

**Reform Ideas that Travel Far Afield:
The Two Cultures of Reform in District #2 and San Diego¹**

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District reform has been capturing attention nationally (Knapp, in press). Whereas districts have traditionally been cast as slow moving bureaucracies that impede change, a small handful of researchers has begun to identify ways in which districts can actually be engines of change (Elmore, 1993; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Spillane, 1996). In the current standards- and accountability-based policy environment, districts may be in the best position to advance state reforms and facilitate school-level implementations because of their greater access to expertise coupled with the potential for economies of scale (Hannaway & Kimball, 2001). Moreover, those districts that can truly guide and support instructional improvement, have the potential to influence the learning of thousands of teachers and students.

Much of the trailblazing for district reform has been done by practitioners themselves, sometimes working in conjunction with university partners. There now exists in the country today a handful of districts that are being looked to as models for what might be accomplished. The vast majority of districts, however, continue to struggle, thereby raising the question: Is it possible for districts to learn from each other? More specifically, are there strategies for district reform that would be effective across districts? Conversely, are there aspects of district reform that are too dependent on local contexts to be widely transported to other regions? We know that districts cannot simply imitate other districts' strategies without adaptation. At the same time, districts should not have to reinvent the wheel every time they attempt reform.

The purpose of this paper is to identify how contextual factors influence district-wide reform. The analytic strategy that we employ is to compare the reform strategies in two districts: Community School District #2 in New York City and the San Diego City Schools. District #2 has been called an "existence proof" that districts can be powerful agents of change (Elmore & Burney, 1997). In 1998, the superintendent of District #2, Anthony Alvarado, was hired as the Chancellor of Instruction for the San Diego City Schools, bringing with him many of the strategies with which he earned success in New

York City. While the strategies for reform across these two cities are similar, the contextual elements are very different, thereby allowing us to begin to understand how context influences the feasibility and effectiveness of reform strategies.

The paper is cast within a *reform-as-learning* perspective. All reforms require that individuals learn to do something new. In the case of high-level, theory-based reforms that implicate significant changes in classroom practice (McLaughlin & Mitra, 2001), the learning that is required—at every level of the system—is substantial. In the final section of this paper, we use sociocultural theories of how individuals learn complex skills in a social environment as a framework for examining the conditions of learning across the two districts. Within this perspective, the contextual factors that appear to be most salient and on which we focus include the kind(s) of curricular and instructional programs teachers are being asked to implement, the pace of reform, the size of the district, the external policy environment, and attributes of the student, teaching, and administrative population such as level of experience and prior training.

The paper is organized into four sections. First, we describe our data sources and general similarities and differences between the two districts. Next, we identify the strategies for reform shared by the two districts, the means by which these strategies have traveled from District #2 to San Diego, and the extent to which they've taken root in San Diego. We then move to an analysis of how various contextual factors have interacted with the reform strategies to influence conditions for learning throughout the San Diego system. We close with some thoughts about the viability of our approach as a method for analyzing travel.

Data Sources and Background Descriptions

The data sources for this paper constitute both a wide-ranging body of data spanning two large funded projects and a more narrow, focused data set that targets the questions of the present study. The authors of the present study represent the confluence of knowledge related to the two districts—knowledge that consists of both systematically collected and analyzed data and scores of informal conversations with district leaders and educational professionals in the two cities. Mary Kay Stein was the Director of Research for the High Performance Learning Communities (HPLC) project, a five-year study funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) to study District

#2. Along with Richard Elmore, Lauren Resnick, Laura D’Amico and Michael Harwell, she is the author of numerous papers about the district (e.g., Stein & D’Amico, in press-a; Stein & D’Amico, in press-b; D’Amico, Harwell, Stein, & van den Heuvel, 2001; Stein, D’Amico, & Israel, 1999) as well as a collaborator on the production of five videotapes that present the district strategy for reform.

When Alvarado became Chancellor of Instruction in the San Diego City Schools in 1998, Stein joined with Hugh Mehan and Lea Hubbard to study the reform efforts in that city. With funding from OERI and the Spencer Foundation, this new team benefits from both the knowledge of Alvarado’s previous work in District #2 and the deep knowledge possessed by Mehan and Hubbard of the context of San Diego, both as a city and an educational system. The data collection in both the District #2 and San Diego projects spans all levels of the system and includes interviews with top district leadership and union leaders; observations of meetings and professional development at all levels of the system; focus group interviews with teachers, parents, students, and community groups; and systematic observations of classrooms within a subset of schools. Efforts are made to gather information from individuals holding a wide range of views on the reform, from advocates to skeptics.

The data collection that was targeted for this particular paper includes seven interviews (conducted during 2001 and 2002) with individuals who have been employed by both District #2 and San Diego. We began with a far-ranging interview with Alvarado in which his views on the similarities and differences between the two systems and his strategies for reform in San Diego were probed. We then interviewed individuals that had been recruited from District #2 to San Diego to assist with particular aspects of the reform. These included individuals now employed within the San Diego system and individuals who have been hired to consult in San Diego on a regular basis for extended periods of time. In addition, we interviewed a San Diego principal who had participated in a multi-day visit to District #2 and we observed two multi-day events in San Diego during which District #2 professionals presented information and/or modeled practice.

Description of the Two Districts

Table 1 identifies the similarities and differences between the two districts in terms of size and the kinds of students who comprise their populations.

Insert Table 1 Here

As shown on the table, San Diego is nearly six times larger than San Diego. The percentage of students on free/reduced lunch is comparable across the two districts (slightly more than half), as is the percentage of Caucasian and African American students. However, San Diego has significantly more Hispanic students while District #2 has significantly more Asian American students. The overall percentage of students classified as English language learners in San Diego is twice the percentage in New York.² There are other notable points of comparison as well. San Diego City is a K-12 district whereas District #2 is primarily comprised of elementary and middle schools. In the New York City system students leave their K-8 community school districts to attend one of a common set of comprehensive high schools; District #2, however, sponsored a few small alternative high schools. The percentage of students who attend these small high schools, however, is only 4.5% of the entire District #2 student population.

In addition to the differences identified in Table 1, there are other differences between the two systems that cannot be so easily quantified. For example, the cities within which the two districts reside have very different reputations. New York City is viewed as a liberal East Coast hub of artistic, financial, and intellectual activity; San Diego is seen as a conservative West Coast city whose politics have been driven by military and corporate interests. New York City is home to many universities that have well-known and active programs of educational innovation and outreach (e.g., Teachers College), whereas only San Diego State University of San Diego's institutes of higher education has been prominently involved in K-12 education. Although both cities have high percentages of immigrants, San Diego's immigrants are more homogeneous with respect to country of origin (Mexico) and language. The Latino community has formed a particularly strong

voice in the San Diego community around issues of school reform. Mexican-Americans in San Diego travel back and forth between Mexico and San Diego frequently, thereby influencing their attitudes about the importance of maintaining their first language. Immigrants in the catchment area of District #2 (middle to lower Manhattan) are primarily Asian American or Hispanic (mostly Puerto Ricans who do not travel back and forth to their home country as frequently as do Mexicans); however, nearly 100 countries are represented in District #2 schools.

The teachers' unions have played very different roles in the two cities. In New York City, teachers belong to the American Federation of Teachers, a progressive organization (previously led by the late Albert Shanker) that, by and large, is supportive of instructional reform. Although there have been pockets of resistance within District #2, Alvarado maintained an exceptionally strong relationship with the AFT at the local, regional and national levels. In San Diego, opposition from the San Diego Education Association (SDEA) began almost immediately after the arrival of Bersin and Alvarado. Although the SDEA (a local chapter of the National Educational Association) was supportive of the hiring of Bersin and Alvarado, once the two leaders began the reform without explicit approval of union leaders, the SDEA became and remained a voice of active opposition. For example, in March 2000 and prior to the school board's vote on the district's proposed \$49 million reform package, there was a series of heated community forums and teacher protests led by Marc Knapp, president of the SDEA. Knapp complained bitterly that "teachers were never consulted in the early stages about what they wanted." He stated that while he thinks that "everybody wants the same goal . . . nobody ever bothered to ask the teachers, the practitioners, what they needed to raise student achievement. And no one knows better than us." (San Diego Union-Tribune, 3/14/00)

A final difference between the two districts is the timing of *our* knowledge with respect to the unfolding of reform. The HPLC project was conducted during the final four years of Anthony Alvarado's 10-year tenure as superintendent. The San Diego study is documenting the reform from its inception. Therefore we treat "stage of reform" as a

² We have not looked deeply into the two system's methods for classifying students as proficient or non-proficient in English. Therefore, the reader is asked to interpret this comparison with caution.

contextual variable that differentiates the two sites and can potentially influence conditions for learning.

