The Changing Roles of Teachers in an Era of High-Stakes Accountability
Linda Valli and Daria Buese
*Am Educ Res J* 2007; 44; 519
DOI: 10.3102/0002831207306859

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://aer.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/44/3/519

Published on behalf of

[American Educational Research Association](http://www.aera.net)

By

[SAGE](http://www.sagepublications.com)

Additional services and information for *American Educational Research Journal* can be found at:

Email Alerts: [http://aerj.aera.net/cgi/alerts](http://aerj.aera.net/cgi/alerts)

Subscriptions: [http://aerj.aera.net/subscriptions](http://aerj.aera.net/subscriptions)

Reprints: [http://www.aera.net/reprints](http://www.aera.net/reprints)

Permissions: [http://www.aera.net/permissions](http://www.aera.net/permissions)
The Changing Roles of Teachers in an Era of High-Stakes Accountability

Linda Valli
University of Maryland

Daria Buese
McDaniel College

This article examines the impact of federal, state, and local policies on the roles that elementary school teachers are asked to assume inside and outside the classroom. Through a detailed analysis of changes in teacher tasks over a 4-year period, the authors determined that role expectations increased, intensified, and expanded in four areas: instructional, institutional, collaborative, and learning. These changes had unanticipated, and often negative, consequences for teachers’ relationships with students, pedagogy, and sense of professional well-being. The authors use one policy directive, differentiated instruction, to illustrate the complexity of role demands currently made of teachers, and they draw implications for policy and research.

KEYWORDS: differentiated instruction, expansion, high-stakes accountability, intensification, teaching practice, teacher roles

That teachers assume a number of roles in their work in schools and classrooms is hardly news. Teachers have always adapted both their classroom instruction and out-of-classroom practices in response to changing educational trends and policy demands. Changes in expectations for teachers’ roles have been particularly striking over the two decades of educational reform...
that led to the high-stakes accountability climate teachers now experience with the ratification of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001, No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002). In this article, we discuss how teachers' roles have changed as high-stakes accountability has become an increasingly pervasive factor in their daily work.

Our research reveals that teachers' work has increased, intensified, and expanded in response to federal, state, and local policies aimed at raising student achievement. We describe the differences in these three kinds of role changes within the policy context in which the fourth- and fifth-grade classroom teachers in our study conducted their work from 2001 to 2005. By focusing on differentiated instruction, a directive that permeated teachers' work, we track role changes as teachers differentiated their instruction through special programs and instructional strategies. We find that rapid-fire, high-stakes policy directives promote an environment in which teachers are asked to relate to their students differently, enact pedagogies that are often at odds with their vision of best practice, and experience high levels of stress. The summative effect of too many policy demands coming too fast often resulted in teacher discouragement, role ambiguity, and superficial responses to administrative goals. If policy expectations for teacher role change had benefited students, one could argue that the toll on teachers, although unfortunate, was for the greater good of students. But that did not seem to be the case.

**Literature Review**

This article is situated within the diffuse body of literature on teacher roles, teachers' work, and teacher change. This area of scholarship is rooted in the early sociology-of-education literature, exemplified by Waller's (1932) *The Sociology of Teaching* in which the author delineates the role of the teacher as institutional leader and poses the provocative question, “What does teaching do to teachers?” (p. 375). Since then, scholars have examined teachers' roles through a variety of lenses. Some have been interested in the historical development and persistence of a culture of isolation (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986; Little, 1999; Rosetholtz, 1991; Sarason, 1971) in which teachers work in “egg crate schools” that promote “teacher separation rather than teacher interdependence” (Lortie, 1975, p. 14). Others have examined the bureaucratizing or professionalizing influences on teachers' roles (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Wise, 1979); the separation of conception and execution in teaching tasks (Apple, 1982; Gitlin, 1983); and, more recently, the influence of external mandates and reform efforts on teachers' roles and practices (Bailey, 2000; D. K. Cohen & Hill, 2000; M. Cohen & Kottkamp, 1993; Kennedy, 2005; O'Day, 2002; Spillane, 1999; Wilson, 2003).

Many of these analyses create a picture of teachers' roles and everyday work as remarkably stable, resistant to change forces (D. K. Cohen, 1988; Cuban, 1993). The image of teachers' work that emerges from these studies is of simple, routine tasks: “Teachers and students spend most of their time with lectures, recitations, and worksheets. Intellectual demands generally are modest,
Teachers, themselves, have described teaching “as a routine task with low task variety and low task uncertainty” (Rowan, 1998, p. 43). When change occurs in teachers’ work, it is often limited to a small number of teachers (Elmore, 1996), tinkering with inconsequential components of teaching (Tyack & Cuban, 1995), or adapting a program of radical change to fit into established teaching patterns (D. K. Cohen, 1990).

Other studies, however, suggest that teachers’ work changes all the time and that in the face of strong mandates, teachers are relatively powerless to resist change forces. Richardson and Placier (2001), for instance, describe how teacher change occurs naturally and spontaneously through “discussions with other teachers, an evaluation by an administrator, a workshop, experience with an often-tried activity that no longer works, an article in a practitioner or research journal, a new grade level or population of students, etc.” (p. 908). Studies on external change forces have found evidence of the de-skilling (Apple, 1982), intensification (Hargreaves, 1992), marginalization (Bailey, 2000), and expansion of teachers’ work (Bartlett, 2004). When teachers’ work becomes excessively regulated, a host of unintended and negative consequences can result, such as job dissatisfaction, reduced commitment, burnout, loss of self-esteem, and early departure from the profession (Calderhead, 2001).

What sense can be made of this literature? Should we conclude that “teachers’ work has remained surprisingly stable . . . [that] little has changed in the organizational structures, instructional practices, and authority structures of teachers’ work . . . [and that] teachers’ work today remains fairly similar to that of 100 years ago” (Kirtman, 2002, p. 2)? Or, conversely, is Hargreaves (1994) right when he claims that “whatever else might be said about teaching, few would disagree that the nature and demands of the job have changed profoundly over the years. For better or worse, teaching is not what it was” (p. 117). The apparent contradictions within this literature are partially resolved by noting that what counts as change differs across studies. Invariably, stability wins out over change in research on external efforts to change teaching practice in highly ambitious, reform-oriented ways. On the other hand, change wins out in research on external efforts to professionalize teaching by including teachers in administrative decision-making processes. Change seems to occur more easily on the margins of what is widely considered to be the core role of teachers: their instructional practice (Elmore, 1996).

But a problem underlying much of this literature is the assumption that changes in one facet of teachers’ work have little spillover into the other. That might be the case in schools that are insulated from accountability concerns and in which teachers function in isolation from one another. By tracking change, or lack of it, in relation to only one factor, these studies lose their ecological validity, failing to capture teachers’ everyday experience as they literally are bombarded with new requests. With only a few exceptions (see Hargreaves, 1994), even the literature on the expansion or intensification of teachers’ work underestimates the impact of change across teachers’ responsibilities. Although separating teachers’ roles into core instructional practices...
and more peripheral administrative practices might be a useful heuristic, it obscures the tight link between teachers’ work inside and outside the classroom and seriously underestimates the amount of change teachers experience and enact. By tracing change in one core element of teaching practice—instructional differentiation—we show the interrelated complexity of teacher roles, a far cry from the teacher who can close the classroom door to block out external influences.

The Policy Context and Role Change

The site in which we conducted the study is a large school district bordering a major metropolitan area in a mid-Atlantic state. Since the study began in 2001, the federal government ratified NCLB, and to comply with the act’s guidelines, the state revised its annual assessment program, established proficiency standards, set adequate yearly progress (AYP) benchmarks, and developed a state curriculum that linked state content standards with state tests at each grade level. In these 4 years, the state also strengthened its policy for including special needs students in regular classrooms and was putting pressure on the school district to comply more quickly. In addition, the school district released its own new mathematics curriculum in 2002 and a new reading curriculum in 2004 for the fourth and fifth grades. It also introduced a reading intervention program for low achievers, was gradually having all schools implement an organizational improvement program, and was implementing a new grading and reporting system. This veritable deluge of directives compelled a reshaping of teacher roles.

Teacher Roles

But what, exactly, do we mean by teacher roles? Although that term is sometimes used in the singular—teacher role—we view it as a multidimensional, dynamic construct. Standard definitions of role emphasize the differentiating “set” of tasks or activities expected of those in social or organizational positions (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Turner, 2001). When those activities are work related, they are generally described as tasks. Following Cuban (1988) and others, we expand the definition to “sets” of activities in order to forefront an important aspect of role theory: the potential for individuals to experience conflict in the various roles they are expected to play (Turner, 2001). These potentially conflicting roles have been described in a variety of ways. Some have focused on multiple roles inside the classroom (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000; Cuban, 1988) or multiple leadership roles (Smylie & Denny, 1990). Others have examined teacher roles inside and outside the classroom (Kirtman, 2002). And although Ingersoll (2003) analyzes “decision types” rather than roles, his typology of social, institutional, and administrative decisions implies different role functions that teachers carry out. Given the authors’ varied purposes, these category systems are all reasonable and helped us conceptualize teachers’ roles as distinct but overlapping dimensions. However,
because our interest was in the changing nature of teachers’ roles, we developed our categories empirically through a task analysis of teachers’ work.

In addition to positing teacher roles as sets of potentially conflicting tasks or activities, role theory argues that expectations for roles will differ across time, situation, and person (Biddle, 1986; Turner, 2001). As Waller (1932) noted, because “the role inheres in the social situation” (p. 322), there can be a “kaleidoscopic shifting of roles” (p. 332). This suggests that individuals’ views about their own roles or the roles of others can change. And because roles embody values, norms, and “some of our highest aspirations” (Buchmann, 1986, p. 531), conflicts about role expectations are likely. The semiprofessional status of teachers who work within hierarchical but loosely coupled organizations heightens that potential. As Metz (1986) has observed, teachers generally have some autonomy regarding lesson content and pedagogy but must also heed administrative directives: “Schools live with a perpetual tension between a formally hierarchical structure, in which teachers are line subordinates, and a vaguely defined tradition of attenuated professionalism; they work out varying compromises between these two opposing principles” (p. 48). To describe that tension, we use the term **hierarchical control** for the control (e.g., authority, supervision, directives) that administrators exercise over teachers and the term **delegated control** for the “individual responsibility, initiative, and discretion” that teachers have over their own actions (Elmore, 1983, p. 343).

