded in the daily work of an urban high school, its teachers, administrators, and administrative relations with state and federal policy–makers. Their work settings, tasks, constraints, expectations, and resources would be recognizable in almost any high school in America. The purpose of looking more closely at the work of this team was to shed light on the complexities of implementing school reform policy through teacher teams in the course of their daily professional work.

What follows is my analysis of observations and interviews with the mathematics teachers at Cardinal High School. The field work provides us with a glimpse into their practical, everyday world of making sense of policies and directives aimed at improving the work of teachers, while, at the same time, doing the work of teachers. This chapter introduces the setting, the team members, and the themes that emerged from my data regarding the expectations and practical contingencies of using teacher-based teams for the implementation of school policy reform.

Introduction to Cardinal High School

Cardinal High School inhabits an old brick building on one of the city's main thoroughfares. Originally constructed in 1922, it was renovated, restored, and re-opened in the last seven years. Its white marble entrance looks majestic as commuters drive past on their way downtown. When it was built, Cardinal was in the heart of a vibrant African American community that has since faded. The neighborhood is working hard to revitalize the business and cultural district. New restaurants, coffee shops, and churches are helping to draw people back to the area. The city has helped renovate an old theater, repaired sidewalks, and renovated the high school that had become tarnished and out of date. The building now has beautiful woodwork, wrought iron railings, skylights, and new windows that allow natural light to brighten the setting. The gymnasium has three basketball courts, all with gleaming floors. The cafeteria is open and airy, with round tables and pictures of the school mascot featured on the walls. The district outfitted classrooms with new furniture and modern educational technology like interactive Smart boards. The renovation managed to bring the old building into the 21st century while retaining the original character and detail from almost a century ago.

Signs in the parking lot directed visitors to an entrance at the back of the building, eschewing the use of the stately front steps and entrance. Visitors entered the building through a set of locked glass doors equipped with a camera and

intercom system that required an office clerk to "buzz" the door open. This back door had become the *de facto* entrance for most staff and students.

During my first visit I was disconcerted by the feeling of walking right into the heart of the school, with the cafeteria on one side and the gym on the other. A community volunteer sat at makeshift security station, a small table and folding chair, with a guest log. I signed in, noted the reason for my visit, received a sticker that said "VISITOR" in bold red, and the volunteer directed me up the stairs to the school office. During subsequent visits, I noted that security guards, students, or, sometimes, nobody at all staffed the security station. Uniformed security guards were also sporadically visible throughout the school.

I found myself waiting in the main office, seated in a single row of blue plastic chairs set up for students. Once in the office I waited quite a while before a staff person acknowledged me. The office had glass doors and large windows that allowed for a view in and out of the main hallway. Someone propped open one of the two doors, with two-way traffic pushing in and out. I watched students and teachers come and go, engage in quick conversations, pick up mail, use the phone. The office was noisy with an orderly commotion; there were patterns to how people accessed the office space and tools. There seemed to be unspoken rules about where teachers could go (behind the counter, into the conference room, the copy room and supply room) and where students were to wait (in front of the counter, in chairs lined up by the window). Only the adults had access to the supply room, telephones and

mailboxes. Telephones, the traditional landline variety, sat on each clerk's desk and seemed to be coveted by students; access to the phones was a commodity difficult to obtain. Teachers came and went, either alone or with students in tow, but rarely with one another.

When Principal Forrest arrived, he ushered me behind the counter and into his office for our meeting. As I walked past the counter, I felt the adults in the room watching me, wondering who I was and what I might be doing there; I sensed a general unease about the unknown individual in their presence. This was our first meeting and Mr. Forrest was friendly and eager to boast about his staff, students and the beautiful building.

It was our first meeting, after receiving permission from the City District's research office. They requested and reviewed my research proposal and IRB approval. After approving my project, the research office provided me with a "letter of introduction" to share with principals as I worked to identify a site. While the district had approved my study, I needed to gain Mr. Forrest's approval to work with one of the teams at Cardinal.

As we talked, Mr. Forrest asked few questions about my study. He extolled, bordering on overpraise, about the teacher-based teams that met every week, how the school was using the Midwestern Improvement Process (MWIP), and the great results he was seeing. After a scant few minutes he needed to hurry to something else, but first assured me that I would be welcome to visit any of the team meetings

in the building and that I should expect to be impressed by their work. He encouraged me to sit in on team meetings, talk to teachers and students, and observe classrooms at my leisure. However, I already knew that my observations would stop at the teachers – I was looking for the intermediaries of school reform policy and not "outcomes" at the student level. As a former teacher, I also knew that his open invitations were not the same as invitations from the teachers and the teams themselves.

Mathematics team at Cardinal High School

After meeting with Mr. Forrest, I observed two team meetings. He recommended I meet with both the English language arts and mathematics teams because they had regularly scheduled weekly meetings and were working on MWIP consistently. They were both also working with a transformation coach who worked for State Department of Education's regional office[5].

City District used the long-standing departmental structure at the high school level to create the teacher-based teams required for participation in MWIP. Every department – mathematics, science, social studies, and English language arts – had its faculty organization to attend to its collective tasks through weekly meetings and special assignments. The District leadership appropriated these departments to serve as collaborative teacher-based teams too, as a required by MWIP's shared

[5] See Chapter 3 for details about the selection of the mathematics team.

leadership model (MWDE website, n.d.). That is, the already and long–established departmental faculty organization became the MWIP teacher-based team (TBT) organization.

The organizations were not quite identical. The MWIP teacher-based team (TBT) model integrated special education teachers into the content area teams. Mr. Forrest assigned two special education teachers to the math team because their schedules happened to align. The re-organized math TBT, with the addition of two special education teachers, retained their departmental tasks and responsibilities (distributing and collecting textbooks, administering standardized tests, implementing curriculum standards, ordering supplies and more), with the addition of new MWIP tasks and responsibilities.

MWIP guidelines suggested that TBTs should function as a community to accomplish multiple tasks:

> The TBT shifts the focus from an individual teacher to a team of teachers who can function as a purposeful community. TBTs provide structured time for teachers to come together and review and revise the impact of teaching practice and student learning. They are forums for job-embedded professional learning. Well implemented, they enable teachers to draw from the professional knowledge that exists in their own school and among colleagues, which is informed by other professional development opportunities that help them learn research- or evidence-based practices (MWIP Stage 0 Guide, 2012b, p. 19).

When one reads this promissory passage while sitting with the practical tasks and contingencies of an urban high school departmental faculty, it is hard not to sense a schism of language and ambitions.

As the team discovered and negotiated their way through the MWIP expectations, they also continued their departmental responsibilities, resulting in hybrid meetings taken up with the work of a mathematics department, and a collaborative TBT. For example, the evolution from departments to TBTs did not result in a change of leadership. Mrs. Green had served as department chairperson for over 10 years prior to MWIP. During that time the math team, as its various configurations of staff would come and go, continued to accept Mrs. Green in her role as chairperson. Mrs. Green now became both department chairperson and team leader in the new MWIP structure. When I talked with the current team members individually, none expressed any interest in taking on the leadership role. In fact, they mostly opposed the idea. I heard, "Well you can ask to be [team leader] you know, put your name in and I am not interested" (Richmond, 2014) and, "So the department has to vote. If no one is vying for that position [Mrs. Green] just keeps going … Nobody else wants it. It's too much responsibility" (Mallard, 2014).

Team members

Team leader

Mrs. Green was the first team member I spoke with, not surprising given that she is the department chairperson. She was a fifty-something white woman with an indistinct European accent that felt somewhat out of place in the Midwestern, primarily African American, setting. Her 18 years of teaching experience included multiple schools within City District and some overseas schools when she was younger. She was the most senior member of the team in both years of teaching experience and age. Principal Forrest appointed her department chair "a few years ago" (Green, 2014) and then subsequently selected her for team leader[6] when the school transitioned to the MWIP shared leadership structure.

My initial impression was that Mrs. Green went about her day with a positive, friendly attitude. She smiled when she greeted students, welcomed visitors like myself into her classroom, and I never heard her raise her voice. I later understood through private discussions with her that she projected a positivity that masked her frustration and exhaustion. The responsibilities of being team leader were often overwhelming, requiring her to stay late at school or work extra hours at home (Green, 2014). As the team leader, Mrs. Green's MWIP responsibilities included preparing agendas, compiling notes, preparing data, and hosting the team meetings.

[6] Team members were unsure of how the team leader was selected or appointed. Some members thought the team members elected the team leader, and Mrs. Green remained leader because there were no other interested candidates.

She also retained many, if not all, of the tasks she was responsible for as department chairperson. Even as the leader of the team, Mrs. Green's work was mostly solitary, without much support from her teammates or other school staff. She mentioned during a team meeting how late she worked and what a toll it was taking on her:

> You know something, here's what happens. I think I am paying a lot of attention because I have got to talk about this and get you guys to talk about it … So, I am saying I would be in [the building leadership team meeting] so you guys are not in the same hot seat. So, I [am] remembering this and I am killing myself to do it. Does that make sense? (TBT, 5/1/14).

Mrs. Green did not directly complain, but expressed her frustration with the lack of reciprocation from the team in comparison to the responsibilities and work she had taken on as team leader. As team leader, Mrs. Green served as the conduit between the teacher-based team (TBT) and the building leadership team (BLT) and would present the math team's work in their stead. She felt that the she was making sacrifices as the team leader – the work she was doing was morally important and she cared about doing her work well – but she did not feel that the other team members were accepting their share of the responsibility.

Math 1 teachers

Two teachers were assigned to share the work of teaching Math 1, a required course for all students. Mr. Forrest assigned both Mrs. Richmond and Mr. Mallard to teach Math 1 yet their teaching assignments were markedly different.

Mrs. Richmond, a white woman in her forties came to teaching as a career change. Her previous work was in accounting. She has taught for 14 years at City District. Mrs. Richmond's classroom was on the second floor, not too far from Mrs. Green's, but a world away from Mr. Mallard literally and figuratively. She taught the same course as Mr. Mallard, but he taught all freshmen and had a classroom on the third floor with the other 9th grade teachers. Mrs. Richmond was assigned the students who needed to repeat the course. She enjoyed teaching but struggled with her students. "I agree with having the true freshmen separated from the repeaters, but not giving one teacher all the repeaters … It's been a tough year" (Richmond, 2014). She did not feel comfortable working with Mr. Mallard on curriculum and instruction issues because many of her students, the repeaters had previously failed his class.

Among math team members, Mrs. Richmond seemed to get along best with Mrs. Coates, a young special education teacher. They both had students who struggled with academics and needed extra support. During one of our interviews, Mrs. Richmond complained that since they began the MWIP work the team focused more on data than instruction or student issues: "It's too regimented and it's too geared toward data … That's the way I see it" (Richmond, 2014).

Mr. Mallard, an African American man in his thirties, has taught in City District for 12 years, 11 of them at Cardinal High School. He felt "stuck" at Cardinal for reasons he did not disclose. He intended to teach middle school but came to the

high school to work for a previous principal with whom he was friends. During our interview, Mr. Mallard expressed a clear preference for teaching at the middle school level where, "… you have a much better shot than here [to help students] … Time is, you know, time is almost running out" (Mallard, 2014). He believed that education could improve the lives of students, but felt that high school was too late to intervene with students – the middle school level provided more opportunities to affect the kind of change he was interested in making.

Along with Mrs. Richmond, Mr. Mallard taught three periods of Math 1. However, he taught the freshmen who had not taken the course before. Mr. Mallard generally worked alone by choice. In addition to teaching Math 1 to the freshmen, Mr. Mallard also taught two engineering classes, one at ninth grade, and the other at twelfth. With Math 1 and two engineering classes, he planned for three lessons each day. He acknowledged that this was a challenge, yet his greater frustration was now with the valuable time he was required to spend on the MWIP tasks of the math TBT.

Special education teachers

The mathematics teacher-based team included two special education teachers: Ms. Coates and Mrs. Ritter.

Ms. Coates was in her first year of teaching and was much younger than the other teachers on the team. Her teaching assignment included math, but was

primarily providing intervention[7] in science to students with disabilities. She was confused about why she was assigned to the math team and would have preferred to work with the science team (Coates, 2014).

MWDE requires first year teachers to complete a resident educator program that includes a mentorship component (MWDE website, n.d.). Ms. Coates was working on the parts of the program she could complete on her own, but had not seen her mentor in months. Her assigned mentor did not work at Cardinal High School and only visited twice during Ms. Coates first year. In fact, Ms. Coates could not recall her mentor's name – she had contact information "somewhere" (Coates, 2014). The mentorship program is intended to provide new teachers additional support and guidance as they begin their careers (MWDE website, n.d.). Ms. Coates described both the mentorship program and the teacher team as disappointing because neither was helpful in acclimating her to the profession.

The other special education teacher assigned to the team was **Mrs. Ritter.** She was an African American woman who lived nearby the school. A veteran teacher with over 20 years' experience in City District, Mrs. Ritter found herself at odds with the principal, Mr. Forrest. When I visited her classroom, she explained that it was in disarray because Mr. Forrest had her things moved from her original room. She

[7] Intervention: Specific strategies used to support students with disabilities in achieving grade level appropriate content area standards in general education courses.

explained that she believed she was being punished for allegedly having caused him trouble, though she declined to discuss the details (Ritter, 2014).

I was surprised with how much Mrs. Ritter talked during our interview because she spoke so infrequently during team meetings. She surprised me with her passion for helping her students with disabilities succeed. It was clear that she cared about her students, but felt slighted by the administration and did not connect with the other teachers on the team. She acknowledged her frustration with the new MWIP team structure and her assignment to the math team. She lamented that she had attended just as many, if not more, trainings in MWIP and formative instruction as Mrs. Green but was not given a leadership position (Ritter, 2014). Mrs. Ritter planned to transfer to another high school for the next school year.

Transformation coach

Mr. Nelson worked part-time for a regional office of the Midwestern State Department of Education (MWDE) and served as a Transformation Coach[8] for multiple high schools in City District. An older African American man with graying hair, Mr. Nelson retired from teaching in City District a few years earlier; he worked as a teacher and administrator in City School District for 30 years before he retired. After retiring, he wanted to use his years of experience to help improve the district

[8] A Transformation Coach is assigned by the State Department of Education to support and monitor each Priority School and its district through a visit to the building a minimum of once a month. Transformation coaches are commonly former building principals who have experience in helping challenged schools improve (MWDE website, n.d.).

he attended as a student and where he later worked. Through a state-wide professional development program, he trained to be an MWIP coach. Coaches were trained to guide teacher-based teams in the use of the 5-Step Process to improve their instruction and student achievement (see Appendix C for details on MWIP and an illustration of the 5-Step Process). When the State was awarded the RttT grant, Mr. Nelson's regional MWDE team attended trainings on Formative Instructional Practices (FIP) and, as he described it, immediately saw the connections between both processes.

I met with Mr. Nelson at a local coffee shop to talk more about the team's use of MWIP. He suggested we meet near the school at a locally-owned coffee shop that served a predominantly African American clientele from the surrounding neighborhood. As we sat down he noted that I probably hadn't been there before, which I hadn't, and that the shop was new to the improving neighborhood, which had once been the thriving center of the African American community in the city. He talked easily and openly with me about his work with the math team at Cardinal High School and the other teams he coached. Mr. Nelson was typically referred to using just his first name, Peter, a break from the usual use of surnames for adults in the school. He explained that in his work as a Transformation Coach he used his first name to portray himself as approachable and personable.

This was Mr. Nelson's first year working with Cardinal High School. They had been using some of the MWIP processes the previous year, as had many of the city's

high schools, but City District decided to utilize transformation coaches to help teams improve their use of data and formative instruction. Mr. Nelson worked with the four TBTs at Cardinal and strove to attend two meetings of each team every month. We talked briefly about how the teams were distinctly different but he avoided comparing the teams and their work.

Mr. Nelson's participation in the study provided an interesting dimension as he described to me his impressions of the math team's work. From his perspective as a coach he analyzed team members' interactions, contributions to the work of the team, and their understanding of MWIP.

Meeting norms: An account of one team meeting

I arrived at Cardinal High School on a cold spring morning for my first observation of a full team meeting. The school felt exceptionally cold with the low morning temperature, but also less welcoming somehow. Students were wearing their coats in the hallways as I made my way to Mrs. Green's classroom.

Mrs. Green hosted the weekly meetings in her classroom on the second floor. I arrived a few minutes early for the meeting, which was scheduled for 9:30 am. Mrs. Green greeted me with enthusiasm and explained that her teammates would arrive soon. We went to the back of the classroom where two tables pushed together created a space used for small group work and meetings. Mrs. Green hastily set out agendas and rooted around in a cabinet to find some chocolate and granola bars which she set in the center of the table alongside the agendas.

Team members arrived gradually, selected seats at the table, and said polite hellos that lacked warmth, much like the school building that day. Mr. Nelson, the Transformation Coach, took a seat across from Mrs. Green. He did not remove his winter coat and cap. Ms. Coates and Mrs. Richmond, walked in hurriedly, one fresh-faced and at the start of her career and the other at least ten years her senior, and chose seats next to each other. Mr. Mallard arrived last, seemingly unconcerned that he may be late. I did not see Mrs. Ritter arrive. She came in the room quietly during the confusion typical of the start of a meeting and chose to sit at a separate table. Mrs. Green invited her, more than once, to join the team at the larger table. Mrs. Ritter did not acquiesce until Mrs. Green mentioned that there were visitors present.

