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# Negotiating Implementation of High-Stakes Performance Assessment Policies in Teacher Education: From Compliance to Inquiry

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## Abstract

Teacher education programs in the United States face a variety of new accountability policies at both the federal and the state level. Many of these policies carry high-stakes implications for students and programs and involve some of the same challenges for implementation as they have in the P-12 arena. Serious dilemmas for teacher educators arise in these contexts, as compliance with prescriptive state mandates is often interpreted by faculty to signify a demoralizing loss of program autonomy and integrity, whereas noncompliance may result in loss of program accreditation. The authors describe how one teacher education program negotiated these dilemmas in a fashion responsive to local values and concerns while also meeting state requirements. Results are discussed in terms of tensions between (a) policy goals seeking alignment and coherence across institutions of higher education and (b) motivational conditions likely to engage faculty in the difficult work of programmatic renewal and change in teacher education.

## Keywords

action research, case studies, educational policy, educational reform, self-study

More than a decade of state-level legislation mandating curriculum, assessment, and accountability policies—including the No Child Left Behind requirements—have intensified pressures for change on all educators. In the context of teacher education, these policy changes have taken the form of initiatives aimed at defining professional standards for teacher competence, alignment of teacher education curricula with state P-12 curriculum standards, and increased accountability for program outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Wasley & McDiarmid, 2003). At the same time, changes in federal policy within the United States affecting teacher education have emerged amid a rhetoric of “crisis,” “risk,” and “failure,” as Congress has enacted intensified reporting and accountability mandates aimed at increased control of teacher education policy and practice through the federal Higher Education Act (Title II) and No Child Left Behind (Bales, 2006). A major challenge for teacher educators is how to negotiate programmatic responses to new state and federal mandates in the context of this negative rhetorical climate, a chronic scarcity of fiscal resources, and the historic institutional protections and privileges of academic freedom in higher education. In this article, we describe the strategic response of one teacher education program (TEP) to the challenges of implementing a set of new high-stakes state teaching performance assessment (TPA) policies enacted as part of a comprehensive Learning to Teach system in the state of California. Our study is intended to contribute to what has been a relatively scant literature on policy implementation in teacher education and

to illustrate one approach to engaging dilemmas that arise in the context of externally mandated change in higher education.

We know from policy studies in P-12 education that a variety of tensions and dilemmas often arise in implementing reform initiatives, particularly where policy makers have relied on mandates related to high-stakes testing as a means of holding programs accountable for educational outcomes (Finnegan & Gross, 2007; McNeil, 2000; Whitford & Jones, 2000). Almost two decades ago, Rowan (1990) conceptualized these kinds of tensions between control and commitment in school organizations, noting that policy conditions that intensify external control often undermine the motivation and commitment of teachers expected to participate in change activities. Reviewing the empirical literature on teachers’ beliefs and perceptions about change, van den Berg (2002) noted that the meanings teachers construct around reform policy often affect their commitment to their work. The underlying dilemma here is that external policy mandates, particularly when accompanied by negative rhetoric, may undermine the very motivational qualities necessary to their successful implementation. It is useful to note that the motivational impacts of

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social contexts that are perceived to undermine personal and collective autonomy are not restricted to the arenas of policy implementation but are one of the most robustly documented phenomena in social psychology (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

A second, but related, tension involves the essentially local and contextualized dimensions of knowledge required to achieve effective policy implementation at the program level. A recurring theme in contemporary struggles around teacher education policy has to do with the ways in which policy makers may implicitly frame teaching as essentially technical work that can and should be effectively controlled by centralized agencies and authorities (Delandshere & Petrosky, 2004). This image of teachers and teacher educators as relatively passive “implementers” of curriculum and instructional policies created by others is at odds with much of what we have learned during the past three decades about the fundamental importance of locally and contextually negotiated dimensions of knowledge, work, and innovation (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977; Wenger, 1998). At issue here is the extent to which local knowledge must be engaged as a critical resource if new educational policies are to be effectively “adapted” for local implementation (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978). Viewed from this perspective, policies that ignore the importance and value of local knowledge as a resource for innovation and change are likely to engender resistance by practitioners.

A third set of tensions raised by many new policy initiatives reflects underlying conflicts in basic values and beliefs about the purposes of education (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990). In this context, many contemporary education policies have been interpreted as undermining social and institutional supports for exactly the kinds of critical thinking that are fundamental to citizen participation in democratic society (Apple, 2001; Delandshere & Petrosky, 2004). In teacher education, these value tensions are made concrete as program compliance with state-mandated curriculum guidelines and accountability measures take on increasing significance as factors affecting program accreditation. Indeed, one of the most fundamental dilemmas currently facing many teacher educators is how policy compliance, which is necessary for institutional survival, may be achieved without devaluation of local knowledge, values, and moral autonomy, which most view as necessary for program integrity.

