UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF A STATE ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY IN A PRE-COLLEGIATE URBAN TEACHING ACADEMY PROGRAM

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Abstract

Purpose and Method: *Using perceived collective efficacy and sensemaking perspectives, this qualitative, multi-case study explored teachers' responses to accountability pressures at three high schools within a pre-collegiate Urban Teaching Academy (UTA) magnet program.* ***Results:*** *Three major themes emerged. The first theme of Divergent Levels of Resistance Towards Certification highlighted the two unique viewpoints of the UTA teachers concerning integrating the MOS certification at their specific school sites. The second theme of Perceived Benefits of Certification articulates the varying responses of the students upon executing the certification. The third theme of District Pressures: Industry Certification Points Count emphasizes the three UTA teachers' perceptions of their school district's rationale for imposing the district mandate.* ***Conclusion****: Data interpretations suggested that sensemaking was ongoing in all sites and was associated with teachers' interpretations of accountability policies and their efforts, resistance, and agency to transform classroom practice to be consistent with school and district pressures.*

Key terms*: perceived collective efficacy, school accountability, sensemaking, teacher agency.*

Introduction

For three decades accountability has been a prominent trademark within P-12 education. This era of accountability commenced following publication of *A Nation at Risk* and manifested itself through the enactment of federal and state policies. Major emphases included increasing graduation requirements, implementing high-stakes standardized assessments, raising teacher qualification benchmarks, and elevating student achievement standards (Fletcher, 2006; Louis, Febey, & Schroeder, 2005). All of these domains are components of several legislative initiatives, such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Educational critics, reformers, policymakers, and researchers have argued that the poor performance of students and schools is directly attributable to the lack of centralization, control, and standards for schools and educators (Gaddis & Lauen, 2014; Rothstein, Jacobsen, & Wilder, 2008). On the other hand, more liberal

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perspectives view schooling more critically. They contend institutional policies exacerbate educational inequalities by marginalizing racial and ethnic minorities and disadvantaged adolescents (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Cochran-Smith, 2009). Further research has examined the impact of the accountability era on student achievement (Carnoy & Loeb, 2002; Goddard, LoGerfo, & Hoy, 2004; Figlio & Ladd, 2008), satisfaction of teachers, and teachers' working conditions (Hamilton et al., 2007; Ingersoll, 2003; Phillips & Flashman, 2007; Rothstein et al., 2008; Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield, 2005).

Research has not unequivocally supported the implementation of accountability systems as a long-term improvement strategy (Ingersoll, 2003; Louis et al., 2005). In fact, much discussion as well as empirical evidence has emphasized the costs associated with accountability systems and the unintended consequences for students, teachers, and schools. Ingersoll (2003) found that teacher control has a significant negative relationship with school climate factors (i.e., job satisfaction and student misbehavior). Other unintended consequences of school accountability include a narrowing of the curriculum and quality of instruction (Hamilton et al., 2007; Rothstein et al., 2008; Fletcher, 2006; Sunderman et al., 2005). Louis et al. (2005) argued:

> The answers to both proponents and critics of standards will not be determined in state or federal legislatures but in the schools and classrooms. . . . How do teachers "make sense" of the new standards and accountability environment, and how do they change their practices to adapt to their understanding? (p. 178)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of teachers and students in a pre-collegiate Urban Teaching Academy (UTA). More specifically, the researchers were interested in the UTA teachers' endorsement of the curriculum and the student benefits gained as a result of participation in the program. The UTA program is a four-year curricular pathway for high school students aspiring to continue their studies upon graduation and become educators, specifically in urban schools. During discussions with the teachers and students, the researchers discovered several unintended consequences of working and learning within a mandated accountability system. These unintended consequences included a narrowing of the UTA curriculum and served as a detractor to the learning potential of students.

Conceptual Framework

The present scientific inquiry draws on perceived collective efficacy and sensemaking approaches. These two constructs were derived from social cognitive perspectives (Goddard et al., 2004; Louis et al., 2005; Tollefson, 2000). Perceived

collective efficacy involves teachers' perceptions that as a group they possess the intellectual capital and confidence needed to achieve specific educational goals. Conversely, sensemaking refers to the ways school-based personnel (teachers and administrators) interpret educational plans promoted by local, state, and federal authorities. Additionally, sensemaking focuses on how they come together as a group to provide a common response to those plans (Louis et al., 2005).