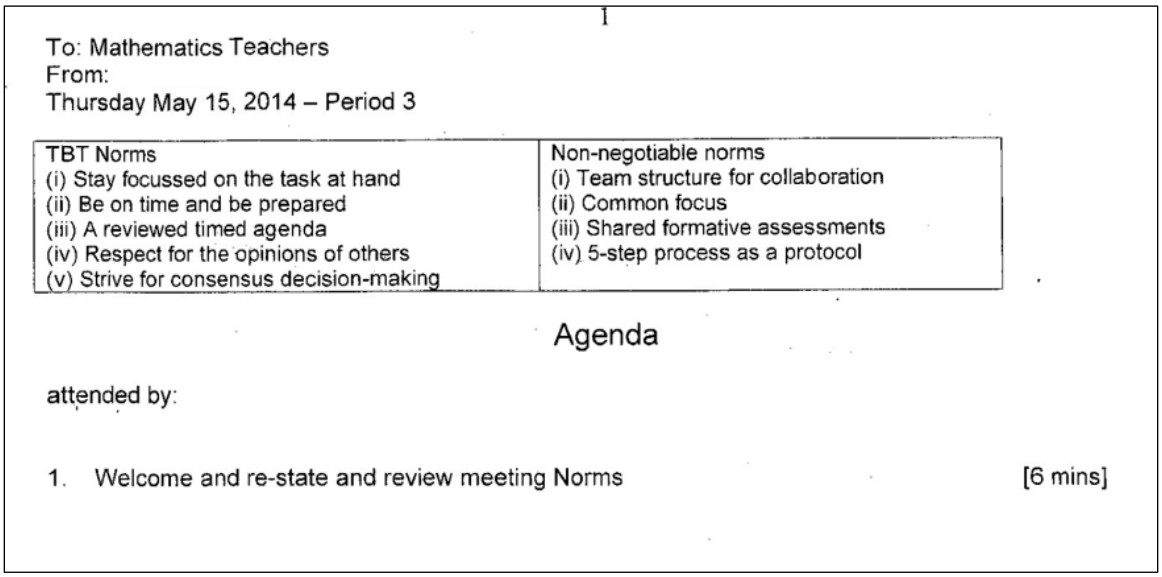
Mrs. Green struggled to gain the attention of the team members – they were involved in side conversations and didn't acknowledge that she was trying to start the meeting. She worked to gain their attention by directly handing each team member one of the agendas that were left untouched in the center of the table. She hastily offered the team snacks, which remained untouched in the center of the table.

Mrs. Green began the meeting by reviewing the norms at the top of the meeting agenda (see Figure 4 below for an example). She later explained to me that the norms were the outcome of a mandated professional development day earlier in the year.

> We all set that up together at a professional development which had probably [Peter] or somebody moving us along … It was one of the

> professional development days that we set aside so we could all be together and they would put up these [norms]. These are first [proposed to] us because of Race to the Top (Green, 2014).

The agenda had two sets of norms at the top, the "TBT Norms" and "Non-negotiable norms." The non-negotiable norms were established with the input of the full staff[9] and were to apply to all teams. The "TBT" (teacher-based team) norms were developed by the mathematics team and were distinct for that team. Mrs. Green reviewed and read aloud the TBT norms at the start of each meeting. As she read them that morning, the group was politely quiet. In fact, they were politely quiet through most of the meeting.



1

To: Mathematics Teachers
From:
Thursday May 15, 2014 – Period 3

TBT Norms	Non-negotiable norms
(i) Stay focussed on the task at hand	(i) Team structure for collaboration
(ii) Be on time and be prepared	(ii) Common focus
(iii) A reviewed timed agenda	(iii) Shared formative assessments
(iv) Respect for the opinions of others	(iv) 5-step process as a protocol
(v) Strive for consensus decision-making	

Agenda

attended by:

1. Welcome and re-state and review meeting Norms [6 mins]

Figure 4. **Top of agenda with team norms for mathematics team at Cardinal High School (TBT, 4/10/14)**

[9] I use the phrase "input of the full staff" reluctantly. I did not observe this process and cannot attest to the participation of the full staff. My assumption is that the expression aims to show a separation between different organizational initiatives.

The first item on every agenda was "Welcome and re-state and review meeting Norms" (Figure 4 shows the top of a sample agenda; a full team agenda can be found in Appendix C). The norms themselves are divided between school-wide non-negotiable norms, expressing the MWIP expectations of collaboration and the use of the 5-Step Process; and the TBT norms, that would seem most relevant to the TBT transactions. The use of shared "formative assessments" in the "non-negotiable norms" reference the formative instruction aspects of Race to the Top. The TBT norms focused on behavioral expectations of the teams, many of which you might see posted in any middle or high school classroom intended to remind students of the rules. The weekly agenda, with the norms at the top and a review of the norms as the first item, served as a weekly reminder of both the behavioral and practical expectations of implementing the policies of MWIP and Race to the Top. Their integration was never quite a topic.

The top left of the agenda sample shows "To:" and "From:", Mrs. Green's name is listed in the "from" box, with the mathematics team in the "to" space. This format reveals that Mrs. Green created each agenda and sent it to the team ahead of each meeting. This was her practical organizational task. On the other hand, her approach to leadership was not among the MWIP principles of shared leadership and collaborative teams:

> TBTs are clear that the chair/co-chairs are not administrators, do not shoulder the responsibilities of the entire TBT, evaluate TBT member's

> performance and do not report or address peers who do not cooperate or fulfill their responsibilities (MWIP Resource 13, 2012, p. 3).

Though the school and district converted the departmental structure into collaborative teacher-based teams to align with MWIP, the mathematics team retained much of the organization of a departmental committee and its ways of doing things. It is an example of the many ways the departmental structure un-surprisingly continued to influence the practice of the math TBT. I did not anticipate this phenomenon. It surfaced as I reviewed my observation notes, artifacts and transcripts, and became a central interest and finding of the study.

In the next sections, I discuss the themes that emerged during my observations, including more examples of how the high school's on–going departmental structure and practices framed the work of the TBT.

Chapter 5: Emergent Themes

This chapter is organized around the four themes that surfaced during my review of data. For each, I first discuss the intention of the policies regarding that theme. Next, I explore how that theme is manifested at Cardinal High School. My aim is to show how policy, often developed apart from schools and without much concern to local contexts, functions quite differently from intentions when implemented in a real school with real teachers.

Emergent Theme 1: Making sense of policy

Intention of policies

City District routinely directs Cardinal High School, its principal and teachers, to implement policies selected or adopted by district leadership for any one of a multitude of possible reasons over time. In this instance, we are looking at implementation of one state policy, Midwestern Improvement Process (MWIP), and one federal policy, Race to the Top (RttT). Both policies aimed at improving student achievement using agreed-upon school reform ideals including collaborative structures, improved instructional practices, and data-based decision making. The State required City District to use the MWIP and provided transformation coaches to

facilitate the process in struggling schools including Cardinal High School. The relevant MWIP policies were thus about process. The federal policy branded Race to the Top, on the other hand, was funded by an optional federal grant awarded to the State and local districts that committed themselves to participate and adopt the policies and procedures as outlined in the grant proposal. These were policies about assessment, evaluation, and instructional practices. Essentially, the State and the District made the choice to enact both policy tracks, and then directed teachers at schools like Cardinal High School to do the work of implementing them in their schools and classrooms.

The mathematics department at Cardinal thus received substantial new tasks. In addition to being a department, it was to become a collaborative teacher-based team (TBT) expected to analyze new academic content standards, create common assessments, share student data and plan instructional improvements, and do so by observing an agreed upon process. These policies overlapped in prioritizing the use of assessment data to plan for instruction. They complemented each other in the use of teacher teams for analyzing standards and creating assessments using the Formative Instructional Practices (FIP) specified in RttT.

As mentioned above, City District utilized "transformation coaches" to facilitate the implementation of MWIP across the district. Transformation coaches worked out of regional offices of the State Department of Education and were funded through school improvement grants. The State and City District expected

Transformation coaches to conduct initial trainings introducing the MWIP 5-Step Process and regularly follow-up with administrators and TBTs in their assigned schools. For high schools, training included the transition from content departments to collaborative teams that worked within a larger system of building leadership teams and a district leadership team. When City District chose to participate in RttT they also utilized the transformation coaches to support the implementation of Formative Instructional Practices (FIP) within TBTs.

Ideally, the overlap of both policies would result in collaborative teams at the teacher, building, and district levels effectively working collaboratively in utilizing assessment data to make decisions for students, schools, and the district. Data would be shared up through the levels of hierarchy and down to the teacher-based teams – a structured communication system designed to facilitate shared leadership at each level. The MWIP advocated for what was referred to as "shared leadership," defined in the guide as:

> **Shared Leadership:** Leadership shared by team leaders and team members—rotating to the person with the key knowledge, skills, and abilities to address the particular issues facing the team at any given moment with the focus on "improvement of instructional practice and performance, regardless of role" (Elmore, 2006) (MWIP Complete Guide, 2012a, p. 121).

Compared to how actual departmental committees actually work, the passage reads as a kind of cultural ideal model.

The expectations and 5-Step Process of MWIP matched well with the use of Race to the Top's Formative Instructional Practices (FIP) (Nelson, 2014). The MWIP

guide provides a definition of TBTs that includes improving instructional practice and the 5-Step Process:

> **Teacher-Based Teams (TBT):** Teacher-Based Teams (TBTs) are teams composed of teachers working together to improve instructional practice and student learning through shared work. As part of the OIP use of collaborative structures, TBTs follow a common set of guidelines described in a 5-Step Process connected directly to the focused goals, strategies, and actions described in the school improvement plan (MWIP Complete Guide, 2012a, p. 122).

Mr. Nelson's role as Transformation Coach was to introduce both policies, illustrate how they worked together, and coach the teacher-based teams through the collaborative use of both processes, MWIP and FIP.

Understanding RttT at Cardinal

While the formal documents of MWIP and RttT explained the multiple educational goals of both policies, the purpose of participation from the teachers' point of view was much narrower. When asked why they thought their district participated in Race to the top, Cardinal's math teachers expressed some uncertainty but each, separately, responded that City District participated because of the available funds. Mr. Mallard: "Why is my district participating in Race to the Top? Basically, for funds … I mean that's what it all boils down to, dollars basically" (Mallard, 2014). Mrs. Green echoed that sentiment, "Because of the money. So, we are funding things that we need" (Green, 2014).

During my interview with Mrs. Richmond, I asked her if anybody had explained why the district participated in RttT. She responded with a quick and clear, "No" and followed up with, "Probably for the funds. To get the funds we need to help – anything to help our students" (Richmond, 2014). Mrs. Richmond indicated that she was given a stipend by the Race to the Top fund and that it, "Brought some money to help with our poor students and try to place some things in place for helping the kids along a bit" (Richmond, 2014).

Mr. Mallard perceived an expectation to implement the strategies he learned through Formative Instructional Practices (FIP) professional development, an aspect of RttT, at Cardinal: "So, building-wide there's been a push to encourage everyone to learn about instructional practices, Formative Instructional Practices" (Mallard, 2014). He described the online learning modules that were available and shared some of his learning with me. He relayed to me the content of the modules reasonably easily; he recalled four of the five practices and worked out the fifth[10]. He also spoke of two big ideas he took away from the online learning modules: 1) providing feedback to students in a timely manner is important, and 2) teachers can use assessment data to drive instruction. When asked if his team had talked about Formative Instructional Practices, Mr. Mallard emphasized the focus on clear learning targets: "We talked about it some. We certainly talked about clear learning targets and setting clear learning targets we talked about" (Mallard, 2014).

[10] See Appendix C for more information on the five practices of FIP.

Mr. Nelson, the transformation coach, described a long process from earlier in the school year of multiple team meetings that led to the set of clear learning targets posted on the wall in Mrs. Green's classroom. The team chose a mathematics content standard regarding algebraic thinking that they felt they all taught at some point in their courses. After creating learning targets, the team worked to create assessments they could use to evaluate students' algebraic skills and gather the data required by both FIP and MWIP. This series of steps matched well with the intentions of the both policies, FIP as an aspect of Race to the Top and the 5-Step Process of MWIP.

Understanding MWIP at Cardinal

One of the hallmarks of MWIP was the use of collaborative teams to make data-based decisions. Cardinal High School began their MWIP efforts 2 years prior to this study with the transition of departmental teams to teacher-based teams (TBTs). Mr. Mallard affirmed that he had been in the math department for 11 years, but they began using the term "TBT" when they began MWIP. The teachers all showed an understanding that there was some difference between a *math department* and an MWIP *teacher-based team*. However, they did not agree on how the TBT would be different and if it was even an improvement.

One of the reasons for the multiple interpretations of the purpose and value of the TBT was likely the inconsistent training the teachers received (Nelson, 2014). Mrs. Green detailed her attendance at multiple days of training on MWIP including a

session on leading teacher-based teams through the 5-Step Process. Mr. Mallard reported he attended at least two days of training the prior year and one day of training more recently. Similarly, Mrs. Richmond also attended "a couple of days" of training but she was less specific in her recollection of the trainings. The other two members of the team, Ms. Coates and Mrs. Ritter, did not participate in any training beyond what they received via Mrs. Green and Mr. Nelson during team meetings.

Mr. Mallard recalled a day-long training on MWIP:

> **Mallard:** We did go to an in-service, it was a day-long inservice actually. And [Mr. Nelson] came in and talked to us about MWIP and what the expectations are. So yeah.
> **Ressa:** Are you aware of the 5-Step Process?
> **Mallard:** No. (pause) Well I'm sure he talked about it but that's it (2014).

Spillane and Burch (2006) acknowledged that the process of making sense of policy leads teachers to different understandings but then suggested that within teams the group will defer to the team leader or outside experts. Ms. Coates and her teammates often deferred to their team leader, Mrs. Green, who had the most training and served as their connection to the Building Leadership Team. The other person they turned to for expertise was the Transformation Coach, Mr. Nelson.

However, there was a great deal of ambiguity around Mr. Nelson's role. Mr. Mallard seemed to get the closest with his explanation: "He's a coach and his role was just to help coach us to do that process and make sure we're on track and doing everything that we need to do to make sure we are fulfilling the necessary steps to meet our [MWIP] requirements" (Mallard, 2014). Mr. Mallard implied that the

coach's role included ensuring that the team was meeting expectations, fulfilling the MWIP steps to meet requirements.

Prior to transition to a teacher-based team, the math department at Cardinal High School met on a regular basis. Mrs. Green served as the department chairperson as long as anyone on the team could recall. For Mrs. Richmond that meant that she knew Mrs. Green as the department chair for 14 years. None of the team members recalled when or how Mrs. Green became department chair and were all unsure of the process for selecting a new chairperson. This seems to be a moot point – since all of the teachers expressed an aversion to taking on the role. "Especially now, because of all the reports requiring everything. It's ridiculous" (Richmond, 2014).

Mrs. Green considered it part of her role as team leader to ensure that the team was meeting the expectations of Mr. Forrest and the district. She worked extra hours on tasks like creating meeting agendas, typing meeting notes, and organizing data for presentation to the Building Leadership Team (BLT). The role of team leader made her very aware of meeting the expectations of MWIP which I discuss in more detail in Theme 4.

Emergent Theme 2: Collaborating

Intention of policies

The literature tells us that historically, teachers have rarely engaged in teaching as collective work (Lortie, 1975). School reformers described the structural and systemic organization that isolates teachers from each other as a persistent problem (Lortie, 1975; Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen & Grissom, 2105). Teachers are physically separated from one another in their individual classrooms, with varying planning and lunch periods throughout the day further limiting communication. With MWIP, reformers attempted to combat this "isolation" through the creation of teams intended to encourage collaboration and innovation (MWIP Complete Guide, 2012a).

The Midwestern Improvement Process (MWIP) and Race to the Top (RttT) both emphasized the importance of collaboration as a part of the school improvement process. While RttT provided little guidance for creating and fostering collaborative environments, MWIP provided multiple resources for use by teams, team leaders and facilitators (MWIP website, n.d.). In fact, collaboration is one of the seven principles of MWIP (see Figure 5).