The challenges of implementing the policies related to the California Learning to Teach system included all of the tensions and dilemmas described above. Reflecting a “mandates” approach to policy design (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987), California State Senate Bill 2042 (SB 2042) was enacted to align teacher preparation efforts across undergraduate subject matter coursework, professional education, and induction phases of teacher preparation (Wechsler et al., 2007). The legislation created a two-tiered teaching credential system, led to new state standards in teacher preparation and induction, aligned teacher preparation standards with K-12 academic

content standards and with the previously adopted California Standards for the Teaching Profession, and established multiple routes into the teaching profession (Gee & Suckow, 2007). In short, the legislation generated “the most far-reaching changes in credentialing and teacher preparation in close to 30 years” (Vixie Sandy, 2006, p. 15). Despite these visionary goals on the part of policy makers, a pervasive sense of demoralization and loss of autonomy was reported among many teacher educators around the state as the new policies were generally interpreted as a dramatic new state intrusion into the work of teacher education (Nelson, 2003). In one particularly well-documented example of this response, Kornfeld, Grady, Marker, and Ruddell (2007) described their faculty’s self-study of their “state-mandated compliance” with SB 2042. Interviews conducted over time with 10 faculty in the program reflected strong alienation and resistance to the state policies, which were largely viewed to represent the imposition of a state-supported, neoliberal ideology onto the program’s curriculum and pedagogy. The authors reported that “for the majority of faculty members, the CCTC’s [California Commission on Teacher Credentialing’s] restrictive language and requirements successfully positioned us in exactly the same way, as powerless, degraded wards of the state” (Kornfeld et al., 2007, p. 1916). The faculty interviews suggested that this sense of alienation continued throughout the implementation process and that “those involved in preparing the document for CCTC made a conscious effort *not* to let that process, and the resulting program, affect their teaching or the program that had been in place prior to adopting the new one” (p. 1921). The authors reported that “the general perception among faculty of the ongoing impact of SB 2042 has been that our teaching and programs have been, for the most part, unaffected by the new program” (p. 1922). The authors interpreted this outcome as a success in avoiding some of the risks of state control over the program.

Although many of the faculty in our own program shared the concerns articulated by Kornfeld et al. (2007), our program leadership (including faculty leaders, program coordinators, and the program director) took a different approach to engaging the dilemmas of implementing the SB 2042 policies. We elected to expand our framing of the new state policies to consider ways in which, whereas undeniably constituting significant challenges in terms of “compliance,” the policies might afford opportunities for inquiry and program improvement. Three general questions were used to orient recursive cycles of data collection, analysis, and action planning throughout our efforts to respond to the new state assessment policies. First, we wanted to learn more about how our own faculty and staff interpreted the new policies and their relationship to our work. Second, we wanted to understand the impacts of the new policies on the program and on our students. Third, we wanted to develop a better understanding of our own processes of policy implementation, learning, and change.

## Theoretical Perspectives

The general problem of policy implementation may be viewed from a variety of theoretical perspectives, including those drawn from the fields of sociology (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), political science (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987), and organization science (Huber, 1991). However, we elected to frame our strategic thinking about the implementation and change process as a problem of learning (Honig, 2006; Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein, 2006; Thompson & Zeuli, 1999). This approach to interpreting the challenges of policy implementation, program renewal, and systemic change has considerable appeal—particularly when considered through the lens of contemporary sociocultural theory related to workplace learning (Billett, 2003; Engestrom, 2001; Wenger, 1998). A central assumption of this view is that learning is best understood as a process embedded in social relationships and social practices. The analysis of learning thus focuses on changes in the ways individuals participate in social practices over time and across settings (Lave & Wenger, 1991). A sociocultural perspective on policy implementation and change as learning processes foregrounds the agency of faculty and faculty leaders as primary “authors” of the change process and positions both the disciplinary knowledge and the local practical knowledge of faculty as resources for innovation (Brown & Duguid, 1991). Several recent studies by researchers in the P-12 education reform arena have used conceptual frameworks derived from sociocultural learning theory to address challenges of policy implementation (Coburn & Stein, 2006; Gallucci, 2003, 2007; Hubbard et al., 2006). An important contribution of this body of work is that it effectively moves the locus of analysis from a focus on changes in internal, cognitive processes (and individual behavior) to a focus on the ways in which individuals and groups negotiate changes in their ways of doing things together.

Within this general sociocultural framing, we found Etienne Wenger’s (1998) theorizing about organizational “designs” for learning and change to be particularly useful in thinking about our own policy implementation challenges. Specifically, Wenger’s observations about the tensions between “reification” (the objectification of products of negotiation in artifacts such as policy statements, regulations, curricula, etc.) and “participation” (the active negotiation of changes in meaning through social interaction) were closely related to problems we perceived in the contexts of our own change process. Wenger has theorized that balance between reification and participation is a characteristic of productive organizational learning environments. Excessive reification tends to produce rigid, compliance-oriented organizational environments that lack flexibility and responsiveness; excessive participation produces chaotic environments that inhibit coherent and coordinated action. Wenger notes that in organizational contexts in which reification dominates—in this case via the intrusion of powerful and prescriptive state

policy mandates—a strong investment in participatory engagement with change may be necessary to maintain a sense of local autonomy and identity. Wenger’s insights about strategic organizational designs for learning, as well as broader sociocultural perspectives on learning, innovation, and change (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Engestrom, 2001), thus formed the basis for the theory of action we used to engage the policy implementation process. The essence of this theory was our belief that “the kinds of personal investment and social energy required for creative work are not a matter of institutionalized compliance or abstract affiliation; they are a matter of engaging the identities of participants” (Wenger, 1998, p. 253). Thus, our approach to implementing newly mandated state accountability policies involved a constant effort to clarify local values and to connect these with opportunities to negotiate the meaning of the policy implementation process in a way that enhanced, rather than eroded, the sense of local programmatic integrity and identity. Following Wenger (1998) and other sociocultural learning theorists (Billett, 2003; Boreham & Morgan, 2004), we understood this as essentially a process of individual and collective learning.