Strategies for Reform Shared by District #2 and San Diego

This section identifies the reform strategies developed by Alvarado and his colleagues in District #2 and then “brought” to San Diego. The “methods of travel” by which these strategies traversed the country are also described. Finally, we discuss the extent to which the strategies have taken root in San Diego.

Strategies “Brought” to San Diego

Upon taking the position of Chancellor of Instruction in San Diego, Alvarado noted that the reforms of San Diego would be new and innovative: “I don’t think this is an issue of emulation. Every reform has to be built in the soil of its city.” (San Diego Union-Tribune, 6/16/98). Nevertheless, there is no doubt that his understanding of educational reform, gleaned largely in District #2—but also as superintendent of New York City’s District #4—have informed his actions in San Diego. While there are many ways in which the similarities might be catalogued and discussed, we have selected five overarching themes that have framed the work in both cities.

Whole-District Reform From the Start

As the leader of instructional reform in both District #2 and San Diego, Alvarado has operated from a consistent underlying belief that *all* schools and *all* classrooms must participate in the reform from the very beginning. This strategy contrasts with reforms that begin with a few demonstration schools, or with a particular level of schooling, expecting—but often never getting to—whole district reform. Alvarado’s justifications for whole-system reform in both cities rest upon both moral and pragmatic grounds. Morally, he believes that a whole generation of students cannot be asked to wait until an entire system is ready to provide them with the support they need in order to learn. Pragmatically, he believes that significant change cannot be accomplished piecemeal. Not only, according to Alvarado, do unwanted aspects of the system persist, but new features have difficulty taking root: “When you do it piecemeal, and with a slow pace, the system

has a way of blubbering, sucking in the innovation and looking a lot like it looked before “ (Alvarado, 2001, p.3). Therefore, in both cities, Alvarado has made it clear from the start that the reforms that were introduced would be reforms that were expected to influence every employee, every school, and every student in the district.

Teaching and Learning Driving the System.

The driver of system-wide reform, according to Alvarado, should be the needs of teachers and students in the classroom. He is quick to acknowledge the strength of this central conviction:

There is no question in my mind that I have internalized, as a human being, this idea of teaching and learning driving (the reform) . . . When I look at a problem, I don't . . . look at structure. I don't look at personalization (for high school reform). Not that I don't know that all those things are influences. I look at *what the hell does a teacher do with kids?*” (Alvarado, 2001: 3).

Hence, what students need in order to learn—in the way of resources, competent teachers, well-trained principals and so on—determines how a school or the entire district should be organized. Whenever a decision needs to be made regarding some aspect of system organization or functioning, the question to be asked is: How will this affect teaching and learning in the classroom?

Professional Development in the Line

The melding of support for professional learning with evaluation is another hallmark of reform in the two cities. In District #2, an early act of reform was the elimination of the organizational entity that designed and delivered professional development, as well as positions such as Director of Social Studies that fell outside the administrative line. Rather than charging a sub-unit of the central office with support of instruction and learning, that function was placed entirely within the administrative line. All administrators were expected to provide professional development in the course of doing their jobs—referred to as “professional development as management” (Alvarado, 1999). Resources that once resided in the district office were reallocated to the schools

where teachers were coached inside their classrooms. In San Diego, a similar attempt has been made to invest professional development responsibilities within the administrative line. In this approach to reform, principals play a pivotal role: They are expected to be instructional leaders and to communicate urgency to their teachers, to take an assertive, pro-active, and supportive stance toward teachers' learning, and, finally, to hold teachers accountable for improvement based on the professional development they are receiving.

Content-Driven Reform, Starting with Balanced Literacy.

Educational reform generally falls into two broad categories: large-scale organizationally driven efforts that typically fail to generate significant changes in subject-matter-based teaching and learning inside the classroom or subject-matter-specific initiatives that generally avoid issues of large-scale organizational change. By beginning their system-wide reforms with an intense focus on literacy, District #2 and San Diego attempt to accomplish both. Both districts' initial work was focused by a theory of how children learn to read, which, in turn, rippled outward to guide the form and substance of their professional development for teachers and principals (Stein & D'Amico, in press-a). As such, the districts' efforts began with issues *at the educational core of how children learn content*, and then drove outwards to implications for the learning needs of professionals at every level of the system.

Both districts' reform efforts subscribed to a particular orientation toward literacy, Balanced Literacy, which has been strongly influenced by models of instruction developed in New Zealand (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996), and emanating from the Early Literacy project at Ohio State University (Fountas & Pinnell, 1995) as well as Reading Recovery (Clay, 1987; Pinnell, 1989), an early intervention program recognized nationally for its success at improving literacy achievement among at-risk students. In the Balanced Literacy approach students interact with texts at varying levels of challenge in a variety of settings with different levels of support from the teacher. The final goal is for students to become proficient and independent readers.³ On the way to meeting that goal, some challenging texts which are beyond the students' current reading capacities are read

³In both districts, the literacy program includes a focus on writing as well as reading. However, the

to the students with the teacher demonstrating vocal inflection, strategies for comprehending a text and a joy for reading. Other, much simpler texts are read *by* students alone as they practice the vocabulary and reading strategies they have already gained. Those texts which are just beyond the students' ability to tackle by themselves, the teacher reads *with* them, providing support, guidance and direct instruction in new reading strategies. The need for students to have *to*, *with*, and *by* reading experiences each day, working towards a time when they will be self-sufficient readers, can be considered the central principle of District #2's literacy program. A corollary to this principle is that students' reading abilities and needs must be constantly assessed so that appropriate texts and teaching points can be selected for them. A second principle of the Balanced Literacy Program is that students' early reading experiences should be with children's literature, without which they will never develop a love of literature or reading. A third principle is that all at-risk readers need to receive direct, individualized reading instruction each day.

Clearly, this orientation toward literacy instruction demands that teachers possess a deep understanding of the theory behind it, and the capacity to implement a needs-driven approach to instruction. The classroom management tasks are complex (teachers must assess students individually on a regular basis and conduct small group instruction while other students work independently or in small groups on pre-planned assignments), as are the intellectual tasks of scaffolding students' reading with just the right amount of support and challenge. The mix of reading *to*, reading *with*, and reading *by* must be calibrated in meaningful ways. Finally, supplementation of this approach with attention to word study—systematic attention to words and letter-sound correspondence—is yet another challenge. Compared to most other approaches to early grades literacy that are meant for large scale implementation and that are more scripted, Balanced Literacy places very heavy learning demands on teachers.

Assistance of Professional Learning at All Layers of the System

The reforms in both cities are built on the belief that effective teaching and competent leadership *can be learned*. Moreover, the learning of adults is viewed as occurring on a continuous basis within a community of learners. Principals are expected to

core of their literacy philosophies is based in reading and so we stress that aspect here.

nurture such communities in their schools and instructional leaders to nurture such communities among their principals. By modeling the need for continuous learning, by making private practice public, and by encouraging social interaction among adults surrounding their work with students, leaders are expected to develop a culture of learning that will become internally accountable and self sustaining.

Opportunities for teacher learning occur during summer workshops, faculty conferences and grade level meetings, and observations of teaching peers who excel at some component of instruction both within their school site and at other sites throughout the district. For principals, opportunities for learning occur during walkthroughs with their instructional leaders, monthly principal conferences, mentoring programs, principal support groups, and school intervisitations. All of these learning occasions are focused by the initiatives of the district. For example, early in the reform in both cities, all learning opportunities were focused around Balanced Literacy.