Collective sensemaking and efficacy are part of a number of theoretical traditions that are useful in understanding the dynamics of accountability policy in an educational context. In the following subsections, the researchers included sensemaking and perceived collective efficacy as two frameworks capable of helping broaden the understanding of structures and functions of accountability systems in a UTA program.

A Sensemaking Approach

Sensemaking occurs at the individual level. Louis et al. (2005) stated that sensemaking is primarily an individual occurrence facilitated by individual reflection. Therefore, teachers navigate through some sort of individual pondering on their teaching practices prior to undergoing collective sensemaking. Louis et al. (2005) noted that teachers are likely to engage in collective sensemaking when they perceive their legitimacy as a teaching professional is under attack. Thus, sensemaking impacts both individual and group dynamics in school settings.

In an era of accountability, teachers are often compelled to question their individual philosophies and ideas about what works for students. Teachers' opinions of best pedagogical practices are expressed in relation to what state and local policies are currently being enacted. Nevertheless, teachers must consider their students' best interests while attempting to identify adequate ways to address the complexities of their accountability environment. Hammerness (2004) analyzed the complex relationships between state context and teachers' passions about and commitment to effective teaching. Hammerness (2004) indicated that the pressures and inconsistencies of accountability have the potential for negatively impacting classroom pedagogical practices. Likewise, Louis et al. (2005) suggested that teachers' interpretations of accountability measures determine whether teachers "engage in significant change, incremental change, or resistance" (p. 178) to policies. Teachers and administrators continually engage in reflective activities as they attempt to understand new policies, and school professionals are aware of their positions as agents of change in the educational process. Another related construct is collective efficacy.

Efficacy Perceptions in Perspective

Collective efficacy is connected to quality teaching because it takes root in teachers' beliefs that schools are capable of closing achievement gaps among students (Goddard et al., 2004). A critical part of quality teaching includes

ensuring that those in charge of instruction have the intellectual know-how needed to achieve certain educational goals (Hammerness, 2004). Another critical component includes teachers having the confidence as a group to achieve goals set by the school (Zambo & Zambo, 2008). Teachers deal with increasing pressures from administrators and policymakers that challenge them to deliver quality instruction. Furthermore, the constructs of individual sensemaking and collective efficacy interact.

Social cognitive theorists have long commented on the interplay between personal beliefs and organizational behavior. In fact, social cognition perspectives emphasize that personal beliefs and organizational behavior are among key determinants of efficacy perceptions (Bandura, 2001). Goddard et al. (2004) stated that the external environment affects the choices individuals make to meet organizational goals. Perceived collective efficacy occurs when the members of an organization choose to align their individual philosophies and ideals with the exigencies of the organizational structure. Collective efficacy means that teachers will remain resilient and persistent, regardless of possible points of contention among school faculty, school professionals, and state and local authorities. Teachers can achieve resiliency and persistence by seeking genuine ways to align their individual philosophies with the state accountability context in which they teach (Yost, 2006; Zambo & Zambo, 2008). Pajares (1996) noted that the idea of collective efficacy implies that greater confidence ensues when school professionals and policymakers have shared visions and goals.

Perceived collective efficacy and sensemaking are both critical to understanding how school professionals understand and respond to accountability policies. The point of convergence between perceived collective efficacy and sensemaking approaches essentially resides in the description of school-based personnel. School-based personnel generate meaning out of externally and internally determined circumstances with a view to taking transformative action in their schools. For this study, the researchers explored ways teachers and students in the UTA program made sense of a district-mandated accountability policy.

Urban Teaching Academy—Program Context

The UTA program is a four-year curricular pathway for high school students aspiring to continue to postsecondary studies and become educators, specifically in urban schools. Students completing requirements were guaranteed college scholarships to participate in four-year teacher education programs at partnering colleges and universities. However, those students were required to agree to teach in an urban school in their district for a minimum of three years.

Students in the program became immersed in three levels of field experiences and a clinical internship. To enter the UTA magnet program, students completed an online application, provided a writing sample, submitted grades earned in seventh grade and the beginning of eighth grade, and presented their results from standardized assessments. At the time of the study, the UTA program was at the

end of its sixth year of implementation. The mission of the UTA program was to prepare students to pursue teacher education as a major and eventually teach in an urban school setting.