## Method

### Policy Context

The new SB 2042 policies identified a set of Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs) intended to define what preliminary teaching credential candidates should know and be able to do prior to licensure. One of the most challenging and high-stakes features of SB 2042 was the requirement that preservice candidates pass a state-approved TPA<sup>1</sup> designed to assess their knowledge, skills, and abilities as articulated in the TPEs. These assessments are organized around a set of classroom-situated tasks related to planning, instruction, assessment, and reflection that teacher candidates carry out with P-12 students. For each task, candidates complete an extensive commentary articulating the rationale for the choices and actions undertaken.

The TPA policies were responsive to a range of professional and political pressures for improving outcome measures for TEPs (Cochran-Smith, 2001). At the same time, the new state policies, including the underlying framework of TPEs on which the assessments are based, were viewed by many California teacher educators to represent a dramatic and regressive shift of values, scope, and vision for the teaching profession (Whittaker, Snyder, & Freeman, 2001), to impose serious fiscal and procedural responsibilities on teacher preparation programs, and to offer inadequate new resources to support implementation. These highly prescriptive state policies thus carried many of the dilemmas of high-stakes testing, increased state control, and loss of teacher agency that have characterized some P-12 reform initiatives (Finnegan & Gross, 2007; McNeil, 2000).

## Program

The TEP described here enrolled approximately 120 students per year (60 students in elementary education and 60 in secondary education) in a 13-month master's degree program leading to initial teacher certification. The faculty and staff of the TEP consisted of about one third tenure-line research faculty, one third non-tenure line faculty (many of whom were PhD-level educators and experienced K-12 classroom teachers), and one third advanced graduate students in education. A small network of partner schools and cooperating teachers participated as TEP members throughout all phases of the program.

The program had several important features that functioned as supports for the implementation process. First, the program was situated on one of the campuses of the University of California—a strong research-oriented institution that offered a variety of intellectual, organizational, and fiscal supports for the kind of inquiry-oriented implementation process we undertook. Second, the program had a well-developed sense of identity and integrity. For example, it had been featured as one of a set of nationally prominent programs in a recent publication on innovative programs in teacher education. The general educational philosophy of the program was oriented around progressive values related to inquiry, social justice, and learner-centered curriculum and instruction. In short, the program was a strong and coherent one that was well positioned to respond vigorously and proactively to new state policy.

## Participants

**Informants.** All full-time and part-time program faculty and staff ( $n = 35$ ) participated in programwide data collection activities including (a) brief freewrite responses situated in a variety of activities related to implementing the TPA policies, (b) participation in program planning meetings in which observational field notes were collected, and (c) completing programwide, open-ended questionnaires regarding faculty viewpoints and experiences with the policy implementation process. In addition, a smaller number of faculty and staff ( $n = 15$ ) were invited to participate as key informants throughout the policy implementation process. These individuals were purposefully selected to represent a broad range of roles and experience levels within the program, including course instructors, field supervisors, and the coordinators of two of the credential programs within the TEP. Each participant signed a consent form approved by the institutional review board for protection of human subjects, which explained the purpose of the data collection and how the data were to be used. Program faculty and staff were assured that electing not to participate in formal data collection activities would not affect their status or participation in the program and that they would have an opportunity to review and modify transcripts of their individual interviews.

**The inquiry team.** The team undertaking primary responsibility for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data on the process of implementation as it proceeded consisted of one member whose primary role and expertise was in the arena of policy research. This individual took lead responsibility for conducting most data collection activities. A second team member was one of the program faculty. She straddled the roles of researcher and practitioner throughout the inquiry process. The third team member was a program administrator (director) for the TEP. The overlapping roles of two of the three primary investigators for the project resulted in a number of methodological and ethical challenges that were a constant focus of concern and deliberation throughout the inquiry process. Particularly at issue were the overlapping roles of the program director. Early in the inquiry process, we adopted the general practice of excluding the director from direct participation in interviews. However, the contextual detail emerging from these in many cases made the identities of informants evident—a problem that was articulated clearly to interview participants as part of the consent process. Participants were given an opportunity to review, revise, and/or delete any portion of interview data we collected from them.

The more positive side of this dilemma was that the participatory nature of the inquiry process, including the director's participation, situated the data analysis very clearly and directly in the context of action (Argyris & Schon, 1996). The data were routinely and purposefully used to make decisions about the implementation process in several ways. In the context of leadership actions, the data helped program leaders understand the concerns and insights of faculty and staff about the new state policies and how they might be implemented in the context of local program values and commitments. This knowledge enabled program leaders to facilitate open and programwide deliberation and decision making around critical issues. Faculty and staff used summaries of the data that had been collected to better understand the impacts of the new policies on their own practices and on their understanding of student learning outcomes. These data formed the context of many collective decisions about how to proceed with the implementation process and provided an important context in which the discourse around implementation was shifted from a focus on compliance with state mandates to a focus on the goals and outcomes of the program.