4. **Is collaborative and collegial.** Every plan gets its strength from the people who are committed to it. To make sure the plan will yield positive results, engage the community in understanding the plan, helping to make it stronger, and ultimately, becoming invested in making it work. Include business and community representatives, students, parents, teachers, administrators, and district or community school staff in the planning process, and make the draft plan available for input from the entire community. Make sure the plan reflects the combined thinking and planning of collaborative teams who support plan development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

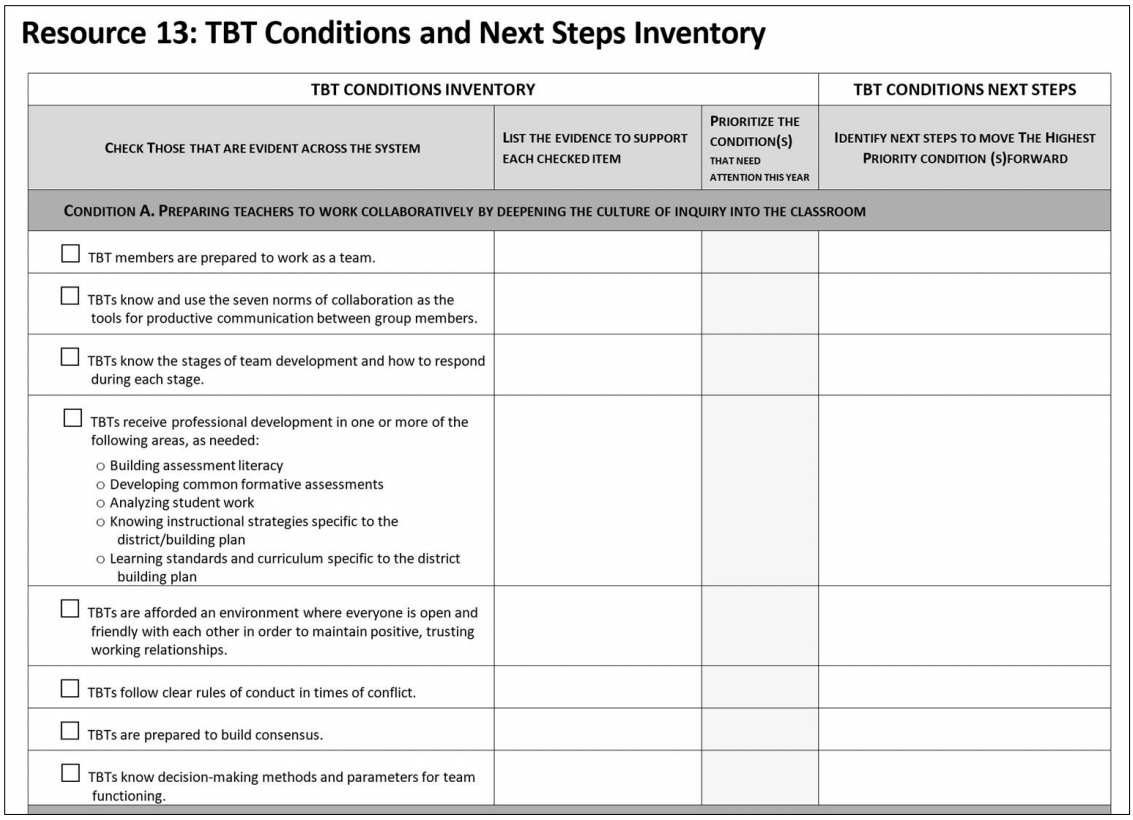
Figure 5. **Principle four of MWIP (MWIP Complete Guide, 2012a, p. vii)**

The MWDE website included a wide-ranging set of MWIP resources including a broad MWIP Guide and more pointed resources like the TBT Inventory. The TBT Inventory served as a self-evaluation tool for teacher-based teams and building leadership teams to assess the TBT "conditions" and plan next steps.

The inventory tool is built around a set of six "conditions":

- Condition A. Preparing teachers to work collaboratively by deepening the culture of inquiry into the classroom
- Condition B. Forming or repurposing building teams to implement the 5-Step Process
- Condition C. Creating schedules and routines that support TBTs
- Condition D. Making TBT meetings purposeful
- Condition E. Defining Roles and responsibilities
- Condition F. Communicating plan indicators and providing available data to all teachers

Each "condition" is then broken down into statements of expected knowledge and practice. For instance, Condition A is broken down into eight expectations (See Figure 6.)



Resource 13: TBT Conditions and Next Steps Inventory

TBT CONDITIONS INVENTORY			TBT CONDITIONS NEXT STEPS
CHECK THOSE THAT ARE EVIDENT ACROSS THE SYSTEM	LIST THE EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT EACH CHECKED ITEM	PRIORITIZE THE CONDITION(S) THAT NEED ATTENTION THIS YEAR	IDENTIFY NEXT STEPS TO MOVE THE HIGHEST PRIORITY CONDITION (S)FORWARD
CONDITION A. PREPARING TEACHERS TO WORK COLLABORATIVELY BY DEEPENING THE CULTURE OF INQUIRY INTO THE CLASSROOM			
☐ TBT members are prepared to work as a team.			
☐ TBTs know and use the seven norms of collaboration as the tools for productive communication between group members.			
☐ TBTs know the stages of team development and how to respond during each stage.			
☐ TBTs receive professional development in one or more of the following areas, as needed: ○ Building assessment literacy ○ Developing common formative assessments ○ Analyzing student work ○ Knowing instructional strategies specific to the district/building plan ○ Learning standards and curriculum specific to the district building plan			
☐ TBTs are afforded an environment where everyone is open and friendly with each other in order to maintain positive, trusting working relationships.			
☐ TBTs follow clear rules of conduct in times of conflict.			
☐ TBTs are prepared to build consensus.			
☐ TBTs know decision-making methods and parameters for team functioning.			

Figure 6. **TBT inventory excerpt (MWIP Resource 13, n.d., p. 1)**

As the figure above suggests, the MWIP resource materials repeatedly defined performance expectations for the teams and their collaborations per se. The second expectation in the inventory, for example, references the "seven norms of collaboration" (see Figure 6 above). To clarify these expectations, I searched the MWIP resources for the seven norms and found only other similarly phrased references to them in similar inventory resources for building leadership teams (BLTs) and the district leadership teams (DLTs), but no list of the norms themselves. An internet search resulted in several documents on the *Learning Forward* website that listed the seven norms and referenced the original source as a book by

Garmston and Wellman, *The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups* (2008). After a convoluted search, I was able to identify the referenced norms:

1. Pausing
2. Paraphrasing
3. Posing questions
4. Placing ideas on the table
5. Providing data
6. Paying attention to self and others
7. Presuming positive intentions (Garmston & Wellman, 2008, p. 42).

I do not imagine that most TBT members would have done the searching to find clarification for the reference to norms in the evaluation tool above (see Figure 6). Yet these norms seem usefully different, and are quite different among themselves, e.g., the difference between "pausing" and "providing data". There is clearly a prior discourse on the "seven norms" that recur in the MWIP materials, but none are particularly clarifying. In the absence of clarifying discussion, formulations such as condition D above— making TBT meetings purposeful—seem little more than maxims.

The MW Department of Education provided districts, schools and those supporting them with a multitude of resources to be used in support of creating collaborative teams at the teacher, building and district level. The resources focused on what the teams should know and be able to do. However, there was little evidence of resources designed to *teach or practice* the knowledge and skills required to be an effective TBT, or the skills of assessing its success. MWIP materials

included a plethora of references to shared leadership, distributed decision-making, collaboration, trust, communication, and many other *en vogue* terms related to teaming. The improvement process seemed to rely on the ability of teams, at multiple levels, to work together effectively and establish a culture of collaboration and inquiry, by exhortation, as in the following formulation:

> One of the seven principles of the [MWIP] is that it is a collaborative, collegial process. Collaboration does not occur automatically; it runs against norms of isolation and autonomy so pervasive in the field of education (MWIP Complete Guide, 2012a, p. 1).

These proposed collaborative structures of MWIP (i.e., TBTs, BLTs, DLTs) ran contrary to accepted practice in many schools and districts. Teachers have traditionally worked autonomously, taking sole responsibility for their classrooms and students. This has included everything from lesson planning and student achievement to decorating and celebrations. The passage referenced above treats isolation and autonomy as "pervasive," communicating a belief that isolation is problematic and needs to be remedied. A cultivation of cases might give us pause about such generalizations. But although not as clearly stated as the goal of improving student achievement, MWIP sought to remedy teacher isolation by implementing teacher-based teams and other collaborative and communication structures.

Collaboration at Cardinal

The available MWIP resources revealed an underlying belief that teachers *should be* working together to implement new standards, plan assessments and instruction, review student work, and improve instruction. There was a kind of moral imperative underwriting the programmatic formulations [as seen above]. For the teachers at Cardinal High School this was a considerable change in expectations. The underlying professional culture at Cardinal, as elsewhere, focused on the classroom; teachers spent their days there; they generally worked independently and professional interaction with their peers was limited to weekly department meetings. The math teachers worked in a similar environment and culture of professional autonomy. They saw their classrooms, students, instruction and assessments as their professional responsibility, and were accustomed to daily classroom teaching and occasional departmental meetings led by the department chairperson, with a flexible agenda that changed based on the relevancy of topics. These are not teacher creations.

Cardinal High School showed the familiar systemic and structural isolation of classroom teaching in a high school, as well as contemporary reform efforts to encourage collaboration through teaming. However, the transition from departments to teacher-based teams at Cardinal High School did not create the ideal of collaboration as described in the MWIP guide and resources. Nor was it clear that there was a "transition" at all.

Scheduled to begin at 9:30 am, the meetings I observed started closer to 9:40 after teachers trickled into the room. When Mrs. Green took me on a tour of the school building it became obvious why team members were often late. On our way to Mr. Mallard's classroom we walked through hallways and stairwells with shiny woodwork and marble reminiscent of an earlier time. His classroom was up a grand staircase, with ornate bannisters and posts, on the third floor where most freshmen had their lockers and classes. The math teachers' classrooms were scattered across the building, in different hallways, on different floors, quite far from each other. While the intention of teacher-based teams was, in part, to combat isolation of teachers, the physical separation of classrooms across the building contributed to their tendency to work autonomously.

Between classes, when high school students filled the hallways, it was difficult for Mr. Mallard to navigate through the traffic, down the staircase, through the next two hallways, and arrive on time to Mrs. Green's classroom for team meetings. This physical separation meant that Mr. Mallard regularly arrived late for meetings and had to make an effort to talk with other team members during the school day. Similarly, Ms. Coates and Mrs. Ritter were assigned rooms far from Mrs. Green's. Their classrooms were not clustered with other special education teachers as might be expected, nor were they near any of the math classrooms. This physical isolation from teachers in their department contributed to the lack of natural, casual interactions among the math teachers.

My interview with Mrs. Richmond provided some insight into how un–examined structural habits can undermine attempts at creating collaboration. Mrs. Richmond explained that teaching assignments differed greatly among team members, with just a scant few instances of teachers assigned the same courses. For instance, the math team had a difficult time deciding which content standards to utilize for the formative assessments because, "We would teach different courses, different levels" (Richmond, 2014). "Content standards" presume prior organizations to sustain them, and these were hard to find in the Cardinal math curriculum. As Mr. Nelson explained to me, the team used multiple meetings to discuss and debate which content standard to work from when developing their common learning targets and assessments (Nelson, 2014). The team found it difficult and frustrating to discuss content when they didn't share teaching assignments. For instance, Mrs. Green worked with the highest achieving math students in the school – she was assigned to teach Math III, IV and Advanced Placement Calculus. One of the traditional perks of being the department chairperson has always been the assignment to teach the highest courses and best students. Mrs. Green was very proud of teaching the AP course and was pleased to have AP caliber students in the school (Green, 2014). Conversely, Mrs. Richmond was frustrated that she and Mr. Mallard both taught Math I, yet he was assigned the "true freshmen" students and she had "all the repeaters." She did not see collaboration as a goal *or a possibility,* and rarely sought out Mr. Mallard's input

when planning instruction. She felt her students repeating the course had different needs than his freshmen.

The MWIP Complete Guide (2012a) included a diagram (see Figure 7) illustrating a continuum of organizational interaction from "communicate" at the low end to "collaborate" at the high end. Using this scale, the math team I observed at Cardinal High School operated at the "coordinate" level. One of the goals of MWIP was to transition departmental teams into teacher-based teams, transforming them from simple communication practices to the complex collaboration described in the diagram.

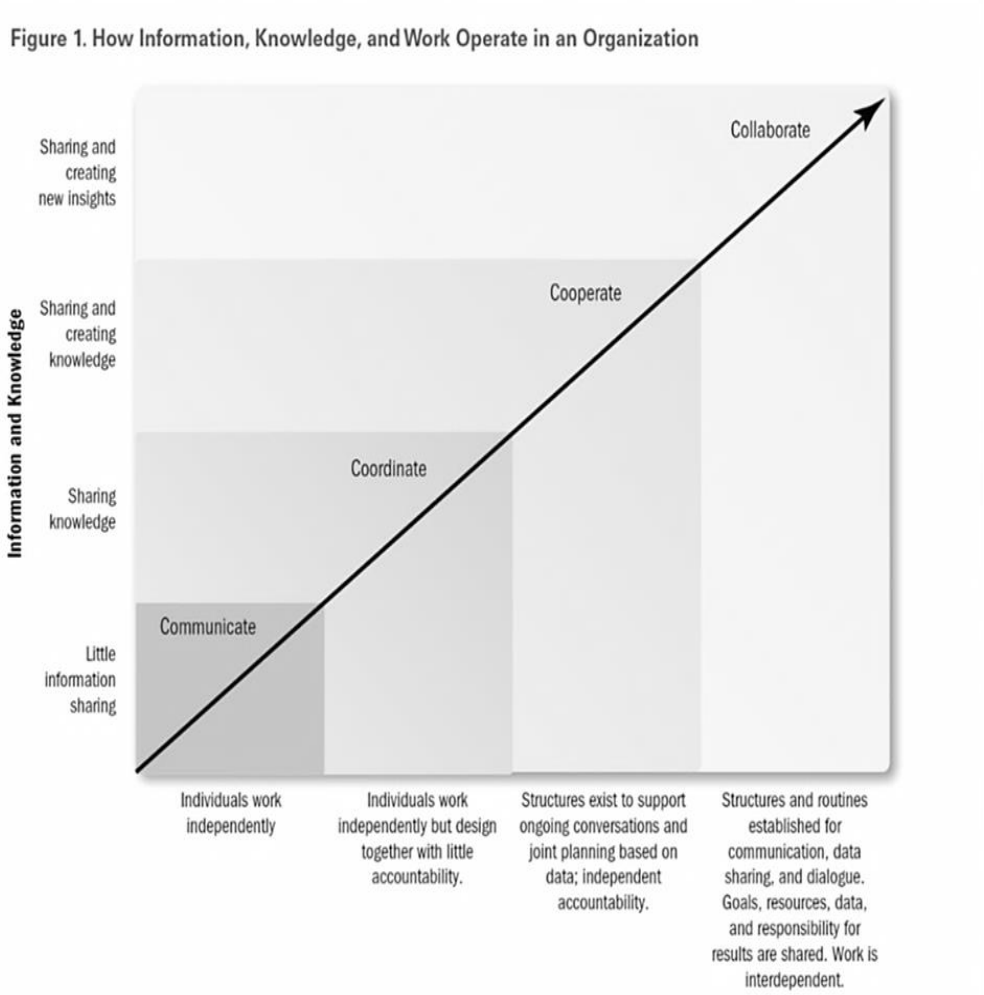


Figure 7. **Creating a collaborative culture (MWIP Complete Guide, 2012a, p. 2)**

But the content of the diagram conveys a belief that the work of teachers could be laid out as a linear path of successively developed skill sets. The chart exhorts interdependency with shared responsibility for results, but shows no interest in the actual daily organization of their professional lives. Perhaps for that reason, and not surprisingly, based on my observations and discussions, a shared belief in this ideal

did not exist at Cardinal High School. Mr. Forrest described the teams as collaborating on standards and assessments but they gave little evidence of the MWIP's ideal level of sharing and interdependence. My research revealed their interactions to be more like, on first blush, the contrived collegiality described by Hargreaves (see Chapter 2 for more on contrived collegiality). The team members managed to communicate and coordinate to meet their understandings of the perceived expectations of MWIP and RttT. They shared pleasantries but rarely delved into personal questions about family or outside activities. They acted collegially, but not out of any special interest in getting to know each other or to share their professional or personal lives. As for these exhortations to work interdependently and the like, their workplace simply had little place for that.

Mr. Mallard provided an interesting reflection on how the team fit into his professional work.

> There are times when it becomes overwhelming. There are times when like [the team is] working on material that is not relevant or is not going to impact our instruction immediately or it's not helping me in my classroom like that time, for example, we were working on assessments. It was hard for me to buy in because I mean I see the long-term impact, I see how it can impact us next year. But, you know, sometimes we are just in survival mode. Sometimes we need to survive today and we're focused on developing this assessment instrument for next year… So it was hard to keep focus or to keep sight of, you know, what the goal is, when I'm thinking about my next group class (2014).

Though he could imagine the eventual value of assessment work, Mr. Mallard also saw an encroachment on his time and his individual professional responsibility to

plan for his classes. He focused his efforts on meeting the needs of his students through thoughtful lesson planning and, to him, participation in the teacher-based team was not relevant when it did not help him advance that purpose:

> **Mallard:** The focus now is [MWIP] process which many of us are having a hard time seeing the connection to our day-to-day teaching.
> **Ressa:** Have you asked [Mr. Nelson] about that?
> **Mallard:** Indirectly. We've had discussions about, you know, he keeps saying trust the process, you know, trust the process. … And I see how it is going to impact instruction next year. It was just so hard to see it this year (2014).

He also expressed concern with administrative tasks and the importance placed on assessment:

> We work, we get burned out, overwhelmed, we talk about how this is really taking us right from teaching. So many administrative things to take care of. Giving all of these assessments - the kids hate assessments. We hate to give assessments. I mean so many of them involved. Is it really, the question becomes is it really improving students' achievement so we have a discussion about that (Mallard, 2014).