**Role Change**

Recent studies portray teachers as “working harder” because of accountability measures (Ballet, Kelchtermans, & Loughran, 2006; O’Day, 2002), and scholars have used a variety of terms to describe what this role change looks and feels like. Three of those terms—**role increase**, **role intensification**, and **role expansion**—guide our analysis. First, the sheer number of tasks can increase as teachers are asked to do more things and do so with an increasing level of sophistication from year to year, with heightened expectations from district, state, and federal policies. Arguing that the “busyness and denseness” of teaching “is compounded when change is mandated,” Bailey (2000) calls teaching an almost impossible job: “Teachers must devote increased attention to more classroom details as well as to more time spent outside the classroom learning, planning and . . . justifying their actions to others” (p. 117).

In addition to the increased number of tasks, Bailey’s (2000) description suggests two other ways that teacher roles can change: through expanded responsibilities outside the classroom and intensified work within the classroom. Advocates of teacher professionalism as a component of school reform suggest that role expansion occurs because of teachers’ involvement in activities beyond the classroom, through which teachers try to coordinate learning experiences within and across grade levels (Lieberman & Miller, 1999). This expanded role is often highly collaborative and related to the “collective pursuit of educational goals” (Little & Bartlett, 2002, p. 346). It brings teachers and
other school personnel together during the school day and represents a noteworthy change in expectations on teachers and in their work environment.

Bartlett (2004) found that if expanded roles are integrated into the regular structure of the school day, teachers are likely to be more engaged and committed to their expanded roles. Conversely, teachers become exhausted and overwhelmed when role expansion is heaped onto an already full teaching situation. Hargreaves (2000) cautioned that role expansion creates a situation in which teachers have difficulty discerning where their commitments and responsibilities should end, making the original view of role expansion as teacher professionalization problematic. Collaboration can assist teachers in marshaling resources, conserving energy, and understanding requirements and demands, or it can be used as a way to promote the implementation of “dubious policy ends” resulting in the consumption of teachers’ energy and professional ideals.

Last, teachers’ roles can intensify. Critics describe this as a process that occurs when “teachers are expected to respond to greater pressures and to comply with multiplying innovations under conditions that are at best stable and at worst deteriorating” (Hargreaves, 1992, p. 88). As Apple and Jungck (1992) argue, intensification erodes working conditions, forcing teachers to work under “interventionist styles of management” where they “rely on ‘experts’ to tell them what to do . . . begin to mistrust the expertise they have developed over the years” (p. 25). Under these conditions, the act of teaching is dominated by external plans and requirements such as prespecified lists of competencies and objectives, pretests and post-tests for determining student skill level, and an increase of record keeping and evaluation. Applying Elmore’s (1983) categories, intensification would necessarily require more hierarchical control. But the form of that control—a hands-off directive or close, face-to-face supervision—could be variable.

As central as expansion and intensification are to the analysis of teacher roles, the scholarship on these concepts is quite different. For role expansion, scholars treat the context separate from the role, allowing researchers to investigate the conditions and consequences of teachers’ expanded roles. Under what conditions does role expansion promote teacher professionalization? In what ways can role expansion be helpful or detrimental to teachers as individuals, to teaching practice, and to the profession of teaching? These are empirical questions that can be investigated. In contrast, the popular use of intensification leaves little conceptual space between role and context. The conditions and consequences of intensification are integral parts of its description, as scholars have been more interested in its impact on teachers than in a clear definition. Thus, teachers’ work is described as intensifying under stable or deteriorating conditions and interventionist styles of management. The consequences are predictably uniform: Teachers distrust their expertise, rely on others, and become de-skilled. And yet, as Ballet et al. (2006) have recently argued, intensification has multiple sources, is mediated, and is experienced differently: “Teachers do not . . . undergo these changes
passively, but . . . cope with them proactively though interpretation and negotiation” (p. 216). This suggests the possibility of variable outcomes.

Although the concept of intensification has opened up important ways of thinking about teachers’ work, its definitional limitations have inhibited investigating important questions about the relationship between role and context. Exacerbating the problem is the absence of an alternative concept. To be able to investigate separately the conditions and consequences of teachers’ role change, we use the following definitions of role increase, role expansion, and role intensification. We operationally define and investigate role increase as new tasks; role expansion as the greater scope of teacher responsibility for work outside the classroom that requires collaboration with other teachers, specialists, or other district personnel; and role intensification as heightened responsibility for teaching and learning that is driven by classroom-level policy directives (e.g., ongoing assessments, data collection, and data management for individual students).

Research Method

This inquiry into the changing roles and practices of teachers is part of a larger mixed-methods, longitudinal study of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers of reading and mathematics. Our primary goal was to learn more about what teachers do to assist students who are struggling to acquire foundational skills by examining teaching practice as well as the contextual supports and constraints on that practice. Teachers invited to participate worked in schools with moderate to high levels of poverty (30% to 85% as measured by the percentage of students in the school who qualify for free and reduced-price meals). Approximately 150 teachers from 25 schools took part over a 4-year period (2001–2005), allowing us to observe instruction throughout the school year and to conduct individual and focus group interviews.

With a reputation of being one of the best school districts in the state, the district was able to be selective in its hiring practices. All of the teachers were certified and teaching within their licensure areas. Ranging in experience from 1 to 40 years, many of the teachers had advanced degrees. Like elementary school teachers nationwide, most were White females, although approximately one third were African American, Latino, Asian American, or male teachers. To understand the broader policy context and expectations for teachers, during the final year of the study we selected three of the higher poverty schools for a closer look at the policy–practice relationship. We attended meetings and conducted in-depth interviews with principals, staff developers, school-based reading and math specialists, teachers of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), special education teachers, and fourth- and fifth-grade classroom teachers.

Data Sources

For this article, we draw primarily on interview data that deal with teachers’ roles: 4 years of interviews with principals; 3 years with teacher focus
groups; and 2 years with school-based specialists and staff developers (see Table 1). For the teacher and specialist focus groups in Years 2 and 3, we aimed for representation across schools, grade levels, and areas of expertise. In Year 4, we focused on the three case study schools, attending meetings and conducting interviews throughout the year so that we could more closely track the change process. Using group and individual interviews gave us opportunities to expand the number of informants and capture a wide range of meanings and experiences for the topics of interest (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Morgan, 1997).

By following established guidelines, we were able to minimize the inherent problems of group interviews while taking advantage of their rich potential: stimulating recollections and dialogue about shared events (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Wanting to avoid a few dominant voices from controlling the agenda, we developed standardized protocols and assigned experienced interviewers to facilitate these sessions. Principals were not present during group interviews, and teachers who tended to be passive participants were invited to contribute. These precautions and interventions helped us keep the conversations focused while allowing for the spontaneous dynamics of the group. To minimize further a few individuals from drowning out reluctant voices, divergent experiences, or unpopular perspectives, we mixed participation across schools. This strategy generated free-flowing exchange about teaching experiences in different contexts. Although the group interviews prevent individual teacher-level analysis, that was not our purpose. Our interest was in the aggregate experience of teacher change for this group of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers. So whereas no single teacher experienced everything

---

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher focus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>groups</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14 teachers</td>
<td>51 teachers</td>
<td>19 teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>representing 12 schools</td>
<td>representing 16 schools</td>
<td>representing 3 schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(focus groups)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13 specialists</td>
<td>18 specialists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>representing 10 Schools</td>
<td>representing 3 schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(individual)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>representing 3 schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total by year</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
we describe below, as a group teachers participated in these patterns of role transformation.

The grand-tour questions that guided data collection and analysis for this article were How have teachers’ roles changed in the past few years? What has influenced those changes? and What were the consequences? Principals provided information about the school context: goals and expectations, teacher and student assignments, the school schedule and organization, resources, the curriculum, special programs, funding, professional roles, and significant changes from the previous year. Teachers, staff developers, and specialists provided more specific information about role expectations, influences on teaching, and teaching changes. Interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and coded through the use of NVivo software. Although we stayed close to data by using a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1994), the coding process was iterative, informed, and guided by our research interests (Erickson, 1986). So, for example, main codes, such as “factors that influence teaching change,” were derived from interview protocols and research interests, whereas subcodes (e.g., teamwork, data tracking, walk-throughs) were derived from the data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred in four phases. First, we conducted a task analysis, looking through the data as a whole to identify specific tasks that teachers were expected to perform. Second, by examining similarities in function, we organized these tasks into five larger role categories: instructional, institutional, collaborative, learning, and relational. These two analytic steps enabled us to see how extensive and complex the roles of teachers were. They also suggested that teachers’ roles were increasing during this time period. To explore more systematically the changing character of teacher work, we did a third round of analysis, recoding the 2002–2003 and 2003–2004 teacher focus group interviews using the five role categories we had identified. We chose this subset of 10 interviews because it was both manageable and comprehensive. Because these group interviews included teachers from 19 of the 20 schools that participated in the study those 2 years, we were confident that we were capturing a range of teacher roles and had enough data to begin looking at changes over time.