Methods

This study was qualitative in nature. The researchers used a multiple case study approach to explore the experiences of teachers and students in a pre-collegiate UTA program. More specifically, the researchers examined the UTA teachers' endorsement of the curriculum and the student benefits gained as a result of program participation. The three cases within the UTA program were located in one school district; these three cases operate within different contexts (Stake, 2006). According to Stake (2006), "qualitative case researchers focus on relationships connecting ordinary practice in natural habitats to a few factors and concerns of the academic disciplines" (p. 10). This particular study included three different school sites. All three sites were studied to examine their similarities and differences. The research approach examined each case in terms of situational issues, interpreted patterns of each case, and then reviewed cross-case issues to make assumptions about each program.

Participants

Participants included 75 UTA students from one school district. The UTA magnet program included three high schools within a school district based in the southeastern United States. All three high schools agreed to participate in this study. According to the *UTA Curriculum Guide*, the goal of the program is stated as follows:

> Students participating in the Urban Teaching Academy will attain general knowledge of the history of education, law, reform, educational theories and practice, and engage in a practical application of this knowledge through field experiences. Upon completion of the Urban Teaching Academy program, students will be armed with the skills, tools and preparation necessary to begin post-secondary training. This will facilitate entry into the teaching profession within an urban educational setting. It will also expose high school students to both the teaching profession as well as what it is like to teach in an urban environment (*UTA Curriculum Guide*[1]).

The UTA program enrolled 120 students, and 75 of the students consented with parental permission to participate in the study. All 75 students completed online questionnaires. Forty-six of the 75 students were selected to participate in one-on-one semi-structured interviews, and 42 students engaged in one of five focus group sessions. The sample was comprised of 58 females and 17 males ranging in age from 15 to 19. The sample included 31 African Americans/Blacks,

[1]A complete citation and reference are not included to avoid identifying the school system.

19 Hispanics, 17 Whites, seven multi-racial participants, and one Asian. The students' mean grade point average was 3.34, and 73% indicated they planned on teaching as their future careers. Two students had no aspirations to pursue postsecondary education, and two planned to pursue the military subsequent to graduating high school. Faux names of the participating school district, schools, and teachers are used throughout this report. The following section describes each school and the school district.

School and School District Context

Central County School District is located in a large urban area. The district population in the fall of 2013 was approximately 2.7 million. Table 1 shows the students' ethnic and racial backgrounds, gender makeup, and socioeconomic status.

Table 1

Student/High School Demographics

Student Demographics	Central School District (n = 206,481)	North High School (n = 1,603)	South High School (n = 1,884)	East High School (n = 2,023)
Female	107,557 (52)	972 (61)	986 (52)	889 (44)
Male	99,284 (48)	626 (39)	898 (48)	1,134 (56)
African American	43,437 (21)	645 (40)	572 (30)	1,400 (69)
Hispanic/Latino	59,983 (29)	382 (24)	627 (33)	237 (12)
White	82,736 (40)	476 (30)	496 (26)	343 (17)
Free/Reduced Meals	117,899 (57)	966 (60)	1,117 (59)	1,160 (57)

Note: Numbers in parentheses are percentages

Data Collection

Three different data sources were used to provide data triangulation to consider multiple and varied resources to seek convergence of evidence (Bratlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). Data were organized using a three-phase protocol to provide rich, detailed descriptions. The protocol included: (a) using an online questionnaire, (b) conducting semi-structured one-on-one interviews, (c) employing semi-structured focus group interviews, and (d) interviewing teachers.

Online Questionnaire

The purpose of the online questionnaire was to gather initial information about the nature and scope of UTA students' experiences as well as their aspirations

and anticipated concerns upon matriculation into the teaching field. Additionally, participants were asked 16 questions that included demographics, future career and college aspirations and plans, and experiences in the program. All 75 participants completed the online questionnaire. Student responses helped researchers structure the one-on-one interview protocol.