A special education teacher, Mrs. Ritter also questioned the purpose of her participation and reluctantly attended the math TBT. She managed to exhibit the minimum expectations of acceptable "TBT member" behavior. In my interview with her, she had very little use for the team meetings:

> I don't know why I'm assigned to them. Doesn't make sense 'cause I only teach math twice. It used to be that special ed didn't have to because we're different and so but now Mr. Forrest says I have to go (Ritter, 2014).

Mrs. Ritter attended team meetings as required, sometimes sat at a side table rather than with the group, responded to questions when asked directly, and shared her

student assessment data only after prolonged discussion with Mrs. Green and other team members. She understood the schema of team expectations and did just enough to meet them, most of the time. But this wasn't simply 'resistance.' She measured the TBT demands to the demands that held her first commitment. Her TBT participation was minimal, construction to meet Mr. Forrest's expectations, because it held little value to her work.

In line with characteristics of contrived collegiality in the literature, the tentative relations among the teachers on the math team were constructed or contrived to maintain a level of harmony and not challenge the status quo. Malen and Cochran (2008) summarized some of the sources of conflict among teachers (see Table 2). While the sources of conflict listed could occur among teachers in any setting or context (i.e., teacher's lounge, professional development session, staff meeting, hallway chat), the context of the team meeting complicates these issues.

Sources of conflict among teachers may include:
• Balance between their desire for autonomy and the pressure to adopt group practices and norms; • Alignment of personal views and values with those of the larger group and organization; • Importance of subject-based instruction versus interdisciplinary approaches; • Importance of pedagogical versus content knowledge; • Role of the team within the school and larger community; • Beliefs about quality instruction and professional practice; and • Role of seniority in decision-making processes.

Table 2. **Sources of conflict among teachers (Adapted from Malen and Cochran, 2008)**

The mathematics team may well have run into many of Malen and Cochran's (2008) sources of conflict throughout their work. The Malen and Cochran list is completely disengaged from any actual work setting or occasion. It reads as a list of freely imagined possibilities [and each item is, of course, possible]. I did indeed observe the team maneuver through conflicts about autonomy, roles and responsibilities, and beliefs. They often used humor as a technique to avoid conflict and diffuse tense situations. One example comes from a meeting during which the teachers discussed an idea that came from Mrs. Richmond (see Figure 8). The idea was to ask students to write goals after completing their assessments. The opening of the discussion was easy and collegial, with heads nodding in agreement. The team

needed to decide how many goals students would write on each assessment. Mrs. Green changed the language from goals to "modifications" which caused some misunderstanding. Mrs. Richmond looked confused and shook her head. The tone changed when Mr. Mallard asked Mrs. Green very directly what she wanted:

1	**Green:** So next time we need to look at modifications.
2	**Mallard:** So what do you want from us?
3	**Green [showing her paper to group]:** This is what I came up with; I thought
4	you'd show me what you did.
5	**Coates:** On what?
6	**Green:** [pauses, sighs, shows others her paper]
7	**Coates:** What if we did [pause] Ask for one goal for next time?
8	**Green:** How about two goals?
9	**Coates:** You're getting *wild* [smiling]
10	**Green:** NO, I, uh
11	**Coates:** Okay… [smiling] They can *always* use more goals (TBT, 5/1/14).

Figure 8. **Clip from TBT meeting transcript, 5/1/14**

The conversation turned toward disagreement when both Mr. Mallard (line 2) and Ms. Coates (line 5) questioned the assigned task, bringing modified reflection questions to the next meeting. Mrs. Green didn't immediately respond – she sighed and showed the other teachers her work. Ms. Coates broke the silence at the table with a proposed a partial, reduced, solution (line 6) then diffused the tension with a smile and joke (lines 9 and 11). As the youngest member of the team and the one with the least experience, she was in her first year of teaching, Ms. Coates was often the one who inserted humor into tense situations. In this instance, she tried to

negotiate to simplify the assigned task on Mr. Mallard's behalf, but acquiesced with a teasing comment toward Mrs. Green (line 9) and then a more explicit "Okay" (line 11) and another teasing aside.

The team worked their way through another conflict later in the same meeting. Mrs. Green and Mrs. Ritter worked to solve a problem of missing data that was to have been turned in to Mrs. Green the prior week. The team watched quietly as Mrs. Green and Mrs. Ritter went back and forth with questions and explanations trying to clarify why Mrs. Green had not received the data. Mrs. Green implied that she did not believe that Mrs. Ritter had sent the information via email but eventually allowed for this possibility. In an effort to prevent the same issue from recurring, Mrs. Green shared how *she* ensures *her* emails are sent and received properly.

Green: When I send something off I send a copy to my email too, I just copy myself, so if I get it I can assume somebody else did.
Ritter [nodding, speaking slowly]: Okay.
Green [speaking quickly]: And also since I use two different email addresses sometimes I send it to the one from home, from my personal, so I send a copy to my district [email address] too.
Ritter [shaking head]: No. I am not going to do all that.
Green: But I am just saying, I send a copy to myself to kind of confirm that it did go out somehow.
Ritter: Oh, okay, I see, maybe (TBT, 5/15/14).

In this exchange, Mrs. Green, the team leader, proposed a 'proof procedure' for Mrs. Ritter to ensure that her emails were indeed sent. She did this by talking about what *she* does herself. Mrs. Green never directly told Mrs. Ritter to change her behavior,

but it was clear to Mrs. Ritter that the intention of the statement was a direction for her to change her behavior. Mrs. Ritter reacted to Mrs. Green's statements as directions; she clearly replied "No" and shook her head to ensure there was no misunderstanding (line 7). But Mrs. Green did not give up – she continued to explain *her* practice as a way of telling Mrs. Ritter to make a change (lines 8 and 9), and she was almost successful – Mrs. Ritter responded with a "maybe" (line 10). Though Mrs. Green never gave a direct instruction or spoke as the team leader or department chairperson, Mrs. Ritter clearly understood the intention. Both women worked to resolve the situation in a way that preserved the collegiality of the group, and a return to the larger topic at hand.

An undercurrent of many of the team members' interactions was the goal of maintaining the groups' tenuous harmony. They each separately expressed to me some dissatisfaction or frustration with the team yet they all worked to ensure that any disagreements were quickly resolved and collegiality was maintained.

Emergent Theme 3: Talking about instruction

Intention of policy

Talking about instruction was an essential step for improving student achievement in both Race to the Top (RttT) and Midwestern Improvement Process (MWIP). The State application for RttT included connections to their improvement process, espousing overlap and alignment of expectations in both policies (MWDE

website, 2010) During my interview with Mr. Nelson, we discussed how the 5-Step Process in MWIP included some of the practices teachers would learn about through the Formative Instructional Practices (FIP) online learning resources (Nelson, 2014). He focused in on Step 3 of MWIP's 5-Step Process (see Figure 9 below) and its relation to the discussion of instruction emphasized in the FIP learning modules.

A closer look at the MWIP and FIP resources showed the use of similar language in describing expectations of teachers and teacher-based teams (TBTs). The definition of TBT in the MWIP Complete Guide (2012a) even included discussion of instructional practices: "Teacher-Based Teams (TBTs) are teams composed of teachers working together to improve instructional practice and student learning through shared work" (p. 122). The graphic used to illustrate the 5-Step Process incorporated "implementing specific effective changes in the classroom" (Step 3) and "implement changes consistently across all classrooms" (Step 4).

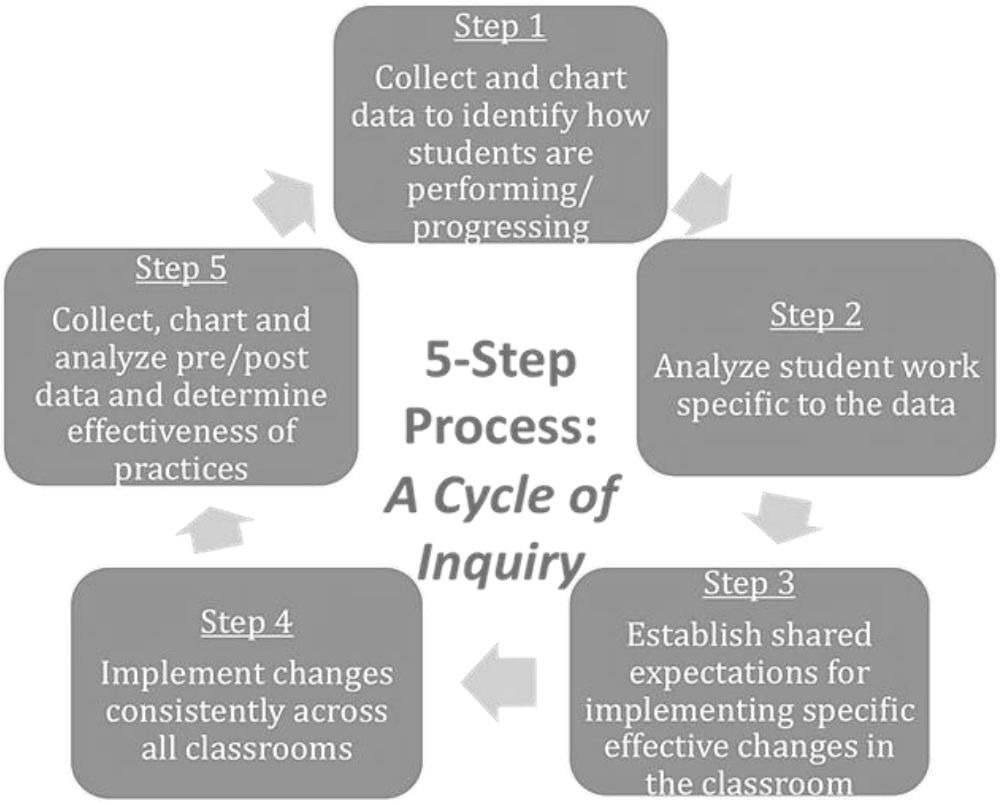


Figure 9. **TBT 5-step process visual (MWIP Resource 14, n.d., p. 1)**

The five steps of the process outline a cycle of assessment, analysis of data, adjustments to practice or instruction and then assessment. The expected outcomes of FIP included the ability to assess students, collect and analyze student data, and adjust instruction to match student needs (MWDE website, 2013). Perhaps the most significant expectation of both processes was the notion that the teachers would follow through these steps as a collaborative teacher team. This ambitious goal was

clear in the FIP Implementation Handbook (2013) as described in the excerpts shown (see Table 3).

Expectations for FIP Teachers
Teachers collaborate as needed to refine clear learning targets and use learning targets that build from year to year to plan instruction and assessments. Clear learning targets are shared with students and parents.
Teachers focus on their professional goals by intentionally advancing their implementation of formative instructional practices in their classrooms. Teachers hold each other accountable for collective progress.
Teachers work collaboratively to create and use assessments that are focused on specific, high-priority learning targets that are always matched to appropriate assessment methods.
Teachers regularly use assessment information to plan instruction, set goals for students, track student progress, and reflect on their own teaching and learning.
Teachers regularly share performance criteria, samples of student work, and assessment questions with students to help them understand the learning targets they are to hit and to help them be accurate assessors.

Table 3. **Expectations for teachers (Excerpt from FIP Implementation Handbook, 2013, p. 34)**

The goal of collaboratively planning instruction and assessment was an ambitious goal for both policies, and each writes generally about these goals. As discussed earlier, the traditional professional culture of high schools has been one of autonomy. The push toward collaboration suggested that policymakers saw autonomy and isolation as problematic, with collaboration serving as a solution to

the problem. Teachers working together would presumably improve their practice through the sharing ideas, engaging in critical discussions, analyzing student work and planning for effective changes as a team. The TBT was envisioned as a place of learning and improvement – an ambitious goal built on multiple presumptions about teachers' professional needs and practice, without benefit of study of how indeed those needs and practices are expressed in the day's professional work.

Talking about Instruction at Cardinal

A recurring topic during each of my observations of the math teacher-based team (TBT) was the collection and review of assessment data. Prior to the start of my visits, Mr. Nelson helped the team debate and decide upon a "content standard" to use for their discussions of student achievement, assessment and instruction. As he explained, the plan was for all five of the teachers to analyze their students' achievement in algebraic thinking, a concept taught in all of their courses. During the three months of my visits the team concentrated on collecting assessment data related to algebraic thinking in preparation for sharing them with the building leadership team (BLT). They discussed formats for their assessments, having students write goals after each assessment, what format to use to organize the assessment results, when to send Mrs. Green their results, and then what format to use when sharing the data with the BLT. Amidst all of these discussions, the topic never turned to *teaching about* algebraic thinking. As Mr. Nelson described it, the team was stuck at step two of the 5-Step Process (Nelson, 2014).

One possible reason instruction was not discussed could simply have been that it was not on the agenda. During my interview with Mrs. Richmond she explained that agenda items were generally the responsibility of the team leader and the team members tacitly agreed to follow Mrs. Green's weekly agenda.

> **Ressa:** The agenda, do you have input into the agenda or is the agenda…? (overlapping dialog)
> **Richmond:** Well, I suppose if we go and say we want to talk about this and when we say [something is] upcoming or something like that. Other than that, not really. It's just okay, we're going, we're going to do this, and this, and this" (2014).

The team deferred to Mrs. Green in developing the weekly agenda, which became the status quo of their weekly routine. Mrs. Green developed the agenda ahead of time and emailed it to the team members. She also printed copies before each meeting and set them out in the center of the table for the others to pick up. When they didn't pick up the agendas, Mrs. Green went so far as to hand one copy to each teacher. A review of the agendas used during the months of my observations revealed that the focus was on ensuring the team had properly prepared the data needed for the upcoming building leadership team meeting. Instruction was not included in the agenda items. But there were other sensible reasons as to why that would be so. The absence of instruction on the agendas wasn't simply an "absence".

Another formative circumstance that prevented the discussion of instruction was the lack of time and access outside of team meetings to talk with colleagues.

After a discussion of her difficult, daily schedule, Mrs. Richmond explained how conversations about policy and instruction rarely took place:

> **Ressa:** So, in your team, do you discuss these kinds of things, these issues?
> **Richmond:** Not anymore.
> **Ressa:** So, is there a chance in your day to talk about the difficulties or is there any time for –
>
> > **Richmond:** Only if we happen to have a moment. Like running in to each other in the hall or right after school or something like that (2014).

Mrs. Richmond described how her days did not include time to talk with other teachers about topics beyond those on the weekly agenda. As a less experienced teacher, she missed the time before MWIP when she felt teachers could discuss students and instruction. Now, in her view, discussion of instruction would happen, "only if we happen to have a moment like running into each other in the hall or right after school or something like that" (Richmond, 2014). She thought the previous departmental team meeting format was more useful because, "We were able to share, in my opinion, more practical information. Information that was more helpful, beneficial, it was more immediately beneficial" (Richmond, 2014). Her description of previous departmental meetings included the sharing of instructional strategies that she had success with in her classroom. Her remarks remind us that not all talk of 'instruction' is the same, and how the arrival of these state and federal resources enforced a certain *kind* of discussion about instruction. Within the local resources of Cardinal High School, however, *those* discussions were difficult to have. There are

reasons for the difficulty, though those reasons are nowhere to be found in the implementation documents.

During our discussion at the neighborhood coffee shop, Mr. Nelson shared his impressions of how hard the teachers and principals in City School District worked to improve student achievement. He had been working with the math team since the start of the school year, about nine months by the time of the interview. His tone suggested some frustration with the team not being more capable in analyzing their assessment data and planning for instruction. However, he was eager to talk about the team and used the opportunity to think through what he saw as a problem. His comments kept coming back to the 5-steps and how the team got "stuck" in the second step of the 5-Step Process, never getting to step 3 which addresses instruction: "This is a part where a lot of the teams never get to because they just do the test, and then they go back and continue the same thing" (Nelson, 2014).

Mr. Nelson noted:

> They were never given the big picture to begin with, and it became an output orientation thing … their goal is to create [assessment data] as opposed to the goal of the process is to use data to drive instruction, and to produce conversation with professionals around that data to better sharing, define the practice (2014).

Mr. Nelson theorized that teachers and administrators lacked an understanding of the "big picture" goals of the improvement process. From his point of view, they did not understand the process of looking at assessment data to inform instructional decisions. He described how the teams he worked with at Cardinal

High School would repeat steps 1 and 2, creating assessments and collecting data, focusing on creating products rather than engaging in a process. Indeed, during my observations, the math team was focused on meeting the expectation that they have data prepared to share at the monthly building leadership team (BLT) meeting. Their focus was on the product: a completed Resource 21C to be presented to the BLT. Resource 21C became a central focus of Mrs. Green's weekly agendas which I will discuss more in Theme 4. But it is quite clear that the Cardinal math team was driven by the very tasks they were presented with. Mr. Nelson may have had a broader vision, but it may have been provincial to *his* instruction. At all events, the materials delivered to the Cardinal math team suggested very different tasks and trajectories.