From this third round of analysis, we determined that teacher roles had increased, expanded, and intensified and that the impetus for these changes was often externally imposed mandates (see Table 2). Based on teacher comments, we selected differentiating instruction as a good exemplar of those changes. So in Phase 4, we expanded the analysis to all 4 years, sequentially examining all data sources by year. Although we had only one data source for Year 1, principal interviews, those interviews provided a good baseline for information about differentiating instruction. Our comparative analysis of this activity was done by first calling up all passages coded for differentiation, followed by text searches for differentiation and differentiate. Other potentially
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Influence</th>
<th>Teacher Task</th>
<th>Instructional Role</th>
<th>Institutional Role</th>
<th>Collaborative Role</th>
<th>Learning Role</th>
<th>Relational Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F, S, D</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural mediation</td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Curriculum adaptation</td>
<td>H</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Curriculum alignment</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Curriculum development</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Curriculum implementation</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Curriculum pacing</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F, S, D</td>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F, S, D</td>
<td>Data management</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F, S, D</td>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>ESOL instruction</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S, D</td>
<td>Inclusion instruction</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Instructional materials development</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F, S, D</td>
<td>Instructional planning</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Organization system management</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Parent communication</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Program enactment</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Remediation</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Special education student instruction</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student advocacy</td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Student grouping</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Student placement</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Team member</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Tutoring</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Vertical articulation</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Rows in bold print indicate teachers’ new roles. F = federal influence; S = state influence; D = district influence; H = high role expectation; L = low/emerging role expectation; M = moderate role expectation.
relevant codes such as student grouping, special programs, resources, and scheduling were also examined to confirm or modify our findings. Relevant information about teacher roles was summarized on charts and organized by year, data source, and role category to help us track change over time.

Determining Teacher Tasks

From the initial analysis of the data as a whole, we created 25 distinct labels that identified the tasks that teachers undertook, whether within the classroom or in activities outside the classroom that were related to instruction, such as assessment, instructional planning, remediation, and student grouping. New tasks are noted in bold print in Table 2. These 25 tasks do not exhaust ways of itemizing teachers’ work; we were purposefully restrained in naming tasks to keep the analysis manageable and to avoid either overstating or trivializing teachers’ work. Guided by grounded theory, each task category we created had to have distinct characteristics and be a substantive part of teachers’ work (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). For example, we limited data-related tasks to just two: management and analysis. In subsequent stages of analysis, when we examined interview data by year, we compared the different kinds of data the teachers collected and the processes they undertook to manage and analyze it. We were also able to view new coding categories as teachers’ tasks around data collection changed from year to year. In addition, by coding teacher focus groups from year to year separately, we could examine how policy pressures influenced what teachers did with regard to the amount of data collected and its use. Although these tasks may seem to be normal components of teachers’ work, they often contained layer upon layer of hidden dimensions.

Determining Teacher Roles From Tasks

To conceptualize teacher roles from this task analysis, we looked for functional commonalities and identified five types: instructional, institutional, collaborative, learning, and relational. Tasks were categorized as instructional when they were performed in direct work with students and had learning as their primary goal. They were categorized as institutional if an external governing authority (school district, state, or federal government) was attempting to create uniformity of practice across schools. We labeled tasks as collaborative when they required teachers to work in groups with other teachers or district personnel. Collaborative tasks could be mandated by the district or school or could result from the nature of the tasks themselves (e.g., inclusion instruction). Tasks in the learning category are those that required teachers to develop new knowledge and skills to perform other role functions. Although teacher learning is most often described as a professional opportunity, we argue that it is a separate role when it has its own set of obligations that consume significant time and intellectual effort. And finally, relational tasks are those that require teacher interaction with students, parents, and other
teachers in ways that cannot be standardized but that nurture and attend to the overall well-being of students. A utility of these role categories was to illustrate the overlapping functions of teacher tasks. As seen in Table 2, most of the tasks appear in four or all five role categories. Furthermore, by looking at how the same task (e.g., data analysis) manifested itself in several role categories, we were better able to examine how such a task expanded and/or intensified over time, particularly as directives that resulted from accountability-based policies gained urgency. Because Table 2 is limited to our data collection opportunities, knowledge of administrative directives, and central interest in the relationship between teaching and policy, we likely underestimate the full scope of role change.

Table 2 also shows the policy pressures on participants to perform certain tasks. We identify both the source of the pressure (federal, state, or district policy) and the degree of the pressure (high, medium, and low). Tasks designated as having high expectations for teacher roles are ones that expanded or intensified as a direct result of increased policy pressure. Tasks with moderate role expectations are those that were influenced by policy directives, but these changes were not a direct intent of the policy. Tasks with low role expectations are those that were not targeted by the policy directive but were incidentally affected nonetheless. For example, the task of assessment had a high role expectation in the instructional and institutional categories because those were the areas of practice most affected by policy; that is, assessment policies were intended to drive instruction, and all schools were expected to use the same assessments for the same purposes. Assessment held a moderate expectation in the collaborative and learning role because although collaboration and learning were necessary components of the assessment tasks and consumed a great deal of teacher time and effort, the intent of assessment policy was not to drive collaboration and teacher learning. By contrast, assessment policies did not directly prescribe changes in teachers’ relational role with students, although, as we shall see, changes did occur. Including levels of role expectations in Table 2 illustrates variations in the policy press that teachers experienced around different tasks.

Increases in Teacher Tasks

The numerous policy initiatives that were enacted during our 4 years of data collection had a strong influence on the nature of teacher role changes, with NCLB-related policies especially prominent. Other influences on teacher roles, such as changing student demographics, were mediated by these policy expectations. So, for example, the increased number of students who were English-language learners (ELL) resulted in more teachers’ taking on tasks of in-class ESOL instruction and collaborating with ESOL teachers. However, NCLB proficiency requirements for ELL students affected the way in which teachers carried out their instructional and collaborative roles as they worked with ESOL teachers to align instruction with the state test.
As seen by the rows in bold print in Table 2, teachers were asked to take on numerous new tasks: curriculum pacing and alignment, data analysis, ESOL instruction, inclusion instruction, instructional materials development, organizational system management, tutoring, and vertical articulation. Teachers’ perception that their tasks were increasing is supported by changes in coding structures. There are three striking additions to the coding structure for the 2003–2004 teacher focus group interviews. Added to the task codes used the previous year were student grouping and placements, data management and analysis, and tutoring. Although teachers have always done some form of data analysis, student placement, and tutoring, they were simply not significant enough for teachers to comment on prior to the 2003–2004 school year. Similar new codes were needed for the principal interviews. Assessing student needs, monitoring students, and monitoring tools were used for the first time in 2003–2004, the first year that teacher stress also shows up as an independent code. As examples, we describe below how just five of these new tasks affected teachers’ work.

Curriculum pacing. Beginning in fall 2002 with the rollout of the district’s new mathematics curricula, the accompanying unit tests, and the need to prepare students for the state’s high-stakes tests, teachers’ relationship to the curriculum began to change in significant ways. As M. Cohen and Kottkamp (1993) remind us, “Historically, most teachers have experienced curriculum control” (p. 211). However, for the first time, grade school teachers in this school district had to pace curriculum coverage carefully. In mathematics classes, for example, teachers were required to move through mathematics units on the district’s schedule because unit tests had to be given within a prescribed time period. Discourse about teaching was often about “keeping up” with curriculum markers (Valli, Croninger, Chambliss, Graeber, & Buese, in press).

Curriculum alignment. Although curriculum pacing continued to be an important task, with the growing urgency of AYP the following year, teachers also began to align the curriculum content and teacher-made test questions to the state test. In schools with AYP concerns, teachers felt compelled to match closely what they taught to what would be tested and worried about how well aligned the district curriculum was with the state test’s content, language, and format. Principals often supported this alignment effort, encouraging teachers to “back-map” from state learning expectations to narrow the school district’s more extensive curriculum coverage. Alignment of the district curriculum with the state test was such a concern in some schools that administrators included it as an agenda item for staff meetings, had teachers match textbook content with state learning expectations, and purchased test preparation materials from commercial publishers. Based on our observations of planning meetings in at-risk schools, we estimate that the source of teachers’ ideas for student learning outcomes was primarily tests or accountability systems. This seems to be far greater than the 10% teachers reported in a pre-NCLB study (Kennedy, 2005).
Data-related tasks. As AYP pressures mounted, so did teachers’ tasks around the collection, organization, analysis, and instructional responses to student achievement data in both mathematics and reading. By the end of the 2003–2004 school year, many teachers were struggling to manage multiple data sets for each student while district expectations for teachers as data producers and users became more formalized. One principal told us that he held seven to nine meetings with each grade-level team that year simply to help them learn how to collect, analyze, and use the data that were available on their students (WP 5-13-04). The following year, the school district required all schools to administer the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT) to below-grade-level readers and the Measures of Academic Progress–Reading (MAP-R) to all students twice a year. In addition, the district was planning to require schools to administer an equivalent test in mathematics (MAP-M) and to increase the administration of MAP-R to three or four times a year, causing one of the assistant principals to complain, “We have 180 days with students and we have all of these assessments. . . . The district is killing us with all these tests” (HT 5-24-05).

ESOL instruction. AYP requirements increased pressure on classroom teachers to raise the achievement of the most challenged students, including ELL students. Ensuring English proficiency for all students became an urgent aspect of teachers’ work, one that required teachers to develop new knowledge and skills. Because they were the teachers of record, classroom teachers did not leave the teaching of English solely to the designated ESOL teachers. They included ELL students in whole-class and small-group instruction, helping them in particular with new vocabulary. As one teacher said, “They need to be in the classroom. . . . My job is to teach the kids. If they don’t know English, that’s my job” (OC 5-25-04). That job could involve receiving support from an instructional assistant, coordinating or coteaching with an ESOL teacher, or assuming the role of the ESOL teacher (e.g., preparing special materials and using instructional strategies specifically for ELL students).

