

EXPLORING DISSONANCE AND HARMONY IN ELEMENTARY MATHEMATICS TEACHERS' CURRICULAR USE, AUTONOMY, DECISION-MAKING, AND COHERENCE

Kristin Doherty
Michigan State University
kdoherty@msu.edu

Mona Baniahmadi
Duquesne University
baniahmadim@duq.edu

Bima Sapkota
Purdue University
bsapkota@purdue.edu

Emmanuel K. Adjei
Purdue University
eadjei@purdue.edu

Jon Brown
University of Arizona
jebrown@email.arizona.edu

Jill A. Newton
Purdue University
janewton@purdue.edu

Marcy B. Wood
University of Arizona
mbwood@arizona.edu

Amy M. Olson
Duquesne University
olsona@duq.edu

Corey Drake
Michigan University
cdrake@msu.edu

We surveyed 524 elementary teachers from 46 states about their mathematics curricular decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic (Giorgio-Doherty et al., 2021). Building on findings from this study, we designed protocols for individual and focus group interviews with teachers from the same school to further explore the complexity of teachers' curricular use revealed in the survey. Here, we report findings from these interviews. The research questions guiding our study were: (1) How do teachers create coherence across their curricular resources? (2) How and why do teachers select or evaluate and adapt curricular materials to teach mathematics? and (3) How do teachers perceive their curricular autonomy? We found most teachers were using multiple curricular materials (some mandated and some not, ranging up to 11 different sources of materials) to plan and teach mathematics. We found teachers frequently focused on content (e.g., connections to key concepts, standards, or lesson objectives) as the key focus of creating coherence between materials for students and for lesson planning. Content coherence also seemed to drive differentiation. Most teachers reported differentiating more than usual to address larger learning gaps across students in their classes due to the pandemic. Teachers stated a preference for curricular materials (like *IXL*) which allowed them to find tasks on particular content and assign students practice problems related to that content at grade level and above/below. Teachers varied in how they responded to different solution strategies presented by different materials. Some teachers provided coherence by directing students to rewrite directions so they use the same solution strategy as in prior lessons from other materials; other teachers felt students experienced better connections to content as they made sense of different solution strategies from different materials. Several teachers used *TeachersPayTeachers* (TPT), with some reporting materials on TPT engage students better than materials from their primary curriculum, do not need modifications, or better meet their instructional preferences. We found teachers who reported high levels of enjoyment and confidence in teaching mathematics made the most adaptations to curricular materials and most often designed their own. Many teachers reported adapting curriculum to be more engaging to students. This included adding visuals or enlarging text size and creating opportunities for problem-based and hands-on learning. Some reported adapting or creating materials to make connections to the world or be more culturally relevant. Overall, teachers reported high levels of curricular autonomy for all curricular materials, including mandated materials (median score of 7 out of 10) and non-mandated or suggested materials (all scoring 10 out of 10).

References

- Giorgio-Doherty, K., Baniahmadi, M., Newton, J., Olson, A. M., Ferguson, K., Sammons, K., Wood, M. B., & Drake, C. (2021). COVID and curriculum: Elementary teachers report on the challenges of teaching and learning mathematics remotely. *Journal of Multicultural Affairs*, 6(2).
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