While Mr. Nelson's conclusion was that the team had not been adequately trained or prepared, I questioned his conclusion. My observations of the team meetings and my interviews thus far supported his concern about the team's focus on creating a *product* rather than working through an improvement *process*. However, his suggestion that the origin of the problem was a lack of training or knowledge did not align with my data. The group had sufficient expertise and available support through their Transformation Coach. Mr. Nelson's task was to guide them through all five steps of the given process and clarify the "big picture" of MWIP as a process. They were equipped with multiple forms, sample documents and videos, some shared by Mr. Nelson and others available on the State's website,

to work through each of the steps including step 3 regarding instruction. My analysis of the data diverged from Mr. Nelson's suggestion that the team lacked knowledge of the purpose of MWIP. Matters of "purpose" are routinely topographic; it depends on how close you are to those who write the purpose documents, and Mr. Nelson was far closer than our teachers. I concluded that the lack of discussion about instruction and use of data to improve instruction was both practical, and not surprising. The Mathematics Team at Cardinal High School worked together in teaching different things. For them, "instruction" was not some generic ideal. It was played out in each of their classrooms in ways distinctive to those students and their curriculum. Only in policy initiatives and scholarly articles does instruction become a unified generic. Classroom teachers know it differently. For these reasons, the Cardinal math TBT may have had very good organizational reasons for setting aside discussions of instruction as the MWIP and RttT proposed them.

My interview with Ms. Coates happened to come a few days after my meeting with Mr. Nelson. This timing provided me the opportunity to ask her about the team's use of the 5-Step Process and conversations about instruction. Ms. Coates was in her first year of teaching and was trained as a special education teacher. Her classroom was on the same floor as Mrs. Green's but on the opposite side of the building – they rarely saw each other outside of team meetings. Eager to talk about her experiences, Ms. Coates was not afraid to share her thoughts and opinions with

me. She described how she held very different beliefs about what good teaching looked like:

> We had a day, inservice, and [Mrs. Green] presented a lesson to the staff. [pause]
> I thought maybe that it was a fake lesson, a bad lesson on what not to do but I think she was serious that this was a model lesson for us to do, to follow, in our class. We laughed after because it was so bad. Not what I would do at all. We don't agree on instruction. [Mrs. Green], well, she does things different than I might probably and she's the leader so I can't just say no, you know, that's not right (Coates, 2014).

Ms. Coates' beliefs about effective classroom instruction differed greatly from those of her team leader, Mrs. Green, and perhaps her story about Mrs. Green was a parable about her TBT experience. Her account of "avoiding the topic of instruction" had nothing to do with a lack of knowledge of the "big picture" and everything to do with her understandings of instruction, preserving team relationships, and showing respect to the leader of the team. While Ms. Coates was comfortable talking to me about their different instructional approaches, she would never have talked with Mrs. Green about their differences. Ms. Coates' comments suggested to me that the team chose to avoid discussing instruction because of an implicit understanding that a conversation about instruction would not only surface disagreement and conflict, but perhaps also call into question the practice of the team leader and department chairperson. These are strong reasons. While the TBT structure was purported to include shared leadership, the math TBT retained the familiar hierarchy of a traditional high school department. They acted within the unspoken norms of the

team, the schema they developed for their meetings, in a way that both avoided conflict and deferred to the authority of the team leader (Spillane, Reiser, & Gomez, 2006). In enacting the status quo of their team norms and collegiality they worked together to circumvent any conversation about their diverse instructional practices. This is a very different account than the one offered by Mr. Nelson.

Emergent Theme 4: Meeting expectations

Intention of policy

The expectations of Race to the Top (RttT) and the Midwestern Improvement Process (MWIP) were outlined in multiple documents, available on websites and in printed manuals, not only for use by educators but also for public review. These expectations relied on the success of the MWIP teams to implement the processes each policy required. An analysis of the available manuals and implementation guides revealed a myriad of tables, illustrations, rubrics, self-assessments, and vignettes to help educators develop collaborative teams at the teacher, school, and district levels.

The MWIP guides described teams as developing through stages from cooperation toward collaboration (e.g., see Figure 7). The MWIP Complete Guide (2012a) included a second table describing stages of team development and characteristics. This second table used different terminology than the previous table. The stages of team development are described as “forming, storming,

norming, and performing" (see Figure 10). This table included additional brief suggestions to help facilitators lead teams through each stage to the next.

Stage of Team Development	Team Characteristics	Facilitator Response
Stage One: Forming	Testing, polite, impersonal, watchful, guarded	Be more directive by clearly articulating the purpose of the meeting/group and discussing ground rules for group functioning.
Stage Two: Storming	Infighting, controlling, conflicts, confronting people, opting out, difficulties, feeling stuck	Help members deal with conflict, clarify differing viewpoints, and make sure hidden agendas or viewpoints are revealed.
Stage Three: Norming	Getting organized, developing skills, establishing procedures, giving feedback, confronting issues	Use problem-solving skills to mediate differing positions, clarify any role ambiguity, and when appropriate, refocus the purpose or rules for group functioning.
Stage Four: Performing	Mature, close, resourceful, flexible, open, effective, supportive	Serve as a collaborator and keep the group moving in a nondirective manner.

Figure 10. **Developing collaborative teams (MWIP Complete Guide, 2012a, p. 6)**

Similarly, Race to the Top (RttT) included expectations for teamwork though not as detailed or repeatedly articulated. RttT's Formative Instructional Practices Implementation Guide (2013) referenced and relied upon the MWIP team structure to implement the suggested assessment and instructional practices of RttT.

These two sets of expectations for teams, FIP and MWIP, intended to help districts create collaborative structures across classrooms and schools. Ideally, a district utilized its district leadership team (DLT) to communicate expectations to BLTs, who then worked with their TBTs to share the expectations of the DLT. This system of communication shared policy information and data both "upward" and

"downward" through the collaborative team system as illustrated below (see Figure 11). It could well be argued that these illustrations and explanations, when looked at as a whole, send confusing, at times conflicting, messages.

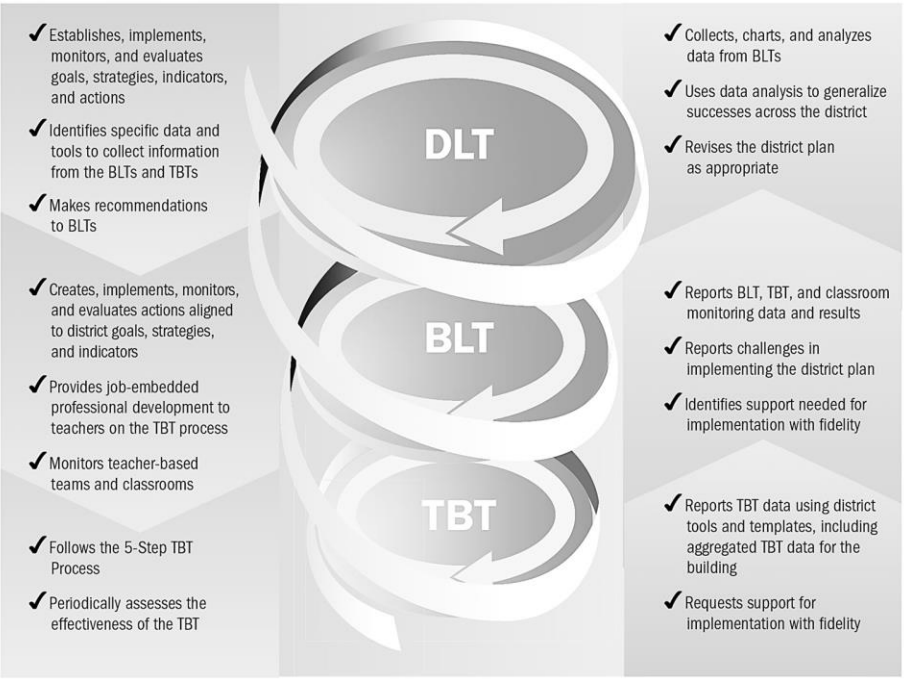


Figure 11. **Interrelationships of DLT, BLT, and TBTs (MWIP Complete Guide, 2012a, p. 13)**

This illustration intended to show how the teams were to be connected and rely upon each other for the information needed to make data-based decisions at each level. At the TBT level, MWIP required teachers to use the 5-Step Process to gather and analyze data to be shared with the BLT and eventually the DLT. The State provided a template for sharing TBT data, referred to as Resource 21C.

Beyond collaboration and communication, data-based decision making was a significant expectation of both policies (MWIP Complete Guide, 2012a; FIP

Implementation Handbook, 2013). The intention was for districts, schools, and teachers to make more informed decisions based on multiple sources of data. At the teacher level, data-based decisions were about selecting the best instructional strategies to match student needs as shown in the collected and analyzed data. At the building and district leadership teams, data-based decisions would have encompassed larger issues like the allocation of funds to professional learning or the addition of social workers. The suggested data sources were wide-ranging, including student assessments, attendance, behavior and discipline records, Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for students with disabilities, and more. The State provided the Decision Framework, an electronic tool to aid districts in gathering, organizing, and analyzing their data (MWDE website, n.d.). The practical goal underlying all of the systemic expectations was a simple one – to advance the use of multiple sources of information when making decisions.

Meeting Expectations at Cardinal

To an outsider, the mathematics team at Cardinal High School would have appeared to be a model MWIP collaborative TBT. They were agreeable to the tasks at hand, used a weekly agenda with norms, and allowed for contributions from all team members. However, upon closer inspection, this team would not have met the criteria outlined in the MWIP materials. The team worked together to achieve the required tasks, with the focus on the outcome of a completed Resource 21C to present to building leadership. They exhibited what Hargreaves (1994) termed

"contrived collegiality". They cooperated and interacted *just enough* to create a simulacrum of a collaborative team, meeting the pre-set norms and utilizing the agreed upon institutionalized talk, without the interdependence and shared responsibility MWIP expected (MWIP Complete Guide, 2012a). They were working together to implement the parts of MWIP and FIP that were practical and useful in their context.

The teachers generally agreed that team meetings were important. Mrs Richmond provided an explanation of why she was a proponent of team meetings: "Oh, definitely, definitely because it's important for us to discuss what's going on and where we're going and what we're doing that's alike and what's different, what's working, what's not working and so on" (Richmond, 2014). She recalled that, "as a math department we've always met on a regular basis" (Richmond, 2014). She described the change to teacher-based teams: "Now, it's a TBT. It's not a BLT, the sandwich (laughter) and it's just like all these initials, all these letters, whatever … It didn't make any difference to me as long as we could meet" (Richmond, 2014). This attitude was consistent among the team members – they agreed that meeting weekly was important but the change to a TBT was mostly irrelevant. At times, the teachers felt that the TBT tasks, especially the additional assessments, were an unnecessary, added burden.

For instance, Mr. Mallard expressed frustration with a proposal of using rubrics[11] with each assessment. He questioned the idea: "Do we have to do this before [each test]? Who has time to create rubrics?" (Mallard, 2014). He objected not to the practice of *using* rubrics, but objected to the implication that he would *have to* use them. The expectation that the team would make group decisions and all members would follow them encroached on Mr. Mallard's sense of autonomy. Mrs. Ritter was also reluctant to agree to the task, but Mr. Nelson coached the team toward consensus. Ultimately, the team did not come to agreement on the issue and the discussion of rubrics ended in this fashion:

> **Nelson**: Do we have consensus?
> **Green**: [Mrs. Ritter], do you like the ideas we're discussing?
> **Coates** (aside to Ritter): just say yes
> **Ritter** (overlapping): yes, yes (TBT, 4/3/14).

Ms. Coates leaned over and quietly encouraged Mrs. Ritter to agree to the use of rubrics to provide the team leader and transformation coach with the answer they needed and sought. In ways, this brief interaction is emblematic of the expectations and constraints the teachers wrestled with. A question is posed ["Do we have consensus?"] that admits of two answers, but only one is permitted; the teachers then go about producing it as best they can, and go on.

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[11] In this instance, the team had discussed the use of detailed scoring guides to assist with scoring students' written responses on assessments.

Throughout April, Mrs. Green focused the team on gathering assessment data so the required form, Resource 21C, for the upcoming BLT meeting could be completed (see Appendix D for images of Resource 21C). The assessment data was intended to show student achievement of the clear learning targets the team developed earlier in the year from the content standard on algebraic thinking (see Appendix C for more detail on FIP and clear learning targets). On the wall near the meeting tables in Mrs. Green's classroom the learning targets were handwritten in black marker on large pieces of chart paper. Mrs. Green and Mr. Nelson both referred to the charts multiple times during the discussion; other members of the team obligingly glanced at the targets from time to time. The conversation included "insider" words and phrases that would not be easily understood by a newcomer without explanation (i.e., clear learning targets, domain, cluster, criteria, rubric). Over time the team developed and utilized the insider language related to the policies they were working to implement. During the discussion of data needed to complete Resource 21C, Mr. Nelson reminded team members of the correct language to use when turning in their assessment results. Mr. Nelson and Mrs. Green worked together to remind Mr. Mallard of the expectation to group students by achievement level:

> **Nelson:** So let's get the language right, so at some point we got the levels of proficient, basic, advanced, etcetera. … [Mr. Forrest] gave you that language which is the same language and I want to make sure we agree of what language, what we use it for.

> **Green:** And they did this in agreement which is what everyone else in the BLT is using. So, this should be ready.
> **Nelson:** You see what I'm saying in the report cards your percentages is that the same that the report card comes out is proficient, basic and advanced. And if that is the case we are going to agree to do that. We need to have common language.
> **Green:** So we just need to take on changes (TBT, 4/17/14).

Mr. Mallard nodded as he listened politely to the explanation provided, as did the other team members. Mr. Nelson and Mrs. Green worked together to reinforce the need for the team to use the "correct" language as shared by Mr. Forrest.

Like most of the meetings I observed, the May 1 meeting followed the pattern of Mrs. Green distributing agendas she had prepared using the MWIP template. Next was a verbal review of the norms from atop the agenda; then, a reminder from Mrs. Green of what the team is working on, with a recap of what was discussed the previous week. Mrs. Green led the team diligently through the agenda as the others contributed as requested or required. The meetings had a rhythm that was only occasionally interrupted by a challenging question or dissension.

Mrs. Green understood her role as leading the team during the mandated process of gathering and reporting data to the BLT. She wearily tried to garner the teams' support in completing the form and reminded them that as the team leader she was responsible for sharing their work at the next BLT meeting in May. Mrs. Green commented to the whole group, "So, I remember this [report] and I am killing myself to do it" (TBT, 5/1/14). She alluded to her dedication to completing the teams' work and the importance she placed on completing the report. She saw

herself as sparing other team members from the burden of being in the "hot seat" and was not, in turn, gaining their cooperation as expected. At the end of the next meeting, Mrs. Green reiterated her request for data.

> **Green:** Okay, so the other data and tasks for next meeting, we'll discuss the other data but if you can get it in to me by the weekend would be great and I could look, we could look good at the [BLT] meeting, we each look good that way. I mean we're all good, and we need to show that. We are doing well. We are actually having these discussions (TBT, 5/8/14).

Mrs. Green surfaces an interesting theme in this passage – the need to "look good" at the BLT. The team, even the reluctant participants, understood the need to look good for the BLT and show that they were meeting the expectations set out by school and district leadership.

The May 18 team meeting I observed occurred on the day of the building leadership team (BLT) meeting at which Mrs. Green was expected to report the math team's data using Resource 21C. She began the meeting in a rushed manner; she skipped over the usual review of the norms and jumped directly into the discussion of the team data (see Figure 12).

Green: So it's our BLT meeting today, so I have done the typical form [for the BLT], I couldn't wait. Two people still haven't done the post testing, as far as I know, they didn't send me any data. I did give [the request] to them on time. You know I think everything was on time.
Richmond: Oh, yes.
Green: So three people got the data in and that was [Ms. Coates], myself, [Mrs. Richmond].
Richmond: And the BLT meeting is this afternoon.
Green [speaking more quickly than usual]: This is what I take to the BLT and I talk about it, yeah. I have ten minutes to talk about it and I have to be concise so on the previous times the BLT, this is a continuing document, so I've put this up (TBT, 5/15/14).

Figure 12. **Clip from TBT meeting transcript, 5/15/2014**

When Mrs. Green introduced the problem of missing data, she made it clear that all the team members had received the data request on time (line 4). She was establishing accountability for the incomplete report, and in this instance, she opted to verbally identify the three team members who did turn in their data rather than naming the two who did not comply (line 6-7). By doing this, she managed to indirectly identify the two teachers who did not contribute to the team report without having to address them directly. She asserted her authority as team leader in a way that was more implicit than explicit. Mr. Mallard, who had not turned in his data, leaned back in his chair and avoided eye contact with the other teachers by looking down at the agenda. After some further discussion of the upcoming BLT meeting agenda and procedures, discussion returned to the missing data (see Figure 13).

1 **Mallard:** [Mrs. Green], you said you wanted the data yesterday,
2 can I give it to you today or is it too late?
3 **Green:** Well I've sent it to everybody in the BLT you see I turned it in and I waited
4 until it was about 11 o'clock last night and I just, you know, yeah. [pause]
5 I do turn on my computer at home so I hadn't gotten it, I mean I could have left the
6 computer on but I guess I didn't have time during the day.
7 **Mallard** [nodding]**:** Yeah, I mean, I understand that. I am just being lazy.
8 **Green:** Okay [pause].
9 And then maybe you could prepare a little sheet like this and give it to me so I can
10 take it to the BLT?
11 **Mallard** [nodding]: Okay.
12 **Green:** Thank you. Yeah, because you have it, just print off your summary. So I just
13 have to take it along with me (TBT, 5/15/14).