Tutoring. In response to interview questions about closing the achievement gap, focus group participants described various tutoring efforts. Although informal tutoring has always been a facet of teaching, these efforts became more institutionalized, targeted to bringing students up to the proficiency level on the state tests. If students were too far below grade level to be placed with an age-appropriate remedial group during the day, one-on-one tutoring was provided. One teacher, for example, said that “to try and fill in that gap or do what’s necessary for that student . . . I tutor in the mornings. I tutor after school. I tutor at lunchtime. Whatever it takes” (MP 5-26-04). A number of schools had before- and after-school activities such as homework clubs, computer lab, math tutorials, book clubs, and ESOL theater clubs that teachers volunteered to lead.
Summary. Implied throughout these descriptions of new teaching tasks are indications not only that the number of tasks increased but that tasks expanded and intensified. Curriculum work, for example, expanded teachers’ roles outside the classroom as they collaboratively learned how to align their teaching more closely to student achievement expectations. Teachers’ instructional role also intensified as teachers were under closer scrutiny to comply with alignment directives. As an outside consultant told her group of teachers, “We have only a limited amount of time, so . . . we want what you are supposed to be teaching to match with [the state test expectations]” (CR 4-04-05). Having described a few of the ways in which teacher roles increased, in the following sections we examine how their work simultaneously intensified and expanded by looking at one task—differentiated instruction. Over the course of the study, this task had a major impact on how teachers worked in schools. By taking on a more prominent institutional character with the increased accountability climate, differentiated instruction changed not only the amount but the nature of teacher work.

Differentiated Instruction: Intensification and Expansion of Teachers’ Work

Table 2 shows the role functions of teacher tasks. As teachers’ work intensified and expanded, there was increased emphasis on one or another category, depending on how tasks changed in response to a directive. For example, some tasks, such as instructional planning, became more collaborative as teachers relied on each other to learn how to use highly structured and paced curricula and to align their curriculum coverage to state standards. Other tasks, such as organizational system management, were strongly institutional, stemming directly from a district mandate rather than an intrinsic desire to participate in organizational improvement efforts. We chose to illustrate the expansion and intensification of teachers’ work by examining the task of differentiating instruction, because of its pervasiveness. Not only was it evident in each of the role categories, but it required teachers to engage in a number of other tasks such as assessment, curriculum implementation, student placement, individual and team planning, and data management and analysis. And although differentiated instruction was a pervasive phenomenon during all 4 years of the study, its nature and intensity changed considerably with the pressures of high-stakes accountability, producing marked role shifts for teachers.

The Impetus for Differentiation

[Teachers] looked at specific students that might need more support in order to reach the goals and which, you know, ultimately the goal is not performance on [the state test]. It’s certainly to be a strong reader and an academic performer, but [the state test] is that tool that determines whether or not a school makes AYP, their adequate yearly progress, or whether they go into some form of corrective action. (Curriculum Specialist, 2-12-04)
The state tests of student achievement required significant increases in student scores between the tests’ first administration in March 2003 and the last year of our study, 2005. The first year’s scores were used to establish a baseline of student achievement. In 2004, schools were required by the state to increase the percentage of students in the proficient category by 2.5% in reading and 2.7% in mathematics. But for 2005, proficiency ratings had to increase by 11.5% in reading and 9.5% in mathematics. Although “being a strong reader and an academic performer” was the ideal goal for student achievement, clearly the goal of attaining AYP was foremost in the minds of district personnel. Differentiated instruction became a primary means for getting to AYP targets.

By differentiation, the school district meant all the ways in which schools and teachers could both accelerate for above-grade-level students and remediate for those who were achieving below grade level. Differentiated instruction was a strong theme in the new mathematics and reading curricula. However, in schools at risk of inadequate yearly progress, bringing sufficient numbers of students in each designated category to proficiency became differentiation’s primary goal. This was addressed through the constant interplay of aligning instruction with the state’s learning indicators and monitoring students’ progress. A battery of tests was given to students throughout the year to monitor their grade-level standings. Based on the test results, teachers worked with their teaching teams to group and ungroup students; determine student placement in remedial programs; find multilevel materials for each class meeting; and document, distribute, and discuss information on below-grade-level students with professional support staff. By the 2004–2005 school year, the task of differentiation had become highly institutionalized. That is, the district attempted to direct the work of teachers on a level beyond what most had ever experienced.

This more institutionalized role is evident when contrasted to the pre-NCLB practices in schools at the beginning of this study. As seen in Figure 1, differentiated instruction was largely the result of teacher-level decisions in informal negotiations with team members and other school personnel. In the 2001–2002 school year, the district role seemed limited to providing a general guideline: “We are expected to differentiate, and we are expected to use appropriate grouping procedures. . . . It’s left up to the principal to interpret” (Johnstown, Campbell, 01-02). Many principals, in turn, left differentiation decisions up to teachers. Principals might assign instructional assistants to teachers who had a large number of ELL, special education, or below-grade-level students. Or they might have special programs such as Soar to Success, ESOL, or William and Mary to which students were assigned for all or part of the school year. Or they might ask math specialists to help teachers set up differentiated centers in their classrooms. Otherwise, teachers had considerable autonomy in their grouping, regrouping, and instruction of students. As the principal at a Title 1 school told us, she believed that teachers should make these decisions, “They shouldn’t be left with the decision that someone else made” (Rosewood, Consuelos, 2002).
By fall 2002, the district was somewhat more involved in directing differentiation, particularly in the mathematics program, because the new curriculum had just been rolled out. Advocating a more accelerated program to prepare students for prealgebra, the district encouraged schools to offer their highest fifth-grade math students the sixth-grade mathematics curriculum. More attention was also given to purchasing materials for differentiation and identifying students for grouping through the use of formal assessments. Nonetheless, teacher-level informal decisions about grouping and regrouping were still prominent. As an example, one teacher with a combination fourth- and fifth-grade class of mostly ELL and special needs students partnered with a special education resource teacher to create inclusive grade-level sections for all subject areas except reading and language arts. This informal switching was done simply through collegial relations. As we witnessed in a number of schools, principals were often not even aware that these classroom-level changes had been made (Valli, Croninger, & Walters, 2007).

By 2003–2004, schools and teachers had considerably less discretion on how they approached differentiating instruction. By then, the district was providing a number of programs and assessments for teachers to use. Now that teachers had a year to become familiar with the content of the new mathematics curriculum, district personnel were emphasizing the importance of differentiation. This was also a strong push when the new reading curriculum was rolled out in 2004–2005. For the first time, third- through fifth-grade teachers were required to differentiate instruction by meeting with their students in small groups for guided reading. The progressive complexity of differentiated instruction, as seen in Figure 2, was articulated by several school-based staff developers we met with during the 2003–2004 school year: “It’s a huge learning curve.” “Teachers are more comfortable with differentiating
by content.” “Everybody has worked really hard to get differentiation going,” “That’s a new emphasis for my staff. Differentiation will be a key part of it [training] for next year. So we’re not quite there yet” (SD 3-31-04). In the following sections, we examine two major means through which the schools increasingly addressed differentiation in more formal and institutionalized ways during the 2003–2004 and 2004–2005 school years: special programs and within-classroom strategies.

Differentiation Using Special Programs

Given the relatively large numbers of ELL, special education, and below-grade-level students in most of the schools we studied, one way in which instruction was differentiated was through pullout and plug-in programs in mathematics and, more often, in reading. At the start of the 2003–2004 school year, the district required a reading intervention program for its lowest achieving schools for students who were not reading at grade level and “strongly suggested” the program for other schools in danger of missing AYP targets (Valli & Chambliss, 2007). The mandated reading block was already 90 minutes long, but for those students requiring intervention, as much as an additional hour of reading was required. The teachers’ task of placement expanded as the number of student placement options increased. Because reading intervention used
multiple packaged programs, teachers had to become familiar with the goals of programs they were not personally using but to which they were assigning students. They were also expected to review an increasing variety of assessment data to determine appropriate student placements in the different types and levels of intervention (e.g., emphasizing phonics, fluency, or reading comprehension).

Some of these assessments, such as the Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA), intensified teachers’ institutional roles as data managers because the teachers themselves administered the tests to individual students, with each test taking up to 20 minutes. New tests, such as the MAP-R and SDRT, were added for diagnostic purposes and to assess grade-level achievement. But because the MAP-R and SDRT were not mandated until the start of school, students were already assigned to their reading intervention classes before results of the assessments were available. This meant that schools continued to administer other diagnostic tests, such as the DRA, for initial grouping purposes, then gave the MAP-R and SDRT for regrouping purposes, further expanding teachers’ scope of work.

Not only did teachers have to give multiple tests, but they had to learn how to give and interpret these new tests. Considerable time was spent learning to read complicated statistical test reports on their students. A staff developer sympathized with the teachers at her school, whose data management tasks would soon expand further with the district expecting teachers to keep running records for students on personal digital assistants (PDAs):

We also have something new down the road, a new initiative . . . that deals with the Palms . . . that we’ve had to have trainings on: How to read the data. What does it represent? What does it mean? Now, hopefully, it will get easier but it’s still very confusing . . . which means a lot more time that has to be spent looking at these test results.  
(BF 5-17-05)

This new initiative would mean still greater institutional and learning role intensification as data managers and analysts.

