

Perceptions of Implementability:

A Policy Instrument Theory-Guided Case Study of a New Curriculum Design

Dr. Colleen Rudy, Department of Curriculum and Instruction



Introduction

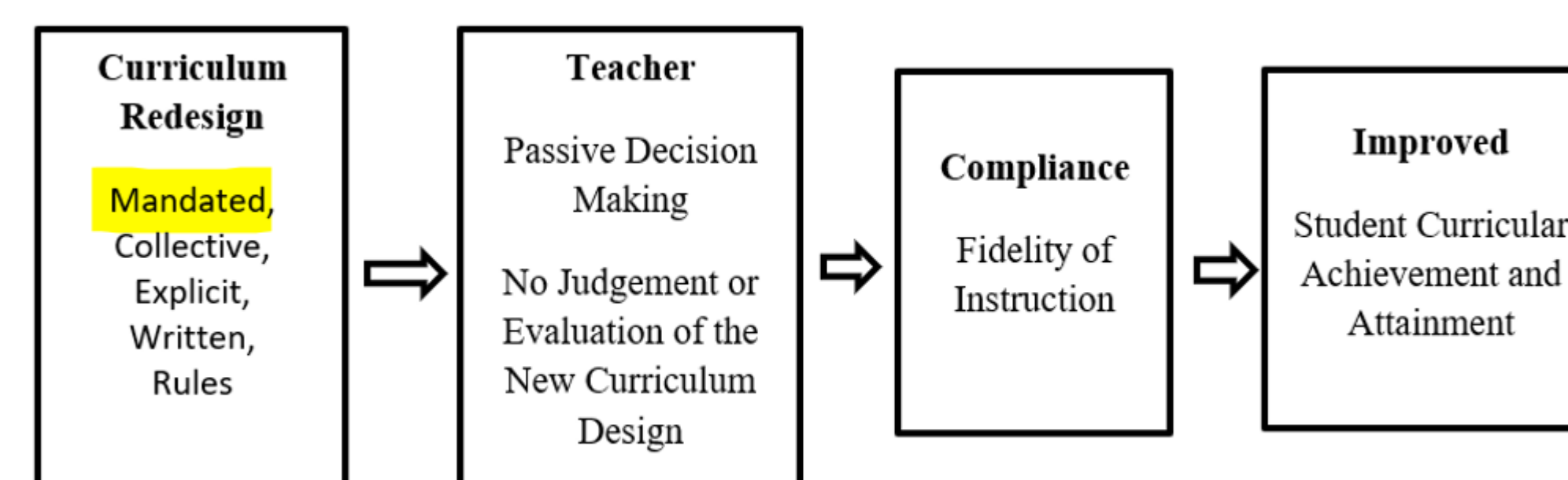
- Public education reform programs often rely on the redesign of the curriculum as the key intervention for driving change in teacher instructional behaviour to achieve improvements in the level of student curricular achievement and attainment.
- This change strategy is founded on policy instrument theory.
- This study investigates the explanatory power of two iterations of policy instrument theory for understanding actual implementation of a mandated new curriculum design.

Methods

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven high school teachers implementing the new curriculum design in the humanities, math, and science.
- Curricula and intertextual documents for grades 10 to 12 English Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, and Science were reviewed.
- A theory-led thematic analysis identified 10 themes: disposition, implementation, collective implementation, choice, clarity, cognitive burden, continuum of growth, equity, accountability, and professional learning.