In summary, the overarching themes of reform are similar in District #2 and San Diego. In both cities, reform is about systemic change that is driven by a concern for content learning in the classroom and that adjusts supports—but not expectations—for struggling students, teachers, and schools. And in both cities, the professional learning of adults is focused by the learning needs of children with support and accountability working hand-in-hand, as is especially visible in the administrative line, to move the system forward.

Means by Which These Ideas Have Traveled

The District #2 ideas of district-wide reform have been transported to San Diego via three main avenues: through individuals from District #2 who are now embedded in the San Diego system, through presentations and demonstrations of practice by District #2 individuals for San Diego educators, and through artifacts that were used in District #2 and now widely shared in San Diego. Each of these is discussed briefly below.

Individuals

As the leader of instructional improvement in both sites, Alvarado has been the key individual responsible for carrying ideas from District #2 to San Diego. Figure 1 represents additional District #2 individuals who now are playing significant roles in the San Diego reform.⁴

Insert Figure 1 Here

Perhaps most significant (after Alvarado) has been the addition of Sandra Harrison, who was Alvarado’s deputy during the reforms in District #2 and who, upon Alvarado’s departure, became Superintendent of District #2 for two years. Harrison has two roles in San Diego: Director of the Leadership Development Academy⁵ and the provision of professional development for the district’s instructional leaders. As shown in Figure 1, her work with the instructional leaders places her at the very highest levels of district leadership. The nine instructional leaders report directly to Alvarado and are each responsible for a learning community of approximately 25 schools. As such, they are responsible for nurturing a sense of community among their schools, developing the knowledge and skills of their principals, and holding principals and teachers accountable for improved instruction and student learning.

As deputy superintendent in District #2, Harrison was responsible for elevating the role of the principal in the district’s overall reform strategy. She also strongly advocated that top district leadership (Alvarado, herself, and a central office literacy administrator) spend large amounts of time in schools (not behind desks at the central office); she developed the “walkthrough” as a strategy for both holding schools accountable and for the professional development of principals as instructional leaders of their buildings . Harrison also spearheaded the monthly ritual of principals conferences in District

⁴ Other than Alvarado, all individuals have been given pseudonyms.

⁵ The Educational Leadership Development Academy is a district collaborative project with a consortium of local universities and other agencies in San Diego that provides support and professional development for San Diego’s leaders. The Academy operates from the perspective that the principal is the most critical resource in the professional guidance and instructional direction of the school. Curriculum development, mentoring, and an internship program prepare prospective principals for this important role.

#2—conferences that focused on instruction, not administrative matters and served to strengthen the bonds between otherwise isolated building leaders.

The instructional leader position in San Diego is modeled after Harrison’s position in District #2. The learning communities that the instructional leaders oversee in San Diego were created to be nearly identical in size to all of District #2. Hence, the belief was that each instructional leader could perform the same oversight of schools and support to principals as did Harrison in District #2.

Harrison views her role in San Diego as helping the instructional leaders to do what she was responsible for doing in District #2.

When I came here and saw the level that they (the instructional leaders) were at . . . They were considered stronger principals than the rest (of the principals at the time Bersin and Alvarado came), but they didn’t really understand how to lead principals, and they didn’t have content knowledge. And they didn’t have leadership knowledge. They’re smart people, but they really didn’t have any idea. And I had to come up with a way that they were gonna be able to see their own practice and get better (Harrison, 2001: 6)

A more recent addition to San Diego has been Alice Winters as one of the nine instructional leaders. Before Winters’ hiring, all of the instructional leaders had been promoted from within the San Diego system. Winters was a distinguished teacher, a staff developer, and a principal in District #2. She was highly respected by top district leadership for her expertise in elementary literacy instruction and was often placed into high-need schools to turn them around. In San Diego she has been charged with several key responsibilities: overseeing the reform in the most high-need schools and serving as the main liaison between the administrative line and the Literacy Department.

San Diego has also contracted the services of two professional consultants—Albert Jenson and Sarah Thompson--who were extremely influential in the rollout of the Balanced Literacy model in District #2. When Alvarado decided that early literacy would be his focus in New York, he reached for arguably the “best” talent in the field and hired educators from New Zealand where theoretical advances were being made and literacy rates soared. These consultants relocated to New York for long stretches of time and

coached teachers in District #2 schools. Jenson and Thompson--two of the lead figures of this consultant corps—are now devoting significant attention to the rollout of Balanced Literacy in San Diego. Rather than working directly with teachers, however, in San Diego they work with staff developers who, in turn, work with the teachers (see Figure 1).

Two additional individuals that straddle work in the two cities include Carol Fulton, an expert teacher who now demonstrates lessons in San Diego and works with principals and elementary school staffs to improve instruction and build learning communities; and Pamela Zimmerman, a literacy expert who now works in the literacy department in San Diego.

Demonstrations of practice

On several occasions, San Diego principals have visited District #2, the first such visit occurring shortly after the arrival of Bersin and Alvarado. A typical itinerary for these visits would include observations in schools and classrooms, discussions with principals and staff developers, and (sometimes) observations of principals conferences. Based upon an interview with one principal who visited District #2, it is clear that these visits are important carriers of reform. Speaking of her visit, she recollected:

I really understood then. Up until that time, I think we were getting a picture of it, but it wasn't until I was actually there and going to these schools and taking these pictures (she is displaying photographs that she took of classrooms, hallways, and libraries). This is what "print-rich" means. And the "libraries." Before, we didn't have any model to really look at. And for me, I have to see it.

These are the things that I came back with. When I did a presentation to the other principals I stressed the culture of learning, the passions that we saw, the urgency, the engagement of the students and staff, the studying that they did together, all the structures they had in place, all the communication that was very evident---books, books, books and a print rich environment" (Garvin, 2001: 7)

In addition to taking San Diego educators to New York, San Diego leaders have brought District #2 professionals to San Diego to either demonstrate or talk about their practice. For example, three District #2 principals visited San Diego during the summer of 2001 and led a two-day seminar for principals (under Harrison's direction). Principals were coached on how to write a work plan that would result in them being able to take effective action to improve performance at their school. Principals also learned how to implement a monitoring system for student achievement, understand content around "accountable talk" and meaning making, and how to lead and support professional development.

District #2 teachers have performed demonstration lessons for San Diego principals as well. For example, in spring 2002 there was a 3-day session with a District #2 principal, staff developer and two teachers, one in literacy and one in mathematics. The teachers conducted lessons for area high school students as a group of principals and teachers observed. They debriefed with the participants later to expose the effective strategies they engaged in to enhance teaching and learning. The teachers also accompanied San Diego principals on walkthroughs of their classrooms and offered commentary on ways to improve instruction. In April 2002, two District #2 principals will lead the San Diego principals conference.

Bringing District #2 experts to San Diego serves several purposes that are both intended and unintended. Intentionally, this process allows for knowledge to be transferred to San Diego educators in ways that encourage faithful implementation of district mandates. Unintentionally, District #2 teachers and principals become more savvy about their own work because teaching facilitates deeper understanding. And, importantly, we have observed that District #2 educators are anxious to know if the model has been tweaked or modified in San Diego in ways that can help them. Thus, conversations offer the opportunity for learning to occur in both directions across the two districts.

Artifacts

Much of the same professional literature is referred to and used in the two settings. Among the most central are the following: Mosaic of Thought: Teaching Comprehension

in a Reader's Workshop (Keene & Zimmermann, 1997), Strategies that Work: Teaching Comprehension to Enhance Understanding (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000), Spelling K-8: Planning and Teaching (Snowball & Bolton, 1999), and The Art of Teaching Reading (Calkins, 2001). Significantly, all of these deal with elementary literacy; those that bear recent copyright dates were, in many cases, used in pre-publication form in District #2. Many of the authors are New Yorkers (Calkins is at Teachers College).

Another common set of artifacts emanates from both districts' association (during the late 90s) with the University of Pittsburgh's Institute for Learning. Organized around a set of "principles of learning" this institute, led by Lauren Resnick, has developed "tools" for organizing for and supporting effective forms of instructional practice. One tool in particular was frequently used in both sites: a set of rubrics for teaching and judging "accountable talk" in the classroom.