As students were identified for special programs, other tasks under the instructional, learning, and collaborative categories intensified or expanded. Even though students were taught by a number of different people, the classroom teacher was the one held accountable for student achievement, including ESOL and special education students who were regularly pulled out of their rooms for special classes (Valli et al., 2007). These pullouts intensified the task of curriculum implementation because, in addition to learning new curricula, teachers had to orchestrate their instruction in a manner that would provide coherence for these students. One experienced teacher expressed the difficulty and frustration of this task:

Some of the children are seen by three people. Now, maybe I’m from the old school, but the idea is that those people should come in that
Differentiating through pullouts continued to challenge teachers throughout the study. In one of our last interviews, a staff developer reflected on the status of the differentiation directive as it appeared in practice at her school:

Well, the hardest thing in both reading and mathematics is the differentiation piece, is the grouping, and the pullout that goes on in the classroom. The teachers are really, really good at taking the instruction, looking at indicators and objectives that need to be taught, and teaching that. But when you have children being pulled out for ESOL, children being pulled out for resource, children being pulled out for reading intervention and it’s constant all day, trying to find the time to teach, it gets kind of hard. And I would say that would be their biggest concern this year. (BF 6-7-05)

But differentiating through inclusion did not provide a simple solution. If the special program teachers were plugged into the classroom, curriculum implementation expanded under the collaborative category. Simply understanding how to use specialists as resources became a necessary component of everyday classroom instruction. In a school that was using an inclusive, plug-in model, teachers met numerous times in grade-level meetings simply to coordinate their reading time block with ESOL and special education teacher schedules. At one meeting we observed, the fourth-grade team leader had prepared a worksheet with all fourth-grade student names, their teachers of record, and columns that broke their reading block into 20-minute segments, with specialists’ availability listed for each segment. The team then spent the next 50 minutes trying to determine how to group and schedule students so they could meet with the appropriate specialist. After all that time, the best solution they could arrive at was relegating whole-class reading instruction to the last segment of the day (3:00 to 3:20), which everyone considered undesirable but perhaps unavoidable (CR 10-20-04).

During the 2004–2005 school year, decisions to differentiate instruction through special programs were driven primarily by school district concerns about schools making AYP. Although differentiated instruction was built into the new curricula, special programs continued to proliferate, especially in high-poverty schools where inadequate progress was of most concern. With regard to special programs, the school district communicated firm, hierarchical control. By requiring teachers to spend more time on student placement and data-related tasks, these programs affected all five teacher roles. Student placement in programs occurred through data-based decision making, with teachers learning to be data analysts. These learning opportunities would seem to professionalize the work of teaching. But teachers’ experience was primarily intensified work of dubious value.
Often lacking trust in the formative assessments, special programs, and pullout routine, teachers were, nonetheless, compelled to comply. Even in schools where special programs such as reading intervention were recommended rather than required, principals adopted the programs. Those teachers who did question their school’s approaches to differentiation were not often successful. This resistance occurred most frequently around the reading intervention requirement, which many teachers viewed as overly scripted, unaligned with the new curriculum, and needlessly focused on isolated skills. However, when one group of fifth-grade teachers petitioned to replace reading intervention with writing instruction, only for those students who demonstrated reading proficiency and only after the state test had been given, they were refused. Reading, not writing, was assessed on the state test. The principal—whose school had already been on the watch list 1 year—remained steadfast in her literal interpretation of school district directives. That course of action made the school less vulnerable to district criticism and corrective action should student achievement scores fail to show adequate progress.

Within-Classroom Differentiation in Mathematics

Differentiation did not stop with special programs. Teachers were expected to differentiate instruction in their own classrooms and to use formative assessments to guide that instruction. As a result, teachers’ roles became more intensified, particularly in the learning category as curriculum implementers and assessors. For fourth- and fifth-grade teachers, differentiating instruction was especially difficult during the initial year of the mathematics curriculum implementation because all grade levels received the curriculum concurrently. This meant that knowledge and skill gaps were the rule rather than the exception. Students simply did not have prior learning opportunities assumed by the curriculum guides. A fourth-grade teacher complained during that first year about the tension she felt trying to follow mandates to both pace and differentiate her instruction:

> I have kids who get 104 on my quizzes because they’ve got it and they’re getting the bonus. So I can’t slow down (for struggling students) . . . because they’ll be bored stiff. I find it more—the pacing of the math makes differentiation difficult. . . . The pacing of the math makes it so I can’t do it anyway.” (BF 6-2-03)

Nonetheless, during this year, a few teachers were delving into differentiation and believed that their efforts improved their teaching. The following statement indicates the intensification of instructional planning as one teacher learned to differentiate in mathematics. She saw the extra planning she needed to do as a benefit to both herself and her students, but her statement also indicates that her learning took a great deal of individual motivation and effort:
This teacher’s choice of the words “forced to” and “forcing myself to” suggest the extraordinary effort required to differentiate instruction. Without support, we suspect that few teachers could be expected to do it well without work overload stain.

To structure systematically for differentiated instruction, one school extended its mathematics block from 60 to 90 minutes. On the recommendation of the school’s math specialist, the principal required teachers to conduct a 60-minute whole-group lesson followed by 30 minutes of differentiated instruction on previously taught material. Separate lessons had to be prepared for those who needed review, were on level, or could be accelerated. In practice, this was the equivalent of preparing four mathematics lessons every day. To assist teachers with this challenging responsibility, the math specialist met with them during their weekly planning sessions. To ensure compliance with the directive, the principal monitored classes so that whole-group instruction would not encroach on differentiation time. She believed strongly that students’ mathematics scores would improve if teachers did a better job using this class format to differentiate. Three aspects of intensification are evident here: the specification of teachers’ use of instructional time, the requirement of producing four mathematics lessons a day, and the principal’s monitoring of those classes. Even the math specialist’s assistance was seen by some as surveillance rather than support.

The demands of differentiated instruction were likely to increase further—and across all schools—as the district began to comply with the state-mandated inclusion model of instruction. According to one teacher who had a full inclusion classroom,

> Everything I do is differentiated a million different ways. I don’t do three groups, I do six. . . . I have everything going all the time. . . . When I create my materials, I create form A, B, C, D . . . the exact same skill, just delivered anywhere from . . . a complex, multistep word problem to pictures . . . ’cause I have nonreaders. (SA 6-02-04)

If previous research is a guide (Bullough & Baughman, 1995; Kennedy, 2005), school personnel might still be underestimating the task requirements of differentiated instruction for an inclusive classroom and the toll it can take on teachers.

One differentiation tool that the school district did provide teachers was unit tests to monitor student progress. But the tool itself expanded and
intensified teachers’ work. Teachers used these test results in grouping and regrouping students within and across classrooms. In many of the schools, teachers wanted homogeneously grouped classes for mathematics instruction. This required that students switch teachers periodically, as determined by unit test results. When asked how often teachers at her school regrouped, one math specialist answered, “At the end of unit tests for sure, because . . . the assistant in my room has their lists and has to put in their data and they [sic] go, ‘Oh, they switched again!’ And that’s the whole point” (HT 12-13-04). This regrouping strategy meant expanded collaboration to determine individual student progress and next mathematics placement. In schools with heterogeneously grouped classes, unit tests were used to regroup students within the classroom and to serve as a guide for reteaching the curriculum.

According to district personnel, ongoing informal assessment was the key to differentiation. So assessment tasks intensified as teachers were directed to use formative evaluation to determine student progress, preferably on a daily basis. One teacher described differentiation as one of the biggest changes she experienced in 10 years of teaching:

Before, you didn’t have four or five groups going in math. . . . You didn’t give an exit card [formative assessment] at the end of every lesson to see who got it, who didn’t, who needs reteaching. And that’s a daily thing now, to figure out where you’re gonna go tomorrow, . . . who’s going on, who’s staying here, who’s going backwards. . . . Before, you taught a lesson to everybody, and, and hopefully, everybody got it. (FG-SA-6-2-04)

Weekly formative assessments had become such a mainstay of instructional planning that even when a team leader at one school went on pregnancy leave, she volunteered to continue writing the assessments and produce the item analysis so her teachers could do the necessary regrouping and reteaching. Although these regular assessments might benefit student learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998), they are also one more task that teachers must fit into their workday. The team leader described above apparently saw this dilemma. Wanting this practice to continue and not wanting her teammates overburdened, she continued to do the work herself. Although her actions exemplify a generosity of spirit, volunteerism is seldom promoted as a sound, long-term strategy for achieving organizational goals.

Much of the differentiated instruction and use of formative assessments in mathematics classes seem like sound pedagogical practice—well worth the expansion and intensification of teacher roles. Teachers collaborated more with teammates and specialists; they also used formative assessments more regularly to determine groupings and match instruction to learning needs. But in this area of instructional differentiation we see two patterns of role expansion and intensification that could well detract from enhanced pedagogical expertise. First, teachers’ expanded collaborative work was mainly about analyzing assessment data for purposes of reteaching and regrouping. Seldom
did we hear teachers discussing instructional strategies. One of the principals offered that this was a problem. Talking about all the formative assessments that were being required, she said,

I don’t think that we as a system do a good job in helping the teachers understand “What am I really seeing in that assessment?” and then “What instructional accommodations do I need to put in place so that I’m making a difference with that kid’s instruction?” And I don’t think that, in general, the teachers have enough knowledge and analysis of the assessments to move forward. (BF 9-28-04)

As with the special programs, another pattern of intensified role expansion was that decisions about unit assessments were hierarchically controlled. The district mandated the pace at which units were covered and when assessments were given. With little support, teachers were supposed to know how to both simultaneously pace the curriculum and differentiate instruction. District personnel did not seem to consider the role conflicts and intensified pressures that teachers would experience in juggling the pacing and differentiating directives. Although some teachers felt as though they were learning how to do this, as we shall see later, it might have been at the expense of rigorous instruction. Teachers were reteaching, but what was the quality of that instruction? In the next section, we examine differentiation as teachers encountered it in the reading curriculum, implemented only 2 years after the mathematics curriculum.