## Data Collection

We drew on the qualitative case study methodology described by Yin (2003), Merriam (1998), and others to construct a rich, descriptive account of the events and impacts of the policy implementation process as it unfolded. Particularly relevant to our methodology was the fit between the “emergent design” of qualitative-interpretivist methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and our desire to undertake the policy implementation process in a fashion that made the negotiation of

the substance and meanings of change visible and accessible to participants. In conceptualizing this methodological approach, we were influenced by van den Berg's (2002) distinction between rational-linear conceptualizations of change and those relying on what he termed a "cultural-individual" perspective, in which the values, insights, and understanding of change agents, in this case faculty and staff, are considered an important context and resource for designing the change process.

We collected data from several sources throughout the 18-month period in which we studied the implementation process:

- Narrative field notes were made during observations of faculty meetings, small-group work meetings, classes, and student work groups. These meetings were audio taped to provide support for the construction of rich field notes.
- A series of two to three semistructured interviews were conducted with key informants during the course of the study. Each of these interviews was audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Interviews were generally structured to gather descriptive data first ("Tell me about your experiences with the TPA process"), followed by answers to more focused questions about specific issues ("In what ways do you see [the TPAs] changing the program?") and questions that asked for more evaluative responses ("Could you describe any concerns you have about the TPAs?").
- Short freewrites were conducted with faculty at key meetings to gather data about their views and experiences of the implementation process. For example, a written prompt of the following type was used to collect faculty views early in the process: "Where do you see these TPA tasks fitting in the program? What current assignments/assessments do you think might be replaced by these? What do you think is missing from these assessment tasks?"
- Artifacts, including course syllabi, assignments, examples of student work completed for the TPAs, meeting agendas, and programwide email conversations were collected throughout the period of study. Artifacts were selected for incorporation into the database when they were referenced by informants as important conceptual or material tools related to implementation of the new state policies or when they provided the opportunity to confirm or disconfirm accounts of the learning and change processes we gathered through other data sources.

### Data Analysis

We analyzed the data collected during the course of the project using the general inductive methods outlined by Merriam

(1998) and others. Narrative observational records, interview transcripts, and artifacts from the work undertaken in the TPA implementation process were analyzed in an iterative fashion, which began early in the implementation process. A first step in the analysis consisted of reading through the entire corpus of data we had collected during the first months of the project. We used the general questions we had identified to mark segments of the data of potential interest for further analyses: What do these new policies mean to faculty and staff? What are the impacts on the program? What are we learning? and How are we learning? We identified potential themes in these early data, summarized the themes with examples, and shared them with the faculty to get feedback about how our interpretation fit with faculty perceptions and experiences. We used this feedback and subsequent analyses to develop a framework for coding and categorizing the data. The general practice of submitting tentative findings for participant feedback was used throughout the implementation process. This served as both a member check on our findings and, equally important, a means of engaging the faculty participants in discussions and decision-making processes regarding the policy implementation process. Twice during the study, the inquiry team met to conduct more extensive data analysis, in which emerging themes and findings were systematically evaluated by triangulating evidence from multiple data sources, from multiple contexts, and across multiple informants. In these analyses, members of the research team independently coded and analyzed data from interviews, observations, and artifacts and made adjustments and revisions to analytic categories based on reanalysis of the entire data corpus collected to that point. Results were again shared with faculty and staff informants for feedback on their accuracy. Finally, after the conclusion of the active data collection phase of the project, the entire data corpus was again reviewed, and a final set of findings were developed based on the coding framework and analytic categories that had been developed.

### Theory of Action and Strategic Design of the Implementation Process

Consistent with Wenger's (1998) theorizing about the importance of balance between reification and participation, our approach to policy implementation was based on the assumption that the forceful intrusion of new state policies required an equally strong participatory response if local program participants' motivation, values, and identity were not to be diffused and diluted by the state mandates. With this principle in mind, we structured the implementation process through a series of programwide meetings of faculty and staff, complemented by both small-group work sessions and a great deal of individual planning and development work. At the same time, inquiry activities were situated in and woven around the planning work to allow the planning process to be

informed by the data we were collecting regarding specific issues of concern to members of the program (including students, leadership, faculty, and staff). This process was characterized by three distinctive features, which we describe below.

**Recursive data collection, analysis, and action.** Data collection and data analysis activities were conducted throughout the implementation process. As the data were analyzed, various leadership actions were planned and implemented based on what was learned through the data analysis. A recurring feature of this process involved bringing the results of data analysis back to the larger faculty/staff group for deliberation and action planning. For example, as one of the first steps in the implementation process, the TEP leadership organized a meeting involving several faculty and K-12 administrators for the purpose of examining candidates' performance in a small pilot testing of the performance assessments. Several kinds of data were collected at this meeting, including field notes, written evaluations from participants (students, faculty, K-12 colleagues), and samples of student work on the assessments. The data collected at this session, together with results of a survey of faculty perspectives on issues related to the programwide implementation of the performance assessments, were then used to design a series of summer task force meetings focused on addressing issues of faculty/staff concern.