One-on-One Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect information from juniors and seniors in the UTA program. The semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were exploratory in nature. The purpose was to gather experiences of each teacher and student in the UTA program. Follow-up questions were asked based on each response. The 46 one-on-one interviews lasted from 30 to 60 minutes. Following the first round of interviews, the researchers read each transcript and designed and recalibrated questions for the focus group interview protocol.

Focus Group Interviews

Five semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted with a total of 42 UTA participants. All three school sites were represented with students at the junior and senior class levels. The objective of the five focus group sessions was to seek clarification and elaboration on statements given in the one-on-one interviews as well as find areas of convergence and divergence in students' experiences. The researchers sought to elicit participants' unique frameworks through open-ended questions designed to expand on the responses from the online questionnaires and one-on-one interviews. Focus group sessions lasted from 60 to 90 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Teacher Interviews

All three UTA teachers at the three school sites were interviewed. The researchers conducted two semi-structured interviews with Mrs. Barbara Jones, the North High School teacher, which lasted 120 minutes each. Mrs. Jones is an African American teacher who has taught for 30 years and who is department chair for career and technical education at her school. She completed a bachelor's degree in business education and then began teaching. She earned a master's degree in computer applications and an educational specialist degree in educational leadership. In addition, Mrs. Jones became nationally board certified. Mrs. Jones took an initial temporary position at a middle school in a different district. After a one-year stint there, she moved to the North School District, first teaching at a junior high school. She indicated that she seeks different ways to improve her teaching strategies and tries to stay abreast of current trends. She also has aspirations to be an administrator. Mrs. Jones uses humor to keep students engaged, and her students see her as a role model and have tremendous respect for her.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Mr. John Fitzgerald at South High School. Mr. Fitzgerald is white and has taught for 13 years at South High School. He has a bachelor's degree in technology education and teaches drafting in addition to the UTA courses. Mr. Fitzgerald has taught reading and has served as a resource teacher assisting other instructors with student discipline issues. He looks forward to his students graduating and one day returning to South High School to teach. Mr. Fitzgerald has a relaxed approach to teaching and seems to have few issues with classroom management or discipline problems.

The researchers also conducted two semi-structured interviews with Mrs. Julia Landing, who once taught at a middle school and has a degree in business education. In addition to business, Mrs. Landing taught diversified career technology, a work-based learning program, and the UTA program. She is white and has taught for 12 years. Mrs. Landing has a very motherly approach to teaching, and the students seem to respect her for it. She places substantial emphasis on caring and building relationships with students and indicated that these relationships take time to cultivate in an urban school.

Data Analysis and Data Reduction

The researchers employed thematic content analysis to capture the meaning UTA students attributed to their experiences as shown in their responses to the online questionnaires, one-on-one interviews, and focus group sessions. The process used included the following:

- reading transcripts (both one-on-one and focus group interviews) to capture a sense of the whole in terms of how participants talked about their experiences and learning,
- rereading transcribed interviews and demarcating transitions in meaning in the text utilizing a lens focusing on the phenomenon under investigation,
- reflecting on the meaning units to examine revelatory research content gained within each participant's transcript as well as across participants' experiences, and then
- synthesizing the themes into statements which accurately represent the structure of participants' experiences (Wertz, 2005).

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, the researchers implemented member checking to ensure credibility (Brantlinger et al., 2005). Member checking included returning the interview transcripts to the respective participants for their review to ensure correctness. Participants were encouraged to comment, clarify, elaborate, or suggest changes that would accurately represent the meaning given to their experiences. A few minor edits were suggested and made by the researchers. All participants agreed with the accuracy of data specific to their particular contexts, experiences, and views of those experiences.

Data Interpretations

The Central School District proved to be a robust site to explore issues of sensemaking and perceived collective efficacy with regard to district led accountability policies affecting the UTA program. While interviewing the three UTA teachers and their students at the three school sites, the researchers uncovered issues teachers faced that resulted from the school district's accountability pressures. Specifically, the UTA teachers were tasked with ensuring that their students obtained Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification.

During discussions with the teachers and students, three major themes with related sub-themes emerged. The first theme—Divergent Levels of Resistance toward Certification—highlights the two unique viewpoints of the UTA teachers regarding integration of the MOS certification into their teacher preparation programs. Mrs. Jones believed certifications improved her students' likelihood of obtaining employment upon graduation. Mrs. Landing and Mr. Fitzgerald determined they were not spending the needed time to integrate the certification into their curriculum, although Mrs. Landing made a greater effort than Mr. Fitzgerald.