A final set of artifacts common to both sites is less easily captured, but no doubt significant. When current District #2 staff and San Diego principals come together, District #2 principals often share examples of forms that they've used, memos that they've written to their staff, work plans, and letters that follow observations of classroom practice. On those occasions in which we have seen these "situated" artifacts shared with San Diego principals, they have appeared to be most appreciated and useful in conveying a picture of practice.

How and To What Extent the Strategies Have Taken Root in San Diego?

Perhaps the most important difference between reform in the two cities has been the processes by which the reforms have been introduced and carried out. While the reform in District #2 developed slowly and organically over a 10-year period, the reform in San Diego has been put into place quickly, largely due to pressures from the business community who support a slim pro-Bersin majority of the school board. Bersin and Alvarado appears to have made a strategic decision to move quickly to get and keep the support of the business community, rather than getting the "buy in" of the teaching ranks, which would have taken more time. Combined with the much larger scale of San Diego, this quick pace of reform has led to the need to modify some of their strategies for reform.

Whole-District Reform From the Start

The idea that no one is exempt from the “arm of reform” has penetrated the San Diego district. It is difficult to imagine a single teacher or principal whose professional life has not been somehow altered by the reform. However, the expectation that all administrators and teachers participate in the reform is more consequential in San Diego because, unlike in District #2 where resistant teachers could transfer to other community districts in the New York City system without financial repercussions or loss of seniority, the same is not true in San Diego. Disgruntled San Diego teachers must actively scramble to invent ways to escape the arm of reform. It has been rumored, for example, that the mathematics specialists (intermediate-level teachers who teach only mathematics) were recruited largely from the ranks of teachers attempting to escape the Balanced Literacy requirements of the reform. Another way in which exemptions from the arm of reform have been sought is through “charter school” status. Three of San Diego’s 16 high schools have asked for and been granted a kind of “quasi-charter” status; a fourth is presently asking for the same.

In District #2, there are also a set of schools that are not subject to the “arm of reform.” Approximately four out of 45 schools are noticeably less tied to the Balanced Literacy framework than others. However, these schools have all “proven” their capabilities in Balanced Literacy practices and have moved “beyond” those practices to more individualized and creative forms of practice. They also have high student achievement scores. Moreover, these schools are still very much integrated into the overall District #2 community; their principals attended all principal conferences, their classrooms are used for certain kinds of demonstration teaching, and their principals are active supporters of top district leadership. The San Diego schools and teachers who are opting not to participate, however, do not share this profile. They appear to be resisters rather than schools who’ve bought into and then moved beyond the reform.

Teaching and Learning Driving the System.

According to Harrison, the larger size of San Diego has made it more difficult, overall, for teaching and learning to drive the district. During her visits to schools in

District #2, Harrison reports that she would sometimes observe mandates from central office that were impinging on teachers' time or freedom to do what was best instructionally for their children. After such occasions, Harrison would make recommendations to various central-office personnel regarding how the bureaucratic needs of the district could be met in less obtrusive ways. In fact, she viewed the reshaping of the bureaucracy to conform with instructional needs of teachers and students to be a major part of her responsibility as deputy superintendent. Harrison reports that, although she is encouraging the instructional leaders to take on this responsibility in San Diego as well, it is much more difficult due to the size and entrenchment of various central office functions in a system that is six times the size.

Due to the size of San Diego, Alvarado has had to deal with organizational arrangements to a degree that he did not in District #2. As much as possible, however, he has attempted to drive organizational decisions by considerations of teaching and learning. For example, upon their arrival, Bersin and Alvarado completely rearranged the feeder patterns and jurisdictions of area superintendents (now instructional leaders). Because the feeder patterns tended to be segregated socio-economically, the new leaders felt that expectations had not been the same across the district. The learning communities into which Bersin and Alvarado organized the district—by contrast—were designed to be heterogeneous. By bringing together schools that historically had been segregated, the intention was for less-advantaged schools to have the opportunity to co-participate with more-advantaged schools in the reform, using their differences to spur learning across faculties that traditionally had not benefited from each others' expertise, as well as a sense of responsibility among all San Diego teachers for all of San Diego's children.

Professional Development in the Line

Transforming administrators into instructional leaders has been challenging. Bersin and Alvarado inherited a cadre of administrators, the vast majority of whom came up through the ranks of the assistant principalship during which their training was purely administrative. Neither the sitting principals nor these principals-in-waiting (assistant principals who believe they are deserving of the nod to become building leaders) were prepared for this change in job description. Many felt that they were quite skilled at

operational issues and were reluctant to give them up for instructional duties for which they felt much less qualified.

A review of the training manual from the first year of the reform in San Diego (Principals’ Instructional Conferences: Training Materials, 1998-99) reveals an ambitious plan that consisted of training the instructional leaders in the Balanced Literacy model and then (sometimes within days) expecting the instructional leaders to turn around and teach the same information to their principals. Not surprisingly, the instructional leaders were able to conduct these sessions in only the most perfunctory manner, despite being armed with pre-printed copies of handouts and overhead transparencies. This led to a perception, among principals and teachers, of a top-down, heavy-handed reform—and also to an overemphasis on tangible but superficial features of literacy instruction such as the appearance of classrooms, the existence of word walls and charts at students’ eye-level, and the rearrangement of classroom furniture.

With instructional leaders and principals equally non-practiced in the literacy model, the notion of instructional leaders providing both support and evaluation to their principals was viewed with some degree of mistrust—especially given the culture into which it was introduced, a culture that was accustomed to the separation of these two functions. During walkthroughs of their buildings, principals were asked to open up to their instructional leader admitting problems in their schools and seeking their assistance. Some were grateful for the attention and ready for the increased accountability. Others, however, hesitated, saying they resented being “written up.” They worried about any educator’s capacity to handle such a relationship professionally as well as the instructional leaders’ yet unproven capacity to deliver the support needed to build the expected school improvements.

Finally, and perhaps most consequential, professional development in San Diego is *not* delivered *only* in the line, but also by free-standing subject matter departments. This represents a major departure from the District #2 strategy where all professional development was under the direct control of the administrative line. In District #2, literacy professional developers were experts hired from the outside by Deputy Superintendent Harrison, who was able to control who was hired and what they were asked to do by the principals to whom they were assigned. In San Diego, on the other

hand, the literacy peer coaches/staff developers were hired from *within*. Their selection, training, and supervision have been placed under the jurisdiction of the Director of Literacy who reports directly to Alvarado, not to Harrison.

Tensions have arisen due to competing agendas, resulting in a less-than cohesive effort. At the school level, for example, although both administrators and the literacy department subscribe to the Balanced Literacy model, it is not unusual for teachers to get one message from their peer coach and a different message from their principal. At the level of central office, literacy department staff are frustrated by the inability of their peer coaches to secure the backing of principals, and instructional leaders and principals are frustrated by their inability to compel the peer coaches to respond to the needs they see as they conduct walkthroughs. In short, the elegance of having both support and accountability resting within the same reporting stream has been lost. Presently, efforts are underway to improve communication channels between the two groups. Literacy managers now join with instructional leaders in planning for and conducting principal meetings, for example.

Content-Driven reform.

As in District #2, San Diego leaders decided to begin their reform with Balanced Literacy. However, due to a number of contextual differences between the two systems, the rollout of Balanced Literacy in San Diego has had to confront a new set of challenges. With respect to the elementary grades, district leaders' knowledge of the program is solid and their ideas about how to help teachers and principals come to understand the program can build upon their experiences in New York. However, several individuals who have worked in both District #2 and San Diego have found the rollout of Balanced Literacy at the elementary grades to be more difficult than it was in New York. According to one consultant:

When I arrived in New York many of the teachers were already beginning to think in the way that we're wanting our teachers to think. . . . The teachers here [in San Diego] have been used to the system of being told what to do. They were told what to do by publishers with their books. They were told what to do by various

programs. . . . A lot of the teaching programs are very prescriptive. And these are my personal views: I've got the strong impression the teachers had stopped thinking about teaching. I am generalizing so take my words carefully here. These are well-qualified teachers, well-trained in terms of their qualifications. And yet, a lot of them had stopped thinking about kids: what kids knew or what they didn't know.