**Emergent design.** An important feature of the inquiry process was its emergent or formative design (Meynell, 2005). The inquiry process was not built around hypothesis formulation and testing or structured through any kind of a priori strategic plan; rather, it was built around a continuous investigation of the perspectives, ideas, and insights of faculty, staff, and students about the TPA policies and how they best might be addressed in the context of the implementation process. This approach allowed the leadership team to base plans for program planning activities around changing faculty concerns as well as emerging faculty insights about how best to undertake the work. Conversely, it allowed faculty and staff to negotiate the implementation of the state policy mandates in a fashion that did not abrogate program values and priorities. For example, in the event described above in which pilot samples of student performance on the TPAs were examined by the faculty, a recurring concern had to do with students' depth of understanding of classroom assessment. This concern became a focus of subsequent analyses, and specific planning events were arranged to investigate this issue with subsequent samples of student work.

**Attention to subjectivity.** An important focus of data collection, analysis, and action in the inquiry process had to do with the meanings faculty and staff constructed around the state policies, program values, and their own pedagogy (van den Berg, 2002). We assumed that the interpretations program members held regarding the state policies were of central importance to their response to those policies. We paid careful and respectful attention to these interpretations and the

accompanying strongly negative feeling expressed about the policies. For example, a significant event in the inquiry process took place when faculty and staff undertook a close textual analysis of the new TPA policies, comparing these to earlier state policy frameworks and to program mission statements. This process clarified the specific areas in which the new policies were in conflict with program values and priorities and led to specific planning to identify ways in which the program could maintain clear focus on valued outcomes that might otherwise be buried under the intense demands of the state policy.

The design features described above reflected our intention to shift the conversation about implementing the new policies from a focus on compliance to a focus on inquiry and program improvement. Below, we describe some of the specific actions and events that took place as this shift occurred.

### **Descriptive Findings Related to Policy Implementation, Faculty Engagement, and Programmatic Change**

Nowhere was the threat of state intrusion into the sense of programmatic identity more problematic than in the arena of local power and authority to define program values and commitments. As one veteran of the "curriculum wars" in the P-12 public school system put it,

I looked at this (TPA policy) process as very similar to the processes that I had faced as a teacher in terms of policy changes. And to me the writing was on the wall very visibly. So I entered [this process] with a very strong concern for maintaining and extending a particular vision of the profession within the program.

We interpreted this type of response as a valuable reflection of faculty commitment to the program and, more specifically, an expression of concern about loss of programmatic identity. We routinely invited expression of this kind of concern about the new policies—and structured clear avenues through which program faculty and staff could engage their concerns proactively and constructively. We conceptualized this process as one of scaffolding dissent in ways that supported active engagement with the policy challenges and reaffirmation of program values and identity. For example, knowing from interview and freewrite data that these worries were being expressed, we planned two activities for the October 2002 program retreat. First, faculty members were asked to write about and discuss the question, "What would you want a graduate to report that he or she took away from this program?" Subsequently, the group created a list of TEP mission themes. The faculty then worked in small groups to study the text of four documents: the TEP mission statement, the California Standards for the Teaching Profession, the newly adopted state TPEs, and the TPAs. They were asked to consider the following questions:

- What values and images of teachers and teaching are reflected in each of these four documents?
- What policy changes are evident as one moves historically from the California Standards for the Teaching Profession developed in the 1990s, to the recently adopted TPEs, to the current TPA policies?
- Considering our stated values and goals, what is missing from the new policy frameworks?
- What are the implications for our policy implementation work this year?

Freewrites collected following these activities reflected the importance faculty and staff attached to maintaining a strong sense of programmatic identity in the context of the new state policy pressures:

TEP has a grand task ahead of us—keeping our guiding philosophies and not losing our higher values *and* adding in all the assessment tasks that we can to the program year. (field supervisor)

Reformulating our mission statement is important, as is the notion that we do not merely tailor our program to meet the TPEs and TPAs, but we embed them within our own larger mission. (instructor)

The process of clarifying program values and concretizing these in ways that made them more widely understood and shared continued over time. At the next faculty retreat, we brought a synthesized list of valued outcomes back for the group's consideration. A discussion ensued concerning what to do with these outcomes now that they were identified. A small group was formed to discuss in depth how to maintain a programmatic focus on the core values that had been identified. A member of that group later reported on how they took up this task and revealed how the conversation had shifted from questions about compliance to questions about clarifying and strengthening local program values and identity: "We collaborated and decided that our goal for this valued outcomes committee was to make just as important the underlying values we wanted for this program. We wanted as much spotlight for those as for the state requirements." We came to view this kind of recontextualization of the policy implementation effort from compliance to inquiry as one of the most important aspects of our work. This shift was accelerated significantly when faculty began to closely examine new kinds of data on candidates' classroom teaching practice.

### *Candidate Performance Assessment Data and Faculty Engagement*

A pivotal point in the policy implementation process occurred when a pilot study of the new performance assessments was

carried out with a small sample of TEP students. Results of this pilot were shared at a meeting of program faculty, supervisors, and partner school colleagues. Together, this group examined artifacts of classroom teaching practice, including lesson plans, videotaped lessons, and documentation of (P-12) student learning submitted by TEP students as part of the performance assessment. In addition, a panel was constructed in which candidates discussed their experiences in completing the assessments. In initial discussions, both faculty and students expressed a sense that TEP students had been well prepared for the performance assessments. However, after the students left this session, faculty began to examine the work samples more closely, and questions began to arise. One faculty member described this experience:

I mean . . . we did know our candidates were prepared to do the task . . . but the interesting thing that came up is that people were surprised at in some cases how shallow the answers were.