Figure 13. **Clip from TBT meeting transcript, 5/15/2014**

This was an interesting discussion, as Mr. Mallard acknowledged his failure and made his apology in a way that a student might. Mrs. Green received it as a practical matter: Turning in his data at the end of the day (line 2), would be of no use. She also took the time to explain her efforts to be available via email even at home. He briefly conceded to her authority and took responsibility by admitting his "lazy" behavior (line 7), and Mrs. Green in turn offered her own solution (line 9), which would allow Mr. Mallard to meet the expectation of sharing his data with the BLT and the expectation that she collect data from all teachers on the team. They negotiated a way for them both to complete the tasks as required. Mrs. Green offered Mr. Mallard—and thus the team—a way to minimally meet the requirement

of presenting a full data report to the BLT. Their exchange was, in this way, a collegial moment too.

During our interview, Mr. Mallard explained the importance of the Resource 21C report:

> So [Mrs. Green] takes this information and she goes back and she has a discussion with the BLT and Mr. Forrest and the other administrators and she has this discussion about what we are doing in our team. This is our evidence of what we are doing in our team, our team meetings. This is the data that was compiled from our assessments that we created. Our goal was to focus on solving equations across the department (2014).

For the math teachers, Resource 21C represented evidence of their meeting the expectations set by Mr. Forrest, the building leadership team, and the district leadership team. They were intent on *preparing the evidence* that showed they did what they were supposed to do. Their MWIP work had become a *performance* for the very real purpose of ensuring their principal and other leaders knew they were doing their jobs as mandated.

Chapter 6: Findings and Implications

This chapter is organized around three prominent findings resulting from my study. For each finding I have suggested implications for three groups, addressing practitioners separately from policymakers and researchers. These implications are drawn, as much as possible, from my study findings. It is difficult to extrapolate from this limited data strong recommendations for specific actions to be taken by practitioners, policymakers, or researchers. The implications I suggest are more so recommendations for further inquiry, possibilities and consequences to consider when making local decisions, and questions for educators to ask ourselves as we consider the repercussions policy decisions have for teams of teachers.

Finding 1: Mandating high school departments to serve as collaborative teacher-based teams does not "solve" teacher isolation.

Implications for practitioners

The math team at Cardinal High School was mandated to work together and was responsible for meeting the expectations set forth by their principal and district policy. The district repurposed departmental teams to serve as collaborative teacher-based teams (TBTs). In the departmental structure there was a clear leader – the department chairperson. The new organization of TBTs promised to engage in

shared leadership and communication among teams at multiple levels of the organization, to the benefit of student and teachers alike. The promises were repeated and, it seems, largely un-examined. The transition to this new organization happened in name only for the math teachers at Cardinal. The TBT plan was simply grafted onto the departmental faculty organization. Those organizational imperatives were never examined, and thus the promise of transformative collaborations that would yield substantive changes to instructional practice, and student achievement, did not show itself.

While some of the math teachers at Cardinal High School expressed frustration with being physically isolated and missing out on opportunities to collaborate, the attempted solution to their isolation, teacher-based teams, paradoxically impinged on their professional autonomy. The solitary nature of teaching has led to a professional belief that the classroom, its students, resources and instructional practices, are all the responsibility of the teacher and any attempt to control or change what happens in the individual classroom is an affront on a teacher's autonomous practice (De Lima, 2001). This sense of autonomy or individual professionalism manifests itself in a professional identity that is sensitive to evaluation and critique (De Lima, 2001). This sensitivity makes mandated collaboration difficult at best.

Policymakers and administrators need to consider the probability that re–purposing high school content area departments as collaborative teams, and

supposing that these organizations will now effectively serve two substantial tasks, will result in limited, or even diminished success. There is no evidence in the policy documents that how indeed departmental life proceeds was ever considered, or that the traffic over these organizational bridges was now being doubled. The policy documents seem to have written an imagined space, aligned it with high hopes and ambitions, and mandated the exercise.

District leaders and administrators clearly have a role in passing along these assumptions. But they could have a more productive role if they were to speak on behalf of the building organizations already in place, the weight and urgency of their tasks, and the prevailing responsibility of teachers to achieve them. One can gain the impression that the promises of policy pre-empt the daily charge of classroom teachers, in a kind of contest of moral goods.

District and school leaders should consider other configurations for organizing teams that might be more productive. Options could include organizing around instructional goals (i.e., a team focused on developing project based learning), professional development interests (i.e., a team interested in studying universal design for learning), or self-selected teams based on existing relationships. While keeping the schedule and organization of content area teams is likely an easier transition for scheduling and continuation of departmental tasks (i.e., distribution of textbooks, administration of tests, sharing new policies) the previous

hierarchy and collegial expectations are retained and inhibit the development of collaboration.

Policymakers and administrators also need to be keenly aware that teachers may not see anything "wrong" with their current autonomous professional practice. The notion that collaboration is essential to improving student learning denies the validity of more independent forms of professional practice (Hargreaves, 1994). Leadership should take the time to carefully communicate the theory and research supporting collaborative teacher-based teams, without degrading teachers' current independent practice as something less than professional (De Lima, 2001). Instead, these policy initiatives seem to have presumed the high values of collaboration, and recommend them a kind of moral good. But there is little evidence that these policies developed in the company of a close consideration of how indeed public education and classroom instruction work as organizational forms.

Implications for researchers and policymakers

Researchers have discussed the theoretical relationship between teacher communities, teacher learning and school improvement, and theorized how they might be otherwise organized (see Achinstein, 2002; Calderon, 1999; De Lima, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 2001; Smylie & Evans, 2006; Webster-Wright, 2009) but many of these studies assume that the organization of communities and relationships can be freely chosen. The intended goal of these teams (also referred to as communities of practice, professional learning communities, teacher- based

teams) is to create occasions for teachers to work *collaboratively* to improve their practice and student outcomes (Malen & Cochran, 2008). The reality is that many teachers, like the ones in Cardinal High School, work in mandated teams organized by well-intentioned administrators attempting to improve student achievement. They work within actual context of organizational resources and constraints, and it seems that it is precisely these practical organizational circumstances that the reform and policy literatures too seldom consider. Instead, they tend to mandate 'collaboration', and then puzzle over the difficulties that follow.

This raises questions for the researchers studying school reform policies. Race to the Top (RttT) and the Midwestern Improvement Process (MWIP) both included teacher collaboration as a primary lever in improving student achievement. They published guides with significant content advocating the use of collaborative teams and proposing criteria for evaluating teamwork. But their discourse was largely one of un-examined claims and stipulations. Based on this study, researchers might pursue a line of inquiry around the practical contingencies of collaborative team making. It might also examine the connection between teacher collaboration and improved student achievement, as a practical, demonstrable matter Are collaborative teams the only way to achieve innovation and improvement? Perhaps centrally, is the discourse of collaboration largely a cultural disposition, a constellation of values and preferences about the ways things should be?

As I considered the policy push toward collaborative teaming by the State and the federal Education Department the reasoning behind the policies became murky. While not clearly articulated in the policy documents, both policies imply that the culture of teachers working autonomously is problematic. The use of the term "isolation" points directly to this connotation of something erroneous, even unhealthy (MWIP Complete Guide, 2012a). Research might then ask: what is the relationship between poor student performance and teacher isolation? Are autonomy, or isolation, obstacles to achievement? And perhaps research has asked these questions. My observation is that the policy documents examined in this study seem to have no need for them.

The intention of Midwestern Improvement Process (MWIP) at Cardinal High School was to utilize existing departmental teams to create collaborative teacher-based teams (TBTs). Prior to my observations and interviews, I hadn't considered the transition from department to TBT to be relevant. The math teachers revealed the persistent nature of the prevailing departmental structure: There is a chair, who is responsible for organizational tasks, who works long hours to achieve them, who has support from the administration, but modest support from the faculty. How does the lingering culture and hierarchy of high school departments impact the development of collaboration, and how could it not?

Finding 2: Pedagogical incongruence can inhibit collaboration among high school teachers.

Implications for practitioners

Teachers' beliefs about pedagogy and their professional practice are both professional and personal. Teachers who have worked with students in various grades, of various abilities, first languages and social locations likely have learned and developed ways of working with those students. There are surely other ways, and other circumstances too. This is the strong sense of autonomy, yet underwriting much of the reform impulse is the development of singular "best practices." A teacher working in a professional environment of autonomy is likely not used to discussing their instructional practices with those who do not know them as well. And as we heard in our teacher interviews, the teachers we not insisting that others teach as they do. This was a concern that Mr. Nelson, the transformation coach at Cardinal High School, had not considered. Nor had I originally considered this possibility. Reformers, coaches, and school leaders need to be cognizant of the fact that teachers hold differing ideals of how to teach their subject area and may avoid discussing instructional practice in respect of each other's professional autonomy.

Advocates of teacher collaboration often see the process as one of inducing some level of cognitive dissonance, as a necessary step toward improving instructional practice (De Lima, 2001). As this study demonstrated, the math teachers at Cardinal High School were not willing to risk it; they were not willing to

disturb their collegiality, or disrespect their team leader or each other, to discuss instruction. Whereas the reform literature sees "instructional practice" largely as a technical matter, for professional classroom teachers it is a good deal more than that. Pressed to choose between collaboration and collegiality, they chose the latter.

Collegiality is essential to their continued work together, and team members can be acutely aware of the need to preserve their relationships. Allowing conflict to grow could interrupt the team's tasks and their ability to meet expectations. Calderón cautioned, "When difficulties arise among the team [members] the work is minimized or subverted. Comfort and status quo become the implicit goal" (1999, p.95).

That teachers teach differently can't be a surprise. But its impact on teacher collaboration and educational reform is not often recognized though researchers have been writing about it for years (see De Lima, 2001; Hargreaves 1994; McDermott, 1977). It did not surprise me that Ms. Coates viewed pedagogy differently than Mrs. Green. Not only were they were from different generations, they taught different topics and cohorts, and knew different relations with their students (Mrs. Green taught AP math and Ms. Coates was trained as a special education teacher).

Malen and Cochran (2008) clarified one of the problems of mandated teacher groups. Similar to the concept of contrived collegiality (Hargreaves, 1994), Malen and Cochran explained that when teachers work in teams, especially new teams,

they tend to "play community" and, "… behave as if everyone holds the same beliefs and agrees on all issues … teachers are reluctant to challenge one another's ideas. They are inclined to keep agendas on safe issues…" (p. 166). But of course, such agreements in belief and practice are precisely what these reform measures aim for. Collaboration yields consensus.

Dealing with pedagogical incongruence is like any other problem, the first step is probably to recognize it. If teams are going to participate in critical conversations about instruction, they will first need to recognize their differing pedagogical beliefs and learn how to talk about them in a productive way. But there is no such discussion to be found in the various and extensive policy documents examined in this study. Had Mr. Nelson been more aware of the teachers' differing beliefs he might have understood their reluctance to talk more about instruction. Teachers also need to know that it is acceptable to hold different beliefs. In a research world in pursuit of "best practices" it may not be surprising that teachers seldom talk about their distinctive instructional practices.

Implications for researchers and policymakers

Researchers have noted that when teachers on a team hold divergent pedagogical beliefs or preferences, there exists the potential for disagreement over instructional choices, as well as the possibility that team members will judge each other's professional practice (De Lima, 2001; Malen & Cochran, 2008). The Cardinal High School math team carefully avoided discussion of instruction by limiting the

topics their conversations (Mr. Nelson would say there were limited to steps 1 and 2 of the MWIP 5-Step Process). They chose to focus discussions on assessments and assessment data, and set their goals around the production of evidence to share with the BLT, topics that could maximize consensus and support collegial relations.

Malen and Cochran (2008) wrote about the inevitability of conflict among teachers in most organizational structures. They posited that, "Teacher-teacher interactions have individual, group, and organizational effects. They are a source of frustration and satisfaction as well as a source of stress and support for the individuals involved" (p. 167) (see also Achinstein, 2002). The frustration Malen and Cochran described is "cognitive conflict" wherein teachers challenge each other to question the status quo and push their thinking toward new ideas and perspectives. Practitioners in coaching and professional development roles would benefit from knowing more about instructional diversity, and how to help teachers talk about their distinctive instructional practices and their contexts. Conflict and debate are inherent to social and professional interactions (De Lima, 2001). Teacher teams are no different, we just need to know how to utilize that "conflict" productively to enhance their work.

Finding 3: Teachers rely on existing systems and professional relationships to make sense of new policy implementation at the teacher-team level.

Implications for practitioners

Cardinal High School has been in the business of educating students since the 1920's – that's almost 100 years of developing internal norms, cultures, political alliances, systems of communication, hierarchies, and more. District and school leaders need to be aware of the importance of local systems and cultures when planning for policy changes. Decisions about policy changes need to account for the local contexts where policies will be implemented – a school is not a tabula rasa, a blank canvas on which to draw new expectations.

It's no surprise that prior to MWIP, the mathematics department at Cardinal High School was a functioning team, carrying out their required tasks. For as long as they had been there, all the math teachers knew Mrs. Green as the department chairperson. The existing departmental system included a hierarchy, with department chairpersons at the top of the system. Departmental meetings were already occurring regularly. The teachers used the departmental meetings as forums to share and discuss relevant topics depending on current concerns or events happening in the school or district.

MWIP attempted to impose collaborative structures *on top of* already existing high school departments across the state. What MWIP did not take into account were the local contexts in which implementation would occur. For example, MWIP

called for shared leadership. The guides on the State website envisioned the sharing of decision-making responsibilities and rotating the role of facilitator among team members. There is little in this vision to debate against. However, in reality at Cardinal, trying to impose shared leadership onto a system that has been hierarchical for many years was not a productive endeavor. As we heard from the teachers, Mrs. Green was still the "chair", she was responsible for creating agendas, facilitating meetings, representing the team at the building leadership team (BLT) meeting, in addition to the usual responsibilities of a high school department chairperson (e.g., distributing textbooks, attending district-wide meetings, ordering supplies). These were not roles that Mrs. Green wanted to share with her team members, nor did the team members want any part of the additional responsibilities. Roles, responsibilities, and relationships already existed among team members, with an underlying understanding that preserving collegial relationships was a priority. Prior to MWIP, they had norms for how to act and interact they just weren't written at the top of the weekly agenda or Resource 21C.

District and school leaders need to be aware of and plan for the existing social and political contexts in which new expectations will be implemented. What may be an appropriate expectation at one school or for one team may not be appropriate for another. While I didn't observe collaborative discussions of lesson plans during math team meetings, they may be taking place naturally in another teacher-based team for whom the practice was an appropriate expectation. Maybe it

is time for leaders to consider differentiating school reform policies to better match the needs of the teachers and schools in which they are trying to make change. Because, ultimately, it is local educators who decide what's doable in their context as policies come and go and they remain in the school, as part of the math department.

Implications for researchers and policymakers

Policymakers are even further from the local context of teacher-based teams than school and district leaders. They are making decisions without considering differences in local contexts or may not be considering local contexts at all. Policy decisions cannot be made with no regard for how they will be interpreted and filtered as the policy trickles down through the layers of bureaucracy.

Teacher-based teams are a level of the educational system that researchers have yet to really explore. However, they are becoming a more and more important part of policy implementation (Honig & Hatch, 2004). This study illustrates how a team of teachers can serve as a filter of policy and make critical decisions that determine what actually gets implemented. Researchers and policymakers need to be aware of the role of teacher teams as intermediaries in policy implementation. How do teams make decisions about what pieces of policy they will implement? Are these conscious, purposeful decisions? Or do teams naturally filter out what they are uncomfortable with as they try to implement all of the new expectations? I believe the math teachers in this study unconsciously chose the pieces of MWIP and RttT

that they were comfortable with, and rejected the pieces that didn't fit into their context. Because teacher teams have this power of accepting and rejecting policy (though they are unaware of it) policymakers need to be more cognizant of the role teacher teams play.

Not all teacher teams are the same and therefore not all local contexts are the same. This seems like a straightforward statement yet much of our education policy is written without consideration of this important fact. Policy comes with the assumption that it will be implemented in a sterile, hermetic environment. Then the policy gets to the teachers in their real work setting, with relationships that need to be preserved and norms to be considered as the teachers decide what parts of a policy fit into their everyday milieu.

Chapter 7: Reflections and Conclusions

Reflections

Research goals

As I reflected on my research I came across a passage from Geertz (2000) that eloquently described the circuitous journey I took from identifying a team to observe, changing my focus and what I thought I knew, and then what I discovered through my field work and the process of writing and re-reading transcripts and field notes.

> This backward order of things – first you write and then you figure out what you are writing about – may seem odd, or even perverse, but it is, I think, at least most of the time, standard procedure in cultural anthropology. Some pretenders to high science and higher technique aside, we do not start out with well-formed ideas we carry off to distant places to check out by means of carefully codified procedures systematically applied. We go off to those places, or increasingly these days, ones closer by, with some general notions of what we would like to look into and of how we might go about looking into them. We then in fact look into them (or, often enough, look instead into others that turn out to be more interesting), and after doing so we return to sort through our notes and memories, both of them defective, to see what we might have uncovered that clarifies anything or leads on to useful revisions of received ideas, our own or someone else's about something or other. The writing this produces is accordingly exploratory, self-questioning, and shaped more by the occasions of its production than its post-hoc organization into chaptered books and thematic monographs might suggest (Geertz, 2000, p. v–vi).