Within-Classroom Differentiation in Reading

Earlier, we described how differentiation was achieved in reading through the use of special programs and how teachers’ roles were affected accordingly. Although many students received supplemental instruction in reading outside of the regular reading block, the teachers still were responsible for within-classroom differentiation. The implementation of the reading curriculum in 2004 had a differentiation component built directly into it: guided reading groups. This mode of instruction was viewed by the district as the best way to teach reading strategies to students of a wide range of ability. One principal used the expression “huge new learning” to describe the impact of this reading instruction directive on her teachers. This word choice indicates the intensification of teachers’ learning role that would be required to implement the curriculum in this way. Anticipating the challenge this directive would pose for his fourth- and fifth-grade teachers, another principal began preparing them for guided reading groups the year before they received the new curriculum:

[We] gave them a preview of what was coming. . . . We’re going to look very carefully at making sure the way that teachers are selecting books, texts, that the text match the students’ reading level, but it also matches the tasks that we want our students to do, which is totally
different from the way we’ve been teaching reading. . . . We had our reading specialist and our staff development teacher develop a training plan. (FB 7-28-04)

We observed staff meetings where some of this training was done. Midway through the first year of curriculum rollout, reading specialists distributed a chart, Four Levels of Implementation, of guided reading groups. This chart was prepared by the district’s Reading Curriculum Framework group and explained to reading specialists at a district-level meeting. The lowest level meant that the teacher was merely repeating the whole-group lesson in small groups using the same text for everyone. The highest level meant having whole- and small-group instruction, with flexible grouping, repeating the focus of the whole group in small groups using appropriately differentiated (a) text, (b) literature discussion, and (c) skills and strategy instruction. Although teachers were asked to use this chart as self-assessment, trying to determine how they could move to a higher level, there was little systematic help to achieve this goal. Earlier that year, teachers similarly had been given another handout as professional development assistance on differentiating within-class instruction for their ELL students. Both sessions indicate further intensification for teachers in their instructional and learner roles.

In addition to these areas of role intensification around the new curriculum, teachers collected reading data as though keeping an “on grade-level vigil.” Meetings commonly referred to as “data meetings” were held in which teachers, principals, reading and math specialists, ESOL teachers, resource teachers, and staff developers met (again taking teachers away from the classroom) to discuss students who were receiving interventions or whose data indicated they were not achieving at grade level through regular classroom instruction. Data for these meetings were not limited to formal achievement data. The teachers kept data notebooks that documented the social, behavioral, and academic traits of struggling students. We observed professional development meetings where teachers were given packets of forms to document students’ performance in each of those areas of development. These packets came complete with checklists of student behaviors and indicators of progress. Teachers also gave individual diagnostic reading assessments to students during class time, again to monitor students’ grade-level ability. These data were presented by the classroom teacher at data meetings, where they were asked to describe the strategies they used to support the students’ learning and were then given instructional suggestions by the rest of the data team.

Teachers were of two minds about the data meetings. Some teachers found sharing information about students with learning problems helpful: “It’s a great way for you to get together with all these other professionals that work with your children, and have advice, you know, different strategies that you can use to help them out” (HT FG 6-8-05). Other teachers thought that preparing for the meetings was excessively time-consuming and needlessly took away from instructional time by requiring them to administer DRAs.
Rather than feeling collaborative support, these teachers experienced a needless intrusion on instructional time and intensified expectations for differentiating reading instruction. These teachers tended to view the data sessions as a form of surveillance. Field notes from one of these meetings captured what a team leader told the data team. Speaking with the confidence of her seniority at the school, she said, “I’ve taught here longer than a lot of you have been alive and I’m [she gestured with her hands like she was shaking sweat off them] . . . my palms are sweating. . . . The perception of this [data meeting] is that it’s a witch hunt” (HT 1-31-05).

The district-imposed policy of walk-throughs also heightened anxiety levels as teachers anticipated a team of individuals coming into their classrooms to make sure they were implementing school district expectations, especially expectations for differentiated instruction. One principal described how he worked to alleviate this anxiety:

When we first introduced this walk-through process we wanted them [teachers] to not look at it as an “I gotcha!” And there’s always that anxiety when you have anybody different coming into your classroom. And especially that many people. So we really worked hard and tried to get rid of that anxiety . . . . We established . . . some more lenses that we were going to focus on . . . high expectations, meaningful differentiation, and language. (RS 3-17-04)

Nonetheless, teachers at some schools continued to feel “under the gun.” Told that the community superintendent and 12 others would be doing walk-throughs, one particularly candid fifth-grade teacher said to his teammates, “This scares the shit out of me” (HT 2-10-05). He wondered when any of the visitors had last taught, and his teammates expressed concern that they would be singled out for doing something wrong.

Looking at the role demands of differentiated instruction across special programs, mathematics classes, and reading classes indicates extensive impact on classroom teachers who, most often, were involved in all three instructional settings. Instructional, institutional, collaborative, and learning roles were all expanded and intensified as teachers were required to learn to analyze student data, simultaneously pace and differentiate new curricula, collaborate on student placements, use formative assessments, find appropriately leveled materials, and conduct small-group instruction. Although principals at some schools anticipated implementation problems and structured for support, teachers at other schools seemed to be left more to their own survival skills. In the worst situations, teachers felt the weight of surveillance on top of already heavy role expectations.

Role Change Consequences

Examining one instructional directive from the perspective of teacher roles illustrates changes in both the scope and nature of teachers’ work in a high-stakes accountability climate. Any single policy directive could be analyzed
through the lenses of task increase, expansion, and intensification and a complex picture would emerge. When several significant directives affect teachers’ work simultaneously, there is more than an additive effect on their responsibility. Each directive requires teachers to undertake certain tasks that, depending on the aim of the directive, are related to several role functions. When the same task is enacted in different ways for different purposes, teachers must tailor the task according to its function, and the impact on role responsibilities is multiplicative. When teachers’ roles are affected to this magnitude, we must ask what this does to the experience of schooling for both teachers and their students.

For the participants in our study, responses to the majority of directives became inextricably linked to AYP, regardless of the original intent of the directives. Teachers’ roles changed as AYP expectations grew, particularly in schools where student populations had the greatest needs for academic growth. Teachers were swept up in a flow of mandates that consumed their thinking, their energy, and for some, even their love of teaching. Our analysis points to three significant areas that were affected by this high-stakes environment: teachers’ pedagogies, their relationships with their students, and their sense of well-being.

Impact on Pedagogy

Apple and Jungck (1992) cautioned that when curriculum becomes increasingly controlled, standardized, and systematized from a central level and when competencies are measured by standardized tests, the outcomes for teaching may not be what was envisioned. “Instead of professional teachers who care greatly about what they do and why they do it, we may have alienated executors of someone else’s plans” (p. 24). The general consensus was that the two new curricula, which were specific in their scope and sequence and directive about implementation, were constraining for teachers, particularly in mathematics. Teachers struggled to replace their old pedagogies with new practices that enabled them to cover a dense curriculum on schedule. However, many of the pedagogical changes they described, particularly during the first 2 years with the curriculum, were not ones that the school district endorsed or envisioned.

Because the curriculum moved at such a fast pace and because the topics were organized in such an unfamiliar way, teachers felt as though they were racing through it. Several teachers referred to the deterioration of their pedagogies into what they called “hit or miss” and “drive-by” teaching. Teachers told us that the rapid pace of the content delivery necessitated that they stop creating lessons that involved inquiry. A few teachers who responded that they appreciated the structure of the curriculum made rather dubious comments about the benefit of moving quickly, such as it was good to move on when a student did not get a concept rather than “harping” on it. More than teaching the student disciplined learning, it seemed that the curriculum was disciplining the teachers: “It makes sure we’re disciplined enough to
move on rather than wanting to make sure they learn it at 100% or 90%” (MP 5-26-04).

We do not claim that the curriculum itself was at fault for these pedagogical changes. In fact, the new mathematics curriculum emphasized conceptual understanding, student reasoning, and alternative problem-solving strategies. Rather, as reported in this and other studies (Ballet et al., 2006), the role expansion and intensification that teachers experience can deprive them of the mental and temporal space needed to understand and use new curricula well. Without time to reflect on their teaching or assess their implementation processes, was it really possible for teachers to enact curricula in thoughtful ways that addressed the range of student background knowledge? Exacerbating the problem was the countervailing press to differentiate in ways that emphasized test-taking skills and content.

When teachers described how they were differentiating in their classrooms, it was almost exclusively in terms of grouping and instructional materials, that is, choosing worksheets that allowed students to practice skills at different levels. Teachers, indeed, seemed to become better managers of activities, resources, and data, but we saw little evidence that their pedagogies improved as they assumed the many roles dedicated to instructional differentiation. Even with training, differentiating instruction was so demanding, especially when it included ELL and special needs students, that it would not be surprising if the quality of pedagogy suffered as the practice of teaching became more complex. As an observer wrote about a fourth-grade teacher’s reading lesson,

I have seen Vicky do this planning . . . . She spends hours thinking about what texts are at [students’] reading level, of interest, the right genre, which are good for teaching particular strategies, what students will be doing independently, how ESOL lessons relate, etc. The planning and coordination is mind-boggling. (CR 2-11-05)

When directives to pace and align instruction coincide with directives to differentiate, the challenge to high-quality teaching is all the greater. Curriculum coverage, matching taught content to tested content, and finding appropriate materials for students become overriding considerations.

Time-sampling data from the study’s standardized classroom observation protocol further suggest the deterioration of teaching between the years 2002 and 2005. These observations (approximately six to eight per teacher per year) indicate that teaching became more basic skill oriented once testing was required at every grade level and had high-stakes consequences. From our total sample of teachers (64 to 76, depending on the subject and year), we witnessed a decline in every category that signified cognitively complex instruction ($p < .01$) and either a rise or constancy in instruction that placed little cognitive demand on students (Valli, Croninger, & Buese, in press). These measures were of both teacher activities and student activities (e.g., levels of questions, responses, writing assignments, problems) in both mathematics and reading, suggesting a pervasive change in teaching and learning. For
example, teacher actions to engage students in cognitively challenging work by asking higher order questions or giving thought-provoking assignments dropped from 14% to 10% in reading and from 11% to 7% in mathematics.