Another commented, "We really do get the sense that their assessment skills are not up to the level I think needs to be in order to respond to the PACT. We agreed we are going to push this more." Field notes collected during this event were summarized with the observation that "it became apparent that several candidate responses did not reflect the depth of understanding that faculty would have expected." In a later interview, one 15-year veteran of the TEP faculty described this session as "the single most important day in the history of the program."

The performance assessment data thus raised significant concerns about what candidates were actually taking up from their courses and fieldwork and enacting in their practice. One instructor commented, "We are finally looking at student work and really pinpointing some of the areas that need to be dealt with." Once these issues began to come into focus, most faculty members began to engage in the change process more vigorously. Some began investigating the reasons students did not perform as well as expected and began planning changes to be made in coursework and fieldwork that might improve candidate performance.

### *Changes in Program Structure, Practice, and Culture*

Our analysis of the faculty interviews, observations, and program artifacts (syllabi, coursework and field work assignments, and meeting agendas and minutes) we had collected during the 18-month period of the study clarified a number of changes faculty and staff made in the program structure, in their working practices, and in their ways of thinking about the program. Drawing on Wenger's (1998) framework, we conceptualized these changes as new forms of engagement, changes in alignment of program elements, and (re) imagination of program values and identity in the context of the new SB 2042 policies. Consistent with the assumptions

of this theoretical view, we interpret the negotiation of these changes as learning processes and understand the achievement of changes in social practices as the product of both individual and collective learning (Peck, Gallucci, Sloan, & Lippincott, 2009).

**New forms of engagement.** Interview, observation, and artifactual data documented the emergence of a number of new modes of direct and indirect interaction between program faculty, staff, and students. One clear category of changes included those related to the structure, participation, and organization of meetings, including the development of new types of programwide meetings in which samples of candidate work on the new performance assessments were examined. In one case, candidates were invited to join faculty in interpreting their performance on the new assessments in relation to the coursework and fieldwork experiences they had undergone. Other examples of new types of engagement involved collaboration across courses or across coursework and fieldwork dimensions of the program, as program faculty worked to develop ways of implementing the new policies that were congruent with their values and goals. The individual and collaborative activities that were undertaken to make sense of the new performance assessment tasks led to a wide variety of program changes and innovations. For example, one faculty member described how she and several colleagues met to examine candidate work on one of the new tasks:

[The Context] task was assigned to the ethnography class and then as a small group we discussed the student teachers' response [as they completed the task] . . . . This caused changes, including changes in the course syllabus and agendas, assignments, and most specifically the lesson plans.

Many of the new activities and roles that developed through the implementation process were viewed as highly productive with respect to issues of long-standing concern in the program. One supervisor commented, "We are all looking at the *same* student work as opposed to supervisors looking at lesson plans and course instructors looking at assignments in courses."

**Changes in alignment.** A closely related change was evident in interviews and observations in which participants described how the policy implementation process led to development of a clearer articulation of connections across courses and across coursework and fieldwork dimensions of the program. A salient focus of many program participants' comments was ways in which the implementation of the performance assessments had "given us a common language, which is so important because when we sit and have conversations we all know what we're talking about." This referred to the appropriation of conceptual and linguistic tools for describing program work. For example, the construct of academic language was taken up from the new performance assessment instrument and became a significant focal point of program

conversation and problem solving across courses, coursework, and fieldwork. In other cases, faculty and staff developed new material tools that functioned to unify the language terms and practices across the program. A particularly important example of this involved development of a common lesson-planning framework for use across all courses and fieldwork contexts. In this lesson-planning framework, students were required to attend to specific issues in planning curriculum and instruction, including those aligned with the TPA. This requirement affected faculty as well as students. As one faculty member reported about the common lesson planning format,

Although the ESL part didn't really give me any problems, I have to admit the focus on special needs students is something I hadn't really thought about much. I was still at that stage where the special education teacher takes care of that.

The coordinator for one of the three credential programs described a similar process in which an important conceptual and practical tool was developed for connecting program practice among the field supervisors:

I think that it [the implementation process] is forcing more communication. . . . It has forced them to do something which they have not done before as a group. Basically in the past everyone has had this performance record, and one of the supervisors or two would write up a syllabus for their weekly seminars, and they would share those around. But this year, the group got together, and they wrote a common syllabus because they definitely wanted to make sure that they were doing what they needed to do when they needed to do it, to be ready for the students to finish up the elements of the [TPA].

**Reimagining the program.** New forms of faculty, staff, and student engagement formed the working context in which new conceptual and practical alignments of program structure and process were negotiated as well as new language conventions for a more deeply shared practice. These changes were related, in turn, to changes in how members of the program imagined their work together, particularly in relation to what they had earlier viewed as a considerable threat of state intrusion:

In some ways, having to address the TPAs provides us with an opportunity to begin developing a shared language of teaching and learning. It also provides us with an opportunity to define how we're addressing the TPAs organically versus having them delineate what/how we teach. (instructor)

Comments from participant interviews and freewrites reflected ways these achievements created new images of possibility and an enhanced sense of identification with the program:

We did *good* work in raising these core values to a high level of consciousness, and I hope we don't retreat from that. Protecting them would come, at least in part, from continuing to name and know them. (fieldwork supervisor)

The impact on my work has been huge. Number one change has been the organizational effort of getting everyone together to talk about and work on how we are going to, hopefully, make the addition of the TPAs a values plus. I already see that they are by causing us to look at where we are now and what we are doing. (instructor)

Conversation in the organization as a whole moved during the course of a year from a focus on early reactivity to the imposition of external standards to the articulation of programwide valued outcomes and how these might be enacted through a more pervasively shared practice.