Assessment had sort of disappeared almost in terms of being a diagnostic tool to assist the needs of these kids. They'd [the teachers] had attended a lot of professional development, but it was a very top down sort of input where they were more interested in how to do something than why you do something and the rationale for doing something. They would go to professional development to get good ideas; so they'd see a piece of practice and would adopt it without thinking, do the kids need it? Or does it really make any sense at all?
[Jenson, 2001, p. 3]

The educational philosophies of New York City's teacher training institutions were in sync with the needs-driven approach of the Balanced Literacy Program; thus consultants found the District #2 teachers more predisposed to the underlying ideas and philosophies of the Balanced Literacy model. These same consultants claim to find San Diego teachers more apt to search for programs as opposed to thinking about their teaching in terms of students' needs.

Another problem in San Diego has been the state policy environment which, over the past few years, has become very pro-phonics. While the Balanced Literacy model does not ignore phonics (it has a Word Study component), the systematic study of phonics does not drive the program in the way that phonics advocates believe is necessary. State monies are available for textbooks which are phonics based and for professional development oriented toward phonics. Hence, San Diego has had to interface with these constraints in a way that allows them to access state resources without betraying the underlying philosophy of the Balanced Literacy model.

Another difficulty in implementing the Balanced Literacy program has been the needs of second language learners. Critics complain that the needs and culture of Mexican students have not been taken into account in the instructional models used at all levels of the system. The needs of second-language learners in high schools, in particular, have been a point of contention. Efforts to secure grant funds from the federal government to establish small learning communities within the high schools that target the needs of these students offers some hope in this regard. (see Hubbard, Villanueva, Rodriguez, & Martinez-Cosio, in preparation, for a full account of language difficulties within the San Diego reform).

Finally, the Balanced Literacy model is most well developed for grades K – 4; District #2 educators had developed extensions of the model for grades 5 – 8. In San Diego, however, leaders have had to quickly devise an approach for literacy in high school which arguably was outside their area of expertise. The literacy department has had to scramble to develop units of study for high school students that are viewed by many as weak. In addition, because students who need extra work in literacy have been placed in extended time-blocks of “genre classes” in the high schools, these students have been essentially tracked together for the other subjects as well, leading to all of the potential problems that are associated with tracking.

Although both San Diego and District #2 began with literacy, the rate with which additional subject matters have come on board in San Diego has been much more rapid than it was in District #2. District #2 did not initiate reform in mathematics until the literacy initiative had been given time to mature (district-wide change in mathematics began in 1995-96, nine years into the literacy reform). In contrast, San Diego announced a “physics first” initiative, which rearranges the high school science curriculum to teach a qualitative, concept-based physics course in the ninth grade, only three years into their reform. San Diego has also begun to define its mathematics program. In the 2001-02 school year, they hired mathematics administrators for the high schools (individuals with administrative credentials and expertise in mathematics) to begin to support and improve mathematics teaching. In 2002-03, they plan to hire coaches for the elementary grades.

What is the same across both districts is the definition of the reform in terms of what gets taught and learned in the classroom. Moreover, the kinds of instructional

programs that are identified for district-wide implementation suggests a propensity to select programs that demand independence and complex thinking on the part of students and hence high demands for teacher and principal learning. Without an understanding of the conceptual basis of these instructional reforms, teachers, principals, coaches, and instructional leaders are in danger of going through the motions but missing the underlying intent. Another concern is the amount of knowledge required of principals to guide reform in multiple subject matters, especially in the high school (Stein & D'Amico, 2000).

Assistance of Professional Learning at All Layers of the System.

San Diego leaders have taken seriously their responsibility to provide support and training to individuals at all layers of the system. A monthly publication that lists professional development opportunities typically contains hundreds of workshops and seminars. All of the forms of professional development that were found in District #2 can also be found in San Diego.⁶ Opportunities for teacher learning occur during summer workshops, faculty conferences and grade level meetings, and observations of teaching peers both within their school site and at other sites throughout the district. For principals, opportunities for learning occur during walkthroughs with their instructional leaders, monthly principal conferences, mentoring programs, principal support groups, and school intervisitations. Moreover, as in District #2, all of these learning occasions are focused by the initiatives of the district. For example, early in the reform, all learning opportunities were focused around Balanced Literacy.

Although the forms are similar, what actually occurs during professional development may not be. Although not systematically analyzed at this point, our write ups of professional development sessions that were observed in the elementary and high schools suggests that they are not always led by knowledgeable staff developers or principals, that the information discussed is often literal rather than deep, and that

⁶ The only exception is the Professional Development Lab which exists in District #2 but not in San Diego.

participants are not always positive regarding how the session will help them in their practice. Over time, we have observed some improvement as individuals have gotten more knowledgeable about the reform.

In summary, the extent to which reform strategies from District #2 have taken root in San Diego varies. Although the majority of schools would identify themselves as “with the drill,” some have found havens from “district-wide” mandates. Teaching and learning remain the driving metaphors on the lips of district leaders and some organizational arrangements (e.g., the learning communities) have been redrawn to facilitate more and better opportunities for learning. However, the sheer size of the district—along with the various bureaucratic structures needed to keep it functioning day-to-day—has challenged leaders’ abilities to stay on top of all of potential impingement’s to successful teaching and learning in the classroom. And, although administrators have internalized the need to spend more times in classrooms, their ability to successfully guide instructional improvement has been curtailed by their own newness to the reform and by peer coaches who may or may share their understanding of the reform. Finally, the provisions for professional development—while admirable in their number and variety—can only be as effective as the teaching and learning that occurs within them.

How Context Interacts with Strategies to Influence Conditions for Learning

The changes that San Diego leadership is seeking in classrooms are profound; they cannot happen through scripted learning. For most teachers, learning to implement programs such as Balanced Literacy involves shifting from a practice grounded in routine demonstrations of decontextualized, often low-level skills to a practice that more closely resembles improvisation within a loosely structured overall plan. Such improvisational forms of instruction cannot be scripted by a set of teacher-proofed materials, but rather depend on teachers’ deep understanding of their own students and the content that they want their students to learn.

It has been suggested that changing to this type of practice is not possible without an accompanying shift in teachers’ epistemological beliefs regarding knowledge and how it is constructed. The teacher learning involved in this shift has been called *transformative*

to highlight the radical restructuring of knowledge, beliefs, and norms of practice that is required; it is contrasted with additive learning which denotes the assimilation of new skills into teachers existing repertoires (Thompson & Zeuli, 1999). Research suggests that most teachers have a great deal of difficulty making such transformations (e.g., Peterson, 1990; Stein, Grover, & Henningson, 1996).

Changing an entire system to support teachers' learning of such complex and sophisticated forms of instructional practice is the task of reform in San Diego. The learning that is required—not only of teachers, but also of principals, instructional leaders, and peer coaches/staff developers—is substantial. Principals must understand the new practices in a deep, theory-based way in order to provide support for teacher learning and hold teachers accountable for the intent of the reform, not superficial aspects of its enactment. Instructional leaders must understand the new practices in a deep enough way to not only judge the quality of enactment in classrooms, but also to assist principals in their roles as leaders of reform in their buildings. Finally, peer coaches/staff developers must understand the new instructional practices well enough to be able to conduct demonstrations of those practices and to provide the right amount and kind of assistance to help teachers learn the theoretical underpinnings of the reform practices so that they can enact them in meaningful and effective ways in their classrooms.

Contemporary theories of how individuals learn complex tasks in social environments provide guidance regarding the processes and conditions needed to support such learning. Unlike low-level skills that can be learned using behaviorist techniques such as imitation with reinforcement, high-level knowledge and skills are learned over time, by performing authentic tasks in continuous interaction with others who are more experienced and can serve as models and guides (Vygotsky, 1978; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wertsch, 1985; Rogoff, 1994). Individuals learn by becoming socialized into a community that shares similar goals and values and that embodies the thinking and actions needed to attain those goals in their day-to-day functioning. By participating in such communities, individuals learn to gradually assume more and more responsibility for carrying out the central tasks of the community. As they do so, they learn the essential knowledge and skills, how to talk and interact in meaningful ways around the central tasks of the community, and develop identities as members of the community.