The second theme—Perceived Benefits of Certification—is consistent with the student requirement to complete MOS certification. Overall, students believed being MOS certified was necessary because it provided them with more marketability as future teachers. However, some students acknowledged that the process was overwhelming even if it looked good on their résumés and increased career opportunities.

The third theme—District Pressures: Industry Certification Points Count—emphasizes the three UTA teachers' perceptions of the school district's rationale for imposing the MOS certification. Mrs. Jones thought the district wanted to produce work-ready teacher candidates. Alternatively, Mr. Fitzgerald believed the district operated as if were a business. Mrs. Landing questioned the feasibility of implementing the district's mandates unless the assigned instructor taught technology. The following sections discuss teachers' and students' interview responses.

Divergent Levels of Resistance toward Certification

Divergent levels of resistance toward the MOS certification proved to be the most prominent issue theme among the UTA teachers. The teachers were instructed by the school district through their principals to integrate MOS certification into their curricula. However, only Mrs. Jones fully supported the directive and actively incorporated the certification into her program. Mr. Fitzgerald and Mrs. Landing questioned the relevance of the certification in a teacher preparation program as well as its value to their students. Although they initially complied with the district's instruction, over time they gradually de-emphasized the importance of the certification. Each teacher provided a perspective regarding integrating the certification into the curriculum.

Competitive edge. Mrs. Jones, who fully supported the school district's instruction to include the MOS certification in her UTA program, believed it provided students with a competitive edge over other teacher candidates. She thought students' mastery of Microsoft Office programs increased their marketability and proficiency. Her students effectively used it to develop lesson plans (Microsoft Word), access e-mail (Microsoft Outlook), develop presentations (Microsoft PowerPoint), and create grade books and develop personal budgets (Microsoft Excel). She provided the example of a former student who had to forego a job promotion because he did not complete the MOS certification while in the UTA program, although he worked in the health care industry. Mrs. Jones encouraged the former student to share his experience with other students so they did not discover too late the importance of getting the certifications while in the UTA program. In addition, she emphasized the importance of earning the certifications and how doing so would place the student in an advantageous position ahead of other job applicants who did not have the certifications.

Time expended. Mrs. Landing, who questioned the relevance of the MOS certification, empathized with her students when they questioned the importance of the certification. Her students rationalized that they were there to learn about teaching, not about computers. Otherwise, they indicated they would have taken computer classes. She lamented the fact that preparing students for the certification exams had consumed an entire year of instruction; and neither she nor her students were satisfied, and all felt it was not worth the time expended. Mr. Fitzgerald also questioned the relevance of adding the MOS certification to the UTA curriculum. He explained that his philosophy for a teacher preparation program was that most of the students' time should be spent in field experiences. Therefore, he never supported integrating the certification into his program. Although he initially administered the certification to his students, he did not enforce it. Similar to Mrs. Landing's thinking, Mr. Fitzgerald voiced his concern that the certification did not add value to the students becoming effective teachers; and he quickly discontinued integrating the certification into his UTA program. Although Mr. Fitzgerald respected his teacher colleagues' decision, he believed that the UTA teachers should have challenged the district's decision to incorporate the MOS certification into the program.

Students' Perceived Benefits of Certification

Mrs. Jones' students provided extensive feedback on their perceptions of the MOS certification. They had mixed feelings about its relevance to their future teaching careers. A couple of Mrs. Landing's students also provided input on their perception of the certification. Some of her students embraced the notion that the certification would improve their marketability; and they looked forward to mastering three of the Microsoft Office products such as Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Excel, and potentially becoming a master certified expert. Other students believed the certification process was overwhelming even though it

might look good on a résumé. They questioned the time needed to prepare for the exams, but they agreed certification would make them more marketable. One student noted that the growth of technology in all walks of life made it necessary that future teachers be technologically proficient. The students' views, whether positive or negative, appeared heavily influenced by the views of their teachers.