The (re)imagination of the program in terms of a more cohesive and shared set of value commitments and more deeply connected practices was particularly valued by individuals who occupied relatively peripheral positions within the program, including some field supervisors and tenure-line faculty who taught part-time in the program. In the following interview excerpts, a senior faculty member describes how the experience of joint planning and discussion around the challenges of implementing the TPA policies affected his sense of connection with the program:

From the first time I ever taught this course, 20 years ago, my course was never really a part of TEP. I never interacted with the faculty, and so my course was perceived by the students, and probably by the supervisors and instructors, as . . . kind of outside. But last summer, I sat down and started with the idea of trying to reconceptualize how the course would be taught with specific reference to the TPAs. I made these changes with greater integration of that course into TEP in mind.

. . . Every discussion of the TPA informs me more about the TEP program and its faculty because I get to hear them respond to issues about the TPA. I get to hear their views, hear about their courses. So there's a big educational experience just around TEP for me. Also, the nature of assessing teachers in this way really uncovers kind of people's core values . . . so I feel like every time I've been involved in a discussion about the TPAs, there's been a chance to share with those people where we have ideas in common.

In this case, and in several others in our data, program faculty and staff commented on how they came to understand the program more completely through the joint activity required to respond to the new policy mandates. This, in turn,

provided a context in which their sense of identification with the program and commitment to collaborative work were actually strengthened through the implementation process.

## Discussion

We have described a process through which one TEP responded to a set of new and demanding state policy mandates that were perceived by faculty and staff to intrude strongly on the integrity of local program values and practices. In a strategic effort to negotiate the tension between these perceptions and the institutional necessity of implementing the new policies, we developed an approach to policy implementation aimed at shifting the discourse of implementation from a focus on compliance to a focus on inquiry. An assumption we made on both theoretical and strategic grounds was that we might usefully view the process of policy implementation through the lens of sociocultural learning theory (Gallucci, 2008). This decision allowed us to interpret our own process of change in ways that were consonant with our values around inquiry and program improvement. An important shift in the motivational dynamics of the implementation process took place as faculty engaged in systematic textual analysis of the new policies and collaborated to define a set of programmatic values they would work to preserve throughout the implementation process. A pivotal event around which motivation further shifted from an orientation toward compliance to an orientation toward inquiry took place when faculty and staff members examined examples of their students' work on the new TPAs. These data challenged faculty assumptions about the efficacy of the program (Argyris & Schon, 1996; Engestrom, 1987) and motivated deeper engagement with inquiry and change. Subsequent observations, interviews, and artifacts documented substantive changes in the way that the program operated, including (a) increased engagement of faculty and staff in new forms of joint activity, (b) increased alignment of concepts and practices across program experiences (both coursework and fieldwork), and (c) the (re)imagination and clarification of program identity. In sharp contrast to descriptions of alienation and demoralization reported elsewhere (Kornfeld et al., 2007), many faculty members described a renewed sense of commitment and identification with the program as they worked together in new ways to respond to the policy mandates. We believe the present findings and the story of policy implementation and programmatic inquiry they document contribute to the teacher education literature in several ways.

Perhaps most important, our description of the policy implementation process illustrates a pervasive tension between state policy goals seeking alignment and coherence across multiple institutions of public education and the conditions of local control and autonomy, which are most likely to engage practitioners in the process of thoughtful and creative change (McNeil, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The California

State policy changes aimed at TEPs were viewed by many faculty members as punitive, reductive, and carrying high stakes for faculty and for student teachers. In their view, the state was demanding a new form of accountability that largely ignored local program goals, required reallocation of substantial program resources, and intruded significantly on areas of programmatic practice that had heretofore been left to university and program discretion. The tension between the mandated nature of these policies and their impacts on faculty motivation for engagement with the change process was one of the most fundamental challenges the program faced.

Wenger (1998) has theorized that strong external intrusions into local practice (such as the state policies described here) must be balanced by an equally vigorous participatory response if a strong sense of local identity and integrity in practice is to be sustained. We interpret the approach we used to respond to the new state mandates to represent exactly this kind of response. By participating in a wide variety of activities in which they took the lead in defining how the TEP would respond to the new mandates without abandoning local commitments and values, faculty members were able to actively maintain substantial control over the meanings the new state policies took on within the program and effectively resist some of the demoralizing effects of the new policies. Our strategic response thus reflects what Engestrom (1987, 2001) refers to as “expansive learning”—invention of new practices as an alternative to two equally unacceptable alternatives (Tuomi-Gröhn, 2003). In the present context, we saw that simply complying with the state mandates carried unacceptable consequences for faculty morale and program identity. Ignoring or refusing to implement the new policies, on the other hand, carried unacceptable consequences for program accreditation.