The successful travel of strategies for district-wide enactment of high-level, theory-based reform faces many challenges. Because of the contextual factors that differ between District #2 and San Diego—most notably, size, pace of reform, and the cultures within which the reforms are embedded—we are finding differential effectiveness of the reform strategies. More specifically, we find that the enactment of the reform strategies has resulted in the development of different conditions for learning across the two sites. In this section, we examine these differences by chronicling the opportunities for learning that teachers new to the reform typically have in both districts. We then examine how size, pace of reform, and culture have influenced the interaction of reform strategy and resulting conditions for learning across the two sites.

Conditions for Learning in District #2

In the middle to late 90s, conditions were ripe in District #2 for teacher learning of complex forms of instructional practice. First, a community existed—at both the school and district levels—into which teachers could be socialized. A teacher who was new to District #2⁷ had an excellent chance of being placed in a school where the district-endorsed instructional practices were being enacted with fair- to high-degrees of fidelity. Her principal would have most likely been an advocate of Balanced Literacy, having been purposefully selected by district leadership because of her effective teaching practices and/or provision of staff development in this area. The new teacher would have most likely found herself next door to—and across the hall from—teachers who had been implementing the Balanced Literacy model for several years. Within days, the teacher would have been invited to grade-level meetings and faculty conferences that focused on the district-endorsed instructional models, where her knowledge could be reinforced and expanded.

Second, the new teacher would have been involved in authentic tasks of teaching and learning from the start. From her first day, this teacher would have been expected to implement the Balanced Literacy program in its entirety. Rather than beginning by implementing one component of the model and then gradually, once that component was

under her belt, moving on to mastering another component, she would have been expected to begin by implementing the entire 3-hour literacy block—with all of the requisite components. However, she would have received support in a number of ways and from a variety of sources to be able to do so. The capacity both within her school and the district would be strong.

Her principal would have helped her to set up her room in a manner conducive to the style of teaching she would be doing. If she needed extra help, or had questions, she would have been able to ask the teacher next door. The teachers throughout the building would have pitched in to help her begin to amass a classroom library of children’s books appropriate to the needs of her students. Within the first months of her employment, she would have attended, at her principal’s request, several district-sponsored workshops on the Balanced Literacy model. Along with other new teachers in the district, she would have been presented with the theory behind the model and the importance of providing students with *by*, *with*, and *to* experiences everyday, as this relates to the theory of how children learn to read.

Within the first few months of her employment, she also would have been observed by district leaders during a school walkthrough. Based on their assessment of her needs, she would have been provided with the opportunity to visit other teachers—outside her building—who were particularly effective implementers of components of the model with which she was struggling. Care would have been taken to assure that she visited a teacher that had similar kinds of students and that exhibited the kind of practice from which she could learn. A staff developer would have accompanied her on this visit in order to help her understand the “thinking behind the practice,” not simply the visible aspects of the practice itself. In order to do this, the staff developer would have had to have been strong in her knowledge of the reform and in her ability to communicate information to teachers. Finally, within the first few years of her employment, she would have been given the opportunity to participate in the Professional Development Lab, a 3-week residency with an expert teacher, which further enhanced her growth as a teacher.

⁷ Most likely, this teacher would have been selected based on high recommendations from a nearby teacher education institution or from a District #2 teacher who had supervised her student

District leaders would not have expected the new teacher to become proficient in the Balanced Literacy model over night. They would have fully expected that she would struggle at first, even implementing the model mechanically. But gradually, with assistance geared to her level of expertise and with expectations and support from her peers and principal, she would have been expected to become a proficient teacher of literacy and that strength would be evident from her practice and from data on student learning from her classroom (For a complete discussion of teacher learning in District #2 see Stein & D’Amico, in press b).

Although we’ve focused on the conditions for learning that might be expected to prevail for teachers in District #2, much the same conditions held for principals. New principals were brought into a district-wide community that valued similar outcomes for children and believed in a particular set of instructional practices that would achieve those outcomes. Over time, they were socialized into this community through monthly principal meetings, a mentoring program, and principal support groups led by Harrison. Interestingly, the third party that must learn—staff developers—were the experts in District #2. Most of the staff developers were either the initial group of consultants from New Zealand or a second cadre hired from Teachers’ College. These external consultants were considered experts in early literacy when they were hired and hence did not require training by District #2.⁸

The example of District #2 suggests that systemic reform that is focused on ambitious instructional practices, a carefully planned and delivered professional development program and strong teacher and administrator knowledge and expertise can create positive conditions for teacher learning. Interestingly, the conditions for learning that prevailed in District #2 resemble what learning theorists suggest is needed for the learning of complex knowledge and skills in a social environment. By aligning *how* individuals learn with the level of complexity of *what* they are expected to learn, District #2 was able to create a positive environment for learning. San Diego, on the other hand, presents a variety of challenges to the construction of positive environments for learning.

teaching. She may even have taught in the district’s summer or after-school program.

⁸ For mathematics, the district undertook the training of in-house coaches, hence more closely resembling the coaching model used in San Diego.

Conditions for Learning in San Diego

Reform in San Diego faces a different set of contextual factors and a different population of both adults and children. One of the major problems, of course, is that *everyone* is new to the reform. Knowledge about the reform is still very much in its early stages and hence mature communities of reform practice into which teachers—and others—can be socialized have not yet been fully established. One of the biggest advantages in District #2 was the capacity at the school site to support teacher learning following the more formal training that teachers attended in district-sponsored workshops. In San Diego, the formal workshop-based training is available, but, upon returning to their schools, teachers do not necessarily find a community that completely values or reinforces putting into practice the skills that were taught. There will most likely not be that teacher next door or across the hall whose practice embodies what they are trying to learn. There would be too few stories from others who have traveled a similar path. Teachers do not hear the reassuring voices of others who also felt overwhelmed at first, but gradually learned, with patience and perseverance, to implement the model.

Instead, San Diego teachers are apt to return to a principal who is just learning the reform herself and, as a result, is likely to reinforce superficial aspects of compliance in place of imparting a deeper understanding about the way in which the reform can assist student learning. As noted by one district consultant:

From what the teachers are telling me, it seems that some principals really don't know what they're doing because of the kinds of things they tell teachers to do. When people are told to hang up from the beginning of the year a chart with the comprehension strategies ala Stephanie Harvey in their room. That doesn't make sense. Why would you hang them up in your classroom? That makes teachers ever so inconvenienced. But that's what they were told (Thompson, 2001: 6).

Without an understanding of why these comprehension strategies might improve meaning making of a text, teachers are left to view it as an inconvenience rather than a tool for learning. Principals who are themselves learning the Balanced Literacy program often zero in on readily visible—but not necessarily fundamental—aspects of the program

when visiting classrooms. This often causes undue stress and confusion among teachers over what is expected of them.

The rollout of Balanced Literacy also seems to be different in San Diego from District 2. Instead of learning to implement the whole program from the start, San Diego teachers were introduced to the model one component at a time. They began in year one of the reform with Read Alouds and Independent Reading (reading *to* and reading *by*); the second year, Shared Reading (reading *with*) was added, and the third year, Guided Reading (reading *with*). The rationale behind this approach, according to the Director of Literacy, was that teachers would have immediate access to and could learn to implement these two components fairly easily. It was believed that all teachers knew how to read aloud to their students and that, indeed, this was something that most teachers enjoyed doing. Similarly, they felt that teachers could oversee students reading independently for some period of time each day. However, the more demanding part of Independent Reading, conferring with students individually to assess their reading level, and the more complicated process of conducting Guided Reading sessions was not expected or taught until later.

