

ONLINE SUPPLEMENT  
to article in

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## The Myth Incarnate: Recoupling Processes, Turmoil, and Inhabited Institutions in an Urban Elementary School

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Meetings at Costen took five forms: full staff meetings, individual grade-level meetings, staff development meetings, “leader team” meetings between representatives from each grade level and the administration, and Local School Council meetings. I sampled all of these, and I regularly attended the staff, leader team, and LSC meetings. Lunches often became a forum in which teachers would spontaneously discuss the meetings and recent events. When shadowing administrators, I would follow them while noting their work and interactions (this often took them out of their offices). Hallway observations included scheduled transition times, as well as spontaneous interactions between people as they moved from place to place.

Interviews ranged from nearly four hours of reflection to brief, 10-minute interviews geared toward soliciting thoughts following meetings. Interviews averaged 45 minutes, with a median of 35 minutes. They were both formal (taped and based on loose protocols) and informal (not taped and open-ended). I entered all of the fieldnotes, interview notes and transcripts, and meeting transcripts into NUDIST, a computer program that facilitates qualitative

analysis. Coding began with the creation of open categories developed from the data in an effort to describe the context. Early observations of individual classrooms fit the “loosely-coupled” characterization prominent in educational research. This became a category. In interviews with teachers, I found that their descriptions of the past also fit this category. Working chronologically through the data, I noticed that many of Kox’s actions, and her stated vision for the school, involved tighter linkages between the teachers and the administration. Data fitting this broad description became a “tight coupling” category. Later, as I worked through the data a second time while reading the literature, I labeled the change between these two categories “recoupling.” Recoupling is a process that represents a changing state from loose coupling toward tight coupling.

Open coding also included a broad category called “policy.” I put any reference to policy or formal programming here, and I found that much of it involved the word “accountability.” This became a subcategory, and it grew as I went through the data again, included references to surveillance by external

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offices, and did word searches for the root “account.” This category indicated pressure from the broader institutional environment.

I found that much of the data coded to “policy” and “accountability” was double coded to “recoupling.” I realized that the school was not only being recoupled internally, but also externally, and that accountability was driving both processes. This finding, in dialogue with the literature, is how I realized that the “myth” of accountability was becoming incarnate.

During my fieldwork, teachers’ emotions were palpable. I noted emotions in fieldnotes and coded segments of the interviews into a broad “emotions” category. These data included the teachers’ own descriptions of “turmoil” and their emotional responses to events. Many of these data were double coded with “recoupling,” enabling me to identify the relationship between the two.

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