In addition, because we were able to observe 53 reading intervention classes as well as 143 regular reading classes in our three case study schools, we could detect more clearly the impact of high-stakes testing on classroom pedagogy. These intervention classes functioned as test preparation sessions and were taught by either regular classroom teachers or by reading and ESOL specialists, not by untrained paraprofessionals. In every relevant category—teacher activity, student activity, and lesson content—the intervention classes substantially reduced student opportunities for cognitively demanding work. As an example, in both types of classes, teacher activities were more often coded as low cognitive demand than high cognitive demand. However, in the regular reading classes, the ratio of low-cognitive-demand activities to high-cognitive-demand activities was less than 2 to 1. In the reading intervention classes, that ratio was almost 6 to 1 (Valli, Croninger, & Buese, in press).

Impact on Teacher–Student Relations

These pedagogy findings led us to consider changes in teachers’ relationships with their students. Despite the expanded collaborative roles that were required for student placement in special programs, most of our study’s teachers complained of the effect all of the movement had on their students and their relationships with them. We described the difficulty teachers had coordinating their implementation of the curriculum with pullout teachers because of the regular coming and going of students in and out of the classroom. Despite collaborative efforts, teachers found that keeping track of the pullout instruction their students received was difficult. Considering the number and scope of collaborative roles the teachers tried to assume, there was not enough time to coordinate instruction or discuss student performance significantly on a day-to-day basis.

Furthermore, teachers worried when students became confused about where they should be at any given time during the day. Consider, for example, the plight of the ESOL student who has yet to attain virtually any English language and the teachers’ instructional and relational roles in trying to help him understand what was going on in any class when he was pulled out up to three times a day. One teacher became so upset with the disruption to her lesson and concerned for students’ well-being that she refused to allow a specialist to take her students until the lesson was over. With the same motivation, the fourth-grade teachers at one school requested a change in the homogeneous grouping policy for reading intervention so they could keep their homeroom students for both the regular reading class and the reading intervention class. Arguing that because of pullouts they did not have enough time with their students, they convinced the principal that limited knowledge of students was harmful to good instruction.
Teachers had plenty of data on their students from the numerous diagnostic and achievement tests that were given. But how well did data analysis serve the student–teacher relationship? Unaware of the broader implications of her comment, a reading specialist at one of the schools told us, “I don’t always know them [students] by face; I know them by data” (HT 12-14-04). And yet few teachers believed the information from diagnostic testing was worth the time and effort it took to administer the tests. Learning to interpret the data was a task that required a great deal of teacher learning, and professional development was already spread too thin supporting the implementation of new curricula. Teachers had so much data from so many tests that they seldom had time to interpret the information let alone use it. Moreover, the constant testing affected the teachers’ relationship with their students in unexpected ways. One special education teacher worried that it compromised her credibility with her students because, after a point, would the students believe that she wasn’t just “blowing smoke” about the importance of the test? She said, “It’s hard to gear yourself up to take a test and tell the children it’s important, if you’re always giving them an important test” (BF 6-16-05). Her colleague added that too many tests were demoralizing for students. She asked, “How much documentation do you need that the child can’t read? I mean, they’re reading three grade levels below. Okay, we know that. Do we have to keep slapping it in their face?” (BF 6-16-05).

Teachers at another school similarly complained that the district’s rigid testing schedule for mathematics had a negative impact on teaching and learning because the focus was “not on the child” but on the information due date. They recalled a unit for which they lost significant amounts of instructional time due to snow days:

Teacher A: And if you know in your heart of hearts that these kids are not ready for the assessment, you have to give it anyway.
Teacher B: Oh, that was so hard to do. It’s so hard to watch them struggle through a task.
Teacher A: Yeah, it was terrible. . . . They weren’t, we didn’t have time . . . and we knew when we gave it [the unit test] that we’re setting them up for failure. (OC 5-25-04)

Consistent with findings from numerous other studies (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 1997; Huberman, 1993; James, 2006), the teachers we encountered considered themselves caring professionals. Getting to know their students personally was important to them, so they had mixed feelings about the expanded task of data analysis. They were torn between accepting the district’s stance that knowing the students’ needs meant knowing their assessment data and their belief that the information they garnered through interacting with students was equally as valuable. The time taken away from instruction for testing purposes was not, from the perspective of most of the teachers, worth the price of diminished relational roles with their students.
Impact on Teacher Stress

As suggested by the preceding account, these heightened expectations for teachers' work took their toll. Principals began talking about teacher stress, which received its first independent code in our analysis in 2003–2004. Even before that, principals were sensing that teachers were becoming overwhelmed with so many new requirements: “They’re overwhelmed period . . . new curriculum framework . . . new testing, new state testing . . . and there is nothing I can do for them, you know. I can’t make it go away” (HT 2-05-03). One principal talked about tension levels rising with growing awareness of the importance of focusing on AYP-designated groups (poverty, ethnicity, ESOL):

If you’re a little bit on edge about things I think you perform at a higher level. But you can certainly hit the point of diminishing returns where it becomes debilitating. . . . The teachers definitely feel, I think, more stress than they have felt in the past.” (CO 5-19-04)

Another principal commented at length on the impact of rapid role change expectations within a new high-stakes climate on even the most capable veteran teacher:

While they are being held accountable with increasing measure they are also at the same time being asked to implement a curriculum that's unfamiliar to them, to change their practices in grading and reporting grades. To really look at the larger, broader scope of assessment and that it is not assessment that produces information about the student so much as it's assessment that produces information and judgment about the teacher. That's a huge shift and I think that you have staff who are experienced staff who have in the past felt very sure about their own level of competence, all of a sudden feeling unsure at the very time when they are being held much more accountable in much more tangible public ways for their performance. (CS 4-27-04)

Teachers used similar language when venting frustration with the rapid rate of change. One teacher talked about teaching three different mathematics programs in 3 years, with only a couple of days training to make the transition: “You’re expected to be able to teach this whole program by the next year. Then they change it. And then they throw something else at you. . . . There’s a lot of juggling going on. . . . They dump it on you, which is insane” (FG, HT 6-01-05). This comment led to an outpouring of sentiments from other teachers about the district’s not having a clue, flying by the seat of its pants, and constantly sending out materials stamped with “Draft.” There was widespread agreement with a teacher who said there was “just too much change, too quickly” that was a hindrance to student learning.
In addition to the rapid rate of district initiatives and curriculum changes, teachers linked their stress levels directly to AYP. Said one fourth-grade teacher from an at-risk school, “And then you have the AYP floating in the back of your head, you have to make AYP, otherwise we have another intervention, and what’s that going to make life like. . . . It’s stressful.” He went on to express doubts about the feasibility of NCLB expectations, wondering how long it would typically take a student to go from a preprimer to a fourth-grade reading level: “I mean . . . is it possible?” (CR, HP, 5-25-05). Similarly, teachers at another school questioned the feasibility of annual proficiency rate increases of 12% to 15%. They wondered why 40% proficiency was good enough for their students one year, but not the next year, and what would happen once high-performing, high-income schools started missing AYP as the 2014 goal of 100% proficiency drew near.

Not surprising, the stress that teachers experienced over ever-changing and high-stakes demands can result in teacher turnover. As one staff developer said, what makes good teaching “a hundred million times more difficult is that we’re introducing a thousand miles of new curriculum, of new everything, and I’m not surprised by the rate of teachers that leave the profession right now. . . . How much can a human being do?” (SD-FG 3-31-04). Although we were not able to collect comprehensive teacher turnover data, there seemed to be a clear trend in movement into and out of schools. As they attained tenure, teachers moved from higher to lower poverty schools—schools with considerably less pressure to make AYP. The principal from one of the highest poverty schools (75%) told us that the teacher turnover rate at her school was 60% to 70% a year. She had not hired a tenured teacher in years and said that once teachers received tenure, they tended to move to less stressful school environments. Reflective field notes and interviews from this school during 2004–2005 were filled with comments about stress levels: “As Union Rep, [Carmen] gets a lot of teachers coming to her about how stressed out they are. She’s had 4 to 5 teachers come to her crying, saying that they don’t even like teaching any more” (CR 10-21-04). “She says to me that she’ll never make it to her fifth year of teaching. . . . There’s so much stress. . . . She spends all her time planning and never gets ahead” (CR 12-01-04). “Time after time they share how tired and stressed they are” (CR 1-25-05).

The stress was so palpable that one of us felt compelled to step out of her researcher role to reassure a first-year teacher who, leaving a planning meeting in tears, said she did not know if she could keep doing this for another year. Linked as they are to accountability policies, these increased levels of stress and anxiety are clearly, as others have argued, the result of workplace cultures, not psychological characteristics of teachers (M. Cohen & Kottkamp, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994).

Discussion

In this article, we examined how work increased, expanded, and intensified for fourth- and fifth-grade teachers between 2001 and 2005. Our central
purpose was to determine if, in fact, teachers’ work did change significantly in a highly charged policy environment, contrary to views that teachers’ work has historically remained quite stable. We began by identifying the tasks that teachers and other school personnel described in their interviews. We found that the number of tasks they were asked to assume increased in number, expanded in scope, and intensified as the policy climate in their school district became more high stakes. Both the magnitude and the rate of change were greater than we anticipated. Because most examinations of teachers’ work have not been situated in the comprehensive array of reform efforts and have lacked the extensive, longitudinal data that we analyzed, they have not portrayed the full pace and interrelated extent of change manifested in the day-to-day work of teachers.

We further found that these changes affected the very nature of teacher work. The increase, expansion, and intensification of work shifted teachers’ professional roles. Although teachers’ instructional role was consistently dominant throughout these 4 years, the increasing significance of their institutional role was unmistakable—shaping and subsuming all other roles. Teachers’ roles had, indeed, become more hierarchically controlled. Their instructional role, for example, was increasingly regulated and monitored through assessment and data analysis expectations. In just a few short years, these teachers had lost a good deal of what Kennedy (2005) found to be the “remarkable flexibility in what [U.S. teachers] teach and how they teach it” (p. 3). But the extent to which teachers were asked to differentiate, align, and pace the curriculum and enact new programs did anything but simplify teaching. Although the test preparation materials that some principals ordered de-skilled teaching, those materials supplemented rather than replaced the rigorous new curriculum. Unlike a bygone era when teaching was demanding but not technically difficult (Hargreaves, 2000), teachers’ new instructional role was both demanding and technically difficult. This suggests that the original use of intensification as a de-skilling process may be becoming obsolete. But even with the strong supports and school-embedded professional development recommended in the research (Kirtman, 2002), there were few indications that instruction improved. In fact, if the level of cognitive demand during a lesson is an indicator of quality, as we believe it to be, instructional quality seems to have declined.