District Pressures: Industry Certification Points Count

As evidenced in this study, both UTA teachers and students were impacted by the requirement that students obtain MOS certification to improve their school's overall evaluation. Mrs. Jones was an avid supporter of the district's decision to require industry certification in the UTA program. She noted that the district superintendent was vitally interested in the students becoming industry certified, reasoning that the more certified students a school has, the better the system's overall evaluation. She equated MOS certifications with AP courses and SCAT (State Comprehensive Assessment Test) scores for improving school evaluations. All three teachers acknowledged that the district influenced their schools to integrate the MOS certification because it improved their school's evaluation.

Teachers' Perceptions for Implementing MOS Certification

The UTA teachers gave various explanations for the district's rationale for implementing a MOS certification program. Both strengths and weaknesses for incorporating MOS certification into the program were cited.

Work ready. Mrs. Jones stated the primary reason for mandating the MOS certification was to better prepare students for work. In her opinion, industry certification was the best way to achieve this goal. She articulated that the increased emphasis placed on industry certification by the system superintendent was a result of comments heard from the business community that students are not work ready—their job readiness skills are not in place. Mrs. Jones explained further that the school district's motivation was based on the belief that all students, including future teachers, should be equipped with the critical career and technology skills to succeed in today's workforce.

The business of school. Mr. Fitzgerald emphasized that the implementation of the MOS certification made sense to him because of its effect on the school grade. He believed the school district received an incentive, and in his opinion the driving force behind certification was money. He concluded that, just as a business needs money to operate, so too, a school must have money because it operates much like a business. In addition, Mr. Fitzgerald explained that he had just received notification that all UTA teachers would have to get industry certification to continue teaching the courses. He did not plan to pursue MOS certification, and he admitted that he no longer encouraged his students to obtain the MOS certification.

Computer teacher or teacher educator? Mrs. Landing not only questioned the relevance of the certification in the UTA program, she also questioned the skill set needed for instructors to teach it. In her opinion, it would be challenging for a non-computer teacher to teach the skills needed for a student to obtain the certification. She remarked that her class in the Microsoft Office Suite took an entire year, so to incorporate that into the UTA program was not feasible, particularly considering that the UTA students were required to complete extensive field experiences. Mrs. Jones was the only teacher in the UTA program who fully supported the school district's mandate. Alternatively, both Mrs. Landing and Mr. Fitzgerald opposed adding the MOS certification. Mr. Fitzgerald refused to continue offering the MOS certification while Mrs. Landing gradually de-emphasized it.

Conclusion and Discussion

In this study a school district's decision to require the MOS certification of its UTA program teachers and students produced divergent levels of resistance while introducing perceived benefits. The three UTA teachers expressed affirming and opposing views of administering the certification. Student views were heavily influenced by their teachers' perspectives. Overall, both teachers and students acknowledged challenges and perceived benefits of implementing the MOS certification. These perceived challenges and benefits made an impact on the curricula and student outcomes within the UTA program.

This study explored the complex, varied, and contradictory ways three teachers made sense of and responded to a state-level accountability policy that had serious implications for the curriculum. All three teachers engaged in individual reflection regarding the legitimacy and relevancy of implementing a state-initiated policy that substantively impacted their curricula. The policy also resulted in tensions between what Campbell (2006) described as curriculum authority (enacting the curriculum as expected by external forces) and professional authority (teachers' own pedagogical decisions to enact curriculum aligned with their professional and personal beliefs and values).

Sloan (2006) indicated that "teachers do not experience and respond to such policies in predictable, mechanistic, or unidimensional ways" (p. 145). It was quite evident that teachers' willingness to embrace the curricular reform was based primarily on their individual beliefs and values. This assumption is consistent with the views of social cognition theorists who cite personal beliefs among key determinants of efficacy perceptions (Bandura, 2001; Tollefson, 2000). Mr. Fitzgerald was committed to exposing his students to the realities of teaching through field-based experiences. According to this commitment, he contended that the time spent on students acquiring industry certifications was unproductive and not aligned with the goal of preparing future urban teachers. Mrs. Jones believed she needed to equip her students with marketable and transferable skills. Thus, she viewed industry certifications as broadening the scope of career

possibilities for her students. For Mr. Fitzgerald, the district pressure to certify his students undermined not only his curricular decision-making but also his values, beliefs, and commitment to both the teaching profession and his students.