Perhaps by introducing the model in this staged manner, district leaders were able to control the level of difficulty for teachers. However, by not being asked to participate in the entire, authentic task of assisting students to learn all components of Balanced Literacy, teachers did not develop an understanding of the “gradual release of responsibility”, the *to/with/by* that is the underlying rationale—the heart of the theory that undergirds the Balanced Literacy model. In the process of reflecting on this, a consultant noted the following concern:

I worry about Shared Reading because I think people don't understand it. They think it's what you do with a big book or what you do with an overhead projector. And I think it's partly because the *to-with-and-by* piece is missing from their understanding. If you don't understand *to*, *with*, and *by* you don't understand Shared Reading.
(interview, 2001: 14)

The key challenge in efforts to implement an instruction-focused reform in San Diego has been, according to Alvarado, the lack of capacity among educators to impart the knowledge and training that can improve teaching and learning.

I believe and work under the theory that the problem is the capacity of the system. It is what the adults know and are able to do that is the primary issue at hand. It has nothing to do with who kids are or what they are doing, what do they know, what about their parents, what about their poverty level, what about the, it is what the adults in that school know and are able to do. (Interview, Alvarado, 4/20/01).

San Diego is attempting to deal with the lack of high-capacity individuals in a number of innovative ways. For example, they've established a "grow-your-own" principal's academy with the University of San Diego to train building leaders who will be schooled in the forms of instruction that the district promotes. The Educational Leadership Development Academy (ELDA) is entrusted with the responsible of recruiting and hiring the brightest and the best to build capacity. However, since San Diego educators are in the process of learning what they would be required to teach, this job has been difficult because there is not a large pool to draw from- in both size and capability—compared to their needs. For example one instructional leader told us recently that she knows she is losing four of her 22 principals—at least that is the number who have told her that they are retiring. This poses a real dilemma for her and the whole district. The ELDA can not turn out principals fast enough to keep up with the supply.

Moreover, training is complex. Educators at all levels of the system must learn content and they must learn leadership. The instructional content is meant to be the glue—and the common language—around which community can be built. An important part of any community is the nature of the talk surrounding tasks. In schools that are organized to promote effective instruction for all children, teachers must regularly meet to discuss student learning and the ways in which their instructional practice can better meet students' needs. Most teachers do not do this regularly in the course of their professional lives and hence need to learn how to talk in professional ways. They need to learn the language of the reform and importantly begin to share a common understanding around a common set of practices.

This is primarily the responsibility of the principal and staff developer at the school site. However, in addition to unpracticed principals, San Diego teachers are likely to find that their school's coach/staff developer—instead of providing expert assistance—is learning the same things at the same rate as they are. Most coaches are on the same level as the teachers; without a differential in expertise, there can be no effective assistance for teachers.

Under a theory of adult professional development that is largely based on learning through interaction with others, the detriment of possessing too few good models cannot be overestimated. The lack of *variation* in expertise is also problematic, however. In District #2, the entire district was a “learning laboratory.” District leaders had an array of models to select from when building a professional development experience for struggling teachers. Great care was taken in matching individuals, so that the learner was exposed to exactly what was needed at that particular point in his or her development.

The expertise in San Diego, now into the fourth year of the reform, is decidedly not as developed as it is in District #2. However, San Diego is beginning to have models of instructional practice that can be used in the professional development of their teachers. Many of these models represent “masters-in-the-making” and the attempt has been to use them in that way. For example, at a staff development last spring, one elementary principal showed a Guided Reading (GR) session that was conducted by one of her “star” teachers. Working together with a consultant, this teacher had conducted a Guided Reading lesson with her students, received feedback from the consultant and then conducted it again so that the a video could be taped that would show the rest of the faculty a powerful Guided Reading session. Although teachers may only be one-half step ahead of their peers, these videotapes provide fodder for conversation and some modeling to improve instruction. Occasionally these videos are shown at district-wide principals conferences so that principals can also hone their skills when observing teacher practice, learn how to suggest strategies for improvement to their teachers and receive support from their instructional leaders in the process. Most models of masterful practice, however, have often come from District #2, and other outside consultants and not without problems (see section below on culture)

Contextual Factors Influencing the Conditions for Learning in the Two Districts

There can be no doubt that stage of the reform process is a major difference in the conditions for learning as reported in District #2 and San Diego. With at least six years of reform under their belt when we began our data collection, District #2 exemplified a mature community of practice. Will San Diego exemplify a similarly mature and hospitable set of conditions for learning within the next two years? Perhaps. However, we would like to close with some thoughts about contextual differences between the two districts that may predict continuing challenges for San Diego.

Size

Ambitious, system-wide instructional reform goals set the stage for a unique set of required conditions for learning—conditions that are very difficult to realize in a district the size of San Diego. In order to get ambitious reform off the ground, high-capacity individuals are needed to model good practice at every layer of the system, to assist the learning of others, and to hold others accountable for learning the new practices. In Alvarado’s theory of reform, these individuals include administrators, individuals who have not traditionally viewed themselves in this role. Moreover, these high-capacity individuals must be present in sufficient numbers to influence the on-the-ground, face-to-face learning of thousands of teachers and hundreds of principals. We have seen how this has been a very tall order to fill in San Diego. Rather than leaders who have deep knowledge of the reform, San Diego has principals who are not highly experienced or capable, setting the tone for learning communities; staff developers who are not experienced or capable, assisting teachers; and instructional leaders who are only steps ahead of their principals, instructing principals how to lead their buildings.

Size has influenced the lack of high-capacity models in San Diego in a number of ways. The selection process for both principals and coaches has necessarily been less-intensive and less-selective than it could have been in a smaller district. District leaders’ time is limited; hence they cannot hand-select principals and staff developers based on in-depth knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses, but rather must rely on others’ assessments. Often, as in the case of staff developer selection, leaders were forced to rely on bureaucratic methods—methods that while common to large organizations, would not

be necessary in a small district. Once individuals are selected for these roles, the training that they receive is not as deep, long-term, or theory-based, at this point, as is needed for the highly complex roles they are being asked to perform. In the beginning, principals were being taught by instructional leaders who only the day before learned the very thing being taught. This leads to learning based on superficial understandings which, in turn, leads to compliance-based implementations.

There has been some change over time, however, that offers hope for the future. Of the current nine instructional leaders, seven have been involved with the reform almost from its inception and all have received intense ongoing instruction from Harrison. These key individuals have learned a considerable amount over the past four years. They are in fact quite a bit more knowledgeable than many principals and teachers because their primary responsibility has been to learn and teach the others.

Pace of Reform

The San Diego leadership has been moving very quickly to get instructional change into all classrooms and schools in order to produce significantly improved student outcomes and to convince their various constituencies of the viability of their approach. While the business and political elites may be impressed by fast gains in student achievement, teachers and principals are feeling the brunt of higher expectations and increased accountability, without necessarily the support that they need to learn how to do their jobs differently. District leaders have, in essence, asked San Diego educators to suspend doubt and to implement a program (Balanced Literacy) that they are assured will work (because, according to their theory, this is how children learn). The hope is that teachers will implement the program, begin to see results (children will learn to love reading, they will become better readers and writers) and then become converts to the program.

The quick pace, however, does not square with what we know about how individuals learn complex skills. In a quick-paced environment, high expectations combined with accountability pressures are not ideal conditions for learning. Without time to internalize the deep aspects of reform, individuals will quickly adopt the “props”

of the reform in order to avoid sanction. This is particularly dangerous in a reform that relies heavily on administrative personnel who have the authority to evaluate.

There are more subtle difficulties introduced by the quick pace, however. Despite rhetoric that individuals learn within communities, San Diego leaders have demanded evidence of individual learning before the communities that are to support that learning have come into existence. We have shown how the communities in which a District #2 teachers practice are essential to their learning. This raises the question of whether San Diego might have been better off to focus initially on the building of a stronger human resource infrastructure before moving to expectations for individual learning. There have been some efforts in this regard, as the district has identified teachers with potential (core teachers) in every building and provided more intensive training to them. The idea is for those teachers to become the core around which a reform community of practice can begin to develop. We refer to this as “seeding” community. Also, additional professional development support in the way of Literacy Supervisors have been added to high schools. But the pace of the reform exacerbates the supply and demand issues for people qualified enough or willing to assume the positions. There simply isn’t enough time to find and train this community of support.