Similarly, teachers’ new institutional role expanded and changed the nature of their collaborative and learning roles. In 2001–2002, for example, teachers collaborated with colleagues during team meetings or in informal ways to group students better for differentiated instruction (see Figure 1). The way they differentiated—finding the right group, program, or material—required little new learning. By 2004–2005, both those roles had changed dramatically (see Figure 2). In concert with Hargreaves’ (2000) analysis, we found numerous factors responsible for the expansion of teachers’ collaborative role, including higher, standardized expectations for their performance. But in this role, teachers spent, in our view, an excessive amount of time grouping and regrouping students, placing them in one program or another. Group planning time focused on curriculum pacing and alignment or test-taking...
strategies—not on curriculum understanding or improved instructional strategies. Although reading and ESOL specialists provided detailed handouts about differentiating instruction, team members rarely had time to work collaboratively on those strategies. Ironically, instructional improvement was not the core of teachers’ learning roles. Teachers were too busy learning how to read data to regroup and reteach students and how to align and pace the curriculum to engage in “rich deliberations” about the substance of their teaching (Spillane, 1999). Unlike the paradigm shift from teacher-as-technician to teacher-as-learner that Finley (2000) reports, the vision of teacher-as-learner does not necessarily mean a thoughtful practitioner or creator of knowledge.

As suggested earlier, and by Table 2, teachers’ relational roles also changed. But contrary to other role changes, which were intensified and/or expanded, teachers had to work hard to keep their personal and pedagogical relationships with students from being marginalized in this new era of accountability, often having to engage in practices that were antithetical to their beliefs about a good instructional environment. Although differentiated and data-based instruction would seem to require greater knowledge of students, this was not the case. Affected by the push to make AYP, teachers felt pressure to reduce their interactions with students to deficit areas. Even the highly relational act of tutoring took on a more rationalized institutional goal orientation. Supporting findings from Bailey’s (2000) study, ours also indicate that teachers may be placed in the position of violating their own deeply felt beliefs about what children in their care need when they are told how and what to teach. The study participants believed mandated changes required them to abandon methods and materials that had been successful with their students. (p. 118)

These and the other findings reported in this article suggest that as policy makers develop curricula and plans for raising student achievement, they need to consider their impact on both teachers’ roles and subsequent, unintended changes. As this analysis has shown, directives can be so demanding that we must ask what would be required for teachers to carry out new role expectations. For policy makers and researchers to address the types of changes we witnessed, a two-pronged effort would be necessary: one that attended to the scope and fast pace of change and one that reexamined the nature of role change expectations and consequences brought about by a high-stakes policy environment.

First, there is often much to admire in school district designs to implement rigorous curriculum and monitor student achievement. However, if these designs make multiple and simultaneous demands on teachers, especially in a short period of time, the consequences may be quite different from the desired outcomes. Similar to findings from other research (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002), the teachers we studied generally sought to accommodate curricular and instructional directives from governing agencies and administration. But the burden of their intensified, and sometimes conflicting,
role expansion caused many to question “whether I’m a good teacher.” Unfortunately, that query can confound rather than improve teachers’ work as well as diminish teachers’ desire to stay in the profession. If improved student achievement is the goal of current reform efforts, policy makers must come to a better understanding of what it takes for schools and teachers to incorporate new learning into their practices. The sheer onslaught of role change expectations over a few short years simply overwhelmed most teachers. Because teachers and principals felt so pressed to implement so many changes, they seemed unable to prioritize instructional improvement efforts according to the needs of their students or themselves.

Although we did not find the kind of pedagogical improvement desired by the school district in our examination of differentiation, other studies indicate that teachers are motivated to enact changes they believe in. They are willing to become re-skilled even though work is intensified, if they have sufficient support (Ballet et al., 2006). To assist teachers in their re-skilling efforts, policy makers would be wise to consider how parsing new initiatives strategically over time might enable teachers to learn new practices that would lay a foundation for the steadily intensifying demands of their work. Simply loading on new expectations without investing in the prerequisite teacher learning and ownership does little to enhance capabilities in using new assessment tools and instructional strategies in consequential ways. Although we saw some of that investment in this study, the nature of our data did not permit an analysis of school-level factors and variations. More attention needs to be given to conditions under which role intensification might lead to meaningful re-skilling and professionalization.

Second, in addition to the scope and rate of role change, this study suggests the importance of examining the nature of that change and its consequences for teachers, students, and the school organization itself. Although too many fast-paced policy demands can affect teachers’ roles in all schools, the demands that come from high-stakes accountability disproportionately affect teachers in at-risk schools, typically those with higher rates of poor, minority, and ELL students. If the patterns we saw in these schools are indicative of broader trends, we question not just the pace of change expectations but the wisdom of those expectations. Teachers’ pedagogy, relations to students, and sense of professional well-being deteriorated over these 4 years. Policy makers and researchers need to determine if that deterioration occurred simply because of the rate of change or because of the types of change associated with particular types of policy. Even if the rate of role change expectations slowed, the value of changes such as increased expectations for curriculum alignment and pacing, data management and analysis, regrouping strategies, and remedial pullout programs would need to be judged in relation to a broad set of outcomes.

One such outcome that seems to warrant further attention is teachers’ perceptions of the value and feasibility of the reform efforts. Unless teachers believe in and help structure new role expectations, they are unlikely to be wholeheartedly involved (Turner, 2001). For example, like assessment scholars...
(Linn, Baker, & Betebenner, 2002), the teachers in this study were highly skeptical of NCLB’s way of determining AYP, believing that their schools should be judged by student improvement rather than by generic proficiency rates. They enacted policies, such as reading intervention, that they lacked faith in, due only to tightened hierarchical control, an organizational strategy likely to increase strain not just for individual teachers but for schools as social systems (Biddle, 1986).

**Conclusion**

As suggested by this study, although beyond its scope, more research needs to be done on the relationships among external policies, workplace cultures, and teacher roles. Over the past decade, scholars have produced robust bodies of literature on important characteristics of schools, such as learning communities (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006), leadership (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001), and the distribution and use of resources (D. K. Cohen, Raudenbush, & Ball, 2003; Little, 1999). But how do those school-based factors affect teacher role change? What kinds of other supports do schools give teachers to both carry out and challenge role change expectations? Because educational policy is mediated not just by individual teachers but also by school organizations, we need to understand better how organizational factors affect teacher roles. Based on previous research (Ballet et al., 2006), as well as on new theoretical models of school organizations (Gamoran, Secada, & Marrett, 2000), mediation is likely to be complex and varied.

Perhaps even more important, we also need to ask what happens to learning communities, leadership, and resources under high-stakes accountability conditions. Although workplace cultures might mediate some of the force of external accountability measures, those cultures themselves are also transformed by external pressures. Principals, for example, who are now the primary focus of accountability measures (Ballet et al., 2006), will undoubtedly have less power to buffer teachers against multiple directives. Although this and other studies provide some general guidance about school cultures and characteristics, scholarship on the organization of schools remains to be systematically linked to the current accountability context.

**Notes**

This study was supported by the Interdisciplinary Educational Research Initiative (IERI No. 0115389), a combined effort of the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, and the National Institutes of Health. The opinions expressed in this article are our own and do not reflect the positions and policy of the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, or the National Institutes of Health. The motivation to write this article came from the unexpected changes in teachers’ roles and responsibilities that we witnessed as we studied teaching practice from 2001 to 2005. The study aims to illuminate, for policy makers, administrators, and teachers, how educational policies affect instructional, organizational, and cultural factors in schools. We would like to thank other members of the research team for their assistance and support in all aspects of the study as well as the AERJ editors and five anonymous reviewers for their helpful critiques.
1 In Year 1, we observed 67 teachers from 11 schools; in Year 2, 70 teachers from 16 schools; in Year 3, 80 teachers from 18 schools; and in Year 4, 71 teachers from 16 schools.

2 Our goal was to interview every principal once a year. In a few instances, we interviewed principals more than once or were unable to interview a principal. In the final year of the study, we interviewed only the principals and assistant principals in the three case study schools.

3 In the early 20th century, task analysis was called activity analysis and used by those such as Franklin Bobbitt to apply principles of scientific management to the work of teachers (Kliebard, 1992). In the sociology-of-work literature, the term production function analysis has been commonly used (Valli, 1986).

4 Vertical articulation is the process by which teachers come to understand what students are expected to learn and be able to do at grade levels below and above the grade level they teach. According to school district personnel, this understanding is vital to the effective implementation of the curriculum.

5 We leave discussion of student grouping and placement to the next section of the article, on differentiating instruction. The assessment and monitoring codes are discussed under data analysis, and the teacher stress code is addressed in the Discussion section of this article.

6 Plug-in programs used academic support teachers, resource teachers, teachers of English for speakers of other languages, or paraeducators to work with students identified for extra support within the classroom.

7 Findings from other studies indicate additional ways in which the curriculum can be narrowed. See, for example, Darling-Hammond (1997), Ingersoll (2003), and Rowan (1990).

8 This was one of the highest turnover rates in this school district. For a related but pre-NCLB analysis of teacher control and teacher turnover, see Ingersoll (2003). More information about the impact of high-stakes accountability on turnover rates is needed.

References


---

Manuscript received January 25, 2007
Revision received April 12, 2007
Accepted June 23, 2007