We learned a number of practical lessons during the course of the policy implementation process that may be valuable for others. These should be interpreted as working hypotheses that we have taken away from this work—our data certainly do not warrant any strong assertions about their value as generalizations of fact. First, we believe it was important to approach the problem of engaging program faculty and staff in the somewhat daunting task of implementing the new state policies by making respect for their concerns about the policies a very visible part of the process. Earlier, we described this approach as one of scaffolding dissent, and our theory about this was that understanding and responding to the voices of dissent among the faculty was critical to constructing a response to the new policies that did not violate faculty values and undermine the meanings that motivated their engagement with their work (van den Berg, 2002). Although this approach certainly could be interpreted through a political lens, it is important to underscore the fact that we also saw it as a sensible approach to a highly ambiguous problem in which the practical and contextual knowledge of the people doing the daily work of the program was essential for

crafting a strong and effective response to the new policies (Brown & Duguid, 1991).

Second, we came to see the way in which data were regularly collected, analyzed by the leadership team, and presented to program faculty and staff as an essential process through which important new meanings of the policies, and the program’s response to them, were negotiated collaboratively. This process allowed the leadership team to function as a support for the collective thinking of program members, and it also kept the faculty/staff in relatively visible control of new meanings for program values and practice as these were negotiated. Practically speaking, this approach of using systematic data reduction and “member checking” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) appeared to make the problem-defining and problem-solving processes more manageable for the faculty as a large group.

Finally, a practical aspect of our work that we came to view as extremely important had to do with learning to see and support opportunities for both individual and collective learning within multiple contexts in the program. Among other things, this meant recognizing the value of insights produced by individual faculty from their detailed analysis of connections between the new policies and the affordances and constraints of the program. We learned it was important to ensure that faculty undertaking such analyses had regular opportunities to bring their insights into public view. Our data also helped us learn to see informal communities of practice at work and to recognize these as the sites in which many of the innovative ideas of individual faculty were developed into workable solutions to wider programmatic challenges (Peck, Galluci, Sloan, & Lippincott, 2009). Finally, we learned to strategically use program-level participatory events, such as meetings and retreats, as opportunities to examine and make sense of data together and to construct new artifacts (such as the list of valued outcomes) as a means of reifying new ideas, language conventions, and practices as they were negotiated (Anagnostopoulos, Smith, & Basmadjian, 2007).

Although we are encouraged by the results of our implementation efforts, we hasten to add that the design of our study does not permit unambiguous interpretation of causal relationships between our approach to implementation and observed changes in the program. A considerable number of factors we have not conceptualized nor described may have contributed to these changes, including unique characteristics of the program itself. We are well aware that TEPs situated in research-intensive universities may enjoy privileges of typically small size and relatively rich resources, which may significantly affect their capacity to take up opportunities for individual and organizational learning as we describe here. Other cautions in interpreting our findings include the limited duration of the data collection (Have the observed programmatic changes endured over time?) and limited measures of student impact (Did the observed changes in program curriculum and instruction produce changes in candidate teaching practice? Did any such changes in practice

affect the learning of P-12 students?). These are significant questions we were not able to address.

We conclude by sharing an interesting question raised by a colleague after he read our account of the policy implementation process. He asked, “So was the policy a good thing or a bad thing?” We think this is an intriguing question, for which we have no unambiguous answer. We note with interest the substantive differences between the approach we took to implementing the SB 2042 policies and that described by Kornfeld et al. (2007). In a sense, one might say that the way we chose to respond to the policy led to a number of positive outcomes—as we have documented. On the other hand, the response described by Kornfeld et al. may have served to deflect what they perceived to be potentially negative outcomes. One interpretation of this difference might be that each of these implementation efforts was driven by a different motive, in the sense identified by Leont’ev (1978) and others. Specifically, it appears that the SB 2042 implementation efforts described by Kornfeld et al. were organized around concerns related to coercion, compliance, and resistance. Indeed, the faculty members in the Kornfeld et al. study, by self-report, were apparently at least somewhat successful in avoiding the risks of what they perceived to be the potentially damaging effects of the new policies. Although our own colleagues shared many of these concerns, the motive underlying our implementation strategy was related to inquiry, learning, and program improvement. Although the implementation outcomes we observed appear to be more felicitous than those reported by Kornfeld et al., we do not conclude that our approach was correct and theirs was not.

As we noted in our introduction, the dilemmas underlying implementation of policy mandates in teacher education are pervasive and significant. A reasonable hypothesis emerging from the study we report here is that outcomes of accountability policies may be affected significantly by the way in which they are interpreted and taken up by local practitioners (Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977). A significant implication of such a view is that it locates considerable responsibility for policy outcomes at the local program level. That is, the answer to the provocative question of whether the SB 2042 policies were “a good thing or a bad thing” may lie largely in how they are taken up by local practitioners. Research that further clarifies the conditions and processes that affect how programs make choices and manage dilemmas of implementing policy mandates would be of considerable value to both teacher educators and policy makers.

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### Note

1. During the period of time described in this study, two forms of teaching performance assessment were under development. Programs had the option of using either the state-sponsored system developed under contract with Educational Testing Service or the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT), developed by a consortium of California institutions of higher education. After piloting both systems, we decided PACT provided richer and more useful descriptions of candidate practice. Although we use the generic terms *teaching performance assessment* and *TPA* throughout the article, these refer to the implementation of the PACT performance assessment methodology.

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