Clearly, the increasing demands and pressures of accountability systems made it difficult for teachers to remain committed to a number of cognitive processes, such as their individual philosophies, beliefs, and passions for teaching. However, these cognitive processes helped them deliver quality teaching (Hammerness, 2004; Lesley, Gee, & Matthews, 2005). Thus, an accountability environment is not always conducive to effective pedagogical practices.

Mrs. Landing initially conformed to the school's pressures to encourage her students to earn industry certifications, even though she was internally conflicted with her decision. Later, as she began to encounter unexplainable questions from students regarding curricular relevance to the focus on urban teaching, she began to de-emphasize the need to earn industry certifications. Mrs. Landing's behavioral transformations might be primarily attributable to the portrayal by Louis et al. (2005) that "teachers may, however, lack the power to develop constructive responses to external demands if they fail to engage in collective interpretations of policies" (p. 180). Stated differently, although Mrs. Landing struggled with the relevance of the initiative to reform her curriculum, she did not seem to acknowledge her internal conflict until her students began to voice concerns. Spillane, Reiser, and Reimer (2002) argued for the need for discourse between teachers and administrators. They contended that it is critical for teachers to construct their own interpretations of policies and apply those policies to student learning. This method of organizational learning is pertinent to perceived collective efficacy and sensemaking processes. Without administrators' discussion and framing of the benefits of implementing the requested curricular changes, teachers are likely to resist the reform.

Despite Mr. Fitzgerald's and Mrs. Landing's resistance to district pressures, they did not make their concerns public or share their perspectives regarding curricular reform to their school and district-level administrators. Mr. Fitzgerald seemed to understand the need for both the UTA teachers and school and district administrators to engage in discourse concerning the policy. In fact, he stated that the teachers collectively should have challenged the district's decision to incorporate the MOS certification into the program. Nevertheless, the teachers chose to take a more passive-aggressive approach by quietly refusing to follow the school district's requested changes. Interestingly, Sloan (2006) found a similar phenomenon with a teacher who "simply shut the door to her classroom and feigned compliance while continuing to do her own thing" (p. 144).

The researchers contend that the teachers should have voiced their concerns regarding the district's curricular change and how they believed it adversely impacted students' learning. Doing so could have essentially enhanced the quality of teaching and learning as well as the objectives of the UTA program.

As the teachers communicated in the interviews, the district is currently seeking to require MOS certifications for the UTA teachers as well. Therefore, time is critical in terms of sharing their frustrations about the district's curricular policy. The lack of agreement between the UTA teachers and the school district could have several implications. As Yost (2006) explained, "if a teacher's philosophy is not in line with a school's shared vision, then, a teacher must make a choice to join the collective group stance, align him or herself with minority opposing views, or leave either the school or teaching profession entirely" (p. 60).

Another interesting phenomenon observed during the interviews was the striking consistencies and similarities of philosophies found among both the teachers and their students. These similarities point to the substantial influence teachers have on their students and further substantiate that teacher individual effectiveness and student success are intertwined (Zambo & Zambo, 2008). Teachers should have the professional authority to construct their curriculum based on what they believe their students need to know and are able to do because teachers have considerable influence on their students' achievement (Center for Teaching Quality, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Lesley et al., 2010; Zambo & Zambo, 2008). The impact of the UTA teachers' adherence, or lack thereof, to the district's policy has direct implications on the quality of instruction in the program (Hamilton et al., 2007; Rothstein et al., 2008; Fletcher, 2006; Sunderman et al., 2005).

The researchers believe strongly that the focus on requiring Microsoft Office skill sets seriously limits students' learning potential and the knowledge base that UTA students will need upon program completion. Additionally, the researchers agree with several of the students as well as Mr. Fitzgerald and Mrs. Landing regarding the seemingly inordinate amount of time devoted to learning programs at an expert level. The researchers also believe this lack of coherence to the UTA curriculum goals ultimately serves as a detractor to student learning. Quite clearly, the researchers find that industry certifications lack relevancy in terms of the objectives and mission of the UTA program. Rather than aimed at improving student achievement, the researchers believe this particular curriculum mandate is more likely a strategy to increase the schools' profile. As such, the researchers think the UTA teachers and school and district administrators should examine how this curricular policy aligns with the program's objectives.

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