When I began my observations at Cardinal High School I had the broad notion of studying how teachers make sense of policy and implement mandated improvement processes. I aimed at adding to the literature on teacher-based teams as the site of policy implementation. My interest was in how teacher teams understood new policies, worked through the mandated processes, and made sense of the tasks required to meet expectations, and also how the literature had found a new faith in teachers and teacher teams as the policy implementation venue.

But neither researchers nor policymakers had looked closely at how the work of teacher teams would be organized to engage policy initiatives. I anticipated analyzing how a teacher team made sense of mandated policies, negotiating the implementation of selected aspects of state and federal policies. My experience and conclusions surprised me.

The role of collaboration in school reform policy

My first observations at Cardinal High School drew my attention to the roles of the different team members – coach, team leader, team members, and the addition of special education teachers. I was curious how these players influenced the teams' work. I quickly saw that their roles were not independently significant, they were team members with distinct yet unexceptional roles. Of all things, I saw that the "teams" were effectively the faculty who constitute the content areas of the school's curriculum. A familiar organization of teachers was directed to take on an

unfamiliar task, in addition to their familiar tasks. It sounded like a recipe for uncertainty.

The first "conclusion" I drew was during my interview with Mr. Nelson, the District assigned "coach". I observed the team working on preparing their data and Resource 21C for the building leadership team (BLT) meeting. Mr. Nelson and I discussed this work and that, by his account, the team was continuing to work on Step 2 of the MWIP 5-Step Process. They were spending their time on Steps 1 and 2 (gathering data and analyzing data), over and over, he said, and that to progress through the steps would entail discussions of instructional improvement. And over time, I could see how the math teachers never talked about instruction as expected in both the state and federal policies they were implementing. The observation seemed significant – teacher practice could not improve if the teachers did not discuss their practice. I envisioned a paper entitled, "The Peripheral Role of Instruction in School Reform".

The process of reading and re-reading my notes and transcripts led me to ask why instruction was on the periphery of the team's discussions, and yet so central to the Midwestern Improvement Process' (MWIP) guide (MWIP Complete Guide, 2012a) and Race to the Top's (RttT) formative assessment guide (FIP Implementation Handbook, 2013). Both included multiple references to analyzing and improving instruction through collaborative teacher-based teams. Instruction was not peripheral in either policy. Teachers were expected, mandated, to discuss

instruction in their collaborative teams but the math teachers at Cardinal were not. Why not?

Ms. Coates provided a key insight when she discussed Mrs. Green's sample lesson and the incongruence between their ideas of what good instruction looks like. I looked for a theme of pedagogical incongruence in other transcripts but didn't see it. But I did notice that the teachers avoided conflicts, quickly recognizing and diffusing difficult conversations, working hard to be polite and get along, and to find tasks they could pursue that way.

The issue was more than just pedagogical incongruence, it was also their efforts at preserving their relationships, their collegiality. The teachers were avoiding discussions of instruction in an effort to maintain relationships, sometimes tenuous, and to show respect to the team leader. Though her role in MWIP was that of team leader, the teachers still viewed Mrs. Green as the department chairperson and deferred to her authority throughout their meetings, and left her to her tasks as chair. It wasn't just that instruction was peripheral for the team meetings, it was collaboration and collaborative discussions that were missing. Collaboration, an essential part of the current school reform landscape (Kimmel, 2012) was eluding the math team as they worked to maintain relationships and show how they had met expectations. It was eluding them for good reasons. My inquiry changed direction as I was writing these observations. The writing process led me to see additional themes beyond the peripheral role of instruction.

Opportunities for further inquiry

Subject-area context: Mathematics team

I did not plan for, or examine closely, the role of subject area context in shaping factors like the content of conversations or team dynamics. During the selection process, I met with two teams: Mathematics and English language arts. How would the study have turned out differently if the English language arts team had agreed to participate?

Spillane and Burch (2006) discussed instruction as being domain-specific. In particular, they argued that we need to analyze mathematical instruction separate from instruction in English language arts because each curricular area is multidimensional and influenced by multiple professional and governance structures. It is also worth noting that mathematics and language arts have received much more attention from state and federal policymakers than other curricular areas. Federal, state, and local accountability systems tend to focus on student achievement in mathematics and reading in lieu of science and humanities. Spillane and Burch (2006) explained that each subject area is "… built around its own unique set of epistemological assumptions and practices, and each is constituted by very different patterns of large, macrosocial organization" (p. 90).

I had not included content area as a factor in my inquiry because I was not engaging in a comparative study. Therefore, my observations and interviews did not include a focus on mathematics as part of the context. During my analysis, I began to

regret this omission because I questioned the teachers' focus on organizing data into tables to create Resource 21C. How did the focus on data relate to the fact that these were math teachers? Would English teachers have placed so much emphasis on organizing their assessment data? Maybe the math teachers were stuck on step two of the 5-Step Process because they enjoyed collecting and analyzing data. Maybe a science team would have the same inclination.

A next step for inquiry after this study would be a comparative study that looked more carefully at how content area context is related to the work of the teacher-based team. This could inform the work of coaches working with content area teams. It could possibly suggest further evidence that researchers and policymakers consider different factors around which we can organize teacher teams.

Mandated teaming

This study revealed some of the limitations of mandated teaming at the high school level. Further research is needed to guide policymakers in designing guidance for schools and districts. Some of these topics surfaced in my review of literature but were outside the scope of my research questions. Researchers have advocated for teacher collaboration and organic professional learning communities, yet they need to consider the real-world application of teaming.

Further research is needed to improve the use of mandated teams or provide evidence for alternate teaming opportunities. This study revealed several topics that

could help policymakers and administrators create better teaming opportunities for teachers:

- Creating trusting relationships
- Embracing pedagogical incongruence
- Avoiding contrived collegiality
- Encouraging cognitive conflict
- Creating teams through self-selection
- Providing collaborative opportunities beyond teacher-based teams

Teacher identities

My inquiry revealed the importance of teacher identities when analyzing team interactions. I had not planned to consider identity factors that became important during my analysis:

- Age
- Seniority
- Training
- Race
- Gender

The mathematics team at Cardinal High School was very diverse and I was left wondering how that diversity was related to their professional relationships, their collegiality, and their ability or willingness to collaborate. Research analyzing how teacher identities are related to professional relationships and teacher collaboration

would shine light on some of the barriers or opportunities to creating environments in which teachers can trust each other enough to engage in more difficult conversations.

"Trickle down" of policy

This study of policy implementation highlights the need for further research into how teacher teams serve as intermediaries or filters of federal, state, and local policies. The decisions made at the teacher team level can determine what does and does not get implemented.

In my review of literature there were few studies that looked at this level of the educational system. However, I found that teachers at the team level have a great deal of influence as to how policies are implemented. In this case, the math team utilized the tools available, including the prescribed agenda format and reporting form, yet they did not engage in instructional improvement, a major goal of both policies.

Darling-Hammond (1990) clearly articulated the importance of local context as policy arrives in schools:

> The way in which teachers and other school people encounter and interpret policy is not just a function of how a particular policy is transmitted to them. It is also a function of the educational context within which the policy lands after it careens down the state school hierarchy (p. 343).

What Darling-Hammond recognized almost 30 years ago continues to be an important and not yet realized area of policy research. Multiple policies landed in

teacher teams at Cardinal High School and schools across the state at the same time. Teams were tasked with implementing a mix of expectations concurrently. We need a better understanding of how teams negotiate their way through the new mandates and expectations, and how their local contexts, and even their individual identities, impact how policy is implemented. This is an area of research that could inform how districts and policymakers communicate new policies to schools and how they plan for support of local implementation.

Conclusion

This study provided me an opportunity to step away from my work as an employee of a state education agency to look more closely at how the decisions made at state departments of education and the federal Department of Education are realized in schools. There is a lot of talk in education policy about the use of teacher-based teams as a vehicle for policy implementation. They are seen as a level of the educational system that can be used to encourage collaboration and improve communication. However, my inquiry revealed that there are local social and political factors at the teacher team level that policymakers have not anticipated.]

This study also serves as a reminder that the most obvious answers are not always the correct ones. At the state level, there is much debate around why policies like Race to the Top (RttT) and the Midwestern Improvement Process (MWIP) are not having the intended results. An easy answer is that teachers and administrators are not really engaging in the processes and just participating in order to receive the

accompanying funding. A closer look shows that there is a great deal of effort on the part of teachers, just not directed at the intended targets. Teachers are not avoiding implementation because they don't care or they don't know how. Teachers are working in real schools, with real politics and social relationships that impact what they can and cannot do. Policymakers need a better understanding of these local contexts to appreciate the barriers to policy implementation and to inform policies better designed to be implemented in real school contexts.

I very much appreciated the time and honesty of the math teachers at Cardinal High School. They trusted me to observe and participate in their conversations. They shared their concerns and their own observations with me. This team of math teachers was earnestly working to meet policy expectations, while continuing to work at their primary goal of teaching mathematics to their students. They may not have met the MWIP definition of a collaborative team, but that was not because they didn't care or were not trying – they were simply acting practically in their local context.

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Appendix A: Operational definitions and acronyms

Teacher-based teams (TBTs)

In the related literature, researchers used multiple terms to refer to teachers working in collaborative teams. Among these terms were professional learning communities, professional learning teams, inquiry teams, critical friends groups, and teacher-based teams. McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) used the phrase 'teacher learning communities' to define the collaborative effort of teams to discuss new practice and support professional growth. For professional teams that might be described as sharing a culture, Lave and Wenger suggested "communities of practice" (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). Similarly, Wolcott (2008) argued that, "The phrase 'community of practice' invites attention to a group on the basis of the shared practices and beliefs of its members … Community in this sense is defined by what people do, not by who belongs" (p. 251). All of these terms seek to describe teachers who share a local culture and work and learn collaboratively. Because of its prevalence in MW, I chose to use the term 'teacher-based teams' to refer to teacher teams as they work and learn collaboratively as part of their professional responsibilities and relationships.

Content area

During my research, I struggled with the multiple ways researchers and teachers referred to the academic domains or disciplines used to organize classes in school settings. Among the terms used were curricular area, discipline, domain, subject matter, etc. In an effort to be consistent, I have used 'content area' as an overarching term. However, some of the researchers quoted do use other interchangeable terms.

Acronyms

The acronyms listed here reflect my use of the pseudonym Midwestern State (MW) to refer to the setting of this study. All of the state level organizations and resources utilize the MW pseudonym or something similar. I listed the federal level organizations and policies with their given titles without the use of pseudonyms.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). ESEA was originally authorized in 1965 and has been reauthorized every five years since. The reauthorization of ESEA in 2001 was branded as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Formative Instructional Practices (FIP). Formative Instructional Practices is the term used by the MW Department of Education to refer to professional development resources focusing on formative assessment developed through Race to the Top.

Local Education Agency (LEA). The local agency overseeing schools, typically a district or county.

Midwestern State Department of Education (MWDE). The state education agency for Midwestern State (pseudonym).

Midwestern State Improvement Process (MWIP). Developed by the State Leadership Advisory Council (SLAC), MWIP is a structured process focusing on the use of data to inform educational decision-making. MWIP includes a set of resources and tools for reviewing and analyzing relevant data.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The moniker given to the policies in the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act by President George W. Bush.

Race to the Top (RttT). Part of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act authorized by President Barack Obama, Race to the Top was a grant program designed to reward states already raising student achievement. The intention of the grant, as described by the U.S. Department of Education, "These States will offer models for others to follow and will spread the best reform ideas across their States, and across the country" (ED, 2009, p. 2).

School Improvement Grant (SIG). A federal grant program outlined in ESEA and available to the lowest-performing schools in economically challenged communities. SIG required the use of one of four intervention models (turnaround, transformation, restart, or closure).

State Association of School Administrators (SASA). A private, not-for-profit organization that served school superintendents and other administrators in MW.

State Education Agency (SEA). A state education agency is typically the state department of education or the department of public instruction.

State Leadership Advisory Council (SLAC). A joint effort of the MW Department of Education and the State Association of School Administrators, SLAC was "… a 50-member advisory and study group comprised of representatives of key professional associations, business and school board representatives, practitioners in leadership roles, higher education representatives and state department of education personnel" (SLAC, 2008, p. 2). The MW Department of Education provided funding for SLAC.

United States Department of Education (ED). Federal level agency responsible for distributing education funds to state agencies and other education organizations, collect data on U.S. schools and systems, and administer federal education laws.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Federal and state policy focus

1. Are you aware of your districts' participation in Race to the Top (RttT)?
2. Why is your district participating in RttT?
3. Are you aware of the RttT policy that requires professional development on the use of formative assessments?
4. Can you describe any previous federal education policy that has influenced your work in the past?
5. Had you ever heard of formative assessment prior to this school year? Had you ever heard of Formative Instructional Practices (FIP)?
6. Have you had training in formative assessment or FIP previously? What was the nature of that training?
7. What do you expect to learn through participating in the FIP professional development?
8. How much control does your team have over how you use the professional development resources?
9. Please share some examples of how you have shaped the PD to make it more appropriate for your team.
10. Have there been times when the content of the PD has felt irrelevant to your work? What was your concern with this content?
11. Does your teacher team discuss district PD policy? State policy? Federal policy?
12. How has your district's participation in RttT impacted your school? The team of teachers you work with?

13. How has your districts' participation in Race to the Top (RttT) influenced your classroom practice?

Professional learning community focus

1. Tell me about a typical teacher team meeting.
2. Do you have an identified or defined role on your teacher team?
3. What is your role in your teacher team?
4. Describe a typical team meeting when FIP would be the main topic.
5. How does your teacher team use the FIP resources?
6. What modules have you completed? When/where did you 'do' the modules? (i.e., at school, during planning period, during team meeting, at home, in free personal time) Were the modules worth your time?
7. How long have you participated in a professional learning community (teacher team)? How long has this particular team been learning together?
8. How and why were professional learning communities (teacher teams) organized at your building? How did you feel when you heard that PLCs were being established in your school?
9. Did you receive PLC training? Did everyone on the team receive this training?
10. How has your practice changed as a result of FIP online learning and team discussions?
11. What kinds of challenges has your team had with the FIP resources?
12. Do you talk with the other members of your teacher team about your classroom practice?
13. Do you ever visit each other's classes to observe teaching practice?
14. How do you provide each other feedback about your changing practice?
15. Do you find yourself informally discussing FIP implementation with colleagues? What is the nature of these conversations?

16. What would you do to improve the professional development resources available to your team?

Personal reflections

1. What are some of the benefits of being part of a teacher team?
2. What are some of the drawbacks of being part of a teacher team?
3. How do you feel about discussing your instructional practices in the teacher team setting?
4. How have you changed your classroom practice as a result of FIP participation?
5. Has your experienced differed from that of your team members? How?
6. How has your perception of the use of Formative Instructional Practices evolved during the professional development process?
7. Has participating as a teacher team enhanced or inhibited your learning?

Appendix C: Federal and State Policies in Detail

Race to the Top grant competition

Race to the Top Criteria

The Obama administration addressed school reform through the competitive distribution of Race to the Top (RttT) grants (Ravitch, 2010). As part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, the US Department of Education (ED) allotted $4.35 billion for the RttT Fund, a competitive school reform grant program (USDOE, 2009). ARRA was a funding bill intended to improve the national economy, allowing President Obama flexibility in how the funds were spent. By using this fund for education grants, the administration was able to bypass the usual Congressional processes and approvals.

The RttT fund intended to create reform in four areas:

1) Adopting internationally benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace;
2) Building data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve their practice;
3) Increasing teacher and principal effectiveness and achieving equity in their distribution; and

4) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools (USDOE, 2009).

RttT awarded funds to states that demonstrated previous success in raising student achievement and showed, "… the best plans to accelerate their reforms in the future" (USDOE, 2009, p. 2). The application process awarded funding to states with the most potential to implement the reforms identified as priorities by the ED, as reflected in grant the criteria shown in Figure 14.

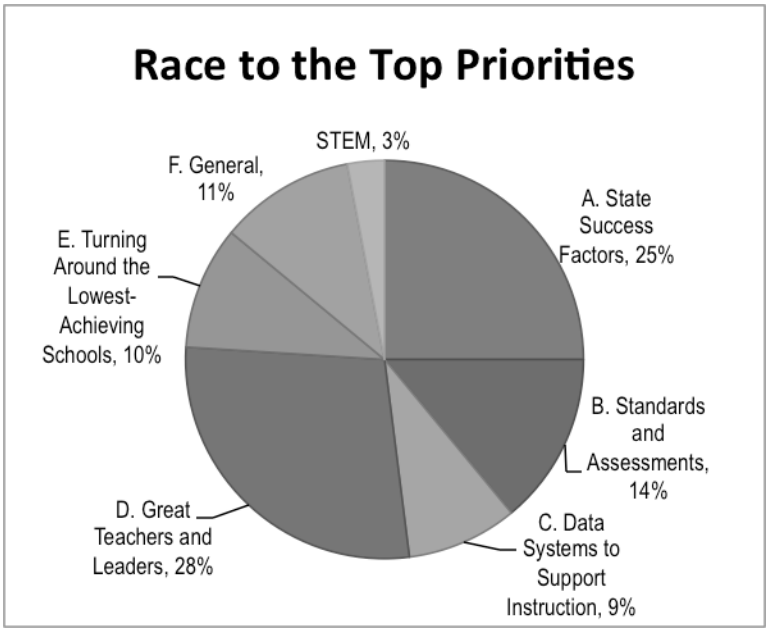

Figure 14. **Race to the Top Priorities (USDOE, 2009)**

RttT grant applications and subsequent Scopes of Work were organized around five "Application Areas" based on the grant priorities (see Table 4). These Application Areas were further broken down into statewide goals and strategies that supported the RttT priorities. My research concentrated on a single component of RttT: Application Area(C)(3), using data to improve instruction. This aspect of the

RttT policy was particularly interesting in that it encouraged the use of data within collaborative teacher-based team settings, already an essential component of the Midwestern Improvement Process (MWIP) being used across the state.