Pace creates a problem also because we know that it takes time to move a whole district. According to Fullan (2000) it takes about three years to achieve successful change in student performance in an elementary school and about six years to do so in a secondary school. Moreover, the size of the district matters because it adds complexity to the change process. San Diego is in its fourth year of reform. Some schools have shown good progress but the change is slow and the successes seem fragile. Concerns over sustainability loom high because structures are only beginning to become institutionalized. New pieces of the reform are continually being rolled out, and new policies and new structures put into place. A changing reform, while vital and responsive on the one hand, often undermines old policies and practices, on the other. It does not necessarily provide the structures to support the new and without time to adequately attend to these concerns, lasting success is problematic.

Culture

Teaching is a cultural activity (Stigler & Hiebert, 1997). Much of what teachers chose to do in their classrooms results—not from their training—but rather from what they themselves experienced as a student, as well as the role of school learning in their community. In this regard, there are several aspects of the “culture” of San Diego that have been referred to by district leaders and others as influencing the conditions for learning.

Balanced Literacy is claimed to be, by its advocates, a program that values and teaches for independence. An oft-stated goal of the program is to create independent readers and writers. Ideally, there should be a match between the goals of the adopted instructional program and the values of teachers, principals, parents, and the community within which it is being implemented. Some have questioned whether Balanced Literacy is a good match for San Diego:

I don't know about the culture. That is, to what extent they really want to make kids independent learners or whether that really fits into the way they think here. Because the whole Balanced Literacy framework and this whole notion of gradual release theory is all about pushing, fostering independence, and pushing kids. But they (the San Diego teachers), whatever you say, they ask “Just tell us how to do it. Give me the rules.” You know, they want the teachers' guide to thinking. And I say, “You can't. It doesn't work. Now I am thinking maybe this isn't for everybody. People in different cultures have different values (interview)

The value that San Diegans place on independence as opposed to conformity has been questioned by others. For example, contrasting District #2 vs. San Diego, Alvarado stated:

It's part of the San Diego culture. That doesn't happen in New York. I can go into New York and I can walk in the district and say, “Eat yellow jelly beans, and they'd say to me, “We're doing to eat green jelly beans. Screw you!” Here, you say, “Eat yellow jelly beans,” and everybody grabs a yellow jelly bean and they eat it.

Compliance and literal interpretation vs. the willingness to argue and grapple with hard issues has been cited at all levels of the system—instructional leaders, principals, teachers. Nevertheless, a condition for learning is that both individuals must feel as though they are listened to and their cultures are respected. Called intersubjectivity by some (ref), this principle of learning contends that no learning will occur without mutual respect and understanding of what each party brings to the table.

In large part due to the capacity issue, the majority of those who are teaching the reform in San Diego are either from District #2 or New Zealand. San Diego educators are given the impression that all knowledge is held outside San Diego, and interpret this as a message that they are not as smart, skilled or talented. Without an accompanying message that explains the rationale, teachers, in particular, are made to feel devalued.

The building of relationships has been challenged by the interaction of size, pace and the differing cultures of San Diego vs. San Diego. The kind of learning demanded by the San Diego reform involves hard work, risk taking, and trust. Teachers and others are more willing to suspend doubts and work hard if they know and have faith in the individuals who are leading them. It is more difficult for district leaders to develop trusting, respecting relationships in a large district. In District #2, the superintendent and deputy had a personal relationship with each of their 45 principals; they also knew most of their teachers by images of their instructional practice, if not by name! Based on these relationships, they developed a sense of shared mission around the teaching of children from high-poverty backgrounds. It is difficult to overestimate the extent to which the bonds of friendship, interdependence, trust, and respect contributed to the commitment and passion with which they were able to implement the reform.

It has been very difficult—if not impossible—for district leaders to establish such relationships in San Diego. The large size of San Diego and the pace of the reform has contributed to this difficulty. Unable to establish personal bonds with all 170 principals in the San Diego system, top district leadership has had to transfer this role to the nine instructional leaders, each of whom is responsible for a learning community approximately the size of District #2. Much of their training from Harrison involves establishing a sense of urgency and a passion for reform; leaders are also expected to get to know their principals well so that they will know what it takes to get them motivated.

But this kind of relationship building takes time and personal involvement which is made difficult by the enormity of the task both in size and complexity. Many intensive training sessions are held around these issues with Harrison, who coaches each instructional leader to develop his or her own style of building relationships—relationships that both nurture and push toward higher and higher levels of professional expectation and dedication. The pace by which they have been required to act, however, has resulted in progress that could be defined as steady but uneven.

Because of the district’s size it has also been more difficult for good ideas that come from classroom teachers and principals to “bubble up” to the surface of the reform and be noticed by district leaders. Having one’s ideas listened to and respected, if not adopted as district policy, is an important part of trust and relationship building. Teachers in San Diego complain that they are not being listened to. There are indications that these complaints are being tempered by recent developments surrounding high school reform, the high school science curriculum, and mathematics reform throughout the district.

Reform as Learning: How Viable is this Approach for Analyzing Travel?

As one assesses the successfulness of reform strategies that begin in one location and travel to another, by what criteria do we judge success in the new site? Although we might be tempted to claim success when “proven” reform strategies are implemented in the new site, we argue that it is more important to examine the influence of those reform strategies in the new site. Most of the District #2 reform strategies took at least partial root in the soil of San Diego. However, the real test of travel, we believe, is in their influence on the climate for learning within the district.

The major challenge to the success of reform in San Diego seems to rest in their ability to provide conditions more conducive for learning. In this paper, we have attempted to explicate the role of context in shaping the differential effectiveness of the reform strategies across the two districts with respect to creating positive relationships for learning. If size, pace and culture have indeed been influential in shaping the differential effectiveness of the reform strategies, what are the implications for a theory of travel?

Our account of travel between District #2 and San Diego suggests at least one implication for a theory of travel: strategies for district-wide reform must take account of the complexity of what teachers and others must learn in order to carry off the reform successfully. Learning demands are more substantial in high-level, theory-based reforms than in more scripted reforms, and the leaders of such reforms must more carefully consider the context within which that learning occurs. As we have seen, initiating newcomers into a mature community of practice is very different from initiating newcomers into a nascent community. This suggests that teacher learning will be enhanced in those reforms in which there is coordination between expectations for individual teachers’ learning and the capacity of the system to develop human scaffolds for that learning.

If leaders are cognizant of the simultaneous need to develop model communities of practice and accountability / support for individual teacher learning, they will be less apt to find themselves in situations in which individual learning expectations outpace the capacity of the system to provide the human infrastructure needed to support that learning. One of the ways in which systems might pay simultaneous attention to community development and individual teacher learning is through what we have called the “seeding” of community—the differential training of high-potential individuals followed by their

strategic placement in schools in order to become a core around which community will form. This maintains the community building focus around the core instructional program, continuing to use it as the glue that binds together people within and across schools.

A second implication for theories of travel is that size and pace may be especially influential contextual factors for reforms that implicate significant changes in classroom practice. In particular, size was found to impact the ability of San Diego leaders to create enough models of good practice to guide learning at every layer of the system. We might speculate further that—even with the development of models of good practice over time—a system’s ability to identify and use such expertise productively may be related to its size. In small districts, it is not impossible to “know” each staff principal—their strengths, weaknesses, style of learning, and interpersonal traits. In a large district, top leadership cannot possibly have their fingers on the pulse of all principals, leaving the success of their ability to tap into and influence this expertise dependent on others. The extent to which individuals can be “trained” to use relationships combined with professional knowledge to lead change is one of the “experiments” currently underway in San Diego.

Finally, the success of reform strategies in creating positive conditions for learning may relate to the degree of alignment between various “cultural” elements and the program(s) that are advocated. These may be difficult to know in advance. In our initial study of District #2, it was difficult to “see” the cultural matches that were (invisibly) enabling the large-scale implementation of the Balanced Literacy model (i.e., the harmony with the approaches taught in the local teacher education institutions, the extent to which the teachers valued nurturing of independence in their students). It was only once those cultural supports were taken away (i.e., they were not present in San Diego) that we were able to understand their role in District #2. This suggests that theories of travel would benefit from studies that purposefully built in contextual variations with respect to a range of cultural variables.

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