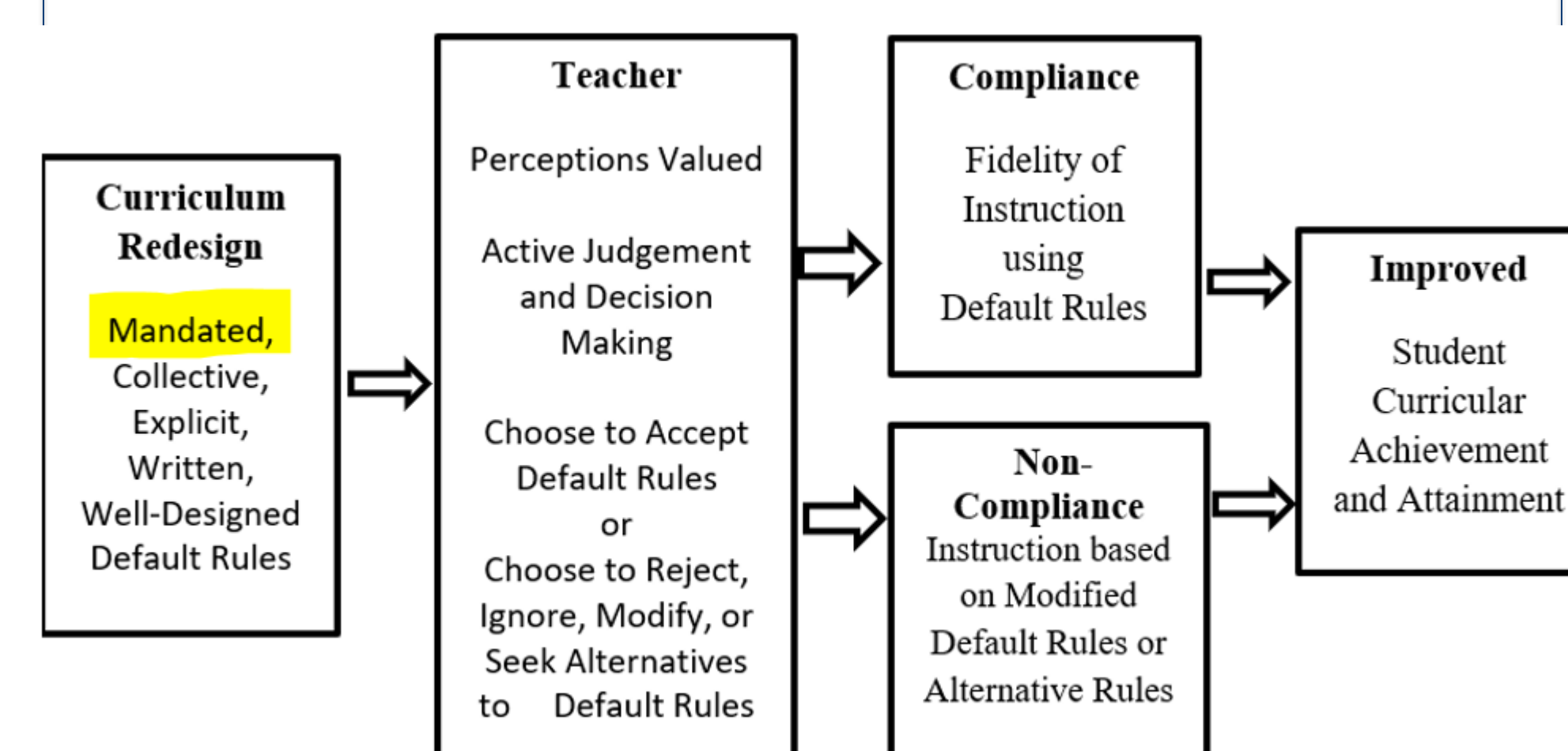
Policy Instrument Theory

- Assumes that a change in the design of the mandated curriculum **should and will cause** a concomitant change in the perceptions, decision making, and instructional behavior of teachers during implementation.
- **Teachers' perceptions are theorized as problematic.**



Extended Policy Instrument Theory

- Informed choice approach to mandated curriculum – assumes new design **may, or may not,** cause a change in teachers' perceptions, decision making, and instructional behaviour.
- **Teachers' perceptions are theorized as valuable.**
- **Goodness of design matters.**



Findings

1. Teachers' perceptions of a new curriculum design mediate implementation.

Teachers are active decision makers with a personal epistemology who evaluate and judge a curriculum design and then decide to accept, adapt, modify, ignore, or search for alternatives.

2. Individual attributes of a new curriculum design may support or hinder implementability.

Teachers spontaneously identified and evaluated six attributes of the new design – choice, clarity, cognitive burden, continuum of growth, equity, and accountability.

3. A mandated new curriculum design should be supported with on-going professional learning.

Professional learning should address teachers' perceptions of the attributes of a new design.

4. Two different policy instrument theories appear to be at play in the same public education reform program.

Curriculum and intertextual documents reflect the causal story of policy instrument theory. Interviews reflect the causal story of extended policy instrument theory.

Conclusions

- Teachers' perceptions play a critical role in curriculum design and implementation.
- Mandates do not result in conversion of teachers' perceptions, decision making, and instructional behaviour.
- Extended policy instrument theory provides an updated causal story for education reform programs that rely on the redesign of the curriculum as the key driver of change.

Next Steps

- Curriculum Implementability Appraisal Framework
- Policy Instrument Theory, Curriculum Design, and Teachers' Perceptions
- Complete Guide to Curriculum Design, Implementation, and Evaluation

Acknowledgements

Dr. Kathy Sanford
Dr. Tim Hopper
Dr. Todd Milford