Race to the top Application Areas

A. State Success Factors
(A)(1) Articulating State's education reform agenda and LEAs' participation in it
(A)(2) Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans
(A)(3) Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps

B. Standards and Assessments
(B)(1) Developing and adopting common standards
(B)(2) Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments
(B)(3) Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments

C. Data Systems to Support Instruction
(C)(1) Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system
(C)(2) Accessing and using State data
(C)(3) Using data to improve instruction

D. Great Teachers and Leaders
(D)(1) Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals
(D)(2) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance
(D)(3) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals
(D)(4) Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs
(D)(5) Providing effective support to teachers and principals

E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools
(E)(1) Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs
(E)(2) Turning around the lowest- achieving schools

Table 4. **Four Race to the Top application areas (USDOE, 2009, p. 3)**

MWDE's RttT goals

The Midwestern Department of Education's (MWDE) successful 2010 RttT proposal resulted in a $400 million grant focusing on accelerating achievement for all students and preparing them to be college and career ready (see Table *5*) (MWDE, 2010).

MWDE's Five Race to the Top Goals
1. Increase high school graduation rates by .5% per year 2. Reduce graduation rate gaps by 50% 3. Reduce performance gaps by 50% 4. Reduce the gap between Ohio and the best- performing states in the nation by 50% 5. More than double the increase in college enrollment for 18 and 19-year-olds

Table 5. **State scope of work (MWDE website, 2013)**

This large grant award was shared among and 478 participating local education agencies (LEAs), with MWDE receiving 47% and LEAs 53% (MWDE, 2011). Expectations for the State and all LEAs were outlined in Scopes of Work, to be revised and resubmitted for approval annually. Scopes of Work served as each state's four-year plan and outlined the actions and measurable goals for each of the five Application Areas.

Focus on Formative Instructional Practices (FIP)

The US Department of Education (ED) outlined general expectations for the work completed using RttT funds, leaving specific details up to participating states. Application Area C focused on the use of data to improve instruction, including electronic data collection and delivery systems, and the use of formative and summative assessments (see Table 4). The ED RttT documents indicated that formative assessment, "… means assessment questions, tools, and processes that are embedded in instruction and are used by teachers and students to provide timely feedback for purposes of adjusting instruction to improve learning" (USDOE, 2009, p. 12).

The State's proposal and scope of work included the creation of professional development resources, including online and face to face components, to support the use of formative assessments. The resulting project was titled "Formative Instructional Practices" or "FIP" (MWDE website, 2013). The MWDE developed FIP in conjunction with a contracted non-profit organization, as well as mini-grants to regional Educational Service Centers (ESCs); eleven ESCs were awarded grants to employ full-time FIP Specialists to serve as coaches within schools. Resources made available free to all LEAs in the state included online learning modules, group facilitation resources, a video library, and ongoing support provided by FIP Specialists (see Table 6).

Resources Developed through FIP Initiative
• 56 online learning resources • Implementation handbooks • Five facilitation guides • Video library • Principal's toolkit • Presentation materials with talking points • Regional support of FIP Specialists

Table 6. **Formative instructional practices resources (MWDE website, 2013)**

All FIP resources focused on four core practices (see Figure 15) which align well with the MWIP expectations (MWDE website, n.d.). The four core practices included collecting and using data to inform instructional decisions, much like the MWIP expectations. Online learning modules concentrated on helping teachers see how each core practice could be used in their content area and with their grade level academic standards. Videos showcasing teachers in the state using the four practices were posted in a FIP video library (FIP website, n.d.). Other resources were designed to assist with implementation of the four core practices including resources for administrators, Transformation coaches, and the regional FIP Specialists.

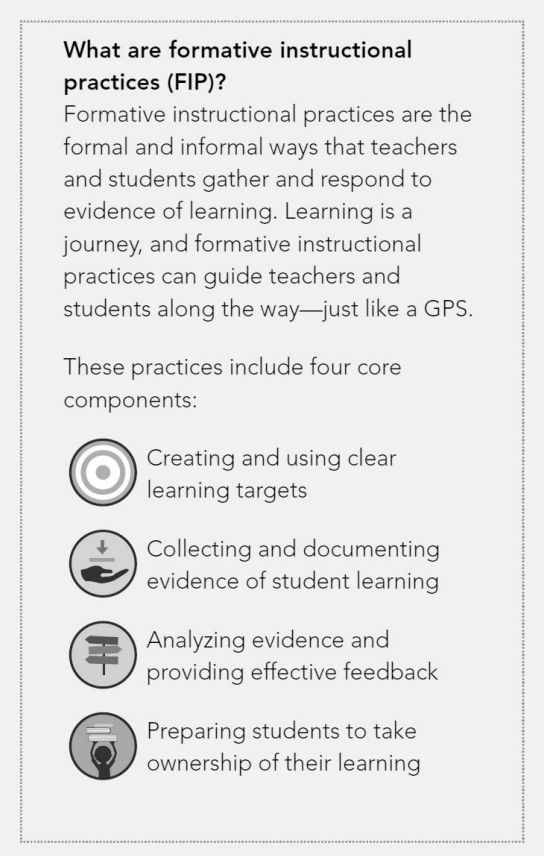

Figure 15. **Core practices of Formative Instructional Practices (FIP) (MWDE website, 2013)**

When the four-year RttT grant ended in 2014, MWDE reported that approximately 40,000 educators had enrolled in the online learning modules or 38% of the 103,400 educators statewide (MWDE website, 2014).

Midwestern State education policy: Midwestern State Improvement Process (MWIP)

The Midwestern State Leadership Advisory Committee (SLAC) was established in 2007 to assist LEAs in the State to, "… develop and support effective leadership at every level" (SLAC website, 2014). SLAC took a systems approach to this charge and created the Midwestern State Improvement Process (MWIP), "A structured process based on the use of a connected set of tools for reviewing, analyzing, and basing decisions on relevant data" (SLAC website, 2014). While the MWIP was originally designed to assist LEAs who were identified as low performing based on their annual report card data, many additional LEAs chose to participate in the process and associated professional development.

MWIP utilized collaborative team structures at the teacher, building, and district levels. The belief was that the use of teams at these three levels would help districts, "… facilitate communication, build trust and credibility, and stay focused on the collective and shared responsibility of improving student achievement" (MWDE website, n.d.). The ultimate goal was to improve student achievement through the improvement of collaboration and communication among staff members.

Participating MWIP districts had access to electronic tools to assist with the collection of data at the district, building, and teacher team levels (MWDE Complete Guide, 2012a). The process for teams at all three levels was fundamentally the same:

1) collect and analyze data to identify critical needs; 2) use data to develop a plan of action; 3) implement and monitor progress related to plan goals; and 4) evaluate the outcome of implementation. This can be seen in the Stages of MWIP (see Figure 1) and in the 5-Step Process for TBTs (see Figure 3).

A tale of two policies

RttT and MWIP were designed by policymakers at differing levels of government yet both policies focus on similar outcomes and methodologies. RttT was intended to award funds to states willing to implement the federal priorities including improved graduation, student achievement, and teacher performance. MWIP's stated goal was improved student achievement through the improved practice of teachers and administrators. Both utilized data-based decision making as an essential tool or step toward realizing the goal of improved student achievement.

At the teacher-based team level, MWIP emphasized the use of the 5-Step Process, an inquiry process designed to encourage teachers to use data to inform their instructional planning. The steps included:

1. Collect and chart data
2. Analyze data
3. Establish shared expectations for implementing specific changes
4. Implement changes consistently
5. Collect, chart, and analyze post-data (SLAC website, 2014; see Figure 3)

When compared with the four core practices of FIP, there is clear overlap with the second practice, "collect and document evidence of student learning" (FIP website, n.d.). Other areas of overlap included the use of learning targets – while not explicit in the MWIP 5-Step Process, teachers were required to develop assessments aligned to learning goals, termed "clear learning targets" in FIP.

For districts, the benefit of implementing both FIP, as part of RttT, and MWIP was access to the professional development and decision-making resources made available through both policies. The FIP online learning modules provided districts with free professional development for all of their teachers as funded through RttT (FIP website, n.d.). The modules and the accompanying resources emphasized the use of teacher-based teams as learning communities and MWIP districts were well positioned to use these resources in their teacher-based teams. The alignment of the two policies and the available tools allowed districts to engage in both policies at the same time, with the assistance of Transformation coaches through MWIP and FIP Specialists through RttT.

Appendix D: Artifacts

Artifact 1: MWIP Resource 21

Resource 21C: TBT 5-Step Process Meeting Agenda and Minutes Template

Date Time Site

Department/Grade level: **Department/ Grade level Chairperson/Facilitator:**

Recorder: **Timekeeper:**

Team Members Present:

1.	2.	3.	4.
5.	6.	7.	8.

Step 1: Collect and chart data to identify how students are performing/progressing	• *Data is ready and brought by all teachers* • *Item analysis is done* • *Data provided prior to meeting*	• *Includes # and % of students tested/proficient and not proficient*	• *Subgroup data is reported* • *Determine benchmark score for grouping criteria*
What data has been collected by the TBT?			
Step 2: Analyze student work specific to the data	• *Determine overall student strengths.* • *Are there patterns or trends??*	• *Were there common errors?* • *Are there urgent needs?*	• *Were there misconceptions?* • *Prioritize needs for next steps.*
What does the data tell you about the students' learning?			
Step 3: Establish shared expectations for implementing specific effective changes in the classroom	• *How will students be grouped for instruction?* • *What differentiated strategies will be used?*	• *When will this instruction happen, e.g., during core class, intervention period, enrichment time, after-school tutoring?* • *What support/training in a specific strategy is needed?*	• *Determine length/frequency of instruction. How many minutes/days and weeks?* • *Decide on post assessment.*
What instructional strategies will be employed in the classroom to address individual student needs?			

Step 4: Implement changes consistently across all classrooms	• *Tie walk-throughs to the strategies the TBT has chosen to implement.*	• *Ensure feedback is provided to the staff.* • *Peer to peer classroom visits can occur to work as a team on tuning the instructional strategy.*
What will be observed in the classrooms? What will the teacher be doing? What will the students be doing?		

Step 5: Collect, chart and analyze pre/post data	• *Everyone comes with assessments scored and data ready.*	• *Best practices shared from classroom teachers with high student results on post-test*	• *Include pre data and post data for all students and any subgroups* • *Use same chart from Step 1 to collect/record data*
What does the post-data look like? What instructional practices proved to be successful?			

Meeting Evaluation	• *What was the level of implementation of the 5-Step Process - full, partial, not at all?*	• *What did we learn - successes and obstacles?* • *Reflections*	• *What do we need as a result of this meeting... obtain PD, receive support, additional resources, etc.*
What was successful? What needs to be revised or changed?			

Communicate	• *What message(s) needs to be delivered?* • *How will the message be delivered?*	• *Who needs to receive the message ...students, families, other TBTs, BLT?* • *What feedback, if any, is needed?*
How will two-way communication be accomplished?		
Assignments/Next Steps	• *What needs to be done between now and the next meeting?* • *Who is assigned to do it?*	• *What do we need to bring to the next meeting?*
What are the next steps to prepare for the next meeting?		

PARKING LOT (What other issues need to be addressed at **another date**?)
•

Artifact 2: Resource 21C, Cardinal High School Mathematics Team

Resource 21C: TBT 5-Step Process Meeting Agenda and Minutes Template

Date___ May 15, 2014 ___ Time ___ Period 3 ___ Site ____ School Room 102____
Department/Grade level: Mathematics Facilitator:
Recorder: Timekeeper:
Process Checker: Reflective Questioner:
Team Members Present:

1.	2.	3.	4.
5.	6.	7.	8.

School Goal:
Achieve increase of 13% proficiency on OGT mathematics results for each of the next 3 years.

Target Goal for Standard Being Taught:
Develop an instrument that will measure each student's progress in learning on the Algebra - Reasoning with Equations and Inequalities [A-REI] standard over a three year period [Grades 9, 10, and 11].

TBT Meeting Norms:
Stay focussed on the task at hand
Be on time and be prepared
A reviewed, timed agenda
Respect the opinions of others
Strive for concensus decision-making of the team

Step 1: Collect and chart data to identify how students are performing/progressing

PLC Guiding Questions: *What do we expect our students to learn?*

Guiding Questions & Tips

- What data has been collected by the TBT?
- What are the student outcomes based on:
  - Pre and/or Post-assessment data
  - Exit tickets
  - Standardized assessments
  - Diagnostic assessments
  - Common formative assessments
  - Running records
  - Quick checks
- Include # and % of students tested, proficient and not proficient - report student group data

A three item pretest was administered for the A-REI 1 standard.
Student responses were scored on a four point [0-3]rubric, collecting evidence of the following learning achievements:
I can recall and explain the properties of equality. [Knowledge and Reasoning]
One item: Identify; Explain
I can explain each step in solving an equation and justify the solution method. [Knowledge]
One item: Correct equation; Method; Solve; Explain;
One item(stretch): Method; Solve; Explain
Data broken down by Teacher:

	Red - Intensive Working Below Standard		Yellow - Targeted Progressing Toward Standard		Green - Benchmarked Meets the Standard		Blue - Advanced Meets the Standard	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
	29		29		12		6	
	23	18	17	16	10	12	4	6
	24	12	17	13	3	10	0	6
	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
	29	14	13	8	0	2	0	0
	35	34	0	4	0	1	0	0
TotalTestedPre:256 TotalTestedPost:	145		76		25		10	
	57.6%		29.7%		9.7%		3.9%	

	Student % Correct	*Student Ability to Explain(%)*
	57.2	40.4
	53.9	44.2
	44.3	38.4
	12.3	4.4
	30.77	19.0
	11.8	2.2
Total %:	42.64	31.4

General Procedure for Posttest
(i) The students pretest (photocopy) was to be returned corrections to test items were made.
(ii) A Test Correction Document was given to students. This gave an opportunity for students provide a written response: analyzing their test answers, and then explaining how the test question could be answered correctly.[Student ownership of learning]
(iv) Students were then asked to review their Test Correction Document and choose two actions that would improve their test score when next taking a test. [Student ownership of learning]
(iii) A three item posttest was administered for the A-REI 1 standard.
The test rubric and analysis remained the same as for the pretest.

Data from Test Correction Document

examined student action responses and determined that students listed most often an action of reading the question more carefully. Attending class and providing an explanation of work were listed most often as a second action students would take. Third tier actions were arithmetic errors, attentivenesss and checking work.

mentioned developing common strategies across department and all BLTs...e.g. focus on reading by developing a common theme/strategy building wide.

Data for individual teachers

	Intensive	Targeted	Benchmarked	Advanced	Aver.Score	Correct%	Explain%
Pretest	100%	0%	0%	0%	3.2	12.31	4.4
PostTest	100%	0%	0%	[illegible]	5.6	21.54	15.6

	Intensive	Targeted	Benchmarked	Advanced	Aver.Score	Correct%	Explain%
Pretest	69%	31%	0%	0%	8	30.77	19.0
PostTest	58%	34%	8%	0%	9.67	37.18	27.8

	Intensive	Targeted	Benchmarked	Advanced	Aver.Score	Correct%	Explain%
Pretest	53%	38%	6%	0%	11.5	44.3	38.4
PostTest	29%	32%	24%	15%	17.4	65.1	55.0

	Intensive	Targeted	Benchmarked	Advanced	Aver.Score	Correct%	Explain%
Pretest	100%	0%	0%	0%	3.06	11.8	2.2
PostTest	87%	10%	3%	0%	6.74	25.9	14.8

	Intensive	Targeted	Benchmarked	Advanced	Aver.Score	Correct%	Explain%
Pretest	43%	31%	19%	7%	14	53.9	44.2
PostTest	35%	31%	23%	12%	15.2	58.6	50.2

Artifact 3: Sample Agenda for Mathematics Teacher-Based Team Meeting

1

To: Mathematics Teachers
From:
Thursday May 15, 2014 – Period 3

TBT Norms	Non-negotiable norms
(i) Stay focussed on the task at hand (ii) Be on time and be prepared (iii) A reviewed timed agenda (iv) Respect for the opinions of others (v) Strive for consensus decision-making	(i) Team structure for collaboration (ii) Common focus (iii) Shared formative assessments (iv) 5-step process as a protocol

Agenda

attended by:

1. Welcome and re-state and review meeting Norms [6 mins]

2. Results from A-REI 1 Post Test and Student Correction Document [24 mins]

3. Report back on Instructional Strategies to make effective changes in the classroom.
   (i) Precision and language
   (ii) Rubrics with assessments [9 mins]
   (iii)

4. Summarizing statement [4 mins]

5. Tasks for next meeting